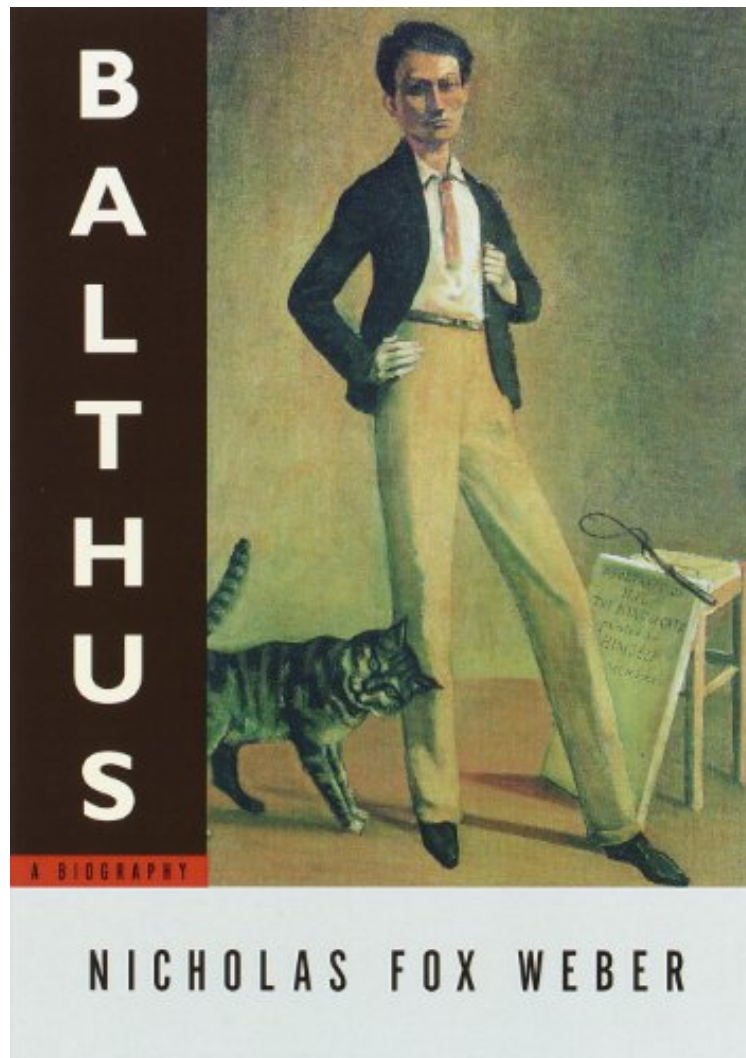


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## Balthus: A Biography

Von Nicholas Fox Weber

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**Von Nicholas Fox Weber : Balthus: A Biography** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Balthus: A Biography:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. No perspective or sense of scaleVon Seigo TanakaBalthus, The Count of Rola, The King of Cats, part ethnically Jewish Roman Catholic, self-invented, self-taught, king of the figurative painters of the last century, deserved a better biographer than this.Nicholas Fox Weber has very strong opinions about his subject. Unfortunately, his opinions take on the form of judgment and one can only have wished that he would have had the intelligence to bow out and leave the task to someone who could temper their passion with objectivity.Balthus wants to remain an enigma. This is well

known. To assume he would be the one to gain the artist's full trust and candor was hubris on Weber's part. Of course, Balthus' reinvented past posed problems to the author but as he points out in his Afterword, he was forewarned. Instead of being persistent, even confrontational, Weber wimps out. He gives up. He proclaims Balthus a hopeless, self-deluded, pathological liar. And so, he relies almost exclusively on second- and third-hand accounts including those from excommunicated friends whose motives are questionable. Even worse, he stands in for the artist, assuming he knows what the artists would have to say about his observations and gathered conflicting facts. Weber's frustration is visible on every page—he takes it out on his subject. Like an adolescent discovering the fallibility of an adored parent, Weber magnifies the flaws and uses every opportunity to illustrate them. One senses the author, feeling challenged, is on a mission to strip the artist bare and then mockingly point out his shortcomings. It is not a question as to whether all accusations may be true; Weber makes some convincing arguments (as well as some amazing assumptions). But the tone is adversarial and without compassion, sense of proportion, and sometimes simple decency. (When Weber discovers that Balthus' two-year-old son died from Tay Sachs disease, he holds the fact up as proof of Balthus' denied Jewish heritage and some kind of divine justice. It's absolutely horrifying.) Weber lets us know that he is not above the vain snobbery he attributes to his subject, when in the last chapter he waxes rhapsodic when Balthus dotes over his two young daughters. But then, in the Afterword, he accuses the same man of being pedophilic when he dotes over another adolescent, his latest model Anna Valli, in a photo shoot. Like some beauty pageant stage-father he comments on Anna as being dressed "too sexy" a "knowing Lolita... delighting in her stardom." Catty and jealous beyond belief. Fortunately, the simple facts of the artist's life are fascinating enough, the anecdotes from his friends and enemies, colorful and sometimes insightful. I do care what these players think about this man. I don't care what Mr. Weber thinks about him one whit.

