

# Querl

*dismantling the book*  
Stefanie Dykes

A final project paper submitted to the faculty of  
The University of Utah  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Art and Art History

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THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH GRADUATE SCHOOL

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a final project paper submitted by

Stefanie Dykes

This final project paper has been read by each member of the following supervisory committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

2nd August '10 \_\_\_\_\_  
Chair: Justin Diggle

2nd Aug 2010 \_\_\_\_\_  
Alison Denyer

August 2, 2010 \_\_\_\_\_  
Brian Snapp

THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH GRADUATE SCHOOL

FINAL READING APPROVAL

To the Graduate Council of the University of Utah:

I have read the final project paper of Stefanie Dykes in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographic style are consistent and acceptable; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the Supervisory Committee and is ready for submission to The Graduate School.

2nd August 2010

Date

Justin Diggle  
Chair: Supervisory Committee

Approved for the Major Department

Brian Snapp  
Chair, Department of Art and Art History

Approved for the Graduate Council

Raymond Tymas-Jones  
Dean, College of Fine Arts

## ABSTRACT

When an artist adopts an intuitive working methodology, the creation of images or objects often appear before a final clear conceptual idea is defined. My artistic practice changed dramatically with my desire to dismantle books, to unburden myself from outdated or discarded texts, and to fold them into new structures.

Dedicated to my husband, Mark, who has shared his passion for reading and his books with me. Mark has introduced me to some of the finest bookstores from Cody's Books in Berkeley, California, City Lights in San Francisco, California, Iconoclast books in Sun Valley, Idaho, searching for Hemingway novels, and for wandering through the basement of the Strand Bookstore, home of 18 miles of books near Union Square in New York City, New York.

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## INTRODUCTION

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand . . . nor look  
through the eyes of the dead . . . nor feed on the  
spectres in books,  
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,  
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

*Song of Myself, Walt Whitman*

When I adopted an intuitive working methodology, the creation of images and objects appeared before a final clear conceptual idea was defined. My artistic practice changed dramatically with my desire to dismantle books, to unburden myself from outdated or discarded texts, and to fold them into new structures.

My books were transformed by the repetition of one simple act performed faithfully each day. This ritual brought to the surface recurrent symbols or motifs that had been hidden or never contemplated. Individually, each book form is an artifact of an activity. The accumulation of these objects dislocated the emphasis from their normal use-value to their value as evidence, and framed these objects as having another use-value. As objects of contemplation, they became triggers for remembering and prompters of making.

The *Querl* exhibition as a whole represented a place of transition arrived at through an inner journey that twisted and coiled around concepts self-identity, books as cultural icons, and the use of pattern recognition as a creative tool.

## ACCUMULATION

One of the fastest growing industries in the United States is the building and renting of self-storage units. Goods are sold more cheaply than ever before. We spend our lifetimes amassing furniture, gadgets, stationary bikes, and for myself, books. We are a consumer society that cannot seem to throw anything away. Economists say that if you are not using something, it is useless, so why keep it? Changing economic climates, shortages, war, and poverty have all been motivating factors for keeping and storing personal possessions, but I think we have a stronger psychological need to keep objects. For myself, certain objects act as triggers for memories and associations. If you kept everything that had a memory attached to it, you would soon be buried under a pile of possessions. Hoarding may be a way of safekeeping the future by clinging to the past.

I remembered seeing *Waste Not*, an exhibition by Song Dong and his mother, Zhao Xiangyuan, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, New York, 2009. (Hung) It was a mind-boggling collection of random objects crowded into the 3,000 square foot exhibition hall. Initially driven by poverty and insecurity, Xiangyuan felt reluctant to throw things out even when these things had clearly become useless. For Xiangyuan, 'Waste not, want not' was her primary reasoning for saving things, but as things amassed, the objects were kept for the sake of memory. Useless objects were saved for sentimental reasons because they were associated with someone intimate to her or represented a special moment in her life.

Eventually, Xiangyuan's home became so overcrowded with objects that there was nowhere to sit. It was the breaking point. Thinking that art could help heal Xiangyuan, Dong and his mother began sorting, cataloguing and clearing out her home. Together, Xiangyuan and Dong undertook a simple creative ritual. As objects were taken from Xiangyuan's home, her son would write down the memories and stories associated with each item. Every bit of fabric, piece of furniture, bundle of string, and dry hardened bar of soap was carefully assigned a number and catalogued.

