

BOOKS

THE OLD WEST

In the Introduction the reader is informed that '... it would be hard, even today, to find a book about Indians, cowboys, the United States Cavalry, Mexican vacqueros, frontiersmen or the Spanish-American war which does not reproduce some of Remington's prodigious output of illustrations on these subjects...' Frederick Remington's pictures continue to influence a vast public from historians to movie makers.

This is an enthralling book, written in Estelle Jussim's inimitable, lively and enthusiastic style. The subject, in its totality, is brought to life and the role of photography, usually understated in this context, is revealed in such a way as to extend our appreciation of the importance of the medium to the artist.

To all those readers interested in the history of photography this book is strongly recommended, as it leads to a better understanding of one of the major uses of photography during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. I had expected to skim through the pages to review the book adequately, but found myself engrossed in reading page after page. Dr Jussim embarked on the task of reappraising this cult hero, who is synonymous with the West in the American imagination, in a series of lectures which she presented in March 1981, and on which the book is based. In researching her subject she discovered the largely unknown fact of Remington's reliance on photography to enact his role as illustrator. She believes that Remington provides an insight into the relationships between artists, photographs and the illustrated press from c1880 to c1910.

Frederick Remington first visited the American West (Montana) when he was nineteen, in 1881, lured there by stories of Custer, cowboys and red Indians. He was a man who admired action above all else especially as enacted in fighting. He wanted to be a journalist and an artist and eventually succeeded in combining the two.

The illustrated press of the period (for example *Colliers*, *Century* and *Harpers Weekly and Monthly*) had their own methods of transmitting visual information before photographic reproduction procedures became available. The usual form taken was to procure a sketch made by an itinerant artist (good, bad or indifferent) on the spot. The art editor then engaged an experienced publication artist to make a drawing on the woodblocks used for printing pictures. These sketches, even in talented hands, sometimes bore little relation to reality. In the late 1860s and early 1870s a much more realistic depiction became possible as at that time photographs taken for government railroad and geological surveys became available. Nevertheless, artists continued to be engaged who redrew the information in the photographs, often adding romantic touches such as distant storms, moonlight, horsemen and mid-distant standing figures. When 'photography on the block' was introduced it enabled wood engravers to make more exact transcriptions of photographs for news journals. These promoted readers' appreciation of visual truth.

Remington's earliest work in his role of itinerant artist was lively but crude and he had to take time off production to study the techniques of drawing. Despite his life-long preoccupation with drawing horses, cowboys and red Indians of the Western states, he lived and worked in the east of America in the vicinity of New York. As a result he was very dependent on photography, his own as well as that of others, to provide him with the information necessary to produce his detailed illustrations for publication.

The camera was an essential tool to him, although he did

not acknowledge it until late in his career. Estelle Jussim informs the reader that for at least half of his career Remington acted as intermediary between photographic images and the printed page. 'He personalised and interpreted a mechanically produced representation into a hand-drawn depiction of the subject in which he eliminated non-essentials and emphasised those elements he considered would give narrative credence to his illustrations in oils, water-colours and sketches....'

Remington achieved nationwide recognition for what was considered to be his outstandingly brilliant artistry in the illustration of horses and riders in action, but there is no doubt whatsoever that Muybridge's superb photographs of animal locomotion provided Remington with the essential information he needed to produce his pictures. By combining visual descriptions taken from Muybridge photographs with impressions taken from the unrecognised photographer Huffman's cowboy photographs and an imaginary but appropriate landscape setting, Remington's work improved greatly after 1887 (the year of the publication of *Animal Locomotion*).

Another major influence on Remington and his work was the invention of the photomechanical processes. The author states that '... understanding the progress of photomechanical reproduction is of utmost importance in understanding the career of Frederick Remington...' and '... after 1892 the invention of the improved photomechanical half-tone process enhanced Remington's action pictures as then no intermediary intervened between his work and the printed page except the half-tone screen and the process camera...' In addition to producing some 3000 paintings and drawings, Remington also wrote eight books during his comparatively short but hectically busy life (he died aged 48 in 1909).

This book is very well illustrated. Many of the illustrations are pairs which relate a Remington drawing or painting with the photograph on which it was based.

MARGARET HARKER

- *Frederick Remington, the Camera and the Old West* by Estelle Jussim (Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, 1983) (soft covers)

ANNIE LEIBOVITZ: PHOTOGRAPHS

Unlike, it seems, every other member of my generation, I never had a personal subscription to the *Rolling Stone* magazine, but I do admit to ruthlessly ransacking my friends' copies of the magazine — ripping off covers and whole articles — just so that I could get my hands on those fantastic photographs by Annie Leibovitz. That is why it is a particular pleasure to see *Annie Leibovitz: Photographs*, previously available only as a hard-back import, now available in the UK in paperback from Thames and Hudson.

