

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Shreya Sethi, "ARTURO HERRERA // CORBETT VS. DEMPSEY", *The Seen Journal*, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Arturo Herrera has always been interested in how his artworks are "read." As an artist dealing primarily in the medium of collage, he articulates a language that is able to combine different elements, and therefore say multiple things simultaneously. The artist is aware, however, that in the visual world, images are nonetheless still subject to fixed associations and can sometimes be as comprehensible as word or text. In his most recent production, *Books*, Herrera addresses these issues of the intelligibility in art in an aggressive manner, waging war on singular meaning.

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Installation view of Arturo Herrera, *Books* and John Sparagana *Crowds & Powder* at Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago. Photograph by Tom Van Eynde.

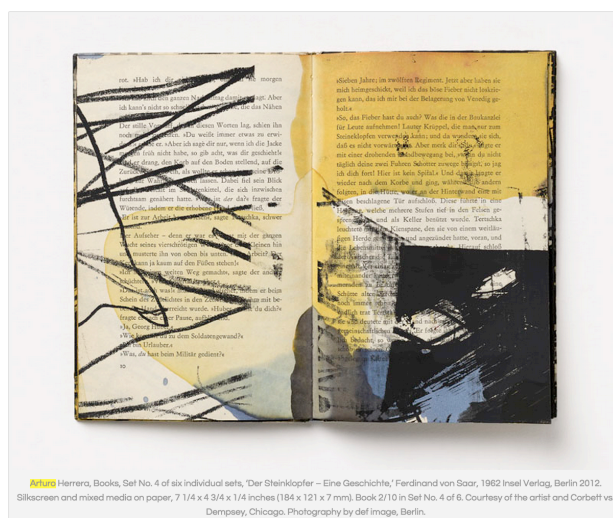
Currently on display at Corbett vs. Dempsey, you will find a series of aging books that have been violently marked up with abstract shapes of black and red paint. The exhibition, concurrently hung with John Sparagana's *Crowds & Powder*, is a far cry from light-hearted illustration; these works come across as strong interventions into the act of reading. Using the help of stencils, Herrera haphazardly covers up the content of every page to the point of illegibility. We are forced to consider the nonrepresentational shapes,

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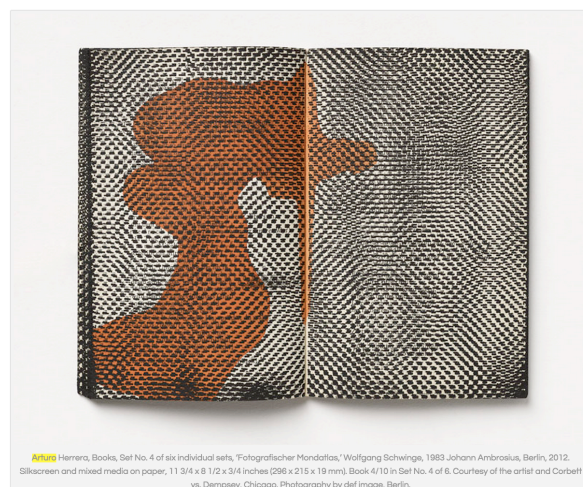
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foregrounded by the contents of the book, as a kind of linguistic information whose meaning we are left to determine. There seems to have been an urgency to intrude into the content of the book that shows evidence of a vigorous and insatiable desire for something – a hunger whose endpoint remains unspecified.



Fluctuating between their status as books and screen-prints, the content of these works escape designation and allow for an ambiguity to emerge. The half-words and letters of the text, which are mostly in foreign languages in any case, transform into markings or sketches; while the strokes of the stencils conversely morph into a kind of text. The abstractions themselves cannot be pinned down, as they sometimes appear to be clearly defined – reminiscent of geometric abstraction, and at other times expressive or accidental. They are made to displace meaning, standing as an antithesis to a glossy magazine, whose words and images are built to harmoniously combine compositions that fulfill clearly defined objectives.



Furthermore, these already abused and tattered creatures can be found in in pristine horizontal display cases that send an even more contradictory message to its viewers. There seems to be a break from

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the trajectory of Herrera's practice, which was previously focused on works that were made for the wall in a classical display of two-dimensional art. The shift from wall-hanging collage to the more sculptural glass-encased object seems to be an important one that is in agreement with the ideas of conceptual art, where the context provided for the artwork generates a great deal of its meaning. This causes his work to surpass the art historical benchmark that conceptual art represents, and instead enter a contemporary art conversation, without being pigeonholed as Modernist. Herrera also manages to evade fetishism through the violent acts he commits towards the books, while simultaneously exalting the printed medium – an entity nearing extinction.



<http://thesejournal.org/art-seen-chicago/arturo-herrera-corbett-vs-dempsey/>

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