

IN REVIEW

Bronx, New York

Reviewed by
Sandra Sider

Rare Editions: The Book as Art Lehman College Art Gallery



Rare Editions: The Book as Art included numerous examples of surface design in bookish modes. This exhibition at the Lehman College Art Gallery (February 10–May 20, 2009), featured works by fifteen contemporary artists. Many of the works were hybrids incorporating painting, drawing, printmaking, collage, photography, and sculpture. Fiber and textiles figured prominently among materials and concepts used to create the diverse structures that were on display, and several paper-based objects were manipulated to fibrous extremes—for example, Doug Beube's *Twisters*, a wall installation of phone books manipulated into a giant ruff-like object.

New York artist and art educator Susan Fleminger curated the exhibition, relying on her training in book arts at Haystack School and the Center for Book Arts as a point of departure for the exhibition. Fleminger's hands-on experience with the book as an art form, combined with her apparent affinity for disparate materials and processes, resulted in a stimulating, provocative presentation at Lehman. *Rare Editions* concerned not only book arts, but also gallery space as a curatorial challenge, with works neatly arrayed in vitrines contrasting with forms that flowed across the wall or floor.

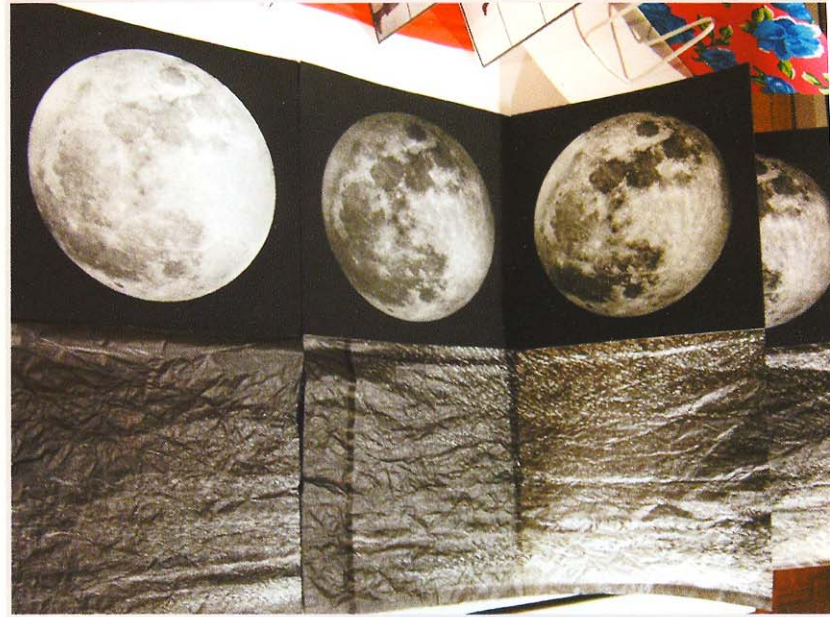
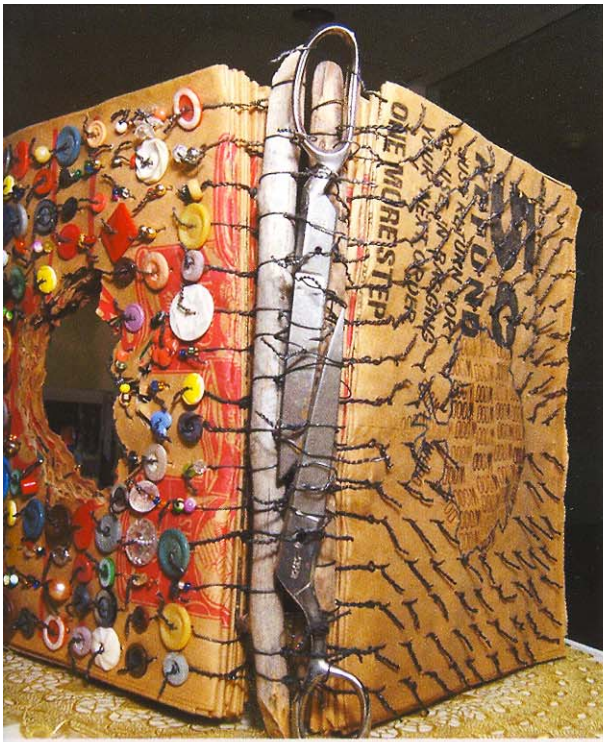
A viewer could appreciate some of the work intellectually—e.g., the vintage *Fluxus 1* by George Macuinias, including the stamped wooden box often used as a mailer by Fluxus artists. These ephemeral elements were reminders of the influence of Fluxus on conceptual art and resultant challenges to hierarchies in the art world. Other pieces prompted emotional response, notably Beube's *Vest of Knowledge* (2008), an installation created for the exhibition. Here, pages from an encyclopedia were rolled and inserted into trans-

