

CHAPTER 6

Art

When I was a child my mother said to me, 'If you become a soldier, you'll be a general. If you become a monk, you'll be the pope.' Instead I became a painter and wound up as Picasso.

Pablo Picasso

LIBRARY: MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Address: 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

URL: <http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/library/index>

Telephone: (212) 708-9433

E-mail: <http://www.moma.org/about/info/>

Access: For researchers by advance appointment

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MuseumofModernArt?fref=photo>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MoMALibrary>

I cannot remember the first time I visited the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), but it must have been in the early 1990s when we first moved east. We have stayed with them over the years—even visiting the temporary MOMA in Queens when the Midtown building was undergoing renovation. We have joined the museum several times over the years, including the past year, so I was particularly eager to visit this library. When I first e-mailed the library, there was a prompt response from the reference librarian, and an appointment was set up.

The restrictions for visitors on their Web page sound a bit draconian, but when I got there, I found everyone to be pleasant and helpful. I did have to leave most of my gear in a locker, but once I did that, and got my elevator pass, everything went like clockwork.



Display area overlooking 54th Street.

The library overlooks the sculpture garden and the main floors of the museum. I checked in with Jennifer, the reference librarian, who suggested that I look around, and told me it was alright to take pictures, as long as I did not take a recognizable picture of any of the library users. I mentioned to her that the restrictions on the Web page made it sound tougher than it really was, and she admitted that maybe they could revisit that. The ready reference shelf was in Library of Congress order, and it included bound volumes of the Museum's journal. This was followed by shelves of volumes related to past MOMA exhibitions, which seemed to be in chronological order.



Current journals reading area.

Minutes later, the library director Milan Hughston came around the corner and invited me into his office for a brief interview. It turned out that we had Long Island in common, since he owns a home on the east end of the island, just short of the Hamptons. He told me that the library owns over 300,000 books. The items he is most proud of are the artists' ephemera. These are collections pertaining to MOMA exhibitions, including objects such as announcement cards, press clippings, posters, and flyers. Hughston said that books have been written about this collection.

When asked about famous people who had used the library, he thought for a moment and mentioned that the actress Clare Danes had been in doing research. Funding for the library comes directly from the parent institution.

LIBRARY: FRICK ART REFERENCE LIBRARY

Address: 10 East 71st Street, New York, NY 10021

URL: <http://www.frick.org/research/library>

Telephone: (212) 547-0641

E-mail: library@frick.org

Access: Open to the public

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/fricklibrary>

The Frick Collection is, I will admit, one of the few museums on the Upper East Side that I had never visited. I was not even entirely clear on the matter of what set them apart from other museums on 5th Avenue. Several other librarians I had interviewed asked me something like "You're doing the Frick, aren't you?" That was an easy answer because they were always on my target list, and it got even easier when I made my first call to the library, and I was quickly forwarded to Heidi Rosenau, Associate Director of Media Relations & Marketing. Heidi was quite enthused about being in the book and quickly set up a meeting with the highly distinguished people who managed the library.

The meeting was arranged with Heidi; Stephen Bury, the Andrew Mellon Chief Librarian; and Inge Reist, Director of the Center for the History of Collecting, an initiative within the library. Among other activities, the Center works with the Pennsylvania State University Press for the publication of scholarly works. We sat in an office just off the main reading room, and the three Frick administrators filled me in on the museum and library's story.

This library is just short of its hundredth anniversary, as it was founded by Helen Clay Frick, as a memorial to her father, Henry Clay Frick, an industrialist and avid art collector, in 1920. He was interested in knowing more about the artists whose works filled his house, and Helen took up that cause with energy, determination, and note cards. The library in the early days shared a space with the bowling alley in the basement of the Frick mansion and finally moved into its current quarters in 1935.

In the beginning, she had been inspired by the work of English Scholar Robert Witt, who had amassed a large library of photographic images of paintings. I was told that this collection included 1.25 million images. A large number of these works are found in private collections, but Miss Frick was able to use her high society connections to open a number of mansion doors to the photographers.

