

COVER STORIES

THE ART

OF THE

BOOK JACKET

30TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION
DECEMBER 3, 2010-FEBRUARY 12, 2011

printworks

COVER STORIES

THE ART OF THE BOOK JACKET

INTRODUCTION BY MARK PASCALE

Book Covers?

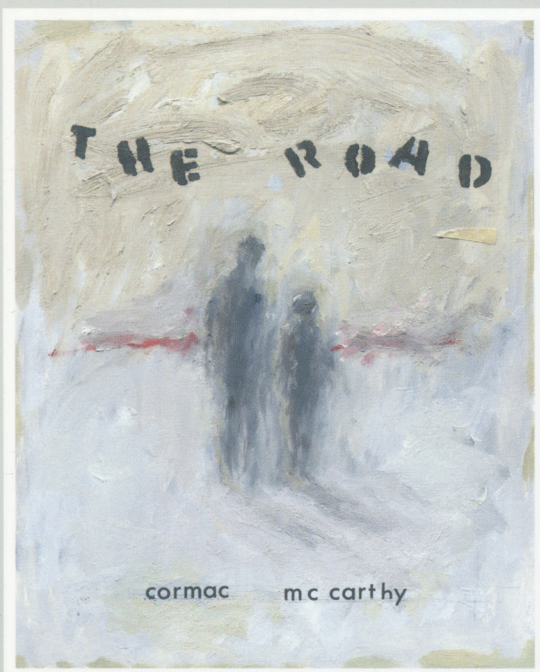
Given the precarious state of publishing, it might seem anachronistic to invite a group of artists to create designs for book covers to comprise an exhibition. However, because this event has been planned to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of Printworks Gallery — it somewhat anachronistic, its theme is less surprising. What makes this idea anachronistic is the fact that one sees more people reading from digital devices, as opposed to real books, which categorically remove the unique cover design, created in part to sell the writing. And while book cover designs still are mediated and sweated over to a high degree, most libraries remove and discard the printed jackets that wrap hard cover books before shelving them, thereby eliminating a portion of the experience of handling and contemplating the content of a given book. In a gesture filled with generosity and, paradoxically with pathos, the Ryerson Library of The Art Institute of Chicago exhibits the covers cut from recently catalogued books on a bulletin board that welcomes employees and guests who enter through the museum's administrative wing.

Hooray for anachronism! Contemplating the 68 works submitted by as many artists took me back to my first experience in a German bookstore, where I discovered to my horror that most of the titles had text only covers, and lacked any manipulation other than subtle differences of type design and its layout, rigidly parallel to the margins, and symmetrical. This was not the dynamic visualization of type wrought by El Lissitzky. Rather, it was the typewriter text one expects to find on the covers of academic tomes, so wooden in style as to suggest that their content will awe the reader to complete numbness.

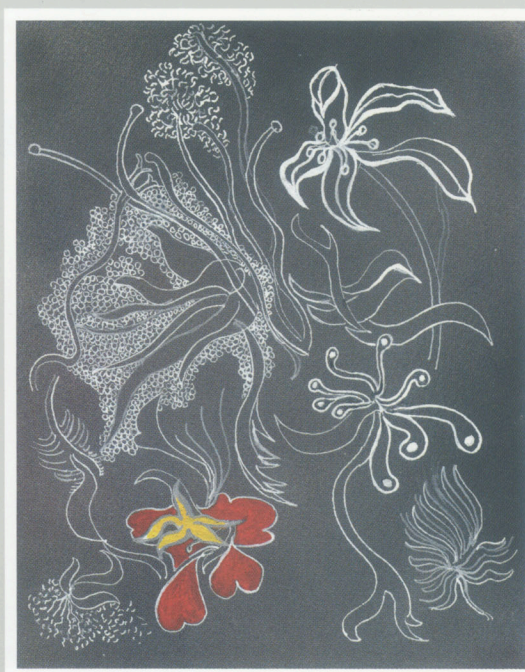
The range of titles selected by these exhibiting artists are largely focused on Modern literature, but also include a classical work, *The Iliad*, and a seventeenth century French comedy. Paula Campbell's design is for a Molière play entitled *The Hypochondriac* (originally *The Imaginary Invalid*). It is telling that she chose a torso-like urn form and placed it in front of a closed curtain, because the author died soon after performing as Argan, a character in the play who was a hypochondriac. An equally compelling cover image has been created by Louise LeBourgeois, who used the physical and material qualities of water, air, and light as metaphors for the title of her book *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* by Carl Jung. Her conception hardly requires text to be clearly associated with the book, and she chose not to attempt it.

It would be disingenuous not to mention that book covers probably function as marketing tools to sell a piece of writing, as much as they are platforms for artists' invention. Indeed, for a huge portion of the commercial art world, criticism of, competition for, and awards for book cover designs are still evident, making it an idiom as economically viable as it is aesthetically satisfying. So, rather than this exhibition idea being anachronistic, perhaps it's more a case of two gentlemen, Sidney Block and Robert Hiebert, being dedicated readers, and therefore in tune with the fact that book cover design is as vigorous and inspired as ever.

MARK PASCALE IS A CURATOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PRINTS AND DRAWINGS
THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO



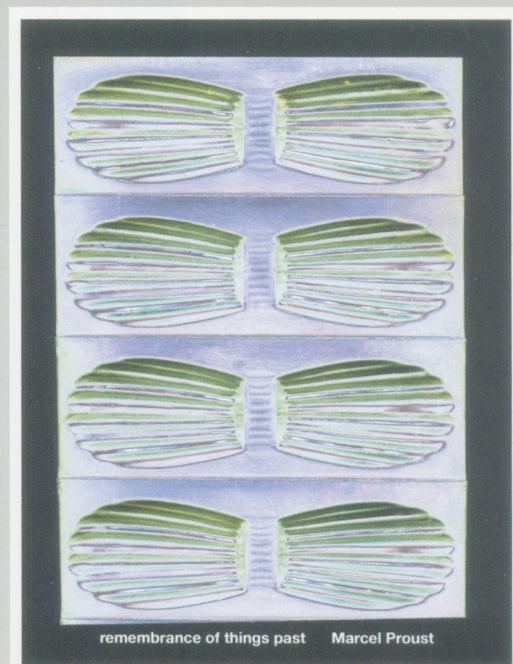
ARTHUR LERNER
The Road
 Cormac McCarthy



RICHARD LOVING
Gardener of Evil
 Pierre Loving



TIM LOWLY
A Personal Matter
 Kenzaburō Ōe



RAY MARTIN
Remembrance of Things Past
 Marcel Proust

printworks

311 WEST SUPERIOR STREET
CHICAGO, IL 60654
TEL. 312.664.9407
PRINTWORKSCHICAGO.COM

DESIGN: ROBERT SALM
©2010 PRINTWORKS GALLERY