



LEIBER & SULLIVAN

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Leiber & Sullivan

Modernism (c. 1860s–1970s) was a period during which artists consciously rejected the art of the past as a model for the art of the present, instead celebrating innovation and novelty. By the 1960s, with the advent of minimalism and conceptualism (the last phases of modernism), visual artists increasingly reflected upon the work of art itself. Minimalists severely reduced the form of a work of art to emphasize its physical properties, rather than its metaphorical or symbolic content. For the conceptualists, the notion of idea over object was the primary constituent of art; they often used language, instead of paint or physical items, as a medium for communicating their ideas about art. Despite their indifference to tradition, the modernists left a legacy that inspired successive artists and collectors to repossess a piece of art history. This exhibition brings together familiar publications of the modernist era alongside those by an art dealer (Leiber) and an artist (Sullivan) whose own works are re-creations and re-presentations of late modernist documents.



Steven Leiber is a San Francisco-based dealer who specializes in selling contemporary art and artist-generated documentation such as books, catalogues, ephemera, multiples, and works on paper produced chiefly from the 1960s to the present. Each of his sales catalogues is based on a historical model (ephemera, publication or multiple). Often his ideas are sparked by one of the items offered for sale. Two of Leiber's catalogues, for example, are inspired by the publications of two of the early dealers in conceptual art: Seth Siegelau**[1]** and the Art & Project gallery **[2]**. As he pays homage to his predecessors, Leiber made subtle alterations to distinguish his catalogues from theirs.



In the framework of conceptualism, a publication can become a work of art in itself – an unmediated presentation functioning as a platform from which an idea is simultaneously disseminated in multiple copies. Siegelau and Art & Project each set a precedent for making an exhibition publication into an object of art.

Leiber also adapted Dan Graham's "Schema (March 1966)" **[3]**, which had been published in several magazines and in an exhibition catalogue. Like Graham's self-referential work, Leiber's *Images Nr. 3* contains a list of elements relating to a sales catalogue's use of words and design. Both Graham and Leiber manipulate these elements to read like a poem, at once melding the practical with the aesthetic. The front cover of Leiber's work lists the physical details of the catalogue's production, as well as the bibliographical and historical data that collectors look for in a dealer's catalogue. The back cover enumerates the offerings included in the catalogue. Leiber's appropriation and subsequent reconfiguration of Graham's piece demonstrate the latter's versatility and adaptability.



The 1972 catalogue for the international exhibition *Documenta 5* [4] consists of an orange vinyl-covered D-ring binder that more resembles a project file rather than a traditional exhibition catalogue. The cover, designed by Edward Ruscha, shows images of ants clustered in the shape of the number 5. Leiber's catalogue is modelled on this format: his cover also features ants in two clusters, forming the initials "S L," which represent his initials, as well as the German words "Scheiss" and "Laden" that appear as the title on the spine. *Scheissladen* ("shit/crappy shop") is a cheeky reference to Leiber's archive and an irreverent take on the theme of *Documenta 5*, "questioning reality." Steven Leiber's imaginative sales catalogues reveal his astute observation and keen understanding of contemporary art history, its publications and its exhibition-related material.

The Toronto-based artist Derek Sullivan re-interprets books inspired by minimal and conceptual art, adapting them to his world. His silkscreen print *Untitled [Books Wanted]* [8] resembles a hastily made sign commonly seen affixed to telephone poles or grocery store bulletin boards, complete with tear-off slips listing the artist's phone number. Sullivan's crude advertisement is an ironic statement on the value system underpinning art as the items listed are, in fact, rare, expensive and difficult to find.

Sullivan has also re-interpreted several of the desired books, simultaneously paying homage and laying claim to them. Lawrence Weiner's *Statements* [9] and the National Gallery of Canada's *Donald Judd* [11] catalogue are two examples of which the artist has created full-sized models. Both models are composed of empty sheets, with manually copied typography on the covers. Another early artist book classic, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* [12] by Edward Ruscha, also appears on Sullivan's list. Ruscha's book is a long, accordion-folded, twenty-seven-foot strip of paper that opens to depict storefront facades on the famous Los Angeles thoroughfare. Ruscha's piece inspired two new books by Sullivan: the first re-works the title of the book, *Every Letter in "The Sunset Strip"*; the second, *Persistent Huts*, adopts one of the re-configured titles as its own. Sullivan also uses the accordion format to present his survey of photographs of hut-like structures built from multiple copies of Martin Kippenberger's *Psychobuildings*. Kippenberger's book documents anonymous architectural elements or structures set in forgotten urban settings. Sullivan's borrowings from both books contradict the modernist dictum of originality and authenticity. Instead, his work echoes the ideas of the postmodern American artist Sherrie Levine, who argues that artists do not create in a vacuum but instead work within an art historical tradition, borrowing from the past and splicing together what already exists.