This has a number of uses. My guides pointed out to me that even paintings by the masters can be altered to suit the artistic tastes of the time when they show up for auction. To prove it they showed me several images of the same painting from which a face in the original went missing. Also, the collection had a use that Miss Frick may not have anticipated at the time. During World War II, the collection was closed for six months while the government used its data to pinpoint the location of rare art and smooth the transition to repatriation. As part of this effort, the museum produced 700 maps to show allied pilots where to avoid bombing campaigns.



Art book with documentation.

In addition to a major collection of books in art reference, the Frick also owns thousands of art auction catalogs, as well as pamphlets from dealers.

When asked about famous users of the library, I was told that everyone in art criticism has walked through these doors at some time or another. Also, it was mentioned that Jackson Pollock had been to the library.

The library has more than 200,000 books in total, but there is more to its bragging rights. They ran a survey in WorldCat and found that 27% of the books in their collection were not found in the massive bibliographic database—meaning that these books are unique holdings in the library world. Among the more significant holdings here are a 1727 catalog of the Duke D’Orléans. They are very proud of their manuscript of the Cavendish Square Art Collection. Holdings are described in an Innovative Interfaces catalog or enhanced in a Primo discovery system. The books are all reference, even for museum members, and they are arranged in Library of Congress order.



Fine art book from the collection.

After our talk, we took a brief tour of the library facility. As we went through the reading room, we had to hold our voices down, because nearly every seat was taken by with someone in deep research. Upstairs, I was shown the original office of Helen Frick—left more or less the way it was with the exception of a computer at the desk. From what I had been

hearing of Frick, she would have certainly approved, because she proved to be a proponent of using the latest technology at all times.



Book restoration desk.

Upper floors included an in-house facility for the restoration of books, as well as a state-of-the-art digitization facility.



Digitization room.

Next, they took me to the penthouse floor, where we walked out into a magnificent view of Central Park and west to the Hudson River.



Looking west towards the park.

For a final surprise, Ms Rosenau took me on a quick tour of the art museum. Arguably the most famous holding is the portrait of Thomas More by Hans Holbein. One might consider this the equivalent of MOMA's *Starry Night*, but unlike the Van Gogh painting, it was easy to stand in front of More without being jostled by crowds of people taking selfies with the great work. Rosenau feels that Bellini's *St. Francis in the Desert* is the key holding of the collection.

The Frick Collection Library is an outstanding resource for anyone interested in researching in-depth material about the art of Western Civilization.

LIBRARY: COOPER HEWITT

Address: 2 East 91st Street

URL: <http://library.si.edu/libraries/cooper-hewitt-smithsonian-design-library>

Telephone: (212) 849-8400

Access: Open to the public

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/cooperhewitt?fref=nf>

Transportation: Bus line M3 or M4

When we were newly minted New Yorkers, fresh off the boat from Arizona, we visited the Cooper Hewitt Museum early in our stay. I only knew that it was a Smithsonian museum and that the focus was more on the practical side of artistry. I had not seen the library at the time, so I was very pleased to find out that they kept a library that was well within the bounds of this project, being open to the public. I set up an interview with the library director, Stephen Van Dyk. I found out that it is possible to walk to this library from 70th Street, but not in 15 minutes.



Library reference area.

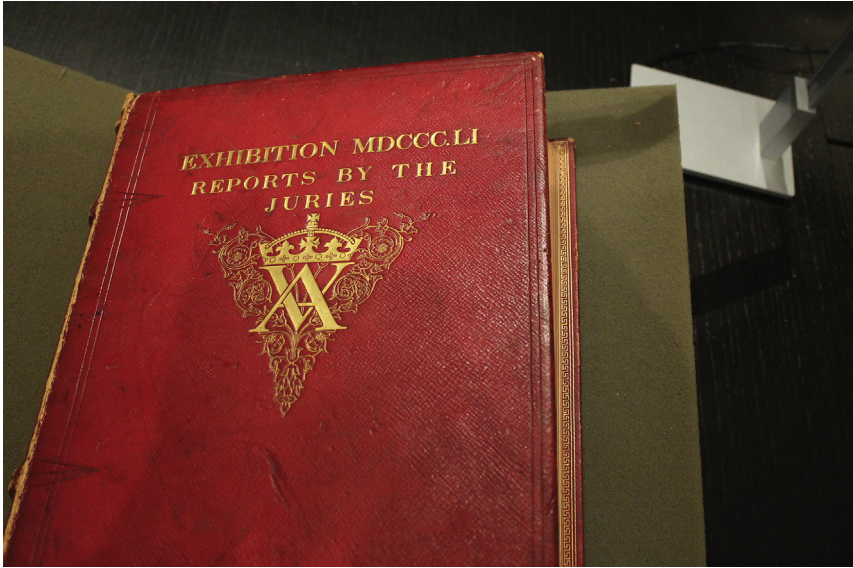
While waiting for Stephen, I took my own quick tour of the library and found it to be humming with activity.

