

Binder Archives

A Portable Exhibition





BINDER ARCHIVES **A Portable Exhibition**

• **Project Manual** •



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Above: Binder Archives at 60dum during “Winter Services” in Chicago.

Below: Included as part of the exhibition “Get rid of yourself” at Lothringer dreizehn, Munich, Germany.

Binder Archives

Binder Archives is a portable exhibition that is designed to travel with the greatest of ease. In Binder Archives, three-ring binders and their European equivalents are used as a mode of presenting or containing large quantities of material and information. For this project, individual artists, exhibition organizers, creative people, archivists, and groups are producing binders that they will fill with photographs, drawings, documentation, photocopies, printed ephemera, tactile objects, or any other material that can be punched with three holes or stored in clear plastic sleeves. Each binder is a self-contained project or archive of a person's or group's work. Some of these individual binders contain as much material as one might expect to find in an entire exhibit or a book. Viewers can freely handle the binders just as they might browse through books in a reference library.

Binders are easily available from any office supply store. They are inexpensive, sturdy, and available in many different sizes. Their design is very basic and has not changed significantly over the years. Binders make it possible to create your own hardbound book without the expense or finality of publishing. Pages can be removed and rearranged until a satisfying presentation is determined. The contents of the binders can be photocopied and made into new binders. If a binder gets worn out from excessive use, it can be replaced easily; its contents can be transferred into the new binder.

The project Binder Archives is easily unpacked and installed in a matter of minutes. Everything that is needed for the exhibit fits in a single, modified, hard, foam plastic case. The case is large enough to hold between ten and twelve binders containing over one thousand pages of material. It can also store over 100 free booklets, posters, and one or two camping chairs. The case is suitable for indoor or outdoor use. It is lightweight, resistant to rust and corrosion, and made from plastic with a strength that is topped only by metal. The case can be checked into the body

of an airplane as luggage. The case weighs approximately sixty pounds when it is filled. One person can wheel Binder Archives down the street and unpack as much or as little of the work as can be displayed at a particular site. A site with tables or desks is ideal, but a floor will suffice. Walls are unnecessary. As with all Temporary Services projects, a free booklet about Binder Archives will accompany all presentations. A poster will be used to mark locations or advertise publicly. A separate Exhibition Guide has been produced. This guide can be changed and re-published as old binders get replaced with new ones.

The participants in Binder Archives can play a critical role in determining where the entire project is shown. Since a fixed location is not required for any considerable length of time, the people that are a part of Binder Archives can use their contacts, friends, and collaborators to extend the exhibition of these works beyond our own means. They can help to secure new locations for short term presentations.

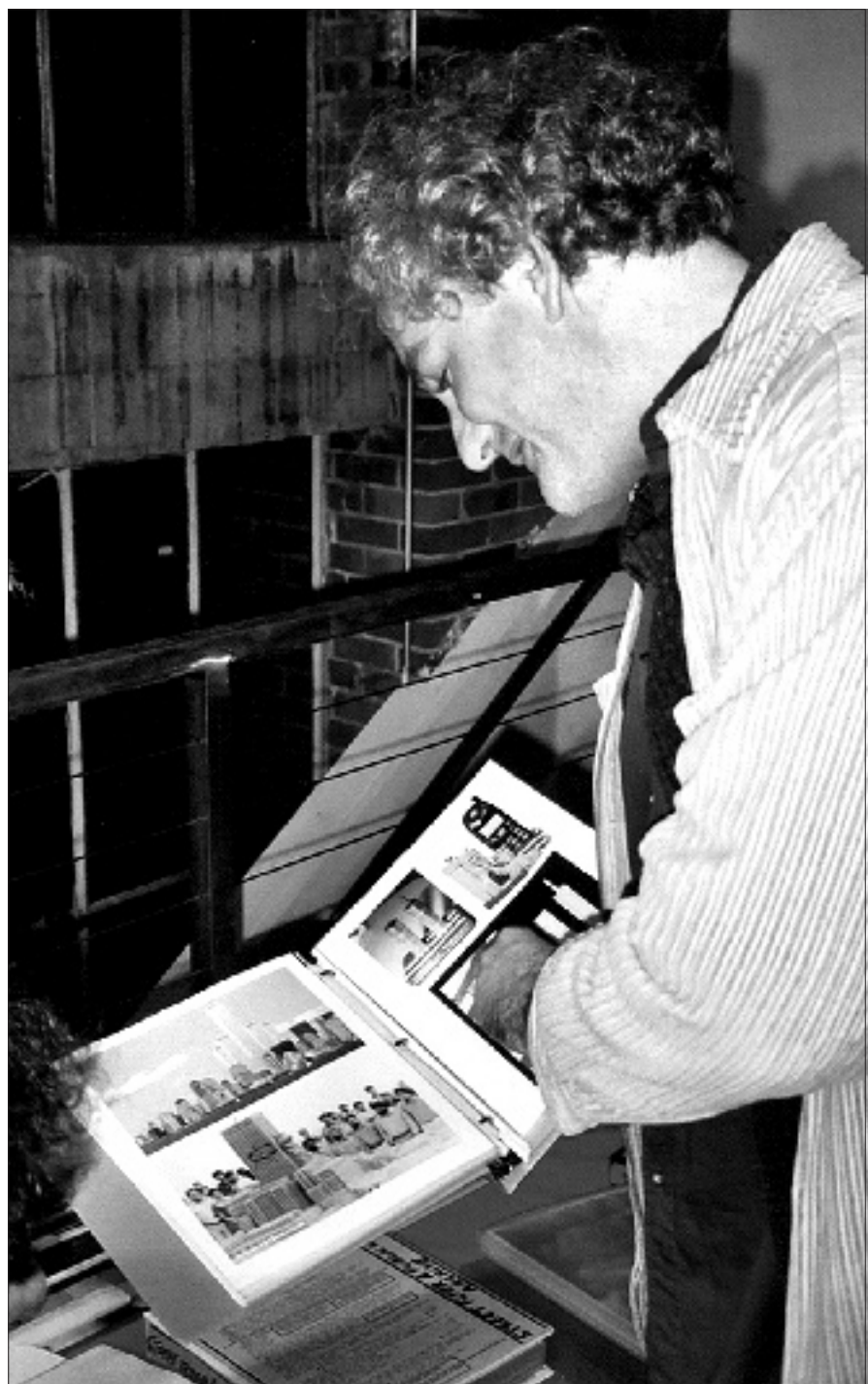
With Binder Archives, Temporary Services has developed a new strategy for bringing large and complete projects to different audiences in an active manner. This means finding new spaces that are available inexpensively or for free, using other institutions on a short-term basis, using the homes of friends in other cities, using publicly trafficked space in new ways and finding affordable ways to present exhibitions internationally.

