BEYOND THE BOOK: GRAPHIC NOVELS ARTIST’S BOOKS

A Presentation by Charles Brown to the Florida Bibliophile Society, January 21, 2018
Advice for people who are about to cover 40,000 years of human history in 20 minutes
PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TELLING STORIES IN PICTURES FOR A LONG TIME

There are many ways to tell this story. This one focuses on pictorial storytelling.
40,000 BCE
SULAWESI

This is a long time ago, and this isn’t the earliest. Note the simplicity and playfulness.
28,000 BCE
CHAUVET, FRANCE

Notice the complexity. This isn’t a picture of an animal; it’s a active scene.
12,000 BCE
BHIMBETKA, INDIA

Now people appear: riding horses, carrying, weapons, wearing ornaments.
WHEN PEOPLE MADE THEIR OWN CAVES (BUILDINGS), THEY CONTINUED TO PAINT THE WALLS.
1,500 BCE
EGYPT

Notice the crowded canvas and the interplay of words, representational images, and symbols.
This image is an illustration of a scene from the Aeneid, the epic of the founding of Rome.
Cathedral windows tell stories from books that most people cannot access or read.
The finest and most important manuscripts combine pictures and text.
This is printed book. They were made to look like manuscripts. Pictures often included.
Picture and text work together to tell the story. Prints like this were popular, affordable art.
We are bombarded by images in which words and pictures tell a story.
Obadiah Oldbuck is unlucky at love in this book, regarded as the first comic.
Newspaper comics developed the devices and appearance – the visual language – of comics.
COMICS’ POPULARITY → MANY MORE COMICS → SHARED VOCABULARY
By 1923, artists have developed an extensive vocabulary that readers have learned to “read.”
Comic books were popular, portable, and immersive. They were very popular but “low culture”.
In the ‘20s, comic books were emerging, and artists experimented with wordless storytelling.
Pop artists brought all aspects of popular culture into traditional art forms.
1994
UNITED STATES
Roy Lichtenstein was famous for paintings that used comics’ visual language.
Not the first graphic novel, but seminal in popularizing the term and the medium.
GRAPHIC NOVELS USE A VISUAL VOCABULARY TO TELL A STORY
COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS SALES IN 2016 = $1 BILLION
A SELECTION OF GRAPHIC NOVELS
1980-1991
UNITED STATES
1995-2000
UNITED STATES
1991-2000
UNITED STATES
2008
UNITED STATES
2005
UNITED STATES
1993
UNITED STATES
WHAT IS THE USE OF A BOOK WITHOUT PICTURES?

– ALICE
ARTIST’S BOOKS
IT ALL BEGINS WITH THE BOOK.
CODEX FORM CREATED
~0-100 CE
Several Roman tabula bound together make a codex.
The idea of binding paper in a codex form goes way back.
Great libraries expressed wealth, knowledge, and cultural heritage.
Books become symbolic of the ability to read, of knowledge, of authority.
WHAT IS A BOOK AS A STRUCTURE, AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES THAT STRUCTURE PROVIDE?
Every component of the book structure can be altered or elaborated.
Another possibility is using books like bricks.
The late 20th century saw a rapid increase in artists’ book production.
TOULOUSE-LAUTREC
GAUGIN
PICASSO
MATISSE
RUSCHA
KEIFER
KRUGER

Many famous artists made books.
The increase in artists’ book production parallels graphic novels and visual culture.
Our brief look at the development of artists’ books ends, and we take a sharp turn. Refer to the February 2018 newsletter of the Florida Bibliophile Society for explanation of the following works.
ORIGAMI
ASSEMBLAGE

I STOLE ALL YOUR TOOTHPICKS TO MAKE THIS
BOOK ARTS

FEET (2005)
TEA BAGS

TEA BAG TORNADO (2012)
DESTRUCTIVE PROCESSING – STARTS WITH A BOOK
BURNING BOOK MINI

- BOILED
- DYED
CONSTRUCTIVE PROCESSING – ENDS WITH A BOOK
NO RHYME
NO REASON
(1994)
STICKY PAGES (2004-present)
BURNING BOOK (1992)
MILLION PIECES OF PAPER
WRAPPED BOOK: GREAT EXPECTATIONS GIFT-WRAPPED IN ITS OWN ILLUSTRATIONS (1990)
IF THE GLOVE DON'T FIT
YOU MUST ACQUIT
A HISTORY OF THE BRIEF LIFE OF JACOB M (2016)
That's all Folks.