

“The Keeper” at the New Museum

Review of an exhibition of and about collecting

Eric Holzenberg

“The Keeper” is a demanding exhibition in every sense. Physical stamina (and comfortable shoes) is necessary to make a complete circuit of the show, which extends through a dozen galleries on four floors of the New Museum in Soho. It also requires an elastic attention span, as well as the willingness – on the part of this reviewer, at any rate – to suspend, at least temporarily, certain cherished opinions about the nature of collecting.

Curated by Massimiliano Gioni, the New Museum’s artistic director, with assistant curators Natalie Bell, Helga Christoffersen, and Margot Norton, “The Keeper” is “dedicated to the act of preserving objects, artworks, and images, and to the passions that inspire this undertaking” (exhibition information at <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/the-keeper>).

I approached the exhibition with some anticipation. As a collector (personally and institutionally) and the director of an organization of people devoted to making, gathering, selling and/or preserving artifacts, I am no stranger to the passions that objects can inspire; and at this point in a career that has included encounters with objects ranging from prostitute trade cards to illuminated manuscripts to book-shaped biscuit tins, I felt reasonably sure of my ability to connect with any type of collection, or collector. (Full disclosure: among other things, I collect angel chimes. Comprehensively.)

The director’s foreword to the excellent published catalog describes the exhibition as “an array of imaginary museums and personal collections – what one might consider to be museums of the individual” [p. 6]. The value (monetary, historical, cultural) of the artifacts in these museums is irrelevant – the point of the exhibition is the keeper, not the kept: particularly the personal motives, emotions, impulses, and compulsions driving the



Ydessa Hendeles, “Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)” 2002. “The Keeper” continues at the New Museum, 235 Bowery, New York City, through September 25.



500,000 drawings by Vanda Vieira-Schmidt.

creation of such collections. Contemplating that focus on the personal raised a number of interrelated questions, which I kept in mind as I toured the exhibition:

- ☛ What drives people to collect things, to keep things?
- ☛ What did these collections mean to their keepers?
- ☛ To what extent can those meanings be

shared with others?

☛ Questions of “value” aside, can one – should one – distinguish between collections, hoards, and art assemblages/installations?

☛ What role does curatorial intent play in such distinctions?

The curators asked (and occasionally answered) some of these questions in the label copy. A few of the questions were my own; in cases where the curator or the artist was silent, sometimes the exhibition itself

provided a satisfactory answer, and sometimes it didn’t.

Answers to questions about motivation and meaning were often hard to come by. An arresting series of photographs by Mario Del Curto documents the work of Richard Greaves, who used “found” objects – scrap wood, discarded appliances, plastic sheets,

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Message from the President

Highlights Then

In our last season we once again welcomed and celebrated our scholarship grant winners, which this year included a repeat winner in Hannah Batsel, who donated her winning project, *Maneater*, to the Club.

It was hard to tell which of our Caxton on the Move events was more stimulating – the Maclean Collection, the Shakespeare First Folio from the Folger Library exhibition in Wauconda (a program inspired by Paul Ruxin), or the behind-the-scenes view of the “Dionysus Unmasked” exhibit at the Art Institute. We also had the honor to welcome the Mellon scholars from Rare Book School who were on a tour of private collections and libraries. Their visit to Chicago coincided with our April dinner and by all accounts they were greatly impressed by the Club and its programs.

We owe much gratitude to Jackie Vossler, Ed Hirschland, and Arthur Frank for their exhausting efforts getting the Club’s inventories and archives at the Newberry in order, and thanks too to Donna Tuke and Ed Bronson for the idea of generating a member benefit by offering excess copies of back issues of the *Caxtonian*.

