



## ABC READING CLUB 2022-2023

### **March 28- Finding Dora Maar: An Artist, an Address Book, a Life by Brigitte Benkemoun**

Merging biography, memoir, and cultural history, this compelling book, a bestseller in France, traces the life of Dora Maar through a serendipitous encounter with the artist's address book.

In search of a replacement for his lost Hermès agenda, Brigitte Benkemoun's husband buys a vintage diary on eBay. When it arrives, she opens it and finds inside private notes dating back to 1951—twenty pages of phone numbers and addresses for Balthus, Brassai, André Breton, Jean Cocteau, Paul Éluard, Leonor Fini, Jacqueline Lamba, and other artistic luminaries of the European avant-garde.

After realizing that the address book belonged to Dora Maar—Picasso's famous "Weeping Woman" and a brilliant artist in her own right—Benkemoun embarks on a two-year voyage of discovery to learn more about this provocative, passionate, and enigmatic woman, and the role that each of these figures played in her life.

Longlisted for the prestigious literary award Prix Renaudot, *Finding Dora Maar* is a fascinating and breathtaking portrait of the artist.

### **May 31, 2022- Caravaggio: Painter of Miracles by Francine Prose**

In *Caravaggio*, *New York Times* bestselling author Francine Prose offers an enthralling account of the life and work of one of the greatest painters of all time. Caravaggio defied the aesthetic conventions of his time; his use of ordinary people, realistically portrayed—street boys, prostitutes, the poor, the aged—was a profound and revolutionary innovation that left its mark on generations of artists. His insistence on painting from nature, on rendering the emotional truth of experience, whether religious or secular, made him an artist who speaks across the centuries to modern day.

### **July 26, 2022- 9th Street Women by Mary Gabriel**

Five women revolutionize the modern art world in postwar America in this "gratifying, generous, and lush" true story from a National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize finalist (Jennifer Szalai, *New York Times*).

Set amid the most turbulent social and political period of modern times, *Ninth Street Women* is the impassioned, wild, sometimes tragic, always exhilarating chronicle of five women who dared to enter the male-dominated world of twentieth-century abstract painting -- not as muses but as artists. From their cold-water lofts, where they worked, drank, fought, and loved, these pioneers burst open the door to the

art world for themselves and countless others to come.

Gutsy and indomitable, Lee Krasner was a hell-raising leader among artists long before she became part of the modern art world's first celebrity couple by marrying Jackson Pollock. Elaine de Kooning, whose brilliant mind and peerless charm made her the emotional center of the New York School, used her work and words to build a bridge between the avant-garde and a public that scorned abstract art as a hoax. Grace Hartigan fearlessly abandoned life as a New Jersey housewife and mother to achieve stardom as one of the boldest painters of her generation. Joan Mitchell, whose notoriously tough exterior shielded a vulnerable artist within, escaped a privileged but emotionally damaging Chicago childhood to translate her fierce vision into magnificent canvases. And Helen Frankenthaler, the beautiful daughter of a prominent New York family, chose the difficult path of the creative life.

Her gamble paid off: At twenty-three she created a work so original it launched a new school of painting. These women changed American art and society, tearing up the prevailing social code and replacing it with a doctrine of liberation. In *Ninth Street Women*, acclaimed author Mary Gabriel tells a remarkable and inspiring story of the power of art and artists in shaping not just postwar America but the future

### **September 27, 2022- Clara and Mr. Tiffany: A Novel by Susan Vreeland**

It's 1893, and at the Chicago World's Fair, Louis Comfort Tiffany makes his debut with a luminous exhibition of innovative stained-glass windows that he hopes will earn him a place on the international artistic stage. But behind the scenes in his New York studio is the freethinking Clara Driscoll, head of his women's division, who conceives of and designs nearly all of the iconic leaded-glass lamps for which Tiffany will long be remembered. Never publicly acknowledged, Clara struggles with her desire for artistic recognition and the seemingly insurmountable challenges that she faces as a professional woman. She also yearns for love and companionship, and is devoted in different ways to five men, including Tiffany, who enforces a strict policy: He does not employ married women. Ultimately, Clara must decide what makes her happiest—the professional world of her hands or the personal world of her heart.