Whether one is a devotee of popular culture or blissfully ignorant of the identities and quasi-mythological auras surrounding all of Leibovitz's subjects, one cannot help but be repeatedly, if not consistently, impressed by the quality of her photographs. Hailed as 'the best living portrait photographer in America,' Leibovitz is truly exceptional in her ability to recognise and match the unique nature of each shooting session with a fresh and individualised photographic approach. Her photographs are bold, funny, and provocative. Her compositions are powerful, almost monolithic. Her colour is vivid and intense, giving many of the images a non-naturalistic, often slightly eerie, neon-like glow. But despite this, or perhaps amazingly, in addition to this, Leibovitz never loses sight of the prime purpose of the portrait, and for all the wit, self-conscious visual drama, and good humoured perversity that hallmarks

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Annie Leibovitz's work, each photograph is made singular and uniquely special by the very fact that it allows the viewer an intimate, privileged glimpse into the psyche of another human being. She grabs at you roughly with the strength of her colour and compositions, in order to show you something very tender and delicate. There's something very gratifying, or maybe reassuring, in being told that 'underneath it all' there is something human worth pursuing.

Each reader will have his or her favourites: the trussed-up *Clint Eastwood, 1980* in a Ralph Lauren T-shirt and running shoes, the muddy, but still alluring *Lauren Hutton, 1981*; the 'I don't get no respect' *Rodney Dangerfield, 1980* (which, sadly, is among those few images for which a full American-TV education is necessary in order to understand the full humour of the pose and expressions); or the truly inspired study of *Steve Martin, 1981* demonstrating his attachment to his newly purchased Franz Kline.

In closing, and as the only sour note to an otherwise totally ecstatic review, it is distressing to note that photographers and publishers have yet to come up with a satisfactory compromise on how to deal with the 2¼-square photograph. Of course, one wants to vary the monotony of the layout of a book, and obviously we want the photos to be reproduced as large as is reasonable, but that twenty-five of the square-format photographs in this book were printed running across the gutter is truly regrettable. That the shot of *Marjorie Hemingway, 1982* is among these, borders on the obscene.

KRISTEN LIPPINCOTT



Meryl Streep

●Annie Leibovitz: *Photographs* Thames and Hudson Ltd./Rolling Stone Press, May 1984, £10.95 paperback, ISBN 0 500 27338 3.

Video continued

New Scotch Tape promotion

Having gained first place in the blank tape sales chart after the heaviest video tape advertising in 1983, the Scotch brand was being further promoted in early spring by a £1 million TV campaign, again featuring the skeleton Archie. 3M will also take advantage of the 1984 Olympic Games, by giving away a 128-page *Book of the Olympic Games* with every twin pack of E180 or L750 tapes. A boom in video tape sales is anticipated during the Games because of the ten-hour time difference between Los Angeles and the world's most video-populated countries — Britain, West Germany and France.

As usual at their press conferences, 3M also threw in a lot of interesting ancillary details. As well as being the brand leader in the UK with 17% — 4 points up on Sony and 7 on BASF — Scotch is also leading in the States, also with 17%. 3M also announced plans to

build a factory in West Germany, and to invest a further £18 million in their Gorseion plant in Wales, aiming at a 50 million cassette target from there. The three-hour tape still accounts for the greatest sales; and consumers buy an average of seven tapes during their first year of VCR ownership, and own fifteen tapes after three years. The only blot on the horizon is the cheapo tapes that began pushing down both prices and profits in the last quarter of '83. But there are now over six million VCRs — over 30% of households, and just under two million more expected this year so there's plenty of potential. Rental and purchase is now split roughly 50/50. The format divisions show a VHS increase at 73%, with Beta on 23%, and V2000 with just 4%. And these VCRs are used for an average of fifty hours each month in the home.

Toshiba's lightweight twosome

Toshiba has recently launched a camera and recorder in the States that together weigh only 3.6kg. The IK-2000 camera has a 13mm Saticon tube, an f/1.4 10-40mm manual zoom, with a 'focus lock' that can be set at one metre with the lens at wide angle for 'point-and-shoot' use (normal focusing throughout the zoom range is included), an optical (TTL)

finder, auto iris with BLC. There is also auto white with filters for daylight and fluorescent (the tube is balanced for tungsten), and built-in mono microphone. Minimum illumination is 50 lux. Power consumption is 2.9W (12V DC). Horizontal resolution is 250 lines, video S/N ratio 46dB. Dimensions of this Super-8-style camera are: 228(H) x 56(W) x 270(D)mm. And the weight is just 1.1kg. SRP: \$600.

The VX-34 Betas format portable isn't much larger or heavier than VHS-C portable: its weight is 2.5kg and it measures 78(H) x 187(W) x 260(D)mm, whereas JVC's C3 weighs 2kg and measures 75.5 x 182 x 203mm. Its features include membrane controls, picture search, still frame, frame advance, slo-mo, insert edit and PCM input. A cable remote plugs directly into the VCR, and there's an infrared type that operates via the tuner/timer. This has an eight-event fourteen-day timer with 105 channels. The two together have an SRP of \$1099.

Whether the IK-2000 and VX-34 will be adapted for PAL use remains to be seen; but Toshiba have thus far concentrated on mains models in the UK. ■

REGINALD MILES