-Temporary Services

(Brett Bloom, Salem Collo-Julin, Marc Fischer)



Above and Below: During a trip to Germany for the exhibition “Get rid of yourself”, we brought Binder Archives outside into several public spaces. These photos, as well as the photos on the back cover and inside back cover show Binder Archives in Weimar, Germany. The photo on the front cover of this booklet shows Binder Archives in Leipzig, Germany.



Binder Archives at Southern Exposure in San Francisco

The Rainbow's 9-11 Binder

The *Rainbow Grocery* in San Francisco is the kind of grocery store where one can buy most anything dried and/or in bulk. It's like *Whole Foods*, except for the incorporation and high prices. It used to be run by hippies, albeit religious ones. They sell things like muffins and potato chips too, of course. It's just that the mini-log of udon noodles wrapped in seaweed is a current lunch favorite.

The store, and especially its café seating area, is also an intersection for several communities, most often represented by their free literature. Crusty punk kids leave photocopied invitations for a six-band benefit concert for the local animal shelter next to the sign-up sheet for a free English as a second language class for Thai immigrants over sixty years of age. The ubiquitous yoga newsletter rests here, beside free weekly newspapers for gay and lesbian real estate agents, urban bird enthusiasts, and residents of anarchist housing cooperatives.

During a recent Temporary Services visit to San Francisco, the grocery was a recommended place from one of our hosts to find healthy portions of vegan fare. After buying our non-gluten, freshly squeezed, pure and wholesome meals, we stopped in the café area to eat and peruse some of the local literature.

I checked out a low-slung former bookshelf (now filled with grocery bags and copies of posters advertising outdated events) off to the side of the tables. There was a navy blue, three-ring binder, bursting with multi-colored paper, sitting on top of a stack of impossibly out-of-date concert tickets for the band *Flipper*. There were no markings on the cover, nor title page or identification labels.

Thinking that it was some teenager's abandoned literature homework, and hoping for some classic examples of the tragic love letter poems that only teenagers can write, I nosed into the first section. A map of Afghanistan was taped into the first cardboard divider, with pen-marks denoting movements of various sets of troops. The next page was a photocopy of the front page of the *San Francisco Examiner*, dated September 12, 2001. The third page was simply a typed list of around fifty names, with about twenty more added in various shades of blue pen. Some more cardboard stock pages were used as dividers, and were given titles such as "Players,"

“Land,” “Oil,” and “Bush”. The bulk of the content in the binder was a familiar overindulgence of forwarded e-mailed newspaper articles and insightful political cartoons printed from a myriad of e-mail accounts. Some additions were signed by the contributors, who were further identified on some pages as employees, or “long-time customers”.

