

## The Bookshelf

For this column, CAA News invites a member to reflect on three books, articles, or other textual projects that currently influence his or her art, work, or scholarship.

**N. Elizabeth Schlatter** is deputy director and curator of exhibitions at the University of Richmond Museums in Virginia. A curator of modern and contemporary art, she recently organized the exhibition *Leaded: The Materiality and Metamorphosis of Graphite*, which is traveling nationally via International Arts & Artists. An author of articles, essays, and catalogues, Schlatter recently wrote *Museum Careers: A Practical Guide for Novices and Students*, which will be published by Left Coast Press this spring.

### Victoria Newhouse

#### *Art and the Power of Placement*

New York: Monacelli Press, 2005

Although I refer to this book often,



it both intrigues and frustrates me. Something of a companion to Victoria Newhouse's impressive tome on architecture, *Towards a*

*New Museum* (1998), this 304-page book is filled with photographs and illustrations, thorough research, and insightful writing about the effect of physical context on artwork. One particularly enlightening chapter presents a methodical comparison of various installations of paintings by Jackson Pollock in private homes, commercial galleries, and museums. Two critics—one in *Art in America* and the other in the *New Criterion*—proclaimed, “no museum professional should be without this book” and that it should “be an obligatory read for all who have anything to do with the placement of art.”

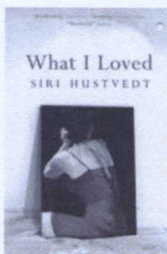
However, as a previous reader rightly noted, the majority of the photographs Newhouse employs lack the most important element of context: viewers. And the final section of the book, entitled “Placing Art,” which includes short segments on topics like wall color, scale, and labels, reads more as a brief compendium of exhibition “do’s and don’ts” than the thoughtful analysis in the earlier chapters. Maybe my problem is that I just don’t like being told what to do.

### Suri Hustvedt

#### *What I Loved*

New York: Henry Holt, 2003

By happenstance, I took a used copy of Suri Hustvedt's book on a recent trip to San Francisco. Being a nervous flier, I was thrilled to be so quickly absorbed into the narrative, which has a rich tonality I can't begin to describe effec-



tively. The author tells the story of two small families enmeshed in the alluring yet imperfect worlds of art, academia, and the New York clubbing scene. I'm awed by

how Hustvedt opens the minds of her characters to create text that is sensitive and authentic, while simultaneously weaving a complex and compelling story. Her characters' astute musings on artwork, inspiration, aesthetic response, and the act of creation are echoed and amplified in Hustvedt's own observations on paintings—by Vermeer, Goya, Richter, and others—in her later collection of essays, *Mysteries of the Rectangle* (2005).

I'm in the midst of coorganizing an exhibition of paintings by artists whose work can be described as narrative but in a manner that seamlessly merges form with image. Like Hustvedt's writing, the “stories” in these paintings are manifest by the artists' medium of choice and by their deft talents; intuitive and invented worlds reside on the canvas yet flow into the consciousness of the viewers through visual content alone.

### Lewis Carroll

#### *The Annotated Alice*

Introduction and notes by Martin Gardner

New York: Penguin, 2001



Influenced by the stories of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), their accompanying illustrations by John

Tenniel, and the life and work of Lewis Carroll, the artist Sue Johnson lent me this book to prepare for an exhibition of her art that I organized this year. I had tried and failed to read a different version of these classic tomes of literary nonsense, which seemed plodding and grating rather than charming and enchanting.

This 2001 edition, however, brims with fascinating notes providing historical and political context, Martin Gardner's own personal and often amusing observations, and obscure minutiae about Carroll (a pseudonym for the author Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a mathematician at Oxford) and his writings as deciphered by obsessive aficionados. With astute commentary, Gardner reveals the depth of humor, symbolism, and intelligence in Carroll's story. As a result, I could better perceive how this vivid narrative resonates with the layers—visual and thematic—in Johnson's drawings and ceramics that examine themes of food, advertising, and mass production.