parent cylinders “wired” in red, like sticks of dynamite, to transparent vests hanging on a coat rack. Their mundane placement on the rack intensified the message of the power of words, which can lead to destruction or salvation.

While several of the mixed media installations referred obliquely to book art, many works in the show incorporated variations of the codex, accordion, dos-a-dos (one cover for two books), pop-up, scroll, and tunnel. A few works combined book formats, and others exaggerated the book concept through monumental scale. Kiki Smith, for example, used photogravure, photo lithography, and screen-printing on handmade Japanese paper in *Tidal* (1998), a magnificent accordion book more than ten feet long, illustrating thirteen phases of the moon along the bottom half and a long rolling wave along the top. The wave functioned as visual proof of the moon's pull on tidal motion.

Miriam Schaefer's three works resonated with memory, humor, and the female condition, personalized with paint, silk, beads, and found objects. In *No Ornament So Precious as the Labor of Their Hands* (2005), hundreds of gloves massed into a twenty-foot-long rope-like structure, meandered onto the floor. Her *Altars of the Invisible* (2007), an inset book with dollhouse furniture and other objects inside a blue wedding dress, rotated so that viewers could see the entire piece and the memories represented within it.

References to clothing were also evident in works by Beube and Susan Joy Share where zippers connected the structures. Share's brightly colored *Zip-Off Fence* (2005) consisted of narrow upright panels decorated with mixed-media surface design. Sabra Moore's embellished covers referred to her



LEFT: GEORGE MACIUNAS *Fluxus 1* Anthology of various-size pages, various papers, and manila envelopes bottled together and contained in a wood box. *Fluxus 1* includes work of: George Brecht, Alison Knowles, Gyorgi Ligeti, Takehisa Kosugi, Takako Saito, Jackson Mac Low, Jones, Higgins, Watts, Williams and others. One of 14 examples from ReFlux Editions, 1984, collated from original printed matter.

TOP CENTER: SABRA MOORE *Closed Book/Cut Trees* Unique artist book. 22 paper grocery bags, scissors, wire, beads, 25" x 12" x 1", 2000. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

TOP RIGHT: KIKI SMITH *Tidal* Accordion book. Photogravure, photo-lithography, and screen-print on handmade Japanese paper, 10.25" x 9 1/16", (boxed); 19.5 x 126.25" (open). Edition of 39, 1998. Publisher and printer: The Leroy Neiman Center for Print Studies, Columbia University. Photo: Courtesy Pace Editions, Inc.

BOTTOM: MIRIAM SCHAER *Altars Of The Invisible* Wedding dress, acrylic, found objects, 67" x 28" x 22", 2007. Inset book with digital printing from an edition of 18. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

family's quiltmaking traditions, with beads, buttons, and stitching, as she addressed social and political issues. The paper bags in *Closed Book/Cut Trees* (2000) made an environmental statement, while the murder of an ancestor and racial tensions were documented through photocopied, transferred, and hand-colored photographic images.

As might be expected, many pieces featured text and lettering, often in innovative materials and formats enhanced by surface design. In performance artist Lesley Dill's *The Thrill Came Slowly* (1996), photo polymer and letterpress on translucent Japanese paper, along with thread and wire, imprinted extreme emotional states on body parts. Photo polymer also was used by Nicolás Dumit Estévez to print the X-ray imagery on satin vellum in *Thirty-Two Letters to My Dentist* (2001-2006), an 18-inch-tall accordion book. Anne Gilman's *Debris* (2007) comprises letters to her deceased father in pencil, ink, wax, paper, and thread. This delicate memorial dealt with the after-effects of death, letting go of bad memories and embracing what remains.

—Sandra Sider, a New York quilt artist, has published articles and reviews concerning fiber art for more than twenty-five years. She is also an independent curator, and the professional online critic for www.QuiltCritique.com.

