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## ARTISTS / COLLECTIONS

# The Library Project by Temporary Services

by LIBRARYASINCUBATORPROJECT on Dec 11, 2012 • 8:27 am

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It is with great pleasure today that we host Temporary Services, a public art group based in Chicago, Copenhagen, and Philadelphia. They talk with us about The Library Project, a fascinating public exhibition whose covert playground is on the shelves of Chicago's Harold Washington Library.

In his [essay about The Library Project](#), Marc Fischer of Temporary Services writes,

*With The Library Project, Temporary Services is adding 100 new books and artists' projects into the library holdings through a donation. The library has not been told about the gifts they are going to receive. Every title has been checked against Harold Washington's catalog to verify that each book is not already owned by the library. Several books that are already in the collection, are being added in creatively altered new versions. We are giving the Library books that it has not acquired on its own. We believe these are books that it will probably want to keep. Nearly all of the books are brand new and most of them were published or created within the last few years.*

*Though composed almost entirely of books by artists, this gift will infiltrate all of Harold Washington Library and not merely the floor devoted to Visual and Performing Arts. Creating new juxtapositions of materials not normally possible in common library practice is one component of this project. Another major goal is to bring obscure, subversive, self-published, hand-made, or limited edition works by underexposed artists to a wider audience.*

For the full background and logistics of The Library Project, we highly recommend reading [the full essay](#).

Twelve years after the launch of The Library Project, we asked Temporary Services some questions. Enjoy!  
~ Laura

### Since the Library Project began, what has been the response from library staff or administrators?

In around 2003, Marc from Temporary Services went to meet with the librarian Margarete Gross. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Picture Collection at Harold Washington Library, which Margarete administrated before retiring. In the course of setting up an appointment, Margarete had a scheduling conflict and called Marc to change the time of their meeting. Marc's voice mail message includes a reference to Temporary Services and Margarete got a bit suspicious. Upon meeting, she brought up the group's name immediately and mentioned that she had many of our books. She then proceeded to bring Marc back to her work area and pulled two large boxes out from under her desk containing about 25 books from The Library Project that staff had found on the shelves. Margarete caught wind of the project and because she also handled Chicago art reference materials, it was decided that she should figure out what to do with the books when they were discovered. She had a great sense of humor about the project and was blown away by how much effort and thought we put into it.

*She did not insist on learning where the other books were shelved, but she also refused to put any of the books that were found back out in the stacks.*

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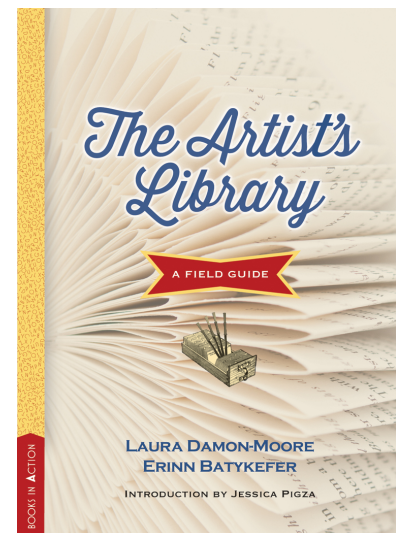
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*She felt the captured books belonged together as their own collection within the collection. Occasionally she would email us when a new book was discovered. Really a wonderful librarian!*

Since then we have developed a friendly relationship with the other Fine Art Reference librarians and have brought classes of students over to see the books. It is clear that the librarians enjoy the project. However, two attempts on their part to display the books and present the project in public vitrines in the building have been shot down by upper level administrators who don't want to call attention to this action. There is a [World Cat record for the project](#), however, and anyone can go to the library and ask to see the books from the Library Project. They are housed in Special Collections on the floor devoted to Visual and Performing Arts. We have also given other materials to the collection and many of our self-published booklets can be viewed in Special Collections as well.


We should also mention that some of the books remain on the shelves and still have not been detected by staff over twelve years after launching this project. We suspect that other books from the project may have been stolen or discarded.



Pieces of The Library Project cover a table at Temporary Services' Chicago space, before slowly being added to the collection at Harold Washington Library.

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#### **How was the Library Project framed/presented to the contributing artists? What has been the reaction/response to the project by these artists?**

We solicited donations of books from artists and in some cases supplied artists with maps of the library so they could choose where their book should be placed. Some artists had very specific ideas of where their books should be shelved and others just let us decide where to place their book or books. The main concerns we put forth to participants were that the books would only go in public areas of the library (nothing in 'staff only' collections that we couldn't access), and we could not control what happened if the library discovered the books. Basically, they should not expect to ever see the books again. We also asked that people not modify any books in the library collection; the project was intended as a quiet gift and not a violation of any books held by the library. All of the books were modified in some way to make it look like they were property of the library. This included rubber stamping, call number labels, glued-in manila due date card holders, and protective clear plastic lamination for the covers of soft-cover books.

*Artists were enthusiastic about every stage of the project as it's probably the dream of most artists that make books to have their work included in a public library's collection.*

Almost all of the books in the project were donated by artists or their publishers. There were just a few books that we had to buy.

#### **This Project represents a type of collection development work – curation. Can you speak a bit about how the works/artists were identified for inclusion in the Library Project?**

We invited people with a wide range of aesthetic and thematic concerns. In some cases we asked artists for specific books that we knew about and wanted to see in the collection. In other cases people made new and/or one of a kind works for the project. Part of the reason for inviting one hundred artists was to have a great variety of approaches, to reach library patrons in more areas of the building, and to make it harder for the library to find all of

the books. Some of the participants were artists we knew personally, some were recommendations by friends, and others were people we did not know but whose work we admired. Many artists were from Chicago but there were also quite a few participants from other parts of the country and world including France, Columbia and Germany. One participant, Michael Piazza, also solicited work by some of his students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Finally, there were some works by political groups or individuals that might not normally fall under the categorization of art that we felt were important to include based on their ideas.

Visit [Temporary Services online](#). Learn more about [Harold Washington Library Center](#).

**Tags:** Artist Book, Book Arts, Collection, Exhibitions, Installation

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