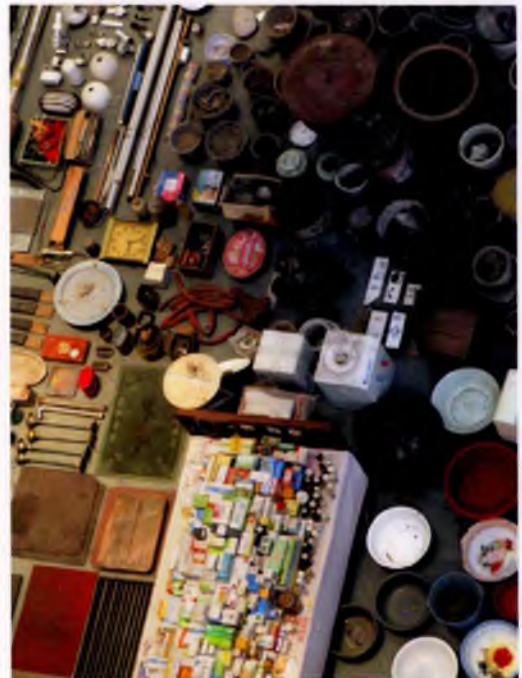


Figure 1: Photo of the *Waste Not* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, August, 2009.

We all reach the point where we simply cannot keep everything. For me, the *Waste Not* exhibition illustrated two artistic concepts that were to become very important to the *Querl* exhibition: 1) the accumulation and collection of objects causes a dramatic shift in the perception of an individual object for the viewer, and 2) a simple ritual could be a working methodology for making art.

## SILTING THE APPRAISABLE

During the 2009 spring semester, I took a poetics and theory class with Professor Maeera Schreiber. Professor Schreiber's class introduced me to Mina Loy. Loy was a modernist writer who was involved with the Futurist and Modernist artistic movements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Loy's circle of friends included Tristan Tzara, Melanie Moore, Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Campbell. Much of Loy's poetry is written in a sort of free verse. Professor Schreiber often described Loy's writing as 'weighty language'. You had to immerse yourself in Loy's use of language to understand her vision. Much of her work, prose, poetry and collages, are best

described as "assemblages."

A bit of a vagabond, Loy charted her transits through the modernist landscape with the use of maps and baedekers<sup>1</sup>, but the image of the book became an expression for her spiritual searching. Books became doorways through which to take imaginary voyages. For Loy a book was an object inhabited by and inhabiting



Figure 2: Brancusi's studio, Paris: Constantin Brancusi, Tristan Tzara, unidentified woman, Mina Loy, Jane Heap, Mararet Anderdons.

space. Her creative process came to resemble the psychic activity she called "silting the appraisable" -- letting the weightier elements sift through the mesh of interpretation as the rest volatilizes. (Burke 23)

This idea of 'weighty language' resonated with me. I was intrigued with the modernists' search for a contemporary language to express themselves against the speed and power of a growing industrial culture. As part of my final project for the class, Professor Schreiber allowed me to add a visual component.

I decided to create shadow boxes, and began cutting up books, creating new assemblages, searching for a visual clue to this idea of 'weighty language.' Slicing through the books revealed the beautiful quality of the abstracted text and brought to my attention the

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<sup>1</sup> A baedeker is a small guidebook. Verlag Karl Baedeker was a Germany-based publisher and pioneer in the business of worldwide travel guidebooks (1801-1859).

overwhelming amount of space my collection of books inhabited in my home. My books had accumulated and overgrown the bookcases. They were double stacked on the shelves, piled on the floors and taking up more and more living space. At the time, I certainly did not see my books as objects of a spiritual journey. I began sorting through the bookcases deciding which books I still needed and which books could be sacrificed in the service of art.

At first, selecting which books to remove from my personal collection was a simple task. The easiest books to get rid of were the ones I had purchased, but never read. Books



Figure 3: *Ultimate Rhythm*, mixed media shadow box, 10" x 10", 2009.

bought for a class or a specific reason were the next to go: *Intermediate Algebra*, *Corporate Law for Paralegals*, and *What To Expect During Pregnancy*. These books were no longer useful to me, and seemed an excellent source material for the shadow box project.

I cannot destroy books without acknowledging past incidents of banning and burning books. I have not targeted specific authors or subject matters to destroy as an act of censorship. Books are ubiquitous, especially in my home, but there is an inherent violence to all this activity.<sup>2</sup> I had to evaluate each book, which books still retained their value, their importance for me,

and which books, as found material, contained the potential for beauty.

As I went deeper into the collection, I recognized that specific memories and associations were attached to certain books. I could recall being on vacation in San Francisco, California, the late night walks through the city, and the selection and purchase of an Ezra Pound book of poetry from the City Lights bookstore. I remembered reading several of the books with my children as they were growing up. This was not going to be a simple 'spring cleaning' activity to clear away the old, damaged and worthless. Choosing which books to keep and which to destroy was becoming an act of self-reflection.

As I sorted through my bookshelves, I came across an essay by Orhan Pamuk, "How I Got Rid of Some of My Books" from his book *Other Colors*. After two earthquakes and their aftershocks during which his bookshelves creaked and groaned under the weight of the books, Pamuk decided to dispose of 250 of his books. Pamuk wrote about how this sorting and clearing out of his personal library brought about a sense of freedom and liberation.

<sup>2</sup> There is a penance to be paid for all the destruction I've done to these books. Occasionally, visitors to my studio and the *Querl* exhibition would tell me it looks like I am 'doing time.' It's easy to envision the hours spent folding each page inward toward its spine. Their amassed numbers are evidence of the amount of attention and dedication I've given to each one to create this collection.



