

Artists' Catalogs:

An Approach to the Foundations of an Artistic Genre

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Abstract—Since the 1960s, artists' books have become an essential form of contemporary art. In this context, artists have also used their exhibition catalogs as forms of artistic expression. Within this framework of creative practices, this article delves into the characteristics that could lead to the definition of artists' catalogs as a specific artistic genre. The concepts of artists' books and exhibition catalogs are compared to discuss the ambiguities and blurred lines that make a precise delimitation difficult. The combination of both typologies is analyzed through a series of works by artists in the field of catalogs as works of art. Despite the great variability that emerges from the different perspectives through which artists' catalogs have been conceived and produced, some common features come to light. These common features, as well as an examination of the functions and uses associated with artists' catalogs, pave the way for answering the crucial questions as to whether these publications—as the works of art they are—are still catalogs and if they might even be considered as a differentiated genre of artists' books.

INTRODUCTION

"Book as Artwork 1960/1970"¹ was one of the first critical publications to focus on what was at that time (1971) a new artistic category: artists' books. Different ways of embellishing books, manuscripts, or prints are as old as books themselves. However, artists' books² are a phenomenon that did not appear until the 1960s with the emergence of conceptual art and, as Johanna Drucker contends, "in many ways it

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1. Germano Celant, "Book as Artwork 1960/1970," *Data*, no. 1 (1971): 35–49.

2. The term "artists' books" is now widespread, although some important authors have preferred other terms. Clive Phillpot distinguishes between artists' books and bookworks, preferring the latter to refer to contemporary artists' books. Clive Phillpot, "Books, Bookworks, Book Objects, Artist's Books," *Artforum* 20 (May 1982): 77.

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could be argued that the artist's book is the quintessential twentieth-century art form."³ For Anne Moeglin-Delcroix,⁴ the key year is 1962, when four seminal works were produced or published: *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* by Edward Ruscha; *Dagblegt Bull* by Dieter Roth; *Moi, Ben je signe* by Ben Vautier; and *Topographie anecdotée du hasard* by Daniel Spoerri. Many of these works, often self-published, were mistaken for normal books because of their industrial appearance (they were generally offset-printed), and were, of course, far removed from *livres d'artistes* or special editions. The dematerialization of the artistic object favored the use of new resources, and the book appeared as an ideal place to disseminate thoughts, photographs, graphics, maps, and drawings. Books or artists' catalogs were an added bonus for viewers—a direct, first-hand experience rich in haptic qualities—and for artists, they were a way of communicating more directly with the audience without intermediaries.

It was during the 1970s that critics became aware of the innovative potential of artists' books, and although this art form emerged as an alternative to galleries and museums, it quickly became closely linked with them. For example, in 1972, at the XXXVI Venice Biennale, there was a section called *Il libro come luogo di ricerca*. That same year in London, books were exhibited at the Nigel Greenwood Gallery, and the following year at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia. Ever since artists' books were integrated into the arts system, as Riva Castleman has pointed out, "artists have . . . been involved in designing their exhibition catalogs, and depending upon their degree of involvement, this has given them another creative outlet as well as experience in the articulation of their ideas in book form."⁵

Indeed, some galleries and museums have published artists' catalogs that are a radical departure from the traditional list of exhibited works and reproductions, as an alternative akin to artists' books. Sometimes these catalogs are actually artists' books edited especially for a particular exhibition—that is, when an artist is commissioned for an exhibition, at the same time he or she is invited to produce a book to be published concomitantly. The line between artists' books published on the occasion of an exhibition and artists' catalogs is so blurred that it has led the American critic Peter Frank to remark wryly that the best way for an artist to publish an artist's book is to disguise it as an exhibition catalog.⁶

Some precursors of catalogs made by artists are worthy of mention. For example, the catalog for the international exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (1947), in part of the edition, contained lithographs and engravings by some of the artists participating in the exhibition, but also an exceptional readymade by Marcel Duchamp on the cover, *Prière de toucher* (Figure 1), depicting a woman's breasts in latex. There were also the Fluxus yearbooks, which began when La Monte Young wanted to compile as a catalog

3. Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 2004), 1.

4. Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, *Sur le livre d'artiste. Articles et écrits de circonstance (1981–2005)* (Marseille: Le mot et le reste, 2006), 348–62.

5. Riva Castleman, *A Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 76.

6. Cited by Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, "Du catalogue comme œuvre d'art et inversement," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, no. 56–57 (Summer–Autumn 1996): 103.

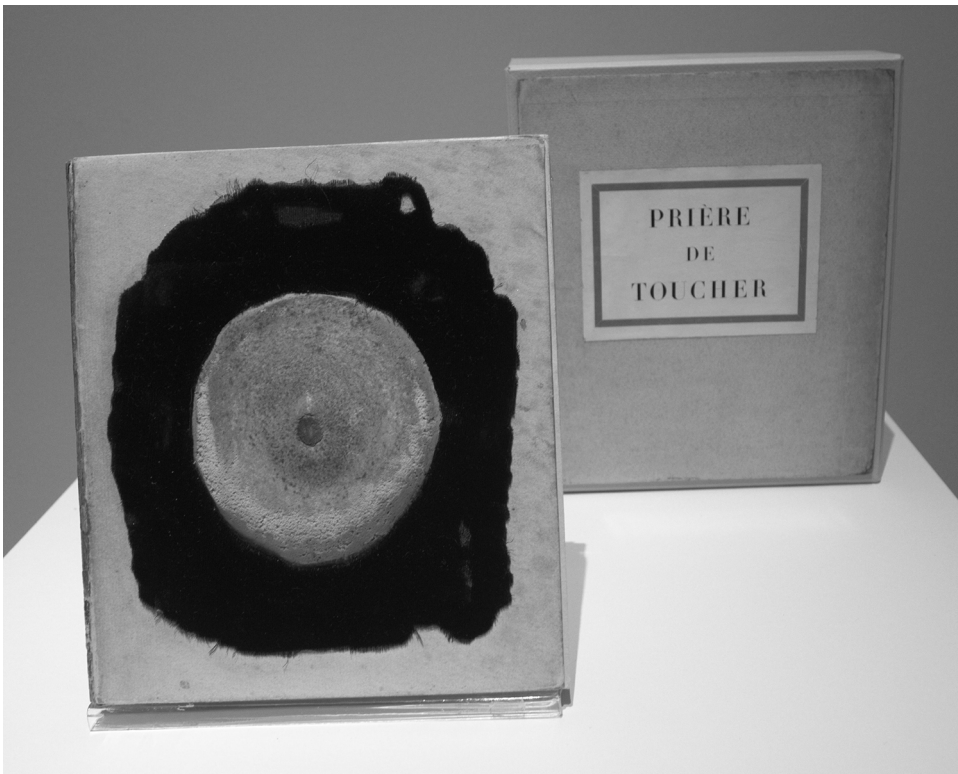


Figure 1. Marcel Duchamp. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Paris: Pierre à Feu / Maeght Éditeur, 1947. Photograph by author. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

everything produced in a period in *An Anthology* (1961). In the following years and up to the present day, countless exhibition catalogs have been produced as works of art by artists themselves. Therefore, there is an important body of published works that can be defined as both artists' books and exhibition catalogs that could cohere within the proposed category of artists' catalogs. However, the ways in which artists are involved in the production of their catalogs are not homogeneous and may consist of layout work for publications issued on the occasion of an exhibition; works conceived as such in book format to coincide with an exhibition; or those books that have been published as documents of ephemeral works, such as performances, and that have been the means of bearing witness to their existence, thus becoming catalogs. As Moeglin-Delcroix has pointed out, "between creation and information, work and catalog, the starting point is not always easy to determine."⁷

