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Value and Validity of Art Zines as an Art Form

Susan E. Thomas

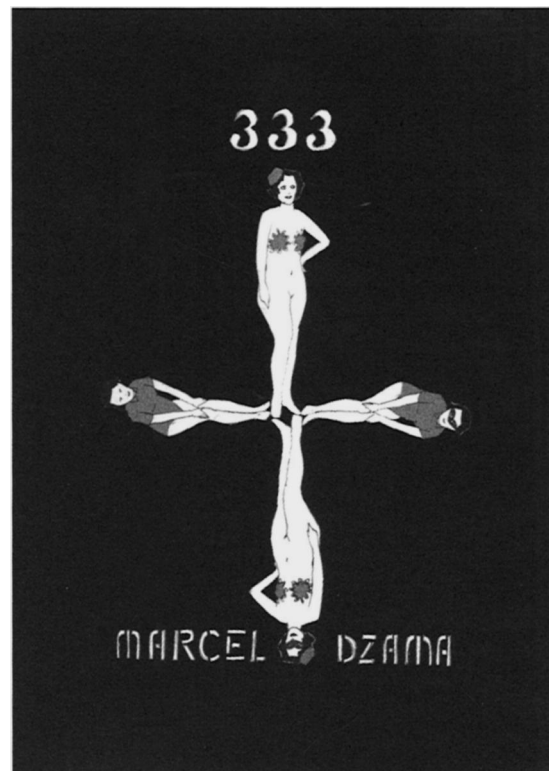
This article documents the contemporary art zine milieu and attempts to define art zines in comparison with zines, artists' books, and artists' magazines and to situate them in the world of contemporary art—and in the library. Contemporary zine practice is also explored. Several types of art zines are identified and described, and the intersection between alternative music and art zine communities is discussed.

Introduction

The word "zine" is omnipresent, referring as it does to everything from magazines available on newsstands to unique book arts. Why are zines so popular now? There is the theory of "retro nostalgia," which includes a fondness or preference for obsolete technologies like super 8 film, 8 track tapes, and Polaroid film. In the face of millions of blue screen and hand-held devices, many find relief in the printed form, much as they find happiness listening to vinyl records, many of which are now often produced on superior, heavy 180-gram vinyl, unlikely to skip. What compels a well-known artist like Raymond Pettibon to produce a \$10 zine for a small art bookstore in Los Angeles? Why does the musician and artist Kim Gordon continue to create zines? Who reads and looks at art zines? The artistic practice of making zines appears to be little understood in academe, including libraries. At their worst, zines appear to be sophomoric scribbles. At their best and most accessible or recognizable, zines by artists like David Shrigley and Marcel Dzama are placed in artists' book collections. As librarians, it is important for us to realize that art zines are undeniably of interest to art majors and professors, and they may be of interest to college students in general and to professors of rhetoric and composition or English. Because zines are paper-based objects to be viewed and handled, they attract patrons to libraries. Their challenging forms and contents should not lead academic libraries to overlook them; rather, they should be prized as art objects that could form a distinctive special collection.

Zine Definitions

Art zines are a subcategory of zines or fanzines. Zines typically are self-published booklets sold cheaply or traded for other zines. In recent media, zines have been discussed in the context of a larger do-it-yourself (DIY) movement, including crafting, home building, scrapbooking, and other such activities. Historically, zines have been part of various subcultures and movements, too many to mention here. Stephen Duncombe has written an authoritative book that provides an excellent discussion of the history of zines and zine makers.¹ Common subjects of zines over the years have included fandom (science fiction, celebrity, and punk rock), anarchist politics, hobbies, and feminism (the riot grrrl period of the early 1990s). Zines often appear and feel uncontrollable, with their handwritten contents, missing biblio-



Cover, 333 zine by Marcel Dzama (2007). 32 pages, 14 x 20 cm, b/w photocopy, edition of 150. Reprinted with permission from Nieves.

graphic information, and unclear subjects. Understandably, librarians feel compelled to define clearly what is and is not a zine. A spirited discussion about what constitutes a zine—in general, not art-specific—is found on the Zine Librarians Interest Group blog: <http://zinelibraries.info/2009/03/18/not-a-zine>.

All zines are artistic in that they are created, usually by hand. Even black and white zines made on a photocopier and stapled together are *made*, and often that "low art" presentation is deliberate. Every zinester makes creative decisions: What format? What kind of paper? How to bind? It is difficult, to be sure, to make a distinction between zines and art zines. Even zines that are primarily "textual" are tactile and visual, with text placed on the page much as an image would be. Alison Piepmeier, in her excellent article about the materiality of zines and the creative

process that goes into making them, states, "In a culture that celebrates ease and immediacy, zine makers are choosing to take part in a process that is deliberately messy, inefficient, and labor-intensive—they are choosing to take part in an art process."² The author agrees that all zines are art objects; nonetheless, there is a distinct class of zines that features illustration, typography (often hand drawn), photography, printmaking, and graphic design. The people who make such zines tend to be art students, artists, musicians, and designers. This article focuses on this class of zines.

The form of art zines may include silk-screened covers, assemblage (including inserts or attachments of three-dimensional objects like stickers, badges, patches, photographs, toys, seeds, or DVDs), or collage—either pasted onto paper or photocopied. There are mini zines, flip-book zines, flip-flop zines (reads inwards from both covers), newsprint zines, poster zines, black-and-white saddle-stapled zines, and offset print glossy zines. With desktop publishing and support and interest from both publishers and the art world, art zines have higher production values and greater distribution than in the past. Reflecting—or perhaps leading—contemporary art, recent art zine subject matter has tended towards the fantastic and gothic as well as the queer, cryptozoological, "emo," and creepy. A review of zines for sale at Cinders gallery, on the Etsey Web site, and at Printed Matter in New York, for example, reveals scores of illustrations and doodles of vampires, yetis, space aliens, melancholic lovers, underground music concerts, and eerie urban landscapes.

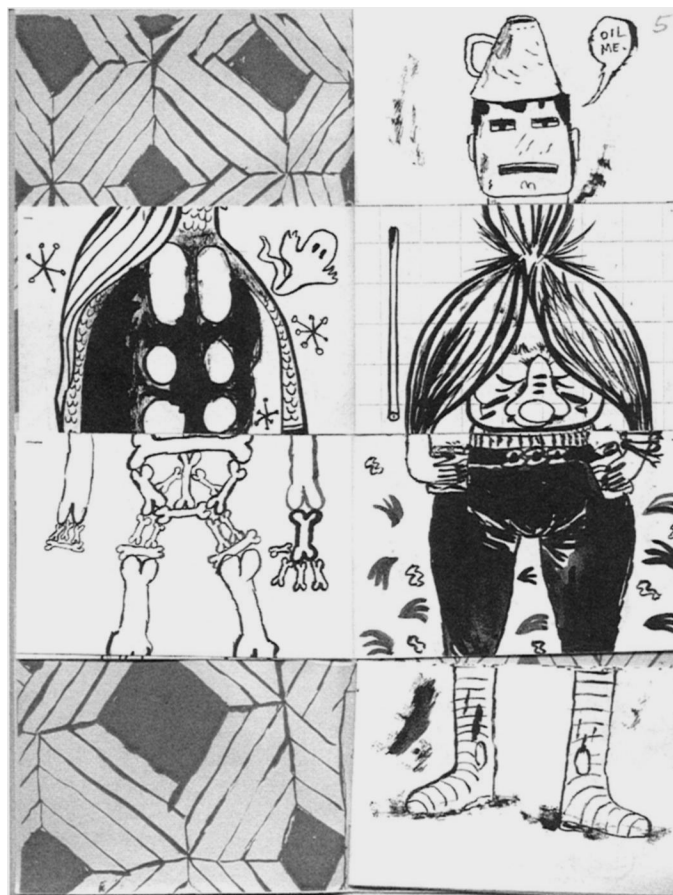
There are different motivations for making art zines. Many express concepts or ideas. For example, Andrew Coulter Enright's *How to be Fashionable or Consume Like Me* is a sardonic typography zine that documents the social habits of young New Yorkers working in creative fields. In *Two Things I Love, Together* (2009), the artists Alex Decarli and Adrienne Garbini place cats and cacti on every page. Other zines are personal or diaristic, and these tend to favor illustration as well as humor. Comic zines fall into this category, including *The Peter Arkle News* (1993-) and Alison Coe's comic zines. Other art zines result from appropriation. *Escape from New York* by Gary Fogelson (published by the art collective The Holster) contains eleven articles about prison escapes originally published in the *New York Times*. Johan Svensson's *Collection* consists of color drawings of classic rock album covers, and *Snakebar Confidential* by Konga is a collage zine made up of historical advertisements. The illustrated zine *Unlovable* by Esther Pearl Watson is based on a teen's diary that Watson found in a bathroom.