The largest and most dog-eared area was the last section, titled “Memorial”. Various people donated angry and confused letters to politicians and a few personal memories for some who perished during the crashes. Writings and crayon pictures from kids were here too. The majority of this section was taken up by one person’s project: someone had cut out both photos and obituaries from the series published in the *New York Times* memorializing all those who died as a result of the various plane disasters, and was starting the process of pasting each of them to their own individual sheet of cardboard stock.

This was a truly egalitarian collection of information and images. There were no boundaries to stop anyone from adding or subtracting their own input. Additionally, there were voices of dissent within the pages. One of the printed out e-mails (from someone’s personal print-outs, not from the grocery) described the connections between the bin Laden family and an oil company that several members of the Bush clan have helped to steer. Written in the margins were several notes, in multiple handwritings: “What does this have to do with dead people?” and “Business is dead people, stupid.” This continued throughout. The only things safe from these mini-graffiti discussions were drawings by children and the New York Times memorials.

The Rainbow started as a form of outreach for members of an ashram in the early 1970s, and has evolved into a workers cooperative, shedding the religious affiliation, but keeping the same sense of goodwill. This binder seemed to be a quiet way for anyone taking a break to retrieve information and find common places of mourning. When we started to leave the café, a fellow diner gently retrieved the binder from the place I had left it and started to leaf through the pages, adding a few notes.

- Salem Collo-Julin

Mel Bochner's Exhibition in Binders

In 1966, the artist Mel Bochner was teaching in the art history department at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. The director of the school's gallery gave him the task of organizing a "Christmas show of drawings" for the small gallery space. Bochner approached people whose work he liked and asked them for "drawings that weren't necessarily 'works of art.'" He received 'working drawings' and proposal sketches from artists like Donald Judd, Eva Hesse, Dan Graham, and Robert Smithson among many others. The gallery director was not enthused by the drawings and claimed the school did not have the money to frame the work. Because it was felt that the drawings wouldn't lose much in reproduction, Bochner proposed photographing the drawings and presenting them that way to save on the cost of frames. That solution was also rejected as too expensive.

Recently the school had purchased a large Xerox machine and this provided Bochner with a solution. He photocopied all of the drawings, reducing and enlarging them to uniform size. Feeling that there were not enough pages to justify making a book, Bochner then added additional materials including articles from *Scientific American*, texts by a variety of thinkers in other fields such as mathematics, architecture, biology, and music and a copy of a diagram that came with the Xerox copy machine. Because the machine allowed for endless reproducibility, Bochner decided to make four sets of copies. He then collated the copies, placed them in plastic sleeves and inserted the sleeves into four identical 3-ring binders. The binders were displayed on four pedestals – each the size of an opened binder – and displayed at reading level without chairs. By providing four copies of the same binder, multiple viewers could take in the work simultaneously. The unwieldy but precisely descriptive title of this exhibition was "Working Drawings And Other Visible Things On Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed As Art."

Bochner's binders are an important precedent for this project for several reasons. Bochner showed unusual resourcefulness and creativity in attempting to rectify a problem faced by many artists: the problem of how to realize an idea in a thoughtful and powerful way with a small budget and a normally constricting set of limitations. Bochner's original ideas for his exhibition were struck down so he devised a new methodology; he took advantage of another resource

that was available to him - a Xerox machine. He used this resource in a way that complimented both his intentions and the inherent qualities that were already found in the works he wished to present. His project is compelling not just because he photocopied artists' works, but because the works were appropriate to photocopy. His project is compelling not just because he found a way to save money, but because he used a series of limitations as an impetus to generating a new form of exhibition-making that had not yet been realized. In short, he realized his ideas without compromising his ideals.

Bochner's other important innovation relative to Temporary Services' Binder Archives project, is that he took an entire exhibition off the walls and presented it in a compact and portable manner. The exhibition was stacked upon itself rather than spreading out across the wall, making it somewhat less dependent on the usual architectural aspects of a gallery space. A logical next step would be to simply remove all of the works from the gallery and present them wherever the presenter saw fit. A facsimile of Bochner's exhibition was later published as a series of four identical books which would allow you to do just that. It is not just the gallery installation of Bochner's show, but its potential for portability that Temporary Services responds to so strongly.

Over thirty-five years after Bochner organized "Working Drawings..." we still have 3-ring binders, plastic sleeves and copy machines. We also have affordable color copiers, scanners, digital cameras, color ink jet printers, and a variety of other tools that people can use to realize complex projects on a maximum scale with a minimal budget. Binder Archives acknowledges Mel Bochner's exhibition as a critical model, but one which can be expanded upon as we look to the past for exemplary ways of working in the future.

- Marc Fischer

Note: For more information on the content of these binders, readers should locate the primary source of this text – an essay by James Meyer in the book Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1966-1973. Yale University Press.

