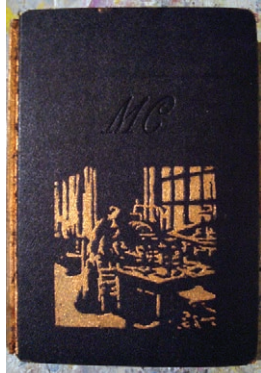




# Strange Birds

Ethan Shoshan



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Ethan Shoshan is a social ecologist, who also engages in aesthetic philosophical visual inquiries, living in New York City. For more information go to [www.disiterate.com](http://www.disiterate.com)

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR BOOK ARTS: The Center for Book Arts is committed to exploring and cultivating contemporary aesthetic interpretations of the book as an art object while invigorating traditional artistic practices of the art of the book. Founded in 1974, it was the first organization of its kind in the nation.

ABOUT THE FEATURED ARTIST PROJECT SERIES: The Center's Featured Artist Project Series provides a critical forum for artists working primarily in the medium of book arts to showcase a recent or cohesive body of work or create a site-specific installation.

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Designed by Frank Gargiulo for [theartdictator.com](http://theartdictator.com)

A featured artist project with

Arthur Aviles, Jill L. Conner, Barry Frier, Bibbe Hansen, Geoffrey Hendricks, Jim Hubbard, Stephen Kent Jusick, Stephen Lack, Agosto Machado, Stefani Mar, Liz McGarrity, Lucia Maria Minervini, Angelo Monaco, Augustmoon Ochiishi, Uzi Parnes, Dennis Redmond, Hunter Reynolds, Charles Rice-Gonzalez, Rob Roth, Edward Rubin, Rafael Sánchez, Arleen Schloss, Gervaise Soeurouge, Sur Rodney Sur, Chris Tanner, Brad Taylor, Gail Thacker, Jack Waters, Kathleen White, Brian "Soigne" Wilson, and Stephen Winter

JANUARY 18 - MARCH 31, 2012

The Center for Book Arts  
28 West 27th Street, 3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
[www.centerforbookarts.org](http://www.centerforbookarts.org)

Artist in conversation with Edwin Ramoran on role models and intergenerational dialog. Wednesday, March 21, 6:30pm. Suggested admission \$10 (Members: \$5)

# W

hen we consider the book as a container of information, it is logical to consider the I-pad, kindle, or other similar devices as a natural progression of technology with steles and wall cave paintings as the more ancient approach and scrolls and codices as the more modern method, which none have disappeared from use. These new electronic books exist alongside the more traditional concepts of the book, both western and non-western, both ancient and modern, yet somehow informs, changes, and enhances the way in which we receive information and enjoy the intimate connection of reading and viewing. Ironically, using modern technology can actually reinvigorate archaic traditions such as storytelling. Shoshan's collaborative project, *Strange Birds*, invites us to recontextualize oral traditions and handheld technological devices as bookends of the concept of the book. The installation, *Strange Birds*, invites viewers to hold an audio device that contains images (icons), which refer to objects that are displayed around the Center's studio spaces. Upon selecting the icon, the viewer hears an intimate story generated by a conversation with the object's caretaker about the object displayed. Thus, the viewer is holding a container of information, hearing aloud the information, and viewing an object that inspired the information, all at the same time. In essence, Shoshan transports the viewer, conceptually, into a book, while connecting traditional and modern technologies, and developing shared language through personal experiences. This exhibition considers the book in the broader context of storytelling, narrative, and text-based work. — *Alexander Campos, Executive Director, The Center for Book Arts*

From left to right: Jack Waters, Circular Train Mirror; Stephen Lack, Ray Singing; 1967; Rafael Sánchez, Cuban Passport c. 1960; Brian "Soigne" Wilson, Miss Piggy Trouble Doll; A gift from his soulmate Brad; Dennis Redmond, Another Mother for Peace Poster; Rafael Sánchez, Marie Curie by Eve Curie with Copper Leaf



“T

erritory and property are not the same thing. Territory is the habitation of the nation. It must be remembered, fought for, and cherished for the good of the nation and for the good of the four-leggeds and the wingeds of the air as well. Property implies a who; property belongs to somebody, property is a principle division. But if space is one, indivisible, centered, recurrent, auditory, memorable, personal, and continuous, how could land ever possibly be private property? The land, the great rolling Plains, belonged to everybody or nobody. The Great Spirit ultimately “owned” everything and had created everything to be shared. Not only the land but also all beings belonged to [the Great Spirit] and all things. Man [and woman were] but a caretaker of being, and eventually all would be returned to its proper owner, even one’s own body. Therefore, as temporary trustee of being, it was proper to share. Being was not having. To be was to share.” ✦

