

The New Criterion

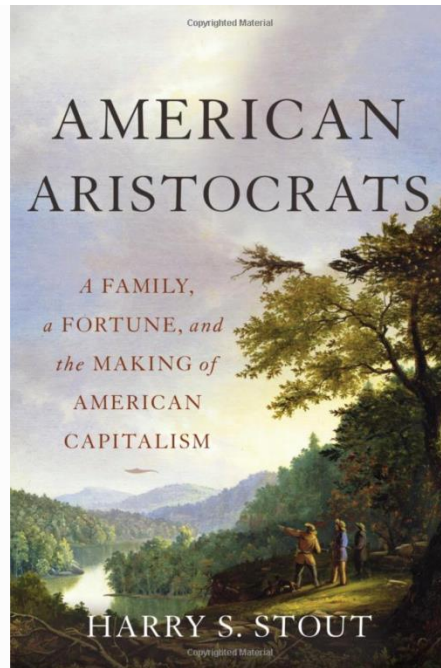
The Critic's Notebook

by *The Editors* Vol. 36, No. 3 / November 2017

This week: Giuseppe Verdi, Graham Nickson & more.



Graham Nickson, Tracks, 1982–91, Acrylic on canvas, Betty Cuninghame Gallery.



American Aristocrats: A Family, a Fortune, and the Making of American Capitalism, by Harry S. Stout (Basic Books): In his 1894 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” the historian Frederick Jackson Turner makes the influential argument that many facets of our American national identity—atomistic individualism, democracy, and the like—were developed by foraging pioneers opposed to the controlling nature of the more centralized governments of the East Coast. Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” focuses on the socio-political interactions among frontiersmen, the East Coast, and Native polities, but as Harry S. Stout argues in his new book, *American Aristocrats*, the almost infinite source of land, of potential private property, beyond the western boundaries of the States’ control was just as central, if not more so, to the establishment of the enduring ethos of American individualism. Stout, the Jonathan Edwards Professor of American Religious History at Yale University, centers his study of the formation of modern American capitalism on the Anderson family of Kentucky, a powerful group of farmers, politicians, diplomats, and financiers who were all deeply engaged in the roller-coaster practice of land speculation. Tackling social, economic, cultural, and religious issues, Stout’s book provides a fresh counterpoint to the often undue focus on the Eastern seaboard by historians of our nation’s birth and first century. —AS

Art:



Graham Nickson, Departure, 1977–94, Acrylic on canvas, Betty Cuninghame Gallery.

“Graham Nickson: Light and Geometry” at Betty Cuninghame Gallery (through December 22): Over forty years ago, Graham Nickson arrived in Italy as a recipient of the Rome Prize. When his supplies and preparatory work were stolen from the back of his car, he climbed onto the roof of the American Academy to paint the sunset. Through lush, chromatic paintings, Nickson has been a sun worshipper ever since, often focusing on bathers in raking light and the storm clouds conspiring over a summer’s day. Five of his large acrylic paintings, spanning four decades of work, are now on view at Betty Cuninghame Gallery, along with a selection on paper of his striking charcoals and besotted watercolors. —JP

Music:



Verdi's *Requiem* at the Metropolitan Opera (November 24–December 2): The Metropolitan Opera is certainly no stranger to Verdi: the master's operas form much of the core of the company's repertoire. For just four nights beginning this Friday, New York concertgoers will have the opportunity to hear the Met's exceptional chorus and orchestra perform Verdi's searing *Requiem* at the opera house, with James Levine conducting. The quartet of soloists features Krassimira Stoyanova, Ekaterina Semenchuk, Aleksandrs Antonenko, and the great Ferruccio Furlanetto. —ECS

Architecture:



1 West Sixty-seventh Street (The Hotel des Artistes). Photo: © newyorkitecture.com
“Not-Starving Artists: How The 1800s New York Art Scene Spawned the Co-op” (November 26): A brick and limestone façade, white-gloved doormen, perhaps an elevator operator, and a location in the East 60s, 70s, or 80s: this is the standard profile assumed for New York City co-ops. But the cooperative apartment building, now seen as the exclusive preserve of the *bon ton*, has humbler origins. This week, Deborah Zelcer will lead a walking tour, under the aegis of the Municipal Art Society of New York, explaining the utopian origin of cooperative living arrangements in New York City. The tour, which will proceed along West Fifty-seventh Street before moving up to the West Sixty-seventh Street Artists' Colony, will illustrate how the originators of New York co-ops sought to establish “creative communities” through apartment living. —BR