

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

The Power of the Archive

by [Patrick Neal](#) on November 9, 2012



Dylan Stone, "100 Years of Personal Pocket Diaries, 100 Years of Receipts and Invoices, 100 years of Printed Programmes" (2012)
(All photos courtesy of Ruth Phaneuf Fine Arts except where indicated)

Once acquainted with the work of the conceptualist, Dylan Stone, one becomes drawn into the world of his art-making. In different projects, he has revisited some of the same interests, including the cataloging and documentation of books, urban architecture, and streets. His work often considers the past, including his own biographical events as well as the happenings of more distant centuries. He seems equally interested in methods of taxonomy as in the libraries and museums that make that process their business.

Stone's work is expansive, with multiple strategies going on at once. The more one involves oneself in his various projects, the more the disparate aspects begin to add up. For past exhibits, he created a wall-size watercolor painting reproducing in painstaking detail all the volumes from his parents' bookshelf. In another, he photographed all of the street blocks in New York City below Canal Street, collecting cheap, drugstore-developed photos and archiving them in museum-quality wooden boxes. Stone collects paraphernalia throughout his life, saving the material for an appropriate project. His work shares the obsessive craftsmanship found in [Andrew Raftery's](#) etchings, the elegant interplay of the literary and visual in [Erica Baum's](#) photos, and the conceptual archiving of [Bas Jan Ader](#).



“100 Years of Personal Pocket Diaries, 100 Years of Receipts and Invoices, 100 Years of Printed Programmes,” (Installation view)

For his show at **Phaneuf**, titled *100 Years of Personal Pocket Diaries, 100 Years of Receipts and Invoices, 100 Years of Printed Programmes*, Stone has arranged two rows of narrow sawhorses down the center of the gallery. Atop these, beginning with the year 1900 and continuing on to 2000, he has placed small pocket diaries, at least one for every year. Acquired from eBay, book dealers, and flea markets in London, several of these ledgers lay open to be read while most are closed, visible as attractive miniatures with titles like *The Sailors & Soldiers Own Diaries* (1920), *Westinghouse Notes & Data* (1959), *Top Notch Trouser Makers* (1905). A few are Stone’s own diaries covering the years 1995 and 2000. It is difficult not to be drawn in by the tiny cursive handwriting opening into personal narratives:

1906, February: “I felt rather lonely this morning when I got up out of bed. It seemed funny not to hurry away early to get buckwheat cakes made.”

1921, November: “Snowy. Ruscha & I ate Thanksgiving alone.”

1928, Vendredi 24 – S. Mathias: “Got back our Geometry papers, our 5th... with 65%, better than I expected...”



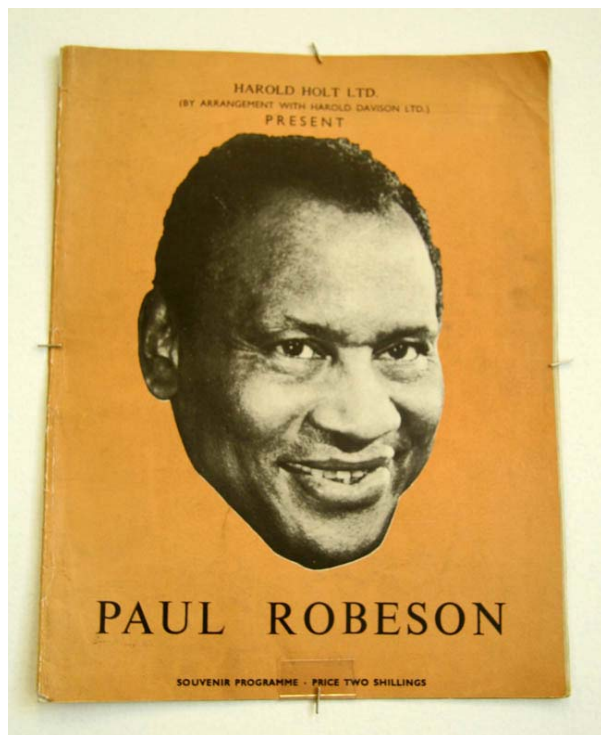
Exhibit pamphlets, performance playbills, and other cultural detritus

On two side walls of the gallery, flanking the wooden stands, are complimentary literature similarly arranged year-by-year throughout the 20th century. The left wall holds cultural keepsakes: theater playbills, art exhibit monographs, cinema show times, and music hall acts. These are original programs advertising events such as Gate Two Cinema Russel Square's showtimes in 1979, featuring the movie *Tommy*; Down District Asylum Xmas and New Year Programme 1913-14; BBC Riding Club Horse Show and Gymkhana 1957; and Robert Frank: Moving Out, The Whitney Museum of American Art 1996.