Like a sultan pacing among a crowd of slaves, singling out the ones to be lashed, like a capitalist pointing out the lackeys to be sacked, I made my selection summarily. What I was punishing was my own past, the dreams I'd nurtured when I'd first found these books and picked them up, bought them, taken them home, hidden them, read them, and labored over them so lovingly, imagining what I would think when reading them in the future. On reflection, this seemed less like punishment than liberation. (Pamuk 107)

While clearing out my bookshelves, I experienced this same sense of freedom, but I took it a step further than Pamuk. By cutting and folding the books into a new structure, I had liberated them from their former use value. After Professor Schreiber's class and through the following summer, I continued to experiment with the book blocks<sup>3</sup> treating them just like any other artistic medium. I was in my studio working and began to roll the pages of a book around a dowel. I would tuck the rolled, folded page in close to the binding of the book, then another and another. The resulting new structure was intriguing. I could see that the possibilities were endless.



Figure 4: *An Interior Life*, altered book and relief print, 5" x 3.5", 2009.

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<sup>3</sup> "Book block" normally refers to folded signatures gathered, but not yet sewn, trimmed or covered. I'm using the phrase here to describe the books after I have removed the covers, but the signatures are still bound together.

## WHEN THE HANDS ARE BUSY, THE MIND IS FREE TO WANDER

The books were transformed and released from their traditional codex format by the repetition of one simple act that became a routine I performed each day. The age and quality of each book's papers influenced how it was shaped. I did not use any adhesives to fix the forms. Only the tension created between the folded pages held the book forms together.

Every week, I gathered books and cut them into smaller booklets. The physical qualities of the book's interior were exposed. The forms were similar in construction and materials, but

never exactly the same. Individually, each book form was an artifact of an activity. I remembered reading *Fate and Art*, Magdalena Abakanowicz's description of her work. Abakanowicz is a sculptor who often creates large scale installations. She works through her concepts by producing multiples of the same subject matter - similar in form, but each piece uniquely individual. A small quote caught my attention:

A crowd of people or birds, insects or leaves, is a mysterious assemblage of variants of a certain prototype. A riddle of nature's abhorrence of exact repetition or inability to produce it. Just as the human hand cannot repeat its own gesture. I invoke this disturbing law, switching my own immobile herds into that rhythm.  
(Jacob 80)



Figure 5: Folding a book form in my studio.

I wondered early on if I could develop a folding pattern so that each one could be exactly the same, but quickly realized that the folding pattern was directly related to how I was feeling each day. If I was tense, worried, or relaxed the forms reflected that in their density or branching effects. Subtle qualities to be sure, but I noticed that how I felt directed the rhythm of the folded pages, and that the repetition of the same exact act created many variants of the same form.



Every day I folded at least one new book form and each one was documented and catalogued. Despite their original formal structure, these new forms turned out to be very organic. They all had the same radiating symmetrical growth pattern. Many organisms and forms found in nature are organized around a central point or axis. Visitors to my studio would recognize this structural relationship and tell me that these forms reminded them of corals or tree root systems.

The characteristic growth patterns of many forms found in nature are influenced by their environmental conditions. Habit is a term that scientists use to describe the distinctive appearance or manner of growth, in plants or crystals. Here was the clue to the “assemblage of variants” that Abakanowicz talked about and I was experiencing.

Since I could not repeat myself, the forms became prompters of making. I just wanted to see what the next one would be like. Their construction, a gesture of my own hands, had become a new habit for me. Their repeated construction became a new routine in my studio practice. I was shifting from thinking about the effects of accumulation and was looking at the act of accumulation as a natural growth pattern. Their numbers were growing by the continuous repeated additions to the collection.

Seeing the accumulation of book forms and the repetition inherit in their construction, Edward Bateman, Assistant Professor at the University of Utah, brought me his David Byrne book, *Arboretum*. Byrne’s book is filled with page after page of his drawings (or mappings) that connect ideas that look like branching trees. In the introduction, Byrne wondered:

What are these drawings?  
Why did I do them?  
Will they be of interest to anyone else?  
Of any use?  
Do they need to be useful?

Well, I guess they’re a lot of things. Faux science, automatic writing, self-analysis, satire and maybe even a serious attempt at finding connections where none



Figure 6: Object No. 090310, altered book, approx. 9"x 9"x 3", 2010.

were thought to exist. And an excuse to draw plant-like forms and diagrams.

These accumulated over a few years until the impulse was spent. Maybe it was a sort of self-therapy that worked by allowing the hand to “say” what the voice could not.

Irrational logic-I’ve heard it called that. The application of logical scientific rigor and form to basically irrational premises. To proceed, carefully and deliberately, from nonsense, with a straight face, often arriving at a new kind of sense.

(Byrne, intro.)

