

FLAT FILES (OUR WORK)

Bootlegging AI: Designing the Catalogue for *Allen Ruppertsberg: Intellectual Property 1968–2018*



Four covers of *Allen Ruppertsberg: Intellectual Property 1968–2018*. Photo: Lindsey Kusterman

How do you bootleg contemporary art? Starting out with its title, the exhibition *Allen Ruppertsberg: Intellectual Property 1968–2018* introduces the theme of copyright to connect the diverse output in the artist's 50-year oeuvre. Amidst Ruppertsberg's work one can find traces of pop culture—borrowed, copied, stolen, and subverted—coalescing to form a giant cultural bootleg filtered through a “Ruppertsbergian” lens. In designing the exhibition catalogue, the artist's relationship with intellectual property became a key focus. I was fascinated by the way the artist seemingly plucked icons, text, and image from their original sources, bringing them back to life in the context of contemporary art—the perfect juxtaposition of high and low culture. The publication needed to steal from Ruppertsberg, both his working process and raw material, and use each to create a design system that felt contemporary while managing to capture the artist's spirit.

BY
Ben Schwartz

FILED TO
Design

DATE
Jul 26, 2018

allen **RUPPERTSBERG**
Intellectual Property
1968–2018



Four covers from *Allen Ruppertsberg: Intellectual Property 1968–2018*, Photo: Lindsey Kusterman

*Allen Ruppertsberg:
Intellectual Property 1968–2018*

On view March 17–Jul 29, 2018.
Organized by the Walker, this exhibition
travels to the Hammer Museum in Los
Angeles February 10–May 12, 2019.

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Spread from *Allen Ruppertsberg: Intellectual Property 1968–2018*. Photo: Lindsey Kusterman



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Early Sketches

The catalogue's bootleg concept came later in the design process and was the necessary element needed to balance the energy and structure of the catalogue. We understood from the beginning that the book needed to feel tighter than previous publications yet retain the spirit, warmth, and energy of the artist. Ruppersberg had done artist books as catalogues in the past (see *Guest Informant*, the *Sourcebook*, *Collector's Paradise*, etc.), and in order to do something different this catalogue needed to be... well, a catalogue. Initial design explorations emphasized language, one example utilized a running commentary by the artist throughout the book. Another direction emphasized the physicality of the book, making overt references to the print process highlighting the artist's affinity for collecting and creating ephemera. None of these ideas really seemed to be working.

1914 Born in Brecksville, Ohio to parents J. Lee Ruppertsberg, an engineer who sold electrical supplies and had a passion for music (also collected calendars) and Geraldine (Isbourn) Ruppertsberg, a homemaker and avid reader. Ancestors are among the founding families of Brecksville.



including a trip to the newly-opened Disneyland; while there, visits the Art Corner souvenir shop in Tomorrowland; purchases souvenirs; an animator's light table and instructional books on cartooning, to help further his interest in drawing and comics into animation. Decides he will one day move to California.



1968

Summer.

Arrives in

L.A.

or...

The

beginning

of the end

1940 Sister Martha is born.

1952 Has a growing interest in art and parents begin taking him to his first art classes at the Cleveland Museum of Art on Saturday mornings. Has a budding interest in comics and animation, and father helps him make stop motion animated films. Family home is near a densely wooded area, where he often goes to search for things to collect.



1967 As a 6th grader, begins collecting magazines. Begins occasionally skipping school to take the bus to downtown Cleveland, eat lunch at cafeterias, and browse magazine shops.

1967 Is a winner in the Favorite Comic Contest for a drawing submitted to the local paper, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.



1953 Begins collecting bubble gum cards; particularly interested in those with the story of Davey Crockett.



1967 Sees Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* for the first time. Realizes "Not only was I looking at a great work of art, but that film proved there was another world out there, and it was a world I had to get to."

1967 During high school, begins spending extensive time in the library, reading the arts section of *The New York Times* to take after school art classes in figure drawing, illustration, and advertising design at Cleveland area art schools, including the Cooper School of Art (later Cleveland State University).

