



Curating Consciousness: Mysticism and the Modern Museum (MIT Press)

Marcia Brennan

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Artists have often taken rational, material existence as a starting point for engagement with metaphysics and mysticism, but no book until now has traced a similar strategy on the part of curators. In *Curating Consciousness*, Marcia Brennan focuses on one of the transformational figures of twentieth-century curatorial culture, and the main protagonist of this (until now) unacknowledged curatorial practice. James Johnson Sweeney (1900--1986) was hired by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., to be the Director of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in 1935. He went on to become the Director of the Guggenheim Museum in the 1950s and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in the 1960s. Throughout his career, Sweeney provocatively engaged motifs of mysticism in order to cast the modern museum as a secular temple of art. Brennan describes how these motifs informed Sweeney's curatorial and textual engagements with specific artists and projects, including works by Marcel Duchamp, Alberto Burri, Pierre Soulages, Jean Tinguely, and Eduardo Chillida.

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