

Beyond Words



Artists' books are generally associated with images, supported by words and texts, that illustrate or reinforce an idea. However, some artists use only text, characters and typographic devices to communicate their message.

On show are different genres of artists' books that use text – without images – to illustrate their ideas. Included are examples of concrete poetry that subvert their verbalization through contrived typographical structures; poetry that uses typographic devices to give precise direction on how it is to be read aloud; seminal Futurist typography books that were created as artworks; books that show excellent examples of hand-lettering and printmaking techniques, and many other books that explore typographic and textual conventions.

Beyond Words challenges the viewer to read into and find purpose in the book artists' choice of typographical devices; to be aware of gaps in and between words; notice the critical placement of text and the empty spaces on the page; be mindful of the artists' choice of font size and style, and the materials and structures they use in their books.

COVER IMAGE

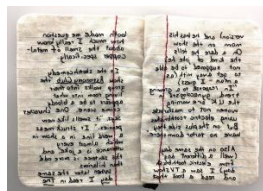
Composition (*Common Threads. Volume 117*)

Candace Hicks

Hand-embroidered fabric.

Unique

2019



Common Threads, a series of hand-embroidered unique canvas books which copy the form and design of dime-store 'composition' books. The books themselves, self-consciously hand-made objects, are a record of coincidental occurrences generally gleaned from reading or mundane events. The use of embroidery thread allows for the production of the text and image with the same mark and material, to make the text, image and substance of the book inseparable. Hicks' choice of the book as a principle medium is due to the phenomenon of the book as authoritative. Books provide an arena in which fiction can be accepted as fact and observations can take on a mythic narrative quality. Her interest in books also stems from their inherent unity of text and image, which lends books continued relevance as a transmedia hybrid.

What is a text?

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all” (Lewis Carroll. *Alice in Wonderland*).

“Intertextuality implies that every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it” (Julia Kristeva cited in Culler 1981:105).

“It is language which speaks, not the author; to write is ... to reach the point where only language acts, ‘performs’, and not ‘me’” (Roland Barthes 1977:143).

“When writers write they are also written. To communicate we must utilize existing concepts and conventions. Consequently, whilst our intention to communicate and what we intend to communicate are both important to us as individuals, meaning cannot be reduced to authorial ‘intention’” (Daniel Chandler 2021:[np]).

“Transtextuality is all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts ... and it covers all aspects of a particular text” (Gérard Genette 1992:83-84).

“A text is ... a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations. ... The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (Roland Barthes 1977:146).

“Each translation is, of course, a re-authoring. No ‘neutral’ translation is possible, since languages involve different value systems ... every reading is always a rewriting” (Chandler on Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique Générale*. 2021:[np]).

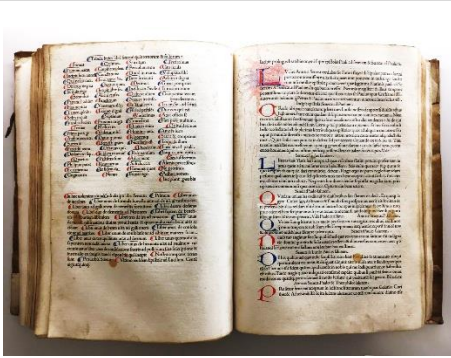
“Texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through the sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or – if the text is brand-new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions” (Fredric Jameson cited in Rodowick 1994:286).

“The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. ... The book is not simply the object that one holds in one’s hands. ... Its unity is variable and relative” (Michel Foucault 1974:23).

-----oooOooo-----

It is this relative variability of texts in the hands of the artist that are under consideration and examination in this exhibition. Selected here are artist’s books that consist only of texts, metatexts and non-texts. Together, these books help unpack their intertextualities and underscore what Gérard Genette terms a text’s ‘transtextuality’: its relationship with other texts and the meanings these texts produce.

01



Opera Philosophica. Epistolae

[Philosophical Works. Letters]

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Naples, Italy

1475

This is an imperfect copy of *incunabulum*. Incunable is a Latin phrase that translates to ‘from the cradle of printing’. This term is given to books that are printed between 1455 when Johannes Gutenberg completed the first hand press book – the Gutenberg Bible – with movable type, up to 1500. These books are from the first 45 years of printing. This book has its original pigskin binding, with remains of ties still extant. Rubricated capitals in red and blue are found throughout the manuscript, with illustrations, indications of provenance and additional cursive text in some margins and on endpapers. The printer was Bernardinus, de Colonia, active 1475-1478. Underlining and marginalia of a later date.

