

Pattern layouts, by Brian Dettmer

Rare Books Collection, University of Melbourne Library



Brian Dettmer (American, b. 1974)

Pattern layouts

Atlanta: Brian Dettmer, 2007

Rare Books Collection

University of Melbourne Library

© Brian Dettmer

Brian Dettmer is a contemporary American artist, well known for his 'altered' object constructions. Dettmer's creations are sculpted from objects such as vinyl records, cassette tapes and, predominantly, books, stripping them of their original function and transforming them into artworks. The process raises questions about the march of technology and the place of these objects in an ever-changing world.

The objects here are two obsolete books, sealed with glue and carved with a scalpel, transforming them into new sculptural creations. For this artist, nothing is planned in the process of creating these sculptures. He simply begins cutting and lets the work emerge organically, with illustrations and text uncovered beneath each new layer. Because they are carved from something that was once another person's creation, the artist has likened his method to a DJ remixing an original song, producing a new take on someone else's work of art.

'My work is a collaboration with the existing material and its past creators and the completed pieces expose new relationships of the book's internal elements exactly where they have been since their original conception.' (Brian Dettmer)

Teaching ideas

The University of Melbourne's curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, [contact a collection manager](#).

Art, Market and Methods

Examine the processes undertaken by Brian Dettmer [in this video](#) and discuss the role of materials and techniques in constructing meaning through contemporary art.

History of Books and Reading

Discuss books as works of art in the form of artists' books. Visit the Rare Books Collection to look at some of the artists' books, which range from Dettmer's sculptural creations through to books of photography and prints.

Exhibition Management

Explore different means of exhibiting items with very fine detail, like Dettmer's *Pattern layouts*. Discover other objects in the University of Melbourne's collections of comparable form and detail.

Poetry

Use artists' books in the Rare Books Collection to explore the relationship between words and images. Use these objects as a starting point for the development of poetic works.

Modern Art: The Politics of the New

Use Brian Dettmer's *Pattern layouts* to start a dialogue about different media for creating art in the 20th century. Discuss the invention of new techniques and try to envision how they would have been received by their audiences, particularly those used by artists in the early 20th century.

Knowledge, Learning and Culture

Visit the Baillieu Library's Rare Books Collection to explore different historical interpretations of a single object type. Discuss the messages that different types of books are trying to convey, including Brian Dettmer's repurposed sculptural books, and the types of knowledge that they symbolise.

Intersecting objects



W. & H. Hutchinson (England, active c. 1878 – after 1919)

Surgical kit, c. 1860

steel and other metal, tortoiseshell, vulcanite, bakelite, caustic stone, gut, cardboard, leather, satin, velvet, elastic and gilt

7.2 × 14.2 × 3.0 cm (wallet containing instruments)

Medical History Museum

University of Melbourne

MHM04072



Robert Jacks (Australian, 1943–2014)

1975–1976: Hand stamped

New York: Robert Jacks, 1976

Rare Books Collection

University of Melbourne Library

© Robert Jacks

To learn more, visit the websites of the [Rare Books Collection](#) and the [Medical History Museum](#).

Further reading

Website of [Brian Dettmer](#).

Brian Dettmer, *The cemetery of forgotten books* (exhibition catalogue), Barcelona: Mito Galeria de Arte, 2008.

Brian Dettmer, [TED Talk](#), February 2015.

Peter Di Sciascio, '[Artists' books: A world of openings](#)', *University of Melbourne Collections*, issue 6, June 2010, pp. 14–19.