

# Stunning images of the world

## Glossy, engaging coffee table books are a low-tech pleasure

By TONY LAROCHE  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Maybe some day, we'll toss our Kindles, iPads and Nooks on the coffee table and call them art books. But downloading a coffee table book will likely never rival the real thing — which at its glossy, weighty best is an art object in itself. Despite the ever-changing publishing industry, these pricy tomes still dominate bookstore shelves at this time of year. Here is a look at 10 that quickly engage the eye and open a view on different worlds.

**“At the Fights: Inside the World of Professional Boxing”** (Sports Illustrated, 240 pages, \$75) by Howard Schatz

This book is a heavyweight in all definitions. It's about as big as a coffee table and weighs about as much. And it is full of stunning photographs of fighters (portraits and action), and those connected to the fight game — trainers, referees, promoters, broadcasters, writers and physicians.

Schatz, a doctor for more than two decades who is in his second profession as a photographer, worked on the book for six years. He interviewed and photographed about 70 former and current fighters in his studio, along with dozens of people involved in “the culture and business of professional boxing.” Portions of those interviews — brief reflections on the sport — are included with many of the photos.

Included in the mix is Rhode Island's own Peter Manfredo Jr. in two photos, including silhouette profile that shows the effects of life in the ring. Manfredo says, “I like boxing because boxing has an art. You know you got two great opponents fighting each other in it. We all know how to throw punches, but now let's break him down. Who is going to think better? Who is going to win the fight now?”

**“Bird of Paradise: Revealing the World's Most Extraordinary Birds”** (National Geographic Books, 228 pages, \$50) by Tim Laman and Edwin Scholes

Of the several National Geographic books I've looked through this season, “Birds of Paradise” is my favorite. It's as weighty as a text on the subject, but also is spectacular just to flip through. “Birds of Paradise” is the cul-

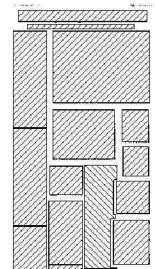
mination of some seven years of fieldwork by wildlife photographer Laman and ornithologist Scholes to create of “family portrait” of all 39 species of birds of paradise, a family of birds on Papua New Guinea, off the northern coast of Australia. The book is divided into four sections, each exploring different aspects of the birds and their habitat, and includes a look into how Laman and Scholes were able to document and study all 39 species. Words aside, the photographs are beautiful, showing the wide variations of the species — many looking as if they flew off the pages of Dr. Seuss.

**“Honky Tonk: Portraits of Country Music”** (W.W. Norton & Company, 144 pages, \$50) by Henry Horenstein.

Horenstein, a professor at Rhode Island School of Design, has chronicled 40 years of country music in a collection of 120 wonderful black-and-white photographs that stretch from 1972 until 2011. Many of the stars are here — Waylon Jennings, Dolly Parton, Conway Twitty, Loretta Lynn, Jerry Lee Lewis — but so are the places they played, from the Grand Ole Opry to the dives along the road, and the fans who, like the author, came out to hear the music they loved. This is an expanded hardcover version of the original work.

**“Streets of Fire: Bruce Springsteen in Photographs and Lyrics, 1977-1979”** (It Books, 128 pages, \$30) by Eric Meola.

If country isn't your bag, maybe the Jersey shore is. These 70 back-and-white photos capture Springsteen at a pivotal moment in his career. In 1977, Springsteen was coming off an enforced two-year studio absence after a battle with his manager. He was also trying to follow up one of the greatest rock albums (yes, vinyl) of all time. Meola had been there from the start, contributing to the star-maker machinery with a studio shot of the Boss leaning on the shoulder of saxophonist Clarence Clemons that became the iconic cover of 1975's “Born to Run.” In “Streets of Fire,” named for a song on the much darker follow-up “Darkness on the Edge of Town,” Meola captures not a triumphant star, but a musician in transition. The only thing better than flipping through the book is flipping through it



with "Darkness" on the turntable.