Art Zines and Artists' Books

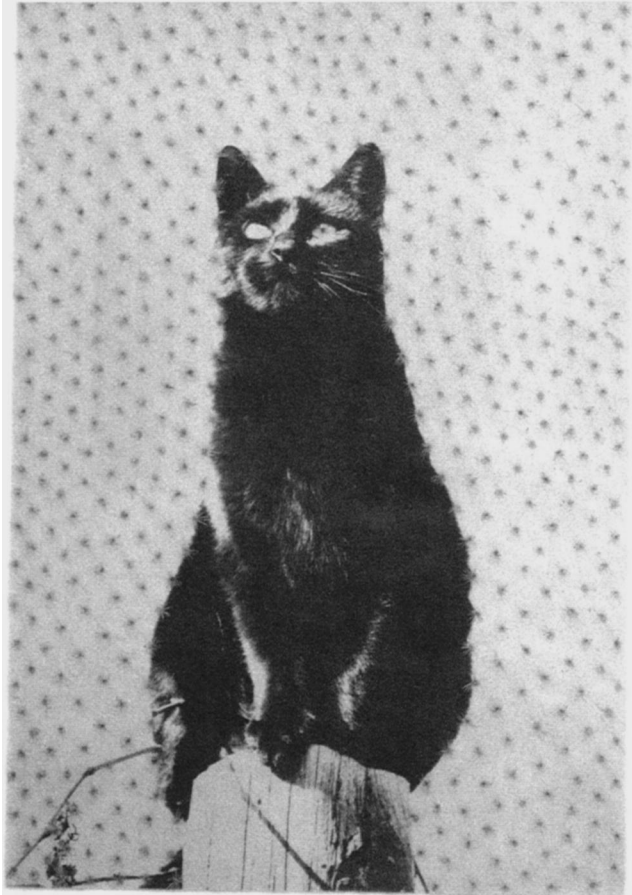
Art zines are difficult to define precisely. Applying hard, fast rules to zine definition may lead to a failure by libraries to acquire important materials that fit neither the definition of art zine nor artist's book. If the zine maker is well known, like Tom Sachs, the zine may be recognized as valuable and be classed as an artist's book even if the artist calls it a zine. In addition, inexpensive but valuable publications may be ignored by librarians who may be looking for fine press artists' books, which tend to be costly and acquired through established sellers. Several authors have written excellent articles that provide artists' book definitions.³ In a 1998 article, Janet Zweig writes about the influence of the zine phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s on artists' books:

Zines have broadened the scope of publication arts and have made the entire enterprise more lively and current. They have blurred the boundaries within the field in a completely different and more exciting direction than book crafts, and they've created a venue for all kinds of eccentric expression. Book artists could enter this realm and contribute a sophisticated visuality to it, while learning from its vitality and immediacy.⁴

The author asserts that many contemporary zine makers are book artists who purposefully choose to create inexpensive multiples, helped in that goal by desktop publishing and Internet sales distribution. In other words, many choose the zine form over fine press and sculptural book arts forms. Martha Wilson, founding director of Franklin Furnace, defines an artist's book as an object whose primary medium is the idea; in the 1960s, artists' books included photocopied or rubber-stamped books, and today, could include fanzines.⁵ Louise Kulp assigns the term artists' book to two categories: production pieces and very limited editions or one-of-a-kind objects.⁶ Art zines could fall into the former category, being "inexpensively produced, widely distributed, accessible, and disposable."⁷ As previously stated, some objects called zines by their makers end up in a library's artists' book collection. To make a distinction, artists' books are more costly than art zines, in general, and tend to be called artists' books or book arts rather than zines by their creators. Art zines tend to have an ephemeral rather than a sculp-



Spread, Flip-Tard zine by Mark Todd, Esther Pearl Watson, and Bwana Spoons (2009). 64 pages, 5½ x 5½", 2-color toner cover with b/w inside. Reprinted with permission from the artists.

