



ence to the Italian [Renaissance] tradition," with its emphases upon elaborate perspective systems, the human form, and iconography (i.e., the painting's allusion to religious or mythical texts). By contrast, the works of such painters as Pieter Saenredam, Willem Kalf, and Jan Vermeer reflect the distinctive cultural climate of 17th-century Holland—a society fascinated by the visible world. The popularity of the *camera obscura* (prototype of the modern camera), optics, and lens-making disposed artists toward a kind of visual reporting. While the Italians sought primarily to interpret the world, the Dutch sought to describe the world—an impulse shared by Holland's skilled cartographers. The interest in description found intellectual support in a number of widely circulated philosophical and scientific texts, including Sir Francis Bacon's empiricist arguments and Johannes Kepler's treatise on the eye. Alpers acknowledges exceptions to the Dutch pattern. Rembrandt's thickly layered canvases, his moody orchestrations of light and shadow, and his frequent treatment of Biblical themes suggest an emphasis on things felt rather than seen. But most Dutch artists strove to depict the teeming here-and-now, a task at which they had few equals.

Science & Technology

ALGENY
by Jeremy Rifkin
Viking, 1983
298 pp. \$14.75

"Can any of us imagine saying no to all the great benefits that the bioengineering of life will bring to bear?" Rifkin, author of the controversial *Entropy* (1980), here argues that we should. "Algeny," a neologism coined by Dr. Joshua Lederberg, a Nobel laureate biologist, is the belief that all living organisms are merely temporary sets of DNA-based relationships on their way to becoming something else—and now, with the aid of genetic engineers, cybernetics, and computers, something "better." The new "algenetic" theory of evolution will, Rifkin believes, supplant the Darwinian theory, and become the justification for a world in which living organisms are

viewed as immediately manipulable "patterns of information." Rifkin's book is mostly a meditation on the relationship between a society's beliefs, such as the theory of evolution, and the interests of its most powerful members. Most biologists will have few quarrels with Rifkin's restatement of the argument that Darwin transferred to nature the "hidden hand" of Adam Smith's marketplace, thus giving the authority of natural law to the emerging disparities of wealth in industrializing England. His assertion that Darwinism is on the way out will raise many eyebrows. Still, this is a forceful warning against the dangers of bioengineering, including the looming prospect of widespread, commercialized eugenics.

IN PURSUIT OF THE PAST: Decoding the Archaeological Record
by Lewis R. Binford
Thames and Hudson, 1983
256 pp. \$18.50

Breakfast in bed may sound like a peculiarly modern form of self-indulgence. But according to Binford, professor of archaeology at the University of New Mexico, prehistoric hunter-gatherers used their beds for a variety of private activities, including eating and tool-making. Examining the material remains—bones, fragments of pottery, and other artifacts—is only one technique Binford employs to "decode the archaeological record." Equally important are comparative ethnographic studies of surviving hunter groups (e.g., Nunamiut Eskimos and !Kung Bushmen) and the experimental simulation of cooking, hunting, and other living patterns that may have prevailed in the distant past. Concerning his life-long interest—the prehistoric transition from hunter-gatherer to farming societies—Binford assails the Marxist theory of a "goal-oriented" change. A nonmigratory agricultural life was, he argues, more a matter of necessity (expanding human populations reduced the stocks of wild game) than of desire; Eskimos today barely tolerate the change to sedentary life. Binford provides an excellent introduction to what has come to be called the "New Archaeology," distinguishing its more scientific orientation from earlier, antiquarian approaches.