In response to this complexity, and given that artists' catalogs could be situated on the borderline between artists' books and exhibition catalogs, sharing features of both

7. Moeglin-Delcroix, *Sur le livre d'artiste*, 87.

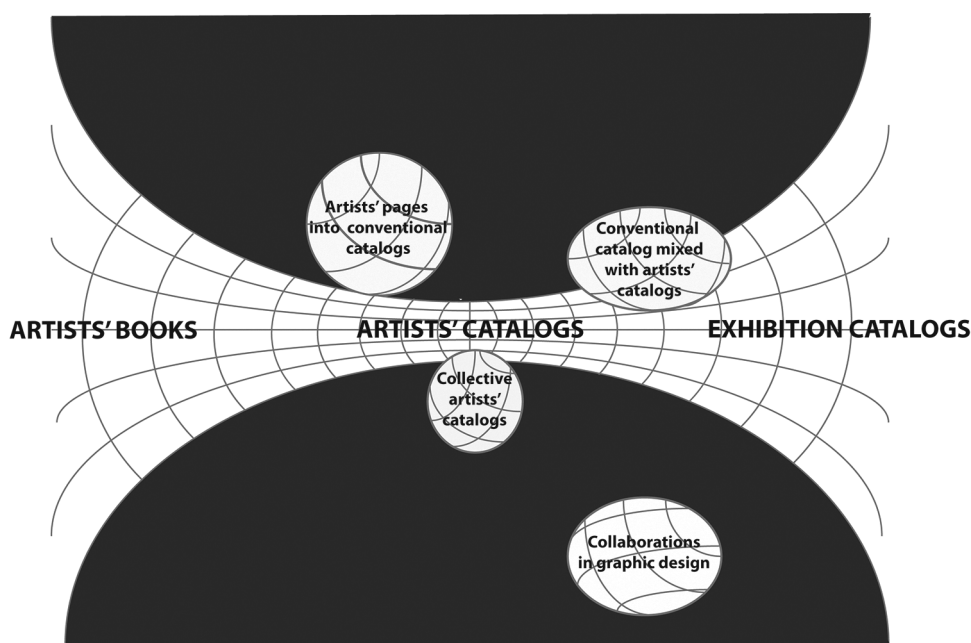


Figure 2. Artists' catalogs. General chart. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

(Figure 2), it seems appropriate to examine these two concepts before venturing to propose, as a conclusion, a basis for what artists' catalogs might be.

ARTISTS' BOOKS

To begin with, it is difficult to determine exactly what artists' books are. There are many ways to describe them, but the danger is that such descriptions are limiting. A strict definition might exclude quite a few artists' books.⁸ Many attempts to define the concept have referred to three elements that converge in the artist's book: form, content, and intention. For example, Lucy Lippard states, "the artist's book is a work of art on its own, conceived specifically for the book form and often published by the artist him/herself. It can be visual, verbal, or visual/verbal. With few exceptions, it is all of a piece, consisting of one serial work or a series of closely related ideas and/or images—a portable exhibition."⁹ The final part of this definition includes the idea that artists' books are, in fact, an alternative to exhibitions.

The difficulty is that artists' books present a multiform diversity, variable concepts, and an exercise in creative freedom—a medium, in short, that is constantly changing and evolving. However, it seems advisable to attempt an approximation to the concept,

8. Dick Higgins, "A Preface," in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (New York: Peregrine Smith Books and Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1987), 11.

9. Lucy Lippard, "The Artist's Book Goes Public," in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (New York: Peregrine Smith Books and Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1987), 45.

rather than an all-encompassing intention with the purpose of mitigating any confusion caused by an abusive generalization of the term “artists’ books.”¹⁰

Donna Stein bases her definition on placing an added value to the artist’s book: “A book is more than a book when it becomes a work of art.”¹¹ Artists’ books are works of art based on the structure of the book form with which they share their identity. But from a formal point of view, there can be no limit due to their immense variety: sometimes they present only text, and other times only images, or other combinations of the most diverse. Their sizes, shapes, and bindings vary substantially from one to another. What seems clear is the existence of a profound symbiosis between form and meaning, an identity between content and container. Isabelle Jameson wondered, “what defines the essence of the book: the object or the concept?” She argues that an artist’s book is

the type of volume produced by a single person, according to the traditional form of the book and whose message comprises the textual content, when present, and the plastic form of the object. An artist’s book is therefore regarded as the works whose container and content form a coherent whole that expresses the artist’s visual thinking.¹²

In a similar vein, Dick Higgins, the editor of Something Else Press that has published innumerable artists’ books, uses the following definition:

A book done for its own sake and not for the information it contains. That is: it doesn’t contain a lot of words, like a book of poems. It is a work. Its design and format reflect its content—they intermerge, interpenetrate. It might be any art: an artist’s book could be music, photography, graphics, intermedial literature. The experience of reading it, viewing it, framing it—that is what the artist stresses in making it.¹³

To summarize, a series of parameters or essential characteristics will be proposed here that approximate what artists’ books are. The question of authorship is crucial. There is an author or authors, working autonomously or in partnership with technicians, to create a work of art. The second important aspect is that of intentionality. The artist addresses the production of a book not with a literary or informative intention, but with an artistic one. The purpose pursued is the creation of a work of art, which is inevitably circumscribed to an artistic context that recognizes it as such and validates it. The third parameter to take into account is the identity generated between

10. Bibiana Crespo Martín, “El libro-arte. Clasificación y análisis de la terminología desarrollada alrededor del libro-arte,” *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad*, no. 22 (2010): 9.

11. Donna Stein, “When a Book Is More than a Book,” *Artists’ Books in the Modern Era 1870–2000* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 17.

