Picture the Seine River as it serpentines through Paris. Interspersed along the banks of the river are bouquinistes, the people who sell second-hand books out of large, green, metal boxes. In his recent show at Jessica Bradley Gallery—“Four Notable Booksellers”—Derek Sullivan appropriated the display techniques of the Seine bouquinistes. To this he introduced his vision of Modernism: one entrenched in geometric abstraction and formalist design. But above all, it was a show about the lure of adventure that one experiences when poring over used books.

Sullivan’s work unfolds like any good book should—by establishing a tight narrative, then twisting it unexpectedly. In the installation Four Notable Booksellers (2013), a skeletal wooden frame supports four green boxes, each containing a different theme: defeat in sport, British mathematician Alan Turing, contemporary art in Toronto and abstract painting. The books inside have been stripped of their original covers and replaced by Sullivan’s own, often cryptic, visual syntax. The cosmology of subjective responses to the work allows the viewers to pick and choose meanings based on their personal interests and history; it’s something that speaks to the importance of bookselling, to the idea of circulating knowledge among the public, perhaps because it’s emblematic of democracy itself. The bouquinistes’ role in the French Revolution and resistance movement during the Second World War provides a telling example.

Opposite the installation, five drawings hung on the wall. The centre drawing, #95, A Man for all seasons (2013), is a portrait of Alan Turing repeated on one of Sullivan’s book covers. In effect, it pays homage to the scientist who cracked the Enigma code and was persecuted in the 1950s for engaging in a same-sex relationship. Many of Sullivan’s drawings characterize his preoccupation with geometric abstraction; others are soothing gradations from light to dark. All, however, are executed in a one-inch straight line—a dash—which has become Sullivan’s graphic signature.

The remaining text-based works represented a departure from Sullivan’s Modernist underpinnings, moving into the typographical Conceptualism of Lawrence Weiner. In Problems That Arise From Continually Confusing Left & Right (2013), the viewer/reader was activated through written language and thus opened to interpretation. Here, as elsewhere in the exhibition, Sullivan tendered instances where the audience negotiates their own subjectivity. Furthermore, he offered a rigorous and penetrating engagement with the subject of reading itself as both a concept and an object. The only thing missing was that distinct smell of old books.
Sobey Art Award Shortlist Exhibition Is Full Of Winners
Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto October 24 to December 30, 2012

By Richard Rhodes
POSTED: OCTOBER 30, 2012

Sarah Fillmore of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia has done a spectacular job in setting up this year’s exhibition of Sobey Art Award shortlisted artists at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art in Toronto. The quality is so high—and even—that one does not envy the hard choice that this year’s jury will have to make on November 16.


Marking the 10th anniversary edition of the Sobey Art Award, they will have to choose between Gareth Moore, fresh from this summer’s Documenta exhibition, who is shortlisted for the West Coast and Yukon; Derek Sullivan, whose work made an appearance at London’s Frieze Art Fair this month and is representing Ontario; Eleanor King, a fresh, impressive artist from Halifax with a firm grasp on monumental scale, who is showing for the Atlantic region; Jason de Haan for the Prairies and the North, who continues to evolve a magical, literary-minded brand of sculpture; and Quebec’s Raphaëlle d’e Groot, who has been behind some of Canada’s most impressive conceptual performance works in recent years.

Together, these artists are vying for $70,000 in prize money from Canada’s richest prize for contemporary art. If there is a show that deserves to travel coast to coast in Canada this year, it’s this one.
In the last decade, Toronto-based artist Derek Sullivan (b. 1976) has refined a playful, idiosyncratic practice that uses everyday forms (books, posters, furniture, and kiosks, to name a few) as arenas in which to stage language games and construct visual puzzles. Folding together the overlapping histories of modernist design, minimal and conceptual art, abstract painting, and concrete poetry, Sullivan's drawings, sculptures and books can be as light and elegant as origami—but also as susceptible to being unfolded, reconstructed or set adrift on the unpredictable currents or breezes of the wider cultural ecosystem.

