

Storybook Bag



I put my books in a bag
volume 1 issue 1



The Archive Artwork

History is rife with examples of books being used as visual material rather than being solely confined to their fundamental purpose – the container of codes that can be deciphered by the literate reader.

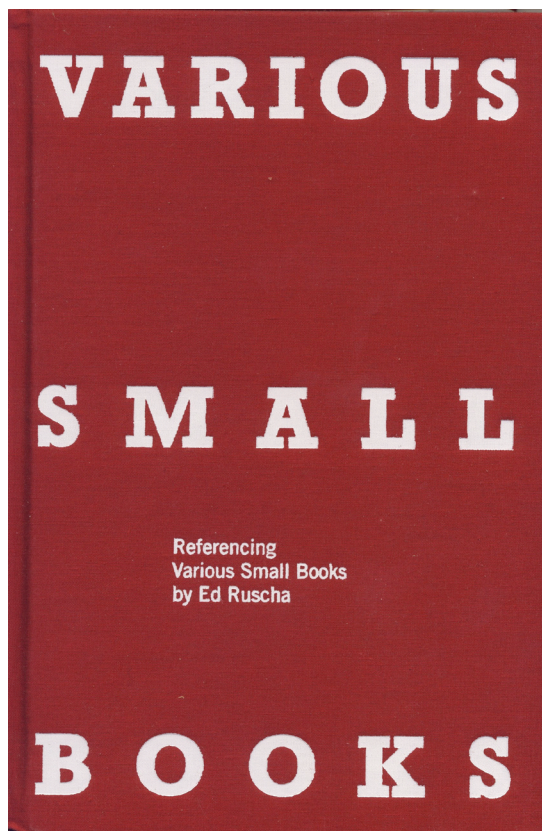
But being tangible objects, books were always on display and were used to demonstrate the collector's erudition, inclinations and/or economic status. In addition, the library might contain not only books but also drawers for two-dimensional maps, etchings and natural objects.

Seeing as they were “collectables”, books quickly entered the antiquarian market, a market based on visual display. The collector might be considered well-informed, a fountain-head of information, but was not considered a “producer” per se. What was “created” (in the terms of art production) through the act of collecting?

Catalogs or exhibition brochures are generally not included under the heading of “artists books” as they have a stated purpose rather than being an autonomous artwork. Nevertheless, some exhibition publications include “creative writing”, extraneous images and a package and/or graphic design that indicates more than “brochure” or “hand-out”. The stack above is a manipulated photograph of some of the exhibition publications I have collected worthy of inclusion in this archive (to be discussed later).

Libraries are systems of “borrowing” and/or “research”, modes common to the production of art (especially in the modern era). The focus of any particular art practice can also be compared to that of the collector by asking these questions: what is the work about, is it about more than one thing, and what materials need to be compiled in order to bring the work to completion?

It becomes a question of which side of the production one stands on, with the viewer, as



Ruscha "artist book" oeuvre is so pervasive that there is a book about how other artists have drawn from or commented on the originals. Published by M.I.T. Press, it is one of their best selling titles.

This might also be the librarian's task, if one is talking about "deciphering" and "interpreting", but one is still assigned the role of spectator, even if they are essential to the artwork's completion (or continuation). Joseph Bueys did state that "Every man is an artist" though he qualified this condition as the creative steps one takes in "self-determination": "To be sure, every man is an artist in a general sense: one must be an artist for example, to create self-determination. But at a certain stage in his life every man becomes a specialist in a certain way; one studies chemistry, another sculpture or painting, a third becomes doctor, and so on. For this reason we understandably need special schools."

Specialization is again indicated, while my proposal places the collector (or more properly archivist) more firmly into the creative process or what we designate as an artwork.

well as the collector, being assigned the role of "consumer". The object is bought rather than produced. But paint (in the modern era) is manufactured, packaged and sold and then used to create something else, something "original".

It is the modern (or post-modern) era, with its over-abundance of specialization that blurs or combines categories. New categories or frameworks are invented, acknowledging the sheer breadth of material, but not necessarily making the ordering or type any clearer.

We can therefore start with the simple dictum that anyone-(or thing)-can-be-an-artist-(or art). In Marcel Duchamp's framework, it is the artist who names (or designates) the artwork, but Duchamp also proposes this condition in other ways: "The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act."





Martha
Rosler
Library



This re-assumption of what art could be, or is, intends to provoke the “extra-economic” impulse at work in society. Or should I say “at play in society”? In this context we can recognize that the “public library” (or archive) is frequently free and open to the public. It is a place where we can idle and play (and/or work).