I’ve been interested in the way we produce meaning in our lives and how these created meanings effect our growth and development. Specifically, I look at the way in which objects function as prostheses – as extensions of the body/self, helping to enhance our lives in seemingly ordinary ways. Clothes, furniture, tools; whether as mementoes, tokens, spiritual icons, or utilitarian in nature, hold an added value by the relationships we build with them as sites of memory or repositories of experience. On a similar note, when the person is no longer there, these prostheses become traces of a life lived, and through their relationship with their caretaker, share similar phenomenological experiences. ✦

My work depends on the creation of and identification with personal archives (imaginary, fictive, physical or becoming) and the relationships of an object or a collection of objects have to a community consciousness, personal identity and cultural understanding; in a way, developing and maintaining associations of autotopographies. This exhibition is an extension of the storytelling project I organized in 2009/2010, “I’m always thinking of you even when I’m kissing another boy.”\* These projects inform the way I relate to the world around me, and share a reciprocal learning experience through the process not only of arriving at the exhibition, but of viewing, touching, talking, and listening; engaging with one’s senses in a dialectic experience.

I have asked people I know, directly and peripherally, to look at the way they see the world through an object or experience they value to gain more insight into their lives and our “human condition,” as an apprentice would, learning a trade from a master. This project is built around intimate conversations with people I’ve met in my life. They are personal interviews of touching moments, milestones, and inspirations that have effected their lives, and through their telling, have effected my life. The objects and photos on display are beginnings, “vignettes” into the experiences they represent, portraits of personal meanings. From Bibbe’s relationship with her mom through gathering stones to a realization of home in acceptance of every moment as “perfect,” to SKJ’s first projector providing the construction of personal and social resources that help shape his creative community. These are just some examples of the relationships between caretaker and objects in this exhibition.

It is by sharing these stories (personal and political histories) that we connect and engage with the people behind them, and gain insight and an intimate connection to something within ourselves. The need for personal archives and institutional archives, forgotten histories, memories, and embodied experiences are important and integral to this project. It is a testament or an affirmation of life portraying the singularity of each individual as the flow of thoughts and experiences. The subjects of/contributors to this project have skills and knowledge through experience that are inspirational to me and important in my life. They are *strange birds*, pilots in their own epic flight.

In this process of creating, archiving, and exploring personal spaces and objects, I have found intimate connections with personal struggles and the beauty of a queer consciousness, which are distant and displaced in most media forms and technology. What I mean by a “queer consciousness” is mainly holistic in the sense of understanding the ways relationships shift and change; that is, how everything informs every other thing in this process. When we speak about an object, we speak about ourselves, our hopes, our experiences, our lives, our inspirations and in essence we touch something deeper in ourselves and others. It is through “the other” we come to ourselves – that to me is a queer consciousness, an indirect reciprocal relationship.\* This project exhibition is embodied criticality in an investment of lived experience with what is discarded in the social, or worse, deemed invaluable: feelings, ephemera, fragility... to uncover a small sparkling gem buried just beneath the surface.

I realize that its been quite special for me to have these conversations with every person involved in this project and wanted to thank all the participants for sharing with me the gift of their company, time, and experiences. In making this exhibition, there are several outrakes, mistakes, remnants of thoughts, conversations, laughter, tears and expressions that have not been included in the exhibition, but I want to acknowledge because even the things left out or unsaid or unrecorded are just as influential and important as what is kept and the process has been very formative for me and possibly for the people involved. I would also like to thank Robin E. Corsino, Lisa Darms and the Fales Library & Special Collections at New York University, Wayne Northcross, Alice O’Malley, Edwin Ramoran, and Robert Summers for their contributions.



Counter Clockwise from Upper Left: Rob Roth, *Piece of Wood from Jackie 60 Stage*; Gervaise Sœurouge, *Decoupage Suitcase*; Jill L. Conner, *Theater of Dionysus, Athens Greece*; Uzi Parnes, *Urn with Jack Smith’s Ashes*

... Therefore, as temporary trustee of being, it was proper to share. Being was not having. To be was to share.”

