

Reviving the 1960s underground art magazine Newspaper

Megan Williams :: 4/5/2023

A new publication is bringing a wordless magazine led by three artists out of the shadows, showing how it gave a space to creatives outside of exhibition environments

By [Megan Williams](#)

In July 1968, an obscure magazine went into circulation around New York City. The magazine was unusual in that it was called Newspaper but contained no writing, just pictures. It was the brainchild of a then 22-year-old Steve Lawrence, who worked with fellow artists Peter Hujar and Andrew Ullrick on editing the publication, which ran for three years until 1971.

“There are very few extant copies of the original Newspaper and they are all yellowing and crumbling. Opening an issue does irreparable damage to it every time it is handled,” says photographer, archivist, and historian Marcelo Gabriel Yáñez. “Within institutional contexts such as a library or a museum, Newspaper is a work you can rarely even call to view because of its fragility.”

Yáñez worked with book publisher Primary Information on collating all 14 issues into one reprinted publication, which features a nude image by designer Ruspoli Rodriguez on the cover. The process of retracing Newspaper’s history has required a lot of graft. Lawrence left behind no papers and there is barely any reference to it in Hujar’s estate, explains Yáñez, who has dedicated years to investigating Newspaper.

But there was no doubt of its influence within New York’s subversive creative scene. Work by over 40 artists appeared across the magazine’s run (including Lawrence, Ullrick, and Hujar), whose names are pieced together as best as possible at the end of the reprinted version.

These include a mixture of well-known figures like Andy Warhol, Richard Avedon, Roy Lichtenstein, and Yayoi Kusama alongside a constellation of creatives who aren’t as widely known today, but were an important part of what the publisher describes as an “emerging coterie of queer artists”. (Hujar himself would have fit into that bracket until recently, when his work has become recognised on a far bigger scale.) The magazine was all about meshing together contrasts, whether that’s the level of fame of the artists featured or the mix of “high and low culture”, borrowing images from Walt Disney and Leonardo da Vinci alike.

“Newspaper is unique for how early it comes within the history of artists’ magazines and their use as alternative exhibition spaces,” Yáñez explains. There was a surge in these from the 1960s through to the 1980s, starting with Phyllis Johnson’s “magazine in a box”, Aspen, which was “a template for what the artists’ magazine as exhibition space could be”, Yáñez says. “Newspaper presents an evolution to Aspen in its cheapness and format.”

He explains how the pages of Newspaper could be removed and hung up as artworks and posters, and even appeared in a 1970 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Of the rare original copies of Newspaper that remain, many have missing pages because they were used as posters.

Primary Information's version was designed to resemble the original, with spreads that were painstakingly restored by designer Rick Myers based on photos by David Vu. However, some concessions had to be made regarding size and format in order to finally get it into more hands. The team decided to scale it down from its original 23×34 inch format to 9.75×13.38 inch, to avoid distribution and storage issues. "Large books are cumbersome and are turned down by a lot of booksellers and institutions."

Yáñez was set on bringing the fading publication into the present day in an act of "preservation", he says. "We wanted to produce a book so that the publication could actually be seen and handled without fear."

Newspaper is published by Primary Information; primaryinformation.org