I had heard this called ‘pattern recognition’ or ‘apophenia.’ Apophenia is a term coined by Klaus Conrad in 1958. Conrad described apophenia as the experience of seeing patterns or connections in random or meaningless data. Defined as the “unmotivated seeing of connections” accompanied by a “specific experience of meaningfulness.” In other words, we look for personal



Figure 7: Pitt Rivers Museum, Treatment of the Dead display, Oxford, England.

meaning in the experiences we have and the objects we encounter. Not to be confused with the concept of gestalt, which proposes that the mind (and brain) is holistic with self-organizing tendencies. We visually recognize figures and whole forms instead of just a collection of simple lines or curves. We perceive the essence or shape of an entity’s complete form by combining all the parts. The theory of apophenia takes gestalt’s proposed self-organizing tendency and suggests that there is personal meaning in all these forms and experiences for the individual. I began keeping an Apophenic Index. Following Byrne and Conrad’s processes, every connection or association that occurred to me while folding a book form was written down, later researched and filed away in a large three-ring binder – no matter how relevant at the time.

In the past, I had always worked by developing a conceptual theme first and then produced my artwork within that idea. Here the work was being produced before I understood what the concepts were. I was driven to make these new forms, but what were my hands trying to say that I did not have a voice for yet.



In September 2009, I traveled to England to attend the IMPACT conference.<sup>4</sup> I took a day trip to Oxford to visit the Pitt Rivers Museum. Lieutenant General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers was an English army officer, ethnologist and archaeologist. His approach was highly methodical by the standards of the time, and he is widely regarded as the first scientific archaeologist to work in Britain. Lt. General Pitt Rivers insisted all artifacts, not just beautiful or unique ones, be collected and catalogued. He focused on collecting everyday objects as the key to understanding the past.

The Pitt Rivers Museum is an amazing collection of objects arranged under common themes, i.e. Treatment of the Dead, despite their cultural or geographic origin, and displayed in black enameled cabinets. Pitt Rivers' contextualized treatment of his collection caused me to wonder about each item individually and how it fit in the general category (ancient Egyptians and Tasmanians tribesmen treated their dead quite differently). It occurred to me that the Pitt Rivers collection and arrangement of all these unique objects were as much a representation of Pitt Rivers, as they were about preserving the everyday objects as relics of the past.

I found myself in front of a display case that contained a variety of fossilized corals, and began wondering what was the connection between my impulse to dispose of and dismantle

my books. Was I prematurely acting as the archaeologist, methodically, treating the books as relics of my past? In a way, I was handling the books as if they were artifacts, slicing through their structures, shaping their pages into specimens, displaying the anatomy of the codex. I had



Figure 8: Growing archive collection.

documented and recorded each individual book form as evidence of my creative practice and as a passing icon. I, too, seemed to be contextualizing the book in a very different manner than I had initially envisioned.

Since each book yielded four to five new forms, my personal collection of books was expanding exponentially. The accumulation of these objects had dislocated the emphasis from their normal use-value to their value as evidence, and framed these objects as having

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<sup>4</sup> IMPACT is a biennial international printmaking conference that originated at the University of West England in Bristol, England.

another use-value. What were the 'weightier elements' settling out during this process? The book forms had moved beyond their everyday associations to encompass the creative ritual as well. As objects of contemplation, they had moved away from triggers of memories to become prompters of making.

## NEW HABITS, OLD ISSUES

Ritual brings to the surface recurrent symbols or motifs that had been hidden or never contemplated. In October 2009, the W. W. Norton & Company published Carl Gustav Jung's *Red Book*. It is a book that contains his personal explorations of his unconscious through free association drawings and memoir. Jung introduced the concept of Individuation. Individuation is a process of transformation whereby the personal and collective unconscious is brought into consciousness by means of dreams, and active imagination to be assimilated into the whole personality.



Figure 9: *Plummet*, graphite drawing with collaged book texts, 30" x 22", 2010, detail.

I began wondering if Jung's approach could help me understand what my hands were creating and why all the memory associations were surfacing while folding them (the book forms do resemble a mandala of sorts). I began to draw the forms not as a single drawing but as a series of drawings. The forms had become a personal recurrent symbol that I was working with that went beyond the specific memories associated with an individual book, but as a repeating symbol more closely related to the new forms as organic structures with a natural growth pattern. As yet another daily routine, I would journal my responses to the falling forms across the bottom of the pages. I was in dialogue with myself drawing



and writing. My free association writings were written over and over, obscuring the text so that it could not be read which reminded me of the cut obscured text of the book blocks. This mode of creative process was new to me. I was shifting from old habits of creating to a new working methodology – one of investigation while withholding a final definitive conceptual theme.

All this folding, drawing and writing reminded me of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concepts of the sedimented body and habit acquisition. (Steeves) Our bodies are capable of incorporating new habits. It is how we learn to dance or ride a bicycle. The acquisition of new



Figure 10: *Concordant Landscape (Lacking A Narrative Thread)*, digitally printed book jackets, installation 9"x 28', detail.

habits helps us understand the external world around us through the physical actions of our bodies. (Hass 90) Merleau-Ponty also talks about how the body is where the public (external world) collides with the private (dreams, memories, and associations).