Lunch programs were varied and as always illuminating. We heard about the “Thieves of Book Row.” We learned about the books Proust read and their influence on his work. Ellen Clark spoke on the role of printing during the American Revolution. Joseph Ornig returned with more stories about Teddy Roosevelt. Jill Gage introduced us to the Newberry’s Fall 2016 exhibition, “Creating Shakespeare.” Paul Gehl conducted another stimulating conversation, this time on ghosts, with fellow Caxtonian Audrey Niffenegger. One luncheon was given over to books published by Club members John Blew, John Roberts, William Hesterberg, Caryl Seidenberg, and Craig Jobson. We delighted in an illustrated presentation on the noted Chicago photographer and preservationist Richard Nickel. And Richard Fizdale, who evolved from a hippie war protester to CEO of Leo Burnett, focused on the famous building at 999 Lake Shore Drive.

Dinner programs once again did not disappoint, with an array of renowned scholars and bibliophiles. James Green, librarian for the Library Company of Philadelphia, talked about the unusual origins of early American bookstores. Anna Sigridur Arnar spoke about how the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé and the Symbolists’ use of books as art anticipated the evolving social dimensions of book culture, as exhibited, for instance, at the Venice Biennale. Her talk was subsequently complemented by Michael Thompson with a program on books

made by artists, and their influence as well on the current state of conceptual art. Along a similar track, Marvin Taylor talked about the emerging presence of archives as art. Longtime favorite Mark Dimunation came to recount the ten seminal moments in his distinguished career. Richard Bales amused and impressed with stories of the “forgotten” literature of Nelson Algren as found in the men’s magazines of the time. Susan Jaffe Tane, the eminent bibliophile and philanthropist and foremost collector of the works of Edgar Allan Poe, held a special members-only program on her adventures at auction. Theodore Crackel delved into the challenges of establishing provenance for George Washington’s papers and publications. And in a special event we delighted in seeing and hearing about the results of a challenge to three local binders to see what they could do with \$1,000 and the unbound pages of Frank Piehl’s history of the Club.



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Spotlights Now

This season offers more delights. Luncheon programs will take us from medieval times to present day mayhem as we hear about fakes, forgeries and frauds, the Glessner House library, Winston Churchill as reader/writer/leader, the reading habits of the stars, and a pioneering Englishwoman book collector with a name out of a Hammer horror film. We’ll hear from faculty, directors of local cultural institutions, and a special agent of the FBI. We’ll meet Henry Bienen, president of the Poetry Foundation. We’ll get a curator’s tour of the fall 2016 Newberry exhibition, “Creating Shakespeare,” which will feature an English menu for dinner, English session beer, and a treasure from the vault. We’ll hear about the art of books that aren’t, the Chicago Collections Consortium, and the English Short Title Catalog, a remarkable online collection of early English books. And in the centennial year of her birth, we’ll learn more about programs being developed around the city to honor Chicago’s own Gwendolyn Brooks, renowned poet and honorary Caxtonian.

Bright Lights Always

It’s going to be a great year. Sign up early and often. This is what we love to see and talk about and it’s the only way to do so. Well worth the price of admission. Come join us for an exciting, bright new season. We look forward to seeing you soon.

–Don Chatham

"THE KEEPER," from page 1

cardboard – to create elaborate but ephemeral structures in a backwoods lot near his home in Quebec. Is this a hoard, endowed with unusual intricacy and structure? Or a particularly ramshackle art installation? There are no captions, and no text by Greaves. The photographs tell us a certain amount, and we have the curator's interpretation of what the structures might mean; but in the absence of the "keeper's" voice we are – presumably by design – left wondering what Greaves himself thought he was keeping, and why.

A different set of ambiguities attaches to the work of Vanda Vieira-Schmidt. Her "Weltrettungsprojekt" (World Rescue Project) consists of a mass of over 500,000 drawings (produced at a rate of several dozen to several hundred every day since 1995) meticulously stacked in tall piles that nearly engulf a plain wooden table and chair. It is both an art installation and a record of long-standing delusion allied with compulsion: the drawings are talismans against demons, which the artist feels she must constantly renew. Compared to Greaves's project, we know both more and less about Vieira-Schmidt's "Weltrettungsprojekt." The curatorial statement lays out the basis for the artist's compulsion with a clarity and level of detail lacking in the Del Curto / Greaves project; but although we can experience Vieira-Schmidt's "collection" – walk around it, view it from all angles – the individual drawings are stacked so that they can't be seen. In this case, although we are told what led to the collection, and what it means to its "keeper," we experience it not as a collection – a gathering of multiples – but as neat, uncommunicative columns of paper.

