Watch the birdie

Prudence Hone on photography

Tonight as teenagers and students head out to parties, pubs and clubs, they will be carrying their mobile phones and digital cameras; by tomorrow lunchtime (or teatime if it's been a particularly busy night) they will each have loaded 40 or 50 photographs on to their Facebook pages. In a month, they will have taken, and appeared in, more pictures than their grandparents would have had access to in a lifetime. Everyone is a photographer now. Yet Massimo Vitali comments in Photo-wisdom: Master Photographers on Their Art edited by Lewis Blackwell (Chronicle, £35): "The fact that everybody is taking pictures today is interesting and not a problem for me. People can take their pictures, but when they see one of mine they realise it is different to theirs - and they are not going to take a picture like that usually." This is an outstanding collection, with illuminating commentaries by the photographers, who range from grand old men of photojournalism such as Elliott Erwitt to celebrity-snapers Platon and David LaChapelle.

Vitali might recognise something of his style in We English by Simon Roberts (Chris Boot, £35): from the Camel estuary to Kirby Lonsdale, the dreamy panoramas, with their sweeping skies and miniature figures, are a lyrical reminder of the beauty of the countryside. There is a tranquility and charm in these documentary shots which is in stark contrast to the up-the-nostrils, harshly lit studies in Luxury by Roberts’s stablemate Martin Parr (Chris Boot, £25). Parr also appears in Photobox: Bringing the Great Photographers into Focus by Roberto Koch (Thames & Hudson, £19.95), along with 199 others, some of whom also appear in Photo-wisdom. Split into categories such as reportage, war, nature and so on, it is a snappy run-through of famous names, with each spread showing an example of the work on the right and a brief summary and biography on the left. This is a beautifully produced and reasonably priced survey.

Steve McCurry (one of Koch’s "greats") has an unerring eye for colour and form. Each image in The Unearthed Moment (Phaidon, £25) is perfectly composed, and although the subjects are familiar - the Taj Mahal, Tibetan monks, Angkor Wat - these views are surprising and fresh (the Taj is reflected in the water as a boatman plays a hand of cards, the monks are having a “debate” of a fairly physical nature). Danny Lyons’s Memories of Myself (Phaidon, £45) contains diary entries that are touching and instructive, revealing his engagement with his sitters, and accompanying photos of Haiti, Brooklyn and Knoxville, shot mostly in black and white, andbooked by colour sections on Cuba and Cartagena in Colombia. Lyons likes people; the Cubans are incidental in Atados Al Mar by Clive Frost (the Picture, £35), a record of the mainly Spanish colonial buildings that once stretched along Malecon Avenue on the Havana waterfront. Taken a couple of years ago at the start of a restoration project, this panoramic sweep is now a historical record as a third of the buildings no longer exist. Steve Bloom’s Trading Places: The Merchants of Nairobi (Thames & Hudson, £24.95) has a similar continuous strip (along Langata’s Kitengela Road) to introduce the exuberantly customised corrugated iron shacks that house shops, hair salons and even something that claims to be a "car wash (adults only)".

Ara Güler’s Istanbul (Thames & Hudson, £32) and William Klein’s Rome (Thames & Hudson, £65) are black and white homages to the city each loves. Street scenes, cafés, men chatting are common to both. Güler covers the period from the 1940s to the 60s, while Klein’s is a record of a period in 1955 when, as an assistant on Federico Fellini’s Nights of Cabiria, filming was delayed and he was taken about the city by Fellini ("Rome is a movie and Klein did it"), Pier Paolo Pasolini and Alberto Moravia. A different traveller in an antique land, Georg Gerster’s Paradise Lost: Persia from Above (Phaidon, £35) is a magisterial sweep from the Caspian sea to the Gulf that was undertaken between April 1976 and May 1978, two decades before Yann Arthus-Bertrand’s now ubiquitous The Earth From the Air became a bestseller. The tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargad and the dimpled roofs of the bazaar in Esfahan are reminders of the awe-inspiring, and alien, beauty of Iran.

We Are One: A Celebration of Tribal Peoples edited by Joanna Eede (Quadrille, £30) is an emphatic example of the fact that "we are definitely not one". A thoroughly worthy project in support of Survival International, with commentaries from Jonathan Porritt and Robin Hanbury-Tenison among others, this mixes a swath of lively, if sometimes familiar, images of indigenous peoples with some occasionnally gnomic quotes: “Fine horses and fierce eagles are the wings of the Kazakhs.”

Few photographers can equal Jane Bown’s back catalogue. In Exposures (Guardian Books, £30) the most successful portraits seem to be those of writers, such as Jean Cocteau (clutching a Siamese cat) and Samuel Beckett, or painters (Graham Sutherland, looking mysterious), who do not perform professionally. The actresses, rock stars and opera singers are simply too practised at being in the camera’s eye. Jesse Norman, whom Bown photographed in 1981, also appears in glamorous, imperious form in Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present, by Deborah Willis (WW Norton, £70), a lavish study of nests and bird colonies from the coast of Newfound-land Island in the Pacific to the little blue heron in a noddy prance across cactus, balletic legs, wings and pithy notes bring into perspective: "The Heron is a baritone howl, sounds like the sound of a Chrysler.”

Dogs in Vogue: A Chic by Judith Watt (Hodder, £40) is a reminder that the British are doggy Americans were their first edition of Vogue - use of man’s best friend accountable. Front- endpapers in hounds is a dog-lover’s delight, raphers, from Cecil Beaton to Vogue: "the unsung hero of many of my life’s experiences", were poodles - the slinky, was an early favourite that Vogue isn’t always women and clothes, that portraying a dog of a hound, taken for Christmas in a suit, and self paper, while Susan, terrier, looks on quietly.

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