



Robert Barry

Art Lovers

Robert Barry was interviewed in Brussels, on the 22nd of March 2006 by Vera Kotaji, pp. Michèle Didier*

*Obligatory mention: © Vera Kotaji pp. Michèle Didier

About *Art Lovers* by Robert Barry

The book *Art Lovers* by Robert Barry is a continuation of the artist's work. Robert Barry has always used different kinds of media, including books, which have become highly significant both as artwork and as artists' books.

Robert Barry: *«I like books. I like the idea of holding them and turning pages. It creates a physical experience, a personal time. The artist book is about being a book. It is about turning pages, going back and forth and controlling time and space. It is like a wall, a gallery, a frame or a video. It is a possibility to do art. Of course, most of the books are used for reading text and my text is not a traditional text because these are not words which are meant to be information».*

Art Lovers is an unbound book of 72 plates. Each plate superimposes two layers: a photographic portrait and a word outline cut into a black surface. The portrait is covered by the black layer turning the opening made by the word into a keyhole. If we go back to «Belmont, 1967» published in 1977, one of Robert Barry's most «narrative» books and a tribute to Ad Reinhardt, we find the same sense of mystery, the same idea of a hole in a black surface acting as a window onto a face, without comments or explanation. In *Art Lovers*, the mystery is even greater. The viewer can barely see the portraits and has to infer their subjects from a few sparse and vague elements. The 31 «*Art Lovers*» in question were photographed by Robert Barry himself and are friends of his. Artists, gallerists, critics, collectors and curators such as Sol Lewitt, Jonathan Monk, Leo Castelli, Yvon Lambert, Anne Rorimer and René Denizot are hidden «through» the words. They are there but it is impossible to identify them.

Robert Barry: *«I wanted to create a sort of mystery within a portrait book. I want people to know that there is something there, that there is someone there. And I want the people not to be really sure of what it is. Sometimes it is just textures, light and darkness. I want people to look very closely so that they can find some sense. But even if they don't find some, it is okay. I want a feeling that something is there that is not really showing. The word in a way exposes a part of the reality of that face, but without really knowing everything. If we see a classic portrait of a stranger or well-known person, we don't know anything about the person. You really don't know who that person is. The photograph portrait does not reveal what a person is. There is quite a mystery in the question of what people are».*

Each word corresponds to a single person but the connection between the two doesn't exist. Although words like *illusion*, *disturb*, *inevitable*, *alone*, *reason* cannot help but be evocative, they are not meant to indicate something about the image they are associated with, that is to say, with the person represented.

Robert Barry: *«I don't think that there is that kind of relationship that we could normally find. I don't like the idea of captions. I don't like the idea that somehow these words might define that person. I place words that I thought might expose a part of the face that I want to show. Any word can be associated with any picture. There is no specific relationship between the picture and the word. I don't want it to be read as a typical kind of «word-picture» relationship. They are separate things and I don't think of it in that traditional way as a comment on the person, on the personality. Word and image work together aesthetically, not as a poetical or personal comment on the person».*

The positional axes of the words vary from one plate to another. The word is carefully placed «at random» on the square plate. *Art Lovers* is a book of words and images in the purest sense. Words and images are indeed intermixed, both literally and mentally. In Robert Barry's first books, words were centered on the pages (It is...it isn't..., Paris, Yvon Lambert, 1972). Later, they began to «move», as they did in the wallpieces, vertically, horizontally or diagonally and sometimes upside down (*Come On*, Imschoot, 1987). Words are sometimes cut by the edge of the page, defining space just as a wall or a screen would. Within that range of ideas, we can also establish a connection between the *Art Lovers* black back-of-pages and the black slides projected between words in artists' slide shows in the 70's.

By definition, the book generates a continuous flow of meaning, derived from a set of distinct elements. *Art Lovers* brings together different issues characteristic of Robert Barry's whole work. According to the artist, «... there is a dimension in visual art which is not visible.» In fact, this «hidden aspect of art» is «luminously» incarnated here.

Robert Barry
Art Lovers

Specifications

- 27,6 cm x 27,6 cm
- 72 pages
- Paper: Hello Silk 250 g
- The slipcase is made of laminated coated paper 115 g mounted on cardboard 1.7, and measures 28,8 x 28,8 x 2,5 cm
- Printing by Arte-Print, Brussels
- Binding by Trehout, Estaimpuis

Production

- Limited edition of 270 numbered copies and 30 A.P.

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