



WINTER 2017

Derek Sullivan: Booklover



Derek Sullivan, *The Booklover* (detail), i2014, nkjet print on fabric, rope, thread. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Tatjana Pieters, Ghent. Photo: Don Hall.

DEREK SULLIVAN: BOOKLOVER

FEBRUARY 24 TO APRIL 23, 2017

CURATED BY JENNIFER MATOTEK, DIRECTOR/CURATOR

The “before-life” and “after-life” of books

BY JENNIFER MATOTEK, DIRECTOR/CURATOR

“A book can be read without ever opening it.”

– Derek Sullivan

Introduction

The first long conversation I had with Derek Sullivan was about books. At an opening for a now-defunct Toronto gallery, we talked for an hour about our favourite novels and artist book makers. In particular, we talked about the beauty of the book as an object – their aesthetic qualities, their weight, how it feels to touch them, and what it says about you, in how you choose to navigate a book.

I doubt Derek will remember this conversation. But it stayed with me, in part because it took place during my MBA studies – a period where I heavily resented reading thanks to

textbooks which weighed down my knapsack, causing me severe back and shoulder pain. Years earlier, I devoured three novels a week outside of classwork, barely sleeping. Our conversation reminded me of the solace, contentment, and companionship I once found in books.

Chapter One (and Only)

Derek Sullivan has made art about books for nearly two decades¹. His sculptural installations often reference literary works and their themes – in particular, fiction by authors such as Umberto Eco and Georges Perec. Sullivan’s 2015 site-specific exhibition at Oakville Galleries’ Gairloch Gardens, for example, titled *The Missing Novella*, was made during a time when the artist took a keen interest in novels focused on the “country house” – the choice



Derek Sullivan, *Booklover* installation view. Photo: Don Hall.



setting for writers such as Patricia Highsmith and Henry James. Sullivan is also interested in the physical structure of books – his 2011 exhibition, *Albatross Omnibus*, at The Power Plant, with its zigzag floor plan, gave the appearance of an accordion-fold book. His approach to displaying his work in a gallery context considers how viewing art in an exhibition is akin to the act of reading a book.

In Sullivan's work, reading is an activity, a concept, and an object – ideas which grew out of the art book movement of the 1960s and 1970s, as conceptual artists such as Sol LeWitt and Ed Ruscha began making art books that were at once, about art and books. Sullivan's work, visually and conceptually, often underlines, ~~strikes through~~ – and pauses upon – through the use of dashes – notions of authorship, querying ownership of ideas and their means of circulation.

A book is a whole, discrete entity that also often exists as a series of parts, in chapters. One's experience of a book could be purely physical, a sensual browse, or intellectual - an engagement where one dives in to explore a world, coming up for air only when necessary.

A book, like a relationship, can be experienced and evaluated as positive or negative. Books may be borrowed, gifted, purchased, kept, circulated, or disposed of. Books are meant to be sold, consumed, and disseminated as consumer goods. Library books have their own meaning as free vessels charting intellectual freedom, owned and shared by everyone in a community.

Yet in spite of the open, free movement and circulation of the ideas in books which may be spread in the present tense, books are also frozen in time. Books are closed, in some sense, at the past point of their publication date. Only digital publications have the freedom to evolve into new formats and iterations.

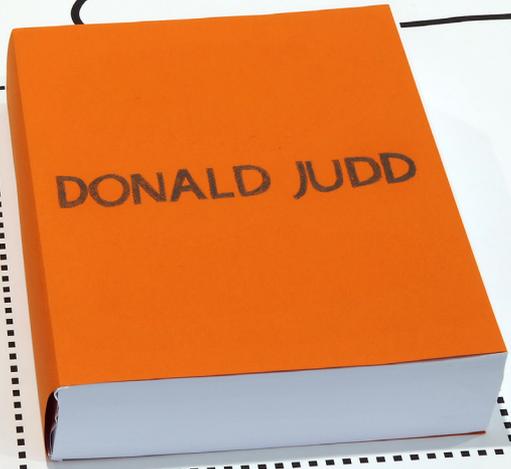
Sullivan's exhibition at Dunlop Art Gallery is a near-complete survey of his book works to date. The books are arranged by the artist in no obvious order on decades-old, heavy wooden tables once used by visitors to Regina Public Library. A site-specific drawing wraps up, down and around the walls of Central Gallery, waiting to be read in either direction. Just above the viewers' heads hang pennants with photographic reproductions of men and women reading. The banners weave through the space, perfectly binding the exhibition's components.

