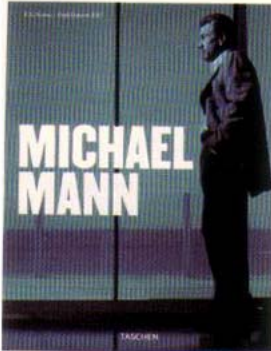


Michael Mann

(Taschen, 192 pages, \$24.99)

By F.X. Feeney

Michael Mann's fiercely intelligent films, designed as they are to the *n*th degree, with maximum care applied to the selection and placement of every element seen or heard, couldn't be better suited to the Taschen treatment (here in a midsize, soft cover format). This



critical analysis of the director's work offers dozens of gorgeous, painterly frame enlargements, production stills, and materials from Mann's own archive. Among the latter is a detailed breakdown of the

planning for the final fight sequence in *Ali*, including trial video, sketches and the director's extensive, in-depth notes on how he re-created the bout. Wrapped around the images is a perceptive text (plus equally informative photo captions) by *LA Weekly* film critic F.X. Feeney that benefits from the author's extensive conversations with the director.

Feeney shows—as Mann himself is often at pains to point out—that the director is anything but a mere stylist. His colors are always carefully calibrated to serve theme and character. The minutely precise construction of his images and soundtracks provides a range of pleasures for the eye and ear, but nothing is offered

gratuitously: everything has a larger purpose beyond sheer virtuosity.

Mann's work ethic and total-immersion approach to his aesthetic are, according to Feeney, an embodiment of the themes that galvanize his movies. The dedication to professionalism and the driving personal commitment that can be found in his characters are equally important to Mann's filmmaking method. To get the job done right in a contemporary world he depicts as "a lawless frontier," a person must be, as the filmmaker suggests, "a law unto himself." And if his movies have a common overarching idea, Mann tells Feeney, it is "to thine own self be true."

Mann describes his characters as "men of discretion who find themselves obliged by their consciences to stand against ruthless power structures simply to make known what they know to be true ... whatever the cost to themselves." Whether that means taking on Big Tobacco (*The Insider*), racism (*Ali*) or those who would brutally co-opt one's labor (*Thief*), Feeney argues that an equivalent set of ethics propels Mann to get his movies done his way and no one else's.

"The organic continuity of Mann's view of America," and the director's consistent and coherent body of work, are splendidly represented. Feeney's text curls gracefully around the images as he describes them. The result is a book whose combination of elegant layout and thoughtful prose echoes the virtues of Mann's movies.