12. Isabelle Jameson, “Histoire du livre d’artiste,” *Cursus* 9, no. 1 (2005), <http://cursus.ebsi.umontreal.ca/vol9no1/Jameson.html>.

13. Higgins, “A Preface,” 11.

form and content. The book form is the feature that the artist uses as a starting point, accepting or subverting its characteristics, to create an artistic work. From this symbiosis emerges a work that is simultaneously a work of art and a book. Neither of these two attributes exists independently, but both are the same thing. Another essential question is the multiplicity that, for most of them, not only does not detract from the work but gives it its meaning. These works were conceived to reach a wider audience than the sacrosanct unique work. Multiplicity is part of its very essence and is, therefore, one of the values that characterize it.¹⁴ However, from the late twentieth century, as Tony White has noted, “the shift from printing technologies to desktop publishing results in a change in the types and numbers of books produced by artists.”¹⁵

EXHIBITION CATALOGS

On the other hand, there is the question of exhibition catalogs. It is, without doubt, one of the characteristic expressions of the modern arts system. The first documents that can be considered as forerunners of exhibition catalogs appear in the seventeenth century, although it was not until the nineteenth century that exhibitions became widespread. Most of the catalogs were no more than a list of exhibited works and artists, with commercial information, such as the measurements of the works, the subjects, or brief reviews of the artists, stating, for example, if they were already deceased. Sometimes they included illustrations, which at first were etchings, then photolithographs, and some critical texts, although they were mainly numbered lists that generated “a principle of order, of classification, and designation”¹⁶ (Figure 3).

The publication of exhibition catalogs has become commonplace because they satisfy both documentary and commercial needs. Indeed, the fact that a work appears in catalogs increases its commercial value and gives references to authorship and year of production. It is what remains of an exhibition when it is over, a way of perpetuating it. Exhibition catalogs have evolved over time. They are no longer just a list of works, or reproductions—more and more often, they include texts by theorists and critics, sometimes also by the artists themselves, who contribute to the understanding of the works. Exhibition catalogs have a documentary value and have also become subjects for research and critical analysis, essential for thinking about art and writing its history.¹⁷ However, these exhibition catalogs do not always comply with specific criteria in terms of their form or content, and not only due to a temporal evolution or development since their inception. For example, sometimes they include reproductions of more works than were exhibited, and sometimes fewer. Critical texts have sometimes been replaced

14. Salvador Haro González, *Treinta y un libros de artista. Una introducción a la problemática y a los orígenes del libro de artista editado* (Marbella: Museo del Grabado Español Contemporáneo, 2013), 25–26, <http://mgec.es/publicaciones/Treinta%20y%20un%20libros%20de%20artista.pdf>.

15. Tony White, “The Evolution of Artists’ Publishing,” *Art Documentation* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 227.

16. Patricia Falguières, “Les raisons du catalogue,” *Les Cahiers du Musée National d’Art Moderne*, no. 56–57 (Summer–Autumn 1996): 6.

17. Jérôme Dupeyrat, *Les livres d’artistes entre pratiques alternatives à l’exposition et pratiques d’exposition alternatives* (PhD diss., Université Rennes, 2012), 87.

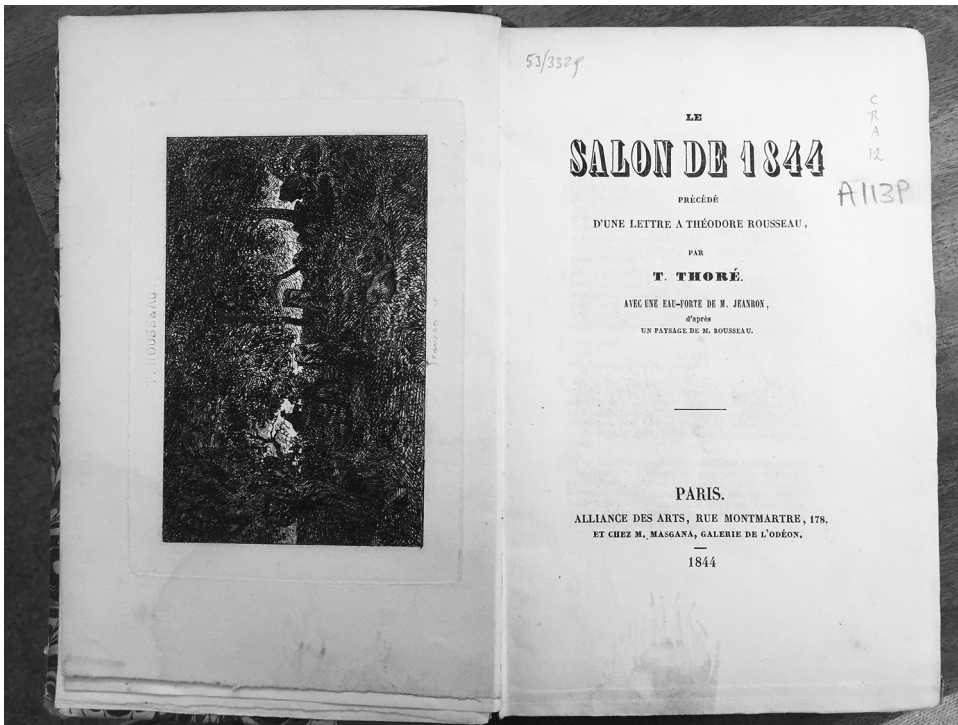


Figure 3. Catalog of *Le Salon de 1844*. Paris: Alliance des arts, 1844. Photograph by author. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

with institutional texts, and lists of exhibited works have even been omitted. In this way, due to the scarcity of financial resources, or in the most noteworthy cases, a desire for novelty, the principles that theoretically should prevail in the conception of an exhibition catalog have been subverted. All of this is done without requiring the participation of the artist, because in that case it would be an artist's catalog. These are exhibition catalogs, in museums or galleries, with a focus that can be distinguished from traditional patterns. In other words, it is not easy to establish precisely what exhibition catalogs are, nor what their essential characteristics are. In some cases, a monograph is published on the occasion of an important exhibition and distributed as the exhibition catalog. For example, in the exhibition *Picasso les années Vallauris*, the catalog includes texts by eighteen different authors and reproductions of some of the works either on display or not, and it does not even include a list of the works exhibited.¹⁸ In spite of all this, it has been distributed as a catalog of this exhibition and has certainly generated great scientific interest, above all in terms of its critical apparatus. However, in the future it will not be possible to establish what works were presented in this exhibition.

¹⁸ Anne Dopffer and Johanne Lindskog, eds., *Picasso les années Vallauris* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2018).