The compulsion to make and to collect is much on display in "The Keeper," and although the show avoids assigning traditional notions of artistic or other value to these "museums of the individual," I occasionally found it refreshing to encounter a collection whose beauty and significance did not lie entirely in the eye of its keeper. Vladimir Nabokov's meticulous drawings of the wing patterns of butterflies is one example; the charming and diminutive apple paintings of Father Korbinian Aigner (known as the Apfelfarrer, or "apple pastor") is another. "Beauty" is perhaps too strong a term to apply to "The Houses of Peter Fritz," a collection of 387 models of vernacular architecture created in the 1930s by an Austrian insurance clerk, but for those

who delight in miniatures it is an immensely appealing "imaginary museum." Some of the collections, although emotionally moving (the detailed pencil sketches of Auschwitz by the anonymous "MM," for instance) or compelling (as in the case of Susan Hiller's compilation of audio clips recording endangered or extinct languages) are content to trade surface beauty for other, deeper significance.

Of the three hours it took to make a complete circuit of the exhibition, I spent fully an hour in rapt contemplation of "Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)" (2002), an enormous collection of 3,000 photographs of people posing with teddy bears. The photographs, assembled by Ydessa Hendeles, a curator and collector, are mostly from family albums, and date from around 1904 – the birth of the "teddy bear" craze – to the 1950s. Ranged in two double-height galleries, the photographs



Zofia Rydet, "Zapis socjologiczny" (Sociological Record).

are grouped by type: literally hundreds of types. My notes on the groupings – not labeled as such, and not always obvious – go on for pages, but among the typologies I could decipher were: teddies and children (subcategorized by gender and age); teddies with grown-ups of various sorts, including parents, teachers, nurses, doctors, celebrities, and soldiers; teddies in vehicles (graduated from automobiles to kiddy cars to wagons to prams to sleds); teddies in various costumes (sailor suits, dresses, bonnets, etc.); teddies with books, or radios, or phonographs, or musical instruments, or guns; teddies held by the head, by the ear, or by one arm; and teddies in racy poses, or as props in erotica.

For what it is worth, Ydessa Hendeles's "Teddy Bear Project" comes closest to the kind of traditional "collection" that libraries and museums – and their donors – would recognize. It is substantial, well-developed,

and made up of objects chosen (evidently) for both quality and physical condition. More importantly, it is a "self-aware" collection, put together by a knowledgeable curator in order to define a particular corner of the physical universe, for the purpose of making certain points, in this case about the past – her past, and our shared cultural past. Each of the images individually has the power to charm, and a shoebox full of such things would be a lucky flea-market find. But a roomful of 3,000 teddy bears, meticulously and intelligently grouped, exerts a very different effect – exponentially more charming, but also more complicated, more nuanced, and therefore I believe more likely to stick in the mind – my mind, at least.

At the end of my tour of "The Keeper" I had answers to at least some of my questions. I learned – or rather was confirmed in my

long-standing opinion – that acquiring things is a compulsion, active at all levels of collecting, however defined; and that what chiefly separates Pierpont Morgan or Ydessa Hendeles or Richard Greaves from the kind of hoarder you see on cable TV is the ability to apply structure to an undifferentiated mass of "stuff," and make it say something. What a collection says depends on the collector. Some collectors can't "speak" in that way, and one might define hoarding as "inarticulate collecting." A "keeper" frantically drawing talismans against demonic messengers is speaking loudly and clearly through her own "personal museum," but

mostly to herself, and not in a language we can easily understand. Some collectors – like Nabokov or the "apple pastor" – use their collections to sing to us. And some, like the Austrian insurance clerk with his miniature village, no doubt once had a voice, but it does not survive – at least, not in his collection.