02



Paris Metro Affiches

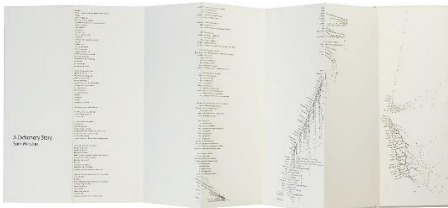
Franticham [Francis Van Maele and Antic-ham]

Redfoxxpress, Ireland

2011

The book is made up from torn posters from the Metro from Paris. Its large size consists of 20 screen prints, 2 original collages and 1 original poster, printed on recycled cattle feed paper sacks, brought from Seoul, and the screenprinted cover is made from a recycled truck tarpaulin.

03



A Dictionary Story

Sam Winston

London

2006

Winston rearranged the words in the dictionary to reflect on our understanding of them, and how the definitions of words interrupt our otherwise smooth reading experience. In a disintegration of convention, one side of the page is a narrative informed by the structure of the book, on the reverse, is a definition for each word in the narrative with the typography set adrift across the pages. Words, phrases and letters swell and shrink in a field of black and white text. The white space left between characters often meander like rivers and settle into ponds of blankness, while other pages see letters. “I am always trying to find new ways of slowing down the reader ... enough to get a sense of wonder about what’s actually happening ... taking apart the reading experience to such a degree that it creates doubt about how it works. I usually do this by breaking down the form and structure of words or playing with grammatical rules” (Winston online).

04



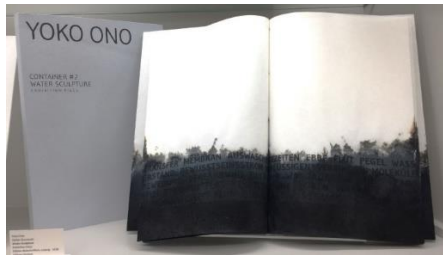
Das Fall

Uta Schneider and Uwe Warnke
Berlin
1992

Letterpress, concertina, slipcase

A double-sided concertina on the subject of 'setting' and 'falling' and its implicit contradictions. The concept of the book explores Isaac Newton's law of universal gravitation which states that the gravitational attraction between any two objects or bodies, is directly proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them.

05



Water Sculpture

Yoko Ono and Stefan Gunnesh
Liepzig
2019

Water Sculpture was the outcome of a creative intervention for Yoko Ono's exhibition PEACE IS POWER at MdbK in Leipzig. In 1971, Yoko Ono invited over a hundred people, artists, musicians, art critics, celebrities, and people from her own team, to give her containers, or ideas of containers. In the 2019 iteration of the Water Event, Gunnesh provided a book to which Ono added water. The water dissolved the pigments on the pages, turning the water black. The pages of the book then soaked up this black liquid, obliterating the text in the process.

06

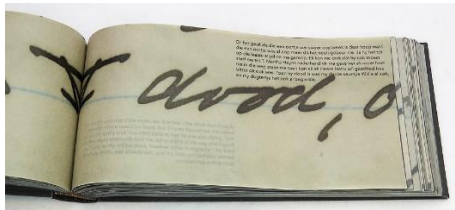
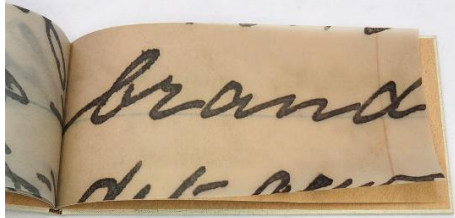
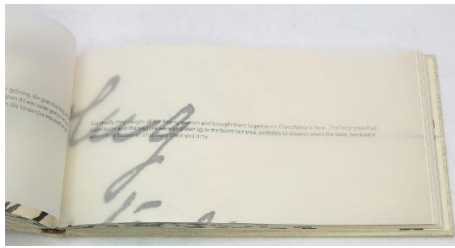


Alienation / Separation

Maureen Cummins
U.S.A.
2019

Based on first-person accounts of refugees / re-settlers, *Alienation / Separation* is curated from a series of interviews that Cummins conducted with four families who collaborated on the Friends, Peace, Sanctuary project. She selected and collaged 48 excerpts to create the narrative arc. Bearing testament to individual points of view while speaking to the larger, epidemic experience of displacement, resettlement, and separation. The four volumes give the reader a visceral sense of separation. While interacting with the book, readers experience how frustrating it can be when even the most ordinary tasks and routines, such as reading a book, become a challenge. Cummins hopes that the experience of the reader/viewer is in part one of dislocation, alienation, and separation and that this experience opens an empathetic space for reading the accounts shared by the individuals she interviewed. As with the re-settlers themselves, the books must be reunited in order to be understood and made whole.

