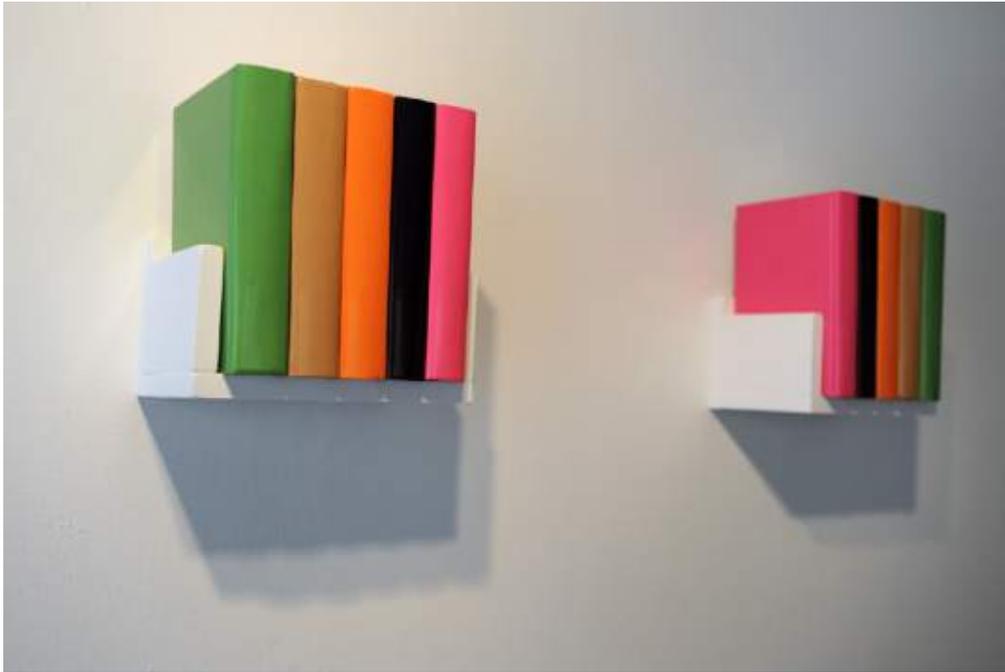


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## It speaks volumes



This One Works Best With Two People by Brett Yasko featured in the Books exhibit at the 709 gallery, Downtown. Jasmine Goldband | Tribune-Review

**By Kurt Shaw**

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

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A tidy little exhibit tucked into 709 Penn Gallery, Downtown, is worth a look if you're into the spirit of the book.

Simply titled "Book," it's the brainchild of [Pittsburgh Cultural Trust](#) curator Sonja Sweterlitsch who grew up around books at her family's home in Silver Spring, Md.

Her father, a theoretical physicist who works for the government, literally amassed thousands of precious volumes in all subject areas, but concentrating in philosophy, poetry, studies of Ezra Pound, and especially his amazing collection of rare, out-of-print and first-edition physics books.

On March 20, 2012, a freak lightning bolt hit a tree in the backyard. The tree exploded. The lightning hit the ground, traveled through the tree roots and ignited the house.

"While my parents made it out of the house, with few exceptions, they lost everything," Sweterlitsch says. "It was on three news channels in the D.C. area.

Though the lightning strike reduced her father's vast library to ashes within minutes, Sweterlitsch says, "He had a wonderful outlook on it,

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### Details

'Book'

What: Book-inspired artworks by Pittsburgh-area artists Seth Clark, Dana Ingham, Randie Snow and Brett Yasko

When: Through Nov. 18. Hours: 11 a.m.-6

telling me, 'It's all just material, and there is much more to life.'

"As we talked about it, he repeated something he often told me growing up, that 'Books are the least material of material objects to have, because, essentially, they are ideas.' "

In light of that fact, and the general disappearance of physical bookstores in favor of digital books, Sweterlitsch invited Pittsburgh-area artists Seth Clark, Dana Ingham, Randie Snow and Brett Yasko to reflect on books as we revere them. Not only as objects, but in the way we perceive and consume them.

