

OPENERS

The Book As Art

by *Beth DeFrancis Sun*

If a picture paints a thousand words—as the adage suggests—then why am I using written language to compile my “Openers”? Why not simply paint a picture that sums up what I’d like to convey instead? Well...for starters, I can’t paint, or at least not very well, which is why I have tremendous admiration for those who can. When I pick up a book that contains eye-capturing images—whether a children’s picture book, a young adult comic strip, an illustrated dictionary, or a coffee table volume—my “reading” experience is transformed. The visual art fires up a portion of my brain that allows me to “marvel” in a completely different way.

This special focus issue of *Virginia Libraries* on “The Book as Art” is intended to get readers thinking about the importance of *appearance* as it relates to books. What *is* art? And what *is* a book? These are two of the questions that Katharine Adkins tackles in her thought-provoking piece titled “Readymade

Reading” (page 7). Are there creative ways to perpetuate the life of a well-loved book that extend beyond “preservation”? Can we recycle our books in ways that

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enhance Virginia library programming and provide novel experiences for our patrons? For insights and ideas, check out Janet Melton’s “The Book as Art at the Pamunkey Regional Library” (page 9) and Maryke Barber’s article, “Thinking Outside the Book” (page 5).

In “Young Adult Book as Art” (page 12), April Pavis describes how gifted writers such as Leo Tolstoy

and Kazuo Ishiguro have the ability to evoke images and strong emotion with the perfect choice of words and phrasing. But she notes, “sometimes books are more than gently woven words and carefully crafted paragraphs. Sometimes there are images to correspond with the words, giving the reader the ultimate experience: text and images sewn together so as to enhance the reader’s imagination.”

The perfect “pairing” of text and images can be seen in so many of the handcrafted volumes produced at the Virginia Arts of the Book Center, a program of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. Beginning on page 14, you’ll learn more about this unique studio that takes the book arts to a whole new level.

My hope is that these pages not only open up new ways of thinking about books, but new possibilities for Virginia Libraries and the patrons they serve. Feast your eyes! **vi**