

Kyla Mallett: Marginalia

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British playwright Joe Orton first made his mark—literally—by inserting obscene words and images into library books. This outlandish yet oddly circumscribed form of rebellion got him thrown into jail on a charge of defacing public property. It also set the tone for his art's shocking opposition to establishment mores and institutions.

Kyla Mallett's *Marginalia* addresses a much milder impulse to insinuate an individual or alternative point of view into a text that culture and propriety have already nailed shut. The artist's project here has been to photograph the pages of "damaged" books from the Vancouver public library's collection. On view are selections from Klee Wyck, *Kids on the Brink*, *The Montreal Massacre*, *Paradise Lost*, and *The Bride & the Bachelors*. Each of Mallett's beautiful inkjet prints is mounted in a deep, dark frame, enhancing the impression of a museum or archival display. This is an extremely handsome show.

Damage to the books consists of readers' comments, underlining, asterisks, and exclamation marks, most written or drawn with pencil, some with ink or highlighter, directly onto the page. (A few comments are inscribed on heart-shaped Post-it Notes.) What's documented here is not so much random acts of vandalism as responses to the texts under consideration. Some examples: "Think about light and/or darkness" from Klee Wyck; "The masculine media defined the event" from *The Montreal Massacre*; and, from *Paradise Lost*, "Lust not sex is sin," "Adam talks to Eve with Respect," and "God was omniscient [sic]." As the exhibition's statement suggests, a dialogue is established between the author of each book and the unidentified reader.

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The recording of individual voices, especially those of teenage girls and young women, has been an important element of Mallett's art in the past. In this exhibition, the handwriting, punctuation, and Post-its suggest that, again, young women may be the authors of these impromptu messages. Still, despite the show's assertion of the "unsanctioned", "unruly", and "transgressive" nature of the dialogue, most of the notes and comments are nonradical and nonoppositional, almost as if they'd been dictated by teachers. Neither the antic rebellion of Orton nor the energy, anger, and camaraderie of women's washroom graffiti are to be found here. The form of the damage may be antisocial but, on the whole, the content is not.

Still, it's an intriguing visit to a place where minds are grappling, through their interpretations of an eclectic group of books, with finding a place in the world. And, somewhere down a long line of library loans, their own voice.

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