INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Allen Ruppersberg: The Torn-Apart Book

Allen Ruppersberg, *The Novel That Writes Itself*, limited edition of 24 numbered and signed copies and six artist's proofs, produced and published in 2014 by mfc-michèle didier. ©2014 Allen Ruppersberg and mfc-michèle didier. Photo: Gene Pittman

BY
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In the autobiographical project *The Novel That Writes Itself* (2014), Allen Ruppersberg invited friends, family, and acquaintances to appear in his life story—for a fee: major characters were $300, minor one were $100, and so on. Begun in 1978, this constantly evolving book is different every time it is exhibited. The original proposal is on view in the exhibition *Allen Ruppersberg: Intellectual Property 1968–2018*, and the resulting novel eventually became a book, which includes the following essay by LA-based curator, educator, and writer Jan Tumlir, which we share online for the first time. We're grateful to mfc-michèle didier and Allen Ruppersberg, who produced the book in 2014, for allowing us to share it online for the first time.

When, as a young man in 1962, Allen Ruppersberg stepped off the bus that brought him from Ohio to Los Angeles, it was "as if he were opening a brand-new book that would change his life forever."[1] These words, paraphrased in an essay by Allan McCollum, are telling because this is an

artist we readily associate with the West Coast as well as the subject of literature. His metaphorical conflation of the two serves to retrospectively foreshadow the ensuing course of his career, while also hinting at a process of inner preparation that no doubt began long before. The book that Ruppersberg would encounter on the streets of the city is both empty and full; until it is opened and read, it remains as good as unwritten, and yet one has to assume that this reader already knows what he will find there. Like any visitor, Ruppersberg had come with a certain set of expectations inspired as much by the reality of the place as the various fictions it has given rise to in the mass media—all the LA-based television programs, films, stories, and songs that he was exposed to in his youth—and in this sense they might be deemed at least in part unrealistic. Or so it would be in any other city than this, the one-time capital of the entertainment industry, where fiction is literally embedded in the everyday life of its inhabitants. On this point, Ruppersberg's expectations were right on the mark: When he came to Los Angeles, it was to follow the fictions that had streamed into his Cleveland home to their source, their productive locus, and thereby become a producer of fictions himself.

Evidently, Ruppersberg had been primed to greet Los Angeles as a book of a particular sort, its make-believe contents "drawn from life," to quote an idiom he is especially fond of—that is, a book based on such things as newspaper articles and police files and adapted to the dictates of genre, preferably noir. The opening line of the *Dragnet* TV show provides an apt introduction: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the story you are about to see is true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent." To a distant observer, Los Angeles might itself be seen as the machine that generates these "true stories," and to now find oneself there, in the thick of it, is to become a renamed character oneself, written in by the city, while simultaneously writing it.

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Installation view of *Allen Ruppersberg: Intellectual Property 1968-2018*. Photo: Galen Fletcher for Walker Art Center

In 1972, Ruppersberg published his first novel titled *Greetings from LA*.

allen **RUPPERSBERG**
Intellectual Property
1968–2018

Allen Ruppersberg:
Intellectual Property 1968–2018

On view March 17–Jul 29, 2018

These words appear, in the artist's familiar cursive script, on the front of this slim paperback volume against an orange ground, the color of ripe fruit, surf-wear, and sunsets, and above the title he prints his name: Allen Ruppersberg. This, then, is a book authored by the artist, and yet from the outset he makes it plain that he did not necessarily invent anything in it, that in its entirety it has been "drawn from life" as life takes shape in LA, where elements of reality and fiction freely combine. The title is obviously sourced from a travel postcard, and the color on the cover thereby stands in for many of the most globally recognized features of its city of origin. This play with cliché continues within, throughout the writing, which is composed in the first-person voice of the hardboiled detective and/or crook, and filled with factual detail. Street signs, stop lights, car makes, the names of gasoline stations, diners and bars, the headlines on local newspapers, and so on—all of these prosaic things are scrupulously itemized in Ruppersberg's novel and aligned with the city's actual layout. One assumes that he traveled the path of his hero in order to write it, or that this writing began not in the author's imagination but out in the field, as an act of man-on-the-street reportage. There are shadowy meetings, intimations of crime, a courtroom scene, and all of this is related with an eye to "just the facts," as *Dragnet*'s inspector Friday famously advised, in a way that remains mostly true to genre convention. The principal aberration occurs in the book's structure, where brief two- to four-page runs of text alternate with lengthier sections of pages left blank save for the number on their bottom edge. Here, the book is infused with the particular self-reflexivity of art to declare its status as a stand-alone object, a kind of sculpture. The sculptural book is a thing among things—one made of paper, ink, glue and thread—but that is not all that it is. The logic of compositional reduction here invites more than a phenomenological inspection: Solicited as readers, the audience is invited to fill in the missing content in any way they see fit and, thereby, to project themselves into the story as writers. This, then, is a book that absorbs us into its constructed world and which we inevitably reconfigure to suit our own real life experiences—a book like any other, only more so.