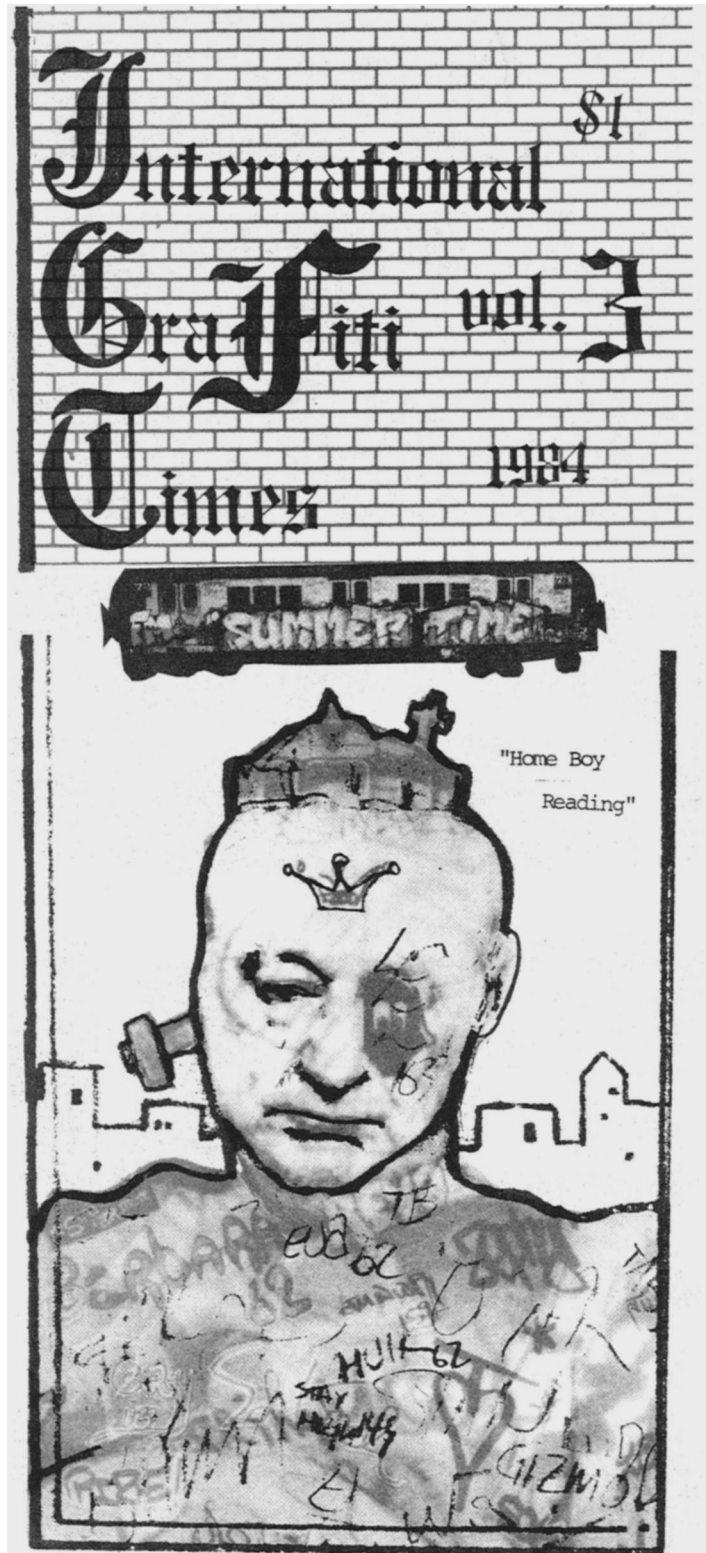


Page 11, *Two Things I Love*, *Together* zine by Alex Decarli and Adrienne Garbini (2009). 42 pages. Edition of 125. Reprinted with permission from the artists (*What Nothing Press*).

tural quality, whether that is in material or price. One focus of art zines is independent, unmediated production, outside of the art establishment. To further confuse the issue, conceptual "production piece" artists' book makers of the 1960s and 1970s were similarly exploring alternative book forms and modes of dissemination and distribution.⁸ Cheaply made from ordinary paper materials, artists' books by artists like Ed Ruscha and Lawrence Weiner could easily be assigned to zine collections if they were being made now. There is indeed a fine line between art zines and artists' books.

Art Zines and Artists' Magazines

Closely related to art zines are small-circulation, glossy, independent art magazines, the subject of a paper published by this author in 2007.⁹ Many could be called artists' magazines since they are made by and for artists, often publishing interviews, art made for the magazine, and personal statements. In a *New York Times* article describing independent art magazines, James Truman claims that they are an "update of the fanzine" and have an "irreverent, sometimes loopy voice . . . sustained by attitude rather than subject matter."¹⁰ Attitudinal or not, the editors of the independent artists' magazine *ANP Quarterly* have an excellent record so far of publishing lengthy, rare interviews with and profiles of emerging and influential yet overlooked artists. Many independent magazines—as compelling and creative as they are—are partially financed by advertising, often by art galleries



Cover, *IG Times* zine, vol. 3 by David Schmidlapp (1984). Reprinted with permission from the artist.

and small companies, but sometimes by monoliths like Nike, which may or may not publish advertising in the magazine.¹¹ In any case, the amount of advertising is small in comparison to commercial art publications like *Artforum International*.

Zines, in contrast, are self-produced or produced by small publishers or art galleries and almost never contain advertising. In fact, most in the zine community would agree that the inclusion of advertising in a publication is the end of that publication as zine. Nonetheless, independent art magazines and art zines still have much in common: a dedication to revealing the obscure or unknown and a commitment to visual and graphic excellence. In the same *New York Times* article, Rachel Whang, co-owner of Atomic Books in Baltimore, said that the audience for new independent art magazines is different from the zine audience: professional, graphic design types, not anarchists. The audience for art zines tends to be design types, too. The commercial design magazine *Print* often includes zines in its awards issues. An ad agency asked its art director to create a zine for the agency's relaunch. Can the maker of the zine *Power in Numbers* (2007)¹² still be considered a zinester? The writers at *Print* seem to enjoy the term "zine," and the frequent use of the word in its pages helps exemplify the broadest definition of zine, one in which the noncommercial ethos does not rule.

Art Zine Working Definition

In summary, an artist publication could be called an art zine if it has several of these features:

- Created by artist, designer, or architect
- The hand of the creator is evident (signed, illustrated, punched, stamped, etc.)¹³
- Limited, numbered editions are large
- No ISSN
- No ISBN
- Irregular size or shape (not magazine size)
- Not particularly sculptural or dimensional
- No masthead
- No known publishing company
- Independent publisher or art gallery (not fine press)
- Available directly from creator
- Available from an art bookstore or zine distributor ("distro")
- Identified by the creator as a zine
- Modestly priced (less than the price of a typical artists' book, but more than traditional zines)¹⁴
- Not usually available for trade (as traditional zines are)

Literature Review

A review of library literature yields few articles about art zines in particular. Piepmeier offers an explanation for the dearth of critical writing in scholarly journals about zines in general, including art zines:

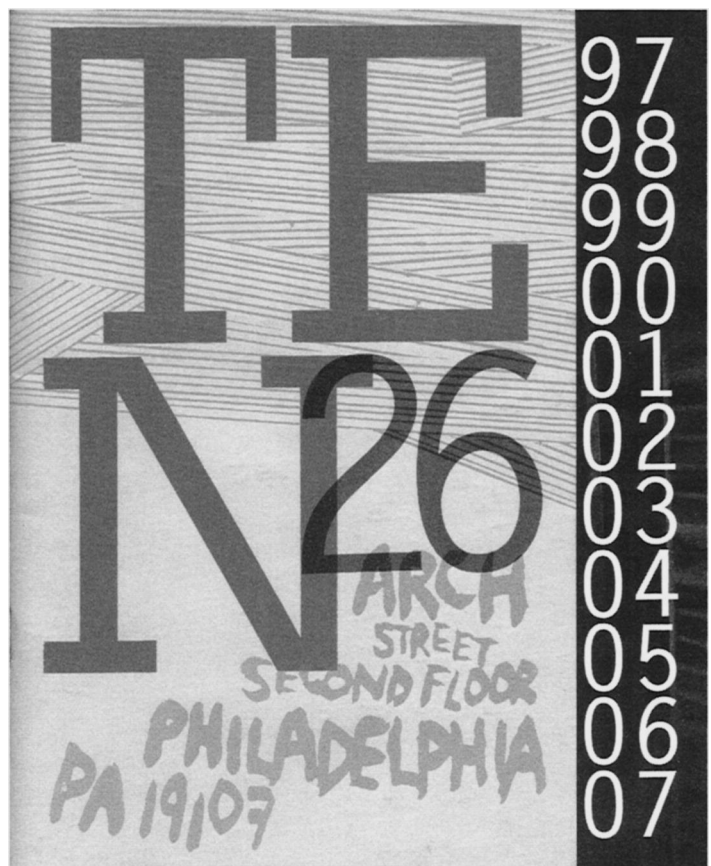
Zines' trashiness may, in part, explain the reluctance of literary and art scholars to analyze them: zines revel in informality and threaten conventional boundaries. They explicitly reject the standards, methods, and visual vocabulary of mainstream publishing and the art world. Rather than appearing as well-wrought artistic pieces, zines take the form of ephemera, notes passed in class, doodles. ... They reject art economies, and they are therefore so (intentionally)

low in terms of the hierarchies of printed material that they are below the radar of many academics, but even those who know of them may not consider them as legitimate objects of study. And yet simultaneously zines have a quality of preciousness.¹⁵

