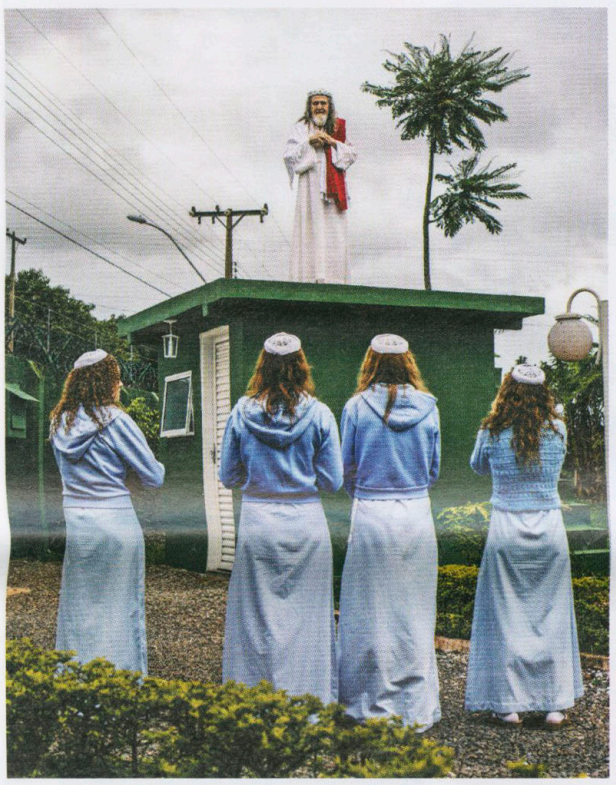
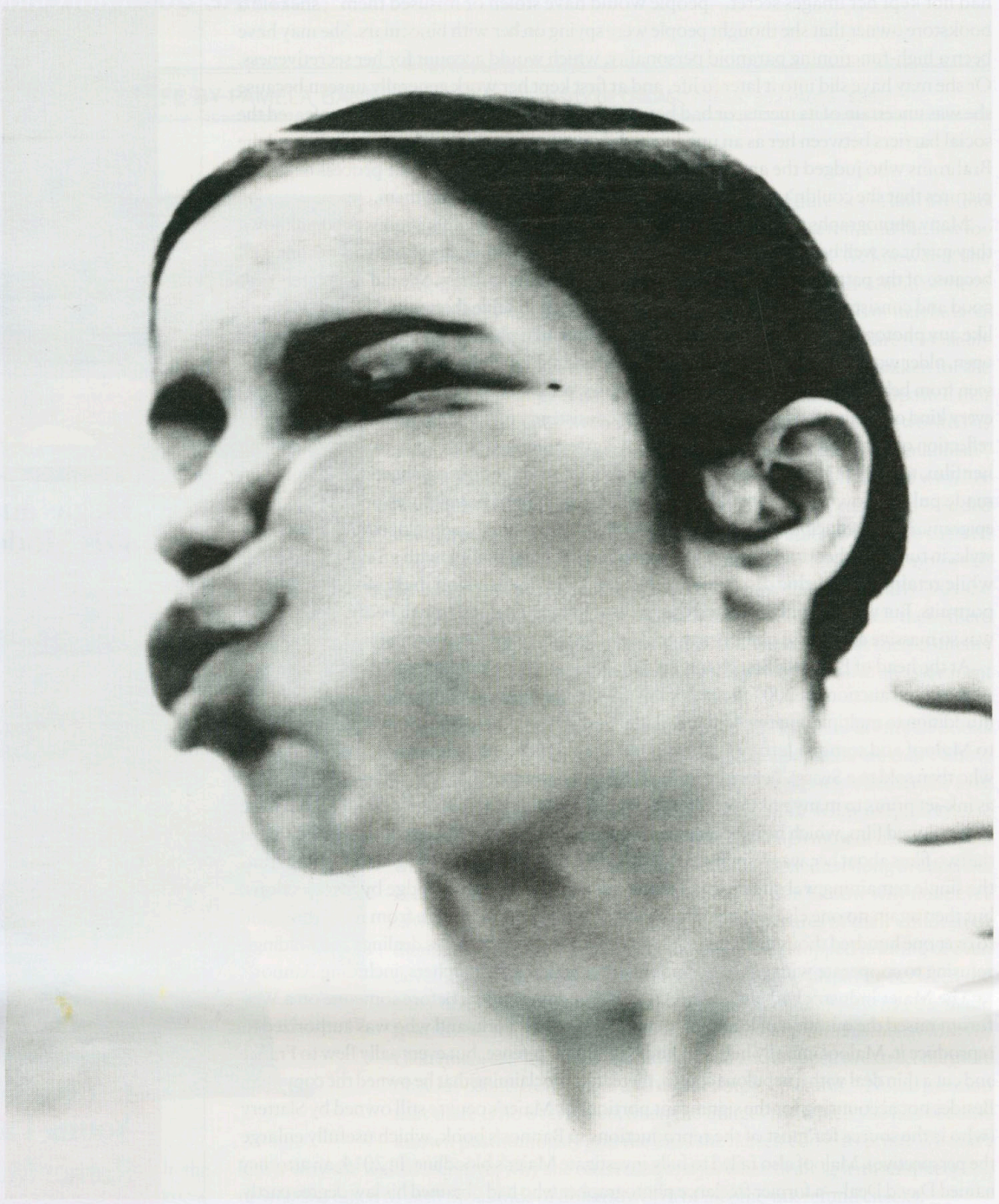
Artful Volumes