Ruppersberg conceived his next novel, *The Novel That Writes Itself*, in a related spirit: As a forum, a platform or site, in which existing people could have their real-life experiences transformed into literature. In 1978 he sent his project proposal to a select group of friends and supporters—fellow artists, dealers, critics, collectors, etc.—offering to sell them parts in this upcoming work. The plot would of course be determined by the author, who installed his own life as a young artist at its motivating center from the first moment by composing the potential list of supporting players from among his colleagues and professional acquaintances.[2] However, from this point onward, the narrative would be subordinated to an economic calculus of buying power, investment, and interest. One's actual standing in the artistic milieu that Ruppersberg chose as his setting could be either decreased or augmented in the novel depending on the level of financial commitment: $300 for a "leading character," $150 for a "major character," and $50 for a "minor character."

Front entrance of the Colby Poster Printing Co., 1332 W. 12th Place, Los Angeles

As this work progressed, the artist had several posters commercially produced by the Los Angeles–based Colby Poster Printing Company listing the various "characters" that had signed up for the project—among them, Ed Ruscha (a colleague), Rosamund Felsen (his dealer at the time), Elyse and Stanley Grinstein (his collectors), and Dave Hickey (the critic). These works served simultaneously as gifts to his donors, coming attractions–type announcements, and works of art in their own right. Ruppersberg paid for them by the letter in hopes of subsidizing any future writing, which is, to be sure, a pragmatically self-serving motive, and one that conforms absolutely to the given function of the sort of merchant street posters he had selected for this purpose.

