

20 Best Art Books of 2020

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December 14, 2020

To celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the *Brooklyn Rail*, our editors and writers have selected our favorite art books from the past year. Many of the titles reflect a year spent mostly at home, often in isolation. What follows is a selection of what kept us company during this difficult year, kept us thinking and dreaming about art and language, and kept us rethinking what looking and reading can and should be.

Michael Snow's 1975 *Cover to Cover*

(Primary Information and Light Industry, 2020)

Originally published in 1975 and long out-of-print, Michael Snow's *Cover to Cover* reappeared this year in a facsimile edition from Primary Information and Light Industry. Its 316 pages of full-bleed, black-and-white images are the result of two photographers capturing opposite and sequential views of the media between them: pages, windows, walls, a record, a truck, a figure (Snow himself). With doors at either end, the book is a sort of passageway, one which flips upside-down partway through, recalling the old tête-bêche Ace Doubles. Like Snow's films, it plays a game of approach and avoidance, stretching tension across volumes of space and time, here with the cinematic grammar of the reverse shot. Each moment of domesticity, transit, and contemplation soon destabilizes and slips into a stack of images, until the book itself becomes the only fixed point. Key to Snow's work is his willingness to break his own rules, to evade dry conceptualism in order to satisfy the expressive desires that emerge from a structure. His experiments anticipate an audience, not an auditor. There is density to ponder on every spread, but also a lithe urgency that keeps the pages turning. —*Maxwell Paparella*