

# BOOK CLUB

The printed word plays muse for a host of Canadian artists.

By BETTY ANN JORDAN

In this new digital era, many artists are looking to the printed book for inspiration. But it isn't the content of the book that is necessarily the driving force behind these works; there's a growing nostalgia for the look and feel of tomes whose physical format, constant since Gutenberg, is now shifting with the advent of e-books and online libraries. Many even fear that, soon, the physical book could be lost for good. Artists from around the world carry a torch for these traditional editions, their works ranging from the melancholic to the slyly humorous.

Canada, too, has its share of book-fixated artists. Toronto's Roula Partheniou leads the pack with her painted and drawn facsimiles that she calls decoys. Arranged in stacks or lined up on shelves,



FROM TOP: *Vanitas 10.06.25* by Paul Béliveau (2011), acrylic on canvas, 24" sq., \$8,525; *0 to 9* by Roula Partheniou (2010); *The Books I've Read* by The Royal Art Lodge (2008), screen print on Stonehenge paper, 11½" x 70", \$500; *What Turns Women On* by Michael Dumontier and Neil Farber (2009), acrylic and pen on hardboard, 6" sq., \$1,000.

her trompe l'oeil canvases are so convincing that many would-be readers have picked them up for a browse. Her skilfully rendered copies are the end product of a process that entails finding books whose dimensions are an exact match for small blank canvases. Partheniou, who rarely reads the source book, says, "It's key to the project that I judge a book by its cover." Though, she admits, "Of course, I occasionally get drawn in."

Quebec City painter Paul Béliveau is also devoting his studio time to the look of books. His oversized pop canvases depict invented book covers and spines whose titles are often extrapolated from existing expressions. The subjects of the books range from history to philosophy to even art itself, another playful nod to the art-book connection. Poetically,

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