Whatever we may think of the theoretical basis of "The Keeper," the curators are to be congratulated for gathering this array of personal museums, and encouraging them (keepers and collections) to speak. It is no fault of the exhibition or its curators if I did not understand every voice, or disliked some of what was said, or did not find everything equally compelling. But as much as I appreciated the show, I must confess that I came away with most of my own collecting prejudices – for clear voices, full of meaning, speaking in a language I understand – substantially intact.

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Remembering Colleen Dionne, 1928-2016

Tom Joyce

Colleen Dionne, 88, passed away June 24 this year, after more than a decade in a nursing home. Colleen had suffered a stroke, which, regrettably, made it difficult for her to enjoy her books.

But most of Colleen's life was a success, filled with many friends, including her husband, Edward, who predeceased her in 1987. At that time, Colleen was nearing the end of her career as a senior legal secretary for the law firm of Kirkland & Ellis in Chicago.

Colleen and Ed were childless, but much of their passion for life was a shared passion for books. My suspicion was that they intended to retire and to conduct a second-hand bookshop in the south suburbs where they lived in Olympia Fields. Indeed, they had started a search service for old books under the name of Old Verities Books.

The south suburbs have traditionally been a desert for old books and bookshops, despite certain exceptions. I am sure that Ed and Colleen knew Reinhold Pabel, a German POW whose autobiography, *Enemies Are Human*, detailed how he escaped from a POW camp near Peoria, and ended up virtually inventing the out-of-print book search service as the Chicago Book Mart, eventually located in Chicago Heights.

In a certain circularity, Pabel sold the search business of CBM when he decided to move back to Hamburg, Germany (where he continued in the rare book business). The buyer was Caxtonian Charles J. Shields, from suburban Frankfort. Charley had the Chicago Book Mart, so Colleen and Ed had to invent a place of their own. Before Charley died, he and his wife sold CBM to Josephine Bray, another Caxtonian, who hailed from Batavia, Illinois. It was a well-known search firm, begun a year or more before its rival, International Bookfinders, started in Pacific Palisades, California (with P.O. Box 1, and decades before Ronald Reagan set up his west coast White House there). Old Verities never attained the market penetration of those two search firms, which effectively became obsolete with the advent of the World Wide Web – which, not coincidentally, also caused the demise of *The Antiquarian Bookman's Weekly*.

Young Colleen, nee Austgen, could not have obtained her copy of *The Great Gatsby* (a first edition) when it was published, but she must



Colleen Dionne, Susan Hanes, Frank Piehl, Jo Ann Baumgartner, Fina Bray

have been young, because her book sports an Austgen bookplate. It was perhaps the earliest rare book that she acquired.

For some years, Colleen assisted, in her spare time, Jack Von Berg, at the old Canterbury Bookshop, on south Wabash Street for many years before it re-located to Congress Parkway, and finally to Adams Street, just west of the Art Institute. Those locations were near the Illinois Central / Metra commuter line, which was very accessible from Colleen's suburban home.

Colleen joined the Caxton Club in 1994, and attended as often as she could, unless she was traveling, which she enjoyed in her retirement. She was persuaded by Caxtonian Peter Stanlis to share his enthusiasm for his old mentor, the poet Robert Frost. Subsequently, Colleen acquired several dozen signed Frost first editions, including both British and American editions of Frost's first book, *A Boy's Will*. She also had books by various Caxtonians, Johns Steinbeck, and Updike, other modern first editions, and books about books. In fact, she had a carton-full of the J. H. Slater's 1892 book, *Book Collecting*, which Von Berg had reprinted.