BOOKFORUM CONTRIBUTORS ON THE SEASON'S OUTSTANDING ART BOOKS.





Clockwise, from top left: **Philip Guston, *San Clemente*, 1975**, oil on canvas, 68 × 73 ¼". **Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints—Face)* (detail), 1972**, eleven gelatin silver prints, each 10 × 8". From *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950–1980*. **Jonas Bendiksen, *INRI Cristo preaching to his disciples*, 2014**, ink-jet print, 27 × 20".

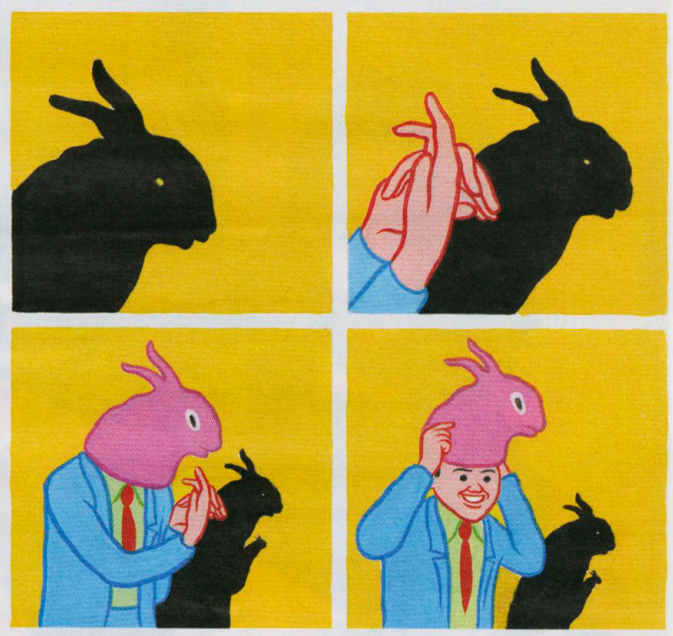
SOUL OF A NATION: ART IN THE AGE OF BLACK POWER (ARTBOOK DAP/Tate, $40), the catalogue for a recent show at Tate Modern in London, covers a period, from the early 1960s through the early '80s, when Black Power exhibitions proliferated in the United States. Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley's volume is an impressive feat of research, presenting and contextualizing many artists who never became household names. Alongside the well-known photographs of Roy DeCarava, we see a fuller history of the Kamoinge Workshop, including rich gelatin silver prints by Louis Draper, Anthony Barboza, Al Fennar, and Beuford Smith—to name just a few. Groups like AfriCOBRA and the Spiral collective, led by Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden, have recently received greatly deserved attention, but here we also find the Smokehouse Associates, a group of artists including William T. Williams, Melvin Edwards, Guy Ciarcia, and Billy Rose, whose output was colorful, geometric, and abstract—a radical choice for public art in Harlem in the late '60s. Other highlights include sharp formal descriptions of Emory Douglas's 1968 revolutionary posters for the *Black Panther*, a party newspaper in which the Panthers' agenda—"Revolutionary art, like the Party, is for the whole community and deals with all its problems"—was disseminated. *Soul of a Nation*'s focus on the Studio Museum in Harlem helps emphasize that institution's vital role in preserving many of these artists' histories, making the export of an expansive vision of this important era of American art possible. —ANDRIANNA CAMPBELL