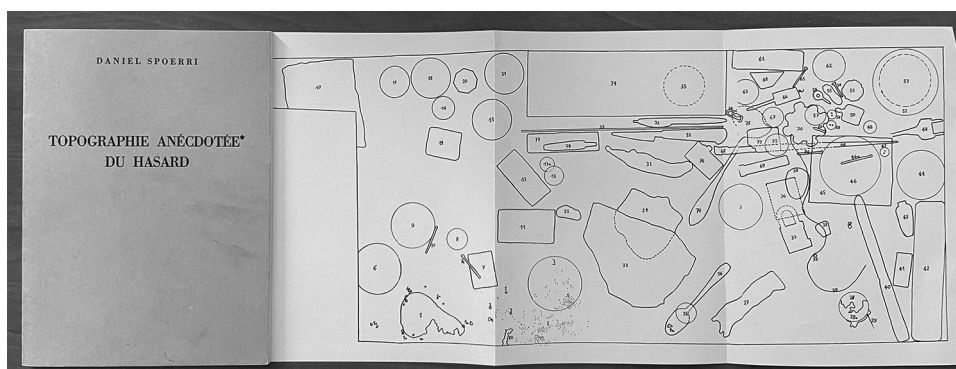


Figure 4. Daniel Spoerri. *Topographie anécdotée du hasard*. Paris: Galerie Lawrence, 1962. Photograph by author. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

ARTISTS' CATALOGS

If artists' books in particular, but also to some extent exhibition catalogs, are complex to define and therefore impossible to delimit precisely, how can this be done for artists' catalogs, when they are a hybrid that shares traits of both? Moreover, the casuistry is formidable, and the differences among them are enormous. In any case, an attempt will be made to establish some of their key characteristics. If, as Joan Lyons has written, "artists' books are not books about art or an artist, but books as art,"¹⁹ artists' catalogs should also be regarded as works of art in themselves, as part of the artistic activity of their authors. Given this, a paradox arises. If artists' catalogs, by their very dual nature, are simultaneously exhibition catalogs and artists' books, it follows that what emerged as an alternative to exhibitions (artists' books) is indelibly integrated into exhibitions, galleries, or museums (exhibition catalogs). The countless artists' catalogs published in recent decades denote very different conceptions, uses, and degrees of intervention by artists, subverting the conventional practice of exhibition catalogs in very different ways.

Perhaps the first example is that of Daniel Spoerri, who, as a complement to his 1962 exhibition at the Lawrence Gallery in Paris, chose to publish an artist's book instead of a conventional exhibition catalog—the aforementioned *Topographie anécdotée du hasard* (Figure 4). It is a small booklet in which he included a folded sketch of the artist's table at a certain point in time and, from there, a series of autobiographical reflections and other texts. On the sketch, like a map, the elements are represented by their silhouettes and numbered. In the following pages, the artist lists and defines them, adding comments and anecdotes. It was probably the first time that an artist's book and an exhibition catalog were merged into an artist's catalog.

A different, but also singular, example was that of the artist Herman de Vries on the occasion of his solo exhibition at the Galerie 't Venster in Rotterdam in 1967, *toevals-objektivering*. As he would do on subsequent occasions, between the pages that made up the exhibition catalog he inserted two sheets of a different type of paper containing

19. Lippard, "The Artist's Book Goes Public," 49.

works created specifically for the catalog, pageworks rather than bookworks, to use Phillpot's terminology,²⁰ within an exhibition catalog. They were, in fact, works in themselves and not information about the works exhibited. Meanwhile, in 1968, Andy Warhol held an exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, which included a catalog containing some unique features. For example, the cover is an image of flowers with no information, and inside, the only texts are aphorisms of the artist, as well as images gathered in a large section called "Reproductions," a large number of unnumbered pages of thin, poor quality paper. In fact, Olle Granath has pointed out that "an important part of the exhibition was the production of a book. It was not supposed to be an analytical catalog of Warhol's work, but a book that conveyed his aesthetics without heavy texts."²¹

Occasionally, the initiative comes from the museum or gallery. Seth Siegelau managed a New York gallery devoted to conceptual art between 1964 and 1968. He produced some important publications in the field of artists' books, such as *Xerox Book*,²² and began to publish catalogs of exhibitions that never took place after the closure of the gallery. The first of these publications was *November 1968* by the artist Douglas Huebler, an exhibition catalog that was quite ordinary-looking but had the distinctive feature of completely replacing the exhibition. In fact, the title of the publication is the date of the supposed exhibition that never took place. In the introduction to the booklet, the artist himself explains that "the existence of each sculpture is documented by its documentation. The documentation takes the form of photographs, maps, drawings and descriptive language."²³ Every item, however, refers to a real exhibition catalog. The date and address of the gallery are included, and on one of the pages, with the title "CATALOG," there is a list of the works (fifteen) with their titles and measurements. Next, reproductions of the works with no text other than the title above and underneath the word "Documentation" are followed by a small description of the image. Only a month later, and following the same principle, Siegelau published Lawrence Weiner's *Statement*, an austere artist's catalog that contained a phrase on each page, some existing works, and others that were new. The following year he published several pioneering collective artists' catalogs, such as *January 5–31, 1969*; *1969 March 1969* (with collaborations by thirty-one artists including Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, and Joseph Kosuth); and *July, August, September 1969*. In all of these, the artists participated with the understanding that there would be no exhibition and that the work would be the exhibition catalog itself. As Siegelau himself pointed out, "The catalog, which served to 'document,' was not referring to an object which existed outside of it, but could be simply another aspect of the work, or even the artwork itself."²⁴ However, on the first page, "Catalog of the

20. Phillpot, "Books, Bookworks, Book Objects, Artist's Books," 77.

21. Olle Granath, "With Andy Warhol 1968," Moderna Museet, <https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/andy-warhol-other-voices-other-rooms/with-andy-warhol-1968-text-01/>.

22. Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol Lewitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner (New York: Siegelau/Wendler, 1968), <http://www.primaryinformation.org/files/CARBDHJKSLRMLW.pdf>.

23. Douglas Huebler, *November 1968* (New York, 1968), <https://www.printedmatter.org/catalog/35225/>.

24. Seth Siegelau, "Some Remarks on So-Called 'Conceptual Art,'" in *L'Art conceptuel, une perspective*, ed. Claude Gintz et al. (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989), 92.



Figure 5. Joseph Beuys. *Beuys*, 1968, and Piero Manzoni. *Manzoni*, 1970. Städtisches Museum Abteiberg of Mönchengladbach. Photograph by author. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

exhibition” can be read in English, French, and German without any reference to the gallery or its address. On the next page there is a list of contents divided into two parts: a list of artists and specific information (location, dates, etc.) about all the works. On another page, Siegelaub thanks all of the artists for their participation and cooperation in making this exhibition possible. Thus, he seems to establish some intentional confusion about the nature of this exhibition catalog/work of art.

