

Viewed any good books lately?

In new exhibit, creativity comes both unbounded and bound

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Looking for a few good books? Skip the stores and drop in at the Ann Arbor Art Center.

The new exhibit there, "Open Book," may not challenge the traditional A-list for fiction and non-fiction best-sellers, but it does continue the Art Center's impressive run of challenging displays in modern art.

Curator Lynn Avadenka has thrown out convention in organizing this show devoted to the aesthetic border between bookmaking and the visual arts. As she points out in a printed statement accompanying the exhibit, artists and designers have often worked jointly to make books appear pleasing.

"Some artists use words, some combine word and image, some artists use only images, (and) some suggest a narrative, be it visual or textual. Some work is on the wall,

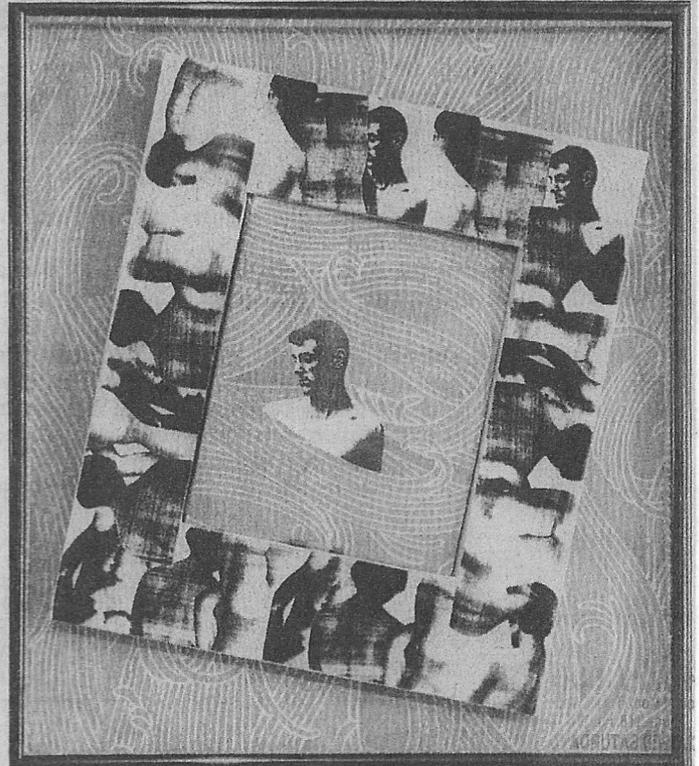
ART REVIEW

some is on the floor, some even exists in the familiar book format. It all begins with the book and the desire to communicate."

You can make book on Avadenka's astute observation. She's dressed the Art Center's gallery with an array of works, very few of which have the traditional binding and look. One book hangs from the gallery ceiling; another sprawls across the floor; and there's one book that resembles ... a wooden log. It's only with careful observation that many of these works of art reveal themselves as books, and it's only with careful observation that some of these books reveal themselves as works of art.

Among the Michigan talents on display are East Lansing's Susan Hensel, Ferndale's

See BOOKS, D2



Detail of Susan Hensel's 'Body Copy,' among works on display in the Ann Arbor Art Association exhibit 'Open Book.'

BOOKS: Gallery exhibit speaks volumes about bookmaking as a genuine visual art

Steve Magsig, Niles' John McQueen, Stevensville's Margo Mensing and Concord's Pati Scobey.

Ann Arbor is represented by mixed-media specialists Julia Miller and Lisa Steichmann.

Mensing's "The Crazy Quilt: A Wedding Gift" has been laid on the gallery's floor with four step ladders placed around it so one can look down upon its blue and white aphorisms. Magsig's quartet of stitched volumes extol the time-honored intersection between bookmaking and printmaking.

Miller's "Exquisite Odalisque" hangs from the ceiling with its collection of feminine images and insight dangling low enough to be read comfortably.

Steichmann's handworked volumes are elegantly crafted tomes that mix her message with photography. And Scobey's "Under Falling Questions" blurs the distinction between lithography and literature with its handsome expressionist overlaying.

The show's most distinctive books have been crafted by Susan

Hensel. Her wall mounted works of art — "Body Copy," "La Grande Poupee," and "Not Your Grandfather's Disease" — use differing tactics to fuse bookmaking with the art of manual printed books. "La Grande Poupee" is an expressionist showcase using a series of abstracted designs as the content of its pages and "Not Your Grandfather's Disease" uses photographs of turn-of-the-century baseball players to get its memorable point across.

"Body Copy" is Hensel's most accomplished work in the exhibit.

Doubly framed in a cloth casing, "Body Copy" detaches from its sleeve to allow for viewing. The book itself consists of a stitch-bound catalog of nudes bearing three printed cut-lines: "voice over," "cut to commercial," and "cut to news."

Alternating these three stamps and nude images from page to page, "Body Copy" indeed turns out to be exactly what its name implies.

John McQueen has framed this exhibit with his mixed media masterpiece. "Falls Short(ly)" is definitely the bookend to end all books.

McQueen's work consists of a mounted log upon which a row of photographed branches has been set side by side to spell a message in its leafy foliage.

"Falls Short(ly)" falls (appropriately enough) only slightly within the bounds of bookmaking.

But admittedly, as McQueen himself writes, reading the "leaves" of his book "leaves much to be desired." And he, above all else, should know.

Bookworms (and just about everyone else) will find something intriguing to explore in this inventive display of bookmaking arts. Rather than close the book on printing and artistic creativity, Avadenka has instead written a whole new chapter on the history of artful binding.

"Open Book" will continue through September 3 at the Ann Arbor Art Center, 117 W. Liberty St. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesday-Thursday; 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Friday-Saturday; and noon to 5 p.m., Sunday. For information, call 994-8004.