

Leo Steinberg, Rosalind Krauss, Scott Burton, Siah Armajani, Betsy Baker, Printed Matter

by Nancy Princenthal

Among the people I've had the very good fortune to know, and want to recognize, are a couple of formidable teachers (Leo Steinberg, Rosalind Krauss); a few artists who early on prodded me by their wisdom and invention (Scott Burton and Siah Armajani); and one editor, who, I'm guessing, I won't be the only person to thank, profusely: the inimitable and indomitable Betsy Baker. But I'd especially like to acknowledge an institution (though the term doesn't seem exactly right): the bookstore and sometime publisher Printed Matter. I fell into an early job there ("assistant manager") when it was brand new, and spent the first few weeks of a roughly year-and-a-half-long tenure trying to figure out where I'd landed. What *were* these publications, which ranged from stapled sheaves of Xeroxes to simply fashioned leporellos, perfect-bound offset texts? What was this barely heated hole-in-the-wall on Lispenard Street in Tribeca, with its battered desks and handmade shelves—a shop, a museum, a node on an invisible, high-tension power network? Alternating between public art and private passion, trenchant political analysis and the most personal visual and narrative accounts, the publications that the nonprofit store showcased and sold—original artworks in the form (mostly) of open-edition books, most of them under \$10—stormed across boundaries. In an open challenge to the blooming gallery system, Printed Matter offered an alternative that was absurdly idealistic and surprisingly resilient. The explosive growth of its annual New York Art Book Fair is one sign of that. Not just a standard-bearer for independence but also a bulwark against the flooding tide of social-media-based communication, Printed Matter and its fair have a reach that is international, intergenerational, and cross-disciplinary. Now led by the wonderful Max Schumann, it was founded in 1976 by Sol LeWitt and Lucy Lippard; the board also included Pat Steir, Amy Baker (Sandback), Walter Robinson, Mimi Wheeler, Irena von Zahn, Robin White, and Edit deAk. Tony Whitfield stood in as director for Ingrid Sischy, who remained deeply involved (while pursuing an internship with John Szarkowski at MoMA). I see this homage is becoming a kind of daisy chain of name-dropping, but it was the collaboration among these brilliant, energetic, and wildly diverse women and men that provided the foundation for an effort which—much against the odds—still thrives.

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