Undoubtedly inspired by the Fluxus boxes, and at the initiative of its director Johannes Cladders, the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg of Mönchengladbach published several artists’ catalogs between 1967 and 1978.²⁵ These were modest cardboard boxes, *kassettenkataloge*, about 21 × 17 × 3 cm. When an exhibition was held, the artist was asked to include inside whatever seemed appropriate, and an edition was produced on this basis. The artists included pamphlets, photographs, posters, texts, and many kinds of different objects. The first artist to make one of these artist’s catalog boxes was Joseph Beuys (Figure 5). The box includes the name “BEUYS” in large red letters. Inside it contains a twelve-page leporello, with photographs on one side and German texts on the other; another similar foldable book with drawings; a gray felt with the name of the artist in red and a cross; an invitation signed by the artist; and a small unstapled notebook with a list of works. This first example by Beuys

25. Another interesting pioneering experience was that of Liliana Dematteis. While head of the Martano Gallery in Turin in the 1970s, she published numerous artists’ catalogs. See *BOOKS! From the Sixties to the Present Day: Artists’ Books from the Liliana Dematteis Collection in Deposit at the Mart of Trento and Rovereto* (Milan: Silvana, 2008).

was followed by boxes from more than thirty artists. For example, in 1969, a *kassettenkatalog* was produced for the *La Cédille qui sourit* exhibition by George Brecht and Robert Filliou. In the same year Piero Manzoni created his own box, which included photographs and texts, but most importantly, he removed the cardboard box lid, replacing it with see-through plastic with four circles in reverse relief, like a big transparent Lego piece (also shown in Figure 5). Richard Long (1970), Daniel Buren, Jasper Johns, and Marcel Broodthaers (1971), and a long list of important artists did the same until 1978. In the case of Broodthaers, for his exhibition catalog *Films als Objekt, Objekt als Film* in Mönchengladbach, the artist alludes to the conventional system of references to images in the texts ("Fig."), as he did in his previous exhibition *Section Cinéma*, part of his great fictional museum work *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des figures*. With this *kassettenkatalog*, Broodthaers shatters the notion of exhibition catalogs because his references do not ultimately refer to any image. On the main gray cardboard box, the artist recorded the inscription "Fig. 1"; inside this there was another somewhat smaller box with the inscription "Fig. 2"; then there was a third with "Fig. 0," and a fourth and final one with "Fig. 12." Broodthaers had, in fact, made his first artist's catalog in 1970, one year before his participation in Mönchengladbach, for an exhibition at the MTL gallery in Brussels, entitled *MTL 13/3/70–10/4/70*, a typed manuscript with drawings, which included among other things a film, a plan, and one of the artist's medical certificates. Two years later, he reused this particular catalog as the catalog for a different exhibition, *Tractatus Logico-Catalogicus (ou l'art de vendre)* (1972) at the same gallery. In total, throughout his career, he produced eleven artists' catalogs. In addition to those mentioned, he created *Moules Oeufs Frites Pots Charbon Perroquets* (1974, with references to the exhibition held in Antwerp in 1966), in the Wide White Space gallery; *Catalog: catalogus* in Brussels at the Palais de Beaux-Arts (1974); and *L'Angelus de Dauterive* in Paris (1975) at the Centre National d'Art contemporain.

Laurence Weiner, after his first experience with the artist's catalog published with Siegelau, participated in several of his own exhibition catalogs. In 1970, he made his second artist's book, used as a catalog for the exhibition *Tracce / Traces* in Turin. This is a small format book, printed only on the odd pages, which includes just one word in capital letters, in Italian at the top and in English at the bottom. The only reference to the gallery is its name (Sperone), listed as editor. Other artists' catalogs by Weiner include *8 Arbeiten*, for his exhibition at the Städtisches Museum in Mönchengladbach in 1973; *Displacement*, for his exhibition at the Dia Center for the Arts in 1991–1992; *From Point to Point* for the exhibition held at the Kunstverein-Kunstmuseum in Stuttgart in 1995; and *To Build a Square in the Rhineland*, at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne in 1995. For an artist who bases his artistic work on the use of language, the book occupies a special place within his artistic output. In fact, in 1989, the Portikus Gallery in Frankfurt organized a retrospective devoted to his books and artists' catalogs. The artist himself described the exhibition as a formless *mise-en-scène*, compared to the book that actually does have a form.²⁶

26. Lawrence Weiner, *Not Done! Het Kunstenaarsboek = The Artist's Book* (Gent: Imschoot, 2004), 71.



Figure 6. Richard Long. *A Hundred Stones: One Mile between First and Last*. Kunsthalle, Bern, 1977. Photograph by author.

Like other land art artists, Richard Long creates his ephemeral installations in nature and photographs them to preserve them in the form of artists' books. In fact, for his exhibitions he preferred the format of the artist's book over a conventional exhibition catalog. Many of his books were published on the occasion of his exhibitions, taking on the role of exhibition catalogs, and so becoming artists' catalogs. For example, *A Hundred Stones* was published in 1977 for the exhibition held at the Kunsthalle in Bern (Figure 6). On the hard cover, the title of the exhibition can be read in red capital letters and in black the subtitle "ONE MILE BETWEEN FIRST AND LAST," as well as the name of the artist, the area where he took the photographs, the museum name, and the exhibition dates. Inside, the cover is reproduced, followed by one hundred photographs of black and white landscapes, printed without margins or text. Not one of these photographs was part of the exhibition. The catalog does not therefore constitute exhibition documentation in any way. He repeated a similar formula in 1983—although this time leaving some blank pages between the images—in *Countless Stones*, published as a catalog for the exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum. *Mountains and Waters*, from 1992, includes images of interventions with stones in nature, with indications of places, distances and days to walk them, maps, and other data. It was published for his exhibition at the Anthony Ollaf gallery in London.

Annette Messenger, whose production has been important in the field of artists' books, also made some artists' catalogs. In 1973, she published *Mes clichés* and used the original model of that book as an exhibition catalog in 1994. In 1989, she published *Mes ouvrages* on the occasion of an exhibition in l'Eglise Saint-Martin du Méjan d'Arles, in which she replicated images and objects that were hung on the walls. It is a small, elongated book that reproduces small photographs of body parts and almost illegible texts. In the exhibition, the objects and photographs were suspended with long strings in and among many handwritten words on the walls. In the book-catalog, she presents a similar relationship between text and image, although the simultaneous nature of the

exhibition inevitably led to the sequence of the book format itself.²⁷ Messenger has published many other artists' catalogs, some of them in collaboration with her partner Christian Boltanski, such as *Contes d'été* in 1990. Other recent noteworthy experiments are the book/exhibition hybrid by Mark von Schlegell (*Dystopia/New Dystopia*, 2011); *LOVELAND* by artist Charles Stankievecch (2011); and *100 Notes-100 Thoughts* as part of DOCUMENTA 13 (2012).²⁸

A MATTER OF DEGREE?