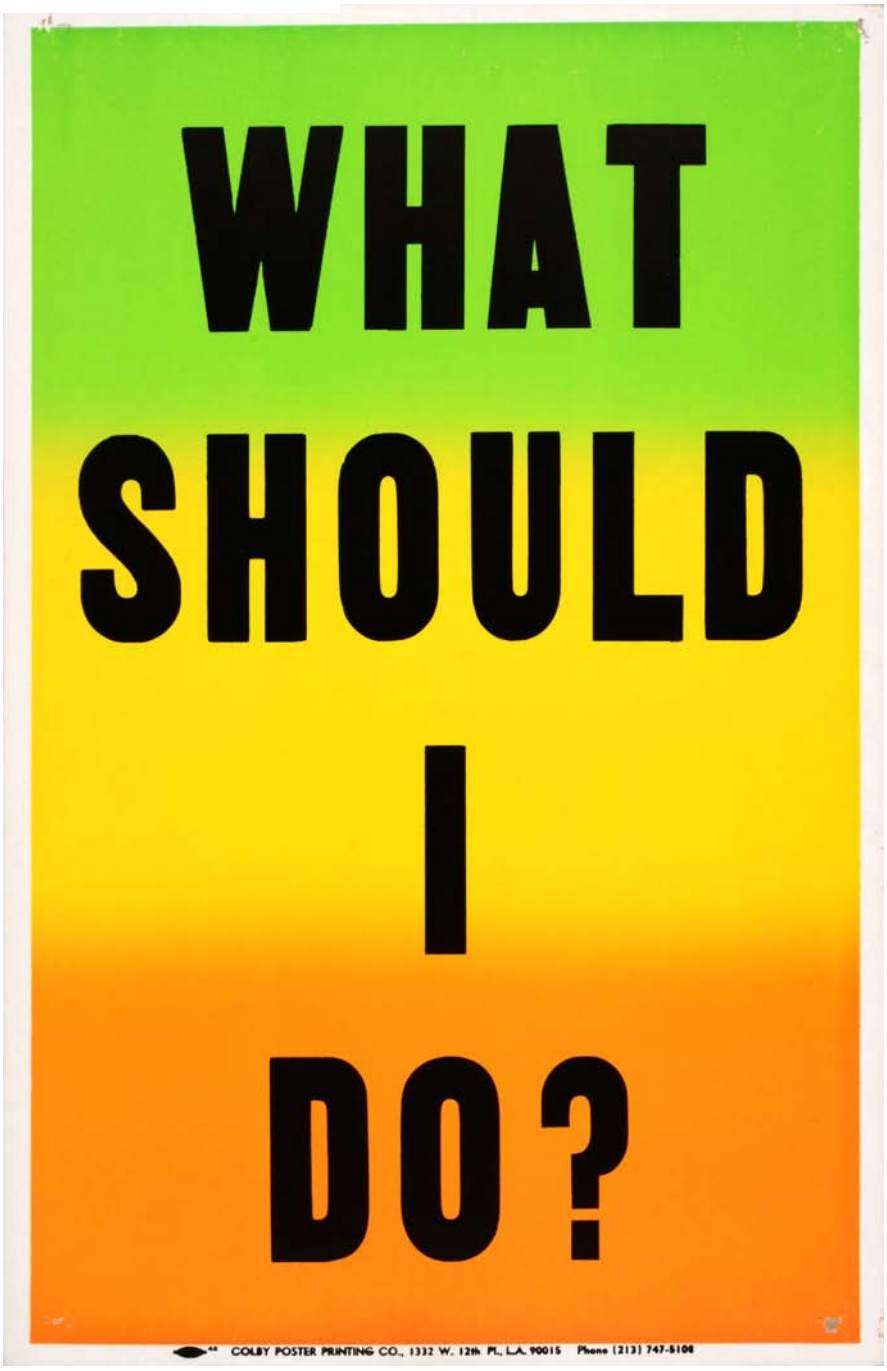
Typically employed to promote neighborhood events such as street fairs, swap meets, gun shows, and small-scale musical concerts, as well as a range of private services from divorce law to tax accounting, real-estate brokerage to furniture moving, the Colby company provided individual advertisers with a competitive means to address the general public within the increasingly mobilized culture of the postwar years. Ruppersberg contracted their services as just another self-starting entrepreneur, and in this way he aligned the exceptional work of the artist and writer with the productive mainstream, while simultaneously reflecting on the general state of an economy increasingly driven by information. As it happens, the book would remain unwritten, and the reasons for this bear some analysis. It could be that the response was not sufficiently compelling, or that the artist simply lost interest and moved on to another more urgent project, but the fact remains that if one were to take the proposal at its word, that is to say absolutely literally, a "novel that writes itself" could not be written by him.[3] In a sense, Ruppersberg reneged on the book deal, but in regard to the posters, something clicked, and from this point onward he continued to make them with the same company in a more or less regular fashion for a variety of reasons mostly unrelated to the above project—or so he assumed.

Allen Ruppersberg, *The Singing Posters: Allen Ginsberg's Howl by Allen Ruppersberg (Parts I–III)* (detail), 2003/2005. Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York; photo courtesy Skirball Museum, Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer

Ever since Ed Ruscha had Colby print the ad for his 1975 film *Miracle*, the company has gone on to work with a long list of artists, but none has been a more faithful client than Ruppersberg. Over the years, Colby posters bearing a series of questions, statements, slogans, expressions, aphorisms, and non-sequiturs that he either wrote himself or quoted found their way into one exhibition after another, until their formal signature became virtually synonymous with his own. In 1996, he was invited to mount a mid-career survey at Magasin, Centre National d'Art Contemporain in Grenoble, and decided to fill the space wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling with these posters, mixing his gallery-bound versions with a random sampling from the company files in what had by then become his customary fashion. The show was titled *Where's Al?*, and it was at this juncture that the thought occurred to him that, even if he did not know it, his abandoned novel had perhaps been writing itself all along. Typeset by the Colby team and then printed in bold black letters in a range of fonts atop cardboard sheets silkscreened with washes of fluorescent pigment, this was exactly the sort of book he had been looking for: graphic, objective, spatial, a walk-in and walk-through experience. It took shape on the border between private and public life, creative expression and straight information, high art and vernacular culture. Its pages, actively co-written with an anonymous multitude, were continually gathering and could be endlessly reshuffled, giving rise to ever-changing configurations of meaning. And in turn these posters, as the pages of a book that could be seen all at once rather than one at a time, invited new modes of access on the reader's part. Arranged in lines on the wall, in gridded formations, or in stacks on the floor, this reading became less prescriptive and more performative, an act of spontaneous recomposition, and hence rewriting, by every visitor on every visit.

