

MASS MoCA

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Bibliothecaphilia

Six artists wander through the stacks



Clayton Cubitt, Still from *Hysterical Literature: Session One: Stoya*, 2012.

North Adams, Massachusetts — For centuries, libraries have exerted a quiet sort of gravity, pulling us in with the promise that for a while, in the hushed, book-filled corridors, we can exceed ourselves. But, in this age of eBooks and library apps, does the physical and philosophical space of the library remain relevant? And what qualities define a library? Can libraries exist digitally, or be constituted of

things other than books? The six artists in *Bibliothecaphilia*, on view beginning January 24, 2015, explore the medium and ethos of libraries: institutions straddling the public and private spheres, the escapism that libraries offer, libraries' status as storehouses for physical books — and thus for experiences and knowledge — and the way that these objects circulate and are re-used. Participating artists include Clayton Cubitt, Jonathan Gitelson, Susan Hefuna, Meg Hitchcock, Dan Peterman, and Jena Priebe.

Bibliotheca: From the Greek βιβλιοθήκη, meaning library. “Traditionally, collection of books used for reading or study, or the building or room in which such a collection is kept.”

-philia: From the Greek φιλία, meaning friendship. ...A suffix meaning “friendly feeling toward, [...] tendency toward, [...] or] abnormal appetite or liking for.”

Perhaps no work in *Bibliothecaphilia* likes the library more than Clayton Cubitt's *Hysterical Literature*. In each “session” of *Hysterical Literature*, the camera captures a woman from across a table as she reads aloud from a book that she has selected for her “session.” Slowly we become aware of an unseen force — is it the book or the unseen assistant, pleasuring her with a vibrator below the table, which sends her

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into titular hysterics? One woman writes of her session, “This is my revolutionary act of selfishness... my virtual picket sign... my one-woman rally... my rebel yell... my sedentary march... a call for dialogue and understanding.”

In Jonathan Gitelson’s work, *Marginalia*, the presence of books’ previous readers is felt despite their physical absence. The markings and ephemera that they leave behind invite us to imagine their relationship to the text — a relationship that, he writes, “may be a dying mystery [...] with the advent of e-books and computer-based reading.” In *Marginalia*, visitors have the opportunity to explore shelves of marked books that Gitelson has collected in a work that includes bits of ephemera found in the books and silkscreens that show bright lines of highlighting drawn from the pages of the books — from which the printed words have been removed.

Dan Peterman’s work likewise deals with the repurposing of used materials. In place of books, however, Peterman’s work utilizes pieces of compressed post-consumer plastic. His previous installations include *Archive (one-ton)*, 2012, which occupied a former private library, where he filled the shelves with paperback-sized boards of plastic to act as “surrogate books,” and a 100-foot long continuous table in a public park, at which, each day, strangers dine together (*Running Table*, 1990). Like the books of a library, these materials form part of a circulating network of individuals whose knowledge of one another is limited to their shared connections to the materials that they (re)use.

Jena Priebe and Meg Hitchcock’s works engage with the reuse of texts that takes place in libraries, as well as the interaction between books and readers. For Priebe, who often uses books that have been deaccessioned from libraries as materials in her work, books become fodder for immersive installations populated by towers of tomes and swirling streams of pages that appear to defy the laws of physics. Her works blur the boundary between the physical material of the book and the reader’s mental experience of the text. Hitchcock’s intimate *Texts* brings the books themselves into conversation, using letters and words from one holy text to recreate the verses of another. In her hands, the books are transformed into geometric meditations on interconnectedness.

Susan Hefuna’s *mashrabiyas* isolate the interstitial space between public and private life that libraries so often occupy. Historically, *mashrabiyas*, large-scale carved wooden screens, were placed in windows to

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allow air to circulate. Hefuna became interested in the way that they allowed women to view the outside world while being shielded from the public eye: “You see life outside the room, hear the cars and feel the hectic pace of the city — but you yourself are in calm surroundings, so it’s therefore very meditative.” Dyed with ink, the patterns of Hefuna’s large-scale screens are woven with spare words and phrases, with past and present resonances with which viewers are called to engage.

Ranging in scale from intimate to all-encompassing, these artists’ works prompt both private contemplation and public exchange, and invite us to imagine what might be lost if libraries — those archives of paradise and longings — should truly disappear.

Related Programming

The exhibition coincides with a year-long initiative at Williams College (including the Williams College Museum of Art and Clark Art Institute) dedicated to books, libraries, and information. It focuses on exploring the diverse ways in which people preserve and convey ideas, creative works, data, and other forms of information. The project features a wide array of public presentations, performances, courses, and exhibitions (including at the Williams College Museum of Art and Clark Art Institute) that imagine the theme from many perspectives.

Sponsorship

This exhibition is made possible by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in support of MASS MoCA and the Williams College Graduate Program in the History of Art.

About the Artists

Clayton Cubitt’s (b. 1972, New Orleans, LA) practice includes video art, fashion photography, and photojournalism. He embraces internet videos and blogs as media for widely accessible artistic engagement, receiving millions of visits from viewers worldwide. He lives in New York, NY.

Jon Gitelson (b.1975, Mount Kisco, NY) draws inspiration from chance events, ritual, and the archive. His work is included in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, MoMA, and Whitney Museum of American Art. He lives in Brattleboro, VT.

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Susan Hefuna (b. 1962, Germany) works in media including video, sculpture, and performance, exploring networks that structure public interaction. Her work was included in recent exhibitions at MoMA, Serpentine Gallery, and the Venice Biennial. She lives in Egypt and Germany.

Although **Meg Hitchcock** (b. 1961, Springfield, VT) trained as a painter, it was her longstanding interest in religion and philosophy that inspired her *Texts*. Her work has been featured in *New Criterion* and *Art Critical*, and was recently exhibited at Crystal Bridges. She lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Dan Peterman (b.1960, Minneapolis, MN) creates works that blur accustomed boundaries between art and functional objects, often using recycled materials. His work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennial, Kunsthalle Basel, and Chicago's Millennium and Grant Parks. He lives in Chicago, IL.

Jena Priebe (b. 1978, Michigan) uses vintage and found objects to create immersive environments that juxtapose organic and mechanical, real and surreal. She has created site-specific works for The Last Bookstore, Los Angeles, and the Burning Man festival. She lives in Los Angeles, CA.

Images

A collection of high-resolution images is available here: <http://bit.ly/1x4MSui>.

About MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest (and largest) centers for making and enjoying today's most important art, music, dance, theater, film, and video. Hundreds of works of visual and performing art have been created on its 19th-century factory campus during fabrication and rehearsal residencies, making MASS MoCA among the most productive sites in the country for the creation and presentation of new art. More platform than box, MASS MoCA strives to bring to its audiences art experiences that are fresh, engaging, and transformative.

MASS MoCA's galleries are open 11am to 5pm every day except Tuesdays. The Hall Art Foundation's Anselm Kiefer exhibition is open seasonally, through November 30. Gallery admission is \$18 for adults, \$16 for veterans and seniors, \$12 for students, \$8 for children 6 to 16, and free for children 5 and under. Members are admitted free year-round. For additional information, call 413.662.2111 x1

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or visit massmoca.org.

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