In the 1970s and '80s, Czech-born photographer Josef Koudelka spent every summer traveling around Europe, living with nomadic peoples on the sidelines of society. It was an austere existence: He slept under the stars until the age of fifty-two, when he finally broke down and bought a tent. Koudelka's asceticism eventually produced the classic photobook *Exiles* (1988), which heralded his distinctive aesthetic: stark, brooding, imaginative, enigmatic. In **THE MAKING OF EXILES (Editions Xavier Barral, $65)**, previously unseen photographs are gathered with that book's iconic images in a new sequence. "I never stay in one country more than three months," Koudelka once proclaimed. "If I stay longer I become blind." Similar aphorisms fill his travel journals, many published here for the first time along with a series of poignant self-portraits. We see Koudelka at rest, the camera placed flat on the ground, each image showing a different "skyline" receding into the distance—there are skyscrapers, rocky canyons, eroding brick walls. Forever itinerant, Koudelka remains elusive. But in this new volume, rich personal details illuminate a photographer who, like many of his subjects, thrives in the margins. —SARA CHRISTOPH

LATIF AL ANI (Hatje Cantz, $50) is the first monograph on the artist's work, despite the fact that he is widely regarded as the founding father of Iraqi documentary photography. Born in Karbala in the 1930s, Ani began taking pictures while working for the British-owned Iraq Petroleum Company in the '50s. For nearly three decades he documented the rapid development of the oil industry and its effects on the country and the region: the enterprising, cosmopolitan, experimental energies that defined mid-twentieth-century Iraq but have since been totally crushed by dictatorship, sanctions, multiple wars, a brutal insurgency, and the ascendance of the so-called Islamic State. Featuring a clear-sighted essay by the art historian Morad Montazami and an insightful conversation between Ani and the writer Tamara Chalabi, the book extends a generous invitation to think critically about how and why Ani framed the world as he did. Montazami credits Ani's "kaleidoscopic eye" and his photos' "acrobatic angles" while also acknowledging that Ani's images were propaganda of a kind. This volume—with over a hundred images, including pictures of dams, date palms, shepherds, socialites, ancient architecture, religious sites, and more—is a stunning example of how radically shifting realities can thoroughly recast the purpose and meaning of a body of work, turning a collection of dubiously promotional and seductive images into something that feels both historic and tragic. Ani's photographs are a mark against forgetting that Iraq was ever something different, and something more, than the wreck of the day's news. —KAELEN WILSON-GOLDIE

"Do not be deceived by the false prophets who are saying Jesus will come from the sky when I am already here on earth," quoth Jesus of Kitwe, a Zambian taxi driver and father of five. About twenty years ago, he received divine notice that he was Jesus Christ reincarnate, and now he devotes his off-hours to spreading the Word. He's one of seven men featured in **THE LAST TESTAMENT (Aperture, $50)**, the Norwegian photojournalist Jonas Bendiksen's resplendent document of guys who got the godly memo. In the early 1990s, Sergei Torop—now called Vissarion—of Russia realized he was the Son of God and founded a church in the remote Siberian taiga; Jesus Matayoshi, of Japan, today campaigns for political office from atop a van, promising to bring forth God's kingdom once elected; INRI Cristo, of Brazil, uploads sermons and spiritual montages to YouTube from his

GUSTON: © THE ESTATE OF PHILIP GUSTON. COURTESY HAUSER & WIRTH; MENDIETA: © ANA MENDIETA; BENDIKSEN: © JONAS BENDIKSEN. COURTESY MAGNUM PHOTOS



Clockwise, from left: **William T. Williams, *Trane*, 1969**, acrylic on canvas, 108 × 84". From *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*. **Page detail from Joan Cornellà's *Zonzo*** (Fantagraphics Books Inc., 2017). **Latif Al Ani, *Darbandikha*, ca. 1960**, ink-jet print, 9 ⅞ × 9 ⅞".

compound. These chosen men are worlds apart—no country is big enough for two of them—but similarities abound. Each has written copiously about visions for a new world order (their texts are published at the tops of the book's chapters), and they all have preferred messianic costumes, usually a flowing robe or sash. But Bendiksen underscores the great distance between their dominions: He captures one of Cristo's female disciples crouching in a lush vegetable garden, among the red soil and glistening leaves of a Brazilian Eden, while dozens of Vissarion's followers are shown marching across icy-blue snowfields in the early dusk of a Siberian winter. Bendiksen's remote scenes convey the ideological remove of his subjects, who are far from the equator of conventional life. They exist on the outskirts of our world—even if they think they're at the center of it. —JULIANA HALPERT