07



Marias Story – Vlug / Brand / Dood

Maureen De Jager
Helene Van Aswegen – bookbinding
Grahamstown [Makhanda]
2014

Maria's Story comprises three hand-bound books contained within a solander box. The passages of Afrikaans text in these books were transcribed verbatim from a handwritten memoir by Maria Anna de Jager, the artist's great-grandmother. The English translations are by her father, Johan de Jager. Maria was captured by British soldiers in August 1901, during the South African War, and detained in the Winburg Concentration Camp in the Free State. Here four of her children died of disease and malnourishment. Having barely survived her own illness, Maria was released in June 1902, after the surrender of the Boer forces, and reunited with her husband. The artist's grandfather, Moritz, was born shortly thereafter. Maria would have been an elderly lady – and the war a seemingly distant memory – when she wrote her story in 1943. The immediacy of her memoir suggests a trauma relived almost daily.

08



Hilur

Cecilia Vicuna
Dartmouth, Massachusetts
1997

The title *Hilur* is a neologism combining the Spanish "hilo," or "thread," with the English "lure." The scroll consists of text hand-written by the artist in russet ink on Chinese writing paper with interleaving tissue. In the mid-1960s, the artist began creating precarious installations and *basuritas* – objects composed of debris; structures that disappear – along with *quipus* – an ancient Inca device for recording information, consisting of variously coloured threads knotted in different ways – and other weaving metaphors. She called these works "Arte Precario", and they soon evolved into collective rituals and oral performances based on dissonant sound and the shamanic voice. The multi-dimensional quality of these works allowed them to exist in many media and languages at once.

09

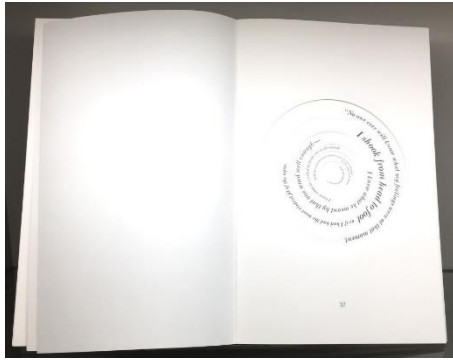


Alphabet

Paul Heimbach
Cologne
1990

Bound in newsprint, the portfolio contains: 26 frontispieces, (reduced by one letter that appears on the back), a booklet with the letters filtered out, a compilation, and a booklet for 26 letters in which the characters meet under altered proportions. Heimbach seems to be exploring the more complex notions of reading in meaning-making suggested by James Joyce (Lerm-Hayes 2004).

10



Descent into the Maelstrom

Hinab in den Maelstrom

Stefan Gunnesch

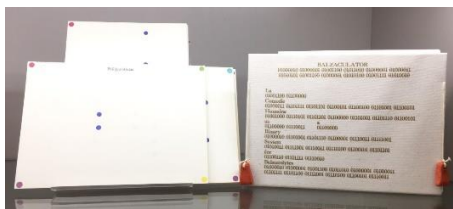
Edgar Allan Poe

Leipzig

2021

The book and its structure is inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's short story *A Descent into the Maelström*. Between pp37-49, the paper pages are cut in descending circles upon which the text spirals downward, getting lighter and smaller in font size as the pages progress, and thus, depicting a typographic maelstrom. The page numbering mimics this maelstrom using the top, bottom, left and right edges of the pages.

11



Balzaculator Color Code

La Comedie Humaine as Binary System for Balzacylotes

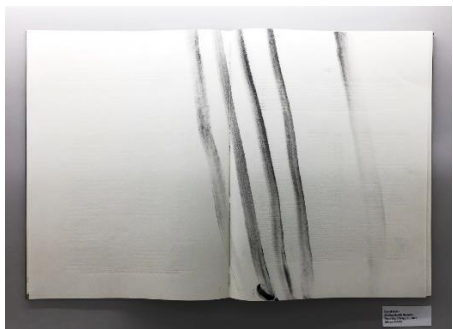
Angela Lorenz

Bologna

2013

This is an analog, proto-computer to determine which characters created by Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) appear in which stories or novels of *The Human Comedy*. In 1833 he realized the potential of weaving repeating characters throughout the works, to introduce familiarity into any scene and to eliminate the need to describe every figure anew. Of the thousands of characters, all appearing four or more times are here. The loom apparatus pays homage to French weaver and merchant Jacquard, whose innovations around the time of Balzac's birth constituted the first computer program: a series of punched cards to indicate a pattern to be woven automatically on a loom. The viewer places the punched card in front of any of the 179 repeating characters in the Balzaculator and coloured dots will show the texts in which a character appears.

