

"You see it's like a *portmanteau*—there are two meanings packed into one word"
Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*

When, in French, people refer to Lewis Carroll's wonderful invention, the "word-suitcase," [portmanteau] we hear above all "word" and less so "suitcase," which is normal since, born in a book, the "word-suitcase" designates other words while the "suitcase," in this case, is only an image. If the word is born in a suitcase, things might be different. Sara MacKillop's works create a desire to take the hypothesis at its word, finally, seriously (isn't this authorized in Lewis land?), given the relationship between the container and the content, and then also those of the tool and the finished creation, the perennial and the disposable, are reversed in it with a multiplicity of ways that she invents with, like the significative suitcase, a material leitmotif... paper. Obviously, these are first of all her *Book-Bag-Books* that suggest the idea of a word-suitcase, in a circularity worth of the "A Mad Tea-Party" chapter (to go back to Alice).

Closed, the *Book* only seems to be a *Bag*, in the form of a monochrome, orange, yellow, pink or blue paper rectangle, completed by paper handles or strings, to nimbly take hold of to go shopping. But no, absolutely not! The bag is already full. Inside, when it is spread out, as we would open a book, we discover the pages themselves made of paper shopping bags, in different formats and origins, creating a surprise effect like pop-up books. Acquired when making purchases, found in the street or made by the artist (for example, the bags created from calendar pages), the bags are skillfully assembled, sometimes showing a few words that don't necessarily need to be read, words that are just there, words that in any case, don't draw our attention to the point of forgetting the book's materiality... in a *custom binding* practice as the exhibition's title suggests. And we are clearly situated at the heart of one of the major fields of exploration of the artist's book, around its visual and tactile, potentially sculptural qualities. What basically is a book? A paper being, with more or less volume, thick, soft, with a cover, colored, recycled, expertly folded, assembled or bound, which creates a link with other things, among which, therefore, the paper shopping bags that proliferate. With this restriction that instead of "things," we should possibly, following the term used by Vilém Flusser, call the latter "non-things," a category that the philosopher also calls "stupid stuff," in the sense that "we believe we are able to scorn them." Whereas the book remains a "thing," because it benefits from a certain esteem. Sara MacKillop's *Book-Bag-Books* could consequently be thought of as "things-non-things-things," each one folded on the other, echoing Barbara Kruger's strategy; most especially in her poster *I Shop Therefore I Am* (a sort of "statement-shopping statement," so to speak).

A few printings on paper and fabric made from photographs of colored pencils that the artist notably buys in museum gift shops, responds in the exhibition's hanging to a first series of works. An artistic reminiscence incarnated in a gadget, half-tool, half-accessory, or a new occurrence of Flusser's "stupid stuff," these pencils are used to create works that also bite their own tail. Because the pencil is supposed to allow one to draw and make art, but in the present case, the art is already drawn on the pencil. This is how, reworked and digitally repeated, the image of the pencil and its decorative motifs becomes the composition's motif, in short, a ready-made motif. But if it were only that, it would be too easy, life would be too wonderful. Sara MacKillop recounts that when she worked on her pencil images, she heard a reading of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* on the radio. The story recounts the life of a woman locked into a bedroom by her husband. The only thing she wants is a pencil and paper, to write, but he does not allow her to have them. Thus, condemned to do nothing, she observes the motifs of old dilapidated wallpaper until she goes mad. The labyrinth that the repeated images of the pencils

trace recalls the space without exits of this wallpaper, a custom binding in the sense this time of shackles, from which one must manage to free oneself.

Vanessa Morisset

1. Sara MacKillop's works very often have a link to paper, in its materiality and its different uses, for example, gift wrap and book jackets.
2. Vilém Flusser, "Choses de mon environnement," in *Choses et non-choses. Esquisses phénoménologiques*, published in German in 1993, translated into French in 1996, at éditions Jacqueline Chambon.