Sullivan’s additive and generative methods ensure that few of his pieces retain a fixed form or decisive reading. In fact, reading in his work stands in as both an embodied activity—involved in the acquisition and flâneur-ish exploration of books as objects and spaces—and as his principal metaphor for interpretation and meaning-making. At the same time, Sullivan’s penchant for referentiality and recombination ensures that both authorship and ownership in his work remain constantly in motion. From early works like Books Wanted (2004) (which mimicked a hand-drawn sign with pull-tabs seeking copies of rare artists’ publications) and National Gallery Catalogue (2003) (a hand-made decoy replica of the catalogue for Donald Judd’s 1975 solo show at the National Gallery of Canada), Sullivan’s covert appropriations and accessible formats have been a way to toy with the economies of art and inspect the knots that bind knowledge, experience and pleasure to objects and images.

In the Fall of 2011, Toronto’s Power Plant gallery staged the largest solo exhibition of Sullivan’s work to date: Albatross Omnibus, an ambitious project that included a commissioned series of 52 limited edition books produced through print-on-demand technology, which were hung from the gallery’s ceiling, accessible only by ascending one of several sky-blue industrial stepladders. In another room, a zigzagging wall that mimicked an accordion-fold book (also the format of the exhibition’s catalogue) acted as support for two of Sullivan’s ongoing series: Poster Drawings and Illustrations from The Albatross. Simultaneously with Albatross Omnibus, Jessica Bradley Art + Projects staged another solo show of new sculptures by Sullivan. On the occasion of this welcome abundance of work, I conducted an e-mail exchange with Sullivan in which we discussed his methods, his interests and the many hats he wears: artist, collector, librarian, and gardener.

SAELAN TWERDY (ST): In his catalogue text for your show at The Power Plant, AA Bronson pointed out something that I hadn’t noticed: your work never touches the gallery walls. Your Poster Drawings and Illustrations from The Albatross are supported by the custom-built accordion-fold structure in the first room, and the 52 books you produced are suspended from the ceiling in the second room. Is there a deliberate gesture of refusal here? It seems significant that, for your biggest institutional show to date, you’ve chosen an unconventional form of installation.

DEREK SULLIVAN (DS): It wasn’t so much a gesture of refusal, but rather one that used both my additions and the native structure to carve a path (and at times a narrow one) in which the viewer needed to move. The Power Plant was the “book” that held my project and Albatross Omnibus was a project that considered the architecture of the book in a number of forms. A book is a space from which we all can intuit a path through—we all know how to move through a book, either with the intention of the author/designer, or against it. My wall was an enlargement of an accordion-fold book, where the book’s architecture was scaled up to that of an actual wall, making it as if the drawings placed on it were illustration plates on this text. The separation from the native architecture of The Power Plant was to force the viewers to be within the space carved by the building and the space carved by the work.

ST: Stéphane Mallarmé’s remark that “everything in the world exists in order to end up as a book” has been brought up with regard to your work before, but it seems especially apt when talking about exhibition catalogues. The catalogue for your show at The Power Plant is like a model of the exhibition space in that it presents all of the posters, drawings and book covers on a big accordion fold-out. So much as the exhibition was about reading as an embodied experience and books as architectural, spatial forms, the lasting artifact of the exhibit is naturally, inevitably, another book. Is it fair to say that your work is more at home on the page than in the gallery?

