

Imperfect Fragments of an Uncertain Whole
Rafael Domenech

Opening reception: 22.04.2021 4pm-6pm UTC+8

Exhibition duration: 23.04.2021 - 31.07.2021

Where You See Ugliness, I See Possibilities.

Suspended textured fiberboard panels always mean one thing: there is a mess up above. The drop ceiling made its first appearance in 14th century Japan before becoming a staple of modern construction. Pipes, fixtures, dust, cables, wires—all of the things that we do not want to see, the drop ceiling tucks away out of view. Yet hiding is a form of exposure.

City Lights

A relationship between light and texts immediately brings to mind the story of advertising, this is when light becomes malleable and becomes sovereign in the form of neon signage. Yet the ultimate implication of light is the shift to modern life when daylight is brought into the night. With this comes the whole world of nightlife. Nightlife is space that keeps urban centers alive.

In Fleeting Contact

Exposure is a form of contact. Could we understand design as a form of virus? Think of ubiquitous ceiling tiles mutating, silently, as we ignore their presence in much of the architecture we inhabit. A building is a vehicle for experience, a place of production, and a machine for living. What if these spaces could write? What kinds of stories would they tell? "Dust flakes hovering in a ray of light (say, under a lit lamp) reveal that ray, its extent and direction, along with our lived space, never as transparent as we believe."¹

"There is no dwelling without an inner fire"²

Rafael Domenech acts as a choreographer of light, inviting us to chart our own path through a variable landscape of vivid, refracting poetry. Information brushes against information. Interplay becomes a form of production. Domenech describes his lamps as a "book published in a form of light" and reading thereby becomes an act of spatial displacement. They hang in different sizes and complexities, and function as bridges between multiple realities—moment of drifting, of reverie, of circulation. With their modular format, which the artist constructs through seemingly endless permutations of color and text, these plexiglass lights fragment the authority of the author and the individual text to give birth to a reader in movement, who navigates the space between image and text to construct a narrative of infinite possibility.

Fragments of the Space Traversed

Slender cords extend from the drop ceiling tiles embellished with incised text, through a table, and practically to the floor where flame-shaped plexiglass lamps laser cut with texts converge with various primarily colored geometric shapes. The lamps hover centimeters above the floor where they cast bright spotlights. The massive table occupies the entire exhibition space of Hua International's Beijing location, dividing the room into three different zones. The table is not a table to sit around at. Instead, it surrounds you. Envelops you, even. Its organic, undulating form proposes various streams, channels, and passageways through the exhibition space, yet also seems riddled with traps. Sometimes, the only way out is under.

Artist Books

Artist books were themselves a revolution—they were not books about art or even books that featured art but entire artworks themselves. Some of the earliest European artists books came out of two revolutionary paths: one is that of Fluxus and Nouveau Réalisme, that embraced the randomness of the world, pushing the concept of the

death of the author, the everyday, and accumulation; the other path aims to create new proletarian art for the people in a new communist epoch. Artist books had a huge impact on European avant-gardes, with design and text-based works made by revolutionaries for revolutionaries with some of the earliest forms of self-publishing. In 1961, Dieter Roth, who remains a central inspiration for Domenech, made miniature books, including daily mirror book, from cut-out pages of daily newspapers and magazines. Undergoing the process of cutting, these artist books cannot be read in any practical manner as they only contain snippets of images, articles, and advertisements. With the action of cutting, the words are divorced from their meanings, turned into visual noises.

A Commutative Device

On October 17, 1961, at 3:47 in the afternoon, artist Daniel Spoerri traced all the objects gathered on the blue tabletop of his Parisian hotel room onto a large sheet of paper. Paper clips, wine stoppers, matchboxes, burnt matches, spice jars, cutlery, leftover bread, spilled salt – nothing was left out, nothing was deemed too unimportant. These objects subsequently evoked associations, memories and anecdotes from both the original author and his friends Filliou, Emmett Williams, Dieter Roth and Roland Topor. An Anecdoted Topography of Chance is an archaeological game, a poem to the arbitrary, an encyclopaedia, and above all else, a celebration of friendship and creativity. Domenech is at the forefront of a new generation of artists experimenting with the temporal and spatial modalities of book-making. As Max Schumann notes, the (artist) book is a multimedia, commutative device. It is multidimensional. It has limitless possibilities of combinations, surfaces, planes, spaces, and architectures to explore and investigate.⁵ Domenech's spatial interventions adopt this ethos, while tracing a historical trajectory from the political engagement of El Lissitzky and the Constructivists to the boundless experimentation of Dieter Roth. Just as Ulises Carrión described the book as a "space-time" sequence, a sequence of moments, in his canonical text "The New Art of Making Books" (1975),³ Domenech understands exhibition-making as an expanded form of publishing, thereby cultivating the space of exhibition as an active site of production, rather than a repository container.

Rafael Domenech (b.1989, Havana City) lives and works in New York. He has exhibited his work internationally, most recently in a solo exhibition at the Sculpture Center in New York. Domenech is currently preparing a dual exhibition at the Bass Museum in Miami.

—— Justin Polera

1. Michael Marder, *Dust (Object Lessons)* (London: 1 Bloomsbury, 2016).

2. Michael Marder, *Pyropolitics: When the World is Ablaze* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020).

3. "Learn to Read Art: A History of Printed Matter," *Document Journal*, posted December 2014, <https://www.documentjournal.com/2014/12/learn-to-read-art-a-history-of-printed-matter/>