In fact, the author almost missed Piepmeier's essay because it was indexed in the *Communication & Mass Media Complete* database, not in any art indexes. Piepmeier's quote included an end note in which she described how a professor of humanities, upon being asked to evaluate Piepmeier's project, suggested that zines have not been studied because they are not worthy of study.¹⁶

In the article "Low-Tech Media Chicanery as a Means of Cultural Resistance," Mandy Mastrovita discusses the way that the establishment has failed to comprehend or even to recognize the important work made by artists using low-tech forms like zines and comic books: "Their working materials are relatively inexpensive and accessible, have been rejected by production facilities, while their content has been rejected by arbiters of 'fine art' and/or the academy."¹⁷

Tangential articles about artists' publications and ephemera that have appeared in library literature are important to consider.¹⁸ Design journals have published articles about zines, usually discussing typography and other design elements. The much admired journal *Émigré* published an eight-article special issue about zines in 1998—Fanzines and the Culture of DIY¹⁹—and Stephen Heller wrote an article for *Baseline* about the lasting design influence of punk zines.²⁰ Articles about art zines have



Cover, TEN26 zine, "published on occasion of the Space 1026 10-year anniversary exhibition," (2007), Philadelphia. Reprinted with permission from Mark Price.

been published in popular and independent magazines like *Art on Paper*, *Metropolis*, *Print*, *Ampersand*, *Map* (Scotland), *Juxtapoz*, and *the journal*.²¹ Even *The Christian Science Monitor* published an article about art zines.²² There has been a great deal published in the library literature about zines in general, including an influential 2006 article by Jenna Freedman and Karen Gisonny in *Collection Building* and the book *From A to Zine: Building a Winning Zine Collection in Your Library* (American Library Association).²³ There are also articles found in the education and rhetoric literature about the uses of zines as educational and creative tools.²⁴

The Avant Garde Repeating

Dada and Surrealist periodicals are historical influences on the current art zine milieu. Although the words "fanzine" or "zine" were not existent, artists associated with the Dada art movement, such as Francis Picabia (391), Marcel Duchamp (*The Blind Man*), and Kurt Schwitters (*Merz*), are viewed as art zine influences because they self-published. The Dada movement in particular was developed by networks of friends and colleagues, often at the international level, and such networks continue today. Marcel Duchamp invited Beatrice Wood to illustrate the cover of *The Blind Man*; in the same spirit, Trinie Dalton asked Sue de Beer to contribute to *Mirror Horror* zine. Whether one considers "Little Magazines" of the modern period or art zines of the twenty-first century, the do-it-yourself spirit is the same. What are the manifestos of the modern period if not early zines? Conceptual artists' book makers from the 1960s and 1970s, discussed earlier, influence contemporary zine makers. Andy Warhol's influence is strong—his *Wild Raspberries*, described as a parody of the collectible book, was given away to friends.²⁵ Other art zine influences include self-deprecating underground comic artists like Harvey Pekar, R. Crumb, and Daniel Clowes.

In their quest for young blood—the art school students are also courted by cool hunters and fashion designers in search of new talent—many gallery directors closely follow artists' publications. Aaron Rose, who ran the Alleged Gallery in New York in the 1990s, says that he "has always looked at zines as a type of field guide, to gauge new artistic output and to see who is coming up on the scene."²⁶ Artist zinesters are at the front, along with independent magazine publishers. A good symbol for art zines is glitter: both glam and art supply, glitter is literally ephemera. Zines often seem just as hard to hold. Zines are difficult to discover, hard to acquire, of limited edition, and often lack bibliographic information. They are often created by glamorous youngsters in exclusive groups. It is usually necessary to be part of the community to even know who made a zine; there are some that do not include the initiating agent. Printed Matter bookstore in New York is a great help to librarians and others who attempt to follow the art zine community; the store provides detailed bibliographic information on its Web site. At the same time, many zine makers are not cool, connected, or fashionable. Looking around the Reading Frenzy and Etsy Web sites, one sees numerous art zines made by artists without renown, working outside urban centers.

The Alternative Music Zine Scene

Specific Object, David Platzker's art project and gallery space, recently exhibited art by Raymond Pettibon, who started out making zines and music flyers as part of the Southern



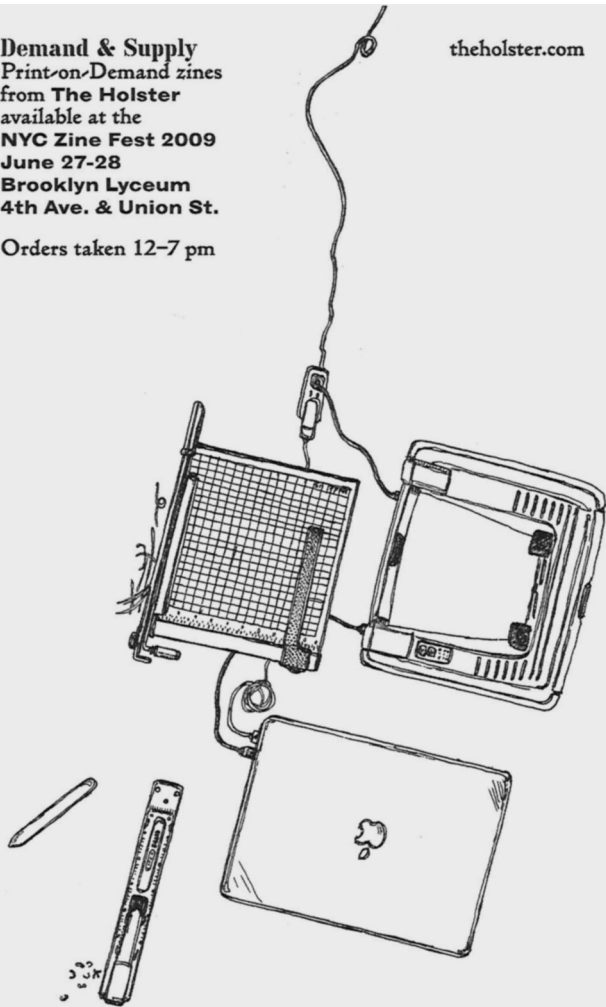
Poster of Zine Covers, published by Nieves (2008). Reprinted with permission from Nieves.