DS: An exhibition and a book have much in common. They both set out to structure and sequence works in relation to one another in a way that allows other connections/expressions/authors to be revealed. The viewer of an exhibit or reader of a book moves through both over a period of time, adding their subject positions as a variable to whatever structures have been conceived by the author/artist/curator. I don’t necessarily agree then that my work is more at home on the page than in the gallery, rather I would suggest that my work treats the gallery and the page similarly: as forums where new relationships and contexts are tested, but one that also collapses the book and exhibit into one another. The catalogue for Albatross Omnibus is an important component of the project as a whole and is not meant to be seen solely as a separate document. It is a cumbersome thing, one that could be opened up and expanded into a 26-foot-long sheet, but can also be flipped through as if a more conventional codex. Accompanying this book-wall-sculpture is a separate slim book that contains texts about the project. I’d asked the designer to create a catalogue that would pulse its contents across the room, a book that could run through your fingers and physically get away from the reader. It isn’t an easy book to handle. Rather than acting as an epitaph for the exhibition, it allows its structures to continue in an analogous form outside the duration of the show.
The Booklover
A great deal of your work is explicitly concerned with books and reading, and even those works that don't share many book-like qualities. You tend to choose mediums (books, posters, kiosks, furniture) that are prosaic, accessible, interactive, and generally mass-produced or multiples. And, as with exhibitions, these forms often function as platforms or forums in which other things can be collected and put into dialogue. Hence, your work is often packed with references and citations. This can be inviting—it gives viewers an entry point—but it can also make the work more opaque and exclusive. So I'm curious about how you navigate this dynamic between the openness and contingency of popular forms and the hermetic, secret-code aspect of specific references and content.

Many of my projects utilize a revolving or accumulating subject matter, where the literal, specific content changes over time. This can happen in many ways: in works like *Endless Kiosk* (2005), the sculpture accumulates printed materials applied by the public, creating a surface that literally changes all the time. This happens in my print-on-demand book works like *The Booklover* (2008), where each copy ordered and printed has the capacity to be a unique iteration, as I'm constantly adding to and refining the content, or with my *Poster Drawings* which, although fixed materially, accrue titles as they are exhibited in order to account for the trajectory of the works' exhibition histories and contexts. In any artwork, there are many, many things happening at once, and we only need utilize a different paradigm to decode any work in a myriad of ways. I use these cumulative strategies as a tactic to destabilize meaning and put the onus on the curiosity and knowledge of the viewer. Although at times references do sit obviously in my work, they often are present as a red herring, or perhaps as a dare. I more often plant nonsensical connections, other times I follow a fuzzy logic, and other times a poetic disregard for what has come before.

I have problems with a type of reading of artworks that draws too much on our hard-wired capacity to read signifiers, works that need to be understood as a tallying of external references, too much on our hard-wired capacity to read signs, too much on an underlying arithmetic. I think “albatross” that need to be understood as a tallying of external references, that relies more on sabotaging the collector’s mentality or circumventing the way that scarcity adds value, like with your decoy books (National Gallery Catalogue) or something like *Burying Small Fires*. So if your practice involves collecting things, perhaps it’s not with the aim of keeping them to yourself, but of putting them back into circulation. Which would make you a librarian rather than a collector.

I wanted to ask you about gardening, since there are a number of references to garden design in *Albatross Omnibus*. What I like about this is how gardening is a kind of arranging and collecting, but the gardener is a much more attractive model for an artistic practice than the collector. There’s a relationship to an ecosystem that’s involved, and the gardener’s materials have their own life and agency: they grow and change. The gardener doesn’t just select and display, s/he actually has to care for their garden. And then the garden itself is a space that other people can be welcomed into, and they can wander around in it. Things come to fruition, they can be harvested, they die, and then they sprout and bloom again. I think all of this is wonderful. What motivated you to start working this theme into the exhibition, and how does it relate to the rest of the work for you?

I started gardening about six years ago, but it was only in the past few years that I began to think of this as a parallel activity in relation to my art practice. For all the reasons you mentioned, it becomes an interesting analogue to being an artist. I’ve always been a huge admirer of the work of Kurt Schwitters, and gardening becomes an interesting way to think about the cumulative ebb-and-flow of his practice, the way the works drew elements from a variety of sources, from the banal, to the political, to the avant-garde practices he networked with. The work was the product of cultivation and indeed some works, like *The Merchants*, grew over the years. It also places the author in the role of catalyst: someone who sets a process into motion that is open to input from the outside, that is subject to the elements, that inevitably grows, changes, is refined and grows again...it must be tended.
Derek Sullivan, *Untitled (Books Wanted)*, 2006, silkscreen on paper, 18 cm × 25.5 cm

