

Conrad Bakker

Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club

> What is *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club*?

*Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* is a carved and painted installation/archive of all of the books/titles from the personal library of the artist Robert Smithson (1938—1973). The *Book Club* part of this project is a participatory component that was active during the construction of the project, allowing viewers and collectors to purchase a second (and final) carved and painted copy of a book/title from the primary archive.

> Why Robert Smithson?

Robert Smithson was a visionary artist and a pioneer of land art in the 1960s and early 1970s whose unconventional artwork and critical writing helped to generate an innovative platform for thinking about contemporary art, culture, and the landscape. On July 20, 1973, while surveying locations for an earthwork in Amarillo, Texas, Robert Smithson died in a plane crash. Soon after this tragedy, Smithson's wife, Nancy Holt, who was also a prominent sculptor, filmmaker and earthworks artist, had all of the books from Smithson's personal library catalogued by art history graduate student Valentin Tatransky, and later placed into the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian. >> [LINK TO ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART](#)



image of Robert Smithson posing with rocks on a station wagon and sketching during the construction of Spiral Jetty.

> What is the significance of Robert Smithson's personal library?

Robert Smithson's personal library is an interesting collection of titles because of the range and depth of its subjects and how it provides a unique window into his (self) education, outlining a framework for his creative research and practice. In addition, because of his untimely death in 1973, this collection of books/titles functions as a time capsule for the ideas and culture of the 1960s and early 1970s.

> How many titles are in Robert Smithson's Library?

> Where are these books currently?

Robert Smithson's personal library includes approximately 1,120 books, all of which are currently housed in the Archives of American Art in the Smithsonian, listed under the *Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers*. The complete listing of all of these titles has appeared in multiple publications, including Ann Reynolds' Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere (2002) and the Robert Smithson monograph for the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2004).

> [Link to the Complete Listing of Books in Robert Smithson's Library](#)



> image of storage boxes at the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian

> image of recent exhibition that featured selected books from archives

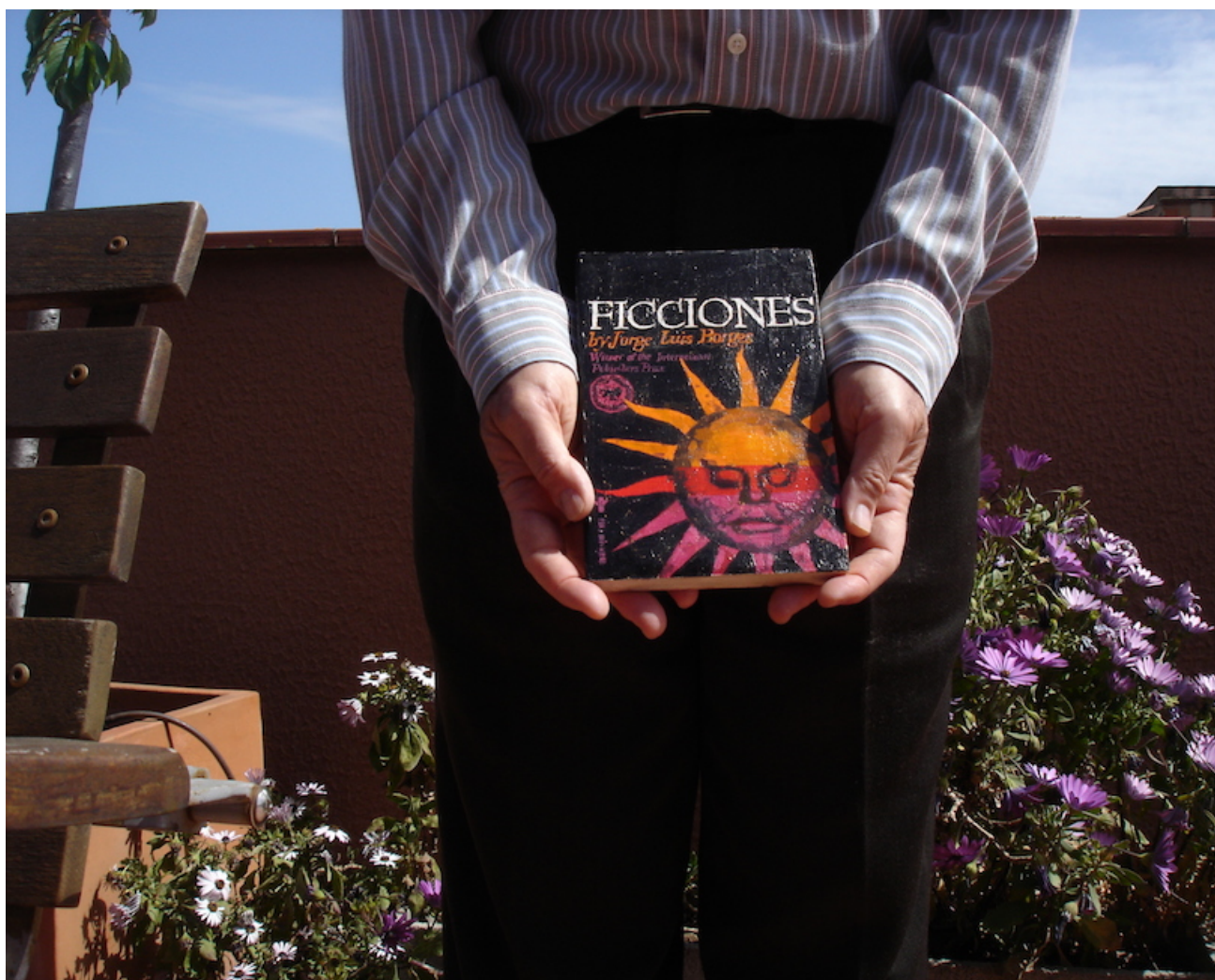
> Explain the two primary parts of *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club*:

*The Library* is the primary archive, a literal recreation of every book/title in Robert Smithson's personal library. Each book is a sculpture that has been carved out of wood at 1:1 scale and painted on the front and sides to look like the original title/edition using reference images from online booksellers from Amazon to eBay. This strategy involves an earnest attempt at verisimilitude in spite of the limitations of painterly representation and the inevitability of errors generated from the online research, but all of this is a deliberate strategy to activate the dialectical shift between the carved and painted book/sculpture and the real, similar to Smithson's own terms of site and non-site).



detail of *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* installed at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in 2014

*The Book Club* portion of this project is a participatory component in the form of a book club membership, active during the construction and exhibition of the larger project. The book club allowed participating members to purchase and own a second (and final) copy of a book/sculpture from the primary archive, made to order. These sculptures have become part of a secondary, distributed archive of Robert Smithson's Library via book club members from around the world, many of which are represented on the project website with images of books being held in book club members hands.



*Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club member Pep Fernàndez, holding his book in Barcelona, Spain*

- > How long did it take to make all of these books?
- > Where has the project been exhibited?

*Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* took five years to complete, starting in 2014 as part of a solo exhibition at the Utah Museum of Fine Art at the University of Utah, with only half of the books/sculptures completed. Additional books/sculptures were added to subsequent exhibitions, in 2015 at the Wright Museum at Beloit College and in 2017 at the Cress Gallery (now known as the Institute of Contemporary Art) at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. The primary archive was finally completed in 2019 when all the books/sculptures were exhibited in the form of a large pile in the Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois. The most recent iteration of this project occurred in 2021, as *Untitled Project: Smithson's Books*, an installation of the completed primary archive in the format of a used book store in the storefront display windows of the Famous Hardware building in downtown Springdale, Arkansas.



detail of *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* installation at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 2014



detail of *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* installation at the Wright Museum at Beloit College, 2015



detail(s) of *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* + *Untitled Project: The Crystal Land* installation at the Cress Gallery (now known as the Institute of Contemporary Art) at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2017



studio image of *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* arranged by author's last name. 2019



image of *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* installation in pile formation at the Krannert Art Museum, 2019



studio image of *Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* in storage bins, 2021



image of *Untitled Project: Smithson's Books* installed in the storefront windows of the Famous Hardware building in Springdale, Arkansas, 2021

## > Untitled Projects + Books

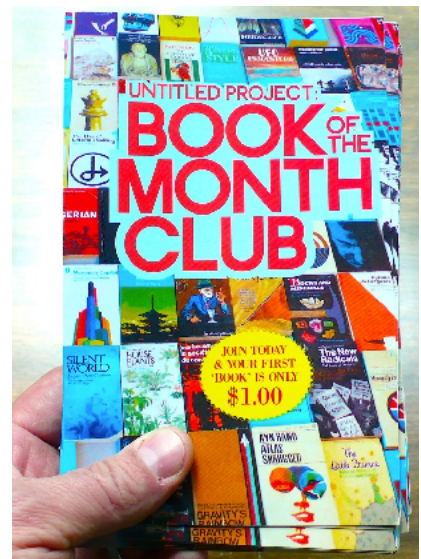
*Untitled Project: Robert Smithson Library & Book Club* is one part of a larger inquiry into the subject/object matter of books that have been conducted in the form of different Untitled Projects over the years: books as historical records of culture and personal memories, books as commodities, bookstores as public spaces, books as outdated technology (perhaps not unlike oil painting and sculpture!), and books as containers of information, instructions, and ideas.

*Untitled Project: Librairie [Geneva]*

*Untitled Project: Book of the Month Club*

*Untitled Project: Self Help*

*Untitled Project: Used Book Sale [NYArtBookFair]*



Conrad Bakker

> [cv/bio+](#)

Conrad Bakker's ongoing series of Untitled Projects involves the hand construction of carved/painted sculptures and paintings of everyday objects that are placed in specific sites, consumer contexts, and/or gallery exhibitions so as to reveal and critically comment upon the political economies and relational networks between persons and things.

Bakker has exhibited his work internationally in venues like Tate Modern (London), Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon (Lyon), Galerie Analix Forever (Geneva), Fargfabriken Center for Contemporary Art and Architecture (Stockholm), the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York), the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (Chicago), Art in General, Artists' Space, and Apex Art (New York City), Contemporary Art Museum Houston, in mailboxes, ebay auctions, and on his front lawn. Bakker has been awarded individual artist grants from the Creative Capital Foundation, the Illinois Arts Council Artist Fellowship (twice), and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant Program.

Some of Bakker's recent projects include: *Untitled Project: Honda CB77 Superhawk* for the group exhibition Motopoétique at the Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon. *Untitled Project: Still Life / Style Leaf* at Devening Projects (Chicago), *Untitled Project: Cabin [Walden / Anglet]* for the Internationale Biennale D'Art Contemporain, Anglet Côte-Basque (France), *Untitled Project: In Search of Lost Time / À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Galeristes, Paris, France, *Untitled Project: Mountain / Rock Shop*, Sun Valley Museum of Art, Ketchum, Idaho, *Untitled Project: Hi-Touch [VHS]*, John Michael Kohler Art Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, *Untitled Project: La Chocolaterie*, Galerie Analix Forever, Geneva, Switzerland, and *Untitled Project: Climate Economies [New Orleans][Souvenirs, Supplies, & Sno-Balls]*

links:

[cv/ bio](#) + [linktree](#)

[untitledprojects.com](#)

[complete list of Untitled Projects \[1997-2022\]](#)