

Galerie VidalCuglietta is pleased to present EX LIBRIS, an exhibition of works with books featuring contributions by gallery artists: Wim Catrysse, Edith Dekyndt, Cheryl Donegan, Amy Granat, Erwan Mahéo, Miks Mitrevics, Mira Sanders, Lisa Tan, Zin Taylor.

It may be said that there is no more perfect form known to woman or man than the book. For centuries now, it has remained remarkably stable: paper pages bound by a cover yield a thing to hold, to give, to read and read again. Just like the human body, the book has two sides. And the early ones, bound in leather covers, may even be likened to the human animal's skin. We encounter the book as a very physical form indeed! And in Milan's Ambrosian Library, there remains an ancient bible illustrated with human-animal hybrids, announcing a world of vitality and transformation.

Today, suddenly, the book is in the midst of its greatest transformation in centuries: With the current digitalization and dematerialization of just about everything, including books, we may lament the book's extinction. Or we may ponder this fine form differently ...Here, the plot thickens: Could not artists be said to use books more consciously and creatively today than perhaps in any moment in history? As the Polish poetess, Wisława Szymborska, once wrote, the book of life is always open in the middle. And this could be turned around and pursued further to say that the fullest life is lived in the midst of books. Such are the lives of the artists who have contributed to this exhibition. At its heart is a collection of their books, housed in a structure specially constructed by Erwan Mahéo and Zin Taylor. The new collection lends insight into the thoughts that drive these distinct artists, making palpable certain shared concerns that can only now come to the surface.

Alongside these chosen volumes, several artists contribute additional works about the books they live with, submitting this fine form to playful and pathos-filled acts of transformation and deception. Lisa Tan presents twin images of books as portraits of a couple: When I moved in with a former boyfriend, our respective libraries converged. The titles of the works play off of the coupling. Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" becomes "Two Hearts of Darkness" and Alain Robbe-Grillet's "In the Labyrinth" becomes "Two in the Labyrinth". Our experience of the same material is interminably independent of one another. A dark romance also permeates Erwan Mahéo's cut-up and collaged version of Roger Lewinter's *Histoire d'amour dans la solitude*, a work that forsakes the linear reading or the page-turner, instead turning the book into a single plane – a picture.

In my library, which includes many art historical treatises, there are several volumes analyzing forms (pictures, sculptures, etc.) which would compete with the book for the title of "most ancient" and "perfect" in the realm of art – and this drama is played out in more than one work in Ex Libris,

as (moving) pictures of books, sculptures evoking books and even a specially performed comedy of the book figure in additional works by Wim Catrysse, Edith Dekyndt, Cheryl Donegan, Amy Granat, Erwan Mahéo, Miks Mitrevics, Mira Sanders, Lisa Tan and Zin Taylor. At each turn, the creative use and the transformation of books into art and art into books speaks volumes of the new knowledge to gained when the book is thought again.

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