

THE
BEAUTIES
OF
DECOMPOSITION

DISPLAYED IN
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND DESCRIPTIVE

PULP

✱

INTERSPERSED WITH
ANECDOTES OF THE ARTS

VOL.I.

LONDON:
Printed at Unit 8, Bow Creek
FOR MSDM PUBLICATIONS
Sold at all good bookshops in the Disunited Kingdom

2017

in memory of Gustav Metzger 1926-2017



Samuel Smiles by Edward Linley Sambourn, *Punch* 1883

DECOMPOSITION:

“Rich are the diligent, who can command
Time, nature’s stock! and could his hour-glass fall,
Would, as for seed of stars, stoop for the sand,
And, by incessant labour, gather all.”—D’Avenant.

“Allez en avant, et la foi vous viendra!”—D’Alembert.

After receiving an unexpected invitation from paula
roush in July 2017 to take part in ‘O Livro Disperso’
(‘The Book Dispersed’), the second exhibition in a
linked series of three organised by the Portuguese
curatorial group Media Instáveis/Unstable Media, a

*“cycle privileging the cross-disciplinary and blurring of
the borders separating art and life”,*

I started to consider some options within the usual
workplace constraints of real time and budget.

Their brief for participants included the following statement

“It also seeks, as in the previous exhibition (‘Faztu Mesmx - Art by Instruction’, at Sputnik The Window, 2016), to remove the artistic work from its protective frame of uniqueness.”

This was suggestive, an agenda pointing away from singularity, fetishism and the investment grade object so beloved of the mainstream art world. The MI/UM brief continued in a similar liberating vein

“The exhibition ‘The Book Dispersed’ thus seeks to develop the possibilities of the transience of the arts, their relationship with daily life from an exploratory perspective of the extensive artistic practices related to text and publication.”

Spurred by this, I happened to recall another experimental project titled #exstrange defined on its home page as


“a curatorial project transforming eBay into a site of artistic production and cultural exchange as an artistic intervention into capitalism”.

Thus, with ‘*The Book Dispersed*’ brief firmly in mind my attention was drawn specifically to a work called *Shreds* by Melbourne based performance artists Maria Miranda & Norie Neumark (aka Out-of-Sync), the title of their deadpan contribution to this project that encouraged the use of eBay as a shopwindow and sales point for pseudo-artistic and artisinal objects, in this case a polythene sack stuffed full

of shredded academic documents; ordinary paper waste.¹

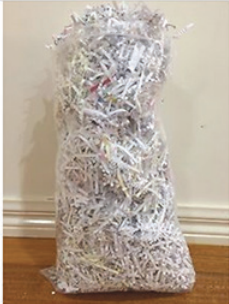
¹ Fancy a bag of supermarket salad with extra protein in the form of dead cockroach or mouse, imported bananas hiding a venomous tropical spider, dodgy hair tongs that burn your house down if overcharged, or a Japanese saloon car with airbags that inflate at the wrong moment causing a crash?! No, clearly not. Occasionally you might even get your money back (after finally digging out the original sales receipt), or a long delayed home or accident insurance pay out. Sometimes consumers are begrudgingly reimbursed by supermarkets, or faulty factory products eventually recalled. There are even fanatics out there who make a living from 'extreme couponing', which comes with the incidental dangers of stockpiling and hoarding. Yet a bag of shredded paper, the kind of thing you can collect yourself from the pavement any evening any day of the week mid-town, especially after office hours, just dumped on the kerb waiting for the bin men, appears to have little or no commodity value or cash back potential. However Miranda & Neumark are retailing exactly that: a clear plastic sack full to the brim with shredded paper! They find therapeutic relief from such banalities in a series of slapstick videos viz *Shredded: Stuplimity and the Aesthetics of Neo-Liberalism*.

SHREDDING


 Shop by category ▾


Search...

[Back to home page](#) | Listed in category: [Art > Mixed Media, Collage](#)



Mouse over image to zoom



 [Have one to sell?](#) [Sell it yourself](#)

Shreds #exstrange

Item condition: **New**

Ended: 10 Feb, 2017 11:15:14 AEDST

Winning bid: **AU \$5.50** [6 bids]

Postage: **AU \$57.45** AusPost Air Mail Parcel | [See details](#)
Item location: Fairfield, VIC, Australia
Posts to: Worldwide

Delivery: **Estimated delivery within 6-13 business days**
Seller posts within 3 days after [receiving cleared payment](#).

