

# BOOK REVIEWS



## Robert Qualters—Autobiographical Mythologies

By Vicky A. Clark

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013

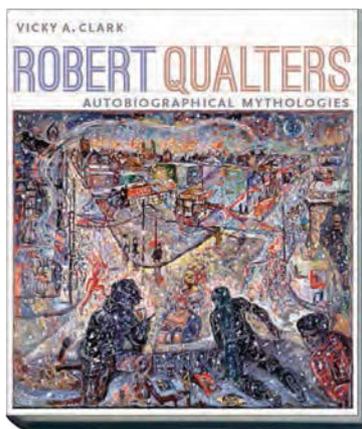
232 pps., 88 color, 15 b&w illustrations

\$64.95 hardcover

Reviewed by Emilia S. Boehm

Active canvases bursting with imagery and vibrant colors and framed by written words have become the hallmarks of the McKeesport-born (1934), Clairton-raised artist Bob Qualters. Described as a “visible figure in the Pittsburgh art scene with a colorful vernacular,” Qualters is a prolific and popular artist whose decorated career has spanned seven decades. The year 2014, punctuated by the occurrence of his 80th birthday, has seen Qualters distinguished with a retrospective exhibition, *Robert Qualters: A Life*, the release of *Bob Qualters: The Artist in Action*, a short film by Joe and Elizabeth Seamens, and the publication of *Robert Qualters: Autobiographical Mythologies*, also by Clark. The volume by Clark, an art historian and independent curator, offers an in-depth and thoughtful look at Bob Qualters career thus far.

While Qualters is known for his frequent incorporation of Pittsburgh imagery, Clark explains that Pittsburgh and its environs provide “a backdrop, a stage set” for Qualters’ “personal and communal memories, histories, and stories, both real and fictional.” Qualters includes the city and region throughout his work—from the Jenkins Arcade, Penn Station, the Homestead Steel Works, and Forbes Field, to scenes in East Liberty, Polish Hill, downtown Pittsburgh, and



McKeesport. But layered on top of these familiar spaces, says Clark, is the true focus—Qualters’ narrative of the human condition. That we recognize the buildings, streets, and bridges in Qualters’ paintings can add to our interest in his work, says Clark, similar to the way that the words (whether the poetry of Blake or Yeats, or the artist’s own narration) he uses to frame his images enhance our understanding of the work. The local imagery Qualters captures in paint also serves to document, from the artist’s unique viewpoint, the history of the region. The author aptly describes Qualters as a “visual raconteur,” in whose paintings the reward is found when one keeps looking and allows the full story to unfold.

The book is richly illustrated with Qualters’ paintings. Recent works appear alongside many of his better-known canvases, and examples of early work are an enjoyable treat, beginning with a circa 1938–1940 childhood drawing (paired smartly with a 2007 work in which the artist revisited the drawing he produced some 70 years earlier). Portraits of Qualters taken by photographer Mark Perrott introduce each chapter and remind us that the artist is indeed present on this journey. (Some of Qualters’ collaborations with local artists like Perrott and Nick Bubash are also included in the book.) The lyrical narrative provides background on Qualters’ life and descriptions of the works depicted while also allowing the artist’s own voice and affable charm to shine through. Insights into Qualters’ influences and

inspirations reveal the role of art and literature, as well as the importance of creating and reflecting dialogue in his work.

Clark’s *Autobiographical Mythologies* fittingly documents Qualters’ career and place in the regional art scene, and will be a valuable and enduring resource on this unique artist. 🌟

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Formerly the Curator of Clayton & Car and Carriage Museum at the Frick Art & Historical Center, Emilia S. Boehm is an independent museum professional in Boston.

## Samuel Stouffer and the GI Survey: Sociologists and Soldiers during the Second World War

By Joseph W. Ryan with an introduction by David R. Segal

Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013

255 pps., index, bibliography

\$64.95 hardcover

Reviewed by Lisa Spahr, researcher and author of *World War II Radio Heroes: Letters of Compassion* (2008, 2013)

Joseph Ryan offers an excellent and thorough introduction into the life and work of Samuel Stouffer (1900–1960), a sociologist who transformed the world of survey research and attitude measurement. *Samuel Stouffer and the GI Survey* is vital to understanding World War II history; specifically how the military gained access to the thoughts and attitudes of those serving, including in combat zones; and better addressed inadequacies in military policy, readiness challenges, and hot-button topics such as racial integration. One of Stouffer’s greatest contributions was *The American Soldier*, a multi-volume (and Carnegie funded) series of more than 200 questionnaires given to more than half a million service personnel during the war. This work was carried out by Stouffer and his research team while he served as head of the Army Information and Education Division’s Research Branch. Stouffer’s notes relay his goal: “My idea is to hunt the fellow actually carrying the ball; he may be far down in the hierarchy.... I want to learn from the ground up; not just