

Pati Hill: My old fur coat doesn't know me

Printed Matter, Inc.

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Printed Matter is pleased to present *Pati Hill: My old fur coat doesn't know me*, an exhibition exploring the publications and expansive photocopy practice of American writer and artist Pati Hill (1921–2014). This archival exhibition traces Hill's work over 40 years, featuring some of her most emblematic projects from the early 1970s onward. With an emphasis on artists' books and related working materials, the show puts on view original publications, mock-ups, manuscripts, and ephemera, much of which is being exhibited for the first time.

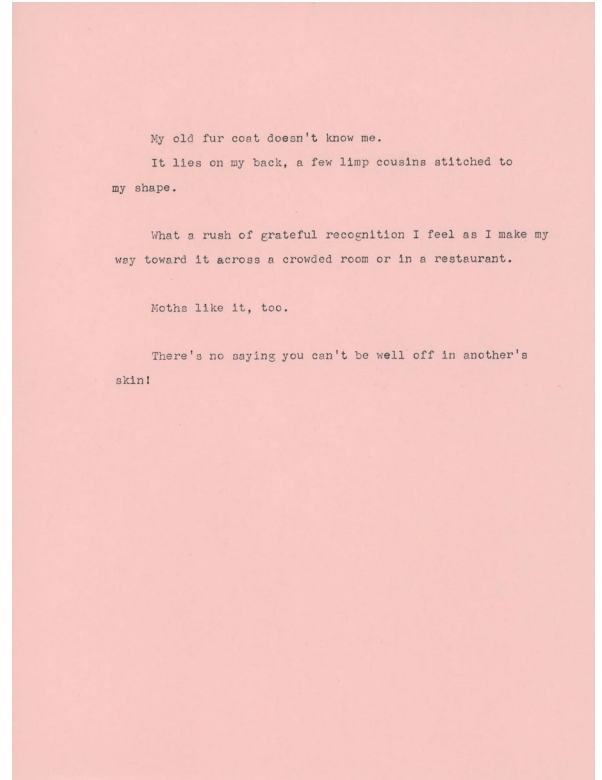
Pati Hill: My old fur coat doesn't know me is curated by Baptiste Pinteaux, publisher of the Paris-based press Daisy and the art journal *octopus notes*. The exhibition is produced with the assistance of the Pati Hill Collection at Arcadia University (Glenside, PA) and gallery Air de Paris.

Hill always wanted to live different lives, “[as we live] in different books.” Following a short but successful modeling career, Hill's early years were spent pursuing her literary interests. In 1953 she released her first book, a memoir called *The Pit and Century Plant*, and over the next decade published three novels, a collection of poems, and several short stories. A few of these stories—as well as excerpts from her first two books—were included in *The Paris Review*.

In 1962, two years after marrying her third husband, French gallerist Paul Bianchini, Hill gave birth to her only child. Overlooked by her writing colleagues and having difficulty adjusting to her new life, she left New York to live between Paris; Les Massons, a village in the French countryside; and Stonington, Connecticut. Her friend and neighbor, the poet James Merrill, sympathized with her new reality and gifted her a cat, saying that she “might as well have all the little luxuries that went with being a prisoner.” Hill did not publish any new work in the subsequent thirteen years, and in 1977 she summed up that period of time on her resume with the laconic words: “Housewife, mother.”

It was that same year Hill acquired an IBM Copier II through designer Charles Eames, who then worked for IBM, after their chance meeting on a flight from Paris to New York. By this time, she had become captivated by the possibilities of xerography, photocopying household items at her disposal—garments, trinkets, flowers, photographs and “common objects”—while also pushing the copy machine in more experimental directions. Over the next four decades, Hill would go on to produce thousands of prints across different bodies of work, along with a catalog of hybrid projects focusing on how text and images might “fuse to become something other than either.”

Hill's approach to the work was clarified in her own writings—often marked by dark and deadpan humor—and she later wrote to Eames of how she pictured herself as a kind of engineer dealing with technique, language, and visual information as a whole, rather than a visual artist or a writer. Her varied and fascinating body of work would explore the nature of reproduction and how an object can be transformed into an image, ultimately regarding the output as “a kind of de-Freudianized series of symbols that suggested language.” Hill began her experiments with xerography in the early 1970s unaware of the pioneering work that Bruno Munari and Barbara T. Smith had realized a decade earlier. Nevertheless, once she started—having come “to copying from writing”—her “more literal use of the copier,” which she claimed she could never work again without, transformed Hill into the one the medium's most ardent advocates.



Pati Hill, text from *Dreams Objects Moments*, 1976, xerograph on pink paper, 11 x 8.5 inches. Courtesy Pati Hill Collection, Arcadia University

View additional images of works on-view:
printedmatter.org/pati-hill

Despite the apparent objectivity of the copier and its formal consistency, Hill's work always demonstrates how any given subject can elude the strictures of its category. This foregrounding of ambiguity was a way to avoid deforming her subject, as we sometimes "destroy dreams by choosing wrong words for them." As someone who was often frustrated by the systems of power, dependency and status to which she belonged, it may have also been a way for her to consider doors to exit her narrative, and to be ready "to [slip] away to [her] next incarnation, as easily as an eel off a china plate."

Among the projects on view in *Pati Hill: My old fur coat doesn't know me* are *Slave Days* (1975) and *Impossible Dreams* (1976), early works that bring together poetry and images, recounting her memories of "housewifeness;" *Dreams Objects Moments* (1976), a series of short, typewritten texts that attempt to break down the distinction between dreams and material life; *Symbol Language* (1977), incorporating Hill's own hieroglyphic system inspired by her collection of "informational art;" one-of-a-kind artists' books (early 2000s) that hold a narrative, if elliptical, logic; as well as her original cartoons that display her biting and dark humor.

On occasion of the exhibition, Printed Matter has released a new booklet that excerpts "High in the Sky," the last chapter of Hill's unpublished journal *The History of Dressmaking*. Written between 1972 and 1977, the text captures Hill's life ten years after she claimed to "quit writing in favor of housekeeping," reflecting on photocopying as well as her time in Stonington, Paris, and Les Massons. The title of this exhibition is borrowed from one of the many brief, wry entries that distinguish the journal and Hill's prose of the period. [Available here](#).

A number of rare publications by Hill are available for purchase—including first edition copies of *Slave Days* (1975), *Italian Darns* (1979), *Top Stories*, Issue 3 (1983), and Hill's self-published pamphlet, *I Decide to Wrap Up My Family* (2010), as well as reprints of her manifesto *Letters to Jill* (1979) and her third novel, *One Thing I Know* (1962). [Browse available publications by Pati Hill](#).

Later this fall, Pinteaux's press Daisy will release a facsimile reprint and the first French translation of *Impossible Dreams* (1976, Alice James Books), an illustrated novel with forty-eight photocopied and appropriated photographs.

[View the timeline of Pati Hill's life and work](#) (Courtesy the Pati Hill Collection, Arcadia University).

For more information, please write news@printedmatter.org or visit printedmatter.org/pati-hill.

Pati Hill Exhibition History

Recent exhibitions of Hill's work include those at Arcadia University (Glenside, PA), Essex Street (New York), Air de Paris, Treize (Paris), Kunstverein (Munich), Kunsthalle (Zurich) and Ampersand (Lisbon).

During her lifetime, Hill exhibited her work in solo exhibitions at Kornblee Gallery and Franklin Furnace (New York), the Bayly Art Museum, University of Virginia (Charlottesville), Galerie Texbruan and the Cabinet des Estampes at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris), Musée Lambinet (Versailles), L'Orangerie des Musées de Sens, and Gallery Modena, Bologne. She participated in group exhibitions surveying xerography and electronic art organized by the George Eastman House, the Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Maison de la Culture de Rennes, and the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam). She also presented her work in exhibitions at the Galerie Toner (Paris) which she helped operate with Paul Bianchini as a venue to support xerography in the early 1990s. Hill's work is included in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Princeton Art Museum, the Fralin Museum (University of Virginia), the Cabinet des Estampes at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the Musée de Sens in Sens-en-Bourgogne.

Curator Bio

Baptiste Pinteaux is a French editor and curator. He co-edits the art journal *octopus notes* and co-leads the publishing house Daisy. His research currently focuses on the work of the PaJaMa collective, made up of Paul Cadmus (1904-1999), Jared French (1905-1988) and Margaret Hoening French (1906-1998).

Thank You

Thank you to the Archives at Arcadia University, Richard Torchia, Anastasia Rousseau, Adam Hess, Matthew Borgen, Mimi Bassetti, Arthur Lubow, Lucy Glasson, Sarah Middleton, the Pati Hill Collection steering committee, Svea Williams, Kelsie Winship, Galerie Air de Paris, Florence Bonnefous and Nicole Huard.

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