But in terms of the role of the artistic creator (in the above examples) and its analogy to the archivist or collector, what we ended up with in theory (and in art history) was “conceptual art”, a category that despite its theoretical impetus was eventually hijacked by the art mar-

ket. “Conceptual art” pointed to objectless actions that were eventually reabsorbed into commodities, but conversely, certain conceptual proposals landed squarely in the marketplace with artists appropriating newspaper and television advertising spaces. These types of initiatives also led to another nebulous category, that of the “artist book”, an inexpensive commodity that intended to extend the accessibility of “art”.

The “artist book”, like the library, is at times unclear about who is the “original” producer/consumer, as in the well-known examples of “Every Building on Sunset Strip”, in which the “artist book” is a kind of an archive, one that is concerned with collecting as much as creating. The use of the archive in this case is certainly ironic, while remaining useful, the irony being Ed Ruscha’s absorption into the bureaucracy (or bureaucratic recording) of Los Angeles.

This is not to say that the roles are completely opaque, but that the role of the archive or library (the collector rather than producer) has also blurred the line between bureaucracy (or collection) and production. Who knows what comes out, quantitatively, from the library of any urban area in the world?

An obvious precedent, one that is embedded in theory, is Walter Benjamin's "Unpacking My Library", a text that aestheticizes his library. His descriptions of finding, collecting and organizing are, despite being presented under the guise of theory, sensual. It would be easy to imagine the text and the books being presented as a thoroughgoing art exhibition (so easy, it has already been done) with Benjamin being easily codified under the heading of "conceptual art".

An example that has taken place (and which is documented in this archive) is "Martha Rosler's Library", an "exhibition" (put in quotes - as it still seems up for grabs) which saw her personal library going on tour in Europe and America. The anecdotal backstory as Rosler, at this stage, had demanded action. As an-ertheless had too many or be done with them, as had already seen "Rosler's Little books, take notes and interacting with Martha



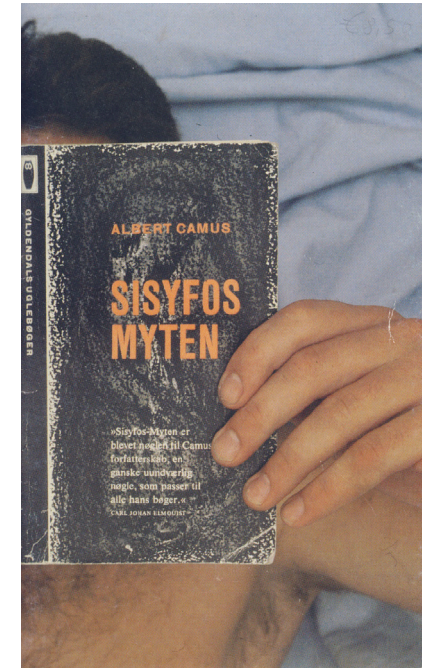
The Rosler library toured New York City, burgh; those who saw the books at these could not "check out" or borrow items. two categories, somehow moving the exact definition into the world of things. And what we call "spectators" saw "The Rosler Library", but just as those who witnessed the library in its original location, the "spectators" could also only take notes or perhaps ask Martha (or a docent) if they could take/steal a particular book.

Taken from this angle, it was an exhibition where you could handle the artwork, a conceptual or oppositional framework of its own. One could surely steal a book, but the entire artwork (the library) had been already appropriated. It consisted of the works of others. The public library allows you to borrow material, but with the introduction of the photocopy machine the library was one of the first institutions to have to consider, and plan for, the ramifications of "illegal downloading".

This is where my archive/artwork starts, a project that wants more than a catalog, a list;



a relationship to this collection that creates more than an ordering. I want to keep track of my holdings but I also want to promote; to build a story made out of my stockpile.



I will try and move this collection into the realm of fiction (or - personal history) through the facility of digital technology and the confusion it creates between ownership

If artists appropriated and responded to Ruscha's "artist books", then I stole an idea from an idea from "Sisyfos Myten" by Erik Madsen and Torben Eskerod in which someone (we only see the hands) reads Camus' text in various locations.

and access, between commodity and give-away. A PDF made of the ephemeral binary code, a product that can be printed out, handled, packaged and re-sold. It is my free artwork made of stolen (or appropriated) material let loose on the web for your purposes (all or none of them).

