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SUMMER READING

Artists Interpret Literature

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Contributing Writer

By Seth Lower

By its very definition, "Summer Reading" promises viewers a cool, easy-going art adventure. At the core of this show is artwork inspired by texts or otherwise infused with literariness.

This is my first visit to Hosfelt Gallery in San Francisco, and I'm surprised by the size of it. It's a big, industrial-looking space, and the art is spare – peppered throughout a few rooms, with plenty of air between the mostly 2D works. I circle from a distance until I hear what sounds like whispering and classical music. To my glee, it's coming from a large, ratty Bible hung on the wall. It's Jim Campbell's *I Have Never Read the Bible*. The artist reads from the book, spelling out each letter of every word. It sounds like some strangely musical ritual, until I listen closely and piece together the occasional H-I-M or E-V-I-L. The letters flow out from a speaker hidden somewhere within the tattered pages. It affects the whole space, and from then on I feel that I'm in the presence of words hovering just out of comprehension, like the sentence I keep re-reading as I daydream—it's in there somewhere, but it's tangled up with reality.

John O'Reilly's *Dead Centaur-of Cormac McCarthy* takes a more cryptic approach, getting at a kind of visual language. He takes images from various sources, including Polaroids and porn, and puts them into collage. The mix of these elements provokes a strange, romantic-yet-spooky world of experience. I think of things, or rather feel things that I cannot name; nevertheless, it harmonizes, makes sense. It's a dreamlike accumulation of displaced and interwoven scenes, parts, and moments—I feel like I've finally dozed off while reading that sentence, dreaming a conglomerate slide show of the things I've imagined. And this time there's something lurking in those woods. I'm surprised that it works, but it does; no new age collective unconscious business here, just the wild weirdness of the human psyche.



Installation View



"I Have Never Read The Bible," 1995 by Jim Campbell



Turning, I then find more words in the forms of Su Blackwell's meticulous and dreamlike constructions. Blackwell cuts up book pages and reconstructs them within fantastical little cabinets. In one of them, a carousel built of words spins, as a lone gull hovers above a paper sailboat, seemingly making its way into the sunset...or the next chapter. The words echo the images; in another scene, circus performers (including a sea lion) traverse their unfolding futures: "...at the age of sixteen he ran away... to join a traveling circus." They are a treat.

A similar unexpected overlapping of text and image is Amy Hicks's video installation *ReAdaptation: the book series*. She uses well-known books that have been made into movies, like Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (*Blade Runner*) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (*Frankenstein ca. 1931*). She uses the actual books as structures with which to show the movie; in other words, she makes flipbooks by pasting movie stills into the book pages. The flipbooks are then translated into video. I'm fascinated with trying to figure out how they synchronize, when suddenly, Philip K. Dick's book flaps its pages and flutters off. The loop comes back around in about a minute and begins again, continuing on to *The Stepford Wives*. I wonder briefly which was better – the book or the film – but why worry when you can experience both at the same time?

There are a couple of other small gems in the show, but why take my word for it? Put the book down and go look at some art about books. The show runs through August 9th in [San Francisco](#) and [New York](#).



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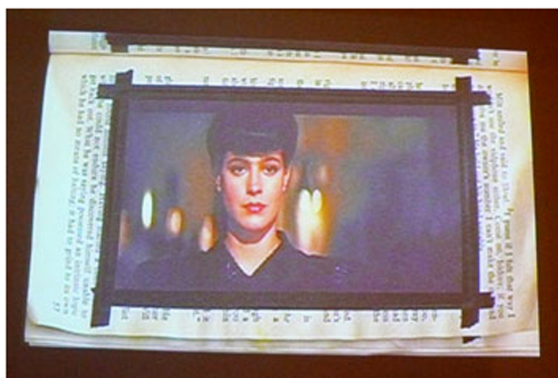
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"Merry-Go-Round" 2008, by Su Blackwell



"Dead Centaur-of Cormac McCarthy," 2008 unique Polaroid and color coupler print montage, 8.5626 x 13.125 inches, by John O'Reilly



"ReAdaptation: The book series" 2007-2008 digital video, 60-second loop, by Amy Hicks