



Unbound

31 July – 7 September 2013
Macquarie University Art Gallery

Bound

Macquarie University
Library Exhibition Space



Unbound

Curators: Rhonda Davis and John Potts

31 July – 7 September 2013
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above

Stephen Birch (1961–2007)

Untitled (bookcase) detail

1989

plaster, acrylic, timber

dimensions variable

Macquarie University Collection

Donated under the Australian Government's Cultural

Gifts Program by Andrew Birch

Photography E y Alexakis

© Courtesy the artist's estate

cover image

Jayne Dyer

A Reading: 3

2008

From *The Reading Room* series

digital image

198 x 120 cm

No. 3 in edition of 5

Courtesy the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery,

Melbourne and King Street Gallery, Sydney

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Robert Adamson, E y Alexakis,
Suzanne Archer, Mireille Astore, Julie
Barratt, Vanessa Berry, Stephen Birch,
Chris Bond, Anne Brennan, Meredith
Brice, Christian Capurro, Caitlin Casey,
Angela Cavalieri, Angela Cavalieri and
Peter Lyssiotis, Stephen Copland, Fiona
Davies, Urszula Dawkins and Peter
Lyssiotis, Jayne Dyer, Ian Hamilton Finlay,
Joachim Froese, Nathalie Hartog-Gautier,
Nathalie Hartog-Gautier and Iain Brew,
Helen Geier, Juno Gemes, Robert Jacks,

Jonathan Jones, Michael Karris and
Peter Lyssiotis, Yvonne Kendall, Bruno Leti,
Ruark Lewis, Richard Long, Euan Macleod
with Lloyd Jones and Ron McBurnie,
Bea Maddock, Chris Mansell, Rocket
Mattler, James McGrath, Allan Mitelman,
Nell, Monica Oppen, Ken Orchard,
Mike Parr, Ed Ruscha, Sangeeta
Sandrasegar, Alex Selenitsch, Sandra Selig,
Kylie Stillman, Richard Tipping, Angela
Welyczko and Anne Zahalka.

Although the 'death of the book' is now a familiar concept and changes to consumption of printed material are having catastrophic effects on traditional publishing models many people still like books. It isn't so much what is in them (we can often access that much more efficiently) – it is their 'bookliness' that really matters. Books are cultural products which have value far beyond their function or content. They are signifiers of education, of culture, of civilisation itself. Reading a book marks you as a particular kind of person. Owning a library marks you as a particular kind of person. Walking around with a book under your arm marks you as a particular kind of person. You are a bookish person. The death of the book is undoubtedly well in train but alongside this economic process is a process of cultural resilience in which the book retains a value far in excess of its practical worth.

Experimental novelists like B. S. Johnson tried to disrupt the reader – text relationship with such works as *Albert Angelo* where holes cut in the pages force the reader to see events which lie in the narrative future, or the *Unfortunates* where the book comes in a box of loose chapters to be read as the reader pleases. The artist Tom Phillips approached the question of the book as art work from a different direction with his *Humument*, a 'treated' version of a Victorian pot-boiler or his illustrated version of Dante's *Inferno* which became – as *A TV Dante* – a prize winning and ground breaking video. However, these remain relatively isolated examples of aesthetic assaults on the form of the book which retain the object as something portable and legible.

This exhibition (and the satellite exhibition in the Macquarie Library) explores the 'bookliness' of books and the bookishness of book lovers. The form and nature of the book is considered in a variety of works which extend and challenge our ideas of what books are and what they are for. This exhibition is not so much about the retention of the book in 'treated' form as an exploration of ideas which have the book as a starting point.

Seen together with its satellite, this exhibition offers a balance between the antiquarian impulse which fetishizes the book as a cultural token fast losing its power as we move into a post-literate world and the opportunities that this world offers to revalue the book and find new ways to explore and celebrate a remarkably durable artifact.