The participation of artists in the conception and preparation of their exhibition catalogs differs substantially, ranging from the complete conception of catalogs as artistic works, sometimes even a totally new work with respect to the content of the accompanying exhibition, to the simple collaboration in graphic design. Between these two extremes lie many intermediate degrees that artists have used as a medium for artistic production, and they have even played with the limits between reality and fiction. Thus, in contrast to how Hans-Peter Feldmann, in the exhibition catalog *Buch/Book #9* (2007), ensures that the reader understands that he or she is looking at an artist's catalog, other artists are interested in just the opposite—that is, it is not easy for the reader/viewer to establish if it is an artist's catalog, a conventional exhibition catalog, a work of art, or a scientific/informative document. Christian Boltanski is a prime example in this sense. The idea of mixing exhibition catalog and artwork becomes another element of reflection on the book format as a form of artistic creation. For example, in the *Reconstitution* exhibition held in London, Eindhoven, and Grenoble in 1989–90, he explores all possible aspects in the catalog (Figure 7). In a cardboard box printed with the artist's name and the exhibition title, he places several items: a book, also titled *Reconstitution*, with texts and images, as a kind of conventional exhibition catalog; a stapled book with a typewritten interview with some parts crossed out; another book with texts and images; one more with a sort of biography and some photographs; a copy of his book *Saynetes comiques*; a copy of an inventory of objects that belonged to a woman from Bois-Colombes; a small photobook with ten images; two stapled brochures (*Recherche et presentation . . . Reconstitution de gestes*); and small photographs, cards, another brochure, a handwritten letter, and a large printed photograph folded twice, most of them old works reproduced in facsimile. In a sort of inversion between the participation of the artist in scientific publications and that of the curator in the artist's publications, the use of the works for the catalog confers a new status of document, while the interview ostensibly crossed out by the artist's hand is presented as a work made for the exhibition. As Moeglin-Delcroix has pointed out, “in this mixed category each publication represents a particular case because of its position on the scale, subtly adjusted, that unites scientific publication and self-sufficient work.”²⁹

27. Renée Riese Hubert and Judd D. Hubert, *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1999), 137.

28. Anne-Sophie Springer, “Volumes: The Book as Exhibition,” *C: International Contemporary Art*, no. 116 (Winter 2012): 39–44.

29. Moeglin-Delcroix, “Du catalogue comme œuvre d'art et inversement,” 103.



Figure 7. Christian Boltanski. *Reconstitution*. Whitechapel Art Gallery (Londres) / Stedelijk van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven) / Musée de Grenoble, 1989–90. Photograph by author. Please see the online edition of *Art Documentation* for a color version of this image.

Something similar happens with a number of Broodthaers's works, in which he generates deliberate confusion between the catalog and the work. One could point to the exhibition *Catalog Catalogus* (Brussels 1974), whose catalog was accompanied by a poster including all the images of the book reproduced together, as in a color proof for printing, mixing images of works from different periods—a poster that in turn was hung as a work in the exhibition—and *L'Angelus de Daumier* (Paris, 1975) (Figure 8), a retrospective exhibition, in which he gave different spaces color names: *Salle Rose*, *Salle Blanche*, *Salle Bleue*, etc. He edited a catalog produced in two volumes. In the first, on high quality matte paper, the pages on the left are blank, while those on the right are printed with a short definition of one *Salle* and a reproduction of a repeated decorative pattern that occupies most of the page. The second volume is printed on conventional glossy paper and includes a small text by the artist and reproductions of the works without any title or reference. Each volume corresponds to clearly differentiated uses and functions: the first match an artist's catalog and the second a conventional exhibition catalog, always under the logic of Marcel Broodthaers's institutional critique.

Another singular case is that of Dieter Roth, one of the pioneers of artists' books and whose artistic production has focused primarily on this genre. In 1974 and 1975, he

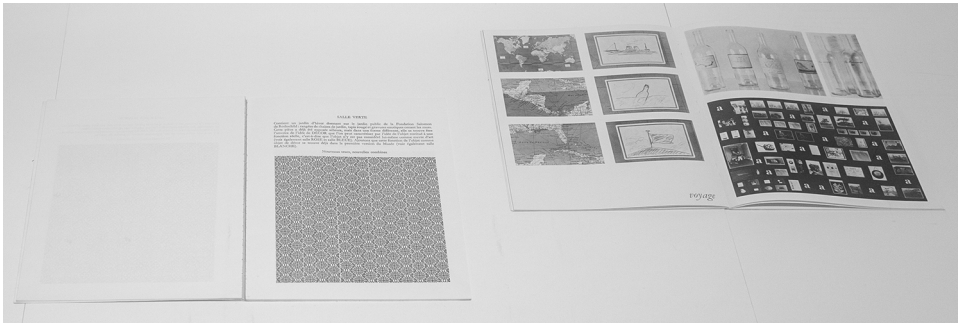


Figure 8. Marcel Broodthaers. *L'Angelus de Daumier*. Paris: Centre National d'Art Contemporain, 1975. Photograph by author.

participated in two exhibitions of his artists' books with their respective catalogs. For the first of these, *Dieter Roth: Bücher*, at the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover, under a cover drawn by Roth on a photograph, he collected some documents without pictures, with reviews of his books, a biography, and several pages with color drawings. For the second, *Dieter Roth: Boeken*, at the Stedelejk Museum in Amsterdam, the catalog contains only very free drawings of heads in which even the artist's daughter had participated. They were printed on large folded sheets and not guillotined; they had no documentary relationship with the exhibition. Similarly, the published catalog for Jaume Plensa's exhibition at the Gamarra y Garrigues Gallery in Madrid (1994) does not include text, only images, with the exception of the name of the artist and that of the exhibition, *Wonderland*. The first two pages contain a photograph of the installation of the doors in the gallery, but the rest are specific creations made for this book/catalog (Figure 9).

