

# Roula Partheniou: Circular Logic

Submitted by Magenta on Thu, 02/04/2010 - 05:56 in [Exhibition Reviews](#)

CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO



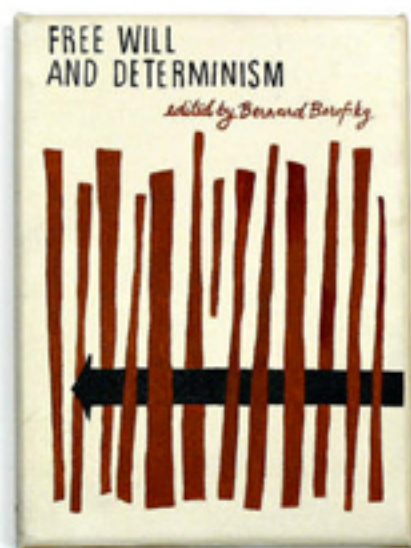
Roula Partheniou, *Circular Logic*, Installation view (2009): Courtesy Cambridge Galleries, MKG127 and the artist.  
Photo: K. Jennifer Bedford.

By Jen Hutton

**Roula Partheniou**  
*Circular Logic*  
Cambridge Galleries, Queen's Square  
Sept. 12 - Nov. 15, 2009

Toronto-based Roula Partheniou's smart off-site installation crystallized her concurrent practices involving game play, geometric structures and what she calls her 'Handmade Readymades'. The Readymades, a series of exquisite *trompe l'oeil* paintings of book covers on canvases matching the size and shape of their real-life counterparts, were placed across from the circulation desk at Cambridge Library, which shares a building with the Galleries' downtown location.

Partheniou's non-circulating library consisted of non-fiction titles from the 1960s and 70s. All shared one common trait: each had an arrow incorporated into its cover design. To exhibit these convincing tomes, the artist borrowed 27 plexiglass vitrines, which usually showcase the library's newest acquisitions, and stacked them in a closed cube — a fortuitous yet clever homage to Sol LeWitt. Partheniou positioned her "books" inside the cases so the arrows generated a multidirectional circuit through the structure. The artist has always emphasized the material qualities of her Readymades, so this configuration asserts these paintings as sculptures.



Roula Partheniou: Oil on canvas (2009):  
Courtesy MKG127 and the artist.

Partheniou's "books" also explore form over content. The stark, bold graphics and distinct colour separations of post-WWII paperbacks seem to comment on the fetishizing of books by designers and bibliophiles, who turn them into objects of desire rather than allowing them to fulfil their intended function. The British publishing firm Penguin, and their defunct educational imprint Pelican, stimulated the book market in the 1950s by introducing classic and non-fiction titles in the paperback format. Their simple aesthetic aligned with Modernist sensibilities and related highbrow subject matter, while responding to the challenge of conveying abstract concepts to dilettante semioticians and general book consumers.

Found in every graphic designer's toolbox, the arrow is a multifarious indicator well-suited for conveying abstract ideas, its meaning changing with its orientation. For example, when pointing to the right, an arrow represents progress or 'forward thinking'. Pointing left, it refers to the past or an action that goes against the grain. In Partheniou's collection, an arrow cuts left through a series of vertical barriers on the cover of *Free Will and Determinism*, while *The Future of Socialism* has amassed a number of arrows haphazardly gesticulating towards the right. *Man's Search for Himself* has an arrow circling inward, of course. Part of these books' appeal lies in the hilarity of these outdated topics, but Partheniou wisely keeps their contents hidden, thereby setting up a visual game of associations. Here, Partheniou referenced LeWitt's use of serial logic (a foundation for playing games) in his practice. Their presentation in a transparent, hermetic structure that generated multiple reflections emphasized the inaccessibility of the "books" and their commodified status, creating formal and metaphorical dialectics between transparency and opacity. By reproducing only covers and positioning them in this way, Partheniou transmits just enough information to turn the circuit into a narrative, allowing viewers to develop their own alternate 'readings' between the works inside.



Roula Partheniou: *Circular Logic*, Installation detail (2009). Courtesy Cambridge Galleries, MKG127 and the artist. Photo: K. Jennifer Bedford.

Jen Hutton is an artist and writer based in Toronto.