*Photo: Chris Thomaidis*
Derek Sullivan, illustration from *The Albatross*, 2010, gouache and EPSON print on paper, 65 cm × 46 cm

*Photo: Chris Thomaidis; courtesy Jessica Bradley Art + Projects*
“You were right. Any fact becomes important when it’s connected to another. The connection changes the perspective; it leads you to think that every detail of the world, every voice, every word written or spoken has more than its literal meaning, that it tells us of a secret. The rule is simple: Suspect, only suspect. You can read subtitles even in a traffic sign that says No Littering.”

PHOTO: TONI RAEKERSCHEID
For *Albatross Omnibus*, the design of the exhibition was of a circuit, or a path...in particular, I was thinking about the 52 books as if they were seeds, how each day one title would distribute out of the gallery, and how each stand-alone title would then exist as a stand-alone fragment outside of the landscape of the exhibit. Each copy would “plant” itself on a bookshelf and (given how discretely identified each one was) would hopefully develop and be interpreted based upon its new context.

ST: I also see the idea of gardening as something that’s related to your interest in the decorative arts, or to places where decoration, functionality and avant-gardism all come together. For example, your fascination with modernist book cover design or the way that, in *Poster Drawings and Illustrations from The Albatross*, you take Daniel Buren’s stripes or Bridget Riley’s patterns or Martin Kippenberger’s gingham and you render them in a handmade way that foregrounds their graphic-design elements. Your reproductions of modernist furniture, like the Gerrit Rietveld chair that was used as a book stand in The Power Plant’s gift shop, fit in with this too. How do you think of your work’s relationship to decoration?

DS: Of the painting references you mention, I do select these patterns, on the one hand from the artists you mention, but on the other, these are vernacular forms that have as interesting resonances outside of the art historical context as within it. With the poster drawings in particular I am selecting (or “clipping”) forms from a range of fine and decorative arts. The *Poster Drawing* project as a whole (and it is continually growing) collapses distinction by this diversity of source material: each then becomes a screen that can receive new information. Some of them do have more baggage than others. There are always more possible permutations, more possible signification, that can be piled onto forms that are essentially empty.

I’m drawn to the way designers deploy their forms into the world, how a typographer can refine a typeface (and have ideas of where it might be best utilized) but once it enters circulation they have little control of the type of messages the typeface expresses. The same for furniture designers, whose pieces (if widely manufactured) can end up in a wide range of contexts outside their control. To see a Judd sculpture sensitively in the landscape of the exhibit. Each other, these are vernacular forms that have as interesting resonances outside of the art historical context as within it. With the poster drawings in particular I am selecting (or “clipping”) forms from a range of fine and decorative arts. The *Poster Drawing* project as a whole (and it is continually growing) collapses distinction by this diversity of source material: each then becomes a screen that can receive new information. Some of them do have more baggage than others. There are always more possible permutations, more possible signification, that can be piled onto forms that are essentially empty.

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With regard to *Illustrations from The Albatross*, the text (*The Albatross*) is entirely fictional—as in, the images are presented as if they accompany a text that doesn’t actually exist, correct? Do you have any plans to realize that text, or to collect that project as a book?

DS: The text is not accessible, or rather, the text exists, but only in what might be imagined in the relationships between the illustrations. It is a contingent text (a poem? a fiction? a history?) based on how each viewer might interpret the images.

ST: On a similar note, you’ve produced quite a number of books at this point, but almost all of them contain either collections of images or some kind of word game (Essay Piece, Nine New Titles, Incomplete and Open...) that plays with or rearranges some existing text. Is there any extent to which you consider yourself a writer or poet?

