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Milstein’s Magic
An artful photographer creates the illusion that capturing airliners at 200 mph is easy.

AirCraft:
The Jet as Art

IF YOU’RE OVER five feet tall and you’ve flown in economy class for longer than three hours, you’re likely to view airliners as torture chambers. Not Jeffrey Milstein. His book of large-format photographs glorifies airliners in motion, specifically the landing-gear-deployed, flaps-fully-extended beauty the craft reveal during final approach.

"Jeff's airliners remind me of butterflies pinned to a museum wall," says Chad Slattery, who has photographed more than 20 Air & Space/Smithsonian covers. “The photos look simple, but are very difficult technically—the airliners scream over at 140 to 150 knots. They’re in his viewfinder a split second, yet he gets them in focus and perfectly symmetrical.”

Back in the days before airline deregulation, airliners seemed a fairly colorless lot, with just a logo painted on a fuselage of bare aluminum or muted white (except rainbow-palette Braniff, which mounted an “End of the Plain Plane” campaign). Milstein includes one legacy carrier with a Plain Jane paint scheme, but most explode with color. I give first prize to Southwest Airlines, for a Boeing 737 painted like the Maryland flag. All Nippon Airways receives first runner up for a Pokémon-theme 747. Now if only carriers would pay as much attention to their passengers as they do to paint jobs.

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