

Book of Ruth by Robert Seydel

Burrowing into the pop-detritus archive somewhere between Ray Johnson's mail art and Tom Phillips's Humument project, Seydel's Book of Ruth describes an allusive fantasy about his aunt and alter ego Ruth Greisman, her brother Saul, and their escapades with Joseph Cornell.

—THE NEW YORKER

BOOK OF RUTH by ROBERT SEYDEL

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Robert Seydel's *Book of Ruth* is an alchemical assemblage that composes the life of his alter ego, Ruth Greisman—spinster, Sunday painter, and friend to Joseph Cornell and Marcel Duchamp. Through collages, drawings, and journal entries from Ruth's imagined life, Seydel invokes her interior world, revealing it in novelistic rhythms. These seductive, unearthed artifacts, conceived as a gathering of materials from the Smithsonian and a suburban family garage, construct a mosaic portrait of a reclusive, unknown artist for whom the distance between the ordinary and the extraordinary is *infra-thin*. The detritus from which Seydel fashions Ruth's art and narrates her inner life shine like the pages of an illuminated manuscript, exploring the imagination of an artist as well as the tenuous creation of self.

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Book of Ruth is the first publication and a rare opening into a richly layered, highly original, and massive body of work that the artist produced before his sudden death at the age of fifty on January 27, 2011. Reclusive and unwavering in his dedication to his work, Seydel worked on multiple ongoing and interrelated series that incorporate collage, drawing, photography, narrative and lyric writing, often using various personas and fictional constructs. His work is deeply embedded with a vast and eclectic body of knowledge as well as with an unrelenting sense of play and wonder. While he rarely exhibited his work—most recently a solo show at the CUE Art Foundation in NYC and "Five Contemporary Visual Poets" at the Wright Exhibition Space in Seattle—Seydel's projects have generated intense interest through word-of-mouth by other artists and poets.

Seydel was most recognized as a teacher, curator and editor. He taught at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts for more than a decade as well as served as curator at the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University for a number of years where he organized ambitious exhibitions and programs. He also edited *Several Gravities* (Siglio, 2009), a volume of collages and poems by National Book Award-winning poet Keith Waldrop.

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A haunting, mesmerizing, and heart-breakingly generous work of art.

—ROSAMOND PURCELL

Book of Ruth is a modern fairy tale unlike any other, arriving from a corner of the world where fiction and fact are interchangeable. . . . Open this book and lose yourself. Out of bits of ephemera held together by cloud and glue an entire universe will rise up to greet you.

—JOHN YAU

Behold Seydel's "Ruth"—banker by day, scribe of daily wonders by night, whose art of "damaged things made" pours forth from a "healing imagination [with] animals in it." Rich with "white magic," as Joseph Cornell put it, Book of Ruth is an enchanting, mischievous, often deeply moving act of invention and homage.

—MAGGIE NELSON

The magical qualities of Robert Seydel's work never cease to astonish me. He conjures something visionary at the edges of language and the fragile material world. Who knew such light could come from torn paper? What joy to finally have this long-awaited book in hand!

—PETER GIZZI