1968 Applies to two art schools: The San Francisco Art Institute and Chouinard Art Institute, in Los Angeles.

Early direction presenting passages with an "official" piece of text and a subtext in the "voice of AI"



Early, unused direction using some crazy frames: Disney wouldn't have been thrilled



Early, unused direction placing emphasis on the printing process

Clip Ideas

I realized that as I focused too much on the structural aspects of the book I was losing the spirit of the work. I reexamined the ways in which Ruppersberg embraces humor, punk, cartoons, comics, and literature. I latched onto the icons of pop culture, the recognizable symbols, the words, and iconography that were plucked from a moment in time. To bring personality to the system, we needed to embrace and amplify the high-meets-low nature of the work.

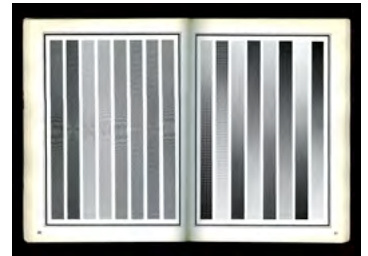
Almost immediately I began cutting out graphics from the work, ephemera, and influences of Ruppersberg. Together the elements began to feel like a flash sheet, a lexicon, a bootleg T-shirt (which we actually tried to make).



An example of T-shirts we never made...

In developing the approach, Emmet Byrne and I began thinking about the title “Intellectual Property” and how it connected to the graphics. We touched on ideas of commodification, copyright, corporate logos, bootlegging, and source material. We realized that the graphics were essentially a collection of clipart—or perhaps better understood as “clip-ideas.”

We framed the icons as bits and pieces of Ruppertsberg’s ideas recontextualized as a commodity ready to be bought, stolen, copied, or sold. To introduce the reader to the world of AI, the clip-idea sheets became the opening pages of the book, as well as on essay title pages, where ideas from the writing were represented through iconography. We wanted to make sure the icons came out nice and rich so we printed them with a special ink called Deep Space Black, which I am only mentioning because the name of the ink is so badass.



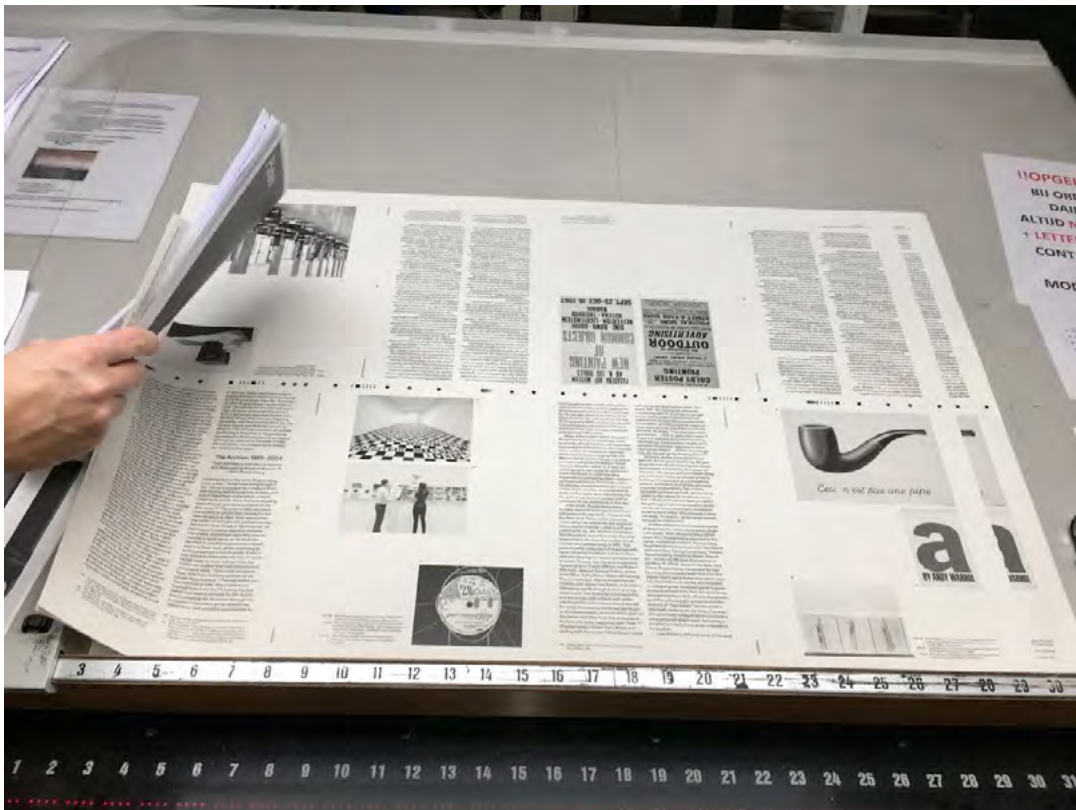
A book of clip art, kindly lent to me by designer Aryn Beitz, as a reference point to pitch the idea to AI.



