



THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM

Norma Jean Calderwood Gallery

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For Immediate Release

ARTISTS' BOOKS: BOOKS BY ARTISTS OPENS AT THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM
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Boston, MA, August 18, 2011): Unexpected and intriguing examples of “artists’ books” will be on display in Artists’ Books: Books by Artists, on view in the Boston Athenæum’s Norma Jean Calderwood Gallery October 12, 2011, through March 3, 2012.

The exhibition, selected and organized by Stanley Ellis Cushing, curator of rare books and manuscripts, will be the first public display drawn entirely from the Boston Athenæum’s outstanding artists’ book collection. The exhibition will offer an introduction to one of the most provocative and hybrid art forms in contemporary culture.

Featured in the exhibition will be works produced by Russell Maret; the Iraq Veterans Against the War; award-winning documentary photographer Stephen Dupont; Robert and Shana ParkeHarrison; Laura Davidson, Donald Glaister, Veronika Schäpers, and Xu Bing.



Julie Chen, *The Veil* (Berkeley, California, 2002). Athenæum Purchase, John Bromfield Fund, 2003.

Among the more than 30 artists' books on display will be examples with text cut by laser or painted on aluminum, an anti-capitalist book made from collaged paper currency, a book on paper made out of veterans' uniforms, photographs of wartime in Afghanistan, and a book that builds into a five-foot tall model of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers.

A hybrid art form with many sources

Artists have been involved with books for centuries, as illuminators, illustrators, calligraphers, and designers. But the art form known as “artists’ books” emerged as a form primarily in the 20th century.

Clive Phillpot, former director of the library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, writes that artists’ books are “distinguished by the fact that they sit provocatively at the juncture where art, documentation, and literature all come together.”

Drawing on many sources, including photography, advertising, classic book design, the history of illustrations, political movements, comic books, modern art movements like Conceptualism, Dada, and Constructivism, and popular culture, artists’ books are both hybrids and form a distinct approach to artistic expression.

They rarely take the book for granted. Some combine traditional hand-made paper, typography, and printing techniques with radical formats. Others bind together found or unconventional materials into a book-like form.

The late curator and bibliophile Peter A. Wick has described “...the book artist who exploits the book form as an artifact, exposing its structural components, penetrating its surfaces, challenging its square format, opening and distending its text and imagery, and pushing its creative dimensions to the frontiers of rationality.”

A collection focused on craftsmanship and surprise

“I want to be able to show books that are perhaps more traditional leading to extraordinary, beautiful, interesting books--- bound, design, and

printed,” says Cushing “Most of [the works in the show] are beautifully conceived, edgy and well constructed. I’m not as interested in poorly constructed pieces.”

The Athenæum’s artists’ book collection has brought a number of important books to the Boston area, Cushing says. It began to grow significantly around the time he became rare book curator about a dozen years ago, he adds.

“I want to stimulate people. I want them to see the diversity,” Cushing says of his collecting philosophy. “I was trained in traditional book making and binding. I want people to see the continuity, people doing all sorts of unusual things with artists’ books that have grown from earlier work.”

Dealers, who know the Athenæum is an important collector, bring him outstanding examples of the form. “They have to stimulate me. If they don’t, I don’t buy them,” he says. “It’s not like a stamp collection where you have to fill in every spot on the page.”

Cushing describes some of the examples in the show as “edgy,” even politically edgy, including some anti-war pieces. “It’s not what you think the Athenæum does, but we do.”

“It’s a fun show, a fun collection,” Cushing concludes. “If you like books, I think it’s going to be irresistible. I want it to appeal, I want to surprise people. They don’t know they like artists’ books yet.”

About the Boston Athenæum:

Located at 10 ½ Beacon Street in the heart of Beacon Hill, the Boston Athenæum occupies a National Historic Landmark building near the Massachusetts State House. It is within walking distance of the

Government Center and Park Street MBTA stations. Parking is available in a commercial lot across from the building and in the Boston Common Parking Garage, under the Boston Common and accessible from Charles Street.

The Boston Athenæum's Norma Jean Calderwood Gallery and part of the first floor are open to the public from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday; from 9:00 am to 7:30 pm on Monday and Wednesday; and from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm on Saturday.

Admission to special exhibitions in the Calderwood Gallery is free to members; \$5.00 for non-members. The Calderwood Gallery and the rest of the Boston Athenæum building are closed on major holidays.

Art and Architecture Tours of the entire building, open to the public, are offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3:00 pm. Tour sizes are limited and reservations are required; to make a reservation, please call 617-227-0270 ext. 279. Many lectures, concerts, readings, and other events at the Boston Athenæum are also open to the public, although seating is limited and reservations are required. Admissions fees vary.

New members are always welcome at the Athenæum. For membership and event information, please visit the Boston Athenæum website at www.bostonathenaeum.org or call 617-720-7641.

Founded in 1807, the Boston Athenæum is Boston's first cultural institution. It combines an art museum, with a public exhibition gallery and collections of paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, photographs, and decorative arts; a leading research and membership library; and a civic forum including lectures, readings, panel discussions, and other events. An innovator and catalyst for more than two centuries, the Athenæum was one of the three founders of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the

inspiration for the Boston Public Library, the first municipally supported library in North America.

The Athenæum's Proprietors and Members have included some of America's greatest literary figures, among them Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, Amy Lowell, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and such leading politicians as Presidents John Quincy Adams and John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Senator Edward M. Kennedy. The Athenæum houses collections of international importance, among them about a third of the library of President George Washington, the largest portion in any library, and portrait busts of American patriots that belonged to President Thomas Jefferson.

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