Of course, Ruppersberg is not the first artist to seize upon the poster as a means of expanding the form of the book to architectural proportions,

thereby activating a collective readership. Even more than the novel, the poster comes freighted with so much of the revolutionary idealism that had fueled the great modern project. The Russian avant-gardes, for instance, conceived of the poster as an instrument of public mobilization, a means of dismantling the former order of literacy, which had come to be seen as reactionary and decadent. The advent of the poster heralded the destruction of the book and, with it, a whole bourgeois culture of interiority. The following statement by El Lissitzky would appear to closely anticipate Ruppersberg's own thoughts on the matter: "The traditional book was torn into separate pages, enlarged a hundredfold, colored for greater intensity, and brought into the street."[4] In 1926, when Lissitzky proclaimed the onset of his new order, the mass culture of urban-industrial mechanization and electrification was only just taking shape on the Russian horizon. For Ruppersberg, however, it is from the start a done deal, and consequently his posters speak more to the post-industrial adaptation of a once centralized system of public services to a plurality of individual needs. Mixing in a broad sampling of everyday street posters with his own art-specific examples, he creates a space of communal communication, but it is one where the parts remain socially unintegrated to the end, where everyone is essentially in business for self.



Allen Ruppersberg, *The Novel That Writes Itself* (detail), 2014; limited edition of 24 numbered and signed copies and six artist's proofs, produced and published in 2014 by mfc-michèle didier. ©2014 Allen Ruppersberg and mfc-michèle didier. Walker Art Center Library, Rosemary Furtak Collection. Photo: Gene Pittman

Alongside the hard-sell tactics of curbside promotion—these being the Colby company's stock in trade—the somewhat less instrumental, more literary and poetic forms of address that he as an artist specializes in appear, at first glance, glaringly anomalous. In the end, that is, Ruppersberg's attempts to construct a social totality from out of these atomized fragments can only fail, and one can assume that it is purposefully designed to do so. The words that he inserts into this equation serve no binding function; rather, they highlight the problem of social separation and the pervasive self-doubt that stems from it. For instance, a series of posters from 1988 includes the following questions: "WHAT SHOULD I DO?" "WHERE SHOULD I GO?" and "WHY DO WE FAIL?"

These are at once generic and very personal problems that speak to the particular conditions of Ruppersberg's practice as a post-studio artist with a vague relation to Conceptualism, Pop, and even Post-Minimalist sculpture. With no clearly determined disciplinary affiliations and no evident means of support, this is an artist who is perpetually condemned to "going it alone." To quote another poster from this period: "WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT? GOING IT ALONE? JUST WHAT EXACTLY IS IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE?" There is a context-specific, self-expressing aspect to the question of "going it alone," but disseminated through the torn-apart pages of a novel that we write together, it gains a much wider currency.

"What are you looking at?"—those are fighting words. They are passed between the artist and ourselves by way of a poster that, in the process of delivery, is allowed to speak for itself, and perhaps to challenge its own visual reception as art as inappropriate. "Don't look at me that way," it could be saying. "Read the message and move on." From the viewer's perspective, however, it is a question worth pursuing, and this is what keeps one standing in place. "What is it I am looking at?" is how this question might now be rephrased. Or, "What kind of thing is this exactly?" Placed in and among an assortment of non-art posters, just how do we recognize this particular one as art, if we do? The easy answer is that we have encountered it in a gallery setting, but what then are we to make of those other posters that occupy this context as well? As far as looking is concerned, the two are almost indistinguishable, yet somehow we know that there is a difference and that it matters. The leveling impulse that underwrites the development of the historical avant-gardes all the way up to Conceptual Art is here emphatically checked. Ruppersberg is interested neither in subsuming art to the common culture nor in raising that culture to the condition of art, and nor is he willing to leave that whole dialectic behind for the sake of artistic autonomy. At the end of the day, his solution must be seen as a compromise, with all the asymmetry that this word implies. "Reality only needs a slight adjustment to make it art" is perhaps his most quoted line, and precisely because the adjustment is slight, almost imperceptible, our attention is drawn to it as the main aesthetic event of his work.

