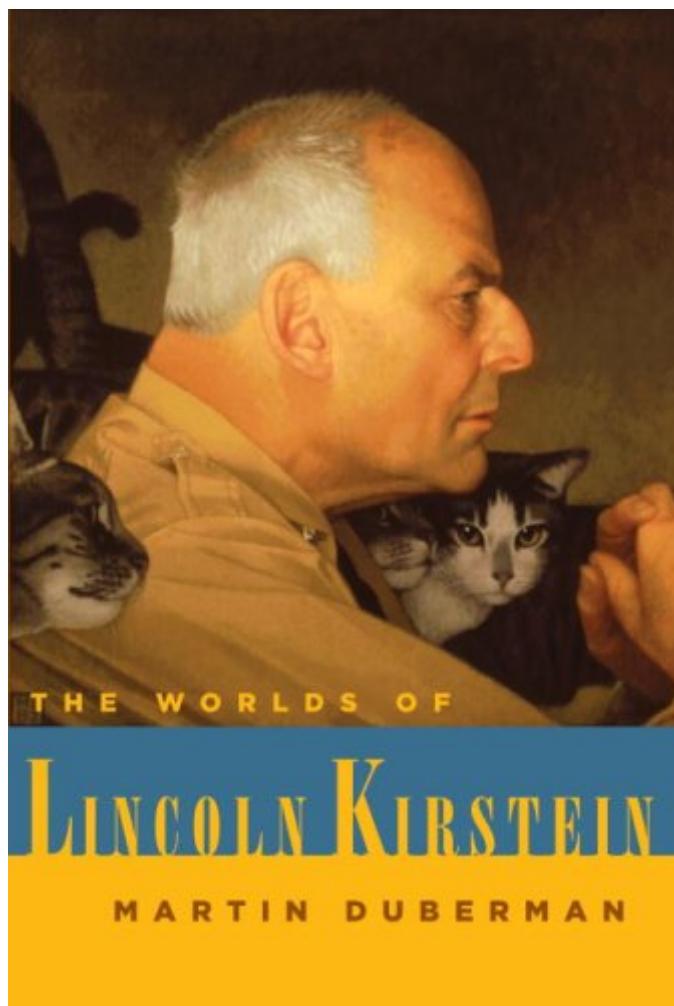


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The Worlds Of Lincoln Kirstein



Synopsis

A rich and revelatory biography of one of the crucial cultural figures of the twentieth century. Lincoln Kirstein's contributions to the nation's life, as both an intellectual force and advocate of the arts, were unparalleled. While still an undergraduate, he started the innovative literary journal *Hound and Horn*, as well as the modernist Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, "forerunner of the Museum of Modern Art. He brought George Balanchine to the United States, and in service to the great choreographer's talent, persisted, against heavy odds, in creating both the New York City Ballet and the School of American Ballet. Among much else, Kirstein helped create Lincoln Center in New York, and the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut; established the pathbreaking Dance Index and the country's first dance archives; and in some fifteen books proved himself a brilliant critic of art, photography, film, and dance. But behind this remarkably accomplished and renowned public face lay a complex, contradictory, often tortured human being. Kirstein suffered for decades from bipolar disorder, which frequently strained his relationships with his family and friends, a circle that included many notables, from W. H. Auden to Nelson Rockefeller. And despite being married for more than fifty years to a woman whom he deeply loved, Kirstein had a wide range of homosexual relationships throughout the course of his life. This stunning biography, filled with fascinating perceptions and incidents, is a major act of historical reclamation. Utilizing an enormous amount of previously unavailable primary sources, including Kirstein's untapped diaries, Martin Duberman has rendered accessible for the first time a towering figure of immense complexity and achievement. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein is terrifically detailed and sweeps the reader into the best years of New York, especially. I could not put it down and walked around carrying this massive tome everywhere because I could not be parted from it. He truly crossed paths with EVERYONE, and it was enthralling to realize how one did that then. Duberman is frank and honest about the material that causes unease, particularly about fascism and social ambitions of some of Kirstein's colleagues over the years. His life was so layered, like a mille-fleur pastry, that Duberman has to keep sweeping back across the same period of months again and again to get it all, which takes some getting used to, but, by 1934, seems as natural a way as any to make the portrait complete.

A superb biography of a complicated person who was not only a key figure in the development of ballet in America, but a cultural leader in a wide sweep of artistic endeavors over most of the last century. While his creative partnership with George Balanchine is central to this book, Lincoln Kirstein also had important early roles in introducing many modern painters to the public and with various fine literary endeavors. The author, Mr. Duberman, does not flinch from Mr. Kirstein's "own varied sexual-affectionate history." Potential readers should know this is an unusually candid account of a notable person's private life. While not a high-lighted part of this book, I especially admire Mr. Kirstein's service in World War II as one of the "Monuments Men", who helped save a large part of European art at the end of World War II. Readers interested in this overall effort might wish to read "Rescuing Da Vinci" by Edsel. (The book's jacket design by Chip Kidd is first rate.)

At the September 2009 of the NYC LGBT Center book discussion group, we had a small but very smart and vocal group that read the "The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein" by Martin Duberman. I think that we all wanted to learn more about Lincoln Kirstein and wanted to like this book, but almost everyone agreed that something "didn't click" in this epic biography. While there were lots of amazing events

and interesting stories and huge personalities, there was not an overarching view of Kirstein's life or accomplishments. The organization seemed a bit muddled. Sometimes there was just too much damn detail. Lots of valuable information was buried in the text. There was no attempt to dramatize events or make the point of some of the incidents clear. There was a lot of sex (which was good) but it was unclear why some of the stories were in the book. One reader pointed out that Duberman was not invited to any of the Lincoln Center activities celebrating ABT and Lincoln Kirstein's anniversary after the biography came out, so he ruffled feathers with this definitive biography including the stories of Kirstein's bouts of manic depression and later mental illness. But for this general interest reading group (even if we are all smart queers in NYC), it all seemed a bit remote and academic for such a major figure in NYC and the American arts.

Anyone attending performances of New York City Ballet will benefit from reading Martin Duberman's book. The Worlds of Lincoln Kirstein details the history and the development of the company and illuminates Lincoln's contribution to City Ballet's standing as one of the best dance companies in the world.

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