

The Bookmark Project 2005: *Outpost*

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A curatorial statement by Diana Kryski

Part of FLEX..., an ongoing program of site-works and interventions at the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre, organized by the Koffler Gallery

For the fourth year in a row, the Koffler Gallery has organized The Bookmark Project, an intervention of artist-designed bookmarks during the Annual Jewish Book Fair in the Leah Posluns Theatre lobby of the Bathurst Jewish Community Centre. During the intervention both unique bookmarks and multiples are inserted into the 8000 books on display, interrupting readers' book-based experiences and encouraging reflection on the nature of texts and the act of reading. This year, artists were asked to submit bookmarks that respond to the theme, *Outpost*. These works examine the bookmark's role as a navigational checkpoint—a recognizable feature that orients the reader in an otherwise nondescript textual landscape, demarcating the known and the yet unknown regions of a text.

This collection of bookmarks offers several key approaches to the problem of negotiating the textual landscape. Some bookmarks use navigational symbols to link the concept of geographical steering to the navigation of text. Other bookmarks incorporate cartography, setting up a dialogue between mapping and the creation of personal meaning. Several relate reading to exploration by invoking literary texts concerned with navigation or adventure. As well, certain bookmarks consider the relationship of the environment—natural, regional, or cultural—to the investigation of text. Still others explore the spatial nature of books themselves and the bookmark's role in punctuating that space.

Two bookmarks in the collection incorporate navigational symbols that normally serve to 'point the way'. **Stephen Cruise's** *withershins* is a series of twenty-four book darts, each marked with a cardinal direction (N, S, E, W). Book darts, a Victorian convention, are tiny paper arrows used to mark specific passages in books. By marking them with the cardinal directions, Cruise presents the parallel necessities for orientation that face both the voyager and the reader. While these book darts aid the reader in finding a way through the text, they also generate a physical experience outside the text. As the reader turns pages, the book darts loosen from their textual bed, falling onto the reader's lap. Or, they can be forgotten and rediscovered nestled deep within the pages of a book, re-emerging spontaneously. In this way, Cruise's work examines the role that the physical experience of a book plays in navigating the text. This emphasis on the reader's experience reappears in **Tomas Morana's** *You Are Here*, which also uses a widely recognized navigational symbol: the arrow. An urban-comic book-style character serves as navigator, pointing out the reader's location in a book. This bookmark addresses us directly in the second person, emphasising the actuality of our location in real time and space. It causes us to become aware of existing in two locations at once: in reality (as we know it) and within a text.

Other artists integrate the navigational tool of the map into their work. **Scott McCarney's** *Reading Between the Lines* uses the intervals between lines of text as a space for the creation of meaning. With the essence of the lettering removed, and replaced by a map interlaced with the remaining ascenders and descenders of the page, this bookmark recalls the role of the imagination and memory in the interpretation of text. The cartographic element evokes the imaginative journey that takes place in the mind of the reader as he or she lingers between lines of text. In contrast to the alternation of text and interpretation which occurs in McCarney's work, in **Tricia Johnson's** *Braided Map* there is the vertical layering of text (or location) and meaning. However, the distinct significance of Johnson's work relies on the interaction of materials and process. In one sense, these elements are gendered; the map is associated with the traditionally masculine conquest and indexing of land, whereas braiding in contemporary western culture inhabits the feminine domain. In this context, the map of Ontario is transformed by the process of braiding, so that geographic locations move in relation to each other; distances become relative and spatial relationships break down. In addition to implying potential gendered readings, this breakdown of geographical relationships seems to mirror the flexible interchange and layering of meaning that occurs within literary texts, enriching *Braided Map* with a certain mythical complexity as it overlaps the page of a book and engages further interpretation.