**"Pittsburgh Steelers: Pride in Black and Gold"** (Sports Illustrated. 176 pages. \$34.95)

"Three Rivers, home of the great teams of the '70s, is no more. No steel mills line the rivers, no smoke clouds the sky. Time has changed, and the game has changed. But the Steelers remain vibrant, the beating heart of their city," says SI writer Tim Layden in his introduction to this look at one of the best franchises in pro sports. SI is adept at matching its vast archive of brilliant images with an equally weighty library of previously published articles, and that is the case here. The book goes from how the team matches its working-class city (hard hats cheering hard hats), to its greatest players, to its glory years.

**"Sports Illustrated Football's Greatest"** (Sports Illustrated. 288 pages. \$32.95)

Get ready for the arguments. Who's better: Tom Brady or Joe Montana? What about UConn? What about best franchise? Packers? Steelers? Patriots? "Football Greatest" is more than just a walk down memory lane in Canton, Ohio. It's a ranking of the greatest by a panel of SI writers and editors — the top 10 in 14 categories, from quarterbacks and linebackers, to stadiums and franchises. Like any top 10 list, there will no doubt be loud dissenters. So be it. That's the fun of sports arguments. Each selection is accompanied by information on subject (much of it from SI archives) along with those great pictures. Old or new, many of the photos are iconic (although some are just pedestrian in this mix).

**"National Geographic Greatest Photographs of the American West"** (National Geographic Books. 304 pages. \$30)

Yet another spectacular National Geographic release, the subtitle to this paperback volume is "capturing 125 years of majesty, spirit and adventure." It is all of that. The images — portraits of cowboys and Native-Americans, photos of climbers perched on a ledge of a glacier, an aerial of the Snake River Canyon with agricultural plots fanning out — are powerful, offering many views of the West in myth, culture and landscape. The book is a companion to an exhibit put together in partnership among the National Museum of Wildlife Art, National Geographic and Museums West, and opened in October at about a dozen museums around the country.

**"Life in Color"** (National Geographic Books,

504 pages. \$35)

If the American West is too limiting for you, National Geographic has a world tour that celebrates the kaleidoscope of colors around us. Curated by photographer Annie Griffiths, "Life in Color" catalogues the world by hue — the blue sky and water of a coldwater stream in Brighton, Ontario; a lone spectacular red oak tree in a green valley in Sassocorvaro, Pesaro e Urbino, Italy; a yellow tinged crowd of revelers dancing amid soapsuds in Ibiza, Spain. Each chapter opens with a short essay on the symbolism or feeling of that color.

**"Carved in Stone: The Artistry of Early New England Gravestones"** (Wesleyan, 138 pages. \$30) by Thomas E. Gilson and William Gilson.

If you've ever liked strolling through a graveyard — and as a kid I remember spending a lot of time walking the dirt lanes of the vast Pocasset Cemetery — this collection of New England's past will fascinate. The Gilson brothers are originally from Connecticut, with Thomas taking the photographs and William writing an essay that starts this brisk collection. The photographs focus on the intricate carvings that decorate these early headstones and an index at the back of the book lists the names of deceased, year of death and location. About a dozen of the 80 photographs were taken in Rhode Island, mostly Bristol or Newport.

**"Newbrow: 50 Contemporary Artists"** (Shiffer, 112 pages, \$29.99) by Shane Pomajambo

Turning to more modern art, this book spotlights 50 artists of the "Newbrow" art, pop surrealism movement — artists from the United States, Denmark, Germany and Australia. As Pomajambo, curator of Art Whino Gallery in Maryland, explains in his introduction, the movement is a "raw unapologetic form of expression that represents today's current culture." The work here has moved far down the road from carvings on stone — to spray painting to stenciling to illustrative art, all highly influenced by pop culture in subject and style.

tlaroche@providencejournal.com  
(401) 277-7040

