

JOHN BOLIN

2022 ART & ART HISTORY
MFA THESIS EXHIBITION



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

MAY 6-20, 2022

2022 ART & ART HISTORY MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

The *2022 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition* features the thesis works of the MFA candidates in Columbia College Chicago's Art and Art History Department. The exhibition, which includes artists' books, prints, drawings, sculptures, photography, sound, projections, and installation works, represents the culmination of two years of development on a cohesive body of work for each artist.

Participating artists:

Kelsey Bogdan

John Bolin

Caitlyn Doran

Samantha Trace Foster

Anna Lipscomb

Alexander Jose Luis Ramirez

Chris Tasiar

Megan VanKanegan

The *2022 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), the Department of Art and Art History, and Paul Catanese, Director of Graduate Studies for Art and Art History.

JOHN BOLIN

the total number of things I own is a series of photographic catalogs which examine the relationship between owner and objects as a type of extended self-portraiture. Through systematically cataloging objects that Bolin owns, he is creating moments of pause in his daily life. This pause, or momentary meditation serves as a reflective period to ponder the necessity of the amassment of objects which he has collected through various moves and transitions in life.

Throughout one's life, our possessions come to be valued in different ways. However, possessions always act as representations of our personality and our extended selves. *The total number of things I own* is an examination of this relationship between oneself, the objects they own, and spaces they inhabit.

John Bolin was born and raised in Hancock County, KY. He is currently based in Chicago, IL. John Bolin's work is an examination of the book form and its capacity to communicate and interact with readers. Through his work, Bolin creates books that function together as a catalog of the mundane and express the absurdity of life. He views books themselves as strange objects, simultaneously sacred and ordinary. They believe that it's like a bible in a motel room drawer, a simple codex without a thought, until it's dropped on the floor and elicits a kind of response. Their work combines elements of photography, design, illustration, and special sense of dry humor.



every object in my dining room closet (detail), 2022, book, 8" x 7" (Closed) 8" x 180"



every object in my dining room (detail), 2022, book



every object on my back porch (detail), 2022, book, 8" x 7"



every object on my back porch, 2022, book 8" x 7"



every object on my back porch, 2022, book, 8" x 7"

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN BOLIN

Conducted by Sierra Delamarter

Sierra Delamarter: You use a lot of mixed media in your work. Could you explain some of your processes when creating your work?

John Bolin: My work comes from a lot of different places. But the most common theme in terms of where the work originates, is language. I talk about how I think about art history, and that's true I do try to bring that into my work as a sort of backbone or reference that the work can stand on or build off of. But more than that, I would say that the work comes from a sense of play. I'm not trained as a typist or a typographer, or even a designer. Those are all things I've been learning and stealing ideas to learn from as I've been making the works. But I am someone who listens a lot, to people around me, to music and popular culture, really just any type of media that I can consume—I like to do so. Not to say I'm addicted to television or social media, but I like to have that white noise while I work or go about my day. And I take a lot from that, I keep a note on my phone where I can write down little bits and pieces of things I hear that I might elaborate on in the future. Once I have an idea, I like to make lots of little test booklets. That's the fun part. I think a lot about Bruno Munari and his ideas around the language of books, and how the book form itself can communicate ideas to the reader. Playing and experimenting with that book form is a huge part of my process. Experimentation is essential to my work. If I'm not learning from the books I'm making, I don't make them. Along with the book forms themselves, I also have picked up photography in the past year and that has been a huge learning experience that's been incredibly fruitful. I like new things; I don't like to settle—it keeps life exciting.

SD: How does your more traditional work influence your books?

JB: I used to paint, and that comes through in a lot of strange ways. The two mediums don't exactly have a lot in common but my background in painting has shaped how I see the whole process of making and talking about art. I also teach a Drawing 1 class on Thursdays here at Columbia. Which is strange to think about really. Me, a bookmaker who is closer to a photographer than anything else, teaching students how to draw. But I actually see the two as very related. I always talk to my students about what drawing is. To me it's a lot of things, not just the replication of a still life with charcoal; it's thinking, it's seeing, it's learning and it's a conversation between yourself and the paper in front of you. And I draw constantly, even more than I make books. I do it get ideas out and visualize my thoughts. I think with my hands, so it just makes sense to me that way. Everything goes into the books. The whole reason I started taking my own photographs was to include them in my books. It just makes sense, book and photography. But that really leads into how I see myself. I make books, that what I always say, it's how I introduce myself. Never as a draftsman, never as a painter, and definitely not as a photographer. It's not out of disdain for any of those mediums, I think of it as more respect for the individual craft. I am currently enamored with bookmaking and book binding that to me, when I do anything else it's only in service of completing an idea in book form.

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN BOLIN continued

Conducted by Sierra Delamarter

SD: You describe your books as “strange objects, simultaneously sacred and ordinary.” Could you go more in-depth about what this means?

JB: I think I would describe all books as strange; simultaneously sacred and ordinary, not just my own. By that I mean that books have a history. Books are sacred texts worth millions of dollars; books are given away for free. They're celebrated and enjoyed, and yet also banned and burned. Books are objects that carry their history very poorly as well. You can always tell if a book has been well used. The spine cracks, pages tear, the text block slumps and sags, or the pages are wrinkled and ruined from humidity and exposure to life. We would never treat a precious object the way we would treat a book. Paintings are examples of precious objects that hold in them a sense of regality, they only really exist at arm's length. It's taboo to touch a painting, and it's taboo to not touch a book. Bringing that back into the context of “art” I think is the strangest thing of all to have this idea of bringing someone into a white cube gallery space and say “no please, touch it”. That creates a huge type of tension I think in terms of what we expect from the gallery space and what we think of as what art should or shouldn't do/be.



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with, and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series is managed by Fine Arts major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistants Kaylee Fowler and Sierra Delamarter. Graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Gray Beyer. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

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