



# CITIZENS *of* HUMANITY

by Jerome Dahan

N°4  
SPRING 2014

# leadapron

Text by Caleb Neelon

Photography by Brigitte Sire

## RARE BOOK DEALER JONATHAN BROWN'S SHOP IS CLEAN, BRIGHT AND CAREFULLY DESIGNED, JUST LIKE THE ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY TITLES HE CAREFULLY SOURCES AND PRESENTS

To imagine a bookstore dealing in rare and old books might bring to mind a small and dimly lit shop with dusty books piled to the ceiling. Jonathan Brown's West Hollywood space LEADAPRON is nothing of the sort, presenting magnificent and hard-to-find art books by artists such as Richard Prince, Helen Levitt and Vija Celmins in a sunny and clean gallery setting alongside contemporary art and photography. Bright white and thoughtfully designed, it's the sort of space a new father would crave amid the household chaos of little new arrivals—in fact, that's exactly what it was.

**Jonathan, just to begin, what's the story behind the name LEADAPRON?**

Everyone that wears an apron is a worker. Whether a waitress/waiter, sculptor, shoemaker, etc. These are the people that keep the fabric of our lives intact. They are the tradespeople, craftspeople, artisans ... they are the people that make the things that furnish the culture and drive the civilization and define the age we live in. So an apron to me is a uniform or symbol of this proletarian work outfit. A lead apron