This is a (digitized) "artist book", a genre which uses words and images (or neither, though I use both). Through images, I aestheticize books. I make them photogenic, give them the look of "product

photography” and use them as my “staged” subjects. This is a magazine about books, a fan “zine”, a promotional freebie. This is an unclassifiable document that mimics all the other documents, paying homage to their inherent variations.

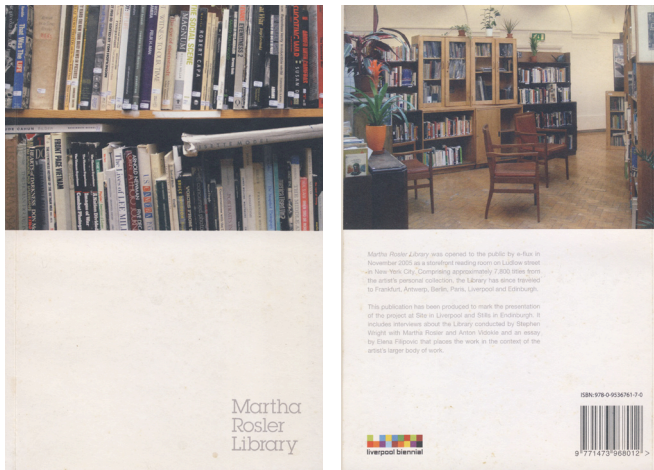
A 35 one-sided page photocopied freebie distributed as part of a curious exhibition at Santa Monica Museum of Art at Bergamont Station in 2006 that most definitely posited the collector as creator.

Ken Brecher's archive, which he elucidates in the hand-out, consists of penants, his deceased father's credit cards, crash landing instructions and vomit bags from airplanes, stickers, photographs of twins, 9/11 postcards and patriotic souvenirs, laundry and dry cleaning lists from hotels, obituaries, aluminum coffee pots and tea kettles, and finally, water, sand, earth, ash, and tears collected in bottles from various locations around the world (the collection of sand et cetera is catalogued at the end of the hand-out- 332 items stating where and on what date they were collected).

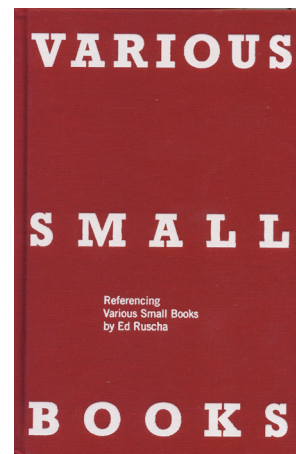
There is also a section about books, in which he states a sentiment common to many bibliophiles, “My library of books is also a matter of arrangement. I have categories and sub categories and I am careful to make certain that when any two books stand side by side there is ‘the possibility’ of a good conversation . . . I am happy to surround editions of Samuel Beckett with Camus, and I keep Emily Dickenson far away from everybody.”



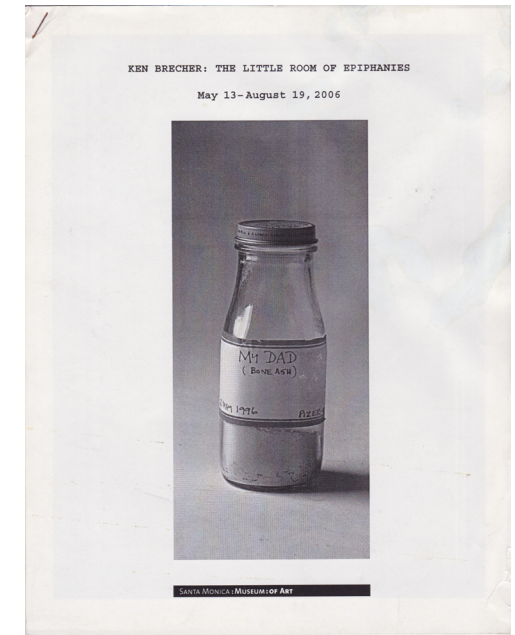
The editions archived (but not necessarily highlighted) in this issue of Storybook Bag #1



Martha Rosler Library
catalog and essays
15cmx21cm
36 pages
ISBN: 978-0-9536761-7-0
published by Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art Ltd. (2008)



Various Small Books:
Referencing Various Small Books by Ed Ruscha
16cmx24cm
288 pages
ISBN:978-0-262-01877-7
published by The MIT Press (2013)



Ken Brecher: The Little Room Of Epiphanies
22cmx28cm
35 one-sided photocopied pages
Santa Monica Museum of Art (2006)



