

Ideal Syllabus: Janice Kerbel

In an ongoing series, *frieze* asks an artist to list the books that have influenced them

Janice Kerbel is a Canadian artist living in London. Her work has been exhibited widely in Europe, North America and the UK. Often inhabiting the form of plans, her work proposes Utopian possibilities by imagining them free from practical and ideological constraints. Nick Silver Can't Sleep: A Radio Play for Insomniacs, was produced by Artangel and broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in 2006, and her work Remarkable was included as part of the 2007 Frieze Art Fair Projects. She is currently working on Ballgame, a 'script for a perfectly average baseball game', and has shows coming up at the European Kunstballe, Cologne, Galerie Karin Guenther, Hamburg, and greengrassi, London.

Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*

(Penguin, London, 1999; first published 1951)

An austere, lyrical and perfectly triangular tale of a misanthrope, a hunchback and a brute, it delicately examines how love is a force that exists beyond the rational.

Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

(Penguin, London, 2003; first published 1856)

Flaubert wanted his novel to be 'as rhythmical as verse and as precise as the language of science': the pinnacle of realism where every detail is of equal value and there are no real villains.

Don DeLillo, *Underworld*, 'Prologue: The Triumph of Death'

(Picador, London, 1997)

A long, single, magnificent breath tracing the journey of a baseball.

H.A. Rey, *The Stars: A New Way to See Them*

(Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 2008; first published 1952)

Best known as the author of *Curious George* (1941), Rey redrew the universal constellations to make them more identifiable to the casual stargazer. By reconnecting the stars in each constellation, Rey made them more depictive of their common English names (Twins, Great Bear, etc.) and easier to find in the night sky. Brilliantly illustrated, Rey's inventive system has become widely adopted as an alternative to more conventional designations.

Patricia Highsmith, *The Complete Ripley Novels*

(W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 2008; first published individually 1955, 1970, 1974, 1980, 1991)

Five novels, best read in order, chronicling the inexhaustible crimes of Tom Ripley. Pure, unapologetic and pleasurable.

Lewis Hyde, *The Gift*

(Canongate Books, Edinburgh, 2007; first published 1983)

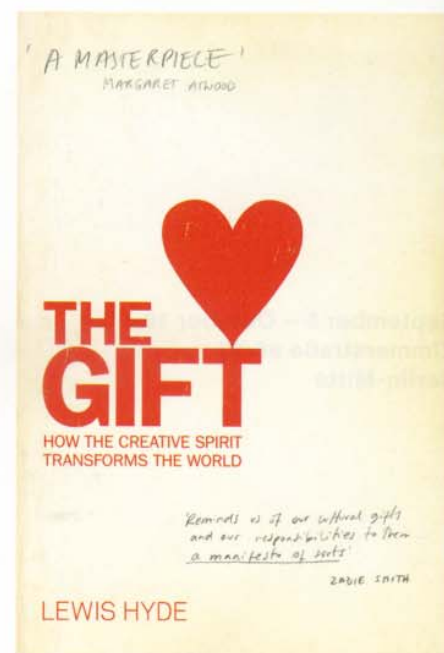
'A work of art can survive without the market, but where there is no gift, there is no art.' Compassionate defence of the value of creativity and its place in a world increasingly governed by capital. Reminds us that not only is creativity still possible, but that it will always be a political, essential and natural form of exchange.



Carson McCullers
1961



Emily Dickinson
c. 1850



Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*

(ed. Thomas H. Johnson, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1955)

Only six of Dickinson's profoundly intuitive poems were published during her lifetime. The full collection was printed for the first time in 1955, and contained all the poems' typographic eccentricities. Always surprising, like the first time you read a poem that does not rhyme but sings.

George Sand, *Laura: A Journey Into the Crystal*

(Pushkin Press, London, 2006; first published 1864)

Cracked geodes. Circular waterfalls. Eskimos on sleds crossing polar seas. An extraordinary visual experience in the form of an impossible love story that consistently defies its own description. A meditation on beauty told through a fascination with form.

Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*

(Penguin Classics, London, 1993)

Responsible for the familiar form of the discursive essay, Montaigne considered himself his only subject. Produced out of solitary introspection and unconfined in the range of their observations, the essays read as eccentric inquiries into topics as diverse as 'The Inconsistency of Our Actions', 'Various Outcomes of the Same Plan', 'Of Solitude', 'Of Cannibalism' and 'Of the Custom of Wearing Clothes'. Habitually having left his house open on principle, Montaigne combines an understanding of the human potential for destruction with a belief in the capacity for honesty and compassion.

Edgar Allan Poe, *Eureka: A Prose Poem*

(Hesperus Press, London, 2002; first published 1848)

Subtitled 'An Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe' and adapted from a lengthy, sparsely attended lecture presented in 1848, *Eureka* is written in the voice of a man with the task of solving the mystery of the universe. An abstract poem derived from mathematical formulations, *Eureka* is arguably, awkwardly and equally both fiction and non-fiction.

William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*

(Penguin, London, 2007; first published 1918)

Commonly known as 'Strunk and White' or 'the little book', this tiny 85-page tome consists of the most basic rules of grammar and usage – Omit needless words! Be clear! – the value of which far exceeds its most obvious application.

Edith Wharton, *The Ghost-Feeler: Stories of Terror and the Supernatural*

(Peter Owen, London, 1996)

Wharton referred to some of these works, horror stories in the truest sense, as if written in 'one long shriek'. Though not as widely read as her novels chronicling the lives of New York's privileged class, these tales are just as fierce and unsentimental.

Richard Yates, *Revolutionary Road*

(Vintage, London, 2007; first published 1961)

Perfectly poised between hope and despair, this beautifully crafted novel tells the story of two ordinary people and the sadness inherent in dreams of escape. Each of Yates' seven novels and two collections of short stories fell out of print within a few years of his death in 1992, but have recently gained long-due recognition with a series of reprintings.



George Sand
1865



Michel de Montaigne c. 1580
c. 1900



Patricia Highsmith
1977