Receipts and invoices

The right wall is plastered with invoices from Britain, France and Germany for such goods and services as Removal & Storage, Groceries, Shoe Cream, Builders & Decorators, Fresh & Refrigerated, Fish Transport, and so on. These bills are sensually rich, made of colored papers of different weights, ruled in all sorts of ways with varied fonts and stamps. They range from eccentric, calligraphic handwriting to modern computerized digits; many of the early invoices depict etched logos, insignia, and delicate hatched line drawings scrawled with colored pencil, marker and pen. There are a few blank spaces on the walls indicating missing invoices, particularly around 1972, 73, and 75. One letterhead from the Sue Ryder Home for the Sick and Disabled in 1992 reads, "My husband bore his suffering courageously and nursing him was a great privilege."



A collected playbill (Photo by the author for Hyperallergic.)

Looking through these three sets of seemingly disconnected printed matter, the mind forms associations. Personal information swims in the mind; a house is being built, a relative is dying, someone is traveling, someone is sick, there is a performance in the evening, the weather is bad, life is humdrum, a war is about to break out.

One begins contemplating the ordering systems we all employ to organize our lives — the habits and sensibilities we rely on to throw into relief our own existences. Reading through the exhibit, we see this in front of us through others' reliance on ruled ledgers and charts, but also in the routines they give themselves, from making breakfast, setting appointments, and the crafts and studies they will undertake to the evening's entertainment and current climate conditions. Looking at all of this, I thought of the day planners my accountant suggested I keep, necessary for tracking art-related business at tax time. Twelve years later, piled up and marking important events in my life, they could now form the potential outline for a novel. Likewise, Stone's project becomes a fascinating account of how we mark the transience of time.

Some of the meaning inherent in *100 Years*, and in all of Stone's work, is what happens offstage. Businesses or institutions contribute what they will to an artistic project. The reality of life asserts itself: an invoice can't be located, a building is demolished, or a clerk's inventory is limited. For a visitor arriving at Phaneuf Gallery and seeing the accumulation of all this literature, the exhibition becomes something of a slow-burn event. Considering what has gone into amassing the quantity, you are goaded to think about the production and its ramifications both for the artist and other

inhabitants of the world, all the while delighting in the visual ephemera before your eyes. The idea surfaces that this may not be the culmination of a project, but one that could continue and broaden in a different context.



The Sailors and Soldiers Own Diary (Photo by the author for Hyperallergic.)

The installation scrambles one's sense of past and future. It's easy nowadays to access the most obscure materials by way of online search engines, but once the physical property is in front of you, as it is here, in glorious smells, colors, and textures, one undergoes a unique physical experience — an exhilarating sense of displacement. I considered how the world is becoming increasingly virtual, and the danger of losing tactile, sensual experiences. We read books on Kindles and fear our lives are invisible if we don't blog about them. I was reminded of Robert Rosenblum's *1900: Art at the Crossroads* exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum several years ago. A show that threw together all painting and sculpture from that period into a stew of the good, bad and ugly, it left us to reconsider our likes and dislikes. An experience that drew on parallels with our own pluralistic times. In Stone's installation, we have the entire 20th century laid out on a day to day basis in a similarly non-judgmental manner.



Handsome Soldiers With and Without Mustaches (Photo by the author for Hyperallergic.)

There are a few other peripheral works in the gallery. These include graphite drawings of [The Albert Memorial](#) rendered from four sides and two different sizes and a photo diptych “Handsome Soldiers With Mustaches” and “Handsome Soldiers Without Mustaches” which capture exactly that. These make for pleasing juxtapositions, throwing light on the larger installation and creating a bit of ambiance. Be sure to notice an encyclopedic set of bins labeled “My Father’s Newspaper Clippings On Art & Artists For Me.” These contain art reviews and articles Stone’s father sent him while the artist was away at art school arranged alphabetically by artist or museum/gallery name. This could be the beginning of an archive likely to grow and re-emerge in a future venue.

Dylan Stone’s 100 Years of Personal Pocket Diaries, 100 Years of Receipts and Invoices, 100 years of Printed Programmes runs through December 16 at [Ruth Phaneuf Fine Arts](#) (1061 Jackson Avenue, Long Island City).

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