

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## A CENTURY OF ARTISTS BOOKS

October 23, 1994 - January 24, 1995

A wide-ranging survey devoted to the modern book as an art form opens at The Museum of Modern Art on October 23, 1994. **A CENTURY OF ARTISTS BOOKS** traces the international development of these books, and celebrates the extraordinary impact that modern artists have had on the centuries-old tradition of book design. Organized by Riva Castleman, Chief Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, this exhibition demonstrates how a diverse group of artists, with the collaboration of writers and publishers, have transformed printed books into beautiful, enduring works of art.

On view through January 24, 1995, the exhibition is generously supported by a grant from the Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund. Additional funding has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

In explaining the importance of the artist book, Ms. Castleman states, "The difference between 'illustrated books' and 'artists' books' is what makes them modern: the artist augments the text with images that do not necessarily define passages in the text. In this way, the reader-viewer may form personal responses to the images as well as to the text, thus broadening the experience of the book.... The intention of the illustrator is to clarify the text, while the intention of the artist is to create images that extend and/or enhance the text."

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Featuring 140 titles by over 100 artists, **A CENTURY OF ARTISTS BOOKS** is organized around the themes of publishers of illustrated books, the complex relationships between artists and writers, the various subjects and purposes of artists' books, and the methods -- and evolving concepts -- of bookmaking. Examples from the Museum's outstanding collection of artists' books are augmented by loans, including numerous drawings, maquettes, and a selection of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century illustrated books, offered as historical models. In addition, four books are shown in their entirety in video presentations in the galleries.

The exhibition begins with Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's innovative *Yvette Guilbert*, the first example of a modern book where text and image were dealt with as a single, clearly conceived object, and Paul Gauguin's manuscript and prints for his planned book *Noa Noa*, both of 1894. It continues with famous volumes by Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso from the first half of the twentieth century; avant-garde experiments from World War I through the 1960s by artists ranging from Sonia Delaunay-Terk and Kasimir Malevich to Robert Rauschenberg and Edward Ruscha to recent books by other contemporary artists, such as Louise Bourgeois, Francesco Clemente, Anselm Kiefer, and Barbara Kruger.

By the end of the nineteenth century, when the audience for posters and prints by painters began to grow, entrepreneurial publishers began to commission artists to illustrate small editions of books. Some of the first publishers of illustrated books were art dealers who felt that producing books embellished by their artists would increase the audience for their paintings. Foremost among these visionary publishers was Ambroise Vollard, whose publication of Odilon Redon's haunting lithographs illustrate Gustave

Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (begun in 1896, published in 1938). Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler was known for collaborating with avant-garde artists and writers, and his first publication, *L'Enchanteur pourrissant* (*The Rotting Magician*, 1909), paired André Derain with the poet Guillaume Apollinaire. Albert Skira published Matisse's first artist's book, *Poésies* (1932) by Stéphane Mallarmé, a harmonious matching of seductive linear drawings with Mallarmé's poetry. More recently, Tatyana Grosman worked with American artists to produce books with unusual formats, like Rauschenberg's *Shades* (1964), a book without words printed on sheets of Plexiglas.

Often classical literature, fables, and folk tales have been the subject of artists' books. The exhibition features *Les Métamorphoses* (1931) by Ovid with Picasso's etchings, *The Eclogues* (1927) by Virgil with Aristide Maillol's wood engravings, and *Fables* (1931) by Aesop with Alexander Calder's wiry line drawings of animals.

Artists have also used the pages of the printed book to focus on political and social issues. For example, George Rouault's *Miserere* (1948), an album of fifty-eight black-and-white aquatints, mixes episodes from the life of Christ with images recalling the brutal events of World War I. Picasso produced *Sueño y mentira de Franco* (*Dream and Lie of Franco*, 1937), two nine-part compositions of violent and satirical images representing Franco and the suffering Spanish people, in order to raise money for the Spanish Republic.

Numerous collaborations between contemporary artists and well-known writers and poets are examined in the exhibition. *Fiorades/Fizzles* (1976), Samuel Beckett's short story (printed in both English and French), includes Jasper Johns' characteristic stenciled words, which appear in English and

French on facing pages, as if in a magic translating mirror. Other examples of collaborations are Larry Rivers and Frank O'Hara in *Stones* (1960), Louise Bourgeois and Arthur Miller in *Homely Girl, a Life* (1992), and Barbara Kruger and Stephen King in *My Pretty Pony* (1988).

In some works in the exhibition, artists have contributed more than images by serving as authors of their own texts. Unlike books in which the artists embellish the words of a writer, these books constitute entire artistic creations, from cover to cover. One early example is Gauguin's *Noa Noa*, consisting of writings and woodcuts related to the artist's impressions of Tahiti and the paintings he made there. Later, Matisse's famous *Jazz* (1947), combines his writings and twenty brilliantly colored and boldly stenciled compositions, while more recently Georg Baselitz's *Malelade* (1990) presents archaic folk language and images of animals in forty-one prints. Among photographers, the sparsely-designed books of Walker Evans, particularly his *American Photographs* (1938), became models for most presentations of diverse but linked photographic reproductions in book form.

For some artists, books have been the means to convey and preserve their teaching and working methods. Malevich's *Suprematism: 34 Risunka* (1920), a group of black-and-white prints, was designed as a textbook for his students. Marcel Duchamp's *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (the *Green Box*, 1934) reproduces his notes for his masterpiece by the same name, produced two decades earlier. Josef Albers' *Formulations: Articulation* (1972) is a compendium of the artist's compositional repertoire, which includes 121 color and six black screenprints.

In the decades since the end of World War II, when American art came to the forefront, there was a similar flourishing of publications, both on art and as art. In the early 1960s, artist's books -- inexpensive booklets and

object books usually entirely composed by artists -- became major vehicles of artistic creation. With Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963), in which all but one photograph faces a blank page, a new artistic attitude was established.

In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Ms. Castleman writes about this abundance of creative work on the part of so many modern artists as evidence that "the book form has become a symbol of a turning point in our culture. Just when electronics have called into question the privacy of possession, these multidimensional creations reaffirm the human need to embrace objects worthy of dedicated attention, admiration, and affection."

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