

ARLIS/NA Reviews

Classical Art: a Life History From Antiquity to the Present by Caroline Vout. Princeton University Press, May 2018. 376 p. ill. ISBN 9780691177038 (h/c), \$39.50.

In *Classical Art: a Life History From Antiquity to the Present*, author Caroline Vout traces the evolution of the “classical art” label as it has been applied from ancient times to the present. Vout, Reader in Classics at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Christ’s College, has authored previous books on ancient Greece and Rome.

Vout emphasizes sculpture over other forms of art, arguing that it is the easiest and most consistently reliable way to trace the evolution of “classical” art through time, stating that what was “classical” during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods differs greatly from what nineteenth-century observers would consider “classical.” Vout notes a blend of influences in early Greco-Roman art - Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Asian, etc. – but finds the most common definition of “classicism” to be found in the Hellenistic style.

The book is divided into 10 chapters, arranged chronologically. Chapters one through 4 cover ancient art and set the author’s argument, answering her question of “what is classical art?” The author uses examples of works from ancient Greece, moving on through the Hellenistic period in chapter 2. Roman assimilation of Greek ideals is the subject of the third chapter, and the fourth focuses specifically on Roman art. Chapters five through 10 trace “classical art” as it is defined in later periods, beginning with the Renaissance and Enlightenment; the “neoclassicism” of the eighteenth century, with an emphasis on the English country house; nineteenth-century notions of classical art; and finally, how “classical art” has been viewed during the twentieth-century to present. The author concludes her argument in chapter ten, seemingly comfortable with the fact that other authors have approached the topic of classical art in entirely different ways. She comments that, “It was never my intention to write a synthesis or survey, but a biography or travelogue –a mapping not of facts, but of the ways in which Greek and Roman artifacts experience history.”

The publication contains a mixture of numerous black and white and color images; the layout of images throughout the book is balanced, making them easy to refer to when referenced in the text. While the majority are small, the images are clear and details are easily observed, and there is a generous section of notes, followed by a forty-one page bibliography, plus, the book contains an index.

Classical Art: a Life History From Antiquity to the Present helps clarify the differences between “classical,” “classicism,” and “classicizing” as applied to art throughout time. The author’s writing style is clear and academic, but easy to follow. A basic knowledge of art history is helpful to the reader, however.

Multimedia and Technology

West Side Story: Google Arts and Culture

Artli Brarian, Art and Design Librarian

Main Library, University of the Arts

Reviewed March 2019

West Side Story is an interactive experience presented by Google Arts and Culture. The project draws material from several cultural institutions, specifically Carnegie Hall, NYPL, the Museum of the City of New York, and the National Museum of American Jewish History. With a mix of narrative content, image-heavy features, slideshows, and 360 degree video, *West Side Story* goes beyond the typical online exhibition in its interactivity and scope.

The entire project is accessible from a single landing page. There is no introductory text, beyond a few icons of the institutions that contributed to the project directly below the large rotating banner images at the top of the page; rather, the user is plunged right into a section called "The inspiration behind the story." The rest of the page is organized into divisions, with a section heading a few links to content. It is difficult sometimes to know what kind of content will be behind a given link or feature. There is a mix of narrative content and image-heavy features. Some of the kinds of content available are slideshows, editorial features, essays, online exhibits, and profiles of key figures. Sprinkled throughout are videos. Especially notable are the 360 videos, which are hosted on Youtube and embedded in the site. Their quality is variable: sometimes the image quality is grainy. As well, these videos are best viewed through Google Cardboard, which could be an accessibility issue for users.

Navigating between pages is difficult, and it is easy to get lost. For example, the top navigation bar is for the entire Google Arts and Culture project. Doing something like clicking "Home" will take you to the Google Arts and Culture home page, not the home page of the *West Side Story* project. Sometimes, there is a link back to the *West Side Story* project landing page, although it is hard to find: in the "Chita Rivera on Making Musical History" editorial feature, there is a short, incomplete list of links to other pages in the *West Side Story* project at the very bottom of the page, undifferentiated from the rest of the content.

The resource does a nice job of contextualizing *West Side Story* with both images and information related to the original stage production and film, as well as contemporary videos and images that explore the legacy of this important production. For example, *West Side Story* does an admirable job of bringing together disparate resources in an online platform. Despite some accessibility issues and a crowded and at times confusing interface, the high-quality content and contextual interpretive text gives a rich experience to otherwise scattered material.

Notable Graphic Novels Review

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic

By Alison Bechdel

Mariner Books

\$16.99

Allison Bechdel's (2007 Stonewall Book Award, 2014 MacArthur Fellow, 2014 Lambda Board of Trustees Award for Excellence in Literature) *Fun Home* is aptly named: "fun" is not the best word to describe this important graphic novel. This graphic novel talks about the author's childhood - living with her closeted father, mother who didn't seem to notice, and not really recognizing her own sexuality until later in life. It's written really well and the art is lovely. This was recently turned into a Broadway production that took home five Tony Awards. This book is important because it helped change how we see LGBT politics in America and was famously censored by several institutions of higher education. The author focuses on the highly emotional interactions between the characters, showing how their sexuality can create points of conflict throughout their lives. As this is seen as an exemplary piece of comic work, in spite of notable challenges in the past, we suggest this for purchase by all libraries especially those with a focus and interest in gender and sexuality studies and illustration. Especially due to its reputation as a controversial title, we encourage this not to be mistakenly placed in a children's section.