### **November 29, 2022- The Book of Tea: Beauty, Simplicity and the Zen Aesthetic by Okakura Kakuzo**

This classic work by Okakura Kakuzo has inspired many generations of readers by illuminating the underlying spirit and message of the venerable Japanese tea masters. *The Book of Tea* doesn't focus on the tea ceremony itself, but rather on the Zen Buddhist philosophy behind it. Kakuzo teaches us to cultivate an everyday awareness of the beauty in all the common things around us. His powerful message is even more relevant today than when he wrote this book, and it serves as a wonderful introduction to the aesthetics of Japanese culture.

In 1906, in turn-of-the-century Boston, a small, esoteric book about tea was written with the intention of being read aloud in the famous salon of Isabella Stewart Gardner—Boston's most notorious socialite. It was authored by Okakura Kakuzo, a Japanese philosopher, art expert, and curator. Little known at the time, Kakuzo would emerge as one of the great thinkers of the early 20th century, a genius who was insightful, witty, and greatly responsible for bridging Western and Eastern cultures. Okakura had been taught at a young age to speak English, and was more than capable of expressing to Westerners the nuances of tea and the Japanese Tea Ceremony.

Nearly a century later, Kakuzo's *The Book of Tea* is still beloved the world over, making it an essential part of any tea enthusiast's collection. Interwoven with a rich history of Japanese tea and its place in Japanese society is a poignant commentary on Asian culture and our ongoing fascination with it, as well as illuminating essays on art, spirituality, poetry, and more. *The Book of Tea* is a delightful cup of enlightenment from a man far ahead of his time.

## 2023

### **January 31, 2023- The Devil and Dr. Barnes: Portrait of an American Art Collector by Howard Greenfeld**

Albert Coombs Barnes, one of the most eccentric, controversial figures of the early twentieth-century art world, springs vividly from the pages of Howard Greenfeld's superb biography. *The Devil and Dr. Barnes* traces the near-mythical journey of a man who was born into poverty, amassed a fortune through the promotion of a popular medicine, and acquired the premier private collection of works by such masters as Renoir, Matisse, Cézanne, and Picasso.

Ostentatiously turning his back on the art establishment, Barnes challenged the aesthetic sensibilities of an uninitiated, often resistant and scoffing, American audience. In particular, he championed Matisse, Soutine, and Modigliani when they were obscure or in difficult straits. Analyzing what he saw as the formal relationships underlying all art, linking the old and the new, Barnes applied these principles in a rigorous course of study offered at his Merion foundation.

Barnes's own mordant words, culled from the copious printed record, animate the narrative throughout, as do accounts of his associations with notables of the era--Gertrude and Leo Stein, Bertrand Russell, and John Dewey among them--many of whom he alienated with his appetite for passionate, public feuds. In this rounded portrait, Albert Barnes emerges as a complex, flawed man, who--blessed with an astute eye for greatness--has left us an incomparable treasure, gathered in one place and unforgettable to all who have seen it.

### **March 28, 2023- Farewell to the Muse: Love, War, and the Women of Surrealism by Whitney Chadwick**

*Farewell to the Muse* documents what it meant to be a young, ambitious woman during an avant-garde movement defined by celebrated men. Focusing on the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, art historian Whitney Chadwick charts the lives of five female surrealists—connecting their experiences with art, friendship, and war. This vivid account, now in paperback, includes the fascinating story of Claude Cahun and Suzanne Malherbe in occupied Jersey, as well as the experiences of Lee Miller and Valentine Penrose at the frontline. Through Chadwick's narrative it becomes clear that loss and trauma shaped these women's transitions from someone else's muse to mature artists in their own right.

Chadwick draws on personal correspondence between the women, including the extraordinary letters between Leonora Carrington and Leonor Fini during the months following the arrest and imprisonment of Carrington's lover Max Ernst as well as the letter Frida Kahlo shared with her friend and lover Jacqueline Lamba years after it was written in the late 1930s.

This history brings a new perspective to the political context of surrealism as well as fresh insights on the vital importance of female friendship to its progress.

### **May 30, 2023- Goya: A Portrait of the Artist by Janis Tomlinson**

The life of Francisco Goya (1746–1828) coincided with an age of transformation in Spanish history that brought upheavals in the country's politics and at the court which Goya served, changes in society, the devastation of the Iberian Peninsula in the war against Napoleon, and an ensuing period of political instability. In this revelatory biography, Janis Tomlinson draws on a wide range of documents—including letters, court papers, and a sketchbook used by Goya in the early years of his career—to provide a nuanced portrait of a complex and multifaceted painter and printmaker, whose art is synonymous with compelling images of the people, events, and social revolution that defined his life and era.

