

The Desk Set  
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## Librarian in the Spotlight: Andrew Beccone

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For this week's *Librarian in the Spotlight* I interviewed Andrew Beccone, founder and librarian of the Reanimation Library. In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention that Andrew and I have co-presented on several panels, and although I couldn't necessarily answer these questions for him, I am shining a light on a friend. A cool friend:

Andrew received his MILS from Pratt Institute in 2005. He is the son of a librarian, has played drums in rock bands, and is interested in art and the cultural history of appropriation. The Reanimation Library is an initiative that seeks to facilitate the production of creative works by offering a collection that "promote[s] reflection and research into the historical, legal, and methodological questions surrounding the adaptive reuse of found materials." It can be visited during select hours at 543 Union Street.

**So the Reanimation Library idea was born out of this one amazing book you found while working at the Minnesota State Legislative Reference Library, right? What was the book again?**

I worked at the LRL for just under 8 years. During that time I made a tremendous number of images by locating visual material in the library and then manipulating that material with a photocopier. While the LRL has quite an interesting collection, it's not a particularly rich visual resource. Sometime in 2001, during the last year that I worked at the library, I was at a Goodwill in St. Paul when I came across a book published in 1958 called *The Behavior of Man: An Introduction to Psychology*. Essentially it's an undergraduate college text, but it is superbly and bizarrely illustrated with all kinds of diagrams and scenarios that attempt to convey various psychological principles. I was immediately captivated. I carried it around with me for weeks and showed it to anyone that was interested. While the collection has grown to over 900 volumes, *The Behavior of Man* remains a highlight.

**And did you start collecting material right after that—when did the physical library come into being?**

Buying that book was completely transformative for me. I became obsessed with locating and acquiring strange, image-heavy, utilitarian books – science texts, how-to books, technical manuals. I was – and remain – primarily interested in images and other visual material, so I started hunting for books of this nature at thrift stores, garage sales, and

library sales. I'm not particularly interested in collecting art books, but rather in books that can be used to make art. This grew out of my own art-making endeavors and I initially intended the collection to be a personal resource. It took me a little while to realize that I could build a collection that was more suited to my own aesthetic interests rather than relying on the text-heavy collection of the LRL.

After about a year of collecting I realized that the project would become far more interesting if it was opened up to other people – if it became a public library. This idea came to me sometime in 2002 when I had probably only 40-50 books, so I'm sure that it seemed rather absurd to people when I started telling them that I was going to start a library. I mean, these were cool books, but people have certain expectations of scale when they hear the word "library." Regardless, I think I saw a tremendous amount of potential for creative and adaptive reuse of the material that I was collecting and my instinct was that there would be other people who would be attracted to working with the library's collection. It's hard to say when it "became" a library. For a few years it lived with me in both Minneapolis and then, briefly, Albuquerque. I moved to Brooklyn in 2003 to go to Pratt SILS and that's when I really started developing the project (despite, not because of my experience in library school). In 2006 I had moved it into Proteus Gowanus to be a part of the library exhibition and then in 2007, I rented a space within Proteus Gowanus to house the collection. It has been there ever since. So it has taken awhile to become the publically accessible resource that it is today.

**How many visitors do you get a week (or month)? How do people primarily use/interact with the collection when they visit 543 Union?**

It completely depends. We're open Thursdays and Fridays from 3-6 and Saturdays and Sundays from 12-6. Weekends tend to be much busier in general. Lately Proteus Gowanus and the many projects that are housed there (which, in addition to the Reanimation Library, include Morbid Anatomy Library, Observatory, Fixer's Collective and Proteotypes) have been getting a lot of press. Some of this has to do with the Gowanus Canal becoming a Superfund site. But each time there is a mention in the Times or Time Out, there is an influx of people. Time Out wrote about Observatory two weeks ago and the following weekend was a madhouse. Some Saturdays are a steady flow – maybe 15-20 will come through. Sometimes no one visits. When they do, though, often they come to learn more about it, although there are definitely people who visit because they have projects in mind. My favorite visitor, however, is the one who has no idea what the place is and then, right after their mind is blown, they sit down and get to work. Occasionally people will walk in and stay for hours, scanning images for projects that they are working on. My favorite question is "Can I actually use these books?" Yes, you certainly can. That's what they're there for.

**Some changes have taken effect since this library's first incarnation, for example, you've started to do events, expanded your space and the collection itself. What are your goals moving forward?**

While there have been identifiable stages of development that the library has gone through, I would hesitate to call them incarnations. I have always been interested in using the library as a platform to create events and as a catalyst for the production of art or writing, or other creative projects. From the start, I anticipated that the library would unfold into many different forms and exist in many different worlds. I think what has been happening more recently is that some of these ideas have finally begun to emerge. This is very exciting for me because in a sense it is a confirmation that the work that has gone into assembling the library has been worthwhile and that it has begun to produce really interesting possibilities and scenarios.

Looking forward, I am going to continue to create "branch" libraries, which are temporary, site-specific manifestations of the library in other locations. The first branch, Center City, took place last August at Vox Populi in Philadelphia. Two more branches are planned this fall – one at Space in London and one at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA. With these, I'm interested in creating a kind of hybrid space that combines elements of art gallery, library and work/studio space. The idea is to create an environment where work that has been created from the library is displayed alongside a collection of books (usually gathered from local sources) and where work can continue to be produced with the aid of imaging equipment like photocopiers and scanners.

But this is just one way to pursue further work with the library. The exciting thing about the Reanimation Library is that it will inevitably continue to take on new forms and facilitate new projects, most of which I haven't even conceived of yet. The collaborative approach almost ensures that someone will come to me with an idea that I would have never thought of on my own. The fact that the library continues to grow and change over time is really what keeps my interest in it alive.

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