On April 5th we had our second talk in a series of discussions to commemorate the 185th anniversary of the founding of the Library. The well attended talk – entitled *What is a book?* – was given by Andy Birsh and Davin Kurzke, from Woodside Press, who spoke about the elements of the book format. Their presentation focused on typography, papers, and bindings in use before and since the days of Gutenberg. Mr. Birsh is the proprietor of Woodside Press in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, one of the largest fine letterpress printing studios in New York. Mr. Kurzke is a trained bookbinder, printer, and graphic designer who lives in Crown Heights.

As always, it was a great pleasure to listen and think about the history of books and to see some books that are great examples of papermaking, printing and binding. Books on view included books on papermaking and specimens books with paper samples and facsimiles of codices such as the Codex Mendoza, the Mexican manuscript. The following is part of the catalog entry for this remarkable book published in London in 1938:

“The Mendoza Codex is a Mexican pictographic manuscript prepared on the authority of Don Antonio de Mendoza, the first viceroy of New Spain ... A Spanish priest, familiar with the Nauaïl ... was employed by the viceroy to set down in Spanish the explanations of the glyphs as interpreted by the Mexicans themselves.” The facsimile includes the original pictographs in colors and the Spanish explanations.”

This codex facsimile is one of many in this collection that document the culture of Mexico.

Several truly rare books were out for the public to see such as *Horti Apollinis selecta hieroglyphica* (Rome, 1599). This emblem book (seen below) documents Horapollo’s attempt to decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphs and offers many woodcut images some of which are supposedly by Dürer. The book was recently on view in the *Egypt Through Other Eyes* exhibition organized by the Museum Library staff.
Other rarities on view included *The First Book of Architecture* by Andrea Palladio (London, 1721) and *Specimens of plain and ornamental printing types, borders, ornaments, rules, &c. made at the type and electrotype foundry of James Conner & Sons* (New York, 1859). A good example of an accordion binding was *The Great Exhibition* "or is to be" or probable results of the industry of all nations in the year '51. Showing what is to be exhibited, who is to exhibit it; in short, how its [?] all going to be done (London, 1850). This book is a continuous, illustrated strip, folded accordion style.

We also had a few artists’ books out that are exquisite examples of printing such as the Peter Kruty edition of *The Diary of a Madman* by Nikolai Gogol (Summer Gardees Editions, 1998) with art by Mikhail Magaril. Peter Kruty’s letterpress studio is in Brooklyn and he worked with a team to produce this great example of letterpress and fine binding. The book was included in the Artists Book exhibition here back in 2000. Another artist’s book that was included in the Artists Book exhibition here and on view for our talk is *The Corona Palimpsest* (1996) made by Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese.

I could go on and on about all of the great books we had out on view ... if you want a full list of what we all looked at send an email and we will be happy to send the list to you.

Keonna Hendrick, Education Intern for Library Outreach, enjoys looking at one of the many rare books we had.
National Library Week having just ended, it seems opportune to bring up a topic that was discussed during the talk which centered on the future of the book and the challenges presented by the Internet. There seems to be a notion in the air that “all of this will be digitized” if it hasn’t been already and that we will not need libraries. Perhaps it is so much easier to click at your computer instead of getting up and opening a book. But what a pleasure that is! Touching the paper, seeing images that in many instances are engravings or are hand colored, feeling the binding. I realize I am speaking from the perspective of a researcher surrounded by books that have a true intrinsic value. As in most art libraries, we have many books filled with tons of images – engravings, photographs, textile and paper samples etc - that have an incredible tactile quality to them. I don’t look forward to the day when I have to climb into bed with a computer instead of a book. I know I am not the only one who feels that we need to speak up for the book as a physical entity and would really like to begin a discussion here about this issue. As far as I can see here in Brooklyn there are two camps of thinking: the book lover who speaks for the beauty of the physical book and the Internet lover who wants everything online and available in a very immediate way. Which camp are you in? Can the wishes of the two camps converge so that we can have everything – the book and the digital version?

Filed under: Event, Libraries & Archives
Tagged: artistbooks, books, internet, library185

March 13, 2008

Book Art in DUMBO – 5 + 5: a dialogue

Dendre Lawrence @ 11:26 am

Brooklyn has a rich community of artists and galleries and this is especially true for artists who work in the realm of the book. By that I mean artists who choose the book form to be their canvas to express ideas or visions. Book art – or books made by artists – has a long tradition and today we are seeing a vast array of examples ranging from multiples (open editions), limited editions to unique works.