California hardcore music scene. The Pettibon show included art zines like *Tripping Corpse* (1981), which originally cost two dollars and is now worth \$250. Pettibon's zine work was addressed to members of the hardcore music subculture, of which he was a part.²⁷ On the East Coast, Greg Lamarche started out as a graffiti artist (known as SP.ONE) in Queens, New York, in the 1980s. He started a graffiti fanzine called *Skills*, published during the 1990s. In it, Lamarche fused photography, collage, and graffiti, with stunning results. Early contributors included Barry McGee (known as Twist), Shepard Fairey (Obey Giant), and Kaws.²⁸ All of these artists have gone on to successful careers in fine art, fashion, and design. Unfortunately, a WorldCat search yields zero results for this influential zine. *IG Times* (sometimes incorrectly called *International Graffiti Times*) was a broadside zine published from 1983-1994 by David Schmidlapp, who called it "the first graffiti, hip-hop, whatever zine!"²⁹ The author recently examined copies at Printed Matter and learned that the zine was actually art directed by P.H.A.S.E. 2 from 1986-1994. The Stanford Library recently acquired the complete run from Printed Matter.³⁰

In an appropriately ephemeral fundraising letter for Printed Matter dated November 9, 2008, Thurston Moore, founding member of the art rock band Sonic Youth, describes frequenting independent book store Printed Matter back in 1978: "buncha books and zines by artists not the punk rock kind I knew about—these were zines for artists by artists—weird."³¹ It is likely that zines by the Detroit-based art collective Destroy All Monsters were found at Printed Matter at that time; in 2009, the oeuvre of Destroy All Monsters—including vinyl LPs, cassettes, and zines—was on display at Printed Matter. Two of the group's founding members were Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw, now quite

Demand & Supply
 Print-on-Demand zines
 from **The Holster**
 available at the
NYC Zine Fest 2009
 June 27-28
 Brooklyn Lyceum
 4th Ave. & Union St.
 Orders taken 12-7 pm

theholster.com



Poster by The Holster group, showing zines-on-demand service, produced for NYC Zine Fest '09, June 25 & 26, 2009. Reprinted with permission from Phil Lubliner.

famous. In 2006, Berin Bolonu wrote that "the do-it-yourself ethos of the 70s and 80s, which spawned all types of zines ... gives artist and writers the freedom to engage in zine-making as an effective way of sharing their output with cherished networks of friends, colleagues, and collaborators."³² Other musicians who have been making zines since the 1980s include Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth, Daniel Johnson, and Billy Childish.

Zines occupy the same tactile zone as vinyl records, loved and collected and fiercely favored by a subculture. The author recalls going to independent record stores in Ohio in the 1980s and 1990s to look for the latest issues of music zines. By that time, the punk rock zines of the 1970s were defunct and had yet to be recognized as important documents. Now designers and academics study them.³³ Historical music zines that influenced artists were about punk rock: *Punk*, *Search & Destroy*³⁴ and *Sniffin' Glue*. Later, the college rock scene of the 1980s spawned music zines like *Flipper* and *Maximum Rock & Roll*. Most independent record labels have either published or distributed art zines or books. SST (now defunct) published Pettibon's early work, and Drag City, a label based in Chicago, just published *The Collected Zines* of Harmony Corinne, who is best known as a filmmaker. The publication is available as a soft cover book or a limited

edition box containing facsimiles of original zines inside a cardboard box with a poster. The box is perhaps a reference to the rumor that Corinne distributed his zines to homeless people. Gary Singh says that zines are "do-it-yourself communiqués with a rabid noncommercial ethos."³⁵ It does not get much more noncommercial than giving zines to homeless people.

Types of Art Zines

In the last few years, the number of art zines for sale on the Internet has skyrocketed. However, most knowledge about art zines can be gained by paying attention at art galleries, museums,³⁶ independent bookstores, guerilla and pop-up stores, book release and magazine launch parties, and art fairs. Over the last several years, some patterns have emerged.

A recent trend is zines as exhibition catalogs. An historical example is the comic-format publications made by the Chicago-based art collective Hairy Who from 1966-1969: *The Portable Hairy Who*, *The Hairy Who Sideshow*, *Hairy Who/Smoke Hairy Who/Hairy Who (cat-a-log)*.³⁷ Another is the catalog for General Idea's performance, "Miss General Idea Pageant Programme," at the Art Gallery of Ontario, October 1, 1971. The catalog was free at the performance and now sells for \$750 on the Art Metropole Web site.³⁸ More recently, zine catalogs have become commonplace. An exhibition may or may not feature zines, but the catalog is published in zine form. A recent example is Ed Johnson's *Indecision Time*, a catalog for his show at London Street Projects in Los Angeles in 2003, and *Werewolf Express*, a zine by Trinie Dalton published in conjunction with the exhibition *The Zine Unbound: Kults, Werewolves, and Sarcastic Hippies* at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. *The journal* magazine includes zine supplements, including the catalog for *Ellsworth Kelly: A Special Exhibition* at the Matthew Marks gallery in New York, available only from *the journal*.³⁹ Partisan Gallery in San Francisco had a photography exhibit, *One to Many*, in which twenty artists made books on a photocopier and packaged them as a box set; these became the primary artifact for the exhibition. The set was limited to fifty copies priced at \$10.⁴⁰ Printed Matter showed Nieves: An Exhibition, making available for perusal all the publications, including zines, produced by Nieves since 2004. A collectible box set of zines was produced for the show.⁴¹

Also evident are zines by collectives. Such groups may produce more than zines, but they are known for making affordable, unique printed material. There are many groups currently active, including *Uninhabitable Mansions* in Brooklyn; *Temporary Services* in Chicago; *The Session* in Amsterdam; *Closed Caption Comics* in Baltimore, Maryland; *Paperrad* in Providence, Rhode Island, and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; *Friends With You*, from Miami, Florida, and New York; *The Holster* in Brooklyn; and *Nous Vous* collective (Leeds, England). *Art Bureau*, *Colouring Outside the Lines*, and *Pencil Fight* are zines made by and for artists.

There are visual arts zines that provide an alternative critical discourse: Mimi Zeiger, founder of *Loud Paper*, an architecture zine, says that when it was founded in 1996, "Self-publishing was a stance against the homogeneity of architectural discourse. It was a way of taking back the means of production and a chance for multiple voices to write louder about architecture."⁴² *Infiltration: the zine about going places you're not supposed to go* was founded by Jeff Chapman and devoted to the subject of urban

exploration.⁴³ There is a history of pamphlet publications in architecture, and Zeiger groups pamphlets, artists' booklets, occasional papers, and zines in the same category of independent publishing.⁴⁴

Comic zines are a large part of the zine world. The readers are legion, and many comic artists are being offered book deals with excellent independent publishers like Fantagraphics, Top Shelf, and Drawn and Quarterly. Like studio-based artists, many continue to produce affordable comics or zines even though their work is appearing in book form or selling as fine art in galleries. Much of the overlap between comic art and zines has to do, in the author's opinion, with the popularity of graphic novels and the recent legitimacy of comics—as both an art form and a scholarly subject. Previously, comics were about superheroes and teenagers, and the general consensus among academics was that they were not worth studying or preserving. Now that the content is considered worthy of examination, whether as popular culture or Cold War history, comic books are the subject of academic discussion. Recent comics explore intensely personal and socio-political subjects to great critical acclaim.⁴⁵ Most comic book stores now have a section for diaristic and political comics, apart from superheroes, manga, and fantasy comics. Library holdings and policies regarding historical and contemporary comic books have recently been studied as well.⁴⁶

Zines reprinted in book form or facsimile by indie publishers like Picturebox, Inc. and Drag City are another trend. Watson's *Unlovable* was recently collected in book form, published by Fantagraphics. K8 Hardy has published, in a clear plastic envelope, *FashionFashion*, a four-zine edition compiling the first four issues of the zine by the same name. *Hot & Cold* editors plan to publish an anthology of all of the *Hot & Cold* issues. Peres Projects has released a box edition of the first two years of the queer art zine *DADDY*. Asher Penn: *Nothing Nothing Nothing Nothing* is a reprint of ten zines Penn made from 2004-2007. For the book, Penn photographed on a different surface of his apartment every page of every zine he made.⁴⁷ The *KnitKnit* book (2007) is an outcome of the popularity of issues 1-7 of the unique *KnitKnit* zine. Champion Fine Art would produce for each exhibit a desktop-published, zine catalog in an edition of 100, distributed freely to gallery visitors. The page spreads that made up those catalogs now make up the recently published book *Champion Zero* (Los Angeles: 2nd Cannons Publications, 2008). In 2006 a book marking the tenth anniversary of *This is the Salvation Army* zine was published by Printed Matter (New York) and Art Metropole (Toronto) and contained an entire reprint of the zines along with more recent drawings and collages.⁴⁸ None of these books, not even the facsimiles, are equivalent to the zines they represent. They are instead related publications and testaments to the value and popularity of these zines, many of which become collectors' items.

