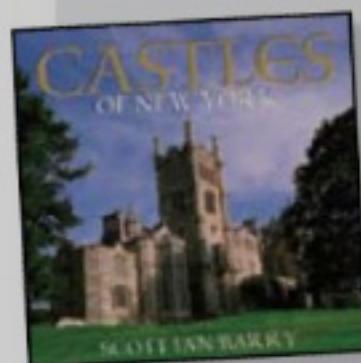


SHORT TAKES

Build a castle, draw a plant, put on a show, self-publish a book, or just clean your closet—a Labor Day tribute to do-it-yourselfers of every persuasion.



CASTLES OF NEW YORK

SCOTT IAN BARRY
EXCELSIOR EDITIONS, 2010, \$29.95

Woodstock wolfmeister Barry (*Wolf Empire*) turns his lens on New York State's castles, exploring the romance and beauty of Olana, Cat Rock, Wing's Castle, Lyndhurst, and many more. Eye-filling photos and detailed essays celebrate the architectural vision and deep-dish eccentricity of men who would be kings. *Book launch party 9/10 at 7:30pm, Oblong Books, Rhinebeck.*



BOTANICAL DRAWING IN COLOR: A BASIC GUIDE TO MASTERING REALISTIC FORM AND NATURALISTIC COLOR

WENDY HOLLENDER
WATSON GUPTILL/RANDOM HOUSE, 2010, \$24.99

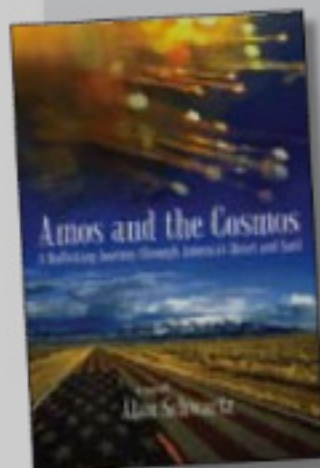
Ever wished for a flower that wouldn't fade? This gorgeously illustrated manual offers expert advice on the fascinating art of drawing plants. With exercises, examples, and guidance on everything from choosing art materials to positioning subjects and drawing from life, Accord resident/CSA farmer Hollender's book is inspiring and instructive for both beginning and advanced artists.



A JEW GROWS IN BROOKLYN

JAKE EHRENREICH
HCI BOOKS, 2010, \$14.95

Expanding on his hit Off-Broadway musical memoir, Orange County writer/performer Ehrenreich spins poignant, funny stories about growing up as the son of Holocaust survivors and his long road from mortal embarrassment at his Yiddish nickname "Yonkee" to self-acceptance. You should read it already.



AMOS AND THE COSMOS: A ROLLIING JOURNEY THROUGH AMERICA'S HEART AND SOUL

ALAN SCHWARTZ
IUNIVERSE, 2010, \$18.95

Amos Boris Lardowitz's journey in search of his cultural and spiritual self mirrors that quintessentially American dilemma: what is our collective identity? Spanning the explosion of awareness from the 1950s to the century's end, author and Rhinebeck veterinarian Alan Schwartz's first novel is a thought-provoking character study.



MINKA RAY: THE HEARTSTONE

ELIZA PRAETORIUS, ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIE BESANCON
EARTHWORKS-BOOKS.COM, 2010, \$12.95

Now here's an original premise: space-child meets igloo. Bred from half-human stock on an orbiting Mothership and trained as a Navigator, spirited Minka is drawn to Earth by a grieving mother's song. She lands in the Arctic, where old-ways shamanism and traditional culture are as endangered as whales. Woodstocker Praetorius based her book on a children's opera.