On view until March 27th, there is an exhibition of artists’ books at the 5 + 5 Gallery in DUMBO offering an intriguing array of unique works in the book form. The exhibition is entitled 8 Artists: 8 Books and includes the work of Todd Bartel, Doug Beube, Donna Maria JesCooke, Raphael Foste, Marty Greenbaum, Caroline Hill, Bo Joseph and Robin Ross, who is also the curator of the exhibition. Each artist shows two works of art – one in a book form and one wall piece – which are dynamically juxtaposed. The works in the exhibition offer magical images that entice the viewer to look into private worlds touched by literature and travel and other forces.

We would like to start a dialogue about these works and we invite these artists to comment about their works in this exhibition and perhaps to answer the following questions in comments to this blog:

How do the works – books and wall pieces – communicate a message together?

Why was the book form selected as a vehicle as a communication tool?
1823 - 2008

185th ANNIVERSARY
BROOKLYN MUSEUM LIBRARY

A little known fact is that Walt Whitman was the acting librarian in 1835 of the Brooklyn Apprentices’ Library which was the nucleus of the Brooklyn Museum. This year is the 185th anniversary of the founding of the Brooklyn Apprentices’ Library and we are reflecting on Whitman in celebration of the anniversary. The Brooklyn Apprentices’ Library was founded in 1823 as the first free and circulating library in Brooklyn. The Library evolved into the Brooklyn Institute which eventually became the parent of the Brooklyn Museum as well as Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the Brooklyn Children’s Museum. Spanning 185 years, the Apprentices’ Library has a rich history including the fact that Revolutionary War Hero General Lafayette laid the cornerstone of the library building on his tour of America in 1825. Years later, Walt Whitman recounted witnessing the laying of the cornerstone by General Lafayette. We’ve got a bit more information on Whitman and his association with this institution on our website.

Would Whitman recognize the library today? Maybe since several of the books in the original Library live on the shelves in the Brooklyn Museum Library. Whitman reported that there were 1,200 volumes in 1835 and today there are over 300,000 volumes ranging from antiquity to contemporary art. We now offer so much more including electronic records to what is in the research collections held in the Museum Libraries and Archives as well as specialized databases, and digital images which all serve to document the Museum’s encyclopedic art collection as well as the broader area of art and cultural history. There is a strong intellectual link between the research collection and the Museum’s object collection since the research tools document the object collections. Over the past 185 years the research collection has taken on the role of a storyteller revealing how and why an object was created and where it was before it came into the Museum collection. The research collection is constantly enriched by new purchases, exchanges with other museums and donations. Recent donations include the Wardwell Collection donated by the widow of scholar Allen Wardwell, a scrapbook on Feminist artists and many books on women artists.

Whitman probably did not foresee the challenges – both positive and negative – presented by the Internet. The positive side is the power of the web and the advantage of providing textual and visual information in a timely manner. The negative is the assumption that all these materials will soon be digitized and that we will no longer need the hard copy. Many of these materials have an intrinsic quality all of their own and are very often exhibited. There is active discussion between the two camps of book lovers and online devotees. We plan to discuss this challenge during this anniversary year to emphasize our belief that the library can live on alongside its digital partner. Our first anniversary talk will be a presentation on Walt Whitman and his association with the Apprentices’ Library on February 2nd and we will have books
on display that were in the Library collection when Whitman was librarian. For more information send us an email!

Come visit and help us celebrate this special anniversary!

Filed under: Libraries & Archives
Tagged: library
comments (1)

November 8, 2007

Academic Open House Part 2

Deirdre Lawrence @ 10:21 am

Eleanor Whitney and I had a great time at our recent Academic Open House which was an exciting first step towards engaging professors and to hear what they would like from the Brooklyn Museum. In the Museum Libraries and Archives we have considerable resources documenting the Museum, its history and collections to provide information to Museum staff and the visiting public. We also have colllected research material on the broader areas of art, archaeology, ethnology and cultural history and wish to make these resources more readily available to professors and their students. If you are a professor or student who would like to visit our Library, feel free to send an email to library@brooklynmuseum.org or search our online catalog.

Eleanor and I look forward to the next steps in this process by widening our reach to include professors from academic institutions in all the boroughs and beyond! We look forward to the next open house in March which will include a tour of our newly opened Japanese print exhibition, Utamaro: Masters of the Japanese Print, 1770-1900.

Filed under: Libraries & Archives
Tagged: academic
comments (0)

Academic Open House Part 1
Finished statues being hoisted into position. Photo Collection: Museum building: exteriors [02].

