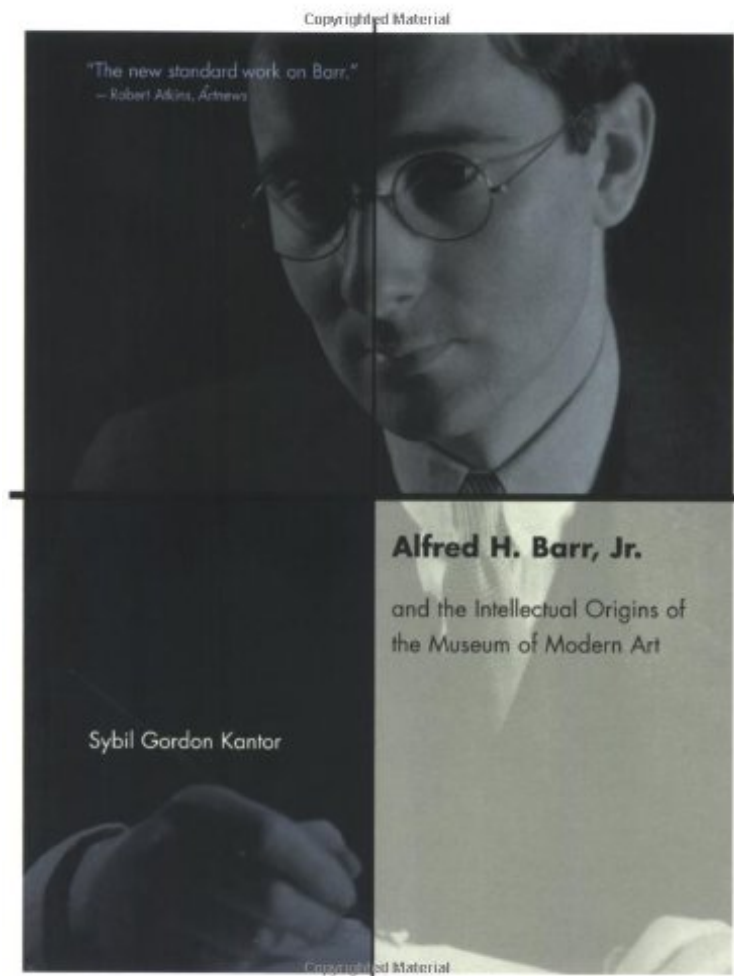


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## Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art (MIT Press)

*Sybil Kantor*

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**Sybil Kantor : Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art (MIT Press)**  
before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art (MIT Press):

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Alfred Barr Jr. and the intellectual origins of MOMA By Yani Gonzalez Torres This book is a must for anyone interested in Modern and Contemporary Art and the birth of modern museums. Contemporary museum architecture, in America, starts with MOMA. 1 of 4 people found the following review helpful. My friend is related to him! By BookLoverLove this book - very interesting and informative. I was looking for a gift for a friend and thought I'd google my friend's name. This book popped up. After reading the details,

I can see beyond a doubt that he is an ancestor of my friend and she is also an artist. I have no doubt this will be the perfect gift for her!

Growing up with the twentieth century, Alfred Barr (1902-1981), founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, harnessed the cataclysm that was modernism. In this book -- part intellectual biography, part institutional history -- Sybil Gordon Kantor tells the story of the rise of modern art in America and of the man responsible for its triumph. Following the trajectory of Barr's career from the 1920s through the 1940s, Kantor penetrates the myths, both positive and negative, that surround Barr and his achievements. Barr fervently believed in an aesthetic based on the intrinsic traits of a work of art and the materials and techniques involved in its creation. Kantor shows how this formalist approach was expressed in the organizational structure of the multidepartmental museum itself, whose collections, exhibitions, and publications all expressed Barr's vision. At the same time, she shows how Barr's ability to reconcile classical objectivity and mythic irrationality allowed him to perceive modernism as an open-ended phenomenon that expanded beyond purist abstract modernism to include surrealist, nationalist, realist, and expressionist art. Drawing on interviews with Barr's contemporaries as well as on Barr's extensive correspondence, Kantor also paints vivid portraits of, among others, Jere Abbott, Katherine Dreier, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, Lincoln Kirstein, Agnes Mongan, J. B. Neumann, and Paul Sachs.

From Library Journal A handful of figures contributed to the establishment of modern art in the U.S. museum community: Juliana Force (Whitney Museum of American Art), Chick Austen (Wadsworth Atheneum), Duncan Phillips (Phillips Collection), and, preeminently, Alfred H. Barr Jr. In a book that serves as both a biography of Barr and a textbook on the theoretical foundation of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, independent scholar Kantor focuses on the philosophical underpinnings of Barr's early life. He explores in great depth the philosophers, teachers, collectors, artists, and others who helped to form the mind of MoMA's founding director (Barr was a mere 27 at the time of his appointment). Barr's important and influential colleagues (Lincoln Kirstein, Agnes Mongan, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, and others from both inside and outside of MoMA) are placed in historical and personal context. This excellent treatment explores Barr's contribution both to modern art in America and to many of the museum practices that are now taken for granted. For a more traditional biographical treatment, see Alice Goldfarb Marquis's *Alfred H. Barr, Jr.: Missionary for the Modern* (LJ 4/15/89). Highly recommended for all collections with an interest in 20th-century art. Martin R. Kalfatovic, Smithsonian Inst. Libs., Washington, DC Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. An important contribution to the historiography of twentieth-century American art... intellectual and biographical history at its most rigorous. (Daniel A. Siedell College Art Association s) Alfred Hamilton Barr Jr. remains a figure of fascination and contention. (Michael Kimmelman *The New York of Books*) It is to the intellectual history of modern art that [this book] makes an indispensable contribution. (Hilton Kramer *The New Criterion*) This truly significant book is at times as compulsively readable as a novel. Yet the spell that the author casts does not come at the expense of rigorous argument backed up by exhaustive primary documentation and pertinent secondary references. (Helen Searing, Alice Pratt Brown Professor of Art, Smith College) A worthy contribution to the literature. Kantor's book is the most detailed and revelatory account of Barr's approach to modern art ever published. (Francis M. Naumann, author of *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*) At last, Alfred Barr's towering stature as scholarship art historian, evangelical educator, and visionary museum director has been given its due. Meticulously documented, Kantor's study recreates not only the formation, step-by-step, of Barr's unique genius but also the audacious intellectual milieu of the 1920s that nurtured it. (Robert Rosenblum, Professor of Fine Arts, New York University) About the Author Sybil Gordon Kantor is an independent scholar living in Columbus, Ohio, and Lugano, Switzerland.