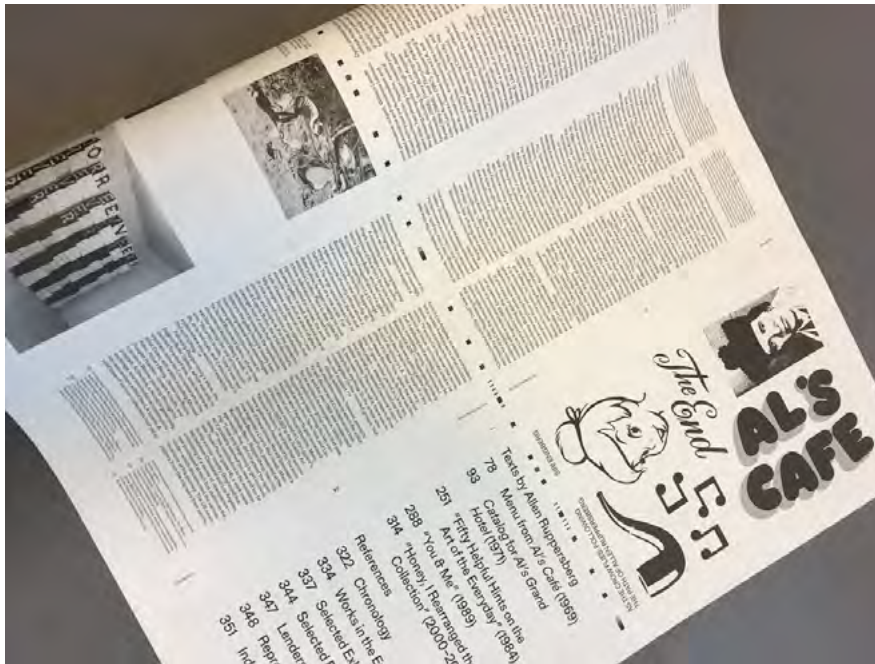
Spread from Allen Ruppertsberg: *Intellectual Property* 1968–2018. Photo: Lindsey Kusterman



Spread from Allen Ruppersberg: *Intellectual Property 1968–2018*. Photo: Lindsey Kusterman



Checking proofs at Die Keure



Looking at a press sheet at Die Keure

Books in Books

Once the main graphic moves and overall structure of the catalog had been decided upon, I turned my focus to the book object. In our initial meeting, the artist mentioned the idea of books within the book—something I thought I might be able to play with through materiality. I began by considering the various type of media Ruppertsberg worked with (newspapers, comics, magazines) and determining how these could be represented.

The solution was simple: paper. The essays would be printed on a newspaper-like stock with black and white references, the plates on a more straightforward “catalogue paper,” and full-bleed zines would be printed on thin, glossy, magazine stock (I need to give a shout out to Senior Image Specialist Greg Beckel, who makes every single image in the book look amazing. Thanks, Greg!). Books within the book became more like a newspaper, art catalogue, and zine within the book. Al approved; we did too.

It’s also worth mentioning that as part of this process I had the unique opportunity to visit the artist in his studio in El Segundo and present all of these ideas. Ruppertsberg’s studio is really an architectural representation of his mind, jam packed and organized with obscure records, magazines, comics, and artwork. It was an incredible place and definitely a part of the book process I’ll always remember. He gave me this little book called *The Story of Your Newspaper* (yes, YOURS!) and told me to reference the layout for a photo essay section in the book. It was a great point of inspiration and lead to my favorite spread in the book:



The Story of Your Newspaper



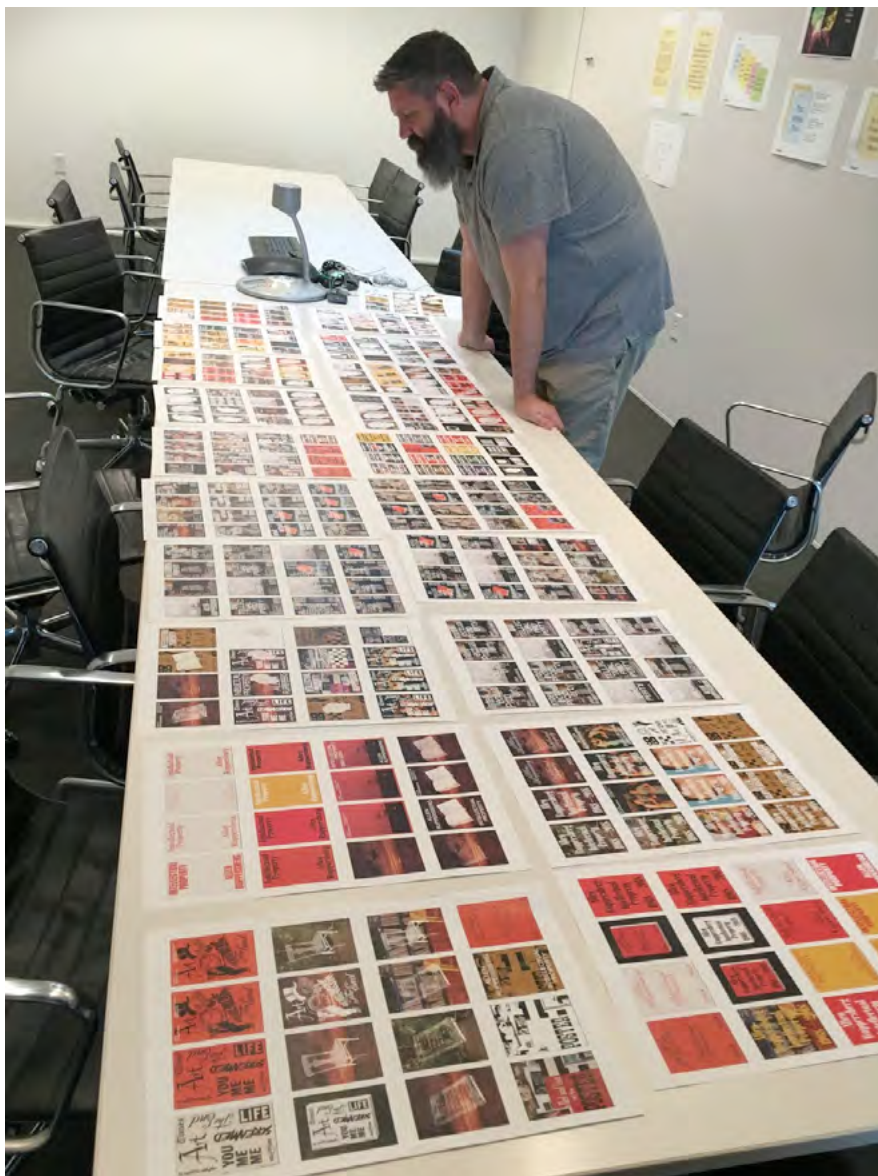
Spread from Allen Ruppersberg: *Intellectual Property 1968–2018*. A mix of the newsprint and glossy zine section. Photo: Lindsey Kusterman



Spread from Allen Ruppersberg: *Intellectual Property 1968–2018*. A mix of the newsprint and glossy zine section. Photo: Lindsey Kusterman



Spread from Allen Ruppersberg: *Intellectual Property 1968–2018*. Straight up plate paper. Photo: Lindsey Kusterman



