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CONTACT: LISA PEARSON publisher@sigliopress.com SIGLIO 2432 MEDLOW AVE, LA, CA 90041 P: 310-857-6935

## THE ALCHEMICAL UNIVERSE OF ARTIST-POET **ROBERT SEYDEL** TWO NEW BOOKS OUT OCTOBER 30 + EXHIBITION OPENING SEPTEMBER 2

# A PICTURE IS ALWAYS A BOOK FURTHER WRITINGS FROM BOOK OF RUTH

PUB DATE: **OCTOBER 30, 2014** \$36 HB 6 x 8.5 112 pages illustrated in color throughout ISBN: 978-1-938221-06-4

Edited by Lisa Pearson, interview by Savina Velkova. Co-published with **SMITH COLLEGE LIBRARIES**. **Advances available now.**

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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*

It is as though Seydel has submerged himself into Ruth to a point of near indiscernibility in his crossing of visual art and poetry, male and female, past and present. . . And it is this near total seamlessness that blurs the bounds between author and subject, real and unreal, primary and secondary roles, master and mastered. —*The Brooklyn Rail*

[*Book of Ruth*] is one of those rare events in art and poetry that actually inspires the reader to write, to create, to make something, and to document and even celebrate the many seemingly insignificant things that make up a human life. —*Los Angeles Review of Books*

Artist and writer Robert Seydel often used various personas and fictional constructs in a vast and multi-layered body of work that incorporated collage, drawing, photography, narrative and lyric writing. His primary alter ego Ruth Greisman—banker by day, artist by night, friend of Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Cornell—lived in Queens, caring for her WWI shell-shocked brother while making hundreds of exquisite collages, a selection of which Seydel collected in the artist's book *Book of Ruth* (Siglio, 2011). As Ruth, Seydel explored the boundaries between the salvaged and the lost, the unknown and the unknowable, the art that is made and art that is found.

*A Picture Is Always a Book* is a first-person, fictional archive, collecting over seventy of Ruth's (mostly unpublished) "journal pages," luminescent and startlingly original writings—typed up on paper purloined from old photo albums, adorned with drawings in colored pencils, oil pens, white-out and ink stamps—that penetrate Ruth's consciousness with visceral honesty and poetic precision. With the acrobatics of her emblem the hare, Seydel's Ruth makes leaps from the banalities of her daily life into an expansive, alchemical imagination that embraces the shape-shifting of meaning, the occult in letters, and the magical invocations of animals—domestic and hallucinatory. For Ruth—as for Seydel—the catalyst for metamorphosis is the eye, the seeing. The writings, infused with play and pathos, accumulate into a portrait of a different kind of artist. For Ruth, the creation of self is tenuous, the artistic impulse implacable, and the distance between the ecstatic and melancholic "infra-thin." She writes, "I'll invent who I am, against what is. My time and name: a Queens of the mind."

***A Picture Is Always a Book* accompanies the exhibition "Robert Seydel: The Eye in Matter," opening September 2 at the Neilson Library, Smith College and traveling to the Queens Museum of Art in 2015 and the Book Arts Gallery Columbia College Chicago in 2016.** Curated by Peter Gizzi, Richard Kraft and Lisa Pearson, "The Eye in Matter" represents a definitive selection of Ruth collages, drawings and "journal pages" and will include dozens of previously unpublished and unexhibited works as well as Seydel's notebooks, opened inside vitrines to reveal his process of making this visionary body of work.

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**siglio** UNCOMMON BOOKS AT THE INTERSECTION OF ART & LITERATURE

# SONGS OF S.

and MAYBE S. / FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF ROBERT SEYDEL

**PUB DATE: OCTOBER 30, 2014** \$24 PB 6 x 8.5 144 pages, including inserted four-color booklet ISBN: 978-1-938221-05-7  
Edited by Peter Gizzi, Matvei Yankelevich and Richard Kraft. **Co-published with UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE. PDF advance available August 1.**  
All Siglio titles are available directly at [www.sigliopress.com](http://www.sigliopress.com) and distributed to the trade by ARTBOOK/D.A.P.