Payments: **PayPal**, Bank deposit | [See payment information](#)

Returns: **No Returns Accepted**

Guarantee: **ebay** MONEY BACK GUARANTEE | [See details](#)
Get the item you ordered or get your money back.

This was sub arte povera, an example of the ‘abject portion’ as Georges Bataille calls the waste product of any system, a final emphatic gesture made by out-of-work academics, revitalised as packaging, animal litter etc.

This decisive action acknowledges that in the 21st century recycling is far more than a lifestyle choice, but crucial to our survival as a species in the Anthropocene. Might this methodology -in which eBay becomes the blind host, a temporary artmart/gallery for products and services- be transferable? I put this idea to paula.

She soon informed me that ‘O Livro Disperso’ was unfortunately “in financial hardship”, (email 10/07/17), and in the same letter proposed a way of processing the paperwork from the abortive Gulbenkian funding application:

“Alternatively we could just pulp it (the rejected funding application) and use the pulp to produce pages of a book, this + your text could then go up for sale on ebay/Casa das Artes and the funding be used to support the artists participating in the project ??? This would make your contribution more concept-specific and collaborative but let me know your thoughts....”

We exchanged largely speculative emails and quickly established a no-nonsense collaborative approach.



10/07/2017

Assunto: Programa de Apoio às Artes Visuais - 2ª fase / 2017

Media Instáveis

Exmos. Senhores,

Concluído o processo de organização, análise e avaliação das candidaturas apresentadas e na sequência dos pareceres emitidos pelo Júri, constituído para apreciação das candidaturas apresentadas à 2ª fase do Programa de Apoio às Artes Visuais de 2017, vimos informar que acaba de ser aprovada a proposta que decorreu da respetiva decisão colegial.

Assim, com base nos referidos pareceres e no contexto das várias propostas em apreço, o vosso pedido não foi considerado favoravelmente, pelo que lamentamos comunicar-lhes que não é possível atribuir-lhes o apoio a que se candidataram.

Com votos de sucesso para os projetos em que se encontram envolvidos-os, apresentamos os melhores cumprimentos.

Luís Gil

10/07/2017

Subject: Visual Arts Support Program - 2nd phase / 2017

Unstable Media

Your Excellencies Gentlemen,

Concluded is the process of organising, analysing and evaluating the applications submitted, and in the sequence of the opinions issued by the Jury, constituted to evaluate the applications submitted to the 2nd phase of the Visual Arts Support Program for 2017, we come to inform that the proposal has just been approved which resulted from their collegial decision. Thus, on the basis of these opinions and in the context of the various proposals under consideration, your request was not considered favorably, and we regret to inform you that it is not possible to give you the support you have applied for.

With successful votes for the projects in which you are involved,
we present the best greetings.

Luis Gil



Front view of Unit 8, Bow Creek, Barratt Industrial Estate

DIARY:

Bow Creek , LONDON E3, 31/07/17. I'm at paula's studio for the tear-up/pulp-in of the Gulbenkian paperwork, together with Samuel Smiles's Chartist manual Self-Help (1859)² and my own magnum opus Unshelfmarked (2015).³ She has recently moved into this light industrial unit as a guardian and established a modular lay-out, living and working areas spatially indissoluble. After dealing with a photocopier paper jam we get on. The report is torn into long strips and deposited into two plastic bins, one light, one dark. Then I remove Chapter 4 'Application & Perseverance' from the Smiles for safekeeping. The remainder is rapidly disbound and torn up too. I leave paula the job of ripping up my own book, dividing its grey pages from the white: night and day buckets.

² A motivational Victorian guru, Samuel Smiles's original manuscript was rejected by the railway publisher Routledge, so aptly he self-published *Self-Help* (1859) and went on to sell 250,000 copies. It included potted rags-to-riches, or more accurately rags-to-respectability stories. Take John Britton (1771-1857) for example, an orphan, a humble pub cellarman and auto-didactic antiquary who virtually invented the popular topography genre though his account *The Beauties of Wiltshire* (1801).

