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A Lively Conversation in Allen Ruppertsberg's Ongoing 'Novel'

Art Reviews

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT
TIMES ART CRITIC

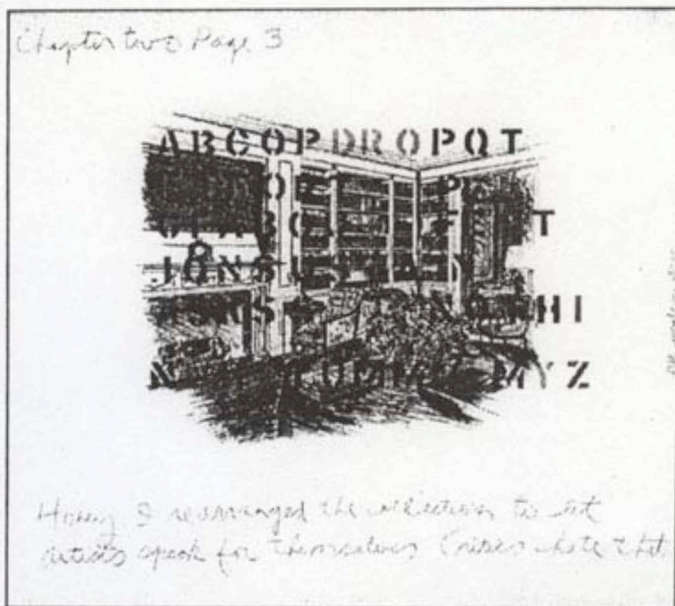
In a world defined by mass production and media saturation, two activities are commonplace: First, you pick and choose from among the roaring flood of stuff; then, you rearrange things to suit your purpose.

In the latest installment of his ongoing, long-term project, "A Novel That Writes Itself," Allen Ruppertsberg homes in on the practices of choosing and rearranging. The walls of the main room at Margo Leavin Gallery are papered from floor to ceiling with some 1,800 brightly colored, carnival-style posters, which provide a suitably chaotic backdrop for the show. Hanging on top of this cacophonous wallpaper are 46 screen prints, each with a hand-rendered drawing that depicts the same formal library in an old-style manor house.

Ruppertsberg's use of the image of a stately domestic library reads as a sign for privileged refinement and deliberation. The carnival of the public world provides a raucous context for the ordered calm of the private realm.

Each screen print bears a pencil scrawl. "Honey, I rearranged the collection," the scrawl declares, suggesting a lively sitcom conversation between intimates about art.

What differs from print to print is the subsequent explanation, also in scrawled pencil, of why or on what principle the collection was rearranged: "with artists we only say 'hello' to"; "because I have seen God"; "because I'm looking for a good argument"; "with Peggy Guggenheim in mind"; or—my personal favorite—"to let artists speak for themselves. Critics hate that."



BRIAN FORREST

Allen Ruppertsberg's "Honey, I Rearranged the Collection. . . ."

Sometimes, the library image on the print has been colored, doubled, abraded, flopped, collaged, printed off-register or otherwise altered. The alteration comments on the text, while also suggesting that standard signs for deliberation and refinement are not without their own eccentricity and capacity for breakdown.

Which of these wry works is better, funnier or more convincing than the rest? You choose. In the space of his savvy installation Ruppertsberg re-creates in miniature the mass-produced, media-saturated modern world, so that your own concentrated picks and choices are thrown into glaring high relief.

This being an art gallery, of course, you're also invited to go the distance: Purchase of a Ruppertsberg work would require, upon its arrival at one's home, rearrangement of the collection. The reasoning is yours.

• Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., West Hollywood, (310) 273-0603, through April 14. Closed Sunday and Monday.