Tomlinson challenges the popular image of the artist as an isolated figure obsessed with darkness and death, showing how Goya's likeability and ambition contributed to his success at court, and offering new perspectives on his youth, rich family life, extensive travels, and lifelong friendships. She explores the full

breadth of his imagery—from scenes inspired by life in Madrid to visions of worlds without reason, from royal portraits to the atrocities of war. She sheds light on the artist's personal trials, including the deaths of six children and the onset of deafness in middle age, but also reconsiders the conventional interpretation of Goya's late years as a period of disillusion, viewing them instead as years of liberated artistic invention, most famously in the murals on the walls of his country house, popularly known as the "black" paintings.

A monumental achievement, *Goya: A Portrait of the Artist* is the definitive biography of an artist whose faith in his art and his genius inspired paintings, drawings, prints, and frescoes that continue to captivate, challenge, and surprise us two centuries later.

### **July 25, 2023 The Painted Word by Tom Wolfe**

"America's nerviest journalist" (*Newsweek*) trains his satirical eye on Modern Art in this "masterpiece" (*The Washington Post*)

Wolfe's style has never been more dazzling, his wit never more keen. He addresses the scope of Modern Art, from its founding days as Abstract Expressionism through its transformations to Pop, Op, Minimal, and Conceptual. *The Painted Word* is Tom Wolfe "at his most clever, amusing, and irreverent" (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

### **SEPTEMBER 26, 2023- The Dali Legacy: How an Eccentric Genius Changed the Art World and Created a Lasting Legacy by Dr. Christopher Heath Brown**



This immersive dive into the life and work of Salvador Dalí unlocks the secret of this creative genius and reveals for the first time how his erotically charged paintings changed the world of modern art.

In turns beloved and reviled, twentieth century art, painter, filmmaker, and designer Salvador Dalí set Europe and the United States ablaze with his uncompromising genius, sexual sadism, and flirtations with megalomania. His shocking behavior and work frequently alienated critics; his views were so outrageous, even prominent Surrealists tried to ostracize him. Still, every morning he experienced "an exquisite joy—the joy of being Salvador Dalí," and, through a remarkable talent that invited bewilderment, anger, and adoration, rose to unprecedented levels of fame—forever shifting the landscape of the art world and the nature of celebrity itself.

In this stunning volume, rich with more than 150 full-color images, noted art historians Jean-Pierre Isbouts and Christopher Heath Brown discuss the historical, social, and political conditions that shaped Dalí's work, identify the impact of Modern as well as Old Master art, and present an unflinching view of the master's personal relationships and motivations. With their deeply compelling narrative, Isbouts and Brown uncover how Dalí's visual wit and enduring cult of personality still impacts fashion, literature, and art, from Andy Warhol to Lady Gaga, and seeks to answer why, in an age of shock and awe, Dalí's art still manages to distress, perplex, and entertain.

### **NOVEMBER 28, 2023- The Collector of Lives: Giorgio Vasari and the invention of Art by Ingrid Rowland and Noah Charne**

Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) was a man of many talents—a sculptor, painter, architect, writer, and scholar—but he is best known for *Lives of the Artists*, the classic account that singlehandedly invented the genre of artistic biography and established the canon of Italian Renaissance art. Before Vasari's extraordinary book, art was considered a technical skill rather than an intellectual pursuit, and artists were

mere decorators and craftsmen. It was through Vasari's visionary writings that artists like Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo came to be regarded as great masters of life as well as art, their creative genius celebrated as a divine gift. Their enduring reputations testify to Vasari's profound yet unspoken influence on western culture.

An advisor to kings and pontiffs—and a confidant to Titian, Donatello, and more—Vasari enjoyed an exhilarating career amid the thrilling culture of Renaissance Italy. In *The Collector of Lives*, Ingrid Rowland and Noah Charney offer a lively and inviting introduction to this pivotal figure in art history, and immerse readers in the world of the Medici of Florence and the popes of Rome. A narrative of intrigue, scandal, and colorful artistic rivalry, this vivid biography shows the great works of western art taking shape under Vasari's keen eye—and reveals how one Renaissance scholar completely redefined how we look at art.

**ALL DISCUSSIONS ARE HELD EVERY OTHER MONTH AT THE  
LEEPA-RATTNER MUSEUM OF ART  
LAST TUESDAY OF THE MONTH  
@ 11:30 AM**