Because of the continuing interest in the statues, we thought it might be a good idea to put together some images and information on them. This was a group effort which included various departments (Information Systems, Digital Collections and Services, Conservation, Planning and Libraries and Archives). See below for additional images and resources. Hope you enjoy them. (more...)

Filed under: Libraries & Archives
Tagged: building, facade, statues, history

October 12, 2007

Pandora’s Book

Dendre Lawrence @ 11:38 am

If Marshall McLuhan were a gypsy and his tea cup the art world, the tea leaves would be artists’ books. — Ingrid Sishey (National Arts Guide, vol. 1, no.1, Jan-Feb. 1979, p.2-3)

This quote resonates so well with me as it points to the role artists’ books have both as messengers of information and works of art in themselves. From mass produced, or open editions to limited editions to unique bookworks – artists’ books underscore McLuhan’s ideas about the medium as the message. Artists’ books constitute a highly varied contemporary art form which can be described as artworks which exist within the structure of books. Usually these are books utilizing a sequence of pages to produce a stream of imagery - textual and/or visual. They employ a full range of forms utilizing unusual paper, typographic design and bindings.
Artists’ books are a vibrant part of the Brooklyn Museum Library Special Collections. The Museum Library started to actively collect artists’ books in the 1970's and now there are approximately 2,000 titles with a collecting emphasis on multiples. In an effort not to duplicate what other art libraries are collecting in the New York area, we have developed a collection policy that focuses on:

- Innovative works created by Brooklyn-based artists
- Innovative works created by artists worldwide
- Works created by artists either exhibited by the Museum or who have works in the Museum’s art object collection
- Works that relate to the objects or cultures represented in the Museum’s object collection

We try to present the artists’ books collection to the public either through display in exhibitions or through on-site visits and artist’s talks. This past Saturday we featured Angela Lorenz who is an American artist living in Bologna, Italy. Ms. Lorenz talked about her very innovative works entitled *Pandora’s Book* (1992). She creates mixed-media limited-edition artists’ books and uses them as a tool to convey cultural observations and historical research. As whimsical and humorous as some of her books are, each one is based on fact often derived directly from experts in architecture, anthropology, art history, textiles, and economics. This thought-provoking bookwork was recently donated to the Brooklyn Museum Library by Dorothy and Jerome Preston in honor of Dorothy Cochlin McCann (1899-1997), art historian and avid sewer.

On December 1st we are going to feature the work of *Brooklyn* – watch our website for details and visit the Library Online Catalog to see what *artists’ books we have in the collection*!

Portions of this text are excerpted from an essay of mine published in the *Artists’ Book Yearbook 2001-2002* (Impact Press, 2001). For copies of the essay or more information about artists’ books send us an email to library@brooklynmuseum.org.

Filed under: Recent Acquisitions, Contemporary Art, Libraries & Archives
Tagged: artistbook

September 17, 2007

*Play*

Deirdre Lawrence @ 11:51 am

One of the great pleasures of working at the Brooklyn Museum is having access to research collections that run the gamut from antiquity to contemporary art. Among these collections are many rare books and archives assembled by the Museum’s founding curators who built the encyclopedic collections that we care for today.
Play at Proteus Gowanus. Gallery Hours: Thursday and Friday 3 - 6 pm, Saturday and Sunday 12 - 6 pm, or by appointment.

I went to the opening of the *Play* exhibition on Friday, September 14th and am delighted to report that the exhibition is well worth seeing! Lots of great books and objects that magically speak to the issue of play on both historical and contemporary fronts. This is the second time we have contributed material to Proteus Gowanus - the first time was for their exhibition on Libraries - in our efforts to increase awareness of the rich resources held here in the Libraries and Archives. With that in mind we are planning a program which will take place here within the next few months on games and the notion of play. The program will be held in the Brooklyn Museum Library where we will be looking at and discussing many items in the Libraries and Archives. We will keep you posted - there is more to be said about Mr. Culkin.

Here are a few images from our contribution to the exhibition to give you a sense of the type of materials on view in the Libraries and Archives.

(more...)

Filed under: Libraries & Archives
Tagged: none

August 2, 2007

**Children’s books at the Brooklyn Museum Library**

Angie Park @ 11:11 am

Summer brings a large number of youth camp groups to the Museum’s galleries. We thought it would be a great opportunity to display books from the Libraries and Archives collections, which would appeal to young readers and viewers. Keith Duquette, Library Preservation Associate, enthusiastically searched through our collection and brought together a selection of wonderfully illustrated children’s books. The books are in two cases - one outside the Library and