Peter Trepanier
Head, Reader Services



Checklist

(for comprehensive documentation on Steven Leiber Sales Catalogues,
visit stevenleiberbasement.com/archive.php)

1. *January 5–31, 1969*. New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969.
Steven Leiber. *Art Information* 3/18/95. San Francisco: Steven Leiber, 1995.
2. Art & Project. *Bulletins*. Amsterdam: Art & Project, 1968–1989 (nos. 1–156).
Steven Leiber. *Art Projects Bulletin* 1995. San Francisco: Steven Leiber, 1995 (nos. 1–81).
Mel Bochner. "Excerpts from Speculation, 1967–1970: 3 Conditions." *Art & Project Bulletin* 27 (September 1970).
Steven Leiber. "Mel Bochner," *Art Projects Bulletin* 12 (1995)
Mel Bochner. "Excerpts from Speculation (1967–1970)." *Artforum* 8:9 (May 1970), pp. 70–73.
3. Dan Graham. "Schema (March 1966)." *Aspen Magazine* 5 & 6 (1967): section 16; published also in *Art & Language* 1:1 (May 1969), pp. 14–16, and *Konzeption: Dokumentation einer heutigen Kunstrichtung / Conception: Documentation of a To-day's Art Tendency*. Cologne and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1969. n.p.
Steven Leiber. *Images Nr. 3* (January 2010). San Francisco: Steven Leiber, 2010.
4. Documenta (5th, 1972: Kassel, Germany). *Documenta 5: Befragung der Realität, Bildwelten heute*. Kassel: Documenta GmbH; Verlagsgruppe Bertelsmann GmbH, 1972.
Steven Leiber. *Scheissladen 1998*. San Francisco: Steven Leiber, 1998.
5. Christian Boltanski. *Inventaire des objets ayant appartenu à une femme de Bois-Colombes*. Paris: Centre National d'art contemporain, 1974; also published as *Inventary of Objects Belonging to a Young Woman of Charleston*. Charleston, S.C.: Spoleto Festival, 1991; and *Inventar der Objekte: die einer Frau aus Ludwigshafen gehört haben*. Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2000.
Steven Leiber. *Inventary of the Swedish Archive of Artist Books*. San Francisco: Steven Leiber; Cambridge, England: 20th Century Art Archives, 1996.
6. N.E. Thing Company. *N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. [A Compendium of Company Ideas, Activities & Works]*. North Vancouver, British Columbia: N.E. Thing Company, 1978.
Steven Leiber. *Proposal Series*. San Francisco: Steven Leiber, 2004–2005.
7. *Artforum* 34:8 (April 1996).
Steven Leiber. *Artform*. San Francisco: Steven Leiber, April 1996.
8. Derek Sullivan. *Untitled [Books Wanted]*. Toronto: Derek Sullivan, 2004.
9. Lawrence Weiner. *Statements*. New York: The Louis Kellner Foundation / Seth Siegelau, 1968.
Derek Sullivan. *Statements: Lawrence Weiner*. Toronto: Derek Sullivan, 2006.
10. Martin Kippenberger. *Hotel-Hotel*. Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1992.
11. Brydon Smith. *Donald Judd: A Catalogue of the Exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada, 24 May – 6 July 1975 / Catalogue de l'exposition à la Galerie nationale du Canada, 24 mai – 6 juillet 1975*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975.
Derek Sullivan. *National Gallery Catalogue*. Toronto: Derek Sullivan, 2004.
12. Edward Ruscha. *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*. Los Angeles: Edward Ruscha, 1966.
Derek Sullivan. *Persistent Huts*. New York: Printed Matter, 2008.
Derek Sullivan. *Every Letter in "The Sunset Strip"*. Toronto: Derek Sullivan, 2008.
Martin Kippenberger. *Psychobuildings*. Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1988.
13. Edward Ruscha. *Dutch Details*. Deventer, The Netherlands: Octopus Foundation, Sonsbeek 71, 1971.

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