Stephen met me in a rather magnificent meeting room to the side of the library, filled with reference books and dark wood paneling. He explained that the Cooper Hewitt was an outgrowth of the Cooper Union facility in Greenwich Village, founded in 1896 at the behest of three granddaughters of Peter Cooper—Sarah Cooper Hewitt, Eleanor Garnier Hewitt, and Amy



Examples of the library's collection of fine bindings.

I asked Stephen if he could name any famous people who had used the library. He mentioned that Martin Scorsese had used the library to help get an authentic look for the film *The Age of Innocence*.



Exhibition report from the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1851.

I soon picked up on the fact that Van Dyk's great passion here was in fine bindings. He mentioned the name of a London binder that made a special binding of only 2 copies. One of them went down on the Titanic. The other was at this library. His proudest holding is a book published by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1851 in honor of their juried exhibition.

LIBRARY: WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART—FRANCES MULHALL ACHILLES LIBRARY

Address: 610 West 26th Street

URL: <http://whitney.org/Research/Library>

Telephone: (212) 570-3682

E-mail: library@whitney.org.

Access: Open to researchers with advance appointment

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/whitneymuseum?fref=ts>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/whitneymuseum>

Transportation: Subway: C&E line to 23rd Street

I had not been to the Whitney since sometime in the 1990s at their previous Midtown location, so I was very happy to revisit them at a time of

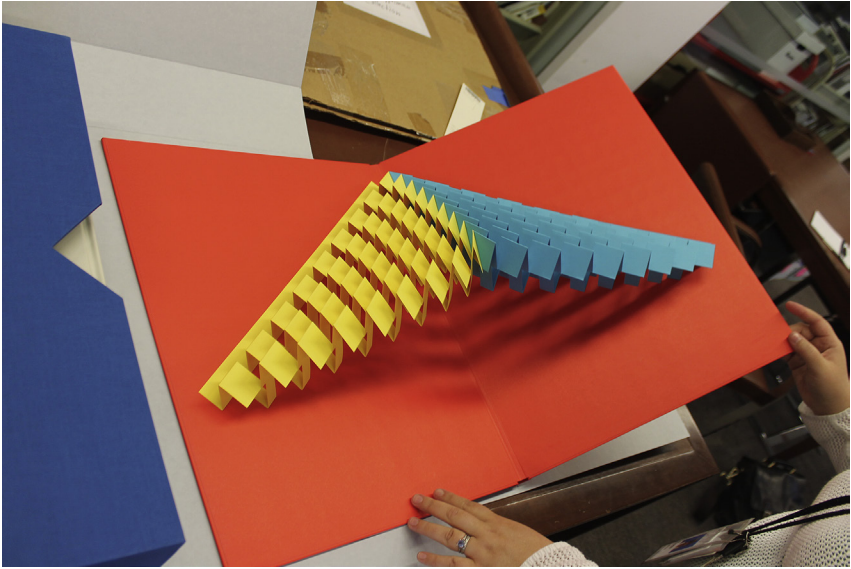
exciting change. When I first contacted librarian Ivy Blackman about a visit in support of the book, I was gratified to get a quick response. We set up a visit on a Friday morning on a beautiful spring day.

I arrived at Penn Station an hour before the appointment, and I could have saved some leg work by taking the subway to 23rd Street, but I decided to just make the walk. It was at least a half-hour, and when I got there, I had to double check the address, which bore no sign of housing a library. It was a medium tall building in an industrial area near the High Line. Scrolling through the buzzer list, I finally did see Library, so I pushed the button and was quickly told by Ivy that I could go up to the eighth floor. Walking in, I saw a stairway to my right, and no sign of an elevator, so I went ahead. I am nearly 70 and not in the best of shape, so I was very glad to make the last few steps.