One of many meetings with Emmet where we looked at a lot of cover sketches

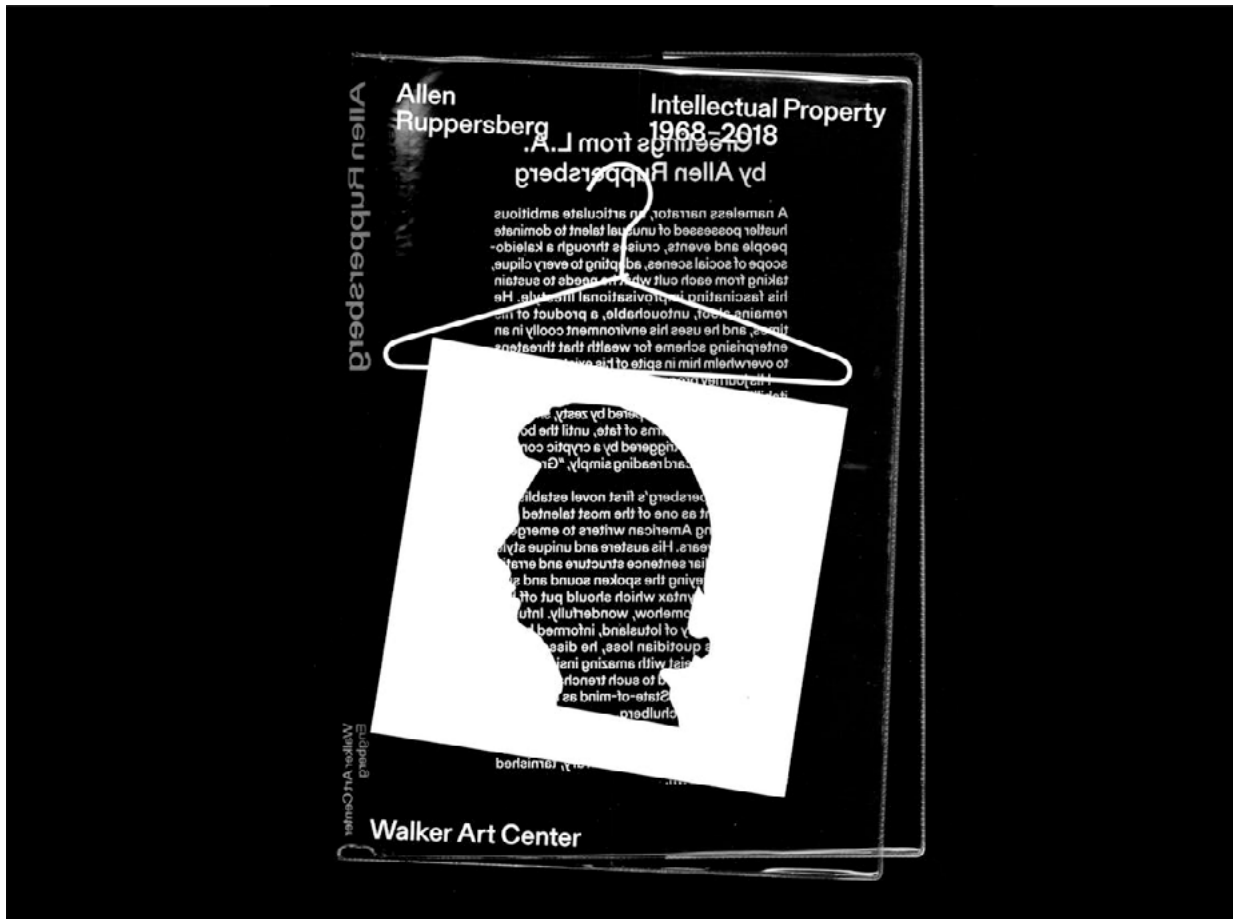
Emmet frequently jokes that “the cover is the most important part of the book” (or at least I think he is joking). Either way we tried A LOT of directions for the cover.

The plastic sleeve idea came about fairly early. Ruppertsberg keeps his ephemera in clear plastic binder sleeves, which I thought was charming and provides a really nice layered quality when looking at the binder as a whole. He also showed me this amazing Duchamp book called *Étant Donnés*, which reproduced the binder sleeve using a nice trompe-l’œil effect, and confirmed that I was going down the right path.



Layering is a consistent gesture throughout the work—layering materials, time, layers of meaning, etc.—so the idea of a layered cover was appealing. In one meeting, I brought Ruppertsberg a bunch of books that had a certain quality I wanted to capture with his book. One was a library archive book which was preserved in a plastic sleeve. It was something we tried to replicate (maybe a little nicer quality, though). We played with a lot of ideas as to what would be screen printed on the plastic sleeve, elements as

straightforward as text or a collage of every icon that we use in the book. We chose a silhouette of the work *Ready and Waiting 7 Days A Week*, for several reasons. It continued the theme of self portraiture. It demonstrated the use of everyday materials. It felt like a logo of sorts (which worked nicely with the title), and whatever was underneath it interacts nicely with the “brain” of AI. And finally (and what we liked the most) is that it felt sort of strange and funny.