In other words, we learn by doing. Page after page, layer upon layer, I recognized that these book forms were extensions of myself. I was now working with the forms along parallel strategies. As the collection amassed, my attention shifted from their individual evolution away from the codex and receptacles of memories to prompters of making and exploration of hidden personal associations.

During this time, I was working closely with Ernesto Pujol, the first visiting artist as part of the Marva and John Warnock Endowed Art Residency program in Department of Art and Art History at the University of Utah. For the residency, Pujol created a durational site specific performance piece, entitled *Awaiting*, at the Utah State Capitol building.<sup>5</sup> Part of the preparation for *Awaiting* was a weekly walking meditation exercise. Pujol had the performance participants walk backwards in a circle metaphorically undoing time. Concurrent to the *Awaiting* preparations and training, Pujol was creating a series of images relating to Mormon culture.<sup>6</sup> Intrigued by the lack of iconography for the Mormon's concept of the "mother of all souls," Pujol photographed himself dressed as a pioneer woman holding Beth Krensky's

<sup>5</sup> <http://awaitinginsaltlakecity.com>

<sup>6</sup> Pujol's work often conceptually addresses regionalism with each of his site specific performance pieces. See "On the Ground: Practical Observations for Regenerating Art Education." *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*. Ed. Steven Henry Madoff. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009. 1-13.

sculptured keys from her work entitled, *Keys For A House That Are No More*.<sup>7</sup>

Pujol's Mormon goddess image started me thinking about enculturation; the gradual transference of the prevailing society's culture, through experience, observation, and instruction. Gary Snyder in his book, *Practice of the Wild*, talks about the importance of recollecting the stories about the places where we live as an act of contemporary self-rediscovery. Snyder wrote, "For most American's, to reflect on "homeplace" would be an



Figure 11: *Placing and Replacing*, digital print on Kozo papers with wooden newspaper sticks, 24" x 35", 2010, detail.

unfamiliar exercise. Few today can announce themselves as someone *from* somewhere." (Snyder 25)

I have lived my entire life in the Salt Lake Valley, a community envisioned and established under a strong patriarchal society. Patriarchy is not unique to Utah, but I was thinking about how this community in the Salt Lake Valley could be described as a culture of a holy book.

No longer a practicing

Mormon, I thought that I had distanced myself from those outmoded ways of thinking about individual roles and gender issues. I had never wanted to create artwork about my Mormon heritage, but Pujol's imagery had struck a strong chord in me. I wanted to explore the effects of enculturation in my life. I was drawing connections with what Jung wrote about how an individual goes through certain stages in their life. Between the ages of 40 and 65, we enter our second adulthood. (Chodorow) It is a time in our lives where we examine the social, religious and personal definitions that have shaped the image we have of ourselves.

Keeping this in mind, I took a series of photographs of myself removing my clothes and dressing in my husband's business suit. I was raised in the Mormon faith and have always associated the LDS church with men dressed in dark suits, white shirts and ties. All of this coincided with my reading *A Room of One's Own*, by Virginia Woolf.<sup>8</sup> Woolf writes that for women to truly claim a genuine voice of their own they should not adopt the historical

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<sup>7</sup> *Keys for a House That Are No More*, Beth Krensky, 2009, bronze and gold leaf, approx. 7" h. x 3" w. x 1/2" d., <http://bethkrensky.shawnrossiter.com/portfolio>. Beth Krensky is an assistant professor of art education and the Area Head of Art Teaching at the University of Utah

<sup>8</sup> This essay was based upon two papers read to the Arts Society at Newham and the Odtaa at Girton in October 1928. The papers were too long to be read in full, and were altered and expanded into Woolf's book, *A Room of One's Own*.



masculine approach but to look to their own experiences as women and to look backwards to their mothers. (Woolf)

While taking the photographs, I realized I was still focusing on the actions of my hands. Those gestures had the feel of opening books and turning pages. For me, much of the Mormon mythology and sacred texts read as long epic poems. These sacred texts describe the men as adventurers, conquerors and visionaries, while rarely mentioning the women. The Mormon Church encourages its members to keep written journals. I could recount the stories of my great-great-grandfathers immigrating and settling in Utah, but not my great-great-grandmothers' stories. Where were my maternal voices Woolf recommended I search out? In my mother's storage, I discovered the personal history of Rebecca Nicholson Sylvester written after her death in 1909 by her daughter, Rosenia Jarvis. I now had the neglected, forgotten maternal stories to merge with the strong masculine images.

For the work *Placing and Replacing*, I printed the personal history of my great-great-grandmother on the backside of the photographs. The text was printed backwards so that it was right reading through the paper across the image on the front side of the paper.