The fact that an artist collaborates in the graphic design of an exhibition catalog does not necessarily make it an artist's catalog. Laurence Weiner is careful to distinguish one from the other in the *Catalogue Raisonné* of his publications, while other artists have chosen to maintain some confusion when it comes to differentiating their artists' books from their artists' catalogs—that is, the books published as works from those produced by them on the occasion of and as a complement to an exhibition. This is the case, for example, with Sol LeWitt.³⁰

Occasionally, artists' contributions to exhibition catalogs are limited to some pages that are inserted within the publication, an appropriation that tends, willingly or not, to generate confusion between the work itself and its documentation. This is the case with *Steps* (1971) by Stanley Brouwn, or the *kassettenkatalog* that Weiner made for the Städtisches Museum in Mönchengladbach in 1973, which includes a booklet with a text by director Johannes Cladders and three other items that present under different forms the statements shown by the artist at the exhibition. Daniel Buren produced several artists' catalogs that can be considered hybrids. For his exhibition at the Staatsgalerie in

30. According to LeWitt himself, "From that time I began to do books as works in themselves, not as catalogs." Saul Ostrow, "Sol LeWitt," *Bomb*, no. 85 (Fall 2003), <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/sol-lewitt/>.

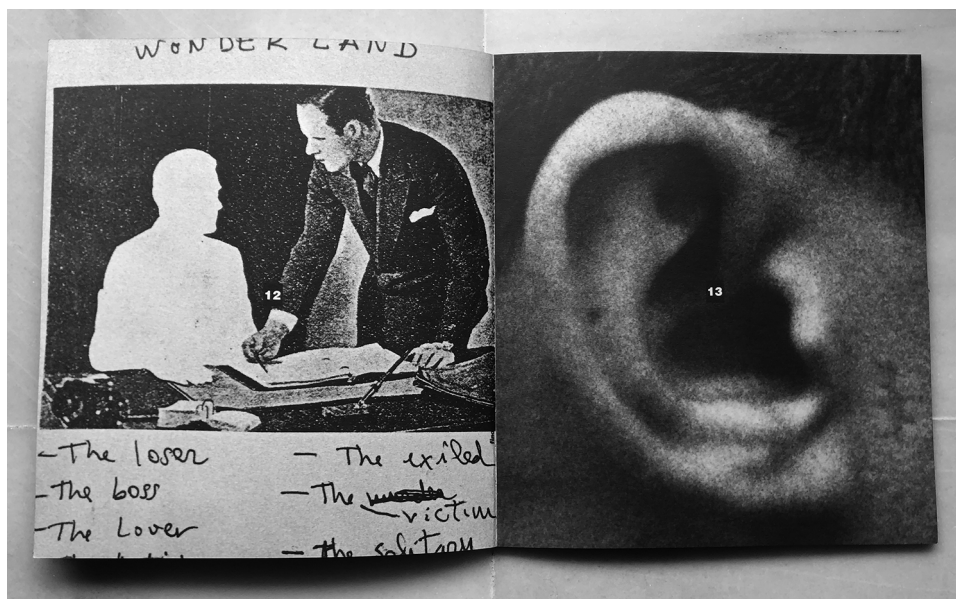


Figure 9. Jaume Plensa. *Wonderland*. Madrid: Gamarra y Garrigues Gallery, 1994. Photograph by author.

Stuttgart in 1990, the catalog maintains conventional features, but at the same time both the cover and the forty-five central pages inside bear all the characteristic vertical bands of Buren and constitute, in turn, a printed work entitled *Ritornell*. There were some precedents for this mixed genre. For example, when Buren participated in the 1986 Venice Biennale, a catalog composed of nineteen chapters was published, of which only two resemble the conventional content of an exhibition catalog—an interview with the artist and reproductions of the works—while the vertical bands appear in multiple variations: alternated with photographs, double-page printed, and diagonally cut. It is no longer the case that within an exhibition catalog some pages can be considered the artist's work, but on the contrary, within an artist's catalog, a conventional catalog is found.

It is worth reflecting on what happens when exhibitions are collective. In this case, in the same way that exhibition participation is usually by invitation of a curator, the contribution to the catalog usually occurs along similar lines. This generates collective artistic groups that are equivalent, to some extent, to the exhibition event, when not replacing it completely, as in the case of those catalogs published by Siegelau. To cite another example, in the 1996 exhibition *D'une oeuvre l'autre, Le livre d'artiste et l'art contemporaine* at the Royal Museum of Mariemont, the catalog is composed of several parts, some of which are conventional. It also contains the artists' original works in the format of the catalog. Some of the collaborating artists included Buren, Downsborough, Villers, Long, and Boltanski.

USES AND FUNCTIONS

Claire Barbillon, during her participation in the conference *Le catalogue dans tous ses états*, organized by the École du Louvre, defined exhibition catalogs as “instruments

for the historization of art," and other participants insisted on the role of the catalogs as sources for art historians, jurists, or the art market.³¹ These are, in any case, a para-artistic vision, elements for study and analysis, documents, and information. That vision is quite generalized. However, since the 1960s and especially the 1970s, there has been an important transformation in some of the catalogs that accompany exhibitions due largely to the growth of conceptual art. In this type of art, the medium of creation itself involves a high degree of collection and presentation of information, documentation, and archiving. As Moeglin-Delcroix has pointed out, there is a questioning of the traditional opposition between art and information, between art and documentation. Thus, for the artist, the exhibition catalog is a perfect medium for archiving and transmitting information and documents, through the text and also the images.³² Even though on many occasions the primary function of exhibition catalogs has been subverted, the appropriation of the pages of these catalogs by artists has meant an extension of their work in the accompanying exhibition, a new work, and a new way of disseminating it. These works are part of the general framework of the exhibition event, and more importantly, these artists' catalogs offer artists a field of expression for understanding their work that surpassed what the model of reproductions of work and critical text could offer. In fact, it has the advantage of offering, in itself, an aesthetic experience, something that can hardly be achieved through standard criticism. Nevertheless, some authors have suggested that when these publications are devoid of critical text or any documentary function related to the exhibition, they can no longer be considered exhibition catalogs. Dupeyrat, for example, stated that:

These books, although they are published on the occasion of the exhibitions to which they refer explicitly, are not catalogs. When they document exhibitions . . . it is only secondary, in the sense that it is not their main function. These publications are not reproductions of the exhibited works, unless they are understood as re-productions, that is, as a new production of the work.³³

The artists' interventions in the editions of these catalogs are very diverse, and it is not possible to unify them. The nature of these interventions determines the final function of an exhibition catalog and whether or not it distances itself from traditional documentary catalogs. In this way, hybrid formats, in which the artist participates in the catalog without authoring it in its entirety—whereby part of it retains the standard format of an exhibition catalog—would therefore present a dual functionality, artistic and documentary, and would vary according to the degree.

Could artists' catalogs therefore have only an artistic function? The question that arises is whether those artists' catalogs, taken to an extreme in the strictest sense—those

31. "Compte-rendu du colloque «Le catalogue dans tous ses états»,” *Histoire des expositions: Carnet de recherche du catalogue raisonné des expositions du Centre Pompidou*, Hypotheses, <https://histoiredesexpos.hypotheses.org/711#more-711>.