Sisyfos Myten
by Hans Erik Madsen, photos by Torben Eskerod
9.5cmx15cm
16 pages
ISDN: 87-89783-46-8
published by Space Poetry (1997)

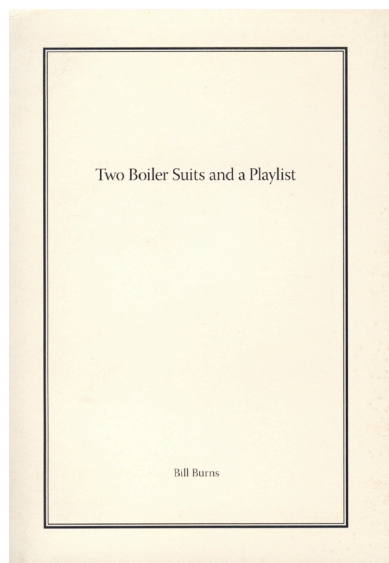


Service: a trilogy on colonization
by Martha Rosler
20.5cmx13cm
55 pages
ISBN: 0-89439-007-4
published by Printed Matter, Inc. (second printing 2008)

martha rosler

a signed copy - this is one of the rare early imprints of Printed Matter who started with the idea of publishing "artist books" but quickly moved into establishing and maintaining their store in New York City. Rosler describes this book as: "... three novels and one translation. In their original form the novels were sent though the mail as postcard series ..."

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Two Boiler Suits and a Playlist

by Bill Burns

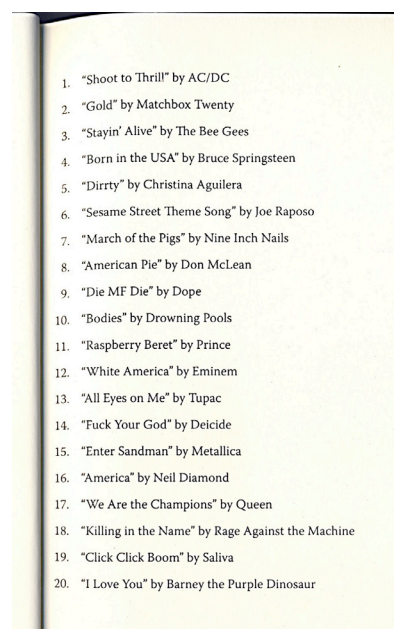
12cmx17cm

54 pages

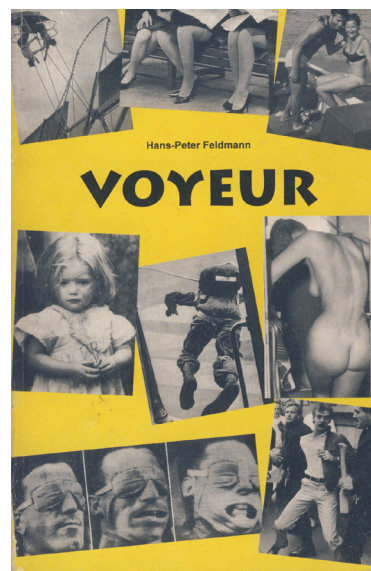
ISBN: 978-0-920397-57-2

published by YYZunlimited (2010)

www.billburnsprojects.com



This book details through drawings and photographs the sole possessions allowed prisoners at the notorious Camp X-Ray at the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, along with a list of the songs that were repeatedly played at high volume in order to extract information from these prisoners, in other words, songs used as instruments of torture.



Voyeur

by Hans-Peter Feldmann

11cmx17cm

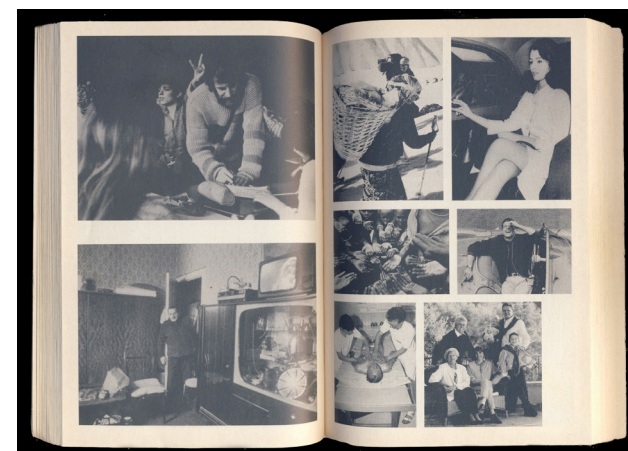
130 pages (approx.)