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A Stronger Editorial Pen Needed Von M. ZEOLI This book would have benefitted greatly from a stronger editorial pen; half the book would have had twice the value. As others have already noted, there is much good study in this book on Balthus. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of autobiography on the part of Mr. Weber, who has painted himself into the Balthus picture as an antagonist with this work. Mr. Weber is relentless in insisting on the importance of Freudian interpretation, as seen, for example, in this paragraph: "He [Balthus] suggested repeatedly that psychoanalysis was unworthy -- and intellectually dangerous. But in fact, in his earlier years -- when most people he knew treated Freudian thought with respect and admiration -- Balthus, like Rilke, may well have been one of those people who believed in 'the primary efficacy of self-treatment' through his work. He, too, may have been afraid that greater self-knowledge and mental hygiene would have prevented him from working through his fantasies and neuroses in the manner he chose -- which was to paint them. Not that Balthus would ever have voiced such sentiments at the stage of his existence in which I found him, but one can easily imagine him having had such views earlier on." This passage seems equally likely to bear out Balthus's concerns regarding psychoanalysis (Mr Weber admits being a patient of psychoanalysis). Mr. Weber is also relentless in tracing in some depth the Jewish ancestry of the painter's mother; you cannot help but feel that it has great personal importance to the biographer himself. Mr. Weber does not seem to fully understand the 'eternal realities' that lie below the surface structure of a Poussin painting. He has in the same way misunderstood the meaning of Coomaraswamy to Balthus. Here some reading of Platonic thought on seeing the 'real' through the veil of the world, perhaps even through the eyes of Augustine, would have helped. Mr. Weber repeatedly remains stuck in 'the veil.' Finally, the gratuitous and unkind personal observations which do not serve to elucidate any aspect of Balthus's work or character, but only hurt the artist's family, bring to ruin what had potentially been a fine biography. If only Mr. Weber possessed a fraction of the editorial skill of Balthus!

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Wish there is less of the author Von Nina L. Kim (ninakim2000@yahoo.com) Well written biography is hard to find. Often than not, you see more of the author's psychology and his hangups than the subject itself. This book has great photos of the Balthus paintings and has excellent in-depth discussions regarding the paintings. However, the author's irritation/contempt/sometimes anger towards Balthus (regarding his dishonesty about his Jewish heritage, the meaning of his art, his past, etc) shows throughout the book. I have no doubt that the artist's lies regarding these matters have importance in understanding his art. However, Mr. Weber should have a little more detachment to the subject, for I cannot help feeling that his near obsessiveness on the matters somehow prevented him from gaining deeper perspective into Balthus' psyche. This is truly disappointing because this mars the otherwise wonderfully researched and much needed biography of the artist. I only wish that the author used more control and restraint in writing. Highly recommend for anyone interested in Balthus art.

**Kurzbeschreibung** The first full-scale biography of one of the most elusive and enigmatic painters of our time -- the self-proclaimed Count Balthus Klossowski de Rola -- whose brilliantly rendered, markedly sexualized portraits, especially of young girls, are among the most memorable images in contemporary art. The story of Balthus's life has been shrouded by contradiction and hearsay, most of it his own invention; over the years he created for himself a persona of mystery, aristocracy, and glamour. Now, in Nicholas Fox Weber's superb biography, Balthus, the man and