32. Moeglin-Delcroix, *Sur le livre d'artiste*, 290.

33. Dupeyrat, *Les livres d'artistes entre pratiques alternatives à l'exposition et pratiques d'exposition alternatives*, 217.

conceived entirely by the artist, with a purely aesthetic purpose and with no direct documentary relation to the accompanying exhibition, without critical texts about the works shown, and even without the works being reproduced or listed—could also be a form of documentation, criticism, analysis, and information about the artist's own work.

As an example, the German artist A. R. Penck created the *Standarts* book that was published by the Michael Werner gallery in Cologne in 1970. It is a set of 150 full-page signs, printed on one of the sides, a kind of dictionary that enunciates and defines the language and content of his paintings, but above all represents a poetic extension of the total conception of the art of the artist.³⁴ That is, it does provide information and document his artistic process.

Sometimes, the expression “on the occasion of” is used in artists' catalogs, referring to the fact that the appearance of the publication is linked to an exhibition, thus indicating that it is not a conventional catalog. This also means that both the publication and the exhibition are closely linked, without there being a subordination of one to the other. They constitute joint events, both when catalogs include images or forms derived or transposed from those that are exhibited, and when their contents do not have a direct but circumstantial reference. It is the artist's work (in catalog form) that takes on the mediating role between the exhibited work and the public, although at times artists use these artists' catalogs as a subversive element against the institutional arts system.

However, Moeglin-Delcroix postulates that these publications imply a loss in the meaning of exhibition catalogs and their critical force. From her perspective, they only resemble a catalog in that they coincide with an exhibition, but they conflict with their usual function in at least three ways: their meaning is lost as a trace of a work or as a memory of an exhibition, they cease to be a scientific tool, and their ability to establish the value of the artistic product in the market is lost. She argues that they should affirm their autonomy by freeing themselves from the documentary function of catalogs to become artists' books, or at least be reconciled with the documentary functions. In this sense she rescues those artists' publications in relation to the development of installations, because books lend themselves to a latent narrative dimension in installations themselves. After all that has been examined in this article, it is not possible to share her position, much less when she states that the critical and scientific capacity of catalogs lies in the fact that they are written by subject specialists, and that these artists' publications “reject, de facto, the distinction between those who do and those who know.”³⁵ Such a statement assumes that those who do, the artists, do not know. But if they did not know, how could they do? Can someone know a work of art better than the person who has created it? Or does it mean, perhaps, that what they do not know is how to interpret and communicate their own work? None of these possibilities can be seriously sustained, much less in contemporary art, as artists document, take references, investigate, and only then produce works. Besides, since these artists' catalogs

34. Castleman, *A Century of Artists' Books*, 76.

35. “Refuse de facto la distinction entre ceux qui font et ceux qui savent,” in Moeglin-Delcroix, “Du catalogue comme œuvre d'art et inversement,” 96.

do not have to contain critical texts and are sometimes sets of images alone or conjugated with poetic or artistic texts, it is no longer a question of coming up with a practical interpretation but of a new work of art that accompanies the whole exhibition. Given this, a new question may be posed: can art not be explained with art? That is, can one work of art help to understand another? A common trend in museums and collective exhibitions is to present several works by the same artist in close proximity. It is increasingly less common for an artist to exhibit a single work; a set of works is normally the case. The reason is that several works together help viewers better understand the discourse of an artist, his or her poetry, and line of work. Art, therefore, can also be explained and interpreted with art. Hence, an artist's catalog turns out to be a work of art that helps to better understand others, those of the exhibition. They acquire a value as a scientific and critical tool. In this sense, the publisher Christoph Keller considers contemporary art to be a parallel scientific discipline and the artist, a researcher who, as such, should make public his or her results and not only in the form of exhibitions: "Thus, publication has become for the artist one of the unavoidable scientific means to communicate the results of their research, their methods, and to validate the reality of the activity of their research."³⁶

CONCLUSION

Consequently, two important concepts should be addressed. The first is to establish whether, despite their particular nature, these artists' publications concomitant with an exhibition can or should be called catalogs. If so, one should propose a definition of (or a foundation for) the concept of artists' catalogs.

Artists' publications, within their enormous variety and approaches, adopt different meanings depending on their production contexts. In this way, those publications that are inscribed and integrated into an exhibition substantially vary their meaning with respect to artists' books, even if they share a concern on the part of the author to generate a work of art in book format. These publications are part of an exhibition event. This context, which modifies their use and purpose with respect to other artists' publications, brings them closer to what is understood by exhibition catalogs, but also because they offer additional information about the artist's work, about his or her creative process, and about the general meaning of his or her work. Certainly, on occasion, the artistic appropriation of catalogs subverts some of their traditional functions, such as recording what works have been exhibited, reproductions, and measurements—that is, the documentary part for use by art historiography. However, conventional exhibition catalogs sometimes do not provide this information, without altering their nature as catalogs. Furthermore, these artists' catalogs offer clues to the understanding and diffusion of the exhibited work, even when they do not include critical texts or interviews with the artist. The capacity of art to explain art itself is capitalized on by artists through these publications. Therefore, it seems appropriate to

36. Christoph Keller, "Nostalgie d'un enquiquineur. Les livres et l'art—quelques Smacks sur fond de crise relationnelle," *Back Cover*, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 2009): 48.

refer to this corpus of publications as artists' catalogs, a differentiated category from artists' books with which they share, nevertheless, some characteristics.

With respect to proposing a foundation for the concept of artists' catalogs, their hybrid nature must be recognized from the outset, a characteristic that simultaneously combines aspects of artists' books and exhibition catalogs. Despite their heterogeneity and even their origin—sometimes at the initiative of the artist, as in the case of Spoerri, and in other cases at the request of the institution organizing the exhibition, such as the Städtisches Museum in Mönchengladbach—it is clear that all artists' catalogs share the characteristic of offering the viewer a firsthand artistic experience associated with an exhibition. Artists' catalogs are works that the viewers hold in their hands, leaf through, flick through back and forth, and preserve as part of the exhibition attended. As has been seen, the ways in which artists intervene in these publications vary as much in their conception as in their form, but above all in the degree of participation, since sometimes their activity is reduced to a few pages, or to the cover, combined with other features of conventional exhibition catalogs. A wide range of possibilities exists all the way through to catalogs that are conceived and produced by the artist in their entirety, whether with direct allusions to the exhibited works or by means of a circumstantial reference, and even posing some ambiguity about their nature. These works are inscribed in the general artistic practice of their authors and are integrated into an exhibition event, offering a new way of disseminating and interpreting the artworks and a new way of intervening in the viewer's experience, which contributes additional information to the exhibited work. They do not cease to be a scientific tool since as long as artists' catalogs are works of art; they are also a source for generating knowledge.

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