Elemental
Book Works by Cathryn Miller
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**Elemental**

Book Works by Cathryn Miller

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**A Word's Eye View by Shani K Parsons**

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**Synesthesia (detail, page 3 of 18)**

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**el-e-men-tal adjective \\ˌe-lə-men-təl\
1. of the nature of an ultimate constituent; fundamental
2. pertaining to rudiments or first principles; elementary
3. starkly simple, primitive, or basic
4. pertaining to the forces or phenomena of physical nature

ELEMENTAL. The word’s many facets of meaning encompass that which pertains to first principles, is fundamental or starkly simple, and/or exemplifies the forces or phenomena of physical nature — definitions which speak to both formal and conceptual correspondences between Cathryn Miller’s multiform works. Ranging from tiny folded paper accumulations to room-filling installations, Miller’s thoughtfully conceived and often laboriously crafted objects represent a sustained investigation of manifold worlds, circumscribing inner/outer, micro/macro, and meta/physical dimensions. Bringing the outside in to her artist’s books, she proffers evidence gathered and discoveries made on the cycles of nature and life, from the land on which her shadow falls to the feathers from a goshawk’s kill and beyond. Conversely, for her altered books she turns obsolete volumes inside out, transmuting page after page into concrete embodiments of the concepts they once conveyed in words, conferring new life upon these doomed editions in the process.

The word elemental also implies a certain necessity and intensity — of focus, purpose, or emotion, and it is this intensity that drives Miller to undertake such effortful or repetitive processes in the making of her work. Her experiences of wonder, anger, and joy — frustration and fascination in equal measure — become tempered through durational labours of conceiving and crafting. In distilling both her feelings and her findings into the personal, poetic, and playful works on view, Miller’s observations and experiences are made exquisitely manifest in the tactile materials, (con)sequential structures, and storied logic of both traditional and invented book forms.

Taking elemental as a point of departure, this survey embarks on a series of playful linguistic engagements with Miller’s works as a way to consider the recurring themes of her practice. Starting with the root word, element (and its ancient association with fire, water, earth, and air) and moving through elementary (works replete with childhood memory), we venture forward in time to experimental and experiential aspects of Miller’s process, which speak to conditions of presence/the present. We then make stops to engage with both her newest work (potent) and an ambitious work in progress (potential), arriving in short order at our final destination (portent) with a lighthearted view to the future.
Flowery Language, 2013

Language Barrier Too, 2013
po·tent adjective \ˈpō-tənt\  
1. achieving or bringing about a particular result  
2. chemically or medicinally effective  
3. rich in a characteristic constituent

ALCHEMY OF THE EYE AND MIND
Synesthesia is defined as concomitant sensation, especially the subjective impression of a sense (e.g., colour) other than the one (e.g., sound) being stimulated. For her new aptly titled and visually arresting wall-based work, Miller infuses square cut pages from a discarded dictionary with rich earthen hues specific to the letter represented on each page.

Affixed in a single line across the wall, the composition achieves a kind of visual alchemy through which the work takes on a musical tone, with the colour/letter combinations becoming as notes from an enigmatic melody. And in fact a song is being sung — or more precisely, spoken — from a Teton Sioux chant which is encoded into the work. Stringing together the letters represented by each page reveals a verse which epitomizes both the essence of the work and of Miller’s world view.*

Through the simple act of rotating the pages 90° clockwise, Miller highlights the visual nature of the source material, transforming typography into topography: the flush left of one text column becomes the horizon line from which mountains or trees magically emerge within the negative spaces formed by the ragged right of the other. Or viewed another way, one may apprehend the shifting colours of a night sky filled with the sparkling trails of innumerable falling stars.

Thus engaging all of the material dimensions of language — visual, aural, and symbolic — Synesthesia is a hybrid of text and image that oscillates between reading and viewing — a contemporary concrete poem. Conceptual in its form (where “structure = content”), and minimal in its affect, Synesthesia puts the audience centre-stage, leaving it up to one’s “poetic imagination to fill in the blanks.”**

*Synesthesia is reproduced in this catalogue in its entirety and can be decoded in the same way as in the installation, by stringing the letters from each of its pages together (starting with the title page of this catalogue). For the answer, see the project’s listing in the Exhibition Checklist on p. 53.

**Coined by the pioneering Noigandres poets from Brazil, the term “concrete poetry” denotes a visual/textual form which “makes explicit the materiality of language” and equates materiality to meaning, allowing free passage between the verbal and the visual. (For more information, see www.poetrybeyondtext.org/concrete-poetry.html).
Synesthesia (ideesthesia) #1 (detail), 2014
TYPOLOGY Projects is a not-for-profit independent curator-led initiative that foregrounds experimentation, collaboration, critical perspectives, and community outreach in the production of exhibitions, editions, and related events.

As an intimate venue for exhibitions, our program emphasizes highly focused art and curatorial projects with an eye toward stimulating cross-disciplinary dialogue between artists, art forms, ideas, images, objects, and environments.

Through our publishing program, each show is documented in an exhibition catalogue with original curatorial writing. Affordable limited-edition prints are also produced in collaboration with exhibiting artists as an invitation to beginning collectors.

Through an inclusive program of events including both kid- and adult-friendly talks, screenings, workshops, parties, performances and more, TYPOLOGY seeks to enrich the exhibition experience and encourage active audience participation in our projects and programming.

In providing opportunities for guest curators and participating artists to mount fully realized exhibitions within a critical framework, TYPOLOGY is building curatorial community and resources for the exchange of ideas on art and exhibition-making as a way to engage and inform audiences from all walks of life.

www.typology.ca

Director’s Bio

Since the mid-90s, Shani K Parsons has pursued a multidisciplinary practice focused on exhibition-making — initially through the lenses of architecture, urban planning and public arts, then installation, graphic, and environmental design, and most recently through research, writing, curation, and collaboration. In the process she has produced an eclectic body of work ranging from intimate artist’s books and publications to immersive installations and exhibitions for venues including the American Museum of Natural History, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Rhode Island School of Design and RISD Museum, the Museum of Chinese in America (MoCA NY), and Mixed Greens, a contemporary art gallery in Chelsea.

After nearly a decade of living and working in New York, Shani moved to Toronto with her family. Bringing together her experience in all aspects of exhibition-making — as artist, designer, critic, and curator — she is building a hybrid space for collaborative and cross-disciplinary experimentation, an independent venue for exhibitions on all forms of local and international contemporary culture.