



Spine

by Megan N. Liberty

ORTEGA Y GASSET PROJECTS | OCTOBER 20 – DECEMBER 9, 2018

Curated by Suzanne McClelland and Leeza Meksin

The human spine supports our bodies; it is both sturdy and flexible, bending, moving, shifting, and curving us. But spines are also fragile—something slips out of place and suddenly our bodies crumple. Books, too, have spines, structures that hold together the fibers of its pages, sometimes stiff and solid, sometimes flexible and soft. The book spine runs along an opening, part of a corner or crevice that metaphorically and physically represents the center of the text, the point which we read from and towards.



Jenny Monick, *5 Posters*, 5 doubled-sided offset prints, 15.25 × 21.5 inches each, Edition of 250, Published by Space Sisters Press, 2018. Photo: Larson Harley.

Spine, Ortega y Gasset Projects' latest exhibition, curated by Suzanne McClelland and Leeza Meksin, brings together seven artists whose collages, sculptures, drawings, and prints play with these associations. The works are hung throughout the gallery at different levels, eschewing the grid or salon-style hang for multi-level placement, with prints mounted high near the ceilings above drawings at eye level, creating groups of wall installations, with sculptures placed across the floor adding a lower level to this display. This varied placement forces us to navigate the gallery in an unexpected way; unable to walk along the walls and view the works in a single progression, instead we must contort our body to look above eye level and down near our feet, always careful not to bump a protruding artwork.

The viewer's own body is fore-fronted here, as we actively participate in the corporeality of *Spine*, reminding us of our body's relationship to the public exhibition space and the book-like objects in it. Artist and writer Tate Shaw, in his essay "Enfolded by Holes: A Diagram of Openings," eloquently describes the "flexible boundary" of book openings and emphasizes "something suggestive in the

movements of the body pertaining to book openings.” These writings jump to mind in *Spine*. Human and book “bodies” share a fold, a corner, or opening. We fold our bodies around books as we read and are metaphorically enfolded in them as we enter the imaginative space of the pages. The works in the exhibition all reference this open and folded space through depictions of room corners, actual folded pages, or physical gaps in materials that create apertures.

The corner of the gallery has visual and



Shoshana Dentz, *A Year(s) of Untitled*, 2008 – present, Gouache, watercolor, and wax paper on paper, Currently 22 × 450 inches. Photo: Frank Oudeman.



Installation view of *SPINE*, Ortega y Gasset Projects, 2018. Left to right: work by Anne Eastman, Cati Bestard, Shoshana Dentz. Courtesy Ortega y Gasset Projects.

metaphorical similarities to the hinge or joint of a book—the place where pages meet the book spine. Cati Bestard’s prints and sculptures most literally play with this property. In the center of the gallery is *Corner #1* (2017), a freestanding whitewood sculpture of two stacked horizontal walls, together standing four-feet tall, reminiscent of Leslie Hewitt’s sculptures in her 2016 SculptureCenter exhibition. These staggered boards leave a small slit that allows light to create layered shadows across the gallery floor and the sculpture. Her prints draw out the book’s relationship to the corner of a room with an emphasis on how surfaces meet to create openings. In *That corner in the living room* (2017), a subtly shaded pink inkjet print, shadows alone distinguish its architectural aspect. Bestard’s work depicts a three-dimensional spatial form on a flat plane, while Shoshana Dentz’s *A Year(s) of Untitled* (2008 – present), a 38-foot gouache and watercolor drawing, makes a flat plane three-dimensional: installed across two walls the paper curves against the corner of the gallery. With numerous pages linearly affixed to each other, it is multi-paged and temporal, like a book, but requires no turning or touching to view in entirety. Sonia Louise Davis has a video in the show, in which she performs small daily actions with fabric in her studio space, making use of the corners of the gallery much like Dentz’s drawing does.

