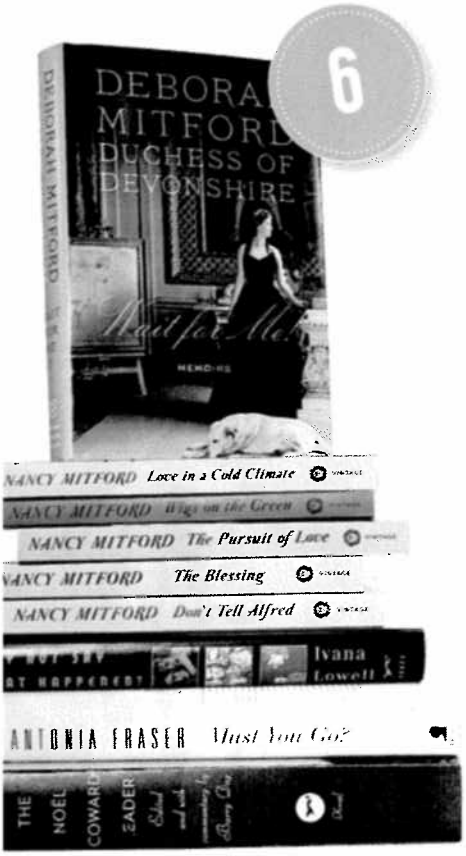


# THE CULTURE TOP 10



## Brit Lit Wit

Of all the things the English have contributed to the culture, one of the most enduring, and endearing, is their uniquely mordant sense of humor, which is on grand display this month in a bumper crop of books by British authors. Leading the pack are three plaintively titled memoirs: Antonia Fraser's lovely *Must You Go?* (Nan A. Talese), a remembrance of her life with her late husband, playwright Harold Pinter; Ivana Lowell's clear-eyed chronicle of her dysfunctional family, *Why Not Say What Happened?* (Knopf); and Deborah Mitford, Duchess of Devonshire's *Wait for Me!* (FSG), a wry chronicle of a childhood surrounded by her famous sisters. The duchess was the sixth girl in an eccentric aristocratic family that had hoped for "a big family of boys." When she was born, her eldest sister, Nancy, wrote their mother a

sympathetic note: "How disgusting of the poor darling to go and be a girl!" Nancy, of course, went on to write the beloved *Pursuit of Love* and *Love in a Cold Climate*, thinly veiled romans à clef about an eccentric aristocratic family. These, along with three of her lesser-known novels—*Wigs on the Green*, *Don't Tell Alfred*, and *The Blessing*—have now been reissued by Vintage. Nancy's less celebrated novels are as sparkling and original as her more famous ones. Curious footnote: the author considered *Wigs*, which includes a character modeled on her Hitler-enthralled sister Unity, too controversial to republish after World War II. Finally, there's *The Noël Coward Reader* (Knopf), a compendium of the bon vivant's best works—and the perfect reminder that great wit has no expiration date.

## NEED TO KNOW IRANIAN ART

Forget China, and for a moment, politics: Iran is the latest contemporary-art-world obsession. Last fall Sotheby's London sold some fifty works by Arab and Iranian artists in a headline-grabbing sale. The market is only expected to get hotter; here's what you need to know now.

**WHERE TO SEE IT** Stateside, gallerists like Rachel Lehmann and David Maupin at **Lehmann Maupin** and Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller at **LTMH Gallery** in New York have been showcasing the work of Iranian artists (such as Shirazeh Houshiary) for decades. Dubai, however, is the real hub for new Arab art; start by visiting the nonprofit **Farjam Collection** ([farjamcollection.com](http://farjamcollection.com)), which houses its founder Farhad Farjam's enormous Iranian-art holdings, before buying your own at the annual **Art Dubai** fair (March 16–19, 2011; [artdubai.ae](http://artdubai.ae)). The adventurous can even detour to Tehran itself, where some edgy spaces have mushroomed, among them the **Parkingallery** collective ([parkingallery.com](http://parkingallery.com)), on the site of an old parking lot, and **Silk Road**

**Gallery** ([silkroadphoto.com](http://silkroadphoto.com)), which specializes in photography.

**LOOK FOR** Iranian artists' work today is quite diverse, though there's an emphasis on video art. "There are lots of opportunities to show work abroad, but packages leaving the country have to be inspected," says Parkingallery curator-cum-artist Amirali Ghasemi, whose own work is largely digital. "But DVDs and flash drives can travel in a suitcase." Names to know include **Shiva Ahmadi**, who creates disturbingly violent yet beautiful sculptures; **Farhad Moshiri**, who's often likened to Damien Hirst; and **Charles Hossein Zenderoudi**, who finds his inspiration in traditional calligraphy.

**WHO'S BUYING IT** **Beth Rudin DeWoody** has added some pieces to her vast collection, and **Mera and Don Rubell** were spotted browsing at Art Dubai. But no one beats **Charles Saatchi**, who regularly spotlights his Iranian holdings, for instance at the recent show "Unveiled: New Art From the Middle East," at his London space ([saatchigallery.com](http://saatchigallery.com)).

MARK ELLWOOD



Above: Seda+ Sobh+Zoud, by Charles Hossein Zenderoudi. Left: Oil Barrel #5, by Shiva Ahmadi.

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