

## J.J. KEGAN MCFADDEN: Review of Cathy Busby's *Steve's Vinyl* (Pile Driver Editions / Visual AIDS 2013)

An artistbook is a curious thing. Like the best of contemporary art, it breaks the rules and defies limitation. It is not a catalogue though at times it stems from an exhibition or event. It is not a monograph though it has been known to include essays or other exploratory texts. It might reproduce artwork or become the artwork itself. In the case of Cathy Busby's latest artistbook, *Steve's Vinyl*, all of the above is true.

As a visual artist whose practice is fueled by research, Busby has always included printed matter as part of her installations, if not as stand-alone works. *Steve's Vinyl* documents a participatory art event at the Khyber Centre for the Arts in Halifax for World AIDS Day 2011, but it acts as more than a factual account of what transpired. Between the glossy full-colour pages, the reader encounters a history that echoes many other histories over the last thirty years of the survivors, those left to deal with the deaths of their lovers, friends, and family.

In 1993 Steve, Cathy's brother, died of AIDS-related illnesses. Beyond their familial ties, he and Cathy shared a friendship galvanized through music, and so it was fitting she inherited his collection of some 200 record albums. Having moved with them around Canada over eighteen years, the artist finally devised the perfect

way to say goodbye. Instead of simply giving the collection away, she orchestrated a full-scale art installation and performance giveaway where the entire collection of records installed within floor-to-ceiling vertical bands of colour was systematically dispensed throughout the evening to an eager crowd, who, upon claiming their vinyl would leave a sketch or message in its place. In 2013, while she was based in Vancouver, Busby's artistbook took shape and has now been co-published by Emily Carr University's Pile Driver Editions and by Visual AIDS in New York, a not-for-profit organization that uses art to enact knowledge about the illness.

*Steve's Vinyl* transcends the pitfalls of so much "participatory art" because it is both event and book. I wasn't at the event, but I have the book. As it is a limited edition of 200 (the approximate number of albums in Steve's collection), there are dozens who participated in the event who won't ever see the book. (Of course, they have their vinyl and there were some real gems in Steve's collection!). Busby's project was "a tribute to Steve and his varied tastes in music, men, and identities, and a way of activating a collection as music and graphics. The collection became a time machine, a stimulant of memory and pleasure."

There are tender moments in Busby's recollections of her life growing up with Steve, as recounted in the personal essay that begins the book. In her own words, Busby saw her brother's selection of music as "autobiographical, a portrait made up his eclectic interests: Barbara Streisand and the divas; the Village People and gay celebration; music from France and Quebec and his francophone connection; Motown and his affinity with the civil rights movement; classical and his conservatory piano training." Just as we all share stories through music, the book includes firsthand accounts by revellers about the albums they scored that night and the thinking behind their selection. Funny, informative, and touching, these stories blend with those of Cathy and the brother she honours.