The image of the map reappears in **Cadence Planthara's** *The Mountain*, which draws much of its significance from the materials that compose it. Using wool and thread, Planthara depicts a topographical map that weaves its route through both a book and through personal memory. Drawing from her childhood experiences of hiking with her mother, Planthara seamlessly unites the study of topographical maps and nightly reading which were essential to their expeditions. The domestic nature and strong tactile quality of the materials invest this work with a sense of intimacy and personal recollection. Like Planthara's work, **Katie Felton's** *L'explorateur curieux (Champlain, 1567– 1635)* also involves the relationship between map-imagery and materials. This bookmark pairs a New World map drawn by Samuel De Champlain with silk, a material rooted in Chinese culture and instrumental in the development of trade and the transmission of culture between East and West. With this bookmark, Felton physically inserts into the text unlikely journeys from external sources, such as the routes taken by the silk trade across Eurasia, the exploration and settling of the New World, and the journey through time that leads from one cultural expansion to another. Moreover, in her juxtaposition of Eastern and Western elements, Felton represents the rapid merging of cultural paths that characterizes today's world.

Instead of introducing navigational symbols and cartography into their works, several artists allude to literary texts concerned with navigation or adventure. **Sarah Lucie Raven's** *Guide to the Labyrinth*, for example, draws its form from the ancient Greek myth of the Minotaur, in which Ariadne spins a silken thread to guide Theseus out of the labyrinth. By its symbolism, Raven's bookmark recalls a moment of navigation within a story, and by its materiality it becomes an effective tool for finding one's way through a book. It alerts the reader simultaneously, then, to the dual notions of navigation *within* a text, and the navigation *of* the text itself. Similarly, this notion is at play in **Athena L Malamas' To Oz**. The work's title and the yellow borders of the film strip allude to the Yellow Brick Road, where reality blends with fiction and the direction of adventure is only ever forward, into the unknown. The use of film thematically situates *To Oz* at one of the crossroads of the photographic process, suggesting not the final destination but a point at which to rest and from which to depart, much like an outpost. Also, one side of the bookmark displays images of open eyes while the other side presents closed eyes. This imagery distinguishes the past or the known (that which has been seen) from the future or the unknown (that which has not). In this way, Malamas frames her work in the present of the reader's experience.

The invocation of specific literary texts becomes a broader reference in *The Shipwreck*, by **Jennifer Kimiko Wilson**. Using image transfers and oil paint, Wilson reawakens one's sense of whimsy and childlike curiosity, calling to mind marine-adventure stories of mythic proportions, as penned by Swift, Melville, and Defoe. Wilson has condensed the eagerness of the adventurous

reader and the inevitability of exciting challenges into a unique, personal object. Like Wilson's work, **Catherine Farrell's** *pape her pay per paper* engages the reader's sense of childlike playfulness and awe of adventure by its evocation of a mode of transport. Moreover, by creating her bookmark in the form of a paper airplane, Farrell has illustrated a powerful two-phase metaphor: the mind as a means of transporting the self, and the page of text as the raw material for doing so. This bookmark investigates the relationship between travel and the imagination, invoking real modes of transport as well as our childhood experiences of play. Like an outpost, then, Farrell's airplane is an emblem of past adventures and feats to come.

Other bookmarks consider the relationship of the environment—regional, natural, or cultural—to the investigation of text. In *The Forest is an Unmade Book*, **Charlie Holland** relates the image of a regional landscape punctuated by a town to the idea of a text marked by a bookmark. Using an end page from a Canadian geography textbook (the function of which is to guide and instruct), Holland highlights the role of the book as a boundary marker and emissary between the abstract world of knowledge and the realm of the reader's understanding. This work examines the construction of knowledge with regards to the boundaries that exist between known and unknown worlds: between the text and its interpretation, and between real geography and textual space. The relationship between the environment and the construction/transmission of knowledge is also treated in *A – Z Again*, by **Mani Mazinani**. In this work, Eastern and Western symbols (a Persian rug and Plato's *Republic*, respectively) overlap and compete to recall the dual environment of cultural fusion/opposition from which texts and other forms of communication arise. Mazinani deals directly with the transmission of texts by preserving every page of *Republic* in a portable and reproducible format. More specifically, the work comments on the technology-induced transition from literacy to orality that is taking place today, by referring to the original transition from orality to literacy to which Plato's text reacts. In this way, *A – Z Again* functions as a signpost, recording directions of cultural transition and the geographical and temporal contexts for the transmission of texts.