The booklover who most frequently appears on the pennants is a black and white portrait of a young woman. She stares directly at the camera. Yet there is something odd about the way the book sits tenderly in her hands, appearing almost as prop, making her engagement with the book, as an object, questionable. When I look at her mechanically reproduced image, I see something of myself.

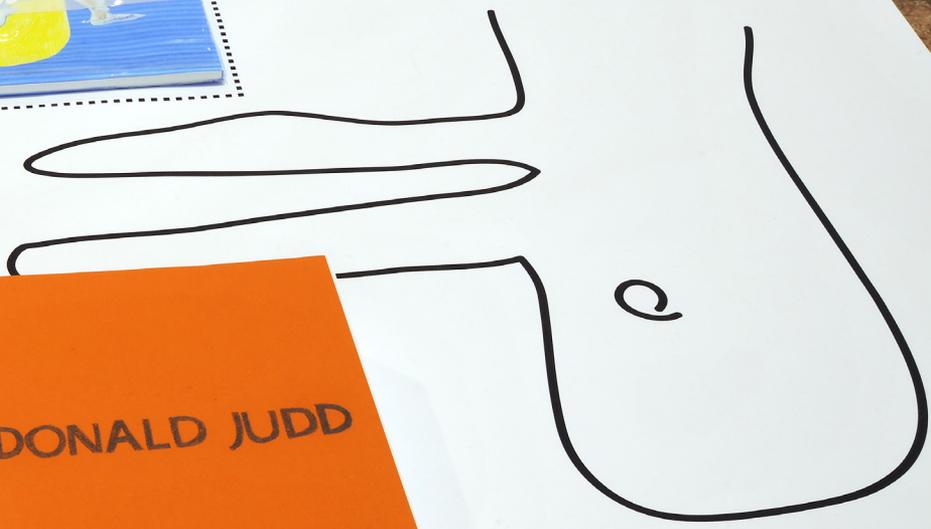


PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH

CREMASTEN 4
2005
—various media on paper and mylar.



PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH



NATIONAL GALLERY CATALOGUE
2002—present

graphite on coloured paper, 500 sheets of
paper, glue
open edition



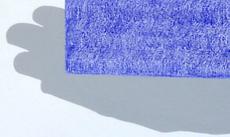
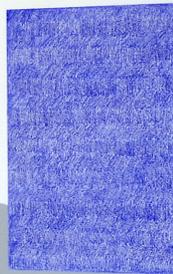
Derek Sullivan, *The Booklover Collection* (detail), 2017, various artist publications, inkjet on paper, antique library tables Courtesy of the artist and Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto. Photo: Don Hall.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Derek Sullivan received his BFA from York University in 1999 and his MFA from the University of Guelph in 2002. He lives in Toronto where he is an Assistant Professor in Sculpture/Installation at OCAD University. Sullivan has exhibited nationally and internationally, and has been nominated for the Sobey Award in 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2015. His work is in numerous public and private art and library collections throughout Canada and beyond, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Bibliothèque de France, and the Getty Museum Archives and Library.



Derek Sullivan, *Seven Pages*, 2017, coloured pencil and vinyl on wall. Commissioned by Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina Public Library.
Photo: Don Hall.





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Closed statutory holidays

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Canada S4TP 3Z5

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Closed statutory holidays

Dunlop Art Gallery researches and presents a diverse range of contemporary artworks, and promotes visual literacy through activities that include exhibitions, programs, publishing and collecting. Central Gallery is attended by knowledgeable staff who are able to answer questions or guide you through the gallery. For more information, please visit our website, reginalibrary.ca/dunlop-art-gallery.

FREE ADMISSION



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COVER IMAGE

Derek Sullivan, *The Booklover* (detail), 2008-(ongoing), print on demand artist's book, varying pagination. Photo courtesy of the artist.



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