

The Reading Room, August 2014



42 CONTENTS

THE DELICATE NATURE OF EXISTENCE

Given that the personal and the political are hard to separate, and statements of protest are often made with books, *Reading Room*, curated by Anil Kumar Jain, explores archaic texts and their narratives of visual history, while also examining the role of books as art objects and sculptures

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In 2003, bowing to local political pressures, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Ghatghar Museum took the rare collection of Sikh holy books, the Guru Granth Sahib and the Islamic holy book, the Quran, wrapped them in cloth and hid them in "secrecy positions" in glass cases. The protest had been that the holy books were fast tracked in the museum, with no rituals or dress codes observed, or reverence shown by the museum or visitors. The protestors were against the holy books being prepared open to scrutiny and accessible to everyone, or anyone. The protest provides an insight into the issues of displaying books at a museum or a secular space, and raises questions about the treatment of

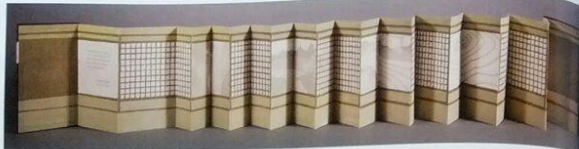
books as sacrosanct, even as they are viewed as works of art and historical interest. The *Reading Room*, an exhibition dealing with books and art practice around books, has maintained the treatment of books as sacred, putting them up on pedestals, under thoughtful lighting and misting on a ritual of interaction. The wearing gloves in some cases and forbidding touch with others. The show approaches books on a visual and philosophical level, addresses resistance of the establishment and the politics of making and viewing into the mix, discusses private and community narratives, and underlines the role of the book in creation and preservation of history.

In a continent struggling with the fall out of the partition and civil and religious violence, it is hardly surprising that there is silence in place of detailed reports from within those affected. This silence has been broken only sporadically, and after serious persuasion from social researchers. Collecting and archiving oral histories allow space for alternative histories, giving those with no agency a chance to articulate the untold. *Herstories: Mother's stories of resistance and hope* by Radhika Hettiarachchi and Shikha Verma, for instance, addresses the lack of female voices in the writing of history from Sri Lanka during the 25-year long and still on-going conflict in



Opposite page: Safayyehnamah — Chronicle text of 38 photographs of a journey, 2013, digital print. This page, above: *Herstories* by Radhika Hettiarachchi and Shikha Verma, 2013, wallpaper books, ink, graphite, paper, 120 gold leaf, acrylic, plastic. Left: *Sandhiya* — Photographs and stories, 4 hand bound egg box and 6 paper, hand stitched. Below: *Herstories* — The pathology of peace

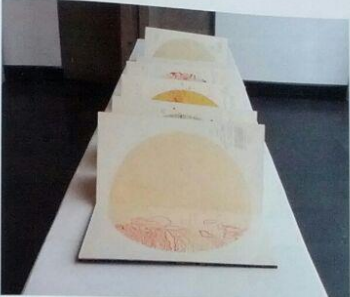




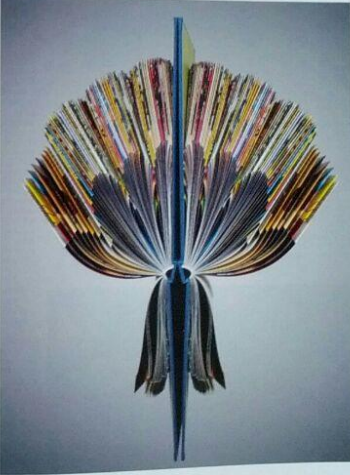
Top: Anne Coveil — Raking Light, 2012. Left: Anne Coveil — Natural order: A game of cards, 2012, artists book-card game. 30 hand-drawn card illustrations, learning guide, and case letterpress printed from polymer



Left: Gonzalez — The Silver Fish, 2014, screenprint book, archival ink printed on archival paper



Right: Meserol — Course of Stones, 2011, mixed media on paper



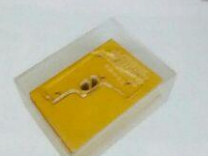
Right: Bano — Pacific, 2014, digital print on archival paper. Top right: Bano — Barkhlyt's succession, 2014





The writing is juxtaposed with odd shapes of water damage. The water marks open for interpretation as though a Rorschach test. The clippings of digital prints, arranged in a grid, transform the physical nature of the diary and heated ink, with a sense of photo-collage rather than a poem into an intricate, personal diary.

The personal and the political need to separate and statements of general are often made with books. The establishment and the public have used books for propaganda and as resistance. Such as seen in Peter Kanawell's 100-chapter video installation, *Four Four Pages*, shown at *Walker Gallery* in New York in 2010. The installation dedicated a segment to Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, who has put the first page denouncing democracy



from forgetting and sensory slugs and stone ash, in the case of art objects, the book is transformed into sculpture. Additional pages are added to writing books, ignoring a fresh narrative that occur on the owner's discourse and engagement with the new book as a new text. Essential to any thinking, it is no wonder that an exhibition is especially invited, exploring and revealing the various roles of books. Reading Room, curated by Axel Kasper (Jan, shown at *SALT* (Steinbock) between August 9 and September 13, 2014, in collaboration with *Blauwerk 10* (The Dutch) and *Coloquio A1* (Buenos Aires),



Li-Peng Han, *My Future is mine and the end philosophy*, 2013, digital print, ink, paper, book, gold leaf, 150x150cm, edition 1/100.

Li-Peng Han, *Future Shock*, 2010, digital print, ink, paper, book, gold leaf, 150x150cm, edition 1/100.

Li-Peng Han, *My Future is mine and the end philosophy*, 2013, digital print, ink, paper, book, gold leaf, 150x150cm, edition 1/100.

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