Electronic Zines

Zines presented on the Internet in PDF format (or other electronic formats) exist, but PDF art zines in general feel like poor substitutes for the zine object. They are better than no depiction at all, but many features of the zine—paper or other material texture, smell, dimensionality, and pagination—are lost when it is read online. The original print zine *How to be Fashionable and Consume Like Me* offers the reader a delightful, amusing



Étagère-En-Valise piece by Robin Cameron (2009). Piece consists of a group of miniature versions of previously made zines, a bookstand, a glass shelf, and brackets. Edition of 5. Reprinted with permission from the artist.

experience turning the pages. When the PDF file is printed out, the original size and shape of the zine, the paper that Enright selected for publication, and the texture of the fonts are all lost. However, it is fortunate that this simulacrum of the zine, which is now out of print, exists on the Internet. Asher Penn, a conceptual zine maker, offers PDF versions of some of his zines on his own Web site.⁴⁹ Again, there is a loss, particularly when the zine is read only on a screen.

Are blogs killing zines? The two formats are entirely different, although they both share a similar motivation: to share one's points of view or interests with others. Blogs are made from templates, with little creative control by the blogger; they unravel in a vertical way, whereas zines can take any form. Blogs are designed to be immediate media, but zines are planned and edited. Blogs must be either read on a screen or printed out as a scrolling, unsightly printout. Piepmeier offers this comparison:

Blogs are easy to create because they are a ready-made technology, but only bloggers with web design skills can play an active role in designing their pages. Zines, on the other hand, are simpler technology, and because no template exists, each element requires choice and each zine is different. The look of zines, then, is individualized and significant in a way that blogs are not.⁵⁰

Contemporary Artists and Zine Practice

Contemporary art zinesters include a range of artists and designers from self-taught practitioners to well-known contemporary artists like Tom Sachs,⁵¹ Ryan McGinley, Scott Treleaven, Jack Pierson, Kim Gordon, Michel Gondry, Laura Owens, Geoff

McFetridge, Rita Ackermann, Terrence Koh, aka Asian Punk Boy, Ryan McGinness,⁵² Marcel Dzama, Leif Goldberg, David Shrigley, Chris Johanson, Jeff Soto, Gary Baseman, Richard Prince, Barry McGee, and Chris Duncan. The artists, despite commercial success selling paintings or photographs, feel strongly about creating affordable work. Many of the artists listed have produced zines for the Swiss publisher Nieves, others for the magazine *the journal*, and many of their own accord.

Phil Lubliner is a member of The Holster, an art zine collective that recently created zines on demand at the NYC Zine Fest 2009 in Brooklyn. He regards zine making as an artist's practice, one particularly favorable for experimentation and spontaneity. Some zines are experiments that lead to work made in other forms, book-based or not; others *are* finished work.⁵³ According to the artist and designer Robin Cameron, who works with whatever form she thinks follows her idea, emerging artists and designers use the zine form to present their work. If galleries are not interested, friends and other people are, and often a great zine leads to a professional opportunity. Cameron also uses zines as a material: a recent piece, *Étagère-En-Valise* (2009), consists of a group of miniature versions of previously made zines, a book-stand, a glass shelf, and brackets.⁵⁴

Trinie Dalton, a well known zinester, wrote, "To me, my zines are literary/art/music history anthologies, following the group-show or salon style. They're like parties on paper, and I want to be an exquisite host."⁵⁵ Dalton is deeply connected in the art and literature worlds, commissioning work from ace artists like David Altmejd, Sue deBeer, and Matt Greene. In the Bay Area, Chris Duncan and Griffin McFarland recruit artist friends for *Hot & Cold* zine, which began with #10 and is counting backwards to #1, when it will cease. For Duncan, zines are expressions of communal growth and achievement—about changing the art world, ultimately.⁵⁶ In New York City, Scott Hug has produced *K48*, a zine with a subversive and campy sensibility, since 1999. He states, "So much was changing so fast and I felt that it was important to try to document it and create a context to think about art and how it related to culture at large."⁵⁷

Zines as Performance

In an interview about the prominence of drawing in his periodical, Michael Levin, the founder of *the journal* (one of many magazines that started out as a zine), describes the action and immediacy he values as an editor:

I like artists that work fast, which is probably why there are so many drawings in *the journal*. I like gesture. *The journal* works in a really diaristic way. The name "the journal" refers to the book with all the notes in it and your appointments and maybe things aren't perfect. It's just a record of what you were doing and who you were at a certain date.⁵⁸

Benjamin Sommerhalder, publisher of Nieves zines, publishes "classic" black-and-white photocopied zines, and says that "A zine for me is always photocopied. ...[It] always has something immediate about it."⁵⁹ Maxwell Krivitzky from Ooga Booga in Los Angeles has this to say about art zines:

I would hesitate in even saying that zines are only a product of subcultures, but perhaps a form that more often follows a more gestural approach to the dissemination of information (versus book, for example). Perhaps street



Spread from Lost in the Stacks zine by Mike Perry (2009), made for Design by the Book Project, co-produced by New York Public Library and Design Sponge. Reprinted with permission from the artist.

art vs. white cube. Many zines are meant to be tossed out, re-appropriated, and inherently obsolete after reading, but not necessarily un-edited or hastily conceptualized. Which makes me wonder about archiving in the context of zine making (personally, it's like videotaping or photographing a happening, it just doesn't make sense, but that's just me).⁶⁰

A similar comment is found in *Dispersion* (2002), in which Seth Price quotes Boris Groys: some artists have a "deep malaise towards documentation and the archive."⁶¹ Upon the creation of an art zine collection at Pratt Institute Library, this very question came up. Initially, the decision—based more on workload than on philosophy—was not to catalog, archive, and preserve; rather, the collection would, by turns, grow and shrink, as well as suffer damage and loss. But it would be a Living Theater of sorts. Later, the decision was made to selectively catalog and preserve zines, while initially displaying all, including unsolicited donations. Zines could be compared to graffiti, as well as performance: the action by anyone to be immediately seen and heard; the assertion that art could or should be ephemeral; and the desire not to be legitimized by the art establishment. Acquisition and preservation by a library, a type of art establishment, may be undesirable to some zine makers. Such a position may be regrettable in the long term. Performance art of the 1970s was poorly documented, often out of a similar sensibility, and the general consensus is that it is unfortunate that more records do not exist.

