

Artful Volumes

BOOKFORUM CONTRIBUTORS ON THE SEASON'S OUTSTANDING ART BOOKS.



Badges and coins featuring wizards and aliens, anthropomorphic fighter jets chasing rabbits, and Duff beer; KGB identity cards; Iranian toy replicas of American drones; a desiccated dinosaur egg. Metal detritus from crashed air- and spacecraft, whose mangled, riven forms offer quiet testament to an intrinsic violence. These are a few of the curiosities found in Peter Merlin's archive, which is housed in a remote corner of the Mojave Desert near Area 51. In **FROM THE ARCHIVES OF PETER MERLIN, AVIATION ARCHAEOLOGIST** ([Primary Information, \\$20](#)), artist and secret-culture aficionado Trevor Paglen has photographed these items against a stark white background. Bold primary colors predominate, along with occasional dark redactions. Full-page detail shots highlight some of the weirdest objects, lending them an ominous air, but you could just read the slogans, in which full-throated military machismo meets a winky tinfoil-hat vibe: One badge featuring a flaming Eye of Sauron promises THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE; another advises that A LACK OF CRITICISM SHOULD BE ENOUGH. Or, more to the point: WE DO BAD THINGS TO BAD PEOPLE. —RAHEL AIMA