



We blogged about the artist Brian Dettmer back in 2009, and were thrilled to hear that his work would be appearing in a new exhibit called “The Book: A Contemporary View” at The Delaware Center for Contemporary Art through April 17th. As a child, Dettmer loved to draw and paint. “I also had a dictionary,” he told me, “that I hollowed out like they did in the Warner Brothers cartoons to hide things, but I had nothing to hide, so I would make up fake codes and pseudo-detective gadgets to conceal.” Little did little Dettmer know, but book-sculpting would become a profitable endeavor! Today, his sculptures range from four thousand dollars for the smaller, single-book pieces to thirty thousand for larger, more involved pieces.

How does he do it? He seals the edges of actual books (nothing antiquarian or irreplaceable), like medical guides, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and wallpaper sample books, and with an X-acto knife, tweezers, scalpel, clamps, or some other precise tool, carves holes and patterns around select words (“is the mystery referred to at the beginning of”) and images (a walrus! Queen Elizabeth!) inside. As he slices away, he stabilizes the remaining pages with a varnish. He never knows what words or images will come next. He calls his process reading, “but in a visual and visceral way.” He said no one has disapproved of his art in person, other than one bookseller who owned his work. “I couldn’t figure that

out,” he said. “It is usually librarians, authors, and booksellers (with the one exception) that come to my defense because they see what happens to books everyday and acknowledge that they are mass-produced objects and that I put enough time into the work to illustrate my reverence for the material.”

(“War Through the Ages,” courtesy of Brian Dettmer.)