

# The New York Times

## Art Bookstore Printed Matter Has New Home

By ALEX HAWGOOD NOV. 18, 2015



In 2012, Printed Matter, the nonprofit art bookstore started by Sol LeWitt and the art critic Lucy R. Lippard, lost more than 9,000 books and sustained hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage during Hurricane Sandy.

It surged back to life with the help of artists and fans who volunteered to salvage waterlogged documents from its basement in Chelsea, and later held auctions to raise money for recovery efforts.

Now in its 40th year, Printed Matter continues to thrive. In October, it relocated to a bigger and more flood-resistant, two-story space at 231 11th Avenue. And once again, the move was made possible in part by artists like Bruce Nauman, Chuck Close and Xaviera Simmons, whose works were donated to raise money for the new space.

Photo: Max Schumann (top right), the bookstore's executive director, with Shannon Michael Cane (holding a dog), the curator of the art book fairs, and the Printed Matter team. Credit Clement Pascal for The New York Times

Such generosity is a testament to the space's singular role in the city's art scene. For many, Printed Matter is regarded less as a bookstore, and more of a scrappy community archive teeming with decades of works, including vintage political posters from the AIDS activist group Act Up, and new underground art zines that can be taken home for \$10 or less.

"In the context of an art market that can now feel really alienating to artists in New York, it is a really important meeting place where a community of artists, designers and publishers can develop relationships and see itself," said David Senior, a bibliographer at the Museum of Modern Art Library.

Such disregard for commercial interests has been the crux of Printed Matter since its founding in 1976 as a storefront on Lispenard Street in TriBeCa. At the time, a new group of conceptual artists, including John Baldessari and Kathy Acker, began to explore publishing as an artistic practice in its own right. Reproducing works within the pages of a book meant that pieces could circulate cheaply, like a kind of lending library that operates beyond the white walls of establishment museums and galleries.

“From the very beginning, Printed Matter didn’t fit into the fancy or fashionable art world that we’re constantly subjected to,” said Wade Guyton, the New York artist known for making large-scale inkjet pieces, and who has previously expressed disgust at the millions his work has fetched at auction. “It’s built by a bunch of nerds and punks and art specialists that offer a different kind of connoisseurship, which is why they’re cool.”

The organization has also been a petri dish for some of the most important voices in contemporary art. Besides Mr. Baldessari and Ms. Acker, Printed Matter has stocked titles from Laurie Anderson, Edward Ruscha and Lawrence Weiner — many of which now sit behind glass vitrines on the space’s new upper mezzanine floor and are still available to buy.



A view of the first floor, which includes plenty of arm’s-length shelving space for staple-bound zines by esoteric artists, and a narrow exhibition wing that recently showed the cartoonish work of the Paper Rad art collective. Credit Clement Pascal for The New York Times

The artbooks-by-artists formula continues. In June, a limited run of large-scale posters of Mr. Guyton’s “X” paintings were snapped up for \$1,000 by collectors who had lined up outside as early as 3 a.m.

“It’s just what we hoped it would be when we founded it decades ago: a unique center for books made by artists as art, not about artists by people like me,” said Ms. Lippard, who moved to rural New Mexico in 1993.

In a way, Printed Matter became a victim of its own mission. As anyone who visited its former home on 10th Avenue near West 21st Street can attest, the space was bursting at the seams. Decades worth of acquiring head-scratching titles caused an inventory pileup of near-hoarder proportions.



“In the old space, there were so many piles of stuff that there wasn’t room for the staff and there wasn’t room for the public,” said Max Schumann, the bookstore’s executive director.

Designed by Handel Architects, a New York-based firm known for its work on the National September 11 Memorial, the new quarter occupies an abandoned train terminal near the corner of 11th Avenue and 26th Street, and commands twice the square footage spread across two floors, connected by an open staircase.



Photo: Mr. Schumann, left, Printed Matter’s executive director, and Mr. Cane, curator of fairs and editions, in the bookstore’s new space. Credit Clement Pascal for The New York Times

The first floor includes plenty of arm’s-length shelving space for staple-bound zines by esoteric artists, and a narrow exhibition wing that recently showed the cartoonish work of the Paper Rad art collective.

The top floor holds display cases for more prominent titles, a hushed reading zone and open offices for its 10 staff members, who have become accustomed to the occasional customer accidentally picking up items from their desks.

Printed Matter also continues to expand with its two annual art book fairs, in New York and Los Angeles. The New York Art Book Fair, which was held in September at MoMA PS1 in Queens, attracted more than 35,000 visitors and 380 vendors from Bushwick to Australia. (The Los Angeles fair takes place Feb. 12 to 14.)

Shannon Michael Cane, curator of fairs and editions, said that the age of digital culture has not eroded the tradition of handcrafted art books. In fact, he has seen a renewed interest in printed paper as an art medium.

On Instagram recently, Mr. Cane came across a drawing of a naked actor from the HBO show “Oz” by an illustrator named Melinda Melmoth. He sent a direct message to Ms. Melmoth, a part-time waitress and Whole Foods cashier from Charleston, S.C. Nine months later, she had her own booth at the New York Art Book Fair.

“At the book fair, people can come up to me and see that I’ve got thousands of hours of drawings on the table,” Ms. Melmoth said. “That’s so different from seeing one image on the Internet.”

**Correction: November 26, 2015**

An earlier version of this article described incorrectly the nature of the recent fundraising effort for Printed Matter. The art works were donated by their owners, not the artists themselves. Because of an editing error, the article also misstated the project that Handel Architects is known for. It is the National September 11 Memorial, not the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. And because of an editing error, the article also misspelled the surname of an art fair curator in one reference. It is Shannon Michael Cane, not Came.