The works in *Spine* are striking in their willingness to embrace the fragility of both the spine and book’s structure. The same opening and folding that links our bodily movements to the movements of the book also creates a flimsiness: at the folds, pages tear. This recalls, less literally, our own tenuousness as we age, bending our bodies comes less easily. Jenny Monick’s suite of posters, each creased in quadrants, embody this tension between tactility and fragility. The pages hang open against the wall, like sun-faded construction paper, referencing the spread of a book. As flat pages, they perform as wall sculptures,

allowing the viewer to glimpse the verso behind the slightly raised edges. But their construction—paper coloring and simple mounting appears extremely flimsy. Standing in front of them, they look almost like they could fly off the wall and tear. Anne Vieux's *Transitory Flatspace* (2014), the only traditional bound book in the show, is so delicate it cannot be touched, and is instead accompanied by a facsimile that viewers can flip through. It includes archival pigment prints, holographic foil blocking, and eight translucent leaves. The materials are extremely tactile, yet, as with Monick's sheets, this tactility is the cause of its instability.



Anne Vieux, *Transitory Flatspace*, German case bound in lenticular fabric, full color archival pigment prints with holographic foil blocking and 8 translucent leaves, Edition of 15 + 2APs, 9 × 12 inches, 60 pages, + facsimile of original that can be handled without gloves. Published by Small Editions Press. Photo: Frank Oudeman.

This fold is reminiscent of a newspaper—an especially fragile material, yet sturdy enough to withhold many creases and readings. This relationship is reinforced—or perhaps sparked—by the other



Lisa Blas, *Enter Stage Left (Monday's image, v. 1)*, 2018. Broadsheet, Edition of 500, 30 × 22 3/4 inches, (folded 15 × 11 inches.) Distributed by Space Sisters Press, Beacon, NY. Photo by Frank Oudeman.

work in the center of the gallery, Lisa Blas's folded broadsheets, which are stacked in four piles atop cinder blocks in such a way that the edges create a visual crease. Each of the four stacks depicts one quadrant, so that the conglomerate shows the complete broadsheet. The image is a collage of photographs of museum objects and front pages of newspapers, in this case the *New York Times*. The project began as a social media project that viewers could comment on and engage with, but this iteration translates the images to the printed page in the mock form of a newspaper broadsheet. Anne

Eastman has a series of wall sculptures in the show in which she has pasted newspaper fragments onto glass, mounted on a wood stand. Behind the piece of wood is a mirror affixed to the wall so that as we approach the object, we are confronted with the back of the page as well as ourselves, viewable in the mirror, reading and looking and being looked at.

The works in the show play with the seen/unseen quality of the multipage recto/verso nature of books, adding an additional awareness not just of our own bodies' folding and unfolding like open book spreads, but also the visibility of these actions in public spaces like the gallery. Despite the title, *Spine* does not offer a straight line between books and bodies, but like the works themselves, it opens up questions about how we move through physical space as readers and viewers and the fragility of these actions and forms.

CONTRIBUTOR

Megan N. Liberty

MEGAN N. LIBERTY is the Art Books Editor at the *Brooklyn Rail*. Her interests include text and image, artists' books and ephemera, and archive curatorial practices.

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES



The *Rail's* Best Books of 2017

Joseph Salvatore, Books Editor

DEC 17-JAN 18 | BOOKS

Selections from our Books Editor



A YEAR IN ART BOOKS

Negative Publicity: Artefacts of Extraordinary Rendition

by Benjamin Gottlieb

DEC 16-JAN 17 | ART BOOKS

To mark the end of the year, the *Rail's* Art Books editors, Ben Gottlieb, Phillip Griffith, and Greg Lindquist, and Managing Director Sara Christoph each selected a notable book from the past year to share with our readers. This is not a list of the *best* books of the year. Instead, it is an informal survey meant to highlight the diversity of art book publishing now.



Blurred Library: Essays on Artists' Books

by Megan N. Liberty

JUNE 2017 | ART BOOKS

How do we enter a book? How do we move around in it and travel between its pages, chapters, and various corners and openings? These are some of the questions Tate Shaw asks in his collection, *Blurred Library: Essays on Artists' Books*.



Lee Lozano Private Books 1-3

by Madeline Weisburg

FEB 2018 | ART BOOKS

"Rebellion?" Lee Lozano asks in one of her late 1960s journals. "Ce-rebellion! Cerebellion." The note, an offhand entry jotted out in ballpoint pen, seems a fitting way to describe the artist's particular brand of artistic defiance, synthesizing as it does the tone, form, and ideology of her now-legendary conceptual practice, which manifested itself as a series of private acts of refusal.

Get the *Rail* delivered to your doorstep.
Start Your Subscription Today!