

ANN HAMILTON: AN INVENTORY OF OBJECTS

Just as the culture is poised to relegate the book and its readers to a lost era, there comes into our presence *Ann Hamilton: An Inventory of Objects* to arouse our most intense desire to curl up by a winter fire with a book—*this* book—in our hands.

Designed by the Swedish graphic designer Hans Cogne in conversation with the artist, the book is bound in midnight blue cloth, with a deep glove leather black binding and black endpapers. Its title is discreetly pressed into the cover and spine, to be touched as much as read; a stamp-size photograph of an open mouth filled with marbles or stones is affixed to the front, the only overt visual marker. Within, satiny cream pages with astonishingly lush photographs accompanying descriptions, chronologies, materials, and processes for each of the “objects” inventoried, as well as an accounting of its relation to Hamilton’s many site-specific installations. For those familiar with this artist’s work and those not, this book offers invaluable insight into the ways in which she collapses conceptual, sensual, and performative categories.

As Joan Simon (who also authored

the recent monograph on Hamilton) points out in her lucid accompanying essay, language—and, by extension, the book—occupies a central role in Hamilton’s work. You might even call these her major tropes, carrying as they do the burdens of modernity’s self-portrait. Hamilton’s profound attention to the varieties of linguistic experience moves across the gesture of the (writing) hand and the sound of the (speaking) voice, in an almost obsessive quest to find the relation between word and thing, sound and matter, motion and stillness. This gives her objects and instal-

lations their characteristic trait: a call to be *read/heard* as much as seen. As Simon tells us, Hamilton began her artistic life in the early '80s studying textiles; the word *text* is, of course, derived from this basic human method of making, and Hamilton, as this book attests, has been weaving her articulations of objects/bodies in space ever since.

—ANN LAUTERBACH

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on a table and were set to rock up speaking voices. For ease, most, as previously noted, were raised and sliding were set beneath mechanical plastic sheeting, and while participants could stand atop the table and be part of a collective act of speech, the fabric in Hamilton's notes, "you could be able to sit on the table and attend the sound of their material workings—the tubes. The sound of the tubes rose and fell in response to fluctuations in the flow of air, and the sound of people walking through the space." Hamilton had included a group of "shape and sound" sculpting among pieces at a collaborative show and performance at Alice Waters' table in 1984 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, to benefit the Whitney Biennial Foundation's support of art and agriculture in the Hudson Valley.

Hamilton had also captured voices in her installation about for the Center Hall of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Brooklyn, in 1984. "Fluctuating sound, wing, breath, and air," Hamilton employed two related notes to generate these resonances. Fourteen hand-crafted mechanical notes made for the installation. These devices, open-ended horns twisted under a silk cloth, were raised at varying elevations to achieve different volumes by human presence wearing felt costumes that Hamilton had designed with Marcel-Louis Hollander at NYU under Hollander's (see p. 10, pp. 148–149) in addition, for the opening Hamilton included four additional figures, also installed around Hamilton's table, Hans Cogne, Maria's Louise Lightfoot, and Anne Maguire—who, while turning the pages of her artist's book about, attended the strings there, the repetition of the phrase she had chosen for meaning, her hand with a small video surveillance camera over the face of the museum's modernist exterior, concentrating on their mouths and hands, assuming their focus here. All four performers had any microphone near their mouths. As they looked at the edge of the stage, the sound rose to page. Hamilton wrote, "She breathed that shape," Hamilton, looking their act of speaking up by about an inch complete. "It is a new vocabulary for words."

These new works took a change in Hamilton's focus of voices from the performance of a scene in installation, scene, or spatial to a scored position within the room in figure, scene, object, and text. The voice was the core of figure, scene, text, or the Watts Foundation, Houston, Houston (pp. 10–11). There, Hamilton used Louis speakers, which, in the explains, "are unique mechanical entry points, speaker systems that operate inside and have the mouth is shown from two operating cores, which is what you see in figure, removed from their original housing and re-figured in figure three position become, in Hamilton's words, "the center of space of the work looking for material because" in their second and third through the subterranean building.

Hamilton's most recent works have changed both the nature of the character and also the space in which these voices might take on their tone. Elizabeth Mann, with whom Hamilton collaborated an early, 1981, may sing in the

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