Like many bibliophiles, Colleen wanted more. With little support in the south suburbs, she traveled to the west suburbs to participate in The DOFOBS (Damned Old Fools Over Books), which had been revived out there. She also actively participated in a sub-group of lady DOFOBS, which included Caxtonians Josephine Bray, Susan Hanes, Jean Larkin, and JoAnn Baumgartner.

Colleen has been missed at Caxtonian

events following her stroke. Her devotion to the Club included a sizable donation to the Second Century Fund, to help underwrite the future of the Club. That was who Colleen was, but I wish she were still here and able to continue enjoying the world of bibliophilia. She will continue to be missed.

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The Caxton Club Grants Committee is pleased to announce the establishment of the Colleen Ann Dionne Memorial Grant to the School of the Art Institute for Book Arts Projects

The Caxton Club has received a \$2500 Memorial from the family of Colleen Ann Dionne.

This memorial recognizes Colleen's support of the Caxton Club, her abiding love of books, and her appreciation of the Art Institute, which provided so many memories for her family. The memorial is given to support the Caxton Club's grants to undergraduates at the School of the Art Institute for Book Arts projects. These grants will ensure that Colleen's connection to the Caxton Club, Art Institute, and the world of the book will continue. Our sincere thank you to her family for this memorial.

Colleen as DOFOB and one of Four Girls

My friendship with Colleen was not a long one, but it developed at a significant time in our lives. I think that, for that reason, it became a deep and precious one to us both. I met Colleen at a Caxton Club meeting, soon after I joined in 1995. I quickly discovered, to my delight, that her statuesque elegance, her sharp intellect, and her keen interest in books masked a mischievous sense of humor. I found that combination captivating, and we sought each other's company at Caxton Club evenings. When I was invited to join the DOFOBs, a group of Caxtonians from the Western Suburbs, I was delighted to find that Colleen, too, was a member of that august group.

It became a custom among several members of the DOFOBs to meet for "margaritinis" at Nick's Fish Market on the lower level of the First National Bank building (10 S. Dearborn) before heading up to the Mid-Day Club for the Caxton dinner. Colleen and I seldom missed those evenings and particularly looked forward to the premeeting festivities at Nick's. Often in attendance were Fina Bray and Jean Larkin. Colleen, Fina, and Jean were all widows who had overcome the loss of their spouses, and embraced life, books, and interesting discussions as true Caxtonians. I basked in their company.

Little did I know that very soon, I would be joining their ranks when my own husband died in an accidental fall at home. Fina, Jean, and Colleen took me under their wings. We got together as often as distance and schedules permitted, and they supported me as I tried to regain my footing.

In the late summer of 1999, Jean invited us to an overnight house party at her farmhouse in Sycamore, where she continued to live after the death of her husband. I picked up Colleen and we drove out into the countryside on a brilliant afternoon. Jean showed us her country lifestyle and we happily talked and shared stories on her back porch over frosty glasses of fresh lemonade. In the course of the afternoon, Jean took us over to the small bookstore that she and her husband,



Storey, had opened, aptly named Storey Books.

As we were perusing the shelves, I came across a green-and-gold-covered book entitled *The Four Girls at Chautauqua* by "Pansey" (pseudonym of prolific Victorian author Isabella Macdonald Alden). As I picked it up, I exclaimed, "This is a sign, ladies. We should call ourselves the Four Girls!"

And that is how our little group began. Since we lived quite far from each other, we decided that we would start an old-fashioned Round Robin letter. We nominated Colleen to start us off by writing a letter to us all and then sending it to the next Girl, who would write her own letter and send both letters on, until our letters had completed their circuit among the four of us.

Our first Round Robin made its way around in late September 1999. I remember how exciting it was to find that bulging brown envelope at my door. We were all delighted. Eventually, we started including photos and clippings that we thought might be of interest to the others. When Jean became ill and moved to California to be with her daughters, the Round Robin kept the Four Girls close. And when Jean died in 2002, Fina, Colleen, and I maintained it, still calling ourselves the Four Girls in Jean's honor.