DS: I’m very drawn to poetry, and in particular the forms and strategies of the concrete poets, but I don’t fashion myself a writer. Text and books appear in my work as objects, and although there are often texts that can be read within (some are rearranged from another source and others are original) I do foreground what the book or text can communicate from the macro view. In laser-cut text fabrics where, once hung and draped, the textual information is lost, but as a viewer you can detect fragments of letterforms, in the collapse of readability, a new “text” emerges.

DS: I am sympathetic to their strategies. I’m particularly drawn to the breadth of Goldsmith’s project. On the one hand are his books, which are more about the fact that they exist than anyone ever reading them (like Day, his word-for-word re-typing of an entire issue of the *New York Times*). On the other hand is UbuWeb, which is about compiling a diverse array of difficult-to-access materials that can be negotiated and manoeuvred through. These projects put the onus on the curiosity of the person coming to the works/site. Although some trajectories are laid out, it is the knowledge of the reader/viewer that allows the work to be decoded...the act of moving through material is generative.

ST: Can you talk about any projects you have planned for the future?

DS: This winter I’m going to be completing the Visiting Artist residency at Open Studio in Toronto. I’m going to develop a group of relief prints, collected under the working title “The Surplus Mappe,” a sequence of illustration plates from an absent book...a book which might have been about my pursuit of a particular portfolio produced by Kurt Schwitters in the early 1920s, or perhaps is a reflection on the surplus/waste printed paper that is generated by all printing processes, or perhaps about the creation of a time capsule in 1912 for opening in 2012. I’m also working towards an as-yet-unitled solo exhibition for Galerie Emmanuel Hervé in Paris, which will include new sculpture and drawing.

Saelan Twerdy is a freelance writer who lives and works in Toronto. He completed a Master’s Degree in Art History & Curatorial Studies at York University in Toronto in 2012, and his reviews, interviews and features have appeared in Boorjes Crossings, Blackflesh, Bad Day, and Cohere magazines.
Derek Sullivan’s exhibition “Albatross Omnibus” — The Power Plant’s 2011 commission — was inspired by the history of the artist’s book, an art form that arose in the 1960s and 70s in conjunction with conceptual art. Sol LeWitt, Ed Ruscha and Michael Snow were among the pioneers of artists’ books, using them to disseminate work to larger audiences while expanding the idea of what books could be. Early audiences didn’t always know what to make of such publications, which could contain only serial imagery, or consist of loose sheets of paper in a box.

Like an artist’s book, this exhibition fostered a sense of discovery. In the first gallery, viewers followed a zigzagging wall that divided the room and replicated the accordion-fold, a popular format for artists’ books. Large works from Sullivan’s Poster Drawings (2006–ongoing) and Illustrations from The Albatross (2010) series were displayed. The pieces contain references to mid-20th-century modernist art movements including formalism, process art and geometric abstraction. (One even features an image of sculptor Louise Nevelson.)

The drawings were a stimulating preamble to the exhibition’s centrepiece: Albatross Omnibus (2011), 52 artist’s books designed by Sullivan. The books comprise — as the exhibition’s title indicates — an omnibus, a publication that brings together existing texts on a particular subject. The books are bound in identical blue covers, with a title printed in a simple font on the front of each book, and in reverse on the back. (Sullivan did a similar thing with the exhibition’s introductory wall text, presenting it conventionally and in mirror image on opposing sides of the gallery.)

There were no locked display cases protecting the books from handling. Instead, the books were suspended from the ceiling in a grid pattern. Viewers had to climb ladders to reach them, which added an interactive, performative element. Among the many standouts were the humorous Burying Small Fires, which contains photographs of the artist digging a hole and dropping a copy of Ruscha’s Various Small Fires and Milk (1964) into it; Dead Ends, which references LeWitt’s Brick Wall (1977); The Borges Numbers, a Christian Boltanski-like catalogue of the phone numbers of people named Jorge Borges; Snow’s Nose, a playful homage to Snow’s seminal Cover to Cover (1975); and More Young Americans and Extra Eyes, which brings to mind John Baldessari’s image appropriations.