The poster asks a series of questions that do not necessarily follow in any rhetorical order, which then begs the larger question of how these might be related. The first categorical question—"What are you looking at?"—is followed by a somewhat more existential one—"Going it alone?"—and this has the effect of further adjusting the broad-based address of the standard merchant poster to this new context, where meaning, precisely because it is unfixed, is subject to ground-up rethinking by every individual member of the audience. In the gallery, that is, we attend to singular works one on one. Ruppersberg highlights this fact in his words as a crucial distinction between what is found in here versus out there on the street. At the same time, this street never gets left behind; as the poster's first home, it will continue to inform and to challenge whatever new purpose it gains within this more exclusive milieu. And in turn, this negotiation, although it occurs entirely inside the gallery, cannot be confined to it. Once back outside, we may continue performing our work of free-associative speculation on every

commercial message we pass—on posters, billboards, storefronts, movie and nightclub marquees, as well as T-shirts, tote bags, and bumper stickers—all the while reconsidering just what it might mean to be "going it alone" in the shared space of the city. Recognized as art inside the "white cube" of the gallery, Ruppersberg's poster claims a state of exception; it is to be looked at differently, but whatever we make of it under these conditions is then applied outside where we tend not to treat our environment as an interpretation problem. Which brings us to the last question: "What exactly is immediate experience?" The moment it is articulated in this way, some part of immediacy has already been lost.

Allen Ruppersberg, *The Novel That Writes Itself* (detail), 2014; limited edition of 24 numbered and signed copies and six artist's proofs, produced and published in 2014 by mfc-michèle didier. ©2014 Allen Ruppersberg and mfc-michèle didier. Walker Art

Center Library, Rosemary Furtak Collection. Photo: Gene Pittman

In 1991 for a group exhibition at Villa Arson titled *No Man's Time*, Ruppersberg redistributed a quote from Jean-Luc Godard across a succession of 11 Colby-made posters that could be arranged in any order and yet still read for their sense: "THERE IS JUST / A MO—MOMENT / WHEN THINGS CEASE / TO BE / A MERE SPEC—TA—CLE / A MO—MENT / WHEN / A MAN IS LOST AND / SHOWS THAT / HE / IS LOST." As media studies reminds us, written words are inherently tied to historical thinking because they follow one after another along a straight line, and when that line is broken, then we begin to think differently. Although those words originated elsewhere, they can be understood as Ruppersberg's very own statement of purpose, since the moment it describes also marks the event of aesthetic "adjustment" of a given reality to the endlessly variable condition of art. Becoming lost is what most of us try to avoid in everyday life, but from an aesthetic standpoint this moment withholds the promise of deeper revelations. Observed from this vantage, "things cease to be a mere spectacle"; they become both less subordinate and less commanding. The man who is not only lost but "shows that he is lost"—that is, the man who takes losing seriously—encounters a world outside the bounds of control, aesthetically redeemed.