The environment and text also interact in **Holly A Senn's** *Textfruit/Textroot/Textmark*. Senn's use of vegetal imagery suggests the fertility of the reader's mind when it is enriched with ideas and sown with new knowledge from the act of reading. "Text fruits" and "roots" extend past the book's physical borders, projecting from the pages of the book and expanding its conceptual limits. What is more, this bookmark can enter/exit the text in more than one place, and the overlapping of text that creates the 'rind' of the vegetal form echoes this multi-dimensionality. In its emphasis on the notion of potential and the expansion of boundaries, then, Senn's bookmark translates a portion of the physical environment into an approach to experiencing texts. This emphasis on the natural environment is shared by **Candace Osborne Bell's** *Germination*, which invokes the tree as a natural landmark and the physical source for the construction of books themselves. The incorporation of real leaves and natural elements into this work generates an intuitive dialogue between the bookmark's raw materials and the processed 'leaves' of the book. In *Germination*, the artist has condensed the strong sense of preciousness innate to the natural world into a kind of relic rich with both the physicality of nature and the abstraction of personal memory. In its evocation of past growth and experience, this relic seems to commemorate the path which has been taken. It provides physical evidence of the terrain covered and secures the reader's place at the furthest point of that path.

Still other artists explore the spatial nature of books themselves and the bookmark's role in punctuating that space. Reproduced as a multiple to augment the unique bookmarks in the intervention, **Jill L Aston's** and **Mani Mazinani's** *Bookspace* functions as an abstracted model of the book in its materials, its purpose and its form. Made with ink on paper, like a book, this bookmark abstracts and portrays the idea of a book the way a book abstracts and portrays other ideas. Similarly, *Bookspace* photographically compresses books the way language compresses thoughts in a book. This bookmark serves as a theoretical model for a real space much the way a map geographically models a real terrain. What is more, it becomes a space in and of itself, emphasising the spatial property and contents of the book-object it inhabits. In contrast, the space within a book gains a temporal quality with **Chris Hayes's** *Forward Remembered*. The repetition of the reader-character's image recalls the comic artist's method of repeating similar panels to show sequential moments in time. Hayes extends time in either direction by the focus of the character's eyes, making the bookmark a temporal marker on a timeline extending across the book's interior space. **Caley Tessier's** *Untitled* also responds to the problem of navigating the multi-dimensional space within a book. His bookmark consists of two birch wood pieces, one of which slides away from the other along a canvas strip. Tessier's work investigates the notion of 'outpost' by examining the association between the whole and the part. This bookmark is both the whole and the part; it functions as a landmark community marking a page, as well as an outpost creeping out over the textual landscape to mark an individual line. In this way, *Untitled* is capable of marking locations across several dimensions, breaking up the textual landscape as well as underlining the spatial qualities of the book-object.

Each of the bookmarks in this year's intervention approaches the idea of bookmark-as-outpost in a unique way. By incorporating navigational symbols and cartographic elements, recalling literary works, examining the environments surrounding the construction and experience of texts, and investigating the spatial and temporal nature of books-objects, these artists have contributed to a multi-faceted visualization of the interface between text and reader. As a group, they raise questions on a wide range of issues such as the real and textual experience of reading, the directionality of discovery, and the potentiality of the unknown. Not only do these works communicate nuanced perspectives on the exploratory act of reading; they are representative of the unrestricted range of methodologies for the task of art-making. The works themselves become outposts of interpretation as they expand and redefine the boundaries of understanding.

Diana Kryski is a Visual Studies student enrolled at the University of Toronto whose practice investigates perception and response through painting/drawing, object-making, and installation.

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The Koffler Gallery/Koffler Centre of the Arts
4588 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M2R 1W6
kofflergallery@bjcc.ca ; www.bjcc.ca / www.kofflercentre.com