What of the other word in the exhibition’s title, “albatross”? The albatross is a metaphor for obstacles or burdens and, as Sullivan’s books are handled, their pages will remain spread open like birds’ wings. The legacies of modernism and conceptual art could be construed as albatrosses that hover over artists today. Perhaps Sullivan also feels encumbered by art history, and this exhibition is his ambitious and successful attempt to capture and tame those birds.
Canadians in Europe: Derek Sullivan, Robert Waters, Gwen MacGregor & Sandra Rechico

Submitted by Magenta on Thu, 07/07/2011 - 03:34 in

Like the rest of the art world, we here at Magenta have our eyes turned towards Europe at the moment because of the Venice Biennale. Canadian artists, however, have long cast their eyes towards Europe. The three articles gathered here under the title "Canadians in Europe" illustrate that Canadians are particularly adept at formulating work that responds sensitively to the foreign social, political, physical and geographical environments in which they are working. While these four artists represent barely the tip of the iceberg of Canadian visual artists achieving success abroad, they reflect the diversity of Canadian art practices that are resonating out there in the international art world. Here, artist and writer Jen Hutton talks to Derek Sullivan (#sullivan) about his recent exhibition in Belgium; Magenta’s editor Bill Clarke talks to Robert Waters (#waters) about his art of engagement in Spain; and first-time Magenta contributor Sally McKay examines the work of Gwen McGregor and Sandra Rechico (#mcgregor) as they currently prepare for an exhibition in Germany.
Derek Sullivan: Young Americans: Installation views at KIOSK, 2011. Images courtesy the artist and Galerie Tatjana Pieters, Ghent. All photos: Yana Foque

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**Bookish in Belgium: Derek Sullivan’s friendly and formal “Young Americans”**

by Jen Hutton

2011 has already been a busy year for Toronto-based artist Derek Sullivan. On the heels of exhibitions in Toronto, Ottawa, Waterloo and New York, Sullivan continues to pursue an ongoing project with New York-based artist Gareth Long and just received his second longlist nod for the Sobey Award. Sullivan is currently preparing for his commissioned exhibition Albatross Omnibus at The Power Plant this fall. This past spring, Sullivan, who is represented by Jessica Bradley Art +Projects in Toronto, took a break to speak with artist and writer Jen Hutton about his recent solo exhibition at KIOSK, an up-and-coming contemporary exhibition space in Ghent, Belgium.
Jen Hutton (JH): How did your show at KIOSK come about?

Derek Sullivan (DS): The show came about after the curator at KIOSK, Wim Waelput, became interested in my work after a solo exhibition I had with Tatjana Pieters, a Ghent-based commercial gallerist, in 2008. Wim had been programming exhibitions in a pavilion connected to the KASK, the art school in Ghent. By the time we started talking about a show, that little pavilion had been decommissioned because the gallery had taken its permanent space inside the school. The KASK is a part of a cultural complex that the city was developing in a group of old building that has been, over the years, a monastery and a hospital. The gallery is in a 19th Century neo-gothic portion of the building that was the surgical theatre for training doctors. The gallery is built around this theatre, with a number of smaller rooms radiating from it. So, it’s quite an eccentric space. KIOSK has only been programming there for one year, so they haven’t developed any tried and true rules for how shows should happen, which is kind of nice actually. The various spaces in their portion of the complex are used differently for each exhibition.

JH: So, it’s kind of a malleable exhibition space.

DS: It’s very malleable. Although KIOSK has programmed solo exhibitions that take over the whole space, Wim seems to prefer programming two parallel solo exhibitions at the same time. I was paired with Jan de Cock, who is known for doing these large, very ambitious projects. How our two exhibitions would work together was the least-resolved aspect of this project before installation began but, in the end, it worked together really well.

JH: Stemming from that idea of a happy accident, it sounds as if the inner architecture of KIOSK’s space could be navigated or read like a book, like many of
your previous projects.

