



CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

*Libri  
Books  
Bücher*

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Castello di Rivoli • Museum of Contemporary Art

## Libri Books Bücher

As World Book Capital 2006 together with Rome, the city of Turin provides visitors the chance to reflect on the relationship between contemporary artists and books with the exhibition *Libri Books Bücher* at the Castello di Rivoli.

An *artist's book* is a special kind of art object. Far from being a simple repository of information, or a medium used solely to vehicle and document the work of an artist, an *artist's book* is a creation in its own right: a place of autonomous experience which, by transcending the limitations imposed on it by the page and removing the barriers between form and content, is able to transform itself into a true work of art. The exhibition *Libri Books Bücher*, one of a series of events organized by Turin as World Book Capital 2006, aims to provide an insight into the *artist's book*.

The history of the book as a medium for artistic creation has its roots in the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, with the experiments of Dada and the Futurists. Up until this point, artists who collaborated on books in the nineteenth century did so purely in the role of illustrators; such projects were for the most part published as

limited editions, and conceived with the aim of producing an object that was exclusive and prestigious. These early collaborations between artists, poets and writers were followed just a few years later by the first books made by avant-garde artists. They differed substantially, however, from the earlier examples, because of the conceptual way they were created. Avant-garde artists adopted a more self-referential stance, and the book became a conduit for the expression of their ideas and sensibilities. It was also easier to distribute than traditional artworks and relatively inexpensive, making it one of the artists' preferred means of communicating their vision.

Running parallel to these experimental projects, the birth and development of visual poetry in the twentieth century also played a fundamental role. As a literary form it was closely connected to the visual world, focusing its attention as much on the aesthetic and concrete aspects of words as on their content. It thus identified further relationships between visual and written communication, creating a link with artists and highlighting once again the experimental way in which the word and graphics were used in relation

to the page during that period. After a period of lesser interest, the *artist's book* enjoyed a renaissance during the Sixties, thanks in particular to the conceptual artists. *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* by Ed Ruscha (1963) is considered to be one of the first examples of the new type of aesthetic work. Ruscha's book, with its twenty-six images of gas stations published without any form of explanatory text or critical content is far from a simple photography book, and can be defined as a work of art in book form. Other conceptual artists were also united by a common interest in the conceptual investigation of the relationship between form and content, and a fascination with the connection between the meaning of an artwork and the mode of communication of its language: for them, the written word was a means of visual expression, and the book became an extension of this, a preferred medium through which they could communicate their message.

It would be hard to explore the entire history of the *artist's book* in one single exhibition, so we have chosen a more subjective approach, inviting several artists who have exhibited at the museum to conceive

artistic displays which help to illustrate their relationship with the book.

Giulio Paolini (Genoa, 1940) explores space and surface in the pages of his books: they are arranged within a number of plexiglass display cases, a transparent medium through which images are revealed. The books thus form part of an installation which is redefined in spatial terms through its relationship to the space of display itself.

A little painted house in turn houses the books of Nicola De Maria (Foglianise-Benevento, 1954), an artist who has investigated color in all its expressive possibilities. Here he has created a dwelling place for reflection and poetry, which encourages the imagination of an ideal form of art.

Enzo Cucchi (Morro d'Alba-Ancona, 1949) makes books with unusual formats which are often outsized, and has created four new books for this exhibition. While adhering to the conventional book format, Cucchi subverts its meaning and use. His books are made out of resin, which paradoxically renders them illegible. The sensual and spiritual quality of Ettore Spalletti's sculptures

(Cappelle sul Tavo-Pescara, 1940) also emerges in his books, which are often the results of collaborations with other artists or poets, and assume the role of works that are unique, intimate and private. The same highly refined, tactile sensations are also present in his series of display tables designed especially for the exhibition: through their form and the unusual use of color, they recreate the very sensations of the books which are displayed.

The physical presentation of a work is of minor importance to those conceptual artists who favor the meaning and use of language over a work's visual appearance; they therefore place more emphasis on the viewing of books, and on their content than on devising innovative display systems. The books of Lawrence Weiner (New York, 1942) are thus installed in simple wall cabinets: the artist treats the books he designs as places in which to express his ideas, and he explores their parameters in linguistic and visual terms.

Joseph Kosuth (Toledo, Ohio, 1945) chooses to exhibit his books in as neutral and grey a setting as possible. They form a special area of investigation into the definition of the meaning of art, through the

use of the written word as a mode of communication: his books are arranged together with the artist's posters, which are also made as a way of expressing his art.

By contrast, the books made by Hanne Darboven (Munich, 1941) have been installed by the curator on simple tables. The books are almost like tracings of the artist's thoughts, which are codified as mathematical symbols almost impossible to decipher, making them similar to musical scores. Their internal structure, often in diary form, marks the passing of time.

While each of the artists in this exhibition offers a different approach to the subject and a multiplicity of interpretations, it is also evident that all of them have a common approach to the book: it is a space which, just like a canvas or an exhibition gallery, can be utilized as the perfect place to express their ideas and objectify their poetic thought; for them, there are no limitations, or distinctions, between book and work of art.

The book transcends the self-imposed restrictions of painting and sculpture and the rules of traditional artistic communication to become form, material and concept, posing

itself as the vehicle of a new system of expression: one that is freer, because it is essentially new or continuously being renewed. The limitations imposed by the physical nature of a book, as an object, provide a chance to move beyond them and experiment with a highly personal and autonomous art form.

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Books