12



Nothing Beside Remains

Daniel Mellis

Chicago, IL.

2007

This is an exploration of the physical presences of things now absent. The book is printed with ink on the printers fingers rather than on the type, thereby creating a record of her handling of the paper as it went through the press. Each page contains a blind impression of decades old standing type: indexes, train schedules, etc. Ink set-off causes strange fingerprint shaped areas to print. There are paragraphs both personal and imaginary: a mother with dementia, a photograph of an ancestor, etc. The printed-out carbon paper of the colophon allows the reader to leave their own traces through their handling of the book.

13

***De Rekening***

Nora Pauwels
John DeMerrit
San Francisco
2006

De Rekening is a work built upon an artist-created system of 'fake writing' used to mark the passing of time. Inspired by the anonymous entries in 19th Century ledgers and account books, *De Rekening* borrows its form and repetitive structure from those utilitarian yet evocative receptacles of time. The ruled lines in the book were mechanically drawn using a pen ruling machine at Golden Business Forms in West Burlington, Iowa, especially for this edition. Pen ruling was widely used in the 19th and early 20th Century in the ledger and account book trade; Golden Business Forms is one of the last purveyors of this technology.

14

***Extremely loud and Incredibly Close***

Jonathan Safran Foer
Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, MA & New York
2005

The selected pages shown here are part of a chapter without paragraph breaks in one block of text. Here, Foer produces perhaps the most visually emotionally charged piece of human communication in contemporary fiction. Grandfather, Thomas Schell's stream of consciousness is a pouring out of his heart to his dead son (also Thomas Schell, killed in the September 11 attacks in New York). Given Thomas's rapidly filling daybook, the text is literally pulled together in Thomas's breath-taking attempt to explain what he must. The overtyped text blocks (shown here) become a typographic index of his utter failure and the incomprehensibility of attempting, too late, to explain "everything" to a dead son and an alienated wife.

15

***Nika***

Anik Vinay
Vaucluse, France
2002

When closed it resembles a square wooden pillar, that opens into a leporello (accordion-fold) structure of four, vertically tall (43 cm high), triangular and hinged pieces of wood. The work presents an unpublished text by French philosopher and writer François Aubrall which is translated into Spanish by Maria Teresa Marquez-Blanc and English by Delia Morris. Although the structure of the book presents as a conventional codex for reading, the thin vertical silver on black paragraphs present a challenge for readers. The book's physicality draws attention to itself whilst reading the narrative of Nika's physical, emotional and spiritual experiences.

16



Iti Amotyoma Muxum
A manual for typography from Utopia

Romano Hänni
 Basel
 2020

Typographer Romano Hänni has been experimenting with unusual compositions of letter forms and symbols since the early 1980s. Creating things manually with the participation of all of the senses is very important to him. In this book, Romano states that he is reprinting the original text of the *Iti Amotyoma Muxum* that arrived in England from Utopia in 1535. The book was purportedly soon "lost in the darkness of history" until 2019, when it was revealed to be in the Vatican Secret Archives. Hänni says that he was able to get possession of the book for a few weeks. Although not able to translate the mysterious lost language of Utopia, he was able to recreate the harmonious overall impression of the book with its deliberately used proportions and its classical and elementary typography. The book displays his mastery of symbols and letter forms beautifully and includes approximately 52 printing forms.

17



Writing by Drawing - When Language Seeks Its Other

Andrea Bellini (curator)
 Sarah Lombardi (curator)
 Milan
 2020

Scrivere Disegnando ("Writing by Drawing") is an exhibition about writing and its shadow. Its aim is to look back over a number of practices, from the early twentieth century to the present day, in which writing leaves the function of communication behind and moves into the sphere of the illegible and unspeakable. It sets out to explore the tension inherent in script, the way that it hovers between the genuinely semantic realm and the uncharted territory of mere arabesques, automatism, repeated marks and scribbles. All of the works on view inhabit a vague terrain in which the act of writing is more about 'trying to say' than 'saying' itself; more about potentialities of meaning than about signification (Giorgio Agamben). It is writing that has transcended communication, becoming a trace of existence and affirmation of self, but also an element of fancy, a metaphor for the mysterious weft of the world. The exhibition centers on this ancient human impulse to move past the communicative side of writing, toward the unfettered, absolute reclamation of the mark, with its wealth of imaginative possibilities.