**DS:** The architecture is comprised of a stacked series of rooms, which related to my strategy of stacking objects and materials formally, somewhat akin to a manuscript where you have to unpeel it one page at a time. It’s about an experience or delivery that is a bit slower. I wanted the show to be based on a conceit that the exhibition *Young Americans* was a book. Actually, the exhibition started with the title *Young Americans*, which I know is counter to how many artists work. But, I used the title as a framing device for collecting certain materials within it. The literal touchstone for the title was a pair of books that the Museum of Modern Art published in the 1950s that I bought in a dollar bin. One was called *12 Americans* and the other *16 Americans*, which were primarily surveys of American art at the time. They were very formalized in a way, in that the editors accompanied reproductions of the work with stylized, staged portraits of each artist—the kind of thing you might see on the back of a book jacket. In the first book, there were portraits of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg—it was their first institutional show—and they looked *young*. To me, there’s something amazing about these books in that they capture the potential that these portraits have, combined with two or three images of work that are the seed or the kernel of a practice that we now know.

![Image](http://www.magentamagazine.com/sites/magentamagazine.com/files/images/sullivan4.jpg)

**JH:** So, are you reading their work through this biographical filter?

**DH:** Only on a superficial level. I became fascinated with these portraits, in the sense that rather than seeing a work as a footnote for a period, you actually saw the faces of the people who made them. In truth, even though I had used the MoMA catalogues as a starting point, I also broke the rules a little bit. There’s an image of Philip Johnson from the 1930s, and one of Montgomery Clift from the 50s. I’ll admit I’m being a little loose with the term, but I’m wholly interested in the idea of the relatively young American artist, and also the position of youth in cultural production. I’m not trying to revisit or unearth a history, but I’m using it to reflect on the present. On one level, I was thinking about how, as a young artist, you might only get a couple of chances: you throw your work up against the wall, and if it...
doesn’t stick, then that’s it.

And so, *Young Americans* became the title for an exhibition that was designed as a book, which is a way that one can formalize a set of ideas or information in a moment and allows us to then reflect on them later on. But, the exhibition is a temporal thing. Although the show contains about 14 framed drawings, they are hung on the walls on top of large black and white Xeroxed pages that in their form imply that they are pulled from the pages of a book. The prints have page numbers though not all of them are present.

**JH:** Looking at the documentation of the show, on some of these pages you’ve used this placeholder for an image—this rectangle or bounding box with an ‘x’ through it—almost as a formal device.

**DS:** Some of the pages have photographs culled from those books that I mentioned, while others have a bounding box as a placeholder ready to receive an image, which in my mind implies that the book is a draft, or in flux. These prints were hung in long horizontals around the various spaces that I was exhibiting in, and the framed drawings were hung on top, creating these two simultaneous rhythms through the space. I’d like to think of them as two trajectories slightly out of sync, so at some points the drawings would obscure what was behind them. But ultimately, you only experience this book within the space at KIOSK.
**JH:** That’s a concept that comes up frequently in your other projects, too—where you posit that a book is a malleable, indefinite thing. This is a relatively old concept—from when early books were ripped apart and bound in anthologies for circulation, to more contemporary ideas around print-on-demand publishing.

**DS:** Yes, as a print-on-demand author you are able to constantly alter the file because each book is being printed one-at-a-time. Each time the book is printed, it has the capacity to become a unique iteration. So, in this sense, the book becomes a malleable framing device that allows one to float or consider a set of ideas.

**JH:** But, that runs counter to what we think books are: how they archive information; how they become these static, singular repositories for data.

**DS:** Well, they still do, but they are about freezing something that is already in flux. In terms of the artist books that I make, indeed there is no definitive version because the parameters of the book are more speculative. So, it’s not about fixing an argument or form in time, but rather making manifest a kind of changing trajectory of thought. A book is fixed, but to experience it you have to read it, which is in itself an act of interpretation and not a fixed thing. These fluctuations of meaning and the shifting of meaning is something I’m very interested in. The *Poster Drawings* are comprised of these reduced, abstract forms so they have the capacity to be about anything.

