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Art in Review

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

'Artists' Books, Revisited'

Printed Matter

195 10th Avenue, at West 22nd Street

Through Jan. 4

For down-to-the-wire holiday gifts, check out the new and improved Printed Matter, an outlet for decently priced artists' books and objects that doubles as a gallery. Created and run by artists (A. A. Bronson and Max Schumann are in charge at present), this nonprofit space opened 30 years ago in a TriBeCa storefront, transferred to a wide-open space in SoHo and then to a daylight-deprived tunnel in Chelsea.

A few weeks ago it moved yet again, to elsewhere in Chelsea. Big improvement. Although the new digs aren't much larger than the previous ones, they feel roomier, thanks to a front window and witty design reminiscent of "Star Trek" by the architect Mark Jan Krayenhoff van de Leur. Best of all, the exhibition area really is bigger, and there is a sharp inaugural show in place.

It was organized by Matthias Herrmann, president of the venerable Secession in Vienna. He commissioned about three dozen artists who had exhibited at the Secession to create artist's books. Each book was to be based on an existing one, namely a copy of the exhibition catalog that the Secession had produced for the artist's solo show.

For some, the process was fairly straightforward: Mr. Bronson gave the cover of his catalog some swipes of white gesso; Monica Bonvicini soaked her book in black paint. Others concentrated on interior interventions. Doug Aitkin punctured pages; Sue Williams stuck them together with chewing gum. Renée Green took the opportunity to add an index to her book, while Koo Jeong-a deleted the logos of corporate sponsors.

Some catalogs were expanded (Charline von Heyl asked another artist, Josh Smith, to add pages of collages and drawings). Some were thinned (Hans Schabus glued and pressed the pages of his book together until it was wafer-thin). At least one was destroyed (Terence Koh burned his book to ashes).

The overriding idea was to take the book as a familiar, functional unit and make it something else - a visual object, a tactile object, a useless object, an accident, a problem, a secret, a mess - and to do so in inexpensive, hands-on ways. Exactly the same idea applies to Printed Matter itself. And while the commissioned objects aren't for sale, much else here is, from books to buttons to hand-painted skateboards. Everything is artist-made or conceived; profits go to artists and exhibitions. So any buy is a smart one, and the show is a gift of the season. HOLLAND COTTER