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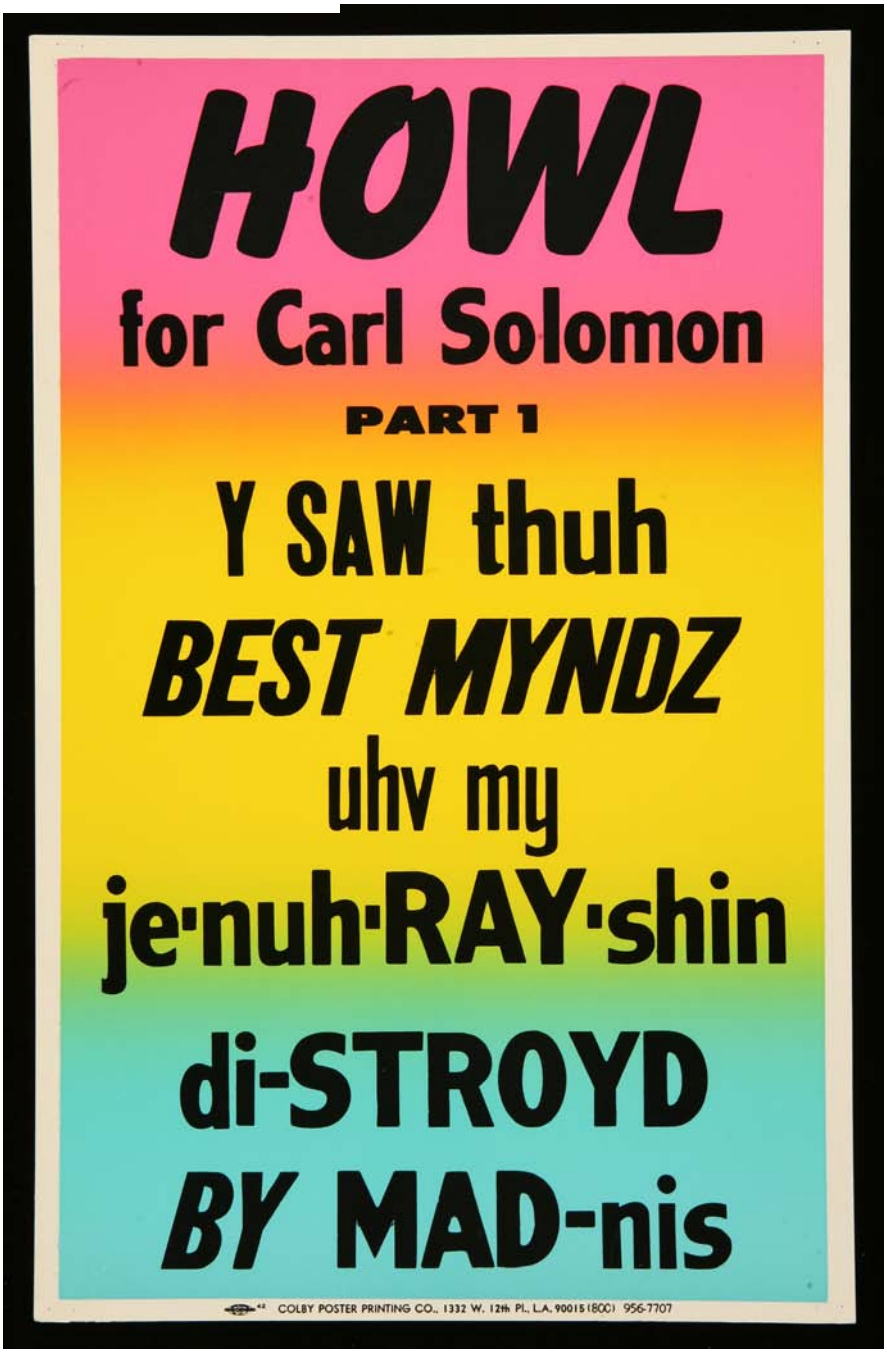
The idea of loss as an experience to be treasured is spelled out on an announcement for *The Novel That Writes Itself* that Ruppersberg produced with Colby company once the connection between the book and the posters had been firmly established in his mind: "WHAT ONE LOVES ABOUT LIFE ARE THE THINGS THAT FADE." This too is a quote sourced from cinema—it is the tagline for Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*—and it appears beside a casual assortment of snapshot photographs of his novel's participants, those who had signed up for a part in its plot.[5] The pictures were gathered when that project was still in its infancy, and here

they are reproduced in retrospect, after the initial plan was abandoned and then reformulated. A companion poster bears this somewhat more desultory message: “THE PILING UP OF NAMES, NUMBERS AND GNOMIC PHRASES STARTS TO FEEL LIKE COMPULSIVE STOCKPILING, WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOMEONE RETIRES FROM THE WORLD TO DREAM BY AND WITH HIMSELF.” These words amount to a kind of explanation for why one form of writing would cease and give way to another. “Compulsive stockpiling” does seem like a largely uncreative chore, and it is therefore not surprising that this artist would air his doubts as to its value in regard to his practice. Why bother retaining any of this information, the posters argue in tandem, when its dissipation is what counts? But if the aesthetic pleasure of the fade inclines toward the release of forgetting, this can only appear alongside the command to remember, and so, in one form or another, the stockpiling must continue nevertheless.