**JH:** Like a screen.

**DS:** Yes, a screen, or a platform to receive information. And, it’s sensitive to context continually. In terms of the show at KIOSK, I showed four works from the *Poster Drawings* series, and in a way they became strangely affected by the structure of *Young Americans*. One in particular was based on this very strange, Op-Art inspired album cover from the late-60s, and it was from that juxtaposition that I began to think about popular music during that time in the context of the show.
JH: Do you feel this show could be easily shown in North America or do you think it has a certain appeal to a European audience?

DS: Well, that’s part of it, as well. Initially, I liked the idea of it as I, too, am a young, American artist—although technically a North American artist—and I thought of the show as a way to frame the foreignness of my point of view. I was making an exhibition at a place where I had already exhibited, so my work wasn’t without context. But, it was foreign. So, it was a nice starting point for me to keep that foreignness in mind. We constantly recall the forms and exchanges in abstraction during the early part of the 20th Century between Europe and North America, but what is actually the residue or reputation of that history? I don’t think we really look that well at art anymore but rather see art as a floating sea of signs. I use these strategies to tease out various signs to create a semblance of a subject, but that subject is always in flux. Dada is a loaded word, but it’s essentially a collage strategy that I’m using. Especially in its early incarnations, such as with Schwitters, collage was primarily a formal enterprise based on abstraction. Understanding the work is based on its composition, though there’s always this residue of where the fragments came from—newspapers, books and so on. The show at KIOSK came together in that way, having a group of images, my own reading experience and then bringing that together with a few other trajectories, such as a drawing practice, and setting it up in a context that is foreign to me. Friendly, but foreign. And, the titling for the drawings would occur after the fact. It’s not being indefinite; I’m very definitive about the fact that ideas change. It’s about being open to the fact that these things are going to be refined and projected on.

JH: Or, accrue meaning over time.

DS: Exactly. It’s like a snowball. But, at the same time, I know I do it in a very subtle way. These changes are quite slight. There are enough practices out there devoted to accruing material, like Dieter Roth’s works or Jason Rhoades’ installations. There are the ways that those things can literally happen, but for me I
feel that the things that I’m using as mechanisms in my work are actually present in all work, though we choose not to see them.

**JH**: Why is that? Is it a strategy of preservation that we don’t see the changing core of art?

**DS**: I think that when an artist puts a work in circulation it is meant to be definitive. If that work becomes contaminated through other contexts, then somehow it’s outside of the work. We know that a work is different in the studio than it is in the museum. There have been enough discussions about the role of the studio and the museum in contemporary art practice before and after Daniel Buren formalized it. We allow the work to be read under the authorship of a collector. But, what happens when, for example, a museum installs a Rothko next to a Brice Marden? Aren’t they affecting each other? Shouldn’t the fact that a certain work that is in storage for a decade should be taken in account? Especially now with the formalization of curatorial practice, the work does reflect the authorship of the curator, as well. The work is physically unchanged, but that exhibition history should be considered a material part of the work; so that in the *Poster Drawings*, the titles grow on them in such a way to acknowledge changes. I know at times the titles can be opaque, but the fact is the real histories of art are opaque. The titles are not meant to be explicative but rather indexes for past contexts that we can’t always access.

**JH**: Earlier you mentioned thinking about popular music, which is funny because I wanted to ask whether there was a relationship between David Bowie’s stab at 60s soul with his album *Young Americans*—or the title track—and this show?

**DS**: No, not at all.

**JH**: Well, is it a latent reference?

**DS**: I want it to be a *false friend*, which is this idea that manifests in translations between languages. It’s a word that sounds so familiar to your own language that it must have the same semantic meaning, but often it can mean the opposite. I wanted to have an ambivalent take on what *Young Americans* was. I’m interested in evoking those latent references, but it wasn’t about Bowie, specifically.

*Derek Sullivan’s Young Americans was exhibited at KIOSK from April 23 to June 12, 2011. His Albatross Omnibus opens at the Power Plant on September 24, 2011.*

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