One of the highlights of our letters at that time was Colleen's House Project. She had decided single-handedly to become project manager for the building of her dream house, a home in Olympia Fields that would have a library large enough for her to shelve the massive number of books that she had acquired with her late husband, Ed, as well as on her own. Neither Fina nor I could believe how involved Colleen was in the construction of her home; more accurately, how driven. Sporting a yellow



Eric, Frank Piehl, Fina Bray, Ken Albert, Charles Miner, Mary Anne Bamberger, JoAnn Baumgartner, Colleen Dionne, Tom Joyce, Susan Hanes, Laurel Church

photographs courtesy Susan Hanes

hard hat over her raven hair, she oversaw every detail of the project. Her letters always included photos of the latest phase of construction, usually with her smiling face in the foreground. The fact that the project labored on, month after month, did not seem to tire or deter her, and we were impressed at her resolve and could not wait to celebrate its completion with her.

The Round Robin came to me for the last time in October 2003. In my last entry, I wrote, "It was exciting to read, Colleen, that as of your April letter, you were well on your way to really moving in to your new place. Now that it is October, I am anxious to hear how things are going. Your energy and tenacity with this project has been truly inspiring. I know that Fina shares my feelings as well."

Sadly, sadly, Colleen never made it to her dream house. I find some comfort in knowing how much she loved building it, though. Maybe, as they say, it is indeed the journey that is important, and not the destination. Fina passed away in 2009, and now my tenacious, lovely, bright friend Colleen is gone too. The Four Girls are down to one, but their story was a joyous one in the years that it lasted, and it remains steadfastly in the heart of their last member. — Susan Hanes

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Book- and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Lisa Pevtzow

(Note: on occasion an exhibit may be delayed or extended; it is always wise to call in advance of a visit.)

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: **"The Shogun's World: Japanese Maps from the 18th and 19th Centuries"** (a range of maps depicting both material and spiritual realms), through November 6.

Budlong Woods Library, 5630 N. Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, (312) 742-9590, **"Writers Who Changed America"** (features authors Lorraine Hansberry, Studs Terkel, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Richard Wright), through September 26.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: **"Pressing for Plants: Herbaria in Books"** (actual plants pressed into pages, often with artistic flare), through November 6.

Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington St., Chicago, 312-744-6630: **"Stand Up for Landmarks! Protests, Posters & Pictures"** (images, artifacts, and ephemera relating to saving Chicago landmarks), ongoing.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: **"Lincoln's Undying Words"** (Lincoln's changing views through five key speeches made between 1858 and 1865), through February 20. **"Chicago Authored"** (works by writers that define the character of Chicago), ongoing.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: **"See Shakespeare in Chicago"** (over 130 years of Shakespeare productions across Chicago), through October 30. **"Called to the Challenge: The Legacy of Harold Washington,"** (an overview of Washington's life and projects as mayor), Harold Washington Exhibit Hall, ninth floor, ongoing.

The Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: **"Creating Shakespeare"** (Shakespeare's life and afterlife, from the 16th century through the 21st), September 23 through December 30)

Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: **"Page & Stage: Shakespeare at Northwestern"** (items including facsimiles of rare books, designs from student productions, archives of theater faculty like Frank Galati, and artifacts from the archive of Ireland's Dublin Gate Theatre), through September 2. **"Dawes Delivers the Vote: A Libraries Exhibit"** (political correspondence, speeches, two original *Chicago Tribune* editorial cartoons, and ephemera from the presidential campaign trail of 1924 in an exhibit about Vice President and Evanston resident Charles Dawes), Deering Library, third floor, through November 11.

Pritzker Military Museum and Library, 104 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-374-9333: **"SEAL The Unspoken Sacrifice"** (features photographs from Stephanie Freid-Perenchio and Jennifer Walton's 2009 book and artifacts on loan from the Navy SEAL Museum), ongoing.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: **Cyrus Leroy Baldridge: Illustrator, Explorer, Activist** (explores the range of Baldridge's life and art, showcasing many of his illustrations for the first time), through September 9. **"Alma Lacha's Kitchen: Transforming Taste"** (explores the Chicago chef's culinary career and displays selections from her fascinating collection of cookbooks), opens September 19.

