Books in Brief

Spring 2002

***Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*, by David Rosand ’59C ’65GSAS | University of North Carolina Press.**

If to the contemporary mind Venice, la Serenissima Repubblica, is a place, to an early modern European it was something larger and more abstract. Venice was the first Western republic; its representative government, presided over by an elected doge held in check by two councils, was an early model for our own liberal democracy.

Over the centuries, Venice developed an art and iconography for its political structure. As David Rosand writes in Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State, “More than any other political entity of the early modern period, the Republic of Venice shaped the visual imagination of political thought. Just as she instructed Europe—and, ultimately, the independent colonies of America—in the idea of statehood, so she taught how to give that idea eloquent pictorial form, especially through the figuration of the state.”

Rosand is Meyer Schapiro Professor of Art History at Columbia, and a preeminent scholar of the Italian Renaissance. For more than 25 years he has been indulging what he calls his “Venetian passion,” reshaping in the process our understanding of the social role of art in the Renaissance republic. With this book he provides a dense yet graceful layman’s introduction to his complex subject. Four short chapters deal masterfully with four iconographical and allegorical groupings and the ways in which they articulated the state’s self-understanding in pictorial form: Venetia, St. Mark, Solomon’s Temple, and the gods of Olympus (loosely and flexibly evocative of ideas of peace, justice, wisdom, and the city’s hybrid topography). Combining elegant analysis of images with precise social historical detail, Rosand demonstrates the shifting readings and uses of the iconography of Venice. He provides a fascinating visual guide through the fluid allegiances, histories, and cultures of this beguiling place, and in the process, offers an accessible introduction to the processes of self-

imaging.

—Judith Rodenbeck ’95GSAS

***Eisenhower at Columbia*, by Travis Beal Jacobs ’60 ’71GSAS with an introduction by Eli Ginzberg ’31C ’34GSAS ’82HON | Transaction Publishers**

This story of Dwight David Eisenhower’s presidency at Columbia (he served from October 1948 to January 1953) focuses on those years as vital in his journey to become president of the United States. Jacobs, a professor of history at Middlebury College, examines previously unused sources to analyze Eisenhower’s leadership and accomplishments, his goals and intentions, and whether his Columbia presidency, generally considered a failure, ever had a chance of succeeding. Historian Jacques Barzun ’27C ’32GSAS calls the book a story of “university governance and turmoil,” but also “an account of what happened when the military hero came marching home, landed into an ill-fitting job, wrote a best-seller, kept on fighting for his country, and became embroiled in national politics that led him to the White House.”

***Beauty for Ashes: Spiritual Reflections on the Attack on America,* by John Farina ’79GSAS | The Crossroad Publishing Company**

The voices of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and other religious movements come together in this collection of responses to the September 11 terrorist attacks on America. The reflections, organized by chapter as a meditation on the Lord’s Prayer, range from the Le Monde editorial *“Nous sommes tous Américains”* to Andrew Sullivan’s essay “This Is a Religious War” published in *The New York Times Magazine.* Though much of the commentary comes from established writers as well as religious and political leaders, there is also an account from William Harvey, a Juilliard student who descibes in a personal letter to his friends how he played his violin late into the night at the Armory on September 16, serenading the rescue workers with every piece of music he knew by heart.

All proceeds from book sales go to the American Red Cross.

***Webster’s New World American Words of Freedom*, edited by Stephen F. Rohde ’69L | Hungry Minds, Inc.**

American Words of Freedom presents the full texts of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, the Bill of Rights (and subsequent amendments), along with notes and commentary designed to make each document accessible to students of all ages. Lawyer Stephen F. Rohde believes it is “vitally important that all Americans learn (or recall) the dramatic history of our founding documents and the fundamental freedoms and liberties for which our country stands.” Each document is put in context with an incisive look at the historical events that surrounded their creation.

The book ends with the full text of George W. Bush’s speech of September 20, 2001, which assured Americans that the war on terrorism would be fought to defend “freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”



Guide to school abbreviations

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