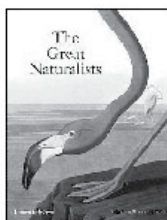
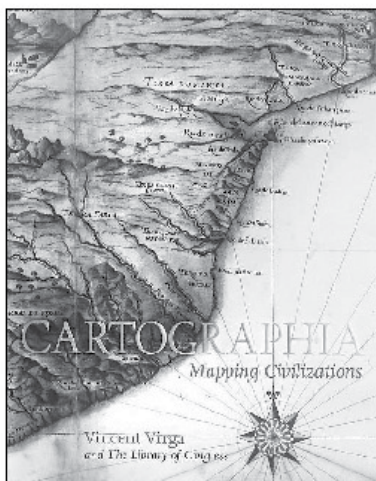
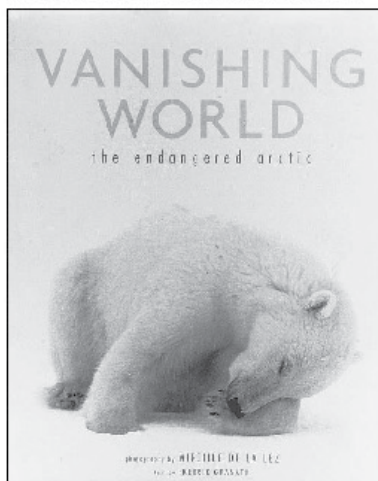


HOLIDAY BOOKS COFFEE-TABLE BOOKS



Earth, wind and fire

• Reinforce your coffee tables for this year's offerings on our breathtakingly beautiful and endangered planet Earth.

By LK HANSON
Special to the Star Tribune

A good chunk of this year's gift-type books reflect an awareness that our world is not in good shape. It's interesting to note how many new titles use such words as "changing," "vanishing" and "endangered" — especially the big, glossy productions involving, in some cases, hundreds of contributors.

One book that capably captures the Big Changes is "Our Changing Planet: The View From Space" (Cambridge, 390 pages, \$45), edited by Michael King, Claire Parkinson, Kim Partington and Robin Williams, with contributions from more than 100 scientists from many disciplines. This is a thoughtful survey, full of stunning photos — both satellite and earthbound — and illuminating charts and graphics. The editors have done a splendid job of organizing a daunting array of material into a genuinely engaging, sobering and informative work that will appeal to even the most science-challenged reader.

Here on Earth, in one of the planet's most extreme environments, we find ourselves in "Vanishing World: The Endangered Arctic" (Abrams, 264 pages, \$40), with photographs by Mireille de la Lez and text by Fredrik Granath. De la Lez admirably conveys the harsh beauty of this landscape, and Granath's brief paragraphs are informative and cautionary. And there are the familiar animal stars cavorting on polar bears with adorable babies and their favorite snack, the arctic seal, along with an assortment of walrus, foxes and hardy birds.

A far more welcoming and hospitable environment is found in "Hispaniola: A Photographic Journey through Island Biodiversity" (Harvard, 374 pages, \$60), where editor-photographer Eladio Fernandez trains his lenses on Haiti and the Dominican Republic. While one of the poorest places in the Western Hemisphere, color-drenched Hispaniola has abundant natural treasures, as revealed in this lovely book. Fernandez has traversed the island and documented its riches in gorgeous,

large-format photos. From dense forests and sunny beaches to shimmering lizards and jewel-like birds, he gets diversity down beautifully.

Change comes at us full force in Fred Pierce's "Earth Then and Now: Amazing Images of Our Changing World" (Firefly, 288 pages, \$39.95). If, for example, you ever wondered what Mount Rushmore looked like before it was "Mount Rushmore," you'll find before-and-after photos here. Examples of change (whether by force of nature or man-made) are dramatic indeed, as in satellite images of the Sumatran province of Aceh in 2003 and then post-tsunami in 2004, or photos of the ruins of Dresden's magnificent Frauenkirche in 1952 and its restored version of 2005. An eye-opening collection of truly dramatic photographic comparisons.

Zeroing in on one of nature's more crystalline wonders is Kenneth Libbrecht in "The Art of the Snowflake: A Photographic Album" (Voyager, 144 pages, \$30). Libbrecht, a name synonymous with snow crystal photography, again shows his mastery in this gorgeous book, proving many times over the old grade-school dictum that "no two snowflakes are ever alike." They're certainly not, and here's the beautiful proof.

Mapping and measuring

Three engrossing histories relating to nature, science and our planet are well worth any curious reader's attention. The first is "Cartographia: Mapping Civilizations," by Vincent Virga and the Library of Congress (Little, Brown, 272 pages, \$60). Before the era of Google maps and GPS, somebody had to figure out what was what and where we were, and this elegant book tells how that was done, from incisions in clay to satellite maps of the universe.

Closely related to maps and mapping is how things are measured, the history of which is told through abundant illustrations and text in "The Story of Measurement," by Andrew Robinson (Thames & Hudson, 224 pages, \$34.95). Counting, determining the circumference of the Earth, making an atomic clock — they're all in

this story of a subject that most of us don't think much about.