³ In *Unshelfmarked: Reconceiving the artist's book*, Michael Hampton vets the medium's history, postulating a new timeline that challenges the orthodox view of the artist's book as a form largely peculiar to the twentieth history.

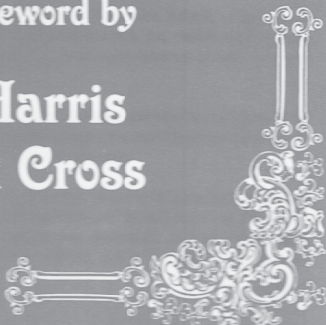


Self-Help

with illustrations of
Conduct and Perseverance

Samuel Smiles

with a Foreword by



Lord Harris
of High Cross



Unshelfmarked
Reconceiving the artists' book

Michael Hampton

Unshelfmarked

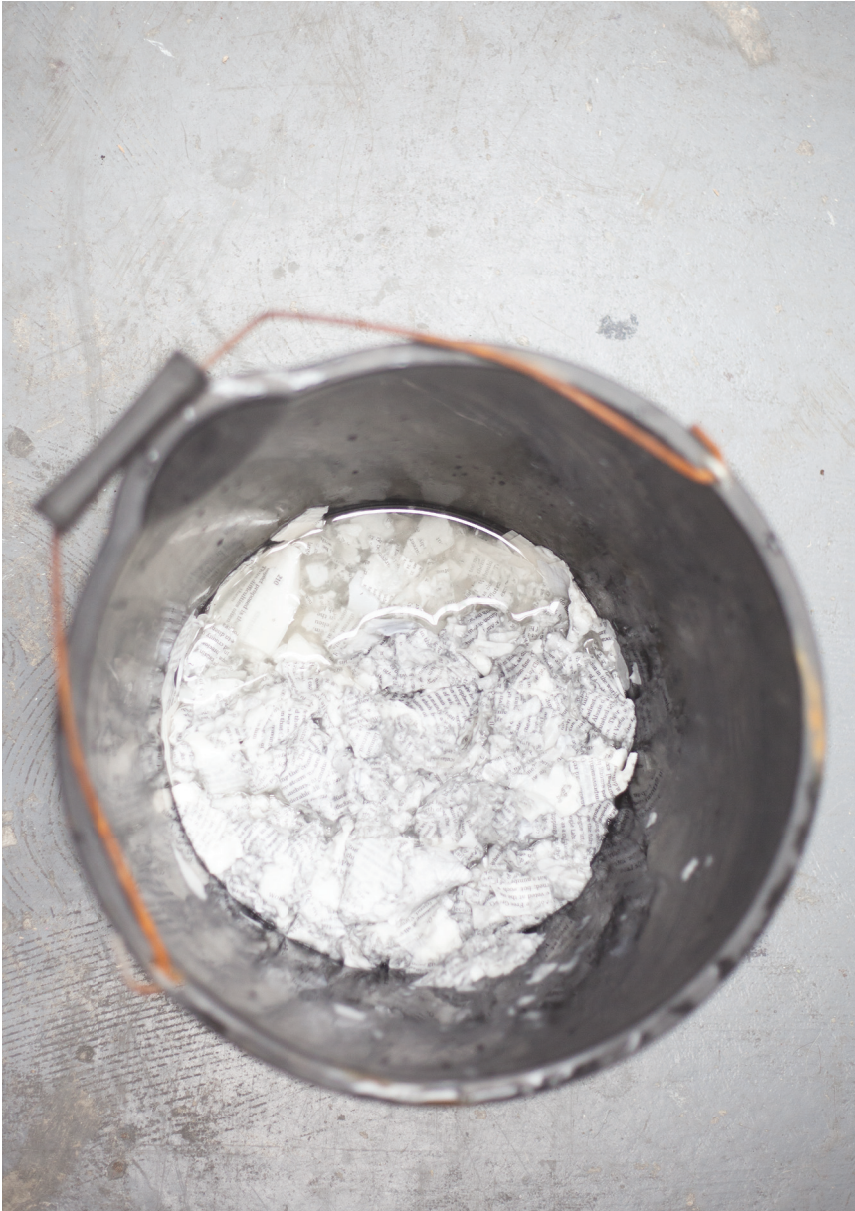
Reconceiving the artists' book

Michael Hampton

Shredding simply
grates,⁴ a way of
facilitating the end
process of recycling,
but pulping aims to
reduce and efface
typographic content,
using rendition
to arrive at an
amorphous state.

