

The Art Book Tradition in Twentieth-Century Europe

ed. by Kathryn Brown. Ashgate, October 2013. 212 p. ill. ISBN 9781409420651 (cl.), \$99.95.

Reviewed May 2014 Jane A. Carlin, Library Director, Collins Memorial Library, University of Puget Sound, jcarlin@pugetsound.edu



The addition of a scholarly monograph on the subject of the art book is a welcome contribution to the limited canon of original research in this area. In her introduction, Kathryn Brown, a professor of Art History at Tilburg University, discusses the problem of defining this unique genre, citing the respected book historian and artist, Johanna Drucker. It is clear that Brown's focus in compiling the essays was not to repeat the history of this genre, but rather to focus on the aesthetic and philosophical interpretation of the *livre d'artiste* as evidenced by her discussion of the cluster concept of art as put forward by Berys Gaut, Professor of Philosophy at St. Andrews and newly-appointed President of the British Society of Aesthetics. Brown states that the primary purpose of the book is to analyze innovative attempts to challenge familiar hierarchies between texts and images, to fuse different expressive media, and to reconceptualize traditional notions of ekphrasis or the literary description on a visual work of

art. While this is indeed an interesting and thought-provoking intellectual approach, readers would have benefited from an introductory chapter that connects the history of this genre so that the essays are interpreted in a more meaningful context.

The essays cover the artists and writers generally associated with this genre such as Raoul Dufy, Guillaume Apollinaire, Henri Matisse, George Braque, Wassily Kandinsky, and Renè Magritte. In addition, the publication introduces new scholarship on lesser-studied artists. For example Deborah Schultz (Richmond University, London) discusses the works of Arnold Daghani, who survived a Nazi slave labor camp and Peter Z. Malkin, one of the Israeli agents who tracked down Adolf Eichmann. Sarah Patricia Hill (Victoria University, New Zealand) analyzes the visual poetry of Giulia Niccolai. Derval Tubridy (Goldsmiths, University of London) discusses the Chinese composer Bun-Ching Lam's publication of Samuel Beckett's *Quatre Poèmes/Four*

Songs.

This publication is intended for serious scholars and historians of the livre d'artiste. The level of writing is complex and presumes an understanding of aesthetics and philosophy, as well as prior knowledge of this genre. The twenty-three illustrations are limited to black and white and do very little to enhance the essays. This is due, no doubt, to the accessibility of the publications. All the essays are well documented with footnotes and there is also an extensive bibliography, including many foreign publications.

This book presents fresh interpretations of the unique relationship between word and text, author and artist, and the intersection of art and writing. It offers new and often intriguing insights into collaborations between artists and writers as well sheds light on lesser-known artists of this genre, thus opening up opportunities for additional new scholarship.