Finally, we find ourselves with "The Great Naturalists," edited by Robert Huxley (Thames & Hudson, 304 pages, \$39.95). Articles from some 24 contributors take us from the time of Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) to Charles Darwin (1809-82), showing how these adventuresome and curious people contributed to a body of knowledge assembled over some 2,000 years of human history. An intriguing bunch they were, as revealed in the concise biographies presented here, along with examples of their work, which include wonderful illustrations, many of them rendered by the naturalists themselves.

Flights of fancy

When we need a break from the turmoil of the natural and man-made world, there's always art, of course. A number of titles fall under the catch-all "art" category this season. Among the most unusual is "Aircraft: The Jet as Art," by photographer Jeffrey Milstein (Abrams, 96 pages, \$29.95). Few of us would consider those ubiquitous flying machines "art" by any stretch, especially considering what it's like to travel in them. However, by removing the backgrounds and placing his subjects against plain white, Milstein reveals these airborne tubes to be extraordinarily beautiful, elegant objects.

Planes mean travel, and travel posters are the subject of Lorenzo Ottaviani's "Travel Italia: The Golden Age of Italian Travel Posters" (Abrams, 160 pages, \$35). Here's a generous offering of those distinctive images, many once part of the decor of numberless dorm rooms, rec rooms and wherever else a dash of color was needed. The posters are indeed beautiful. Along with an informative introduction, Ottaviani offers capsule bios of the artists and their contributions. Highly looky, and charming to boot.

Posters of a completely different sort comprise James Aulich's "War Posters: Weapons of Mass Communication" (Thames & Hudson, 256 pages, \$40). Taken from the collection of London's Imperial War Museum, here are familiar images — from Uncle Sam declaring "I Want You" to the back of a fat-necked Hungarian military official under the words "Comrades It's Over."

More sweetly in keeping with the season is "Art of the Crêche" (Merrell, 208 pages, \$34.95), a lovely book featuring many dazzling examples of crêches from around the world, collected by author James L. Govan and his late wife, Emilia. The crêche (which means "crib" in French) has inspired artists of all kinds, as is obvious in the wonderful examples attractively displayed in this book. The most colorfully inspired — and my personal favorites — are the exuberant works from Latin America, where the traditions of folk art and Christianity come together in wondrous ways.

Burn, baby, burn

Art figures hugely in the most literal sense in Nevada's annual Burning Man festival in the Black Rock Desert. Begun in 1986, it's now a major world countercultural event, important enough to have spawned two books this season. Jessica Bruder's "Burning Book: A Visual History of Burning Man" (Simon Spotlight, 368 pages, \$28.95) shows us the workings of this gigantic, colorful art event, during which artists, builders, performers and creative types of every description meet to create and celebrate. "Burning Man: Art in the Desert" (Abrams, 160 pages, \$29.25) is writer-photographer A. Leo Nash's personal history of Burning Man. While Bruder captures the energy and excitement of this remarkable event, Nash's approach is spare, with beautiful black-and-white photos and minimal text. Whether you're a fan or you've never heard of Burning Man, both books are worth dipping into — if only to vicariously experience this unique cultural phenomenon.

More sobering but just as interesting is Sherry Buchanan's "Vietnam Zippo: American Soldiers' Engravings and Stories 1965-1973" (University of Chicago, 180 pages, \$25), which explores that famous lighter as both a weapon of destruction and a soldier's talisman. Using Zippo from the collection of artist Bradford Edwards, Buchanan shows the personal histories of some of the millions who served in that conflict. This unique approach is by turns funny, pornographic, informative and heartbreaking.

L.K. Hanson is a former Star Tribune staff illustrator and cartoonist. And occasional writer.

TOP TITLES OF 2007

Tree of Smoke	Schulz and Peanuts	The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao	The Coldest Winter	Away	Out Stealing Horses	Exit Wounds	On Chesil Beach	Loving Frank	The World Without Us
Denis Johnson (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 624 pages, \$27).	by David Michaealis (HarperCollins, 655 pages, \$34.95).	by Junot Diaz (Riverhead, 352 pages, \$24.95).	by David Halberstam (Hyperion, 719 pages, \$35).	by Amy Bloom (Random House, 256 pages, \$23.95).	by Per Petterson (Graywolf, 288 pages, \$22).	by Rutu Modan (Drawn & Quarterly, 172 pages, \$19.95).	by Ian McEwan (Nan A. Talese, 208 pages, \$22).	by Nancy Horan (Ballantine, 368 pages, \$23.95).	by Alan Weisman (Thomas Dunne, 386 pages, \$24.95).
An ambitious, perfectly executed novel of the Vietnam	Wonderful, honest portrait of one of America's great and	A deeply imagined, inquisitive, sharply textured, en-	A well researched, understandable and	A brilliantly written novel of a woman's jour-	A beautifully told story of complicated love and under-	A soulful depiction of Israeli life that ex-	An oddly beautiful take on the sweetness, sadness and	A vibrant, imaginative novel of the runaway romance between	A most satisfying environmental book, one devoid of