⁴ Undoubtedly the most notorious contemporary instance of meticulous, total shredding on a factory line was Michael Landy's Artangel project *Break Down* (2001).





DIARY:

Bow Creek, London E3, 12/08/17. We construct a simple wooden frame and cover it with some tacked-on gauze that paula has cut from a formal white wedding dress. It's a shame to ruin the garment but needs must. After pouring off the excess water in the dark bin, and subjecting the paper pulp to repeated bursts from a handheld electric blender, the mush is ready to be spread out into the frame; an extremely subtle grey tinted blend of ex pages now reduced to a perfect consistency, though punctuated here and there by a few tiny scraps of undigested text; more bricolage than fine art! We flatten the pulp on top of the mesh with a cardboard lid weighted down by two bricks, and leave it to dry out on a work table well covered by newspaper and plastic sheeting.





AUTO-DESTRUCTIVE ART



Gustav Metzger, *Acid Nylon Performance* (1961) Southbank, London SE1. *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 2017

The Auto-Destructive artist Gustav Metzger⁵
continues to be a presence here, channelled by
paula who recalled that

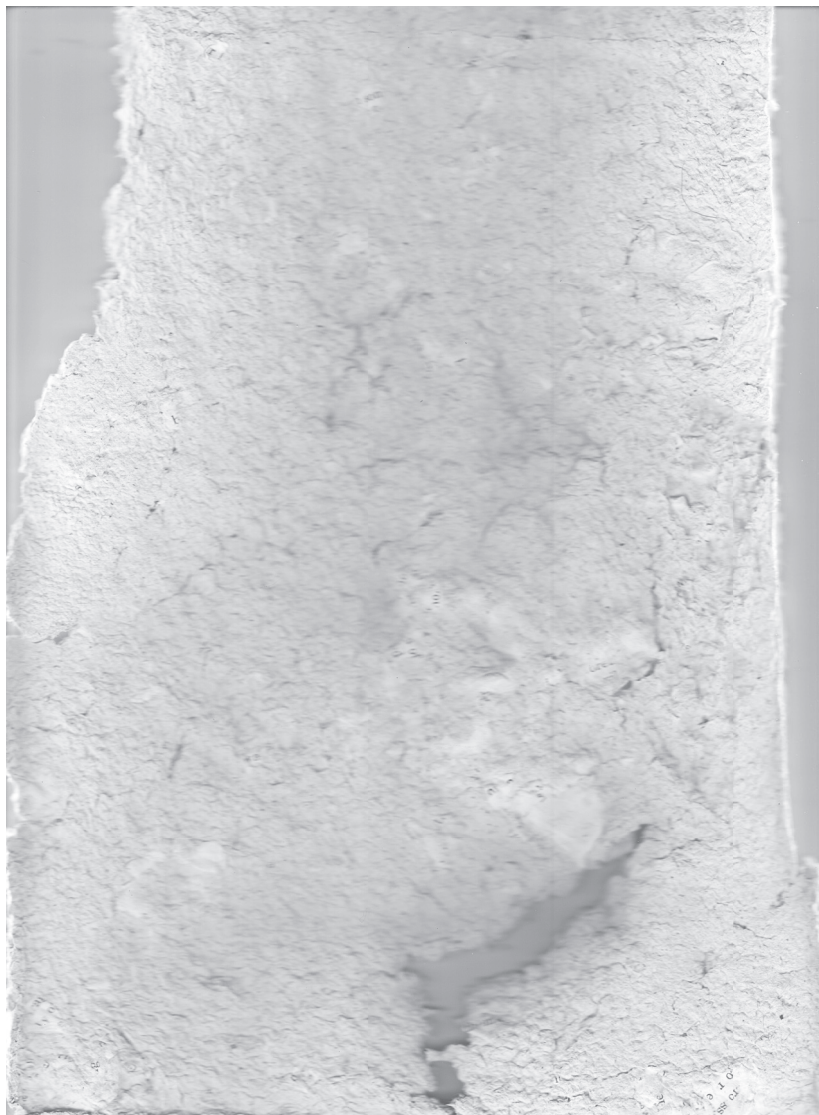
*“Gustav was adamant that whatever you do the
result has to look good, have an aesthetic weight and
be perfectly finished. His words keep coming to my
mind as this process has been generating aesthetically
pleasing objects, in spite of this not being the
intention at all.”*

