

CRITICS' PICKS

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- Caleb Considine
- "...but the clouds..."
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- "Now Dig This!: Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980"

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- "Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art"

Mark Adams

New York

"The Book Lovers"

EFA PROJECT SPACE
323 West 39th Street, 2nd Floor
January 25–March 9

In her essay "Two Paths for the Novel," the author Zadie Smith argues that, despite some dalliances, the novel has remained faithful to the conventions of nineteenth-century realism. "The received wisdom of literary history," writes Smith, "is that *Finnegans Wake* did not fundamentally disturb realism's course as Duchamp's urinal disturbed realism in the visual arts." For artists, the readymade cast doubt on all the old assumptions—the authenticity of the individual, the fixity of meaning, humanism's whole song-and-dance—yet somehow the authors of novels have carried on unperturbed.

But what if Duchamp had written a novel? Or what about his quickest study? A tape recording of Factory chatter badly transcribed by teenage typists, Andy Warhol's *A: a novel*, 1968, is the urinal-talisman for this engrossing exhibition of what curators David Maroto and Joanna Zielinska call "artist novels." The coinage's simplicity belies the difficulty of combining two disciplines with divergent conceptions of authorship. The curators have assembled a library-like survey of examples, such as Richard Prince's *Why I go to the movies alone*, 1983, and Sophie Calle's *Double Game*, 2007, but the exhibition's main draw are featured artists who treat their novels as linchpins for multiple-component projects—instances where the novel, once written, functions as a readymade.

Is a readymade novel meant to be read? Julia Weist, who holds degrees in both art and library science, wrote her romance novel, *Sexy Librarian*, 2008, in order to document the book's circulation. For her, books are sculptural material, a point she makes explicit with a piece that presents a hundred volumes ground into dust. By contrast, Jill Magid wants her artwork and nonfiction novels to receive equal recognition. Ironically, her recent *Becoming Tarden*, 2009, can't ever be read in full, since it's partially censored by the Dutch Secret Service. The agency had signed off on Magid's interviewing several of its secret agents for an artwork, but balked when it discovered she was also writing a book. The moral of the story may be that eliding the roles of artist and author remains a provocation.

—Colby Chamberlain

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View of "The Book Lovers." From left: Julia Weist, *Discarded Library Books I Collected*, 2006; *Library books I wrote*, 2011; *Library books I discarded*, 2011; *Discarded library books I wrote*, 2011; *Discarded library books I collected*, 2011; *plus diplomas*, 2006–13.

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