the artist, stands revealed as never before. He was born in Paris in 1908 to Polish parents. At age twelve he first stepped into the spotlight with the publication of forty of his drawings illustrating a story about a cat by Rainer Maria Rilke, who was then Balthus's mother's lover and a crucial influence on the young boy. From that moment, Balthus has never been out of the public eye. In 1934 his first exhibition, in Paris, stunned the art world. The seven canvases drew attention to his extraordinary technique -- a mix of tradition and imagination informed by the work of Piero della Francesca, Courbet, and Joseph Reinhardt, but unique to the twenty-six-year-old artist -- and to their provocative content; one of the paintings, *The Guitar Lesson*, was so powerful in its sadomasochistic imagery that it was deemed necessary to remove it from public display. Continuously since then, Balthus's work has provoked both great opprobrium and profound admiration -- as has the artist himself, whether collaborating with Antonin Artaud on his *Theater of Cruelty*, transforming the Villa Medici into the social center of Fellini's Rome in the 1950s, or competing for the artistic limelight with his friends Picasso and Andr Derain. The artist's complexities are clarified and his genius understood in a book that derives its particular immediacy from Weber's long and intense conversations with Balthus -- who never previously consented to discuss his life and work with a biographer -- as well as his interviews with the painter's closest friends, members of his family, and many of the subjects of his controversial canvases. Weber's critical and human grasp (he acutely analyzes the paintings in terms of both their aesthetic achievement and what they reveal of their maker's psyche), combined with his rich knowledge of Balthus's life and his insight into the ideas and forces that have helped to shape Balthus's work over the past seven decades, gives us a striking, illuminating portrait of one of the most admired and outrageous artists of our time. Balthus is as multifaceted and spellbinding as its subject, the 20th-century painter whose canvases have been likened both to those of the ethereal Piero della Francesca and sadomasochistic erotica. Biographer Nicholas Fox Weber quotes Oscar Wilde when discussing Balthus's most notorious painting, in which a music teacher violently molests her young pupil: "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.... And so Balthus claimed to me time and again. If viewers find *The Guitar Lesson* ... shocking or titillating, repulsive or seductive, they reveal only their own psyches, not his." Balthus repeatedly insisted on noninterpretive, pre-Freudian, stylistic observation of his paintings--mere studies in light and shadow, form and shape, composition and color--or so he would have Weber (and the reader) believe. Weber describes his own psychological near-seduction by Balthus's proffered confidences, and his brief, initial inclination to allow the artist to dominate their interviews. Despite Balthus's gift for prevarication--romance on short notice is his specialty--Weber is astute enough to sift through every possible document. He elucidates Balthus's mother's long affair with the poet Rainer Maria Rilke; her Jewish ancestry, which Balthus denied; the atmosphere of religious mockery among the surrealists; Balthus's marriages and affairs and his obsession with pubescent girls. As the book progresses, Weber delves deeply into an analysis of the artist's psyche. In the end, he achieves remarkable, sensitive insights into the nature of Balthus's character and subjects. He patiently builds a case for the theory that even the artist's female adolescent models reflect his secret selves and fantasies, developed in reaction to many kinds of childhood pain and confusion. Weber secures every important painting within a framework of historical reference, personal psychology, and stylistic influence. With this he demonstrates his uniqueness among biographers of artists--he actually understands painting, including its technical aspects. A hugely pleasurable read, this book compares to Hilary Spurling's *The Unknown Matisse* in its erudition and richness of detail. --Peggy Moorman *Pressestimmen* "A book that often reads like an update of one of those late novels of Henry James -- as adapted, say, by Vladimir Nabokov -- in which the narrator finds all appearances to be deceptive and every revelation is calculated to raise more questions than it answers." --Hilton Kramer, *Wall Street Journal* "Weber explores Balthus's many influences, from the work of Piero della Francesca to psychoanalytic theory and his brother's fascination with the Marquis de Sade... a splendid account of a complex life and as fine an artist's biography as this season is likely to produce." -- *Publishers Weekly* "Probing the inner man and his work, the author partially explains the mystique that has surrounded this critically acclaimed and self-invented painter whose surreal, sexually charged images are both disturbing and haunting." -- *Library Journal* "A book that often reads like an update of one of those late novels of Henry James--as adapted, say, by Vladimir Nabokov--in which the narrator finds all appearances to be deceptive and every revelation is calculated to raise more questions than it answers.--Hilton Kramer "Wall Street Journal "