

The Art of It

by Christopher Camuto

THE LIFE and work of Milton C. Weiler (1910–1974) is memorably celebrated in **THE ART OF MILTON WEILER: A SPORTSMAN'S WORLD** (LYDIA INGLETT LTD. PUBLISHING, HARDBOUND LIMITED EDITION OF 750, 156 PAGES, \$49.95). Written and edited by John T. Ordeman and M. C. "Bud" Weiler Jr., this book beautifully memorializes the extraordinary work of a watercolorist, sketch artist, and decoy carver who lived a rich life as an outdoorsman. An avid waterfowler and fly fisherman, as well as a studious observer of wildlife and landscape, Weiler ranks among the best-regarded sporting artists of the latter half of the 20th century. Weiler's waterfowling paintings, especially those set on the Eastern Shore and on Long Island, suggestively render the wan colors and cold, blustery atmosphere of duck and geese hunting along our coastal marshes. *Arkansas Timber, Canada's Refuge, Black Ducks into the Inlet, Broadbill, Moriches Bay* put the viewer vividly in the blind—a bit distracted by the beauty of dawn and dusk, but tense with expectation of a flight braking into the blocks. Weiler's paintings of angling in the Catskills, the Berkshires, and Labrador are tinged with earned nostalgia for quiet angling moments. Weiler was also an accomplished decoy carver, and he painted reproductions of historically important blocks. In addition to reproduc-

ing his watercolors, this volume reprints examples of his commercial illustrations for outdoor catalogs and several engaging articles he wrote on hunting, fishing, and the history of decoys for the sporting press. A biographical essay details the rich life of an artist, family man, and dedicated high school teacher. A limited (65 copies) "Fine Art Collector's Edition," in leather and slipcase with original drawings, is available from Decoys Associated of Littleton, New Hampshire.

It's good to see a distinguished publishing house like Alfred A. Knopf remember the connection between angling and literature with **THE ART OF ANGLING: POEMS ABOUT FISHING** (HARDBOUND, 256 PAGES, \$13.50). This Everyman Library's Pocket edition, edited by Henry Hughes, is a warm, witty, and wise collection of excellent verse

in which some aspect of the angling passion, or some brooding over rivers, arises and plays itself out. Most of the volumes of verse I receive for this column fail to rise above commonplace observations and heartfelt sentimentality. This anthology gathers genuine, artful verse that leads us toward the imaginative expansion and metaphoric displacement that is the ultimate goal of poetry. There's wonderful stuff from the

British tradition (Tennyson and Shakespeare, John Donne and John Gay, James Thompson and Thomas Barker, W. B. Yeats and Walter Scott), a wealth of selections from Chinese lyric poetry through the centuries, familiar classics from mid-20th century modernists like Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell, wild yawps from Federico García Lorca and James Dickey, spooky postmodern brooding from Richard Brautigan, Raymond Carver, Margaret Atwood, Ted Hughes, and Jim Harrison, and even an admonition from the Roman poet Martial. Good literary stuff to accompany a single malt by the fire. Buy a copy for the study and another to be battered in your angling grip.


Iwish I saw more books like **THE PERFECT CAST: A CELEBRATION OF FLY-FISHING** (STACKPOLE, HARDBOUND, 160 PAGES, \$39.95). The success of any anthology depends on the taste of its editor. These short angling essays and artwork (drawings, paintings, photographs) were gathered by British angling author Tom Quinn, who has taste aplenty. In addition to a few American voices (Babb, Lyons, Schullery, and Rosenbauer), this book puts in your hands the sparkling variety, warmth, and good humor of British angling literature. Most of the selections are from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with a few from farther back (Berners, Walton) or closer to the present. Quinn offers wonderfully chosen selections from familiar favorites like J. W. Hills, G. E. M. Skues, Sir Edward Grey, Arthur Ransom, J. C. Mottram, and William Scrope, accompanied by a well-chosen selection of artwork showing the ways a love of angling has worked on the imagination and affection of painters and photographers. If you don't know the British tradition, this is an excellent sampler and a fine fireside book, both for the images and the tales. I know the tradition pretty well, but I found a number of pleasant surprises here.

For me, a plainly checked, well-oiled walnut stock with, at most, a tasteful flourish or a meaningful hunting image on the receiver will do to enhance the functional beauty of rifle or shotgun. But there is a centuries-old tradition of using fire-

arms and edged weapons as canvases for the art of engraving. Indeed, embellishing armaments goes back to Bronze Age Greece and other early cultures. C. Roger Bleile and S. P. Fjestad's **AMERICAN ENGRAVERS: THE 21ST CENTURY** (BLUE BOOK PUBLICATIONS, HARDBOUND, 360 PAGES, \$75), is a profusely illustrated large-format book on the current state of the gun-engraving art in America. For background, the redoubtable R. L. Wilson contributes an informative historical essay. C. Roger Bleile provides extensive textual accompaniment to the illustration of work by contemporary engravers like Jim Blair, Winston Churchill, Leonard Francolini, Kurt Horvath, and others who take their art to its full extent. You will find examples from all strains of engraving—floral, naturalistic, historical, Africana, heroic and romantic imagery—that transform firearms and knives into objects of art. For those who collect or invest, S. P. Fjestad contributes expert opinion of the market value of engraved guns.

Iwouldn't have thought there was new light to shed on the art and history of the Catskill dry fly—those lithe and buoyant patterns that were the mainstays of the Eastern angler's fly box for a century or so. But Mike Valla's **TYING CATSKILL-STYLE DRY FLIES** (STACKPOLE, HARDBOUND, 233 PAGES, \$49.95) is both an excellent history of the Catskill tradition and a state-of-the-art fly-tying manual on these still-effective patterns. The author's teenage summers were spent under the tutelage of Walt and Winnie Dette, Harry and Elsie Darbee, Art Flick and others who quietly but famously pursued excellence in tying and angling on the Beaverkill, Willowemoc, Esopus, and other Catskill streams, and the book is full of wonderful photographs of these personalities and the venues of Catskill angling. The tying instructions, expertly illustrated, are top-notch, and the flies themselves—earth-toned Hendricksons, March Browns, Ginger Quills—are as beautiful as ever. ■

The author of several books and a columnist for Trout, Chris practices the art of getting by in central Pennsylvania at his Wolfree Farm, an unkempt woodland with an artfulness of its own.


I went out
to the hazel
wood, Because
a fire was in
my head. . . .

W. B. Yeats, "The Wandering Aengus"
in *The Art of Angling*