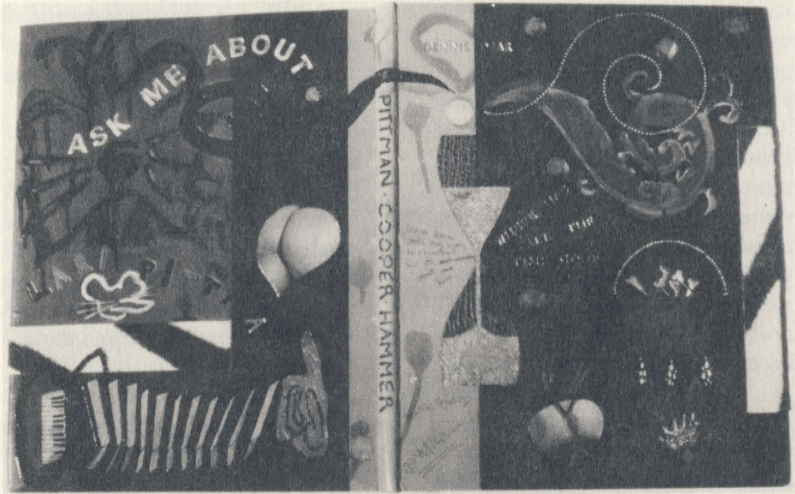


*Where has all the time gone?*, 1992



Jonathan Hammer exploits his skill in the ancient art of bookbinding to bring together the work of contemporary artists and writers. This exhibition presents four groups of recent work: books combining prose by Dennis Cooper with paintings by Lari Pittman, poetry by Joseph Lease with paintings by Richmond Burton, Garcia Lorca poetry with paintings by Alexis Rockman, and books incorporating paintings by Robert Kushner. While Hammer typically works in series, each book is unique, containing original paintings and texts, usually handwritten by the author. Hammer's own role in these projects is to select the artists and writers, facilitate their collaboration, and design and bind the books themselves. He integrates a wide spectrum of media and talents that are both unified and highlighted by his own artistic contributions.

Hammer endows his books with extraordinary richness and vitality: his bindings are as compelling as the texts and images within. In keeping with the lush and sometimes irreverent quality of the art and writing he conjoins, Hammer utilizes a variety of materials from gold and palladium leaf to Japanese silks to frog, shark, lizard and Chinese lacquered stingray skins. Often composed in elaborate arrangements of high-keyed colors and jumbled shapes, Hammer's bindings tread a fine line between over-the-top vulgarity and the invigorating free-spiritedness of a baroque sensibility.

Although the form of Hammer's work is virtually unique, it does have historical precedents dating back to the Middle Ages when fine, hand-written and sumptuously

illustrated volumes such as the *Book of Kells* or the Limbourg brothers' *Très riches heures du Duc de Berry* were as common an art form as wall-mounted paintings. "Indeed," according to Bruce Davis, Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "when we refer to painting before the thirteenth century, we are usually speaking about books."<sup>1</sup> A more recent influence on Hammer is the tradition of the *livre d'artiste* (artist's book). This art form was especially popular in Paris in the nineteen twenties and thirties when many poets and painters collaborated, especially among the Surrealist group. However, Hammer also distances himself from the *livre d'artiste* by emphasizing the "sculptural intent" of his work: "The books...strive for a parity between the 'text,' the 'visual works on paper,' and the 'structure/binding.'"<sup>2</sup>

"Within the tension created by collaboration," says Hammer, "these unique books attempt to address the possibilities of generosity in art making."<sup>3</sup>

Jonathan Hammer was born in 1960 in Chicago. He graduated from Bard College and studied bookbinding at the London College of Printing and with Romilly Saumerez Smith and Monique Lallier. He currently lives and works in San Francisco.

Lawrence Rinder

1. Bruce Davis, "Jonathan Hammer at Shea & Bornstein, 5 December-11 January," *Art Issues*, Feb./Mar. 1992, p. 31.

2. Jonathan Hammer, unpublished

artist's statement, 1992.

3. Ibid.

#### Works in MATRIX:

All works are unique book collaborations with covers by the artist and original works on paper and previously unpublished texts as indicated.

1. *Footloose Radish/Hammer*, 1992, works on paper by Richmond Burton, text by Joseph Lease; full-leather cover with leather onlays, inlays, and paint; leather and paper doublures; 18 1/2 x 13 1/2". Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, N.Y.C.

