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ARTICLES

## From a Beirut Lit Journal to a Kim Kardashian Tabloid, Highlights from BABZ Fair 2017

In a new space for its fifth edition, the art book and zine fair renewed its focus on independent publishers and had a strong community ethos.

Megan N. Liberty | June 5, 2017



A view of the BABZ Fair 2017 (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

It was 70 degrees and sunny. Visitors who had walked the 17 minutes from the L train, waited for the free shuttle bus, or avoided public transportation altogether by riding their bikes streamed through the parking lot and into the light-filled, high-ceilinged, formerly industrial brick building that housed this past weekend's [BABZ Fair](#) (formerly the Bushwick Art Book and Zine Fair). In its fifth year, BABZ crossed the borough border to set up at the Knockdown Center in Queens, and though the venue is a bit off the beaten path, it was worth the trek. Organized by [Blonde Art Books](#), the fair featured a range of small presses concentrating primarily on poetry and art, reading spaces, and zinesters, in addition to an ambitious two-day schedule of programming.

We're living in a moment of high interest in book fairs, especially art book fairs, and it's not always clear what newer events have to offer. Although I enjoyed past editions of BABZ at its previous location, Bushwick's SIGNAL gallery, a much smaller venue with little to no natural light, it looks as though the Knockdown Center holds part of the answer. BABZ isn't alone in emphasizing small presses and independent publishers and makers, but many other book fairs section off their exhibitors; [Printed Matter's NY Art Book Fair](#), for example, has grown in size so much that it places the zines in an outdoor tent, the small presses in another room, and the vanity presses in yet another. Walking into BABZ, I encountered three established Brooklyn-based literary presses in a row — [Ugly Ducking Presse](#), [Litmus Press](#), and [Belladonna Series](#) — followed by [#Blkgirlsworld Zine](#), a women-run zine/Tumblr celebrating metal and Afropunk, and the feminist publication [Ginger Magazine](#). The grouping placed bound poetry collections and letterpress broadsides in conversation with stapled zines, brightly colored risograph posters, and glossy magazines. Due to the size and limitations of space, most fairs don't allow for such fruitful juxtapositions between exhibitors. The vast openness of the Knockdown Center meant that nothing was really cordoned off from anything else. The programming occurred in a large, open room connected to the main space, with bean-bag chairs scattered across the floor and picnic tables for visitors to eat or work on laptops. There was one room with a closed door where more formal panels took place, but even that maintained the casual community ethos of the entire fair.



Participants during the "Artist-Run Reading Spaces" panel on June 4

Browsing the tables, I thought about what brings people to books and publishing in the first place: community, exchange, and a desire to share, themes that are often overshadowed by the necessary commercialism of retail. This tension was explored in one of the programs I attended (in the closed-door room), about artist-run reading spaces, with presentations by and a dialogue between the organizers of [Ulises](#) (Philadelphia), [Wendy's Subway](#) (Brooklyn), [Dispersed Holdings](#) (Manhattan), [Press Press](#) (Baltimore), and [Brown Paper Zine Fair/3 Dot Zine](#) (Brooklyn). Each one, in their own way, articulated the nexus that book spaces present between libraries and stores, by fostering community while still developing a sustainable business model and producing books and other projects for sale (or exchange).

Presumably, the hope of any fair is to be so successful that it must expand, as the NY Art Book Fair and many others have. My hope for BABZ is that, as it grows, it holds fast to the community ethos so strongly present at the Knockdown Center this year — that it remains a space to explore the sociability of books, which is often what draws artists and readers to the form in the first place.

Below are some of the tables, books, prints, and swag that caught my eye at BABZ Fair 2017, reminding me of the wonderful diversity and spunk publishing can have.



Artists Amber Eve Anderson and Josh Sender manned the table for [CTRL+P](#), whose tagline is "poetic interventions in the digital realm."



Among their offerings was [A.F. Oehmke's](#) fake tabloid magazine on Kim Kardashian West, including an essay on KKW's rise to fame, cultivation of social media, and broader cultural influence. At \$4.99, I had to get two.

