



VIEWES DES STARTS

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LA SARRE

BER LAZARUS: EX LIBRIS: ESPACE AGRANDI

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With an ingenious twist Ber Lazarus has introduced narrative into box assemblage art. Poetic and with an intimate feel these intriguing mini-scaled shelfworks recall earlier prop works in the object oriented world of pop and minimalism of the 1960s. The shelves carry nostalgic echos of an earlier time by taking books with a history and reinventing them as objects, containers and 3-dimensional props in the mini-theatre-like settings. The histories reflected are collective and social, and there are warnings embedded in the subtext of these works that are political, social, and definitely not politically correct.

The Rich are Different (Di's Eyes) 1997, for instance is a shelf work we look through an eye hole to see a background image of Lady Di (known for her work on helping



to ban land mines) and a we see a one-legged black child in the foreground. Beside the book are the shaped cut out text pages (once the book's contents) that are a sculptural adjunct to the rest. A source of information and knowledge or culture these reconstituted books are a metaphor for the way these knowledge containers are now being replaced by other media. The book, once information, becomes an object, a sculptural element. Lazarus' inventive use of books speaks of how radically the way information is transmitted has shifted due to technological change. Largely intuitive in his approach Ber Lazarus says: "These box assemblages are not intention driven. There is no plan before I begin making one of them" The book, now deconstructed is given a new function as an element used to construct a narrative, almost like mini installations.

A volume of Encyclopedia Britannica has had its interior cut out to become a sort of spiritual space shaped like the interior of a church. Lit within it had tiny doll-like miniature figures. The shelves in these works function like altars, almost comparable to the Shinto shrines in Japan and often the books are literally nailed down or riveted to them. Small lamps further the sense of an intimate Joseph Cornell like assemblage conception. Tiny, magical, a place to study or focus on the subject. There is even a copy of *The Statutes of Quebec* (2000) to emphasize the nature of knowledge redundancy in an age of rapid-fire, mass communication overload. Tiny colourful plastic babies dance amid text in the space within.

What is interesting about these works is their open accessibility: ordinary people can understand their message. And what is the message? Seeing these tiny figures encased within containers that once held knowledge, on fragile tempo-

rary feeling shelves one gathers a sense of the ephemeral and fragile nature of life itself, and that we are all merely passengers in this world. History itself seems as subjective as these situations, set ups for a narrative. In *La Femme Pressé* (2003), a book by Paul-Loup Sulitzer has been cannibalized. Looking in through a peephole we see a woman with two faces back to back rendered in a Picasso-like line drawn style. A gold thread leads from the foreground to this "drawn" woman. A page from Sulitzer's book rests adjacent and we can read... "Elle c'est Kate Killinger. Indépendente, belle, passionnée..." A mid-life sense of humour pervades the shelf situation that holds a copy of Balzac's *Les Illusions Perdus* (2003). Looking into this book we are confronted with a total void save for a series of line of remaining text that recede to a vanishing point. The space is totally empty and existential... an allusion to mid-life wisdom or transitions?

Ber Lazarus has refurbished books on science, law, fiction, biology, all to rearrange this world of literature and information in a series of shelf sited 3-dimensional constructs – always with a sense of irony and humour. An entire set of the *Illustrated Home Library Encyclopedia* (1999-2000) in red leather has had its entire informational guts filleted like a dead fish. The vaulted interior has men in miniature who float above train tracks, and one sees a Red Cross First Aid symbol and a puppy dog. This industrial scene seems as if from another time. Compartmentalized, these spaces present fragments from narratives that have their own inherently absurd logic. Sure its surreal!

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