"I wanted to respond to my parents' house and the loss of books and bookstores from our landscape in general, and started thinking about books as precious objects," Sweterlitsch says.

"All four artists are also graphic designers, and have a sensitivity to text," she says, making for a truly enticing and engaging exhibit.

That's obvious with the largest work on display, Seth Clark's installation "T, or The New York Times Style Magazine," which is mounted on the back wall of the gallery.

It is basically the Times' "T" logo reinterpreted by the Lawrenceville-based artist and designer 107 times. He says he sees the piece as "an imagined commission of various artists to interpret their logo for the publication's cover."

Here, however, each was hand-drawn or painted by Clark on paper, with some of the logos scratched, painted and even burnt on or off each piece of paper comprising the piece.

Clark says that, in many ways, this series is a simple exploration into typographic play. "I wanted to see how many different ways I could physically alter a logo," he says. "It was a refreshing (exercise), and I think it would be for any other designer."

Not type, but books themselves were altered by Randie Snow of Brighton Heights, who chose to cut into and add objects to everything from a copy of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" to several versions of the Bible. She calls the seven evocative assemblage sculptures she created "book relics."

Snow says these "book relics" are her way to pay homage to the centuries old need of people to "create their own tangible memorials." In some pieces, little bits of jewelry, baby-doll parts and other precious objects are combined in an effort to allude to the subjects contained in each book and also create something that has personal connotations.

Like Snow, Dana Ingham of McKees Rocks used old books to create sculptures that evoke the subjects or themes contained within their original source material. Although Ingham admits, "As raw material, I found books to be a poor source. There was some novelty, but covers stayed covers, the paper is poor quality and the printed text tends towards noise in new configurations. I couldn't separate the content of the books that I destroyed from the work I was trying to create out of them."

Nevertheless, two works by Ingham combine copies of original texts made into intricately detailed paper sculptures — one contains little paper houses, and the other silhouettes people.

About the latter piece, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," which is titled the same as the famous Max Weber book that inspired it, Ingham says, "The silhouettes in this work are from photos of regular people, taken surreptitiously, in and around Pittsburgh. Juxtaposed against the text of Weber's book, I wonder if the 'work ethic' and the 'spirit of capitalism' are still paths to prosperity and virtue available to everyone?"

Not old books, but new are the subjects of Brett Yasko's interactive piece, "This one works best with two people."

For the piece, the Squirrel Hill-based designer created five pairs of books, each case-bound and more than 750 pages. There is no type on the covers, only a solid color for each set. There are two green books, two orange books, and so on. Inside of each, Yasko says, "I have transcribed the complete dialogue of a scene from four movies and one television show from the 1980s that I still remember because it was a scene where the male character is either professing his love to, breaking up with, or being dumped by the female character."

To wit, the books are gender-specific, with the "female" books sitting on the left shelf and the "male" books on the right.

"You need both books of each pair to make sense of what's being read," Yasko says. "The idea is that a couple can take a pair of books and, like a play, recite the dialogue back and forth. But you need two people to make it work — or an extra set of hands if you're going it alone."

p.m. Wednesdays-Thursdays; 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sundays

Admission: Free

Where: 709 Penn Gallery, 709 Penn Ave., Downtown

Details: 412-456-6666 or [trustarts.org](http://trustarts.org)

The movie or TV show titles remain a mystery, Yasko says. “The audience can see if they recognize them as they read. But even if they don’t recognize them, the dialogues are still a good read,” he says.

To that end, Sweterlitsch says, “Sometimes, this seeming disappearance of books from our culture is because of the ascendancy of television and the Internet, or models of Internet book-shopping that do without brick-and-mortar stores, but more and more the physical object of the book is disappearing because of ebooks.”

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