The images were printed on Kozo papers and presented in a codex form, a single page folded down the middle and joined with other pages on wooden newspaper sticks. I chose wooden newspapers sticks as a binding because they are 'almost' obsolete objects. Rarely encountered these days, most of us no longer have recollections of reading newspapers in cafes or libraries attached to wooden shafts. These once common objects are now at the very edge of our memories.

Assembled and hung on the wall, I discovered myself bound up together in a present depiction of masculine authority of my community and the feminine recollections and stories



Figure 12: *Placing and Replacing*, Installation view, approx. 12'x 9', 2010.



of my ancestors. Quite a leap conceptually from where I started, I see *Placing and Replacing* as a start of a new body of work that will explore themes of place with ideas of self identity by situating myself within a new context.

The final question was how to fold all these works that represented converging concepts of self-reflection, ritual, and the threatened demise of the codex, into an exhibition that let the 'weightier elements silt through the mesh of interpretation.'

## MEDITATION, TRANSLATION AND TRIANGULATION

In March, 2010, I traveled with Alison Denyer, Assistant Professor of Painting and Drawing at the University of Utah, to New York City to see Marina Abramovic's, the *Artist is Present*, retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art ('MoMA'). Along with a retrospective of her work, Abramovic created a new performance piece for the event. Abramovic sat in a chair in front of a small table with a matching chair positioned opposite her. MoMA gallery attendees volunteered to sit across from Abramovic and stare across the table back at Abramovic. The rest of us clustered around the perimeter watching the "action." That is when I realized a shift had occurred. Who or what was the subject matter here, Abramovic starring, Abramovic and the volunteer sitting and starring at each other, the viewers watching Abramovic watch the volunteer watch her, or the entire event being recorded and displayed with several cameras around the exhibition hall? My attention to the performance moved in concentric circles of perception, contracting and protracting. I found my awareness and interest shifting back and forth between all the "performers." Again in an apophenic moment, I was drawing connections between the circular patterns in the book forms, the meditative walks with Pujol's class and my experience during Abramovic's performance.



Figure 13: Working on a an altered book form during the exhibition.

During the *Querl* exhibition, I placed myself at the end of a long working table with large pile of cut books ready to be folded. I was going to spend time in the gallery and become the subject matter of my own work – replacing the reader among the books, and empathizing my personal relationship with the books.<sup>9</sup>

As a conceptual shift from what I had envisioned at the beginning, I initiated a 'book exchange program.' Gallery attendees were encouraged to bring me a book in exchange for a book form. Many people returned with books and traded them for a book form. A very interesting ritual emerged. As each person returned with a donated book that they added to the growing pile before me at the end of the table, they would tell me why they no longer needed to keep the

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<sup>9</sup> Conceptually, I am indebted to Ann Hamilton and all of the work she has done with language, both as spoken word and printed texts, her interest in and focus on modes of production and labor, specifically to the attending and maintaining of large collections of cultural icons and symbols.

selected book. Most of the stories recounted to me were about how the books represented a period in their lives when they needed the book, but that they were no longer useful to the individual (or somehow embarrassing, as a reflection of who they used to be). Orhan Pamuk was right. There is a sense of freedom in letting go of a portion of our past bound up in our books.

My initial impulses: 1) to work counter to our culture of consumption and hoarding, and 2) to unburden and reduce my personal collection of books, failed in one aspect, because I now have more books than I ever had. Even after the exhibition ended, people have continued to drop off books to my studio. Books have been left on my front porch. I wonder if Zhao Xiangyuan and Song Dong had experienced a similar effect of accumulation, that the clearing out, and sorting through their personal belongings only created new space for the addition of more things.



Figure 14: *Querl* Exhibition, Gittins Gallery, University of Utah, 2010.

I organized the gallery, without titles or labels on the walls, so the viewer had to navigate the objects and draw their own conclusions without the aid of any written words. The viewers were constantly shifting their perspective between the individual works, the performance element, and the collection of book forms. Alone, the altered book forms were in the foreground, so the focus was on their organic qualities, but viewed as a large collection, they became part of the background, and generated conversations about books as cultural icons.

I also decided to break with gallery etiquette and encouraged visitors to pick up and handle the altered book forms. Books are meant to be held, but the restriction on touching artwork is so ingrained, that occasionally I had to be the one to offer a book form to be held. There is a strong tactile quality inherent in the book forms, and I wanted to extend the experience beyond that of their intriguing surfaces. The individual elements from the *Placing and Replacing* work could also be taken down, allowing people to flip through their pages and replace them on their hooks. The overall effect was that the work was never 'fixed' and open to a rearranging of images, and hopefully, contributing to different interpretations. Being in the gallery during the exhibition meant that I was able to participate in many conversations with individuals. I noticed that each viewer had to make their own shifts in perception and draw their own links and connections with the objects. Rebecca Solnit, in *Eve and the Serpent, Art, Gender and Landscape*, wrote:

“all art is built out of accumulations and isolations, out of the relocation of attention to the absent histories and readable significances of the object.”