BE CLUTTER FREE: SORTING MADE SIMPLE

ROSALYN CHERRY, MS, CHT
WHITE RIVER PRESS, 2010, \$20

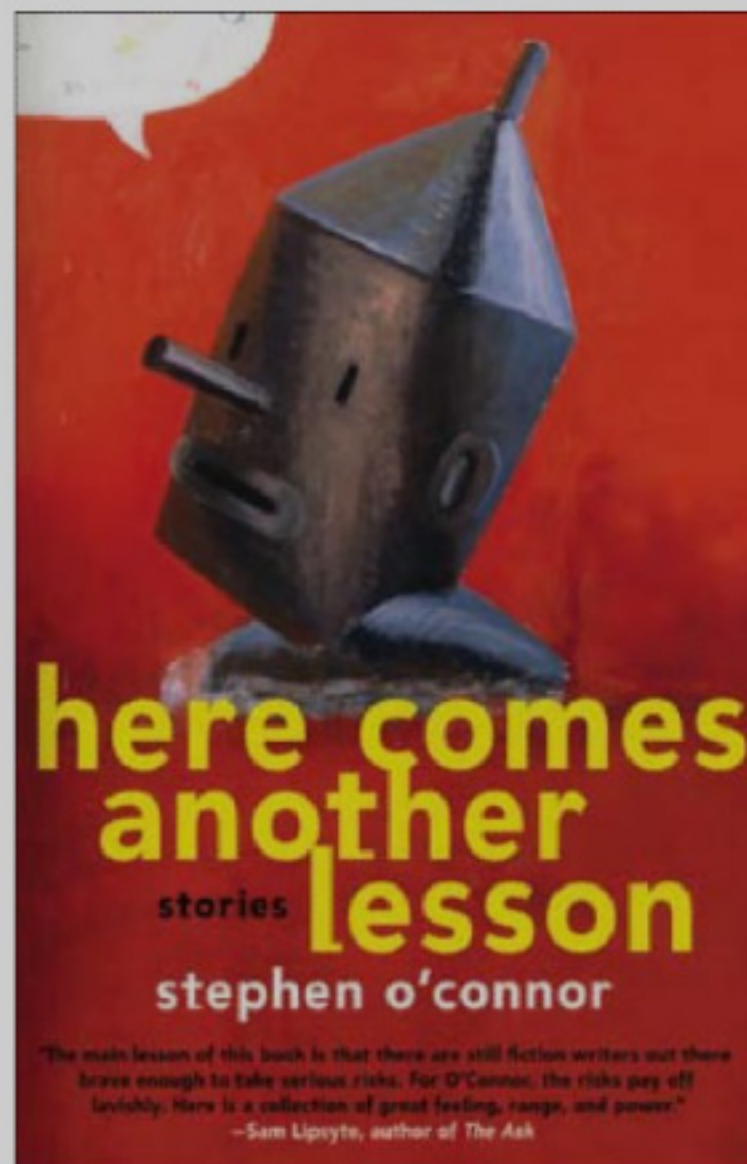
Depressed by accumulations of domestic flotsam and jetsam—but don't know where to begin—or how to find time? In this slender, colorful book, New Paltz clutter-buster Cherry offers a cheerful, step-by-step approach to reclaiming space without getting utterly overwhelmed.

Book Reviews

Here Comes Another Lesson

Stephen O'Connor

SIMON AND SCHUSTER, 2010, \$15



Stephen O'Connor knows how to use the power of myth—as his story “Ziggurat,” about a minotaur playing with its child victim, demonstrates—to give the void a good hard stare. His literary skill set is daunting. Readers of *Here Comes Another Lesson*, the Albany County resident's new story collection, will be entranced by his unexpected metaphors while being led into his gleaming, apocalyptic landscapes.

In his story “Paradise”: “Utterly unfamiliar birds in various combinations of turquoise, school-bus orange and birthday-cake green flitted constantly from branch to branch or darted across the open sky.” On the other side of paradise, where knowledge of good and evil is situated, O'Connor's breeze bristles with an equal and opposite force: “The leaves were black or blood sausage purple; many were barbed and some of the

grasses along the trail were as sharp as razor wire.”

In “Love,” a story about a woman who retreats to an upstate cabin to write a dissertation, the author relays outdoor patters and hisses with methodical precision. His tree branches respond to the woman's moods like vibrating tuning forks. Nearly every paragraph of the 40-page story gives mention of the shifting that is occurring above her in the leaves and sky. O'Connor brings this descriptive motif to a climax with a palette of glints and grays that are never dull and even mildly shocking. To give imagery an arc displays a rare ability, a poet's gift. The woman becomes obsessed with ill-perceived threats. She wonders if it is a rural stalker or a bear that she hears. She ponders whether her Williamsburg boyfriend can be trusted. A sleepless night in bed with her father's hunting knife at her side ends like this: “Only when the ashen light of approaching dawn turned the leaves outside her window the color of cooked liver did she fall briefly into restorative oblivion.” It is not just the striking correctness of color but also the comic morbidity of a plate of liver causing eyelids to drop that makes this small payoff so bracing.

O'Connor crosses smoothly among narrative modes. The plaintively real, the instructional fable, and the farcically transfigured are all familiar waters. The various figures in his otherworldly designs—a pothead mom, a talking cormorant, an adulterous dentist, an owl flying over someone drunk in a truck—seem to be set in motion by a cosmic force that has the feel of a simple dream. It is fitting, somehow, that conversations drift toward dialectical quandaries such as the difference between belief and knowledge. A professor of Atheistic Studies at a fictive Christian college discovers a book with his name on the cover that he does not remember writing. His driver's license picture is on the back. It is titled *Every Known Delight: Gullibility and the Invention of Believability*. When I read what the professor finds between the covers, I laughed so hard that I nearly cracked a rib.

O'Connor's art is shaped from the labyrinthine sources that have always bestowed fiction with a kind of occult power. His devices are ancient, and an introductory omen usually determines the course. In “White Fire,” a soldier returning from Iraq nearly runs over the toddler in his driveway. The story raises the impossible question of how we can love some children and destroy others. “I know it's going to be. You know. Very bad,” says the soldier, glimpsing his fate. In O'Connor's stories, the lessons dangle like forbidden fruit and then drop precisely into our lap.

Reading Sunday 9/12 at 4:30pm at the Hudson Valley Writers' Center in Sleepy Hollow with Akiko Busch, Benjamin Cheever, Edwin Sanchez, and Daniel Wolff.

—Marx Dorrity