Roger's Binder Archives

The most extraordinary Binder Archives used to reside in a cramped Chicago bedroom. One night while visiting friends, I was introduced to a next-door neighbor named Roger. Roger was a hermit. His health was poor (he kept an asthma inhaler nearby while he chain smoked unfiltered cigarettes) so he mostly stayed at home in his bedroom with his cats. Zena Sakowski, who is participating in this project, knew of our ideas for Binder Archives and had told me about her neighbor Roger's binders. I was definitely interested in seeing them so when Roger came down while some of us were talking, Zena cajoled him into going upstairs to fetch a few of his archives.

Each three-ring binder was devoted to a different woman that had been featured in porn magazines catering to men with a fetish for enormous breasts. Roger explained that he found a large quantity of these magazines and set about the task of cutting them apart and reorganizing the contents. The pages were neatly removed and assembled inside clear plastic sleeves. Printed appearances of each woman's name (in a variety of type faces) were cut from the magazines and used inside index tabs or mounted in the corners of the images. He arranged each woman's pictorials chronologically. On small handwritten labels he carefully noted the titles of the magazines, the date of the particular issue the photo spreads came from, and the page numbers. Each binder spanned at least several years and perhaps as many as ten to fifteen different magazine layouts. Roger noted that by arranging the pictorials chronologically, you could see how the women change appearance over time. They change their hair, acquire tattoos and piercings, wear different lingerie, gain weight, lose weight, and in some cases they even change their names (he explained that they often use a different name when they work in other countries, as European magazines represent a different and possibly competing 'market').

The binders were not very interesting. The material quickly became extremely monotonous; to my eyes all the women looked more or less the same and the pictures were all from similar sources. I expressed little interest in the subject but described my enthusiasm for his archiving strategies. I attempted to engage Roger in a discussion about the idea of cutting and sorting these pictures as a way of re-making the world in a format that is more to your own liking. He didn't seem too interested in analyzing his project in this way but he did mention that he had a lot more of these binders upstairs. It took a lot of insistence but he finally let Zena and I come upstairs to see the apartment that he shared with five

roommates, five mangy cats, and a pet turtle that lived in the shower. We walked up the stairs and entered an extremely cluttered, and frankly decrepit living situation. There were mounds of clothing, old mattresses in the living room, and piles of boxes and crap everywhere. Roger showed us to his bedroom. In extreme contrast to the rest of the apartment it was clean and very neatly organized. The three of us could barely fit in the tiny room. It was so jammed with stuff that I couldn't see everything. He had shelving units on top of other shelving units and bookcases on top of bookcases, and a metal bucket on the floor that he stood on to reach things that were perched high up. The overwhelming feature were the bookcases filled with Binder Archives of porn - there were over 80 of them.

Each binder had a different number on its spine. He had one bookcase filled entirely with red binders. There were thousands of images – all perfectly arranged. Roger gave us a brief guided tour of his collection. He pointed out important narrative details about each woman. He was particularly interested in the idea that each woman's gradual loss of innocence was somehow tangible in the photos – that you could observe this progressive loss as they got older and were featured in more magazines and films. He reflected on the varying lengths of their careers. He also noted that Black, Asian, and Hispanic women were featured less prominently in these magazines so he created several binders devoted to races rather than specific individuals. I only saw about six of the binders but you could tell they were all kind of the same. The enormous breasts remained the constant theme throughout every one of these obsessive archives.

Not long after visiting this apartment, Roger and the other tenants were evicted. They moved away and Roger's binders moved with them. Despite their narrow subject, the binders represent an enthusiastic and rigorously executed archive. Still, I'm not sure who, other than another big breast fetishist, might be interested in such a project; I immediately knew that they were inappropriate for Binder Archives. Unlike the other binders that have been realized for this project, Roger's binders were never intended for an audience other than himself. Zena and I felt lucky to see them but, truth be told, some archives are probably meant to stay hidden.

- Marc Fischer

Presentations of Binder Archives to date September 2002 through March 2004

2004:

“Cram Session 4: Collective Effort”, Baltimore Museum of Art,
Baltimore, MD

2003:

“Get rid of yourself”, Lothringer dreizehn, Munich, Germany (2003-2004)

“Get rid of yourself”, Autonomous Cultural Center, Weimar, Germany

“Get rid of yourself”, Halle 14, Leipzig, Germany and in public places.

Studio Arts Cafeteria, University of Wisconsin – Green Bay campus, Green Bay, WI

“International Arts Group Exposition”, Project Room One, Portland, OR

“Shadow Cabinets”, Southern Exposure - Overlook Space, San Francisco, CA

2002:

“Winter Services”, 60dum, Chicago, IL

Mike Wolf’s Apartment, Chicago, IL

Ellen Rothenberg’s “Text off the Page” Writing Class, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Harold Washington Library, Chicago, IL



