

The Picture Show

It's World Book Day. Destroy Your Books!

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It's [World Book Day](#)! Who knew? And in honor of books everywhere we'd like to celebrate their creative destruction at the hand of Atlanta-based artist [Brian Dettmer](#). Dettmer takes vintage books — anything from dictionaries and medical texts to art and architecture books — and carves them into beautifully intricate sculptures. Holy moly, look how cool this is:



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The Household Physicians.

Credit: Courtesy of Brian Dettmer

Dettmer sets the form of the book or books he's working with and then just starts at the front with a cutting blade and dissects its pages, removing them like the skin of an onion. "I don't move or add anything," he writes in an e-mail, "so the final piece is a collaboration between the existing material and my intervention."

It's a process of excavation, and of constant discovery, as Dettmer "reads" through the book, cutting or keeping pieces without knowing what lies ahead. In doing so, he

deconstructs the linear narrative determined by the structure of the book and re-contextualizes its elements, offering them up for a different interpretation.



Courtesy of Brian Dettmer

New Universal and *Core 4*, made from dictionaries.

Although Dettmer doesn't believe the book will ever die, he does note that its relevance has waned in a world where new technology is allowing us to digest information in increasingly free-form, nonlinear ways.

"It is exciting and empowering to have access to so much information instantly," he writes, "but it is also disturbing if we think about the future of our personal and cultural records. I can open a box of pictures or letters from decades ago but I may have trouble opening an image or text file created just a few years ago."

Maybe carving books should be the World Book Day equivalent of carving pumpkins on Halloween. What do you think? What role do physical books play in your life?

Tags: [sculpture](#), [World Book Day](#)