

10 Questions For Christoph Schifferli  
Gianni Jetzer



GJ: What is the first artist's book that you purchased?

CS: Edward Ruscha's *Parking Lots* (1967) edition, a real classic. At that time I was collecting photography books, and I made the distinction between books about photographers and books by photographers. The categorization worked well until I ended up with books that were neither, such as Ruscha's books that include photographs, which were not taken by a photographer and have no explanation text. This turned out to be the first of many artists' books in my collection.

GJ: How many books do you own?

CS: I don't know the exact number, but it is about five to six thousand artist books, several thousand photography books, and quite some catalogs.

GJ: Is there a book that you always wanted to buy, but weren't able to find?

CS: There are books that I always wanted to find, and when I did find them, I could not afford them. Duchamp's book *The Green Box* (1934) is a collection of notes that he made during the production of the artwork *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923) or, as it is often called, *The Large Glass*. The book is absolutely fabulous because it is a sculpture in book format.

GJ: How would you summarize the concept behind the exhibition *Books on Books*?

CS: *Books on Books* departs from the artistic strategy of appropriation, which was prevalent in the seventies and eighties. When I started to look through my collection, I realized that many contemporary artists from the nineties to the present use this strategy to play with and to discuss books and prints. I thought this theme would be an interesting way to approach artists' books.

GJ: What are the three books that you particularly like in your selection?

CS: The first is *Playboy Volume XLI, No. 1. Barbara Bloom*, which is partially an appropriation piece. The edition consists of a Playboy magazine translated in braille, an effort spearheaded by The United States Library of Congress. Bloom uses this braille edition and adds a photographic centerfold, the portrait of Marilyn Monroe reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*. A second title is the artist's book by Marcel Broodthaers that cites Stéphane Mallarmé's poem, *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*. Broodthaers redesigned the poem by blocking out the text with continuous black stripes. This edition was published in 1968. In the same year, and even in the same month, November 1968, Mario Diacono, an Italian artist who was part of the concrete poetry movement, had the same idea; he produced a similar citation with *AMETRICA n'aboolira kat'Alogos. JCT #1* (1968). The similarity and synchronicity of the two books question traditional assumptions of artistic genius and originality. The third book is by Dora Garcia, which reproduces the pocket edition of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1967) with mirrored copy. When exhibited, all two thousand copies of the books were stacked on a table as an installation.

GJ: Which artists are the most crucial for the subject of the exhibition?

CS: There are quite a few people who access the concept in different ways. Olaf Nicolai presents a bibliography of books that were owned by Maria Colao, a Roman gallerist who passed away a few years ago. It is a reference not only to her collection, but also to her life achievements. Rodney Graham creates a bookmark for the trade edition of Ian Fleming's *Dr. No*. When inserted into a specific page, the marker creates a textual loop.

GJ: If a young artist publishes a book today, what is the difference between book production now and what an artist was doing 40 years ago?

CS: Practically speaking, book making has been driven by technology. In the 1960's cheaper offset printing allowed artists to disseminate and produce books easily and inexpensively. Today technology is once again altering the book market. There is more variety in production such as color and inkjet prints, or different kind of papers. Conceptually, there is now a history of printed works, which are part of the subconscious of contemporary artists. There is an interest in citations, and often a very respectful inclusion of the work of predecessors.

GJ: You will publish a first book on books soon, what is this new project about?

CS: This book comes from an exhibition with the same title, *Books on Books*, which I organized in Paris two years ago at the gallery of Christoph Daviet-Thierry. The book consists of an interview between Jonathan Monk and Ian Severin Dubourgh, a young French artist. They selected a number of titles, took each book in their hands, and discussed it. This text will be illustrated by pages and views of the books highlighted in their discussion.

GJ: Will you donate your book collection to a museum one day, or do you have another plan for its future?

CS: It is hard to say. I would like to edit and donate a part of or perhaps the whole to a special institution that could use it for teaching or so. It depends upon many things. I have not yet decided about this.

GJ: You started collecting film stills a couple years ago, why?

CS: I became fascinated by the power of images in movies. The only way to experience stills today, or one of the best ways, is through photographic prints. It is a way to connect with the artistic production. This another uncharted territory, there is no real documentation about the use of photography in movies and about movies, this topic allows me to discover new aspects and be continually surprised.