(Solnit 168)

In the end, there is no conclusion. I still fold new book forms every day, which I will continue to do until the impulse is spent. I have come to recognize how important creative ritual is to my work. In the future, whether I continue to focus on the book<sup>10</sup> as a cultural icon or identify and explore individual authors, the altered book forms will provide a space for further creative investigations. In scientific research, apophenia is recognized as a flawed approach that often produces the expected outcome of the specific researcher. For me, it has been a practice that brought to the surface recurrent symbols and motifs, and established a fluid way of working through concepts. I still identify myself primarily as a printmaker, and the ability to produce multiple variations on a theme helps me think through ideas.

The Querl exhibition did not answer all the questions I raised about accumulation, enculturation, nor the link between objects and personal memories. The exhibition only established a place (probably better considered as a sort of marker along a journey), where a collection of objects and a gathering of people were all present and centered around an everyday common object. For me, books act as a conduit for many concepts and ideas to emerge and expand within my creative practice. I will continue to stockpile books and disperse new book forms.



Figure 15: *Book of Books, the sign begins by repeating itself.* Book 6"x 6". I could not resist making a small 'catalogue' for the exhibition - turning the book forms back into a book.

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<sup>10</sup> Keeping with my book theme, I did not strictly follow the Graduate School Handbook in formatting this document, but chose a format closer to that of a published book.

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*Querl* Exhibition Installation Images



*Concordant Landscape (Lacking A Narrative Thread)*, digitally printed book jackets on trade size books with bookshelf, installation approx. 9" x 28'.



Book forms on pedestals and *Placing and Replacing* installation view.



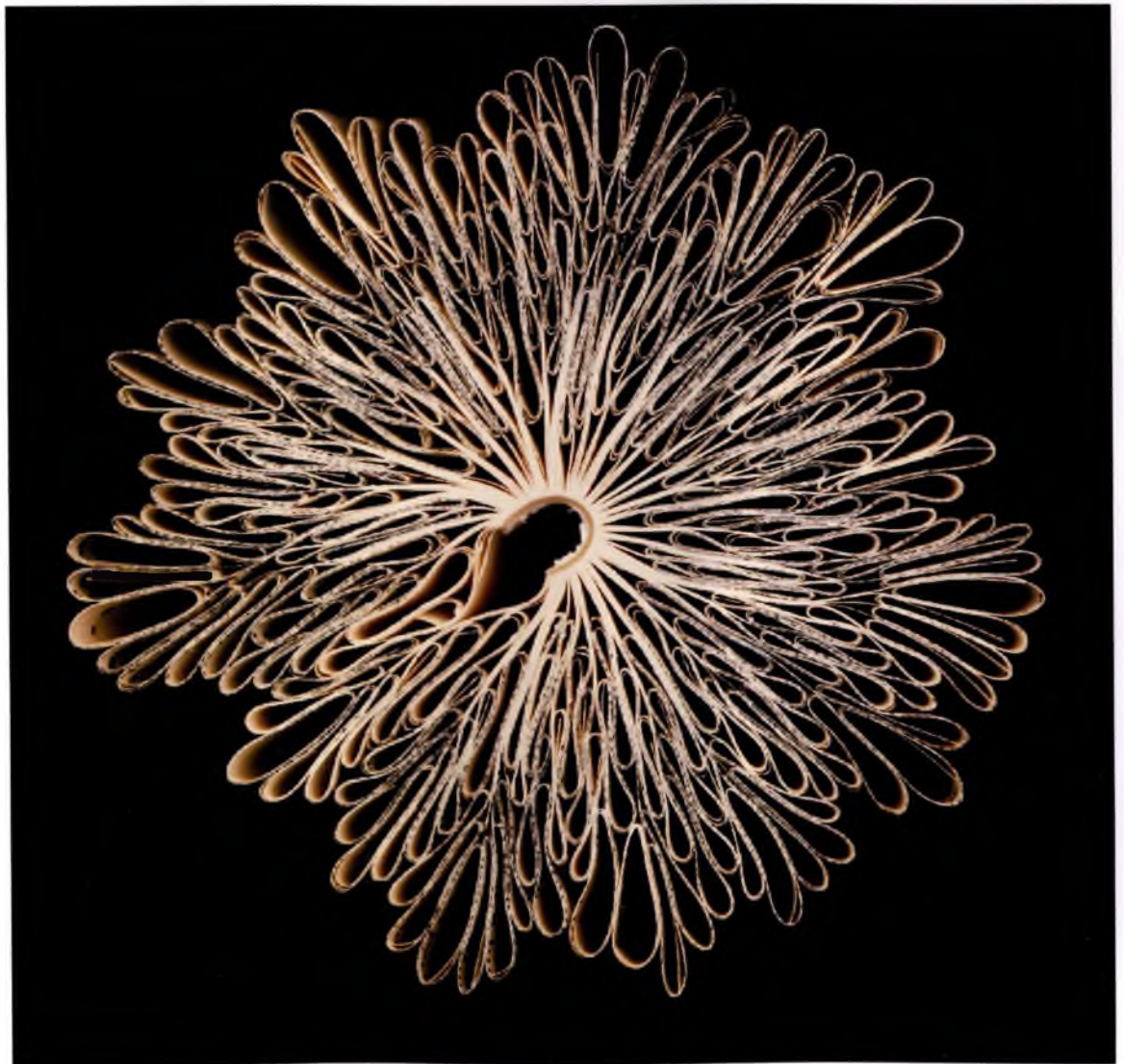
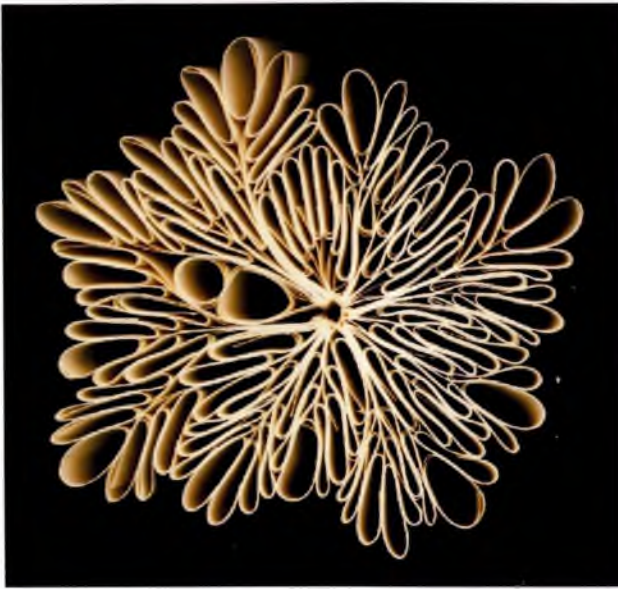