Minutes later, Ivy came out and apologized, because there really was an elevator. She led me to the library, stopping in the kitchen to get me a drink of water. We sat down at one of the comfortable library tables and talked about the institution. The library had been there since 2011, and it is assumed that it is its permanent home. Blackman said that the building shared space with the museum's archival and art storage. The library holds 70,000 volumes, of which 10% are in special collections. They index their collection on a Voyager catalog, which came online in 2000.

The books are arranged in Library of Congress order. In addition to books, the library also collects posters and graphics.

The museum was founded in the 1920s by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who had amassed a large collection of American art. She offered the collection to the Metropolitan Museum, but the gift was declined, so she set about to create her own museum. Her collection of books also became the starting point for the Whitney's library.



Auerbach's 3 dimensional book.

Blackman pointed to a book by Tauba Auerbach as their flagship holding. She pulled the large book from its case and opened the first page, using the care that you would employ in opening the fingers of a one-day-old infant. It turned out to be a graphic in the shape of a pyramid that unfolds as the book is spread. It is a pop-up book for adults, and each entry was more beautiful than the one before. I was also shown a giant book containing an illustrated short story by Stephen King and privately published by the museum's adjunct operation, the Library Fellows. I asked about digitization, and I was told that they have an active program and that they work with archive.org. I am a long-running fan of archive.org, so I was impressed.

The rare books archive containing these gems also has a collection on artists who have not become household names just yet. At the entrance there is a large range of file cabinets entirely devoted to Edward Hopper. "We like to think of ourselves as an artists' museum, not just a museum of art," Ivy said. To that end, everybody who was anybody in American contemporary art has visited the museum, but the most famous recent visitor was Michelle Obama.



The Hopper section of the archive.

Afterward, Blackman asked me if I would like to see the other library farther downtown at the Whitney's new home at the bottom of the High Line. I told her that I most certainly would, so we headed down on the street and then the High Line. When we got to the museum, we saw that there was a line a block long to get in. I felt very privileged to be going in the staff entrance. When we got off the elevator, I was shown a glass case with a circus scene of small objects designed by Alexander Calder. As we were walking around the corner to see the library I could not help but notice the iconic painting of a cow's skull by Georgia O'Keeffe.



View from the museum library reading room.

The library reading room had a generous meeting area on the ground floor, and there was a stairway up to the book stacks. The reading room is almost entirely for purposes of the museum staff. The west wall was entirely a glass window with a magnificent view of the Hudson River, with a constant show of helicopters ascending. I thanked Ivy for going far beyond the normal hospitality and giving me a total Whitney experience. I have a cache of writing money that I use for museum memberships and Broadway performances, and I am likely to make the Whitney part of my repertoire and avoid that line around the block when I bring my wife.



Files on a considerable number of American artists.

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY LIBRARY

Address: 1114 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street, New York, NY 10036

URL: <http://www.icp.org/research-center/library>

Telephone: (212) 857-0004

E-mail: library@icp.org

Access: By appointment only

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/internationalcenterofphotography>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/icphotog>