Northwestern University / Dawes Delivers the Vote
CHARLES G. DAWES ARCHIVE HELD IN THE CHARLES DEERING MCCORMICK
LIBRARY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



Harold Washington Library Center / See Shakespeare in Chicago
SHAKESPEARE, ENGRAVED BY R.A. ARTLETT FROM THE CHANDOS PORTRAIT, THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS; CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER, SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARKS, PHOTO BY JULIE STANTON

Newberry Library / Creating Shakespeare
AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE CHARACTER OF FALSTAFF, FROM "THE WITS, OR, SPORT UPON SPORT," PUBLISHED IN LONDON IN 1673.



Send your listings to Lisa Pevtzow at lisa.pevtzow@sbcglobal.net

Caxtonians Collect: Jose Resendiz

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Jose Resendiz became a Caxton member by virtue of having received a Caxton grant to support his bookmaking. At age 24, he is among our youngest members.

He's a graduate student in the MFA program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). His department is officially named "Visual Communication Design" but for as long as I can remember everyone has called it "Viscom." It is a broad-ranging program that includes courses on many aspects of commercial design as well as book arts.

Previously, Resendiz had earned an undergraduate degree in Graphic Design + Marketing and Advertising at Reinhardt University in Waleska, Georgia. "That was a purely practical course of study," he explains. "We studied marketing, audiovisual design, and graphic design. There was no sign of letterpress or book arts." Waleska is 45 minutes away from Atlanta, where he grew up. "I am very grateful to Reinhardt," he continues. "The financial aid I received there made it possible for me to go to college. My view of the world expanded so much while I was there."

But it meant that his first letterpress studio at SAIC was a whole new experience. "Doing design with metal type was so different than doing it on a computer!" he says. His first book project in grad school was a dissection of a newspaper article about people who lost their lives crossing from Mexico to Arizona. It was a do-si-do in order to be bilingual: in one direction you read English; in the other, Spanish. For a first book project, it was remarkably successful: he made an edition of five copies, one of which landed in the Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection at SAIC. Two other copies were sold to the Newberry Library and the University of Iowa through Vamp & Tramp, a



To read Resendiz's *Underground America*, one unspools the cassette.

national dealer in artists' books.

All aspects of the book arts interest him, but he seems to have a particular affinity for binding structures. "I'm not especially fond of stitched bindings," he explains. "So when

I discovered Dan Kelm's book structures I was really excited." One binding, which used metal-hinged pages to create a book as a Mobius strip, caught his imagination. He wanted to do one himself, and succeeded in creating one using binding tape instead of hinges. He even solved the problem of getting it to fold into a flat package by having two of its "pages" themselves fold in half on the bias.

Another book used *Underground America* first-person stories, "stories of men and women who have come to the United States seeking a better life for their families, only to be subjected to dehumanizing working conditions," to use Amazon's description. Six stories were selected, and each was painstakingly (my word, not his) cut up, conjoined in an extremely long strip, and rolled inside a cassette tape shell. To read it, you unspool the "tape." Each story has its own cassette and its own box, and the set is housed in a case. I dare you to read one! Technically, you could call this an "altered" book, which is yet another art form.

Resendiz covers his living expenses with a part-time job. But the job is right up his alley: he does graphic design for Advance Illinois, "a nonprofit founded to be an independent, objective voice promoting a public education system in Illinois that serves the best interests of our children by preparing all students to be ready for work, college, and democratic citizenship," to quote its Linked-In profile. There he works with the communications team developing infographics and print design.

In the way of long-range plans, Resendiz hopes he can manage to stay in Chicago, where he has found satisfying activities and friends. He knows that it's a long shot trying to make a career out of hand-crafted books, but feels that he has plenty to say with them. He'd like to start a

scholarship fund of his own, since he has benefited so much from such programs himself. "I've been given so much myself, it's my turn to give back," he concludes.