Returning to discussion of action or movement, Piepmeier says that the zine format of *The East Village Inky* allows the creator, Ayun Halliday, to represent visual energy and fluidity that the linear typescript of a standard book or magazine cannot accommodate.⁶² Zines are often diaristic and reveal the doodles and attempts otherwise found in an artist's journal or sketchbooks. Zines often purposefully display cross outs, mistakes, cut offs, and other gestures or actions that depict the thought process. The artist performs on the page. Only a palimpsest drawing comes close to such zines. Piepmeier says that a page of *The East Village Inky* zine, crowded, crammed with text and without a margin, is a visual representation of a crowded home and also calls attention to the materiality of the zine itself.⁶³

On this topic of performance, it is worth further discussing how the relationship between alternative music and art zines remains strong: in 1997, Johanna Fateman, future member of the band Le Tigre, published the zine *Artaud-Mania: the Diary of a Fan. Pi.X*, a music zine recently profiled in the *Times Style Magazine*, is a double-sided, foldout poster, which comes out once a month and is issued on lo-fi newsprint. In 2006, Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth released a fanzine through Nieves called *Stairway: is it my body?*, a limited-edition supplement to her artists' book *Chronicles v. 2*. Nearly every musician the author knows has either made or collected zines. Performance takes place on stage, but it may be continued during the action of zine making and distribution, and zines may become documents of performances, as well.

Conclusion: In the Library

Piepmeier makes a compelling argument that "zines' materiality creates community because it creates pleasure, affection, allegiance, and vulnerability."⁶⁴ Academic libraries seek new ways to attract students and create a learning community or laboratory, especially in the era of the "Death of the Book" and the "Age of Google." Zines bring students to the library, and students are making zines, whether or not librarians and faculty realize it.⁶⁵ A zine collection can be launched with a file cabinet, folders, and signs. Collecting zines provides an opportunity to involve patrons in collection development by soliciting donations or recommendations. They could be cataloged, or not.⁶⁶ They could be displayed, or not. Art zines become historical records or primary sources documenting artists' networks, practices, activities, and interests. Zines also provide a means to make the library seem "cool" and progressive, especially to discriminating art and design students. Finally, zines, like other special print collections, promote use of the library. Art, design, and English faculty will be interested in bringing their classes to the library to examine zine specimens, which help students begin zine-making assignments. Greater acquisition, promotion, use, and preservation of art zines in academic libraries opens the door to many creative opportunities.

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Notes

1. Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Microcosm, 2008).
2. Alison Piepmeier, "Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 18, no. 2 (2008): 230.
3. Lynda Bunting, "What an Artist's Book Is," exhibition essay in *To Illustrate & Multiply: An Open Book* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), <http://www.moca.org/openbook/essay2.php> (accessed December 10, 2008); Duncan Chappell, "Typologising the Artist's Book," *Art Libraries Journal* 28, no. 4 (2003): 12-20; Joanna Drucker, "Critical Issues / Exemplary Works," *The Bonefolder: an e-journal for the bookbinder and the book artist* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 3-15.
4. Janet Zweig, "Artists, Books, Zines," *Afterimage* 26, no. 1 (July/August 1998): 4-5.
5. Thomas Padon, "Interview with Martha Wilson," in *Artist/Author Contemporary Artists' Books*, Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot (New York: D.A.P. and the American Federation of Arts, 1998), 109.
6. Louise Kulp, "Artists' Books in Libraries: A Review of the Literature," *Art Documentation* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 5-10.
7. This description according to Betsy P. Pittman and John Whaley, "Collecting Book Art," *College & Research Libraries News* 54, no. 4 (April 1993): 190, quoted in Kulp, "Artists' Books in Libraries," 5. Timothy Shipe and Harlan Sifford discuss artists' books of the 1960s by artists like Ed Ruscha, which were cheaply made and sold: "Artists' Books in the University Libraries," from *Books at Iowa* 54 (April 1991), <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/Bai/Sifford.htm>.
8. Bunting, "What an Artist's Book Is," 3.
9. Susan Thomas, "Zeroing In on Contemporary, Independent Visual Arts Magazines," *Art Documentation* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 40-50.
10. Quoted in Jessica Pressler, "Remember Zines? Look at Them Now," *New York Times* (May 7, 2006) ST14 (L).
11. The LA-based magazine *Swindle*, for example, has corporate advertising.
12. Edward Lovett, "Warts and All [Ted McGrath]," *Print* 62, no.2 (April 2008): 129.
13. Rick Myers, *Bite Marks in Paper* (Zurich: Nieves, 2007).
14. There are costly zines, such as designer Susan Cianciolo's *The Captain of This Ship is a Famous God* and *Untitled Zine*. *Untitled Zine* sold for \$50 and was made in a series of ten especially for Ooga Booga book store.
15. Piepmeier, "Why Zines Matter," 228.
16. Ibid.
17. Mandy Mastrovita, "Low Tech Media Chicanery as a Means of Cultural Resistance," *Journal of Artists Books (JAB)* 16 (Fall 2001): 2.
18. Including Elizabeth Lawes and Vicky Webb, "Ephemera in the Art Library," *Art Libraries Journal* 28, no. 2 (2000): 35-39; Gill Saunders, "Collecting the Contemporary," *Art Libraries Journal* 28, no. 4 (2003); John Held, Jr., "A Living Thing in Flight: Contributions and Liabilities of Collecting and Preparing

Contemporary Avant-Garde Materials for an Archive," *Archives of American Art Journal* 40, no. 3-4 (2000): 10-16.

19. *Émigré*, no. 46 (Spring 1998): 2-62.

20. Stephen Heller, "Do It Yourself: The Graphic Design of Punk Zines," *Baseline* no. 34 (2001): 5-12.

21. Ken Miller, "God Save the Zine," *Art on Paper* (September/October 2008): 70-77; Neil Cooper, "Zine Culture," *Map* (Winter 2005): 44-48; Andrea Moed, "The Zine-ing of Architecture," *Metropolis* 17, no. 8 (May 1998): 19-25; Carolee Gilligan Wheeler, "Some Favorite Zines," *Ampersand* 24, no. 4 (Summer 2007): 18-19.

22. Daniella Dreilinger, "Wanted: Pen, Plain Old Paper, Imagination," *Christian Science Monitor* (December 14, 2007): 12 [16].

23. Jenna Freedman and Karen Gisonny, "Zines in Libraries: How, What, and Why?" *Collection Building* 25, no. 1 (2006): 26-30; Julie Bartel, *From A to Zine: Building a Winning Zine Collection in Your Library* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2004).

24. Some examples include the following: Christie Bott, "Zines: The Ultimate Creative Writing Project," *The English Journal* 92, no. 2 (2002): 27-33; Kristin G. Gongdon and Doug Blandy, "Zinesters in the Classroom: Using Zines to Teach about Postmodernism and the Communication of Ideas," *Art Education* 56, no. 3 (May 2003): 44-52; Barbara J. Guzzetti and Margaret Gamboa, "Zines for Social Justice: Adolescent Girls Writing on their Own," *Reading Research Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (October/November/December 2004): 408-36.

25. Betty Bright, *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America, 1960-1980* (New York: Granary, 2005), 79-80.

26. Quoted in Berin Bolonu, "They Look Good on Paper," Printed Matter Web site, Research Room > Critical Essays, 2006: 1-6, <http://printedmatter.org/researchroom/essays/berin.cfm>.

27. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Raymond Pettibon: Return to Disorder and Disfiguration," *October* 92 (Spring 2000): 36-51.

28. Caleb Neelan, "All of a Piece," *Print* 62, no. 4 (August 2008): 83-89.

29. From introductory statement about collected, numbered edition of *IG Times*, at Printed Matter.

30. Interview with Catherine Krudy, Distribution and Web Manager, Printed Matter; there were 27 published issues.

31. Fundraising letter received by author from Printed Matter, November 2008.

32. Bolonu, "They Look Good on Paper," 1.

33. Heller, "Do It Yourself," 5-12.

34. *Search and Destroy* was a tabloid-sized newsprint zine in San Francisco. Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti provided the seed money. See *Print Fetish* Web site, Zines/Print (May 21, 2007), http://printfetish.com/2007/05/get_some_history_punk.html.