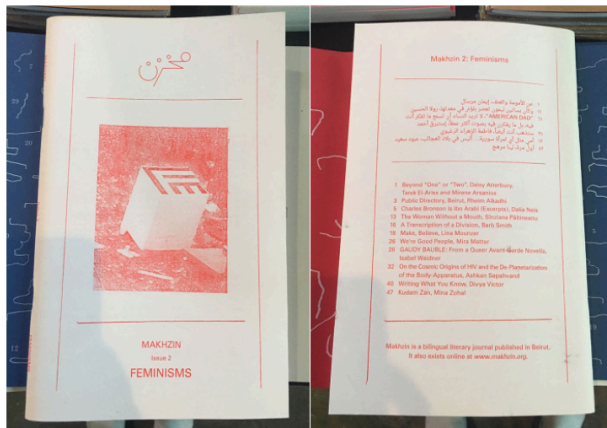




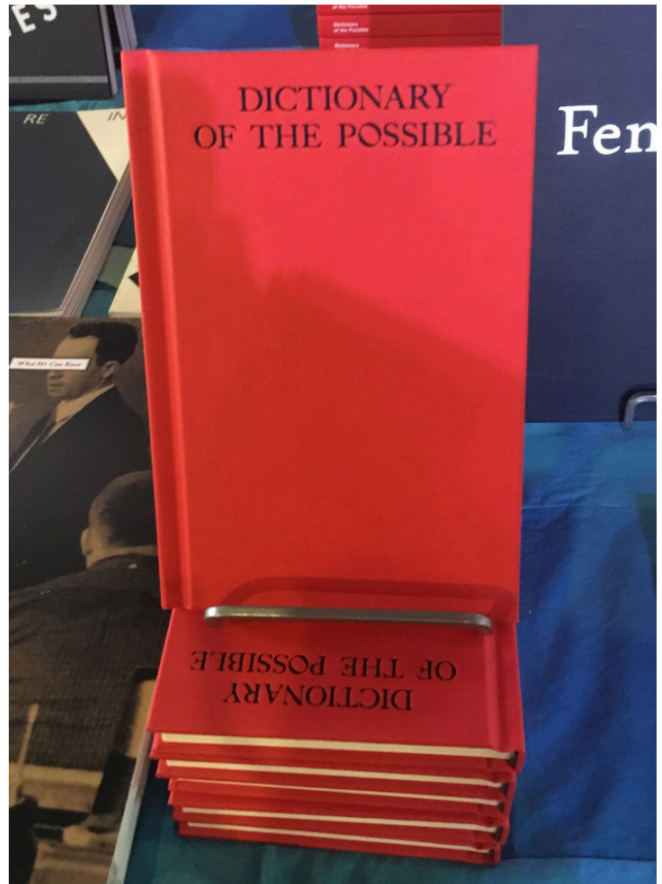
Founded by Sreshta Rit Premnath (who goes by Rit), *Shifter* is a serial publication in which each issue takes a totally different form.



The Bushwick-based library/writing space Wendy's Subway hosts programming at home and travels abroad to promote international connections and bilingual publishing projects.



I wish I'd bought a copy of *Makhzin*, a Beirut-based bilingual literary journal brought by Wendy's Subway. The current issue on feminism had sold out by the end of the fair, before I decided to go back and get it.



Issue 22 of *Shifter*, *Dictionary of the Possible*, caught my eye based on its hopeful title and slim, minimal design. The book documents a series of conversations that took place in person and in a Google Doc, each focused on dissecting a specific word. The first word examined was "avant-garde."



Montez Press brought *Interjection Calendar*, a prime example of the web-print/print-web book trend that I'm currently very excited about.

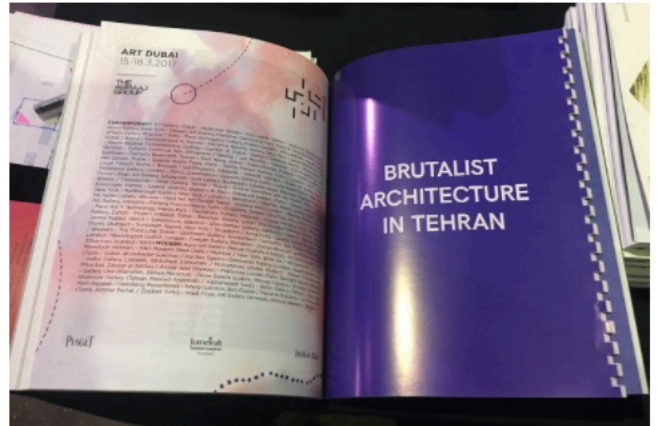




La Liga Zine table with matches saying, “U.S. presidents are war criminals” and “deport politicians not farm workers”



The tagline of *Brownbook*, a bimonthly magazine based in Dubai, is “an urban guide to the Middle East.”



Each issue of *Brownbook* explores a theme of life in the region. I was drawn to the issue on Brutalist architecture in Tehran, which incorporated architectural elements into the design of the magazine, including blocky, scalloped page edges, geometric inserts, and fold-out posters.

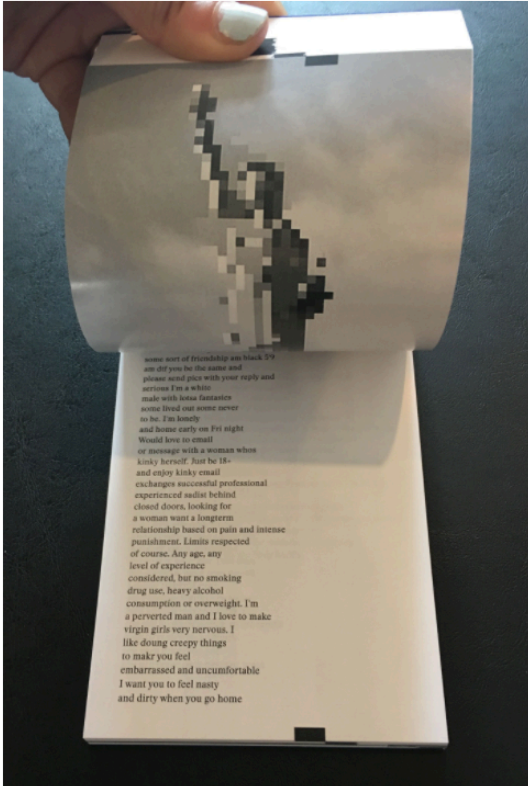


3 Dot Zine’s table with the postcard version of a street artwork by Alexandra Bell, “A Teenager With Promise”



The table of *Passenger Pigeon Press*, run by artist Tammy Nguyen





Each issue of *Interjection Calendar* is built over a calendar year, with one contribution uploaded as a free PDF per month. The issue is free online until the end of the year, at which point it's taken offline and made into a book. The 2017 issue is [online now](#).



Endless Editions, with artist Paul John



#Blkgirlsworld Zine table



Press Press's table showcased the range of projects made in its workspace, which runs on the exchange economy: artists and zinesters can trade services such as running a program or watching the space for a day for the use of Press Press's resources.



Books and ephemera at the Dispersed Holdings table



Draw Down table





Artist [Matthew Scott Gualco](#)'s table with "ArtBae" swag

*The [BABZ Fair 2017](#) took place at the Knockdown Center (52-19 Flushing Avenue, Maspeth, Queens) on June 3-4.*