Allen Ruppersberg, *The Singing Posters: Allen Ginsberg's Howl by Allen Ruppersberg (Parts I–III)* (detail), 2003/2005. Photo courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

Perhaps the most direct statement to this effect is found in his work *Allen Ruppersberg: The Singing Posters, Poetry/Sound/Collage/Sculpture/Book*, which was first shown in 2003 at Gorney, Bravin, and Lee in New York. This is also the single largest job Ruppersberg contracted out to the Colby company: A transcription of the entire contents of Part 1 of Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" in poster form. Ginsberg's paean to the "lost lambs" of the beat generation can also be read as an episodic account of a young man's first encounter with big city life, a kind of "Greetings from New York," and in this regard the street poster provides it with a context-appropriate delivery system. Moreover, in its freeform adaptation of everything from automatism and stream-of-consciousness to the electrified patois of "secondary orality," "Howl" almost anticipates the treatment it

receives here. Once again we are dealing with a dismantled book: Ruppersberg segmented the poem's continuous, incantory form—it is essentially a single run-on sentence—into a succession of stand-alone lines. These are executed in a variety of typographic fonts according to Colby protocol and then hung floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall in the gallery, once again mixed in with a standard assortment of commercial fare from the company files. These now-signature moves on the part of the artist serve to aggressively disrupt the flow of our reading, but whatever states of distraction might ensue are here also countered by his decision to transcribe the poem in phonetic spelling. In this way, Ruppersberg restores to "Howl" some of its original impetus, ensuring that it would be received as it was conceived, in spoken words. Ginsberg has often stated that the length of each one of its lines was determined by what could be said in a breath, and to an extent Ruppersberg's posters follow this cue. There is an organic, embodied rhythm to their alternation of poetic and promotional languages; advertisements punctuate Ginsberg's exhalations of verse with moments of pause and reprieve. They let in the workaday world, to mix freely with the poet's bohemian milieu, infusing everyday life into artistic life like oxygen.

In the gallery, this is a book displayed all at once, an already overwhelming profusion of pages to which still more are added and which we therefore read at random, in passing, and with an eye that skims along instead of probing. Still, here and there, something—a declaration, a slogan, a saying—stands out. To read it is to speak it, and in turn to remember it. As is made evident from the earliest days of our linguistic training, to speak back the word that is spoken to you is to commit it to memory, and this the whole point of *The Singing Posters*, according to Ruppersberg. He appropriates Ginsberg's writing, effectively rewriting under his own name, and in the process, he once again demonstrates just how slippery the question of authorship and originality can be. But there is something else at stake here as well, for in the form of the remake the original is preserved, and then returned to the public as living memory. As the artist tells it, he was inspired to rewrite "Howl" by his students from UCLA who had for the most part never heard of the poem. By way of his posters, he would ensure that they did.

In 1962, the city of Los Angeles greeted Ruppersberg as "a brand-new book," and in the course of his stay that book was opened and then again closed. It was written as it was read, and once finished, it was replaced on the shelf as a monument and memorial to the book to be. In the interim, this book was torn apart into separate pages which were presented as posters inside the art gallery, while retaining a relation to the street outside it. The plot was derived from detective fiction and poetry as well as the everyday business of life as an artist; it concerned the specific circumstances of Ruppersberg's existence, but without dismissing those of the big city mass, that collection of strangers likewise condemned to "go it alone." On the relation of the one and the many, that is, the Colby poster has always had its own story to tell, and this also is worth remembering.

Allen Ruppersberg, *The Novel That Writes Itself* (detail), 2014; limited edition of 24 numbered and signed copies and six artist's proofs, produced and published in 2014 by mfc-michèle didier. ©2014 Allen Ruppersberg and mfc-michèle didier. Walker Art Center Library, Rosemary Furtak Collection. Photo: Gene Pittman

"Family Owned & Run for 3 Generations Since 1948," reads the poster by which the Colby company advertises itself, and which occasionally finds its way into the artist's installations. It reminds us that this business was founded in a period of seemingly boundless prosperity and optimism, still supported on the protectionist ideals of the past, while transitioning steadily toward the economy of global speculation that is still with us. By the time that Ruppersberg began working with Colby, all those former signs of the times had already begun to haunt their output. By the start of the seventies, at the premature close of the "American Century," we may already observe the emergence of a by-now all too familiar crisis economy

of ever-escalating boom and bust cycles.[6] Especially in California, these developments could not have been overlooked by the artist, as this state served as a launch-pad for the ensuing "Reagan Revolution," a test site for the policies of tax exemption and fiscal deregulation that remain at the core of our current stage of "Disaster Capitalism." On the merchant posters that appear throughout his installations, the local, human costs of every national crisis are spontaneously recorded. Taken together, all of those ads for mortgage refinancing, credit repair, bankruptcy filing, home buy-out, moving services and rooms for rent amount to a people's history of hard luck, the bedrock account of what the artist had initially encountered as make-believe in "the land of dreams."

