



**Buzz Spector's** *The Book Maker's Desire: Writings on the Art of the Book*, in which artist, critic and theoretician Spector explores the act of reading, the fetishism of the book object, meditations on Broodthaers and Baldessari, Anselm Kiefer and Walter Hamady, is a must on everyone's reading list.

**Women of the Book: Jewish Artists, Jewish Themes** is a 96-page full-color illustrated catalog of the exhibit, curated by Judith A. Hoffberg, which has been traveling throughout the United States since 1997.

This catalog features texts by the 94 artists themselves, an essay by the curator, an homage by the late David Cole, and full-color images of more than 125 bookworks from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, England, Italy, Israel, South Africa and the United States.

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## LAWRENCE WEINER IN CONVERSATION WITH UMBRELLA ON BOOKS

### What has happened to artist books since the 60s?

Artist book is a misnomer. I don't know what an artist book is; a book is a conclusive question. Reading is a real time experience; looking is a real time experience.

The books of artists are in the form of a book, but artists are/were not afforded the status of having something to say that look the way other books look. Look at the 1920s or the late nineteenth century or the late 1800s. People who made their living as artists also published books, it's not that odd. I don't know how to pop from the late 19th century to visual art of the 20th century, and your primary interest is the art of the latter part of the 20th century. It was not unusual in that part of the century, since it had been done for decades before: the medium *book* already existed.

### The medium existed, but the technology allowed the artist to have an easier time to make the book.

That sounds like a panel I was on that Printed Matter sponsored years ago and that was the kind of position they took because with the technology even back then, any artist who wanted to publish a book and had something to say could give up lunch for a couple of months and just send it out. Kathy Acker as a writer was able to use that whole situation too, and lots of other writers.

And if you remember, I am coming from a generation that first came to California in the late 50s. And there were things like Discovery Bookshop and there were other bookshops. City Lights etc. that sold books of poetry, and had absolutely nothing to do with artists, but they needed artists around because they had the technical skills to put the damned things together.

I did know how to make a book yesterday. I don't know how to make a book today. It will depend upon the content. And form doesn't follow function anymore, or I would know how to make a book today. *Form follows function* is a major problem of our generation. It sounded good at one given time, but it means that you understand the way the world works. And I did think that art was not about understanding the way the world works or the way a book works, because the book is a conclusive question. And it's not like a movie. You cannot move your eyes from the book and continue reading the book, listening to the soundtrack. And even silent films have sound, since you can hear the sound of the projector. We should know that from artists like Robert Morris and artists like Bruce Nauman where this was not an epiphany but this was a stated fact. It's just that no one bothered to realize that the fact was stated.

That's what we get into with books. That's what the problem for me is. I chose books because I really and truly thought that they would cross over. When people find my books, they find no preface and no explanation. Catalogs are different, most of my catalogs have no preface or explanation. I think that if you leave a book behind because you are traveling and you didn't have money for the chambermaid, there's a very good chance that that book will be passed around, and I have had that happen to me over the years.

### It is like children's books, no preface, no index, and they understand just by the rhythm of turning the pages.

We're confronted at this particular point in time with a massive culture that finds itself against another massive culture. One culture believes that what is in a book is always right and the other culture believes that a book is part of the conversation. It's that simple. And when I say "massive culture", I'm not just referring to Islam. I'm referring as well to the fundamentalist readings of the Bible. I don't see the book as a *fait accompli*. I see the book as a questioning structure.

Making books is something important. The first book of mine that was published by a publisher was *Statements*, but I had already been making xeroxed pamphlets and broadsides.

I put the pamphlets up on the walls in the street or I left them behind in coffee shops. And somehow or other they entered into the culture. That's the nice thing about a book: it's not impositional, it's presentational. If there's something in it, it will be passed from one person to another. If there's nothing of use in it, it gets thrown on the cutting room floor. Until artist books became institutionalized and very often they get wrapped in some kind of preservative and put on a shelf. I saw one of the books I did with Edward (Ruscha) called *Hard Light*. People have told me that they saw it on e-bay for various prices and Edward found a couple of cases somewhere. I remember sending them to Pierogi in Brooklyn and selling them for \$25.00 at the same time they were going for ridiculous prices on e-bay. But that's fine. It's not a concern of mine.

### Making was probably the greatest concern?

No. Getting someone to read it was the greatest concern quite frankly. Otherwise, why bother. Nowadays I will publish books by myself or with Moved Pictures. Quite soon another book will come out with Printed Matter. A new book is coming out with Flamarrion in Paris in November, *Trois Petits Canards Une Eau de Vie*, concerning conversations with Luc Veizin, the poet, about the difference between American culture and European culture.

Every once in a while there have been technical problems. The Danish book, *Having Waved*, required typefaces being