(Email 28/08/17)

⁵ *The Beauties of Decomposition* contains handwritten Metzger letters from my collection.

DECOMPOSITION

When dried out the first run of specimens turn out to be really craggy, primordial objects, less paper than paper sculpture. It seems the pulp had insufficient water content, so the mould and deckle were upgraded, producing a new slimline edition of pieces that are left to couch.



Handmade paper: Specimen #1



Handmade paper: Specimens #1 - 12



Ephemeral yet tough; serendipitous lunar pages salvaged from an amateur experiment; pre-aged, pre-eroded lacunæ with tiny parcels of textual meaning embedded crazily in their surface; deckled-edged, pockmarked flags; ragged islands of cross-fertilised matériel their cool texture as uneven and precarious as existence itself; the distant 2-D cousins of oceanic ‘plastiglomerate’;⁶ crude paper mush dried out and laminated; literary tokens stabilised on-site by paula’s craft/photographic skill set; soggy dough sliced and reformatted as a numberless sequence of unbound sheets; resistant and rough, yet made into a proto ‘book’ through InDesign (the project has gone digital); output of a grey, makeshift, self-help economy; a mute home-made index.

⁶ ‘Plastiglomerate’: a type of ‘natural’ shoreline bricolage in which the man-made and organic fuse together; often emanating from the ‘Great Pacific Garbage Patch’

PLASTIGOMERATE



'Plastiglomerate' from Kamilo Beach, Hawaii. *Science Friday*, 10 March 2015

GREEN BOX



Marcel Duchamp, *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même*. Paris : Edition Rose Sélavy, [1934].

DIARY:

*Bow Creek, London E14, 2/9/17. With paula still under the spell of Duchamp's immortal *Boîte verte/Green Box*. (1934),⁷ and the artists' book as archive, we spend the afternoon working on our contents in detail. This means thrashing out together both the criteria for inclusion, and also agreeing on the syntactical/structural relationships between various parts of this still untitled box. It starts to come together and after some laying-out and photocopying, some polite to and fro of ideas, we assemble material inside a prototype. Two luxury boxes and ten standard boxes are to be produced for the show in Porto under the msdm label for Media Instáveis/Unstable Media.*

⁷

Part of the National Art Library V&A Museum.

THE BEAUTIES OF DECOMPOSITION

paula roush & Michael Hampton

Book 1. Essay, cartoon, documentary photographs, various inserts. A look at the studio working process, placing it in a continuum with other self-published books.

Book 2. Images of handmade paper specimens -verso and recto- viewing them as a series. Since they will be dispersed, each original specimen is included in one copy of the edition of 12.

Book 3. Contains letters sent by Gustav to Michael by Royal Mail Post (always first class), mostly trying to arrange meet-ups at specific galleries to see exhibitions, and participate in symposia or other art events.

Unique handmade paper specimen 24x19cm.

Three laser printed books:

1. Decomposition: stapled colour 21x15cm, 40 pages, evercolor 80gsm.

2. Scanned record of paper specimens: b&w #1-12, 27x19.5cm, corona offset 120gsm.

3. "thanks for the information and good news": scanned b&w letters bound by a brass cylinder post: 18.5x17cm.

Colour photograph on gloss paper: 15x10.5cm.

Foil-stamped grey board box: 32x23cm.

Certificate of authenticity signed by the authors.

First edition of 12 copies.



msdm publications

London 2017