Western postwar cultural production could also be classified as post-traumatic—even the most utopian strains of modernist art were unable to heal the misery brought about by the early twentieth century's unflinching pursuit of "progress." **DELIRIOUS: ART AT THE LIMITS OF REASON, 1950–1980** (Metropolitan Museum of Art/Yale University Press, $50), the catalogue for an ambitiously conceived exhibition at the Met Breuer organized by museum curator Kelly Baum and five years in the making, categorizes this thirty-year period of artistic creation and destabilization as the woozy response of a shocked world. Arranged into four sections—"Vertigo," "Excess," "Nonsense," and "Twisted"—*Delirious* collects myriad styles for our careful consideration, including Sol LeWitt's manic Apollonianism; Wallace Berman's Pop art–kissed Christian mysticism; the satanic kinkiness of Nancy Grossman and Darcílio Lima; body horror as humor via Lee Lozano, Ana Mendieta, Jim Nutt, and Christina Ramberg; and the eroticism of the sepulcher, courtesy of Paul Thek and Bruce Conner. Baum takes Antonin Artaud and Samuel Beckett as her dark-angel guides through this period of history, the alpha and omega of chaos, sickness, and magic.

A man pulls out a chair for a lady holding a swaddled infant. She slips while sitting down. She hits the floor and tosses the baby into the air. The kid's head smacks the corner of a table, hard—and there's a fat spritz of blood. And though the woman's dress is stained with the little darling's gore, the couple share a hearty laugh. Welcome to Spanish cartoonist Joan Cornellà's cruel world, in which life frequently—miserably, violently—unfolds in six Crayola-hued panels, among an assortment of chipper-looking miscreants with Barney Rubble pinholes for eyes. **ZONZO** (Fantagraphics Books, $15), Cornellà's handsomely designed third collection of queasy tableaux, overflows with effervescent depravity despite its modest size. The artist is part of a long line of male comic misanthropists—think of Mike Diana and his *Lustmord* fantasies, or Stephen Fievet's Myra Hindley–meets–Minnie Mouse avatar, babysue. But Diana and Fievet attracted small audiences—folks who scoured the racks of 1990s head shops and indie bookstores. Cornellà's online fan base is vast (he has 1.5 million followers on Instagram), and he's a favorite of disaffected teens with angry Tumblr accounts everywhere. Schadenfreude never goes out of style, and neither does the need to puncture the darkness and anxiety of modern living with a chuckle. Or a knife. —ALEX JOVANOVICH

Philip Guston's ferociously satiric **NIXON DRAWINGS: 1971 & 1975** (Hauser & Wirth, $60), paralleled only by Picasso's 1930s skewerings of Francisco Franco, appears just when we are saddled with another thin-skinned lying crook in the White House. This volume includes the complete "Poor Richard" series the artist made in the summer of 1971. For Guston, the paranoid, self-pitying Nixon is not entirely hateful. Initial drawings in the series recount with almost charitable irony Nixon as a youth in California, studying a pile of books by the light of a single dangling bulb. As the sequence develops, though, the ski-jump schnoz of the compulsively mendacious president grows, à la Pinocchio, into a penis that projects upward from above his scrotum-like jowls. Henry Kissinger's "secret" July 1971 trip to China may have been the inspiration for the sudden appearance of Chinese motifs in Guston's later illustrations that summer. But crude Asian caricatures send the "Poor Richard" narrative sideways, derailing Guston's acerbic yet provocatively sympathetic take on Tricky Dick. This mix of qualities reemerges in Guston's Nixon drawings from 1975, including some that render the recently resigned president's ghastly swollen and bandaged leg (the result of phlebitis), which almost evokes pity. —CHRISTOPHER LYON

The past lingers in Jack Pierson's **THE HUNGRY YEARS** (Damiani, $40), a collection of photographs that feature drive-ins, neon signage, leather motorcycle jackets, and a mirrored disco ball resting on a chair. But this is no backward glance. The people in these road-trippy pictures are fully grounded in their moment (1990, to be exact), looking as if they've happened upon a second- or thirdhand world and refashioned it as their own.

© LATIF AL ANI, COURTESY THE ARAB IMAGE FOUNDATION, HATJE CANTZ, THE RUYA FOUNDATION
WILLIAMS: © WILLIAM T. WILLIAMS, COURTESY MICHAEL ROSENFELD GALLERY LLC, NEW YORK, NY; CORNELLÀ: © JOAN CORNELLÀ, COURTESY FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS INC.; ANI: © LATIF