



Frank O'Hara and Larry Rivers, detail of *A City Winter and Other Poems*, Tibor de Nagy, 1951.

Acknowledgments

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Deepest gratitude to my son Alasdair, and, as always, to Caroline Koebel.

— Kyle Schlesinger
Assistant Professor of Communication Design and English
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Angus MacLise and Aubrey Beardsley, *Year*, Dead Language, 1962

POEMS & PICTURES

A Renaissance in the Art of the Book (1946 – 1981)

Poems and Pictures: A Renaissance in the Art of the Book examines 35 years (1946 – 1981) of a long-standing relationship between visual and language arts. The exhibit features over 60 books, as well as paintings, collages, periodicals, and ephemera. Many of the works explore fundamental relationships between: form and content; seeing and reading; writing and drawing; and the extraordinary occasions when these things and activities fuse, introducing a third element.

Books have changed more in the last 50 years than they have since the invention of printing from moveable type 500 years ago. This has changed the ways we read, how we think about what we see, and question what we know. While pre-millennium *New York Times* best-seller Sven Birkerts' sentimental essays mourn the "fate of reading in an electronic age," *Poems and Pictures* takes a nod from Janus' split gaze; seeking to understand the future of art and writing in book form by looking through its recent history. This exhibit begins in the years following the Second World War and concludes with the dawn of the Reagan years. As industry standards in printing changed rapidly, letterpress equipment was quickly replaced with offset equipment. Young poets, publishers and book artists acquired the "obsolete" presses and started a renaissance in book design and typographic innovation that rivaled that of the Dadaists, Futurists, and Arts and Crafts movements of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Skirting the authority of the so-called comprehensive or representative curatorial enterprise, this modest exhibit nonetheless features some of the finest works to emerge from the flurry of activity in these years. Neither exclusively artists' books or *livres d'artiste*, works range from original collages and paintings produced in real time, to unique books, to limited editions printed letterpress, to relatively small editions of a couple thousand printed offset. The editioned works featured in this exhibition were published by: The Auerhahn Press; C Press; Chased Press; Divers Press; Jargon Society; Loujon Press; Poltroon Press; Semina; Something Else Press; Trigram Press; Untide Press; and Zephyrus Image, among others. Together they share the common objective of bringing bold new writing into print where commercial presses fear to tread, and to do so with flair, integrity, and imagination. The exhibition also features unique collaborations rarely on public display, including works by Bill Berkson and Philip Guston, Robert Duncan and Jess, and several others.

Duos such as Ron Padgett and George Schneeman are represented by collaborations spanning decades, while a special case devoted to recent works by young artists such as Aaron Cohick, Emily McVarish, and Karen Randall test the widespread claim that today's "collaboration" *only* transpires online. A decade into the third millennium, we find ourselves enchanted by another renaissance in the art of the book, one indebted (for the first time in history) to a resurgence of information about book culture and the history of print emerging from digital technologies. Online culture bespeaks a growing interest, knowledge, and demand for specialized books.

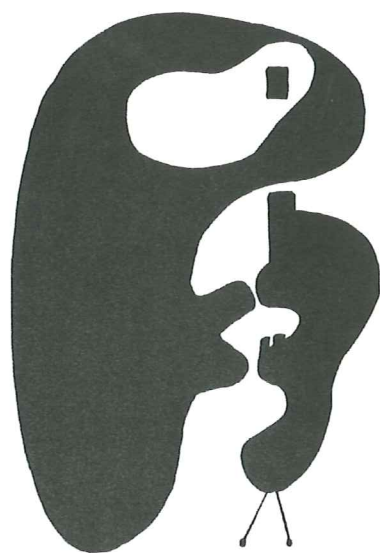
Like Gertrude Stein said, "the only thing, funnily enough, that I never get tired of doing is looking at pictures."



Kenneth Patchen,
Panels for the Walls of Heaven,
Bern Porter Books, 1946

this Edition is Limited
to one Hundred & Fifty
Numbered & Signed Copies
with Covers Decorated
by the Author
(no two covers alike)
132
Kenneth Patchen

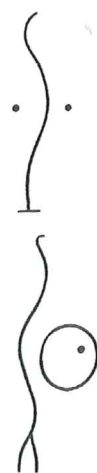
PANEL
SEVENTEEN



• 28

LIFE AND

PANEL
EIGHTEEN



rotten damn cities
rotten damn sheep
rotten damn world
damn
rotten world

Hurrah!

dirtsplittinghell
up into the flame

29•

Kenneth Patchen

Kenneth Patchen (1911 – 1972) was a pacifist, poet, novelist, and painter who is perhaps best known for his Blake-inspired painted books of which he produced nearly 1,000 in his lifetime. As a young poet and publisher, Jonathan Williams volunteered as a secretary for his ailing mentor who suffered from irrevocable spinal damage as a result of an unfortunate accident that occurred while making a repair to a friend's automobile. Williams' Jargon Society published a number of important books by the prolific poet, including *Poem-scapes* (1958), also featured in this exhibit. Patchen once worked as a linotype operator, and his typographic expertise is reflected in many of his books, including the Untide Press' most adventurous title, *An Astonished Eye Looks Out of the Air*. After he died in 1972, the Loujon Press published a monumental double-issue of *The Outsider* devoted to him, wherein Bern Porter (nuclear physicist, poet, and publisher) wrote:

Kenneth's monumental *Panels for the Walls of Heaven* always comes to mind, when under the same kind of editorial censorship that so often plagued him, I repeat the Kenneth Patchen perpetual coda containing hatred of war, the implements of war, even war-like thoughts among men. He says again and again in *Panels*:

Love Thy Neighbor
Love God
Shun Hate
PEACE
PEACE TO ALL
PEACE FOR ALL

This message never was acceptable; those who espouse it are persona non grata even to this day... especially if they themselves are in a horizontal position, as Patchen often is, when uttering it. But he never ceases saying, writing, and painting it. To me, this apologia for man and all his heinous acts make Patchen and his message synonymous. A latter-day Messiah.