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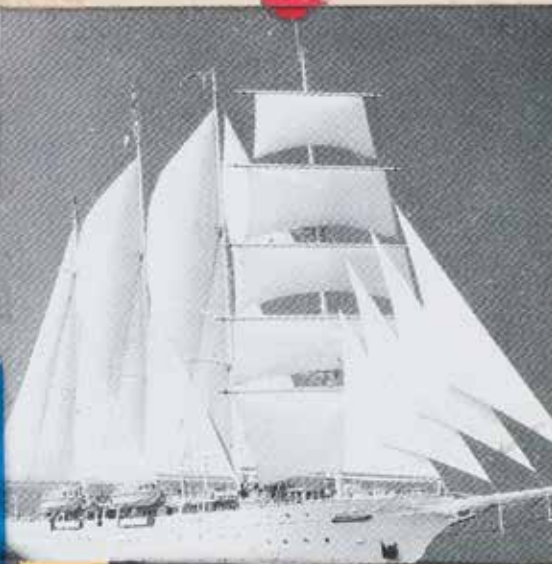
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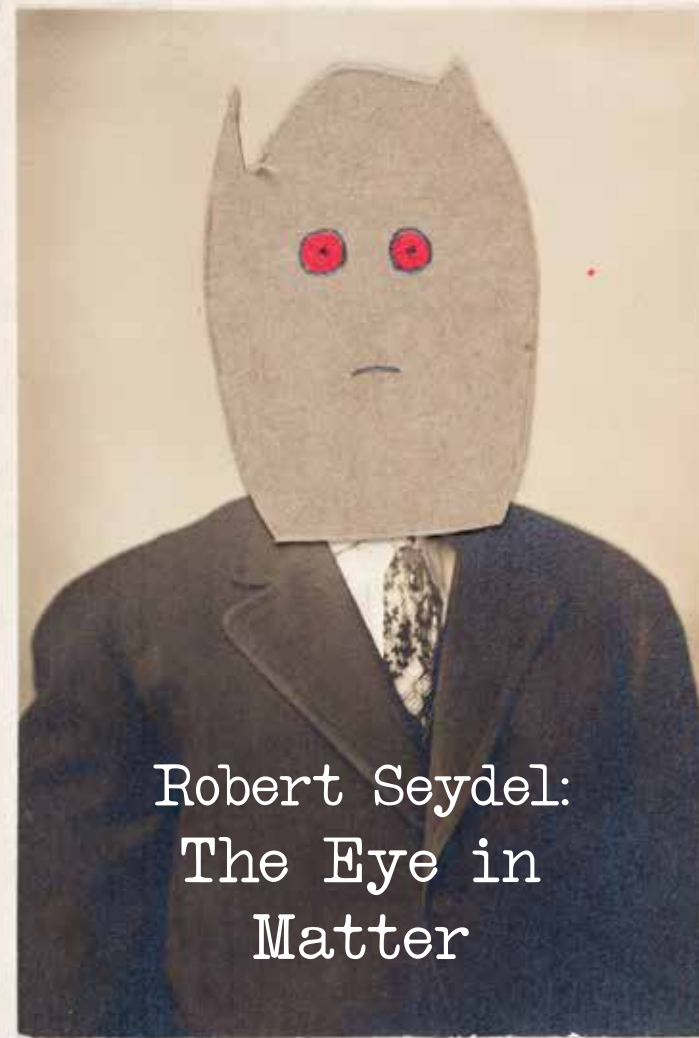
The Book of Ruth is concerned with two main characters, my aunt and uncle, Ruth and Sol Greisman, who were siblings, born in Brooklyn, New York. Joseph Cornell and Marcel Duchamp put in minor appearances as friends to both of them. A fifth character, mostly invisible, is "Robt," or Robert Cornell, Joseph Cornell's homebound brother, or myself, nephew, and the "half-wit" of the book. Neither Ruth nor Sol married; they lived together in Queens not far from the Cornell house on Utopia Parkway.

Sol (sometimes Saul) was in real life a veteran of the First World War and suffered, as it was later said, from shell shock. After the war he became a plumber. Ruth was a Sunday painter who worked days in a bank and was active in Hadassah. The two of them meet Cornell and, through him, Marcel Duchamp. Ruth fell in love with the former who was, in his own way, as impossible and sealed-off as her brother.

Ruth is the artist in the book, her work taking the form of mailings to Joseph, various serial and other collages, such as "Ten Tiny Collages for Teeny" and journal writings. Her work was first discovered among the boxes of miscellanea in the Joseph Cornell Study Center at the Archives for American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Later research by family members turned up a treasure trove of material in a garage in suburban Fort Lee, New Jersey. Ruth's emblem is the hare, Sol's the worm, or sometimes the star-nosed mole.

—Robert Seydel  
Preface from Book of Ruth

The exhibition is located in the Book Arts Gallery, Neilson Library, Smith College. For further information please contact the Mortimer Rare Book Room at [mrbr@smith.edu](mailto:mrbr@smith.edu) or 413.585.2906.



# Robert Seydel: The Eye in Matter

Smith College Neilson Library  
September 2 - December 15, 2014





The art of Robert Seydel (1960–2011) is a rare hybrid species that dissolves boundaries between the literary and the visual, the lyrical and the narrative and the acts of reading and looking. In a body of work marked by an unrelenting sense of play, Seydel collapses the historical past with the notated, emotional present and mingles actual personages with fictional characters. Much of his work is made under the auspices of various personas in place of a singular first person perspective. His is a multiplicitous “I”—the self fractured and expanded into many, the lines between them quivering and permeable.

Beginning in 2000, Seydel created a series of works using the alter ego Ruth Greisman who was inspired by his aunt of the same name (*see reverse for Seydel's description*). “Robert Seydel: The Eye in Matter” features a definitive selection from this fictional archive. Along with a selection of Ruth’s “journal pages” (now collected in *A Picture Is Always a Book: Further Writings from Book of Ruth*) and almost one hundred collages (many unpublished as well as others Seydel included in *Book of Ruth*), this exhibition features Seydel’s notebooks (which he called “Knotbooks”), open to pages that reveal glimpses of the process of making this visionary body of work.

These notebooks are the crucible of his expansive, alchemical imagination and eclectic body of knowledge. An exceedingly solitary man, Seydel spent untold hours each day reading and studying, writing and making art. His notebooks are not simply a diary or record but a means of selecting, arranging and composing. Many of Ruth’s journal writings are first drafted there—merging daily life and dreams as Seydel traces the leaps of her acrobatic consciousness from the banal to the hallucinatory, the melancholic to the ecstatic.

In Ruth’s collages, Seydel applies his combinatorial magic to debris from the street, forgotten photographs and faded scraps of paper, transforming earthly detritus into illuminated arrangements whose meanings shape-shift as each collage is “read.” In all of Ruth’s works, Seydel explores the implacability of the artistic impulse, while recording desire, loss and the tenuous but persistent creation of self. “The Eye in Matter” invites the viewer into a world made from the daily, devotional practice of making art, a world in which the work of art is a life itself. As Ruth writes: “I’ll invent who I am, against what is. My time and name: a Queens of the mind.”

Curators: Peter Gizzi, Richard Kraft and Lisa Pearson  
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