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**LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES:**  
*A History of Art Dealing in  
the United States.*

By Malcolm Goldstein. Oxford Univ.  
Press. 370 pp. \$30

In 1937 Peggy Guggenheim, whose Uncle Solomon founded that famously circular museum, opened an art gallery in London. Hilla Rebay, the German artist who was helping Solomon amass his collection, chided the fledgling dealer: "It is extremely distasteful . . . when the name Guggenheim stands for an ideal in art, to see it used for commerce. . . . Commerce with real art cannot exist. . . . You will soon find you are propagating mediocrity; if not trash." By 1940, Peggy had closed her London gallery—not because she took Rebay's point, but because she hadn't turned a profit. She went to Paris, checkbook in hand, buying a picture a day on the cheap for her own little museum. Only Picasso rebuffed the bulb-nosed American. "Now, what can I do for you, madame?" he asked when she arrived at his studio. "Are you sure that you are in the right department? Lingerie is on the next floor."

Though necessarily episodic, this history of American art dealing is pleasingly written, attentive to nuance, respectful without being sycophantic, and rife with tales of the titans and oddballs who made art their business. The economy and grace of the metaphoric title apply to the admirable book as a whole. The publisher is touting it as "the first history of art dealing in America," but Goldstein, a professor emeritus of English at the City University of New York, makes a far more modest claim. As in Saul Steinberg's cartoon, the states beyond New York scarcely exist here, and only the most influential dealers in American and European art get much play. "Surely that is enough for one book," the author writes courageously. And it is.

American art dealing scarcely existed before the latter part of the 19th century, when European dealers played to Gilded Age millionaires' sense of cultural inferiority by selling them Old Masters. While the dealers showed European paintings, among them Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crosses the Delaware*, American artists struggled: Thomas Cole's paintings hung in a frame shop, available for \$25, and Frederic Church advertised his landscape-painting services in a magazine. An important cultural exchange eventually took

place. European dealers such as Alfred Knoedler and the Scotch-Irish William Macbeth recognized the value of the American product, and American dealers such as Peggy Guggenheim promoted and supported European modernists.

The narrative lingers at midcentury, when the author was a poor student traveling down from Columbia University to 57th Street to buy paintings he could ill afford, on installment. The dealers he met then—Grace Borgenicht, Edith Halpert, and Antoinette Kraushaar—were informed, generous with their time, and not unprincipled. By Goldstein's reckoning, they, and those who followed them (especially Betty Parsons, Sidney Janis, and Leo Castelli), genuinely advanced the cause of serious art. While Goldstein gives scant attention to art dealings' last few confused decades, no one could yet call them historic, and perhaps no one ever will.

—A. J. HEWAT

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**THEREMIN:**  
*Ether Music and Espionage.*

By Albert Glinsky. Univ. of Illinois  
Press. 403 pp. \$34.95

In 1920, Russian engineer Leon Theremin arranged a demonstration for colleagues at his Petrograd research institute. He stood in the



*Leon Theremin demonstrating his eponymous device in Paris in 1927.*