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THOMAS BELLER ON "NEW YORKER" LEGEND JOSEPH MITCHELL'S DISAPPEARING ACT

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of French contemporary art around 1960—along with artists like Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely (whom she eventually married). De Saint Phalle was best known for her “Nanas,” those running, dancing, pirouetting sculptures with gigantic bodies and tiny heads that are like Botoxo figures seen on mescaline. Tucked into this career is a decade or more in which she mounted a savvy, determined assault on the avant-garde as the only female member of the French Nouveaux Réalistes, with intermittent aid from a coterie of American artists and poets of the late ’50s and early ’60s including Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Her most startling works are the “Tirs” (“shooting paintings”), assemblages with bags of paint attached, which she (or invited friends) would “execute” with a rifle, splattering colors. These, and her sculptures incorporating weapons (1962’s *O.A.S. Altar* pays bitter homage to the paramilitary thugs who sought to block Algeria’s independence from France), are counterparts of the self-destructing sculptures produced by Tinguely. As his works now bring to mind acts of terrorism, hers anticipate our era’s intimate relationship to victims of violence—and our perverse fascination with its perpetrators.

DAVID SMITH IN TWO DIMENSIONS: PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE MATTER OF SCULPTURE (University of California Press, \$50), by Sarah Hamill, does more than reveal the important role photography played in Smith’s art; it fundamentally alters how we see the works he photographed—an unusual feat for an academic volume. It questions the assumptions we make when looking at photographic reproductions of art, especially sculpture. Smith employed photography for a variety of purposes,

from conceptualizing artworks to documenting his process and publicizing it in periodicals. Rosalind E. Krauss relied on Smith’s photographs when writing her 1969 Harvard dissertation, which became *Terminal Iron Works: The Sculpture of David Smith* (1971). Hamill shows how Krauss’s readings of Smith’s work were guided by his photographs—an issue Krauss doesn’t acknowledge in her study. Photography was integrated into Smith’s creative process to an unusual degree. The photographs taken at Bolton Landing in winter show his pieces against a snowy landscape, lending them an iconic, timeless presence, which he enhanced by shooting from a low viewpoint and cropping the sculptures’ bases. The book reproduces only a modest number of Smith’s color photographs of his painted sculptures (one wants to see many more!), images that should settle the controversy about whether he intended color to be a primary element of his art.

In early 2012, the photographer Arne Svenson, who had inherited a telephoto lens from a birdier friend, began shooting from his darkened apartment across Greenwich Street and through the floor-to-ceiling, Mondrian-ish windows of the Zinc Building. He captured covert, painterly pictures—softened and distorted by dirt and rain on the windows—of individuals in expensively appointed domestic settings. *Shades of Rear Window*: Svenson’s **THE NEIGHBORS** (Julie Saul Gallery, \$40) could’ve been called *Front Window*, in revealing how residents of a “trophy” building are, in effect, actors on their chosen stage. While the works convey a measure of social criticism, they are also highly formal and self-referential—and quite beautiful. They are about

framing: Each includes mullions and transoms that structure the images, cropping and sometimes dividing figures. Inside, we glimpse furniture and art and obscured, fragmented bodies. One of the most gorgeous of Svenson’s pictures is not included here, because it’s been suppressed in response to a lawsuit (in which the photographer recently prevailed): A child with golden curls, seemingly suspended in mid-flight like a Caravaggesque angel, apparently being held by an adult, is a reminder of how ordinary moments can be transfigured by light—and a long lens.

DUSTIN YELLIN: HEAVY WATER (Rizzoli, \$60) does a good job of reproducing basically unreplicable art. Yellin’s signature works are extremely complex collages on layers of glass, sandwiched together to create a dimensional effect. One of his “psychogeographies” stood sentinel recently at Pioneer Works, the exhibition space Yellin founded in flood-prone Red Hook, Brooklyn. Like the detritus left behind when Hurricane Sandy turned nearby Van Brunt Street into a canal, the fantastic profusion of incongruous elements fixed between glass defies description. Yet Yellin’s approach is consistent: In a series of chunky glass squares, like specimen slides for a giant’s microscope, he examines mysterious fragments of contemporary culture. More fun are the elaborate railway-themed pieces, including several imaginary train interiors with unsavory passengers—*Going Straight to Hell*, 2011, shows a passenger cabin containing Franco, Hitler, and George W. Bush in the rear. An engaging biographical collage (what else?) concludes what is practically an artist’s book in trade-book guise. □
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