The screen printed plastic sleeve, sans book

The cover images (plural) actually began with us looking for a cover image (just one, not four). We soon came to realize that it would be near impossible to find a single image to sum up all of Ruppberg’s practice. If it was too “conceptual arty” than it lost the humor; if it was only a Colby poster, then it felt too familiar to previous catalogues. So we felt like four worked best, and each book represented a part of his practice:

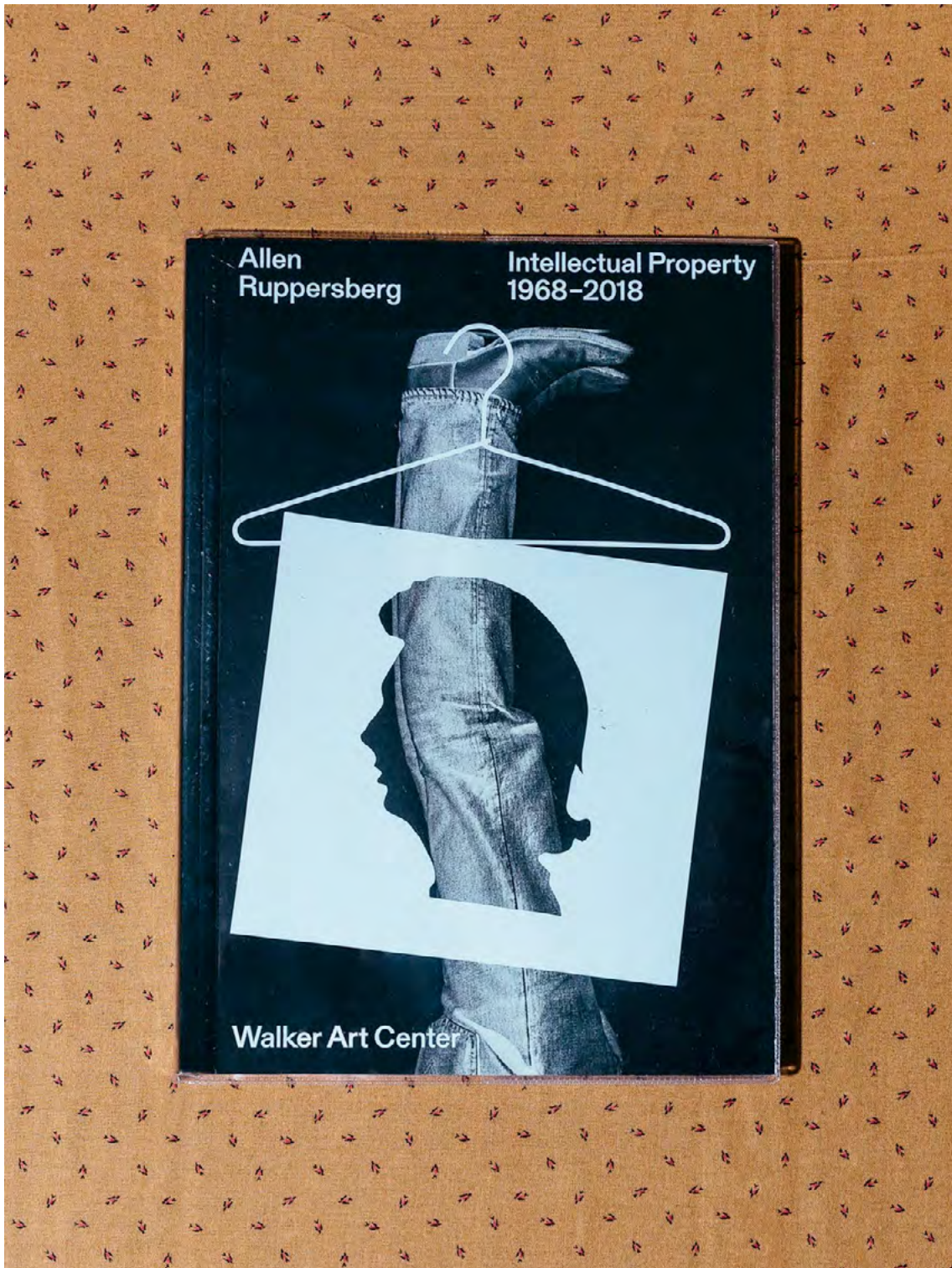


Photo: Lindsey Kusterman

The Legs: The artist is present, but not really. There is a sense of mystery and humor in the work. In a way, the legs complete the head and the book becomes a new and strange self-portrait.



