

By All Means: Artists Books and Objects

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A book is simultaneously object and process, tradition and technology, actor and environment. In the irrepressible efforts of book artists to push past conventional definitions of the book format, a definite if elusive “bookish” quality nonetheless persists.

The work of the seven artists in this exhibition ranges in genre from the drawn and printed page, to sculptural objects and installations, to conceptual interventions and experimental poetry — all informed by the peculiar sensibility of the culture of the book.

Though we may be incapable of reinhabiting a preliterate existence, we can (and must) challenge literacy to continue to make the world imaginatively larger and richer. Owen Barfield, in *Speaker's Meaning*, suggests that language always begins as figure, and then *decays* into mere fact.

Refiguring the book, we remember what it means to read.

Reading, with the physical interaction and luxurious duration that characterize it as an activity, evokes another order of significance, a seriousness of purpose, a seeking after truth, which the depiction of reading itself represents. Artists working with the form of the book are quite consciously attempting to solicit for their own endeavors the kind of attention ordinarily paid by readers to a text. The memory of reading infuses our manipulations of even the most drastically altered variants of the conventional book.

— Buzz Spector, “Going Over the Books”
The Bookmaker's Desire (Umbrella Editions, 1995)

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