

Love Touch Hype! *Visionaire*, Magazine in the Extreme

An Exhibition at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library
April 30 — June 30, 2009



How to print without ink? How to re-conceptualize the modern notion of the artist's book? How to take the idea of the magazine—a printed periodical with a paper cover—and make it into a tactile, luminous thing? These are just some of the questions posed by the publishing venture *Visionaire*. The exhibition "Love Touch Hype! *Visionaire*, Magazine in the Extreme" at the Beinecke Library includes some 25 issues of the innovative magazine, from the first (1991), to the most recent (2008).

Founded in 1991 by Stephan Gan, Cecilia Dean, and James Kaliardos, *Visionaire* was billed as a "multi-format album of inspiration, a journal of fashion and art, a tribute to creativity." The *Washington Post* called it "paper and ink as performance art," drawing attention to its traditional commitment to craft and the book arts. Each of the mostly tri-annual issues of *Visionaire* is devoted to a theme, from abstract ideals such as "Love," to invocations of the senses ("Scent," "Taste"), echoing the magazine's title, itself a tribute to sight or "vision." A more pragmatic approach is found in the quotidian, if deluxe issue "Fashion Special." These experiments in publishing push against the boundaries of how to execute multi-dimensional formats, while they develop the symbiotic relationship between design and new technologies. As an "extreme magazine," *Visionaire* highlights the energetic dialogue that arises when established and emerging artists collaborate to interpret and re- envision themes that bridge the worlds of fine art, fashion, and popular culture.

The exhibition introduces a selection of *Visionaire* from the first issue, "Spring" (1991), a loose-leaf portfolio of images and text, to the most recent issue, No. 55 "Surprise" (2008), a series of skillfully engineered pop-up books sponsored by the champagne-maker Krug and featuring an array of artists including the large-scale photographer Andreas

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Gursky, the avant-garde sculptor, painter, and novelist Yayoi Kusama, and the pyrotechnic art wizard Cai Guo-Qiang. Book-ended in this way in the display cases on the Beinecke Library's mezzanine level, the exhibition draws attention not only to the magazine's architectural approach to print and the plastic arts (shape, form, and structure), but also to the creative thesis that connects the themed issues across time and space. Here they are situated out of joint with the chronology of their publishing history, yet re-connected by their associative ideas. The viewer is invited to weigh up and interpret anew how one issue "speaks" to another through the publication's cross-pollinated artistic concerns and playful self-referencing.

Visionaire features the work of painters and illustrators such as Mats Gustafson and Ruben Toldeo, among others, but particular emphasis is placed on the power of the image and on the place of photography in the age of digital reproduction. While written text in each issue is often spare and generally quixotic by nature (flashes of thought, whimsical reflections, or taut reportage by the *New York Times* fashion

chronicler Bill Cunningham), *Visionaire's* dynamic personality might be best understood and appreciated outside of its usual home in the art gallery. Housed within the environs of the rare book repository, we might consider the myriad ways in which the magazine reflects back on to the idea of the archive itself.

In and amongst the issues we find various hand-made items, or ephemera—photographs as mementos; letters and other keepsakes are slipped into the pages of a "vintage novel"; there are "print variants" and postcards, overtures to the scrapbook, interviews, trinkets, and faux newspaper clippings—all of which embrace those emblems we generally associate with time, memory, and human touch.

Visionaire's packaging, conceptually different for each issue, takes on a life of its own. The magazine's limited edition print runs and niche distribution are mirrored in its otherwise commodified relationship to luxury goods purveyors such as Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Tiffany, and the Japanese lifestyle brand and retailer Beams. A case doubles as an "energy sphere" (No. 28 "The Bible"), a deluxe travel pouch (No. 32 "Where?"), or even, in tandem with its contents, a usable plexiglass frame for a calendar—curvilinear, in homage to the classic television screen (No. 16 "Calendar").

After almost two decades in circulation, *Visionaire* continues to challenge the very definition of the term "magazine" as it moves, for example, from the simple paper-based portfolio to the smooth, molded forms of silk-screened "artists' toys." "Love Touch Hype! *Visionaire*, Magazine in the Extreme" celebrates this enduring quality: from "Spring," in one effortless leap, to "Surprise."

For further interaction with *Visionaire*, please visit the website: www.visionaireworld.com.

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