Professor John Simons
Executive Dean
Faculty of Arts
Macquarie University

John Potts

We live at a time when all that is solid is melting into data, when knowledge is immaterial and lives in the cloud, when the book is said to be disappearing. The CEO of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, has declared that 'the physical book and bookstores are dead', replaced by the Kindle, iPad and other new vessels for digital text.¹ The e-reader and online publishing are upheld as the vehicles of progress, displacing the old-fashioned printed book already referred to, a little disdainfully, as the 'p-book', or, more aggressively, as the 'dead tree book'. There are many digital prophets and 'futurologists' predicting that the old-fashioned writing format known as the book will soon be vapourised – unloved and unGoogled – replaced by its immaterial successors.

Yet it's hard to dismiss the printed book, which, like the wheel, has sheer longevity on its side. The codex form of the book – sheets bound between covers – has existed since the first century, when it was invented by the Romans as an alternative to the papyrus scroll. Previous vessels for writing including dried clay tablets, wax, ivory, metal and glass. But the bound paper book proved the most effective vehicle for the printed word, particularly in the wake of the development of the printing press in the mid- fifteenth century.

¹ Quoted in Ken Auletta, 'Publish or Perish: can the iPad topple the Kindle and save the book business?', *The New Yorker*, 26 April 2010, p. 26.

Mass literacy – and with it enormous shifts in political, scientific and religious thought – rose as printed books became widely available in the centuries after Gutenberg. The printed book distributed knowledge to masses in an entirely new way; the book carries the weight of this intellectual history in its form. Anne Zahalka's *Gesture* series, built on digitally scanned details from oil paintings, suggests the connections between books, knowledge and social power. The social elite once portrayed in oil paintings attempted to concentrate political power through a concentration of knowledge, represented by expensive books owned by the aristocracy. But the printing press made pamphlets and books increasingly available for a wider readership. The free circulation of books symbolised the movement of ideas, knowledge, and freedom to think: when a totalitarian regime sought to restrict thought and beliefs, it staged book burnings. Books – durable capsules of thought and creativity – have helped inspire the great social movements of the last two hundred years.

It is the materiality of books that has often inspired the attention of artists, who in recent years have rendered the book-form in wood, stone, metals and other substances. Perhaps this is a response to the rapid digitisation of knowledge in the contemporary world; perhaps it attests to the sheer attractiveness of the book as object. Indeed artists have long been captivated by the form of the book, often hand-crafting specialist artist books or transforming the basic codex format in creative ways. The art book has functioned as part-documentation of art works and part-art work in itself.

Even the conceptual 'post-object' art emerging from the 1960s found a central place for art books. For a 'land artist' like Richard Long, the work was the process of walking through a landscape, interacting with natural features as he found them. This process, however, was then documented in the form of limited edition artist's books, such as the small book documenting his 1973 walk *From Around a Lake*. This book, initially printed in an edition of 300, depicted leaves found by Long on this walk; the artist book endured long after the walk-as-art was completed, becoming an art object in itself.

Jayne Dyer

Our reverence for the abstract notion of 'knowledge' is one of the great fallacies. Knowledge is relational, contextual; knowledge is not always transferable, it is not necessarily truth. Most cultures have a reverent relationship to books – whether public, private, social or religious, as receptacles of knowledge. I often use the loose proposition of the library to raise questions about intention and value; what is a fact and what may be a fiction is in the way we construct meaning. It all depends on who wrote the book.

Sourced from *Artist Profile*, Issue 13, 2010, p 9.

What happens when the visual arts and language converge?

In an age of the sound-bite and increasingly paperless information exchange, Australian artist Jayne Dyer uses language, books and the loose proposition of the library to discuss the relationship of visual arts with linguistics. Her work raises questions about our relationship with books and addresses issues of translation and knowledge transference that reflect local to global communication and access.

Dyer's installations and art objects are ambitious in concept and scale. Books spill from doorways, columns of books mimic architecture or suspend space, text works are constructed from private conversations and the identities of cities are mapped through individual stories.

Sourced from Jayne Dyer, C.A.P. *China Art Projects*, Seoul International Print Photo Art Fair, 2009.

CAP Director: Tony Scott
Catalogue Editor: Reg Newitt

right
Jayne Dyer
A Reading: 4
2008
From *The Reading Room* series
digital image
198 x 120 cm
No. 1 in edition of 5
Courtesy the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery, Melbourne and King Street Gallery, Sydney
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