*Plummet*, graphite drawing with collaged book texts, installation view, 60" x 8'.

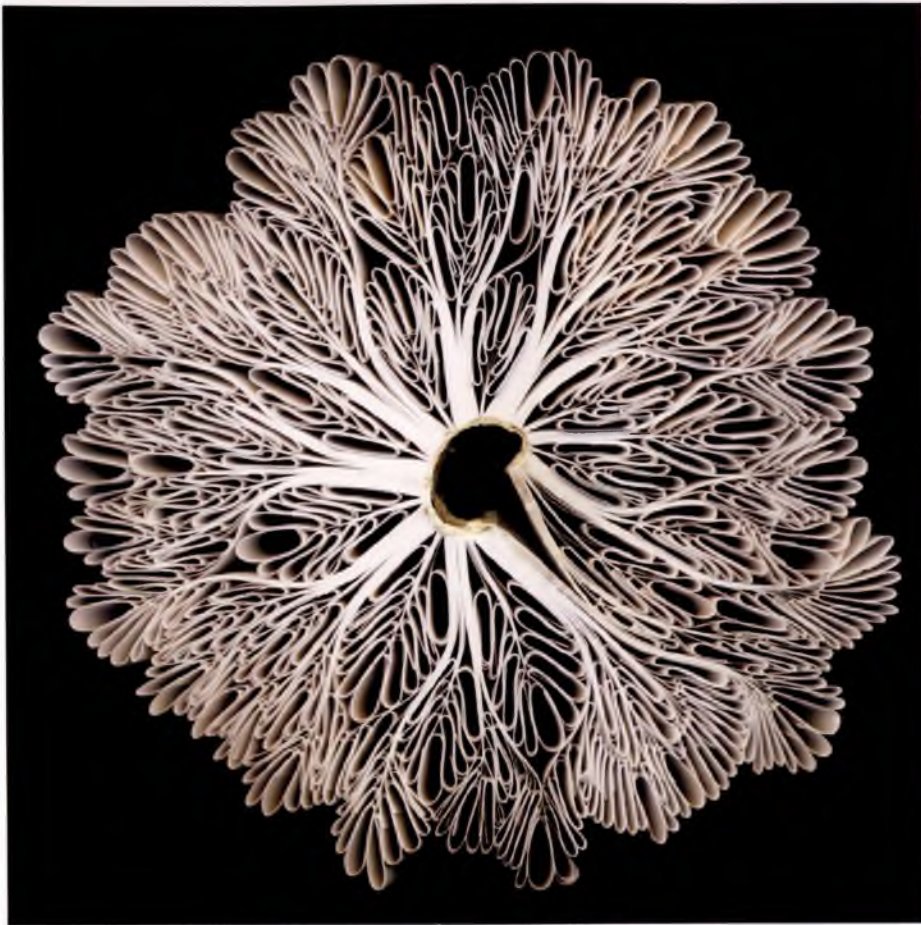


*Plummet*, graphite drawing with collaged book texts, installation view, 60" x 8' working table with book blocks and donated books.

*Object No. 030510 (left), Object  
No. 030110 (right), and Object No.  
290310 (bottom)*







*Object No. 051010*  
(top left),  
*Object No. 042610*  
(top right), and  
*Object No. 081009*  
(bottom right)