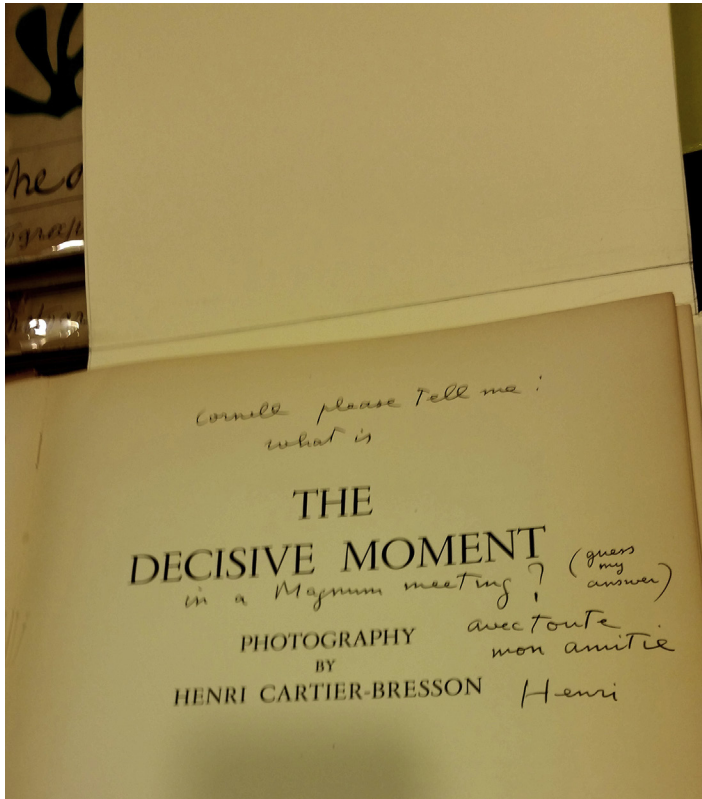
My career in photography began in high school in 1961. I was a sickly boy, and missed physical education class more than the coach liked. I should have gone to the nurse's office every time, but I did not, so I failed PE. By the time of my senior year, I was short a half credit, so I took photography class instead of study hall. It was absolutely the best class I ever took in high school, and I took the second semester even though I did not need the credit. I also learned a lot from my father, whose pictures of the Philippines have been posted on the Web and enjoyed by thousands. He taught me one very important lesson—when taking pictures of people, get right up into their faces.

I had to look twice at the address, because what you see of the International Center for Photography from 6th Avenue looks about as big as a Taco Bell. After that it is not hard to figure out that 97% of the institution is underground.

I found the library easily enough. It was in a compact space with every possible foot of shelf space containing books and periodicals. I was met by Deirdre Donohue, whose official title is Stephanie Shuman Librarian. She told me that the current building was constructed in 2001, but the school has been in existence since 1974. She told me that hers is one of two funded chairs at the school. This is a very stable position, as she is only the fourth librarian in the past 40 years. It is unusual for a college in that the library is open to the public with a minimum of restrictions, although advance reservations do need to be made.

When I asked which famous people had been in to use the library, there was a good selection, given that HBO headquarters is right next door. Names that came up included Gabriel Byrne and Diane Keaton. The library is reference only, although students in the Master's program can take books back to their studios.

In one side of the room there is an appealing space for journals. Their Web page lists 44 journals on their subscription list. Their Web-based online catalog is provided by a company out of California named [Library-world](#), and their 25,000 holdings are noted in OCLC. They are arranged on the shelves in Library of Congress order. New books are often provided as gifts from alumni and publishers. There is an annual book sale that helps with the outright purchase of new acquisitions. When I asked which book they consider to be their flagship holding, I was quickly shown the title *The Decisive Moment* by Henri Cartier-Bresson. It has a long inscription on the title page from the author to one of the school's founders.



The library's most distinguished holding.

There is a substantial program in digitization, although most of it is for the internal use of the school. Deirdre told me that they are particularly interested in making high-definition images of book covers. They did 100 as a test case, and the file sizes were astronomical—going into the terabytes of data. This is one of those libraries that I hope to revisit someday when I can look in as an interested amateur photographer rather than an author.

