

SHAPERO

MODERN

JACK MILROY
BIBLIOPHILIA

Jack Milroy is a Glasgow-born artist with a career spanning more than six decades, whose work transforms and transcends the physical materials of printed culture - pages, type, illustration - into intricate cut-paper sculptures and art with books. Educated at the Scarborough School of Art and the University of London, Milroy has developed a practice that sits at the intersection of surrealist wit and meticulous craftsmanship. His works are held in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Library, the Imperial War Museum, and other major collections.

Bibliophilia, his first exhibition at Shapero Modern, in part explores the gallery's relationship with our sister company Shapero Rare Books, taking books themselves as subject: their textures, histories and layered meanings. Milroy's method is to cut and reassemble, releasing images and text from the conventions of the printed page to create new forms and new readings.

The title is apt. It means, of course, 'love of books', but Milroy's version of love is never passive or sentimental. He deconstructs, dissecting and reassembling, until a new story is told. His art, like the books that inspire it, is an act of reading, of re-reading, and ultimately, of reimagining how knowledge, image and shape intertwine.

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DEDICATED TO GALA

Jack Milroy

Broken out of perhaps an educative or sometimes decorative function, these two-dimensional representations of usually three-dimensional objects, cut from a glossary or guide, cover a generic range. The subject, as such, or incidental as it might be, is allowed at most to suggest a direction the work might take. The material lends itself to, as well as determines, the physical as well as associative moves the artist may follow.

Milroy will at times paint a background that somehow contrasts with the graphic particularity of the 'raw' material, for instance, or he might, on the other hand, lay a base of rocky tissue as a suggested continuation of a context itself. Kept to a shallow vitrine of its own category, the delicate reference, is also at times mixed with totally different images, instance, like that of a postcard of fine art reproduction.



Neither innocent nor overdetermined, moving from page to page, leaving a wedge of negative space, the illustrated front pushes through the page or card. A kingfisher, or singing toad, becomes part of a decidedly lightly touched melee. Milroy mainly, through necessity, utilises the regular beat of the page. Apart from the unconscious sense of a flickering film, there seems to be no grand significance in the relationship between individual works. Milroy is not starting from the beginning, each time, however, but rather seems to intervene in an apparently innocent raw space, with material that already has identity. The negative space, from which the material has been cut, means that the artist starts, with a different, yet the same, idea, in order to set off an often humorous relationship between image and the shape that the image happens to make.

From early days of indulgent colour print, the combination of simple, sometimes exquisite illustrations drawn with crisp outline and cut so diligently, carries a tangled intricate logic. Blurred but helped still through intervention, the birds, flowers, cartoon, historical and Modern art, from postcards, or even the strands from paint in a Pollock painting have been excavated, as such, to be reconfigured in shallow three dimensions. Delicacy hovers between the power of association and the source of the material. With the apparently neutral nature of illustration, Milroy seems to suggest the fluttering of pages in the wind.

Each vitrine at times seems full of cut-out elements appearing like strokes in a pointillist, or cubistic, images, with a flickering of reproduced printed colour. It is also suggesting something continuous in terms of direction yet deliberately limited in formal terms. The heightened colour from popular and valuable books, or a combination of the two, carries an inbuilt rationale of the book from a perhaps more simplified time of categorization.

The colour, also, recalls a period of easy reproduction and education for all. There is no waste, as the object - or subject - of a reproduced Japanese print, for instance, cut around and placed in a shallow vitrine, achieves an animated relief. Each vitrine is imbued with a different extended world that unfurls in relation to the regular pace and beat, in turn, of the page.

The origin might seem to provide the continuation of an idea. Material for both a hanging and climbing plant, for instance, becomes a meticulously constructed mass that flows down, as well as up, with detailed delicacy from one level to the next, and then the other way around. The material lends itself to the way it is used. Balancing, holding, suspending, honing, underpinning, perhaps even delicately forcing, Milroy follows or finds, through an action, nonetheless, a sort of serendipity in relation to the logic of the source. Fish, helicopters, underwater colours, tulips, arrive already described, as ready-mades. Found image is turned into found object. Sometimes the direction of a piece is suggested by the title of a book as the bird is released from the page.

A leaning, revealing, flowery finesse, means that elements come out in perpetual relation to each other and gather phenomenological force. A plant grows, somehow, while a flying machine war machine is interspersed to suggest a surreal state that carries a sense of collapse within it. In the same way that an uncut stone will carry the subject, or the bare canvas will already have a point, Milroy hopes to release what is already there through such manipulation of image and sculptural element.

With subject denied, he remains part of a somewhat conceptual tradition where materiality wins out. By drawing attention to - and bringing into focus - what has been and is still there the artist, who nonetheless retains a deceptive nonchalance, rearranges without false claim.

Sacha Craddock, March 2026





Credits

I would like to thank Sacha Craddock for her illuminating introduction to the catalogue; Tabitha and all at Shapero for their help in preparing this exhibition; Clare Cooper, Benjamin Rhodes and Ivor Mazure for their faith in me over past years, and particularly my wife, Gala for having faith in me, her honest counsel, and dealing with all those boring administrative jobs that I avoid.

Jack Milroy



1. Goldfish Bowl. 1982.

Crumpled pages in a goldfish bowl, 22 x 22 cm. (8¾ x 8¾ in.)

[ref: 122757]





2. Plantes de Rocaille. 2011-26.

Cut and crumpled book pages construction in an acrylic case, 31 x 101 x 70 cm. (12¼ x 39¾ x 27½ in.)

[ref: 122762]





3. Territorial Ambitions. 2014.

Cut book page construction in an acrylic case, 149 x 118 cm x 12cm. (58¾ x 46½ x 4¾ in.)

[ref: 122738]





4. Grey Skies. 2015.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 201.5 x 121 x 14 cm. (79¼ x 47¾ x 5½ in.)

[ref: 122748]



5. Cats. 2016.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 19 x 15 x 11 cm. (7½ x 6 x 4¼ in.)

[ref: 122752]



6. Incy Wincy. 2016.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 19 x 15 x 11 cm. (7½ x 6 x 4¼ in.)

[ref: 122755]



7. Mountain Flowers II. 2016.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 20 x 24 x 26 cm. (7¾ x 9½ x 10¼ in.)

[ref: 122756]

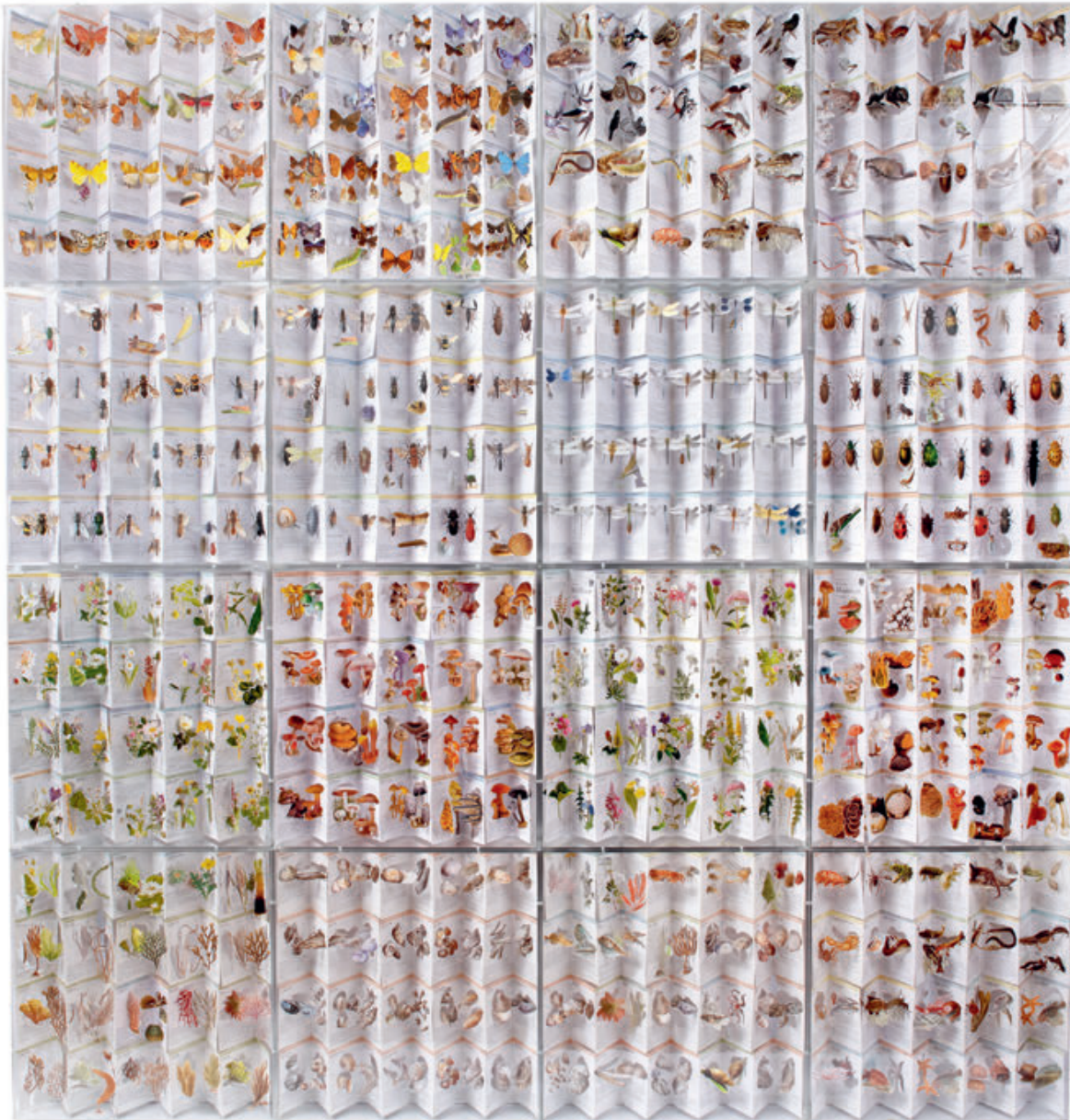


8. Not Knots. 2020.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 38 x 33 x 9 cm. (15 x 13 x 3½ in.)

[ref: 122751]





9. Cabinet of Natural History. 2020.

Cut book construction in 16 acrylic cases, 203 x 203 x 9.5 cm. (80 x 80 x 3¾ in.)

[ref: 122740]





10. The Librarian's Butterfly Collection. 2020.

Cut book page construction in an acrylic case, 67 x 60 x 10 cm. (26½ x 23½ x 4in.)

[ref: 122737]



11. Piccanti Piccanti. 2021.

Cut sardine can in an acrylic case, 19 x 18 x 8.5 cm. (7½ x 7 x 3¼ in.)

[ref: 122753]



12. Piccanti Sartango. 2026.

Cut sardine cans in an acrylic case, 17 x 25 x 9.5 cm. (6¾ x 9¾ x 3¾ in.)

[ref: 122761]





13. Six Short Stories in Search of an Author. 2022.

Cut postcards in an acrylic case, 100 x 84 x 13 cm. (39¼ x 33 x 5 in.)

[ref: 122733]



14. DIVinE. 2023.

Cut book in an acrylic case, 214 x 35 x 19 cm. (84¼ x 13¾ x 7½ in.)

[ref: 122730]



15. The Japanese Librarian's Secret Garden. 2023.

Five cut Japanese books (orihons) in five acrylic cases, 23 x 183 x 13.5 cm. each (9 x 72 x 5¼ in. each)

[ref: 122742]



16. Orihon I. 2023-4.

Cut Japanese book (orihon) in an acrylic case, 21 x 104.5 x 14 cm. (8¼ x 41¼ x 5½ in.)

[ref: 122759]





17. Orihon IV. 2023-4.

Cut Japanese book (orihon) in an acrylic case, 21 x 104.5 x 14 cm. (8¼ x 41¼ x 5½ in.)

[ref: 122760]





19. Dialogue. 2024.

Cut and constructed postcards in an acrylic case, 85 x 65 x 13.5 cm. (33½ x 25½ x 5¼ in.)

[ref: 122729]





21. Monkey. 2024.

Cut and crumpled book page construction in an acrylic case, 50 x 165 x 30 cm. (19¾ x 65 x 11¾ in.)

[ref: 122736]





22. Climbing Plants. 2025.

Cut book construction with acrylic paint on wood and peg supports in an acrylic case, 155 x 174 x 24 cm, (61 x 68½ x 9½ in.)

[ref: 122732]





23. Plantes Grimpante au Coucher du Soleil. 2025.

Cut book construction with acrylic paint on wood and peg supports in an acrylic case, 152 x 112 x 20 cm. (59¾ x 44 x 7¾in.)

[ref: 122731]



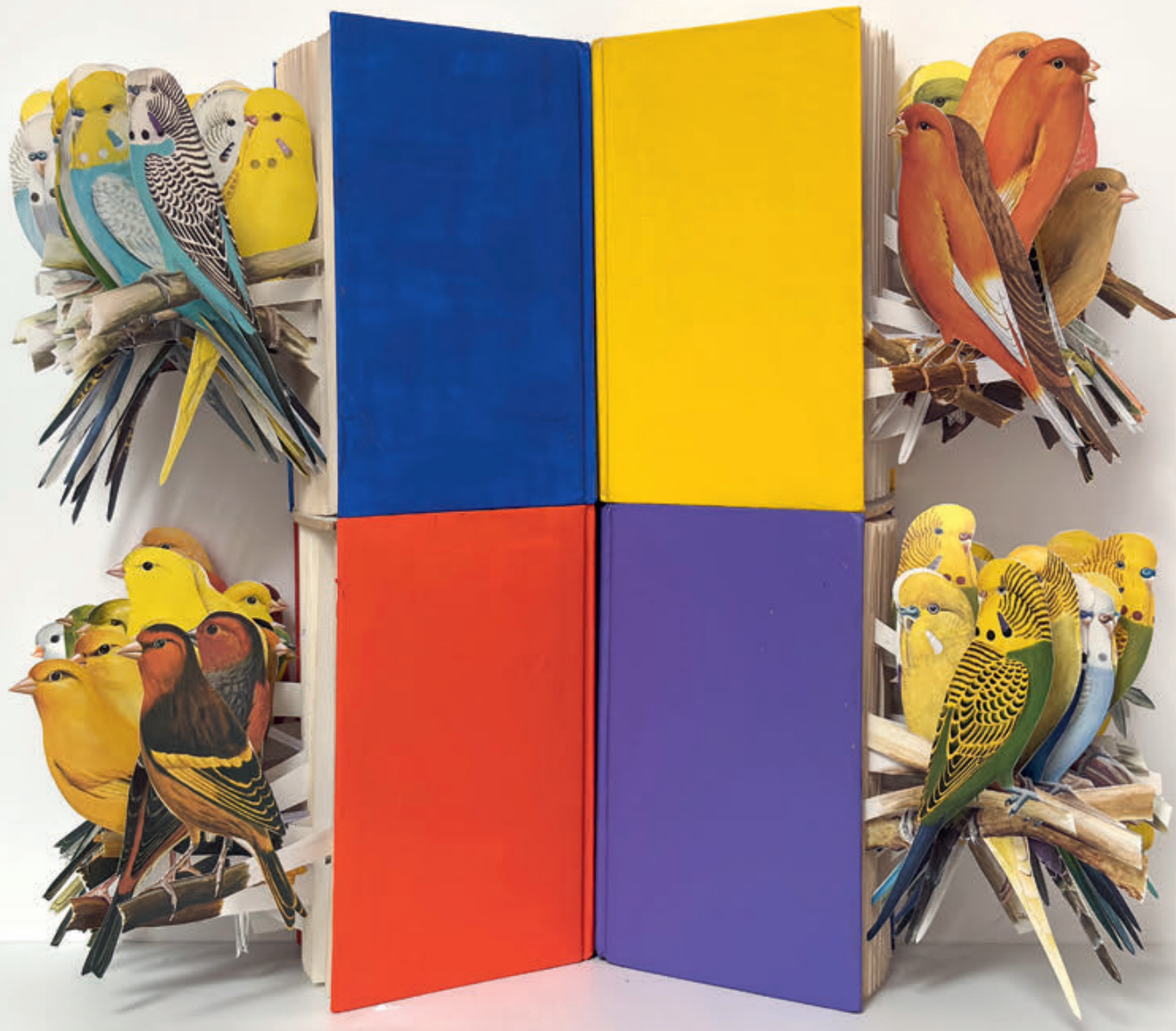




26. Humans. 2025/6.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 2025, 158 x 132 x 14 cm. (62¼ x 52 x 5½ in.)

[ref: 122722]



27. The Critics. 2026.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 106 x 68 x 17 cm. (41³/₄ x 26³/₄ x 6³/₄ in.)

[ref: 122750]



28. Perch IV. 2026.

Cut and constructed books in an acrylic case, 53 x 68 x 17 cm. (20¾ x 26¾ x 6¾ in.)

[ref: 122727]



29. The Librarian's Flowerbed. 2026.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 74 x 100 x 12 cm. (29¼ x 39¼ x 4¾ in.)

[ref: 122726]





30. Fish and Flowers. 2026.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 109 x 106 x 15 cm. (43 x 41¾ x 6 in.)

[ref: 122724]





31. The Librarian's Cottage Garden. 2026.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 129 x 170 x 13 cm. (50¾ x 67 x 5 in.)

[ref: 122728]





32. Gardening in the Library. 2026.

Cut book construction in an acrylic case, 93 x 115 x 13 cm. (36½ x 45¼ x 5 in.)

[ref: 122763]



33. The Monkey and the Nest. 2026.

Cut book construction and collage on board with pegs and acrylic paint in an acrylic case, 85 x 153 x 11 cm. (33½ x 60¼ x 4¼ in.)

[ref. 122723]



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NB: The illustrations are not equally scaled.

Introduction © Sacha Craddock, March 2026

Portrait of the artist and image below © Tim Griffiths, March 2026

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