

PICK TWO

The larger exhibition in this space is *Library Science*, an assembly of works by visual artists interpreting libraries, books, catalogs, and information systems. This smaller show is from the perspective of a librarian parsing artworks.

I was trained as an archivist, so I have a basic drive to seek out common themes and hierarchies. In examining the works in the flat files, I saw shapes, techniques, and media that fell into categories. I chose works that impressed me with their execution and how well they embodied certain ideas. I took notes about the artworks, intending to make a smaller selection for the eventual exhibition – but when I examined my list and sat down to make the final choices for this show, I faced a different challenge.

The next phase of selection would need to be curatorial – choosing the final group of artworks to show the story I wanted to tell (and demonstrative of my present position, as a curator of literature and culture for a library). But I hesitated when I realized that my choice would be just the last of many. The works on display have been through many stages of selection, by chance or design: Artists needed to be aware of the Artspace flat file; they needed to be working in a flat medium; they needed to decide to submit their work (or be encouraged to do so); the artworks needed to pass the first phase of selection; then they had to survive the vagaries of the mail or be hand-delivered; they needed to be in the file (i.e. not yet purchased) when I came upon them . . .

My choice would be simply be limiting an already self-selected and very small universe. The field had already been narrowed at many stages, so what could my selection tell the viewer? I decided to let you make the final selection. Think of this as a mental exercise. Within each group of three works – if you had to choose only two for exhibition – which would you select? Why? Maybe the choice is best seen as “which single item you would eliminate.”

Curators do important work: we present stories using artwork, books, manuscripts, by picking (we hope) the best items that can communicate important information. However, this process means that entire stories are necessarily left out.

It would have been fun to have covered every single inch of the exhibition space in as many works as possible – creating an even less curated environment, but the process would have been burdensome – and I, in fact, did want to show off what caught my eye and imagination. Now look - and see what appeals to you.

Timothy Young
*Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library*