In March of 2001, Temporary Services launched The Library Project. One hundred new books and artists’ projects were surreptitiously added to the Harold Washington Library Center, the main branch of the Chicago Public Library. The library was not told about this donation.

Every title was checked against the library’s catalog to verify that it was not already owned by the library. Several books that are already in the collection were added in creatively altered new versions. The project infiltrated every publicly accessible section of the library.

Creating new arrangements of materials not normally possible in common library practice was one component of this project. Another major goal was to bring obscure, subversive, self-published, hand-made, or limited edition works by underexposed artists to a wider audience.

We held a three-day preview at our office space in downtown Chicago before placing the books into the library. It was a send-off, complete with posters from the American Library Association extolling the virtues of reading, bright lighting, and all of the books available for our visitors to view.

Each book was stamped and processed in the way that the Chicago Public Library would upon receiving a book that they were adding to their collection. Softcover books were laminated for protection and due date card holders were glued into the inside covers. Call numbers were invented so that the books could be shelved in carefully chosen sections based on their content or the desires of the authors. Many of the books were added to sections that they may not have been cataloged in if the library had handled it. For example, *Sexy Polizzei*, a collection of perverse and aggressive drawings of cops by Bruno Richard, may have been archived into the artists’ books collection in the library, which would mean that it would not be on the open shelves for patrons to discover. Instead, one would have to ask the reference librarian in the art section to retrieve it. We placed Richard’s book in the criminal justice section, alongside books on police brutality and test preparation guides for taking the police officers exam.

Many of the books stayed in the library for years after their initial placement. A few were successfully checked into the library – a patron would take them from the shelf and attempt to check them out, and the library staff would assume that they were somehow missing from their computer database and simply put them in to speed up the process.

In 2004, while consulting librarian Margarete Gross for unrelated research, a member of Temporary Services learned that she had been put in charge of handling books from The Library Project as they were discovered by other staffers. Gross had about twenty of the books stored in boxes under her desk. Gross was considering making a public display of the found books but ultimately decided that in light of recent Anthrax attacks at the main Chicago Post Office, it would be best not to create an exhibit about hiding things in the library. Nonetheless, she made it clear that the library planned to keep the books. Shortly after this meeting, Margarete Gross retired from her position and left the Harold Washington Library.

In the fall of 2006, Temporary Services inquired about the books again and found that other staffers were also aware of the project. We made an appointment to bring a group of students to the library to see the books as part of a workshop we were teaching. Not sure how the library would react, we were amazed to find a large display of the “caught” books set out for us in the art reference area. The librarians were helpful and excited about the project, and wanted help in “finding” more of the books that might be on the shelves. We presented librarian Angela Holtzm an with a copy of the booklet from the project and agreed to help her identify the books they had discovered – many of which were unsigned by the artists.

As of the spring of 2007, all of the Library Project books that were found and brought to the Visual and Performing Arts section of the library are officially cataloged under "Temporary Services: The Library Project”. Any patron can now see these books at the Arts section reference desk on the 8th floor. Other books from The Library Project remain on the shelves, still undiscovered by staff.
1. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views contributing to their creation.

- The American Library Association, from The Library Bill of Rights

"Over its lifetime, the book has the capacity to insinuate itself into unforeseen locales"
- Brad Freeman, Artist

"...I became a young novelist and wrote a book about the Jonestown, Pennsylvania flood in 1830 - something where Clara Barton threw her weight around. The book was three-hundred-twenty-one pages long and I had set for myself the deadline of my eleventh birthday. I'd heard the girl who wrote Black Beauty was eleven so I wanted to be the youngest novelist in the world. Since I didn't have any idea of how to get it published, I typed it all up, stapled it together, cut up some beer-case cardboard, and covered it with white butcher paper and Saran Wrap. I painted a relevant picture for the cover and smuggled it into the library and put it on the shelves in the correct alphabetical order. I never saw that book again."
- Cookie Mueller, from "My Bio: Notes on an American Childhood"

"The failure of the democratic multiple is not a failure of production, but of reception - another of the many moments in which the efforts of alternative discourse have been eclipsed by the economically advantaged mainstream. Artists' books have failed to find a place as a democratic art form, at least up until now. But in the future [...]

Selected Books From The Library Project

White Lame Eh by Zena Sakowski & Rob Kelly. Two examples from a set of three handmade books that opened up to become a coat, a pair of pants, and a balaklava hood.

Seed Ledger by Nance Klehm. A collection of free seed packets and informational sheets for weeds common to Chicago.


Selected Books From The Library Project

Why We Got The Sack From The Museum by David Shrigley. At the time of the project, the library only owned two books by contemporary Scottish artists.

Observed Reading on the Armitage Bus 8:15 a.m. 2/15/01 by Michael Piazza.

The Life of Ervin Stuntz by Ervin Stuntz. We found this self-published autobiography in the library’s discarded books store and decided to include it in the project.

Books on a table in Temporary Services’ former office, just three blocks north of the Harold Washington Library Center.