ISBN: 3-88375-198-7

published by

Verlag Buchhandlung Walther Konig

(1997)



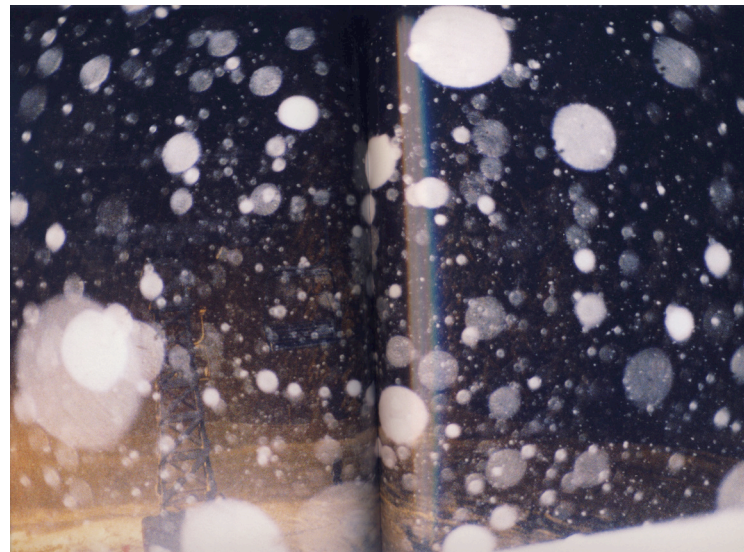
"Voyeur" is an exhaustive and seemingly random compilation of black and white photographs that were collected from public domain archives, that nevertheless, speaks of the human mind's inevitable, if not futile, quest for a linear narrative and/or logic.

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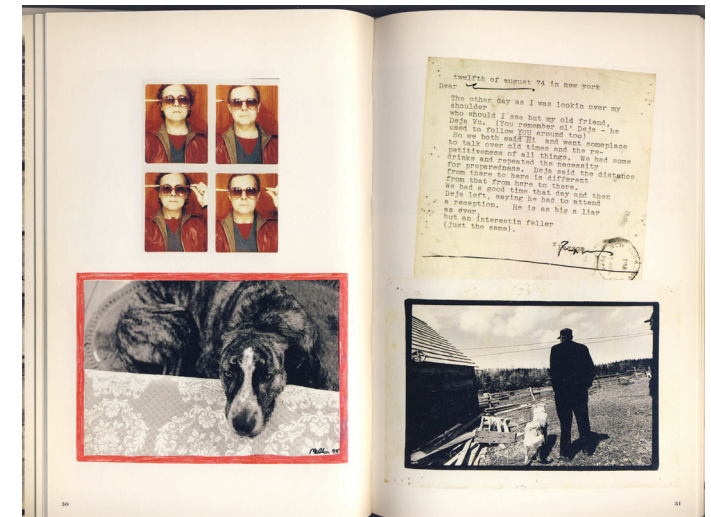
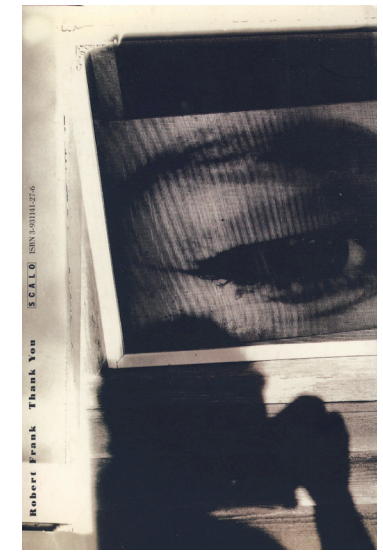


Wonder
by Erik Kessels, Andre Thijssen,
Sabine Verschueren, Hans Wolf
17cmx24cm
150 pages (approx.)
ISBN: 907047808-0
published by KesselsKramer (2006)

A compilation of color print photographs rejected by the original owners and then culled and formatted into a book by a four person team



Thank You
by Robert Frank
14cmx21.5cm
76 pages
ISBN: 3-931141-27-6
published by Scalo (1998)



A collection of postcards, photos and notes sent to photographer Robert Frank from a variety of people in order to say "Thank You" for one thing or another.

A yellow mesh drawstring bag is shown, partially open, revealing several children's books and a small toy figure. The bag is filled with books of various sizes and colors, including one with a green cover and another with a white cover. A small, light-colored toy figure with large eyes is visible on the right side of the bag. The bag has a black drawstring closure with an orange cord.

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