

Books Are Spaces

“a book is not a bag of words (...) a book is a sequence of spaces (...)”—This programmatic statement by artist Ulises Carrión, dating from 1975, represents a new understanding of the book as medium—a medium that is not effaced by its function as conveyor of verbal communiqués but that sets itself up as thematic object. By deliberately disrupting certain expectations regarding appearance and functionality, the book directs attention to aspects of its design, thus opening up for artists a broad field in which to experiment and for the book’s recipients an equally broad field of experience to explore.

The starting point for such artistic experimentation is the book’s format: very large or very small books immediately attract attention, as do books with unusual shapes, or with elements protruding beyond their edges. And of course the materials used play an important role, as in, for instance, Bruno Munari’s *Prelibri* (1980), consisting of a box containing books made of wood, fabric, felt, plastic, etc., their format designed to fit children’s small hands. Special effects can be achieved by photographing images of fabric for printing and then actually integrating real pieces of fabric, such as threads of yarn, into individual pages (*Tenendo per mano il sole*).

The inner lives of books may also contain surprises. For instance, pop-up books may unfold to reveal complicated architectural constructions or fantastic worlds of objects. 3D effects can also be achieved by overlapping pages that, through openings cut out in them, afford glimpses of new perspectives.

Each new page opens up spaces full of unexpected sense impressions: the act of “reading” and turning the pages becomes an unpredictable performative adventure.