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The ICU of forgotten books

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The Reanimation Library project moves with enviable fluidity between two bodies of water: print and digital. Between the library itself and an online archive open to anyone who'd like to browse or use one of its incredible images, librarian Andrew Beccone's project began ten years ago when he started rescuing books with curious visual content from their fate in trash can fires.

In recent days, that work has reached a particular high point: dozens of boxes of books have left their small home in Brooklyn to move to the MoMA, where the library's contents form part of the work space Print Studio, a program taking place in conjunction with the exhibit Print/Out that opens this weekend with works by Ai Weiwei, Ellen Gallagher, Martin Kippenberger, Lucy McKenzie, Museum in progress, Editions Jacob Samuel and Thomas Schütte.

In this way, Beccone's modest collection has been transformed into raw work-study materials, or, better yet, compelling evidence that print continues to be a limitless source of beauty and surprise. "I started the collection when I became aware of the number of books that nobody wanted but that had stunning images," he explains. "They were books with no economic value but with obvious cultural value in their illustrations. Little by little I began gathering up what other people were throwing away."

And the trash, that inexhaustible receptacle of cultural heritage, was a real threat to fascinating books that were being abandoned, neglected, dismissed and forgotten. Books about mammals, about mollusks, about sex, about all of those things together (*Sex lives of animals without backbones*), botany books, science, cooking ... Beccone has some 1,500 volumes for people to resource, photocopy, or simply look at. They are also classified, catalogued and flourishing on the web. One can view select pages of books that may have lost their original relevance but whose images come to life again as artistic material.

So even though nobody's actually interested in *10 Secrets of Bowling*, many will marvel at the images in this book by Don Carter illustrated by Anthony Ravielli and published in 1963 by The Viking Press (New York). Or page (or click) through illustrations of the bodies of bats as they were seen in 1968 in a general interest book by Random House entitled *Bats: Wings in the Night*. Or the frame of an airplane in another 1960's jewel: *747: Story of the Super Jet*. The titles abound: from a Hawaiian cookbook to *A Basic Course in American Sign*

Language, Flying Birds or *The Best Loved Trees of America*. In all of them, out-dated images (naïve, delightful and exquisitely simple) show us a world that considered itself very grown-up when in truth it was no more than a confused adolescent, and what our world really was like not so long ago. “We scan a few images from each book, record them and catalogue them by subject. We have real wonders, really fascinating books on science, sports, medicine. It’s an endless project. We’re getting more and more books, and the idea is that the library will continue to grow indefinitely.”

For now, the contents fit inside the 70 boxes that have arrived at the MoMA from Brooklyn. “We even sent the shelves because they wanted to reproduce the library exactly as it is.” For Beccone, guerilla libraries like his (“or microlibraries”, he says) have a better future than is presaged. “The problem is that a lot of librarians have felt threatened by the internet, but that hasn’t been my experience. I’m equally comfortable in both contexts, one doesn’t have to be replaced by the other. They’re going to have to get along.”

[http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/02/17/actualidad/1329508489_054744.html]