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Bookmarks...

**Luncheon: Friday, September 9, Union League Club
Fakes, Forgeries & Frauds: FBI Agent Luigi Mondini**

Manuscripts, documents, antiquarian books, and letters written by popes and kings. All in a modest home in suburban Berwyn. All stolen. Thirteen art masterpieces from Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. All stolen. A letter from Thomas Jefferson, documents dating to the American Revolution, and a cache of valuable materials from the Second World War. All stolen. Come to our September luncheon, where special agent Luigi Mondini of the FBI Art Crime Team will reveal the story of art and cultural property theft. Using case files, he'll explain how the FBI investigates these crimes to recover and/or repatriate stolen items. Some are tales that screenwriters would be hard pressed to invent and others are the stuff of nightmares for curators, collectors, and dealers. Mondini's own career is as fascinating as his subject. A graduate of American University, where he studied constitutional history, he became a police officer and then an FBI agent. He has battled organized crime. Now as a member of the Art Crime Team he will share stories of how even terror organizations are selling looted cultural properties to finance their operations.

September luncheon: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (main dining room on six) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is \$32. **Reservations or cancellations by noon Wednesday for Friday lunch.** Call 312-255-3710 or e-mail caxtonclub@newberry.org.

Beyond September...

OCTOBER LUNCHEON

It publishes a venerable monthly dedicated to verse. Hosts a schedule of events. Curates thousands of volumes. And has received a remarkable bequest. Hear the story of Chicago's own Poetry Foundation on Oct. 14 from its president, Henry Bienen. He previously led Northwestern University.

OCTOBER DINNER

October 19 at the Newberry Library, Jill Gage, custodian of the Wing Foundation on the History of Printing and the Newberry's Bibliographer for British Literature and History, will give the Curator's tour of the exhibition "Creating Shakespeare," the story of his prolific life and afterlife.

**Dinner: Wednesday, September 21, Union League Club
Valerie Lester on "Bodoni, the Face behind the Face."**

Lester's new book *Giambattista Bodoni: His Life and His World* is the first substantive book about the ambitious and talented Italian printer to be written in English and the first comprehensive exploration of his life in almost 100 years. This talk sets Bodoni in the context of place, time, and relationships and explores the impact these elements had on his elegant typefaces. Valerie Lester is an independent scholar, translator, and author of *Phiz, the Man Who Drew Dickens*, a biography of her great-grandfather and Dickens's principal illustrator, Hablot Knight Browne, and a history of Pan American Airways, *Fasten Your Seats Belts! History and Heroism in the Pan Am Cabin*. She translated Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes (The Magnificent Meaulnes)*. Copies of *Giambattista Bodoni: His Life and His World*, published by David Godine, will be available for signing for \$24. Cash, check and credit cards will be accepted for book purchases.

September Dinner: Union League Club, 65 West Jackson Boulevard. The evening will follow this order: Social gathering: 5-6 pm. Program: 6 pm. Three-course dinner following the program. Drinks are \$5-\$9. Program only, free. Dinner, \$60. **Reservations are required for either the program only or the program/dinner combination. Reservations MUST be received no later than NOON Monday, September 19. Dinner cancellations and no-shows after this time will require payment.** To reserve call 312-255-3710 or e-mail caxtonclub@newberry.org.

NOVEMBER LUNCHEON

She was a Lady Macbeth, who married a Chicago industrialist named Glessner. They built a landmark Prairie Avenue house featuring a superb library where she hosted reading groups. What did they read? On November 11 you'll learn that and more from William Tyre, executive director of Glessner House.

NOVEMBER DINNER

November 16, 2016, Union League Club. Speaker: Mindy Dubansky, librarian at the Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art. The topic: "Blooks: The Art of Books That Aren't." This evening also will announce the 2016 Caxton Club grant recipients and host our past winners.