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Wenyon & Gamble's Bibliomancy

By Cate McQuaid

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Holographic artists Susan Gamble and Michael Wenyon join in a great tradition as artists in residence at the Boston Athenæum: In 1817 young Horatio Greenough used to sketch in the library, and went on to become the first professional sculptor in America. Wenyon and Gamble have made holograms of a variety of books from the Athenæum's stacks. Their show, titled "Bibliomancy" (the word refers to the act of using a passage chosen at random from a book to provide enlightenment), reflects on the life of books as objects, as repositories of knowledge, and as reflections of history.

The gallery has been painted blue, the better to show off the holograms' eerie glow. Holograms of card catalogs hover on two side walls, but the main event is a series of 54 holograms of the spines of Athenæum books running across the main gallery wall. The titles are varied: "The San Francisco Social Register," "The Love Affairs of Mary, Queen of Scots," "Essays Moral and Polite." Each is a document of its era, all the more dear for its oddity today. The wall reads like a piano keyboard of ideas, passions, and stories, ready to play a different song at whim - which is indeed what a library is.

"Bibliomancy," for all its technical razzmatazz, is a quiet show, and a substantive one.

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