



Smithsonian
***Donald W. Reynolds Center for
American Art and Portraiture***

Smithsonian American Art Museum

News

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Rebecca Zurier Is Awarded the 19th Annual Eldredge Prize for Her Book on the Ashcan School's Urban Vision

The Smithsonian American Art Museum has awarded the 2007 Charles C. Eldredge Prize for Distinguished Scholarship in American Art to Rebecca Zurier, associate professor in the department of the history of art and faculty associate for the program in American culture at the University of Michigan. Her book, "Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School" (University of California, 2006), is recognized as a significant reassessment of the painters associated with the Ashcan School and their innovative way of looking at the modern city.

"I am delighted that the jurors have chosen to honor Rebecca Zurier, whose book is a rich re-evaluation of the Ashcan artists and their images of the city," said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The three jurors who awarded the \$3,000 prize were Sally Stein, associate professor of art history at the University of California, Irvine; Sylvia Yount, the Louise B. and J. Harwood Cochrane Curator of American Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond; and Marc Simpson, associate director of the Williams College graduate program in the history of art and curator of American art at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Mass.

In her work, Zurier studies what American art and culture reveal about society. She defines art broadly to include comic strips, mass media, vernacular architecture and other aspects of material culture. "Picturing the City" focuses on painters George Bellows, William Glackens, Robert Henri, George Luks, Everett Shinn and John Sloan. Zurier takes the reader on a visual voyage through New York City as it was seen by this group of urban realists and looks at the booming cultures of vision and representation in early 20th-century New York, a place where strangers habitually watched each

other and new classes of immigrants and working women claimed their places in the metropolis.

The jurors describe the book as a “commanding study” that highlights the contributions of Ashcan artists “to the broad experience of modernity and forms of modernism in turn-of-the-century America” and examines “all manner of visual evidence—from newspaper photos to advertisements and film stills—to effectively remind us of the welter of imagery that confronted these artists.”

“[The book] opens with the inviting command, ‘Picture this,’ and from that strong note to the end, Zurier energetically leads her readers on a quest to look anew. From high and low sources, she collects a brilliant sampling of illustrations as evidence of the many sights to be enjoyed in the metropolis,” the jurors wrote in their statement. They go on to say, “Zurier’s heartfelt appreciation for these men—whose artistic ambitions did not lessen their strong affiliations with proletarian culture—will make readers positively long for a time when artists saw value in hanging their work in modest restaurants as well as more prestigious venues.”

Zurier served as co-curator of the 1995 exhibition “Metropolitan Lives: The Ashcan Artists and their New York” with Virginia Mecklenburg, senior curator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum; and Robert Snyder, associate professor and director of journalism and media studies at Rutgers University in Newark, N.J. The accompanying catalog, which won the Alfred H. Barr Jr. Award in 1997, included essays by Zurier, Mecklenburg and Snyder. She also was the curator and wrote the catalog for “Art for The Masses: A Radical Magazine and its Graphics” in 1988 for the Yale University Art Gallery. Zurier was a consultant to the Whitney Museum of American Art for the exhibition “The American Century” in 1996. She also is the author of “The American Firehouse: An Architectural and Social History” (1982).

Zurier earned her doctorate from Yale University in 1988. She has received fellowships to support her research and writing from the J. Paul Getty Foundation (1993–1994), the Swann Foundation for Caricature and Cartoon (1984), the Smithsonian American Art Museum (1985–1988), the Henry Luce Foundation (1987) and the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard University (1999–2000). “Picturing the City” also has been awarded a New York Society Library Award, and it was a finalist for the College Art Association’s Charles Rufus Morey prize.

On Thursday, Nov. 8 at 4 p.m., Zurier will present the annual Eldredge Prize lecture “Looking Back at Picturing the City” in the museum’s new Nan Tucker McEvoy Auditorium. A reception follows the event. The lecture and reception are free and open to the public.

The Eldredge Prize, named in honor of the former director of the museum (1982–1988), is sponsored by the American Art Forum, a patrons’ support organization. This annual award, initiated in 1989, seeks to recognize originality and thoroughness of research, excellence of writing and clarity of method. Single-author, book-length publications in the field of American art history appearing within the three previous calendar years are eligible. It is especially meant to honor those authors who deepen or focus debates in the field or who broaden the discipline by reaching beyond traditional boundaries. Dec. 1 is the deadline for 2008 nominations.

Recent Eldredge Prize recipients include Margaretta Lovell (2006) for “Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans and Patrons in Early America” (University of Pennsylvania, 2005); Elizabeth Johns (2005) for “Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation” (University of California Press, 2002); and David Lubin (2004) “Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images” (University of California Press, 2003). A complete list of past winners and additional information about the award is available on the museum’s Web site at americanart.si.edu/education/opportunities-eldredge.cfm.

The museum’s research programs include fellowships for pre- and postdoctoral scholars, extensive photographic collections documenting American art and artists, and unparalleled art research databases. An active publications program of books, catalogs and the journal American Art complements the museum’s exhibitions and educational programs.

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 41,000 artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building, a dazzling showcase for American art and portraiture, is located at Eighth and F streets N.W. in the heart of a revitalized downtown arts district. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily. Admission is free. Metrorail station: Gallery Place/Chinatown (Red, Yellow and Green lines). Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Recorded museum information: (202) 633-7970. Web sites: americanart.si.edu and reynoldscenter.org.

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