



What is a book?

Can a 'mass produced artist book' be considered a contemporary art work in its own right?

Can a book be both a book and an exhibition?

And can a book, shown on a wall as a work, also become a catalogue of its very exhibition?

From the very beginning, I have been making photographs to make books starting with *Zakir Hussain* in 1986. I now make books that are the exhibition as well: The book as exhibition concept started with *Sent a Letter* in 2007.

During the decades in-between, I made exhibitions of framed prints on the wall, like everyone else did. But the exhibitions seemed to me as though they were the catalogues of my books. As though the book was the work and the exhibition merely its display. The exhibition format seemed to me like composing music where each note was separated by the display, and ended up in different symphonies/collections. With *Go away closer* I even wanted to slip my book inside each frame, but everyone said that a book is a book and an exhibition is an exhibition.

In 2007, I made *Sent a Letter*, a box with seven accordion-fold books that became my first book/exhibition. I realized that it was possible to have a book that was also an exhibition, but I still wanted to find a form that could be on par with my exhibitions of prints.



Sent a Letter, installed for ten years on Park street, Calcutta. 2008-2018.

When *Museum of Chance*, was published by Steidl, in 2014, I finally found the way to make a work that is a book as well as the exhibition of the book. The *Museum of Chance* book had 88 different cover images, 44 in front and 44 at the back. The 88 covers were all the 88 images inside the book. The single image/note would never be divorced now from the full symphony/sequence. Even if you only saw the front image, I knew that the full symphony was waiting inside.

I had developed a wooden structure that allowed the books to be displayed on the walls of a gallery as well as be read as the traditional book. That structure was the key. I then built a book case, where I could make an accordion fold of 5 of these structures and make a mini exhibition where ever I travelled. Finally I made *Suitcase Museum* where I could travel with 2 suitcases that contained the full set of 44 book objects



Suitcase Museum - 88 Museum of Chance book objects, Sydney Biennale 2016



Museum of Chance book case, India art fair, 2016

From 2011 I had started building mobile museums, that allowed me to take my images away from the wall. I could display them in these large structures, that I could open and close in a variety of ways and change the images inside them as often as I wanted to. An organic form that had change built into it. No longer was the staticness of the gallery wall necessary for my work. I built 9 such museums and called them all Museum Bhavan. But it was only after all the 9 museums in MUSEUM BHAVAN got acquired by the larger museums (<https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/QJSH39O5dZGKQ>) that I decided to make a miniature version of my MUSEUM BHAVAN, a pocket museum. To find a way to disseminate the work in a more democratic manner, while my larger museums sat in the storage of even bigger museums.



Museum Bhavan- a family of 9 travelling museums- Hayward gallery 2013



Museum of Photography, MUSEUM BHAVAN

MUSEUM BHAVAN, published by 2017, is a box that you could carry with you, travel with, read as a book or open into an exhibition (or several). I made it the same size as Sent a letter, so those who had Sent a Letter would now have $9+7 = 16$ exhibitions of my work. With Museum Bhavan, I was able to construct a book that was mass produced and unique at the same time, each cover was one of a kind. This was my provocation to people who did not value books in the same way as 'art' because they were mass produced. The box was priced like a mass produced book, but each box was unique. No two people had the same cover. It was indeed a mass produced unique work. This box allowed my archive to be in your home, that allowed you to be its curator. You could show one book or all of them, in your house, in your office, in the park, in the train.

But I wanted to make it even more mobile, so I made a jacket with nine pockets that allowed me to wear my museums. The jacket says at the back - *My life as a Museum*.

Having shifted the book from the shelf to the wall, I started to think about its other basic concept, that of the sequence. I wondered if I could make an unbound book, where the sequence was upto the viewer/collector to build. This meant that the editing process had to be such that it worked in any combination. An endless book. I have finally learned to listen to the tone of the images, rather than edit by content. This process of a 'sonic editing' had started when I was editing for the larger museums, especially Museum of Chance.

I started Spontaneous books in 2016, to build book-objects, as and when material the asked to be gathered together, as and when the opportunity to disseminate the work presented itself and, most significantly, as and when it could be exhibited and sold in the place it was made for, or in.



Pothi box installed at Callicoon gallery NYC

I am deeply honoured to present the BV box at White gallery, alongside BV Doshi's drawings, and with a conversation on light with him. BV Box, which is the fourth publication of Spontaneous Books, New Delhi.



BV Box installed at White Gallery

Each box of spontaneous books, and consequently BV box as well, is an unbound book of 30 image cards, held together in a wooden structure. The size of the box remains the same, as does the layout of the image cards, so when you acquire more than one box, you can make different curations between the boxes. The structure has been built to allow you, the collector, to change the front image as often as you like.

If you have 2 boxes with 30 cards each, you have 900 combinations possible. If you have 3 boxes you have 27000 combinations possible. All the boxes are published in an edition of 360 and are available only in their exhibition format. As all the boxes are sold, the exhibition disappears and the edition is over.

Is it a book? Is it an exhibition? Is it mass produced? Is it unique? Is it a work of art? a carry home exhibition? All of this and more questions, I hope, as I invite you to become the curator of my work.

Dayanita Singh 28 February, 2019

Book site- www.dayanitasingh.net

Youtube channel <https://goo.gl/uL4zot>

Google cultural institute <https://goo.gl/Bq3e5o>