Photo: Lindsey Kusterman

The Chair: The empty chair is a recurring motif throughout the artist's work (there's an empty chair at the beginning of his major shows, including this one at the Walker). We are waiting for the artist to come and sit down, but of course he never will (presence through absence). Also, the generic nature of the photo references Ruppersberg's interest in the ordinary.



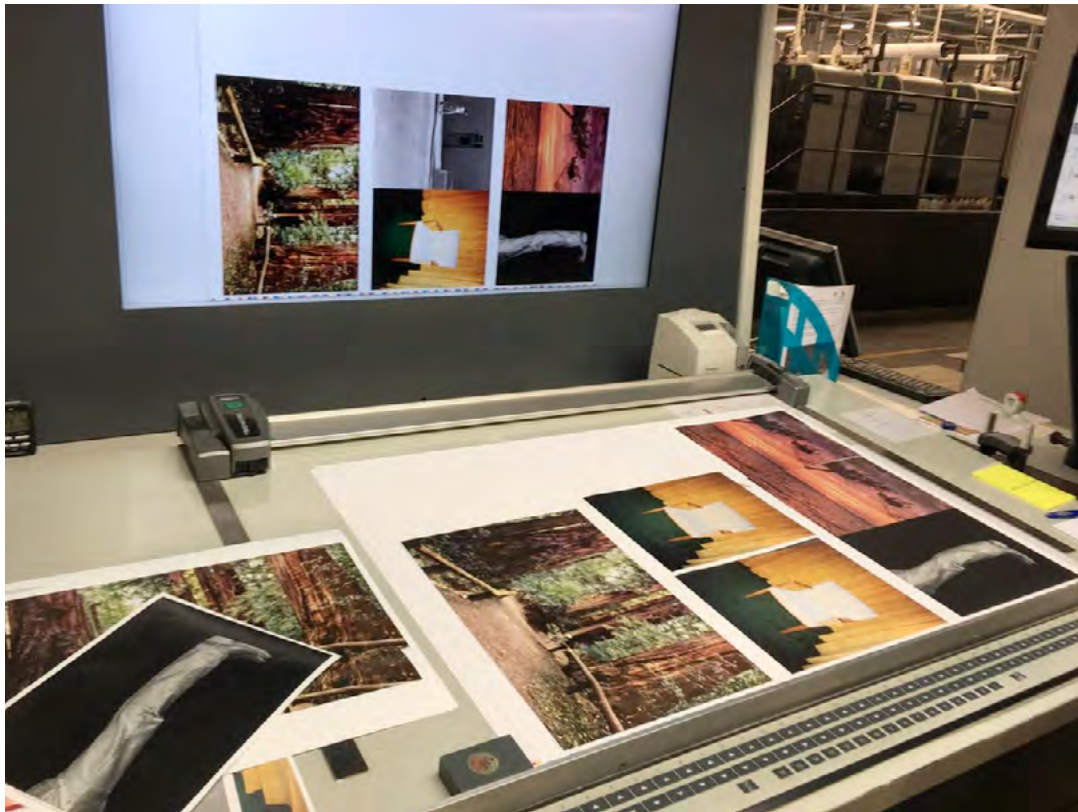
Photo: Lindsey Kusterman

The Woods: The woods come from a California postcard from Ruppertsberg's collection. They represent Al's connection to the West Coast, his work in the outdoors, and his use of found ephemera.



Photo: Lindsey Kusterman

The Text: The text is taken from a Colby poster which features a poem from the artist. The words are stripped from the original fluorescent background making the focus the text and not the “poster.” This cover represents the importance of language throughout Al’s practice.



Proofing the covers



Four covers of Allen Ruppersberg: *Intellectual Property 1968–2018*. Photo: Lindsey Kusterman

Photography: Lindsey Kusterman