In January 2013, Allen Ruppersberg was invited by High Line Art to mount a massive billboard project titled *You & Me* at the corner of 18th Street and 10th Avenue in Chelsea, overlooking a parking lot right beside the High Line walkway. It comprised a grid of eighteen brightly colored panels all printed on a single surface, and bearing the titular pronouns variously interspersed with the conjunctions "and," "or," "plus," "minus." "YOU AND ME AND ME AND YOU," read one; "YOU PLUS ME and ME MINUS YOU," read another. Printed each time in different fonts, sizes and layouts, these words evoked a permutational range of relationships that any one of us could ostensibly have with any other, while simultaneously hinting at something more intimate and lasting. Essentially, the panels of Ruppersberg's billboard were scaled-up versions of the posters that he had been making for more than forty years. Completed shortly after Colby went out of business, Ruppersberg's billboard could also be understood as a memorial to that particular relation—at first strictly professional, and then so much more. [*You & Me* (2013) is on view in the Target Project Space, adjacent the Walker's restaurant, Esker Grove, during the run of Ruppersberg's exhibition.]

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Allen Ruppersberg, *You & Me*, 2013. Billboard commissioned for the High Line New York, installation view at Edison ParkFast, West 18th Street at 10th Avenue. Courtesy Friends of the High Line. Photo: Tim Schenck

The Colby Poster Printing Company closed its doors to the public on the

first of January, 2013. This event would bring Ruppersberg's *Novel That Writes Itself* to a finish—its very own *deus ex machina*, as he puts it. The god from a machine is essentially an elaborate special effect, and it is invoked whenever a plot has grown too complex or convoluted to resolve in any other way. But if the machinery we are considering is Colby's Heidelberg press, then what it releases with its last words is something more lasting than a dramatic quick fix. In Ruppersberg's work, it is a promise that was there from the start and has only grown more insistent. It is the result of a complex negotiation between artist and public—or, to return to the title of his New York billboard project, between You & Me—that began long before his time and will certainly continue beyond it. And yet we do periodically arrive at an agreement, a moment of shared purpose to make what matters now keep mattering, and to insure that how one imagines the future will continue to impact that future, even if it turns out differently.

Notes

[1]Allan McCollum, "Allen Ruppersberg: What One Loves about Life Are the Things That Fade," *Allen Ruppersberg: Books, Inc.* (Limousin, France: FRAC Limousin, 1999), 11.

[2]"Theoretically," writes Ruppersberg in the form letter he sent out to his prospective clients, "a novel's characters are stimulated by the plot and the plot in turn moves the characters. In this case the plot revolves around the life of an artist and his attempts to support himself. Therefore, I decided that I would sell the characters in the novel as I traveled from place to place, developing and expanding the novel as I went. The characters could then activate themselves in relation to the plot, the other characters and to myself."

[3]Moreover, as a work of Conceptual Art, a movement Ruppersberg has been affiliated with from the start of his career, this novel need not be written. Here we may think of Lawrence Weiner's seminal statement from 1970: "(1) The artist may construct the piece. (2) The piece may be fabricated. (3) The piece need not be built." Lawrence Weiner, "Untitled Statement," in *Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings*, eds. Kristine Stiles & Peter Selz (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 1996), 839.

[4] El Lissitzky, "Our Book," from Gutenberg-Jahrbuch, 1926–27, quoted in T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* (New Haven, CT / London: Yale University Press, 1999), 29.

[5]Released in 1980, *Heaven's Gate* is remembered to this day as one of the greatest directorial follies in American cinema. Reports of exorbitant time and cost overruns primed audiences to greet it as the work of a one-time perfectionist who had effectively lost the plot. For all the "love" that Cimino put into it, his film flopped spectacularly, and this lends a tone of both cruel irony and pathos to Ruppersberg's quote.

[6] The promise of an "American Century" was first announced in 1941 by *TIME* magazine publisher Henry Luce in an editorial piece urging the nation to reconsider its isolationist policies and to become involved in World War II.