2. *Marathon House*, 1992, works on paper by Richmond Burton, text by Joseph Lease; full-leather cover with leather onlays, inlays and paint; suede and paper doublures; 18 1/2 x 13 1/2". Courtesy of Jack Hanley Gallery, S.F.

3. *Orient Point*, 1992, works on paper by Richmond Burton, text by Joseph Lease; full-leather cover with leather onlays, inlays, and paint; suede and paper doublures; 18 1/2 x 13 1/2". Courtesy of Jack Hanley Gallery, S.F.

4. *The Sun Drench*, 1992, works on paper by Richmond Burton, text by Joseph Lease; full-leather cover with leather onlays, inlays and paint; suede and paper doublures; 18 1/2 x 13 1/2". Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, N.Y.C.

5. *Iris*, 1992, work on paper by

Robert Kushner; full-leather cover with onlays of leather and silver, with paint; suede doublures; 13 x 11 1/4". Courtesy of Jack Hanley Gallery, S.F.

6. *Magnolias*, 1992, works on paper by Robert Kushner; full-leather cover with inlays and onlays of leather and paint; suede doublures; 17 x 13 1/4". Courtesy of Jack Hanley Gallery, S.F.

7. *Prayer Book*, 1992, works on wood by Robert Kushner; full-leather cover with inlay of beetle armor and onlay of leather and gold leaf; suede doublures; 3 3/4 x 3 1/2". Courtesy of Jack Hanley Gallery, S.F.

8. *Have you seen...*, 1991, works on paper by Lari Pittman, text by Dennis Cooper; full-leather cover with inlays and onlays of shark, stingray, plastic, paper, tooled in gold, silver and palladium; full-suede doublures; 18 x 14 1/2". Courtesy of Jack Hanley Gallery, S.F.

9. *Where has all the time gone?*, 1992, works on paper by Lari Pittman, text by Dennis Cooper; full-leather cover with inlays and onlays of shark, zebra, pig, stingray, paper, tooled in silver; full-suede doublures; 18 x 14 1/2". Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, N.Y.C.

10. *Whoever of this flock*, 1993, works on paper by Lari Pittman, text by Dennis Cooper; full-leather cover with inlays and onlays of shark, pig stingray, paper, tooled in silver; full-suede doublures; 18 x 14 1/2". Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, N.Y.C.

11. *Blue Lorca*, 1991, works on paper by Alexis Rockman, text by

Garcia Lorca; full-leather cover with inlays of stingray and semiprecious stone, tooled in silver; leather and paper doublures; 13 1/4 x 9 7/8". Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, N.Y.C.

12. *Orange Lorca*, 1991, works on paper by Alexis Rockman, text by Garcia Lorca; full-leather cover with inlays and onlays of stingray, plastic, vellum, tooled in gold; leather and paper doublures; 12 1/2 x 9 7/8". Courtesy of Jack Hanley Gallery, S.F.

13. *Green Lorca*, 1992, works on paper by Alexis Rockman, text by Garcia Lorca; full-leather cover with inlay of semiprecious stone, onlays of snake and leather, tooled in silver; leather and paper doublures; 13 1/4 x 9 7/8". Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, N.Y.C.

14. *Purple Lorca*, 1993, works on paper by Alexis Rockman, text by Garcia Lorca; full-leather cover with inlay of semiprecious stone, onlays of leather, tooled in silver and gold; leather and paper doublures; 14 1/3 x 9 7/8". Courtesy of Jack Hanley Gallery, S.F.

Selected bibliography about the artist:

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Helfand, Glen. "Jonathan Hammer: Bound to Be Noticed," *S.F. Magazine* (Jan. '92), pp. 18, 18, 22.

"Bookbinder's War Against Tradition," *S.F. Chronicle* (Jan. 22 '92), pp. D3, D5.

Davis, Bruce. "Jonathan Hammer," *Art Issues* (Feb.-March '92), p.31.

Parsons, Barbara. "Jonathan Hammer Books," *Visions* (Spring '92).

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Selected exhibitions:

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris '90; Biblioteca Wittokania, Brussels '90; Grolier Club, N.Y.C. '91; Lorence/Monk Gallery, N.Y.C. '91; Newark Museum, NJ, '91; Shea & Bornstein Gallery, L.A. '91; Beverly Hills Library, L.A. '91; Mexican Museum, S.F. '92; Center for the Book Arts, N.Y.C. '92; Museum of Contemporary Art, L.A. '92.