S., one of several personas invented by artist and writer Robert Seydel, was a recluse who kept a great library which he suddenly and mysteriously abandoned along with a manuscript of poems and slim stack of drawings. These poems—hypnotic, distilled, obsessive and playful—are written by Seydel as S., whom he devises as a naïf, suffering bouts of madness and apophenia.

Seydel described S. this way: “S. occupied an apartment in a house in Amherst, Massachusetts, on a gray street around the corner from Emily Dickinson’s manse on Main Street. Not that much is known about him as a person... But he wrote prolifically... and kept a journal, and made collages and drew as well, for example the small colored pencil drawings, of heads for the most part, that look like hillocks nestled among the valleys of what might be Amherst’s nearby Holyoke Range... These pictures betray, as do his songs, a certain lack of proficiency, while simultaneously developing a stance of innocence and reverie far from the precincts of the technical... There are hundreds of these little songs, as he sometimes titled them (more often he supplied no title at all, nor is it possible to discern any order for them, chronological or otherwise).”

Siglio and Ugly Duckling Presse have collaborated to publish the complete cycle of poems along with *Maybe S.* a full color 32-page booklet, that includes drawings by S. as well as hand-written excerpts from Seydel’s notebooks that illuminate the creation and revisions of this persona and his singular universe.

**ABOUT ROBERT SEYDEL:** A prolific artist and writer, Robert Seydel (1960-2011), left behind a multi-layered, highly original body of work marked by both an unrelenting sense of play and an extraordinary and eclectic body of knowledge. Seydel’s ongoing and interrelated series incorporated collage, drawing, photography, narrative and lyric writing, often using various personas and fictional constructs. Beginning in 2000, Seydel created a vast series of works using the alter ego Ruth Greisman, who was inspired by his aunt of the same name, including the “journal pages” collected in *A Picture Is Always a Book* and the works Seydel himself selected for *Book of Ruth* (Siglio, 2011). Other Seydel alter egos and invented personas include S., author of the *Songs of S.*, Saul Greisman (“scholar of sewage”), Eckstein-Sousa (“sometimes lecturer and a kind of [failed] poet with Proustian leanings”), and R. Welch (a professor developing a theory of “the biochemical construction of Charismatic figures”), among others.

Trained as a photographer (MFA, Rhode Island School of Design, 1990) with an academic background in literature (BFA, New York University in Photography and English, 1984), Seydel began his pursuit of a very hybrid species of art and literature soon after graduate school. “A Short History of Portraiture,” an early and important series (for which he received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts), was comprised of almost two hundred Polaroid transfer montages which Seydel described not only as an exploration of the “head” as a dense and multi-valent emblem but also as its own form of literature. This interest in portraiture persisted and is readily evident in the many collages (often made by Ruth) in which the heads and faces of old photographs are altered and transformed. Seydel made a parallel and hidden body of portraiture work in his purposeful act of collection: the reverse side of many other collages are old photographic portraits left untouched.

The exhibition “Robert Seydel: The Eye in Matter” is Seydel’s first solo show since he passed away in 2011. In 2007, poet Peter Gizzi curated Seydel’s only previous solo exhibition, at the CUE Art Foundation, which included Ruth works and other series including *Siselnamés* (Mixed Melody), *Hommages* and *Droon Works*.

In addition to his work as an artist and writer, Seydel was also an curator, editor and teacher. He curated more than a dozen exhibitions at various venues including the Photographic Resource Center at Boston University where he served as Director of Exhibitions for a number of years, and he taught at Hampshire College for over a decade. In addition to *Songs of S.*, *A Picture Is Always a Book*, the previous publications *Book of Ruth* (Siglio, 2011) and *Keith Waldrop: Several Gravities* (edited by Seydel, Siglio, 2009), Siglio also published several artist multiples by Seydel for its ephemera series.

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