35. Gary Singh reviews the zine exhibit Third Annual Art of Zines in "Glue it Yourself," *Metro* weekly newspaper (January 9-15, 2003), <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/01.09.03/zines-0302.html>.

36. *The Generational: Younger Than Jesus* exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art (April 8-July 5, 2009), for example, includes a "live archive" section, heavily represented by art zines, including publications by Robin Cameron and Eleanor Whitney. The archive section, however, is not considered an actual part of the show, as the artists represented there

are not listed on the roster of artists. The author had to write a special e-mail request to receive a list of the publications and their authors.

37. Dan Nadel, "Hairy Who's History of the Hairy Who," *The Ganzfeld* #3 (2003): 110-145. The exhibitions were "accompanied by inexpensive comic book format publications for which the group did their own color separations and either produced new work or adapted preexisting images (113)."

38. <http://www.artmetropole.com>, "Mail Art + Ephemera" page.

39. Confirmed by phone call to Matthew Marks Gallery on March 28, 2009.

40. <http://partisangallery.blogspot.com/2009/01/one-to-many.html>.

41. *The Nieves Zine Box 2008* is produced in an extremely limited edition of twenty and contains a complete set of the zines that were produced in 2008.

42. *Loud Paper* 4, no. 4 (2009), free poster zine.

43. *Ibid.* *Infiltration* was published from 1996-2005.

44. Personal interview with Mimi Zeiger, January 14, 2009.

45. Most agree that *Maus* by Art Spiegelman is the progenitor of deeply personal and political comics, which include work by Alison Bechdel, David B., Joe Sacco, Guy Delisle, Jessica Abel, Adriane Tomine, and many others.

46. Comics and graphic novels in academic libraries were discussed by Amanda Gluibizzi in the article "The Aesthetics and Academics of Graphic Novels and Comics," *Art Documentation* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 28-30.

47. Interview by Alex Gartenfeld, "Asher Penn: All for NOTHING," *Interview* magazine blog, (March 12, 2009), <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/blogs/art/2009-03-12/asher-penn-nothing-nothing-an-art-service>.

48. From the Wikipedia entry for artist Scott Treleaven, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scott_Treleaven.

49. <http://asherpenn.tripod.com/forsale.html>.

50. Piepmeier, "Why Zines Matter," 221.

51. Tom Sachs continues to reprint earlier zines at affordable prices, called *Dollar Cuts*. About the original zine *Haute Bricolage*: "In 1999 Tom Sachs made an elaborate collage zine in full color with taped in photographs, edition of 72. Sachs later made a 'Third Class Version,' a re-issue of the original hand-made zine. The zine explores the artist's 1999 exhibition at Mary Boone Gallery." Tom Sachs's Web site: <http://www.tomsachs.org/store>.

52. *What You Don't Know Can Hurt You*, made out of cartridge paper, 1994, found in Liz Farrelly, *Zines* (London: Booth-Cibborn, 2001). Both WorldCat and Google searches for the author and the title yield zero results.

53. Phone interview with Phil Lubliner, March 10, 2009.

54. E-mail exchange with Robin Cameron, June 12, 2009.

55. From dust jacket of Trinie Dalton's book *Mythtym* (Brooklyn: Picturebox, Inc., 2008).

56. Bolonu, "They Look Good on Paper," 4.

57. *Ibid.*, 2.

58. As told to Alex Gartenfeld, "For the Love of Art: Michael Levin on Drawing," *Paper* magazine (October 10, 2008): 72-73.

59. Quoted in Miller, "God Save the Zine," 72.

(continued on pg. 38)

60. E-mail interview with Maxwell Krivitsky, March 10, 2009.
61. As quoted in Seth Price, *Dispersion 3*, PDF, Distributed History Web site, <http://distributedhistory.com/books.htm>.
62. Piepmeier, "Why Zines Matter," 222.
63. Piepmeier, "Why Zines Matter," 222-23.
64. *Ibid.*, 230.
65. Levin says that *the journal* started "as a photocopied zine during our first year at Montserrat College of Art. At the time we were interested in the creativity that came out of the snowboard-skateboard community. None of the magazines were showing this aspect of the culture, so we put together a rough zine." Gartenfeld, "For the Love of Art: Michael Levin on Drawing," 73.

66. Joanna Drucker has written about the need for librarians to be discerning selectors of artists' books and to develop a discriminating, qualitative selection process. Her paper in *The Bonefolder* (see note 3) establishes wonderful metadata for creating rich, full bibliographic records for artists' books. Perhaps art zines will receive such treatment in the future.

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- Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Routledge, 1981.
- Lukas, Paul. "Designer 'zines,'" *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design* 14, no. 3 (1996): 34-35.
- Todd, Mark, and Esther Pearl Watson. *Watcha Mean, What's a Zine? The Art of Making Zines and Mini-Comics*. Boston: Graphia, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Recent Art Zine Fairs, Exhibitions, and Events

- A Few Zines: Dispatches from the Edge of Architectural Production. Organized by Gavin Browning and curated by Mimi Zeiger, Studio-X, New York, January 8-February 28, 2009.
- Artist as Publisher. Organized by Omar Lopez-Chahoud. Exhibition that examines independent art publications produced by contemporary artists. The Center for Book Arts, New York, July 10-September 13, 2008.
- Zürcher Zine Sezession, One-day Independent Publishers Fair, December 14, 2008, Nieves and Rollo Press. Zurich, Switzerland.
- Art of Zines 04. San Jose Museum of Art. Anno Domino gallery partnered with SJMA for fourth installment, 2004 (see Zine Scene).

The Zine UnBound: Kults, Werewolves and Sarcastic Hippies. Curated by Berin Bolonu. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, October-December 2005.

Zine Scene. Cranbrook Art Museum, January 2002. Curated by Sarah Schleuning, traveled to Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California; exhibit grew as it continued, 2002.

Zine Soup. Curated by TCC. First exhibition of international zines and self-published books in Denmark. Many North American participants, Copenhagen, June 1-July 1, 2007.

Zineland. Organized by Darin Kelin. A gathering of L.A. 'zinesters and collectors of independent publications from across the nation. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, July 14, 2007.

Art Zine Distributors and Sellers

- Analogue Books (online): <http://www.analoguebooks.co.uk/category/zines>
- Art Zine Distro (online): <http://www.tranbok.org/catalog.html>
- Atomic Books (Baltimore): <http://www.atomicbooks.com>
- Cederteg (Stockholm): <http://cederteg-books.blogspot>
- Cinders Gallery (Brooklyn): <http://www.cindersgallery.com>
- Etsy (online): http://www.etsy.com/category/books_and_zines/zine
- Family Bookstore (Los Angeles): <http://www.familylosangeles.com/>
- Golden Age (Chicago): <http://www.shopgoldenage.com>
- Last Gasp! (San Francisco): <http://www.lastgasp.com/1/12/0/Quimby's>
- Nieves (Zurich): <http://www.nieves.ch>
- Ooga Booga (Los Angeles): <http://www.oogaboogastore.com>
- Printed Matter (New York): <http://www.printedmatter.org>
- Reading Frenzy (Portland, Oregon): <http://www.readingfrenzy.com>
- TCC Gallery (Copenhagen): <http://www.tccgallery.com/shop>

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