

The Reading Room, August 2014



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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 Vastu Sangrahalaya 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 "weeping 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

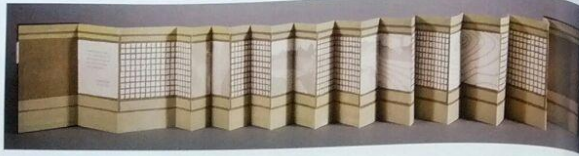
books as sacrosanct, even as they are viewed as works of art and historical interest. The *Reading Room*, an exhibition dealing with books and art practice around books, has maintained the treatment of books as sacred, putting them up on pedestals, under thoughtful lighting and misting on a ritual of 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: Safayyeh-e-Makran — Chronicle list of 38 photographs of a journal, 2013, digital print. This page, above: *Herstories* by Radhika Hettiarachchi and Shikha Verma, 2013, anticipation books, oil, graphite, glass, 120 gold-leaf, plastic plates. Left: *Sanskrit* by Anil Kumar Jain, 2014, egg box and paper, hand-drawn. Below: The pathology of peace

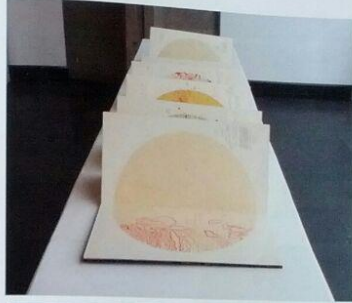




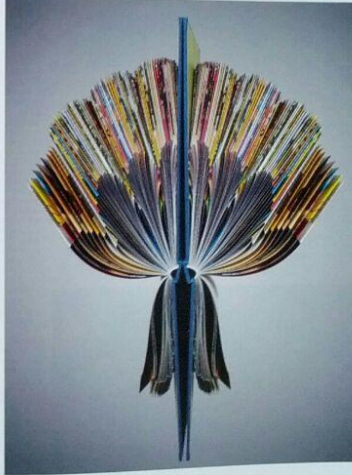
Top: Anne Coveil — Raking Light, 2012. Left: Anne Coveil — Natural order: A game of cards, 2012, artists book-card game. 30 hand-drawn card illustrations, learning guide, and case letterpress printed from polymer



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: Basso — Pacific, 2014, digital print on archival paper. Top right: Basso — Barkhlyt succedanea, 2014



