

“Dada Unshelved: Exhibiting Dada Publications in 1978”

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In 1978, two exhibitions “unshelved” Dada by bringing publications such as *Der Dada*, *The Blind Man*, and *Dada Almanach* out of libraries, archives, and private collections to put them on display in public museums. *Dada and Surrealism, Reviewed* curated by Dawn Ades and David Sylvester at London’s Hayward Gallery and *Dada Artifacts* organized by Stephen Foster with Rudolf Kuenzli at the University of Iowa Museum of Art (Iowa City) both installed the Dadas’ groundbreaking journals and books alongside singular works of art. Although different in scope, character, and design, these two events nevertheless created a shift in the way museums in the English-speaking context typically defined Dada’s transdisciplinary activities—primarily as paintings, collages, and assemblages, in short, as valuable objects legible as “art” to museum audiences. This paper examines three interrelated developments in the unique context of the late 1970s in the US and the UK that can inform our understanding of these innovative displays of Dada: the growing accessibility of Dada texts through their publication in English translation; the development and increasing institutionalization of countercultural artists’ books, magazines, multiples, and ephemera within the practice and study of the visual arts; and the reconceptualization of art exhibitions as “information” or “technology,” a shift that would catalyze a future re-authoring of exhibition practice in the digital age. An analysis of these two events in 1978 also asks us to consider the ways the “unshelving” of Dada publications in the museum and beyond affect our understanding of Dada’s history and its contemporary influence.