✦ from “Dakota Philosophy” by George W. Linden, page 237 in *The Black Elk Reader* by Clyde Holler. I’ve drawn influence from the ways of the Lakota tribe and Black Elk, a holy man of the Sioux. In this, we understand the foundation of property, which is fluid, dynamic, and connected on many levels. It is also here that we begin to reexamine current situations like Occupy Wall Street and other movements that reclaim public and private spaces to reflect social and economic injustices. It is the space of a nation to care for the relationships of place, memory, objects and personal meanings. It is in the ability to recognize our temporary existence that we become caretakers; sharing becomes an understanding of cohabitation, of existence.

✦ “Every experience gives you a different kind of loneliness. Loneliness in Greek civilization is different from loneliness in Egyptian civilization. (I say civilization because people may misunderstand; they may think I’m referring to today’s Greece. For example, a young boy once came to my house and asked me to teach him about illumination. And I was very happy and started showing him piles and piles of books and talking to him. He didn’t say anything. When I finished he told me that what he wanted to learn was how to light a show. He hadn’t understood a thing. But I learned something; before you learn scenic illumination, you have to learn self-illumination.) Loneliness in Roman times was different from loneliness of today. And loneliness in New York is different from loneliness in Los Angeles. Very, very different. We can have something and, at the same time, know the loneliness of what we have. So that when we love someone, we love that person’s presence and his absence at the same time. Because in everything we have, there is an infinity that we can’t have. And that’s what I’m searching for. Loneliness is what I have. Right?” – from a conversation with Jodorowsky, *El Topo, A Book of the Film* by Alejandro Jodorowsky

\* Clothing and cloth with all of its scents and residues; furniture with all of its bodily imprints, shapes, and sags from years of use; worn silverware and shoes: All of these serviceable objects receive the imprint of a human trace as the autonomy of their purely functional status is worn away by time. Used initially as prostheses (to cover and protect, to extend and support the body), such objects often become, after years of use, integrated so inextricably with one’s psychic body... These personal objects can be seen to form a syntagmatic array of physical signs in a spatial representation of identity – what I call an autotopography. Its own form of a prosthetic territory, this private-yet-material memory landscape is made up of the more intimate expressions of values and beliefs, emotions and desires, that are found in the domestic collection and arrangement of objects... Jennifer González, “Autotopographies” from *Prosthetic Territories*, Westview Press, San Francisco 1995, pp. 133

\* “The Other, notes Leader (2000), is not only the set of elements that make up the symbolic world the subject is born into, it also the symbolic place which is present *each time that someone speaks*. The puzzle that emerges here – to reiterate the paradox just offered – is that we have two apparent directions or locations. We have the Other apparently “inside” us, as the foreign language – or “mOther tongue” to use Fink’s (1995) helpful phrase – that we rely upon in our attempts at expression. Then there is the “outside” Other, the Other as the set of communicative rules and symbolic codes which forms the grounds and basis of all attempts at meaning-making. This, we might say, is the Other as a *locus of listening*: The Other is a place from which you are *heard*, from which you are recognized. The Other is thus the place of language, external to the speaker, and yet, since he or she is a speaker, internal at the same time (Leader, 1995, p. 60). It is perhaps easier to grasp this apparent double-nature of the Other (the Other as both “inside” and “outside”; as both ‘discourse of the unconscious’ and the social substance) by drawing attention to how each act of speaking presupposes a point of reception, a place of intelligibility from which one might be understood. This is one of the points Lacan (1977) makes about the functioning of speech in *Écrits*: each instance of speech implies an interlocutor, even (we might add) if this interlocutor is little more than a hypothetical postulate. Why is it, we might ask, that we use socially-intelligible terms to express ourselves – when I swear to express frustration, say – even when we are totally alone? The Lacanian answer: as speaking subjects we never step outside of the social field. Every time we are involved in the making of meaning – even if only to ourselves – we do so in view of a context of potential recognition (i.e. of *how one is heard*). Such a place of recognition – never within the confines of our control – necessarily plays a crucial role in determining the meaning of our utterances, in how they are taken up, how they resonate... The Other as language, as frame of social and communicative intelligibility is thus coterminous with the eruption within everyday speech of unconscious discourse.” Derek Hook, *Absolute Other: Lacan’s ‘big Other’ as adjunct to critical social psychological analysis?* In: Theoretical psychology beyond borders: transdisciplinarity and internationalization. International Society for Theoretical Psychology Conference 2007, 18-22 June 2007, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.