LIBRARY: THE REANIMATION LIBRARY

Address: 543 Union Street, Brooklyn, NY 11215

URL: <http://www.reanimationlibrary.org/pages/about>

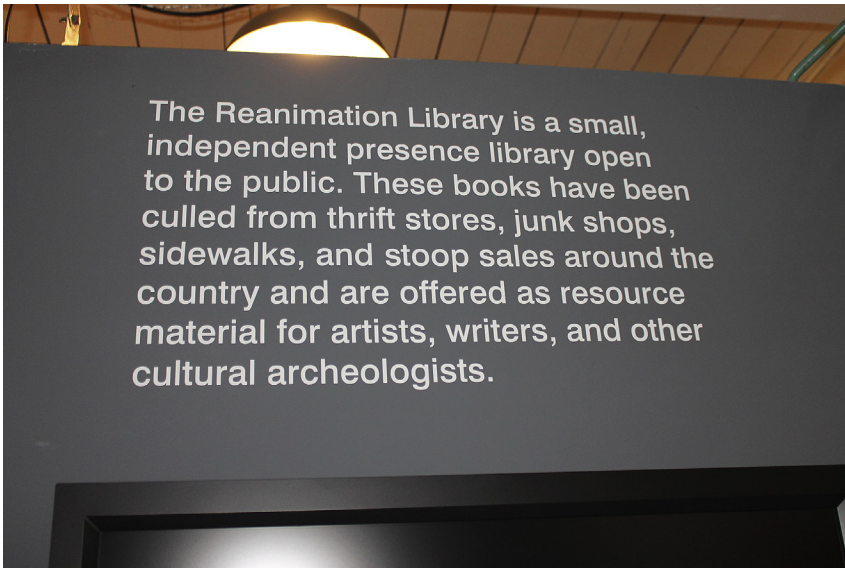
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/reanimationlibrary>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/reanimationlib>

This library was not on my list until another librarian in an art library mentioned it and thought it would be very appropriate for the book. It turned out that she was absolutely right. There is a lot of talk these days that the whole concept of a library is obsolete and that we will be swept off the edge of the planet by waves of unfiltered information on the Internet. This library makes one of the better cases for the ways in which libraries can adapt and thrive in a revolutionary environment.

The library exists in a cluster of artistic enterprises at a location in the Gowanus section of Brooklyn that you might describe as “off the beaten path.” On the relatively short walk from the subway to the building, I saw signs that this part of the city was ripe for a revival—starting with trendy ice cream shops and authentic-looking barbeque eateries.

I rang the buzzer and was soon greeted by Andrew Beccone, the visionary who is creating a second life for illustrated books that he finds at garage sales and thrift shops. “These books were left for dead, but this library is breathing new life into them.” The library is tiny compared to most I have visited. Beccone has been collecting books since 2001, and the library concept came along a few years later. Along the way he got his library degree from Pratt (like almost everyone else I visited in Brooklyn).



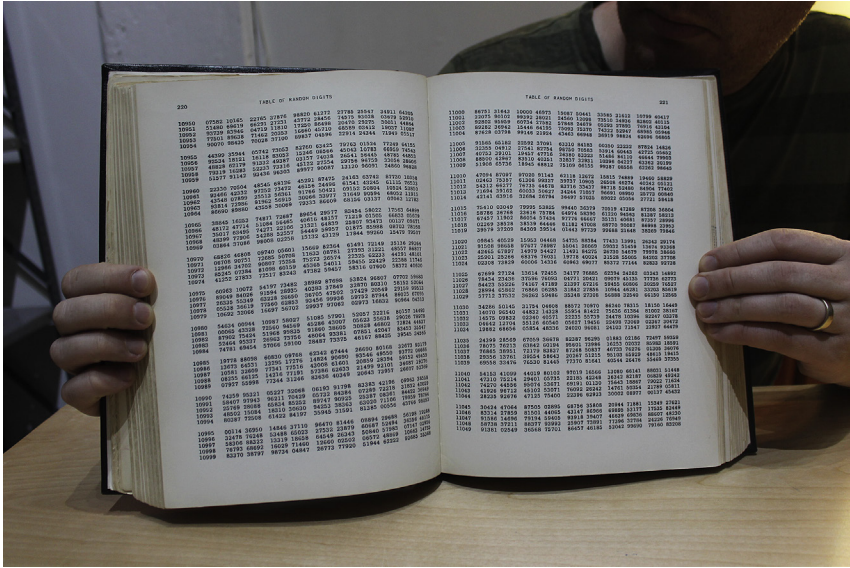
Inscription over the reading room.

The rules seem clear. No juvenile books, no arty books. Practical books that show the underlying structure of moving things. The library is totally self-funded. Books may not be checked out, but Beccone encourages people to make images in-house and send them out through the Internet. Famous visitors include Jonathan Lethem, author of *Chronic City*, and many artists. “I think of this room as my studio and the library is a work of art.”



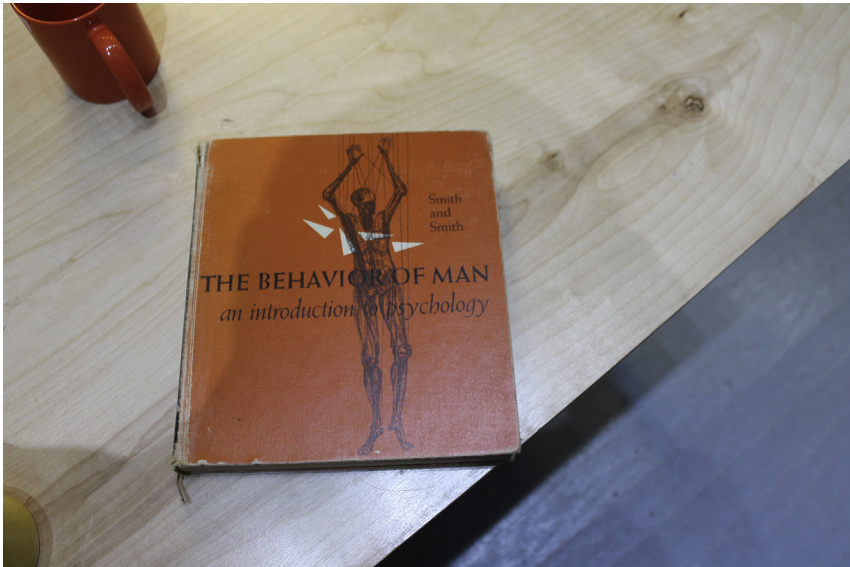
The small but powerful library.

He is not the only one who holds that opinion. At one time he moved the entire library of 2000+ books across the river and it sat as an exhibit for several weeks at the Museum of Modern Art. He has also been sent to places as far away as Beirut to create similar projects in other countries, using materials that he can find in their book stores and thrift shops.



In Becone's hands, a book of random numbers becomes art.

I asked who he considered to be his most significant holding. He reached into the psychology shelves and pulled out a book called *The Behavior of Man*. Some bell rang in the back of my head. I have seen this book before. It was my textbook at Phoenix College for Psychology 101, exactly 50 years ago. The synchronicity dial was off the grid at this point.



Andrew's favorite book and my psychology text from college.

Andrew is also fascinated with the concept of the online catalog. He agreed with me that the problem with online catalogs is that they still operate under the paradigm of the catalog card—a MARC record is just a computer format for the information on a catalog card. He found a way to create a custom-designed online catalog, including images in the records. Do not tell anyone, but he could get rich pursuing this idea in a field that is ripe for change.

I must admit that this visit was one of the biggest surprises in my travels for this book. Beccone has taken the concept of a library, put his own spin on it, and made it work beautifully. I found this to be inspiring.

FURTHER READING

- Artists' ephemera from MOMA: <https://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1377>.
 Blog about the history of the Hewitt Sisters: <http://library.si.edu/libraries/cooper-hewitt/hewitt-sisters>.
 Details about the Thomas More painting: [http://collections.frick.org/view/objects/asitem/items\\$0040:100](http://collections.frick.org/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:100).
 Exploring the Museum of Modern Art Library: <http://www.libraryasincubatorproject.org/?p=14086>.
 Internet Movie Database article on Age of Innocence: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0106226/?ref_=nv_sr_1.
 MOMA article about Milan Hughston: <http://post.at.moma.org/profiles/446-milan-hughston>.
 New York Heritage Digitization project with the Whitney Library 1907-1930: <http://cdm16694.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15405coll1>.
 New York Times Laud's Cooper Hewitt's Object of the day blog: <http://www.bates.edu/news/2013/01/18/new-york-times-cooper-hewitt-object-of-the-day-blog-baumann-87/>.
 Observer article about the Frick, focusing on Inge Reist: <http://observer.com/2009/11/at-the-frick-a-focus-on-the-collector-as-art-history/>.
 Sangorski and Sutcliffe article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangorski_%26_Sutcliffe.
 Whitney collection at Archive.org: <https://archive.org/details/whitneymuseum&tab=about>.
 Wikipedia entry for Stephen Bury: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_J._Bury.