

A BOOK EXHIBIT AT THE MUSÉE POMPIDOU

In her poetic introduction to the exhibit of her books, which she also curated for the Musée Pompidou, the author goes beneath the surface of the genre of artist's book—beyond the materials and the aesthetics into their meanings replete with uncertainty and enigma. Four projects from this exhibit are presented; each demonstrates a divergent approach and intention.

Martine Saillard is a book artist residing in Paris. She has collaborated with such major artists as Albert Aymer, Bryan Gysin, Jiri Kolar and Tom Phillips. She tends to select major literary works for her experimental interpretations, notably texts by Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Ponge, Stein and Kleist. She directs Les Editions La Traversière. A major show of her books took place at the Musée Pompidou in Paris in 1990.

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Martine Saillard, pp. 317–326

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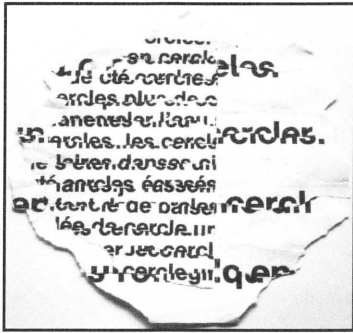


Figure 1

The exposition at the Musée Pompidou is positioned under the sign of the Sphinx. But what is the enigma to decipher—that of meaning? Certainly, but another signification is to be discovered here: that of rhythms and resonances. The purpose of the exhibit is to interrogate the space of the book where the text is staged. The book is a very precise work of conception in which the process and also the resonance, the color of the writing, are given in evidence—are given to be read. A plasticity and a listening: the ear is solicited as well as the eye.

In the space, the works are disseminated like very large open books: a double page at a single glance, as if its particular mood were suddenly rendered sensible and given new impetus visually by the plastic accompaniment of the artists. For each one of them, a short theoretical text details the passage of the writing to the design on the page.

The diversity and theatricality of the books play off each other, and twice the book makes itself known—as itself and in relation to the others. Here also are the original works of the artists: small formats contained in the first copies on beautiful paper. In the showcase are the bibliophile books created with Albert Ayme: *Sixteen and One Variations*, *For the Spider* by Francis Ponge, *L'après-midi d'un faune* by Mallarmé, *Hommage to Malévich*. And at the entrance, as a welcome, are the gazes of the newest Traversière editions: the *Grands Terribles* collection of portraits of Rimbaud, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Genêt, printed in order to translate the mood of each poet and the resonance of his work. Precise interrogation of these choices is possible—it shows how the image translates the work and is marked by it.

How to convey the secret kernel of the text, its tones and its tempo, translate its mood, its content and its divergences, its vibrations or its structures, its particular writing, in the book itself? Each time, a reinvolvement with the *conception* of the book occurs, and it is entirely physical: the format, the appropriated typographical characters, the choice of paper, its color, its substance and its weight, and the colors of the print, the imposition on the page, the blanks of silence and the impact of the blocks of text, the respiration of the montage, and the breaking of rhythms—even at times suddenly changing character, body, quality, to follow the writing in its

Of course, each case will be concerned with only one possible interpretation, the most appropriate one, and also with a passion: writing—a text, what does it provoke? Above all, it is the book itself that translates the interpretation, supports it, give it to us. Seized by the life of the book, how can an interpretation not be tempted to make visible, make touchable, the essence of that which is said, to inscribe the movement of writing in its disturbing strength—to work the text into its body, its form. The secret drive is to see that this quite explosive content is always well wrapped in a quite conventional package! To make it move a bit: there is the temptation, the project, the desire.

FOUR PROJECTS FROM THE EXHIBIT

A Circular Play by Gertrude Stein, with intervention by five artists inspired by the text itself: Albert Ayme, Arthur Aeschbacher, Bryan Gysin, Jiri Kolar, Tom Phillips.

Diverse and nervous scenes, eclipses of sense and sonorous echoes, verbal obsessions, enumerations, visions, proliferations, vocal intrigues, aleatory sketches, phonetic stakes raised and raised again, puns, dramas—*A Circular Play* transgresses and replays the limits of genres. The acid-yellow sonority of the paper betrays the verbal exasperation at the limit of nonsense; the very round letters, ultrafine or very thick, play the black and white notes of this obsessive oratorical game which turns on itself, this jubilation of pure musicality; the recentering of lines like a seismograph registers the drive of the hurled rhythms, expansions and losses of this tenuous, tendered thread: sense or sound?

In order to revisualize the project, five artists intervene, inspired by the text itself, each in accordance with the pictorial procedures corresponding to the author's writing structures, creating, like a new twist of possible meaning, the proper satellites of the text. Aeschbacher, through tearing and with scraps, makes improbable decipherings of the unreadable re-emerge endlessly (*see figure 1*). Ayme superimposes pages, then incises, excavates the textual density with unpredictable spurts of words or meanings (*see figure 2*). Kolar, through his collages, enters into the pure movement of proliferating constellations, enduring irrational fragments. Suddenly, the impromptu makes itself into a musical circle, a head of words or an apple of letters (*see figures 3 and 4*). Phillips crosses out and traces

scrolls, wanderings and knots of these signifying and repetitive labyrinths in which to lose and re-find oneself (see figure 5). And Gysin, the inventor of the “cut up,” displaces blocks of words and figures, mobile pawns in a game of chess, mimes and undermines the comedy of signifiers and situations; the un-tellable is staged.

Through all these intersections and reiterations of method, the art accents the gaming and theatrical space that is writing—the plastic effect is the visual translation of the musical resonance of the work.

On the Marionette-Theatre by Heinrich Kleist, translated by Roger Munier and accompanied by an “Hommage to the Blue Nudes of Matisse” by the painter Jiri Kolar.

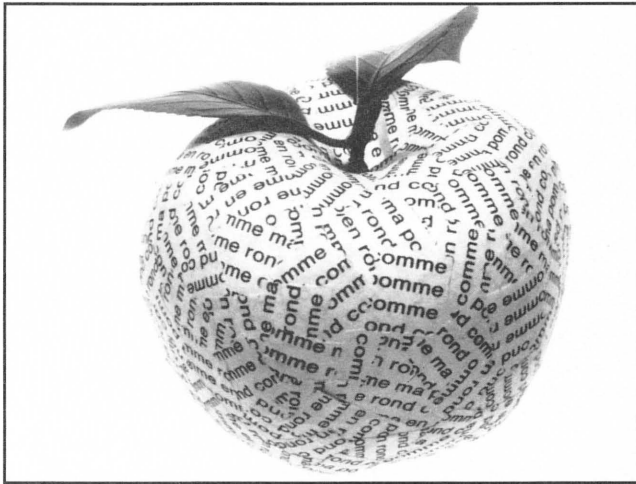


Figure 4

It is impossible to translate the “aura” of this magical and inexhaustible text (so justly celebrated), that attempts to seize man in his pure spirit of being, in this grand duel where the body, at times, surpasses knowledge and is carried away—on ivory coated paper, sepia printing, punctuated by “Matisse blue.” Irreducible text! To give it an absolute reading, glorified, so that each word exists fully—indeed to choose as the typeface the great Garamond, thirty point, to create a restraint on reading, time for questioning, punctuation of the poetic—to enter thus into the physical, to oblige one to traverse the arabesques of the very body of the letter: it is a sensual pursuit.

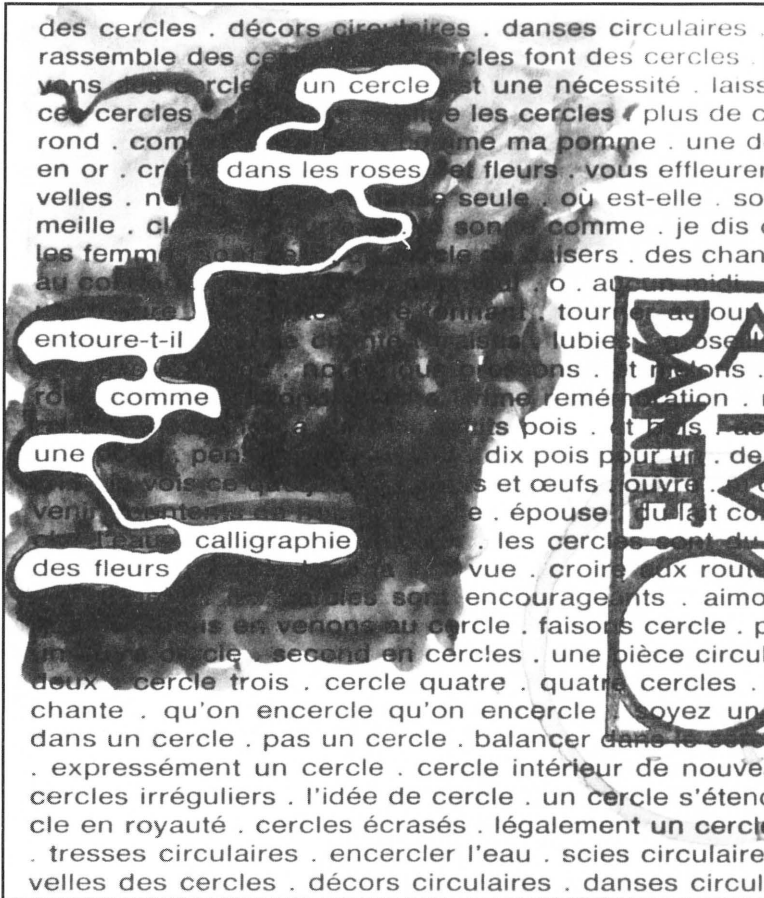


Figure 5

A mystic mood, this blue on ivory, the body, the body dancing to the color of infinite space—"Hommage to the Blue Nudes of Matisse," by Jiri Kolar, who recuts the famous "paper cutouts" and propels them thus like a dancing marionette in a snapshot of movement taken from life, annihilating the subject—like the text itself, which suddenly see-saws between "knowledge" and "the state of grace" when the "center of gravity" is touched (see figure 6). This is the enigmatic moment. This is the oscillating pendulum of the world. This is supreme liberty. This is a "lost paradise," where the movement becomes arpeggios, elevation, pure rhythm, desire, beyond all our habitual weightiness! This setting in motion, this leap of the unknown, this grace, this authenticity: is it "the soul, vis motrix"? The "Nude," treated also by fragments growing larger to the point of abstraction, delivers to us again its

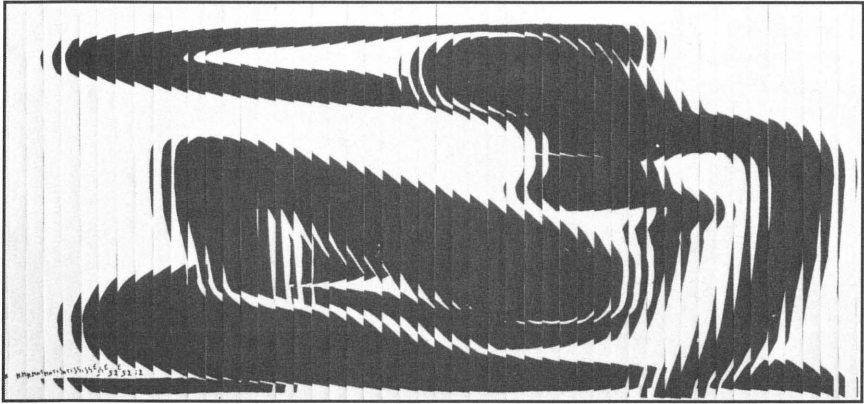


Figure 6

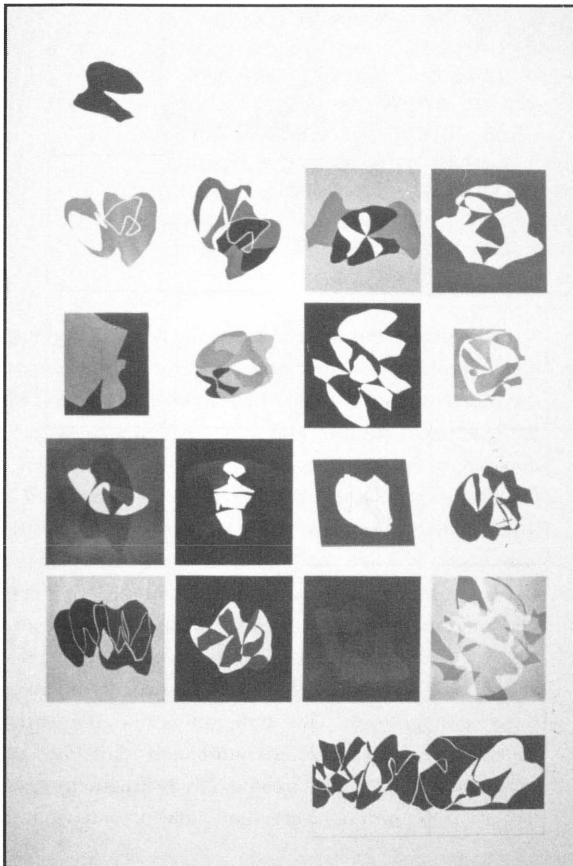


Figure 7

message: it is drowned by the letters or arabesques, once again the body in movement—but a line of sense pursued. Who then is pulling the strings? Who wins: the body or the spirit? Irreducible enigma, cross-sections to infinity—*re*-flexion in both senses of the word. The subject anchors itself in its formal design. Does it respond to the tragic death of Kleist shortly after he wrote this text?

Sixteen and One Variations by Albert Ayme, with “A Song for Albert” by Michel Butor and “Portrait of A.A.” by Jean-Yves Bosseur.

A painter, a writer, a musician—not a vague amalgamation or mixing of genres, but on the contrary, three works created on the basis of an identical, very precise structure: a theme and its variations. First, those of the painter: take a form and draw from it alone sixteen variations plus one, the grand finale where it resurfaces, inverted (*see figure 7*). Then, those of the writer and the musician: take either a stanza and its transformations, a poem subject to permutations in sixteen variants, or the generative seed of a series of thirteen sounds from which flow the sixteen sequences—and in each case the double finale, revealing intact the original matrix.

The book is meant to be, by the dynamic of its montage, like an arena of poetic percussion, where creative methods cross thoroughly in play. These pictorial, poetic, musical variations—so many diverse resonances which intersect each other—give each other new impetus, raise the stakes on each other. The variations of the painter are given to be read in a single block—aren't they orchestrated along the lines of a musical fugue? Those of the poet borrow colors from the painter, then instruments from music, to reunite the echo of their timbres. And in the music itself, suddenly fragments of the poems sing. Indeed, the book opens this reinvented space, where to read is to listen; the sonorous reading runs throughout the book with its notes and silences. The staves of the poem in beautiful, thick, blue-green-turquoise letters. And each of the “three agents,” by integrated and replicated notes, outlines his specific purpose—excavating the unity, making the differences explode into view. Variations, poem, score, texts, conceptual notes—scanned in typographical pianos and crescendos intermixed like so many visual phases of listening to the works, and certainly like a masterful and very new demonstration of reading.

Masks of Writing, The Theatre of Writing by Claude Maillard, accompanied by photos of the Masks of Writing.

Three words cross each other and are projected on the masks. This book, like a field of listening, is the place of their theatricality. Here the page design is the stage design, and texts and their faces collide.

“The Rhythm of Time, the Time of Rhythm” is the voice of fatality, who tracks down the contradictory forces of creative desire, pure energy, and dances in propitious terrain. The voice is a continuum; it links up, free, it moves, laser-printed in dotted lines; it scans its drives.

It is intersected by “The 7 Scenes of the Theatre of Writing,” where the subject (at) tempts his history. But who speaks in this dolorous place? The hero is “la personne,” in neuter, and the narrative is impossible, shot through with omissions, flights, where the blanks of the unsaid speak just as loudly and signify.

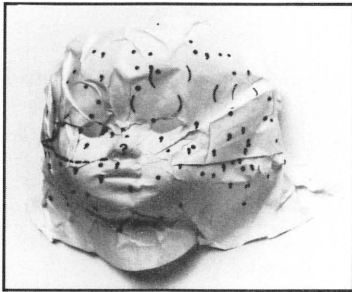


Figure 8

A theatrical stroke: these two texts superimpose themselves, telescope into each other; from this “The Satellites” will shoot out with incantatory fragments, scansion of sparse themes, reprises—it is the chorus. Indeed, under poetic pressure, with sense exploded and redistributed, lines and words fuse; they become irrational effervescences. The paper becomes so white, the letters tend toward blueness. A space suddenly opens far away, decoded; the great parentheses yawn.

These poetic fragments enlarged, projected, molded, make the “Masks of Writing”; they are theatrical figures and faces of speech. Antique mask, orifice of the word, the phrase (revealed and hidden like the oracle to be deciphered, impersonal and tragic) will incarnate all its roles, one by one: the young ephebe or the small animal, infant, pubescent adolescent, witch, mater dolorosa, homo sapiens of the alphabet, good sister in her mobcap, pharaoh, or cruel goddess behind the veil. Eleusis in the leaf! In the soft or cruel plicatures of the paper, the masks are guardians of the enigma—and the *sphinx* finally interrogates you again (see figure 8).

Translated and edited by Susan Rogers