

Newhall, Edith  
"Steve Wolfe: Diane Brown"  
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# LUHRING AUGUSTINE

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## STEVE WOLFE

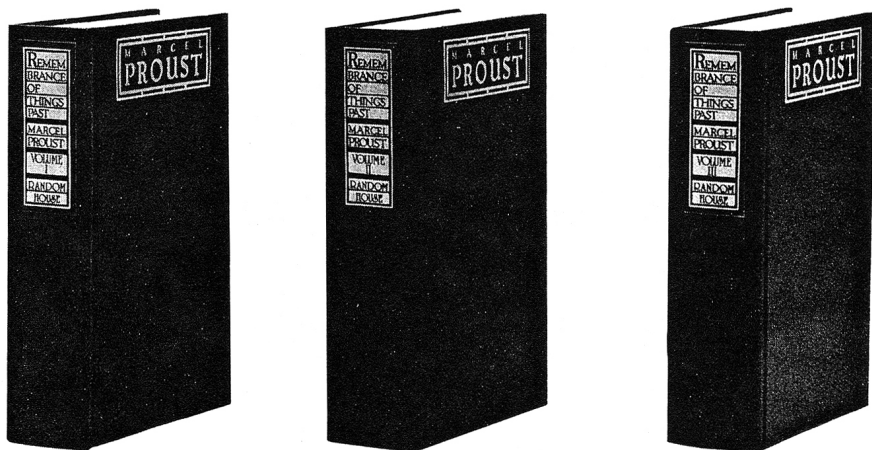
**Diane Brown**

In his second show at Brown, Steve Wolfe addressed the dilemma of the empty canvas in a quiet, thoughtful way with his meticulously crafted copies of Holbein's sketchbooks. Made with silk-screened aluminum and dyed cotton, these "sketchbooks" look so authentic that most viewers unfamiliar with Wolfe's earlier book simulations assume they're the real thing. Not so long ago, works like these might have been categorized, or even dismissed, as trompe l'oeil. Seen today, they challenge the all-too-popular use of found objects in artworks. Confronted by Wolfe's skillful, labor-intensive imitations, we're forced to ask ourselves whether a found object is really that once it has been incorporated and transformed into a so-called artwork.

On display here were a simulated Magritte coffee table-style book opened to expose the insides of the front and back covers, three new Proust novels shrink-wrapped together, and a tableau of Wolfe's simulated bedside table on which simulated copies of his own unread books sit, supported by simulated bookends. Yet there's no irony intended—instead Wolfe's love of literature and obsession with detail give his work a jarring honesty. Wolfe is able to transcend the book as concrete object to create a compelling hybrid of painting and sculpture that works both as a metaphor and as a thing of beauty.

It's one thing to copy a book, but copying one's own choice of reading matter (and these were the books that were sitting on Wolfe's own bedside table as of last December) reveals something about the artist himself. You can read all you want to into the fact that *Lad, a Dog* is sandwiched together with Kazuo Ishigura's *The Remains of the Day*, but the fact that these books are *waiting* to be read makes a more profound metaphor. Wolfe is sympathetic to the artist's plight of "What next?" while acknowledging that there might not be an answer.

—Edith Newhall



Steve Wolfe, detail of *Unread Books #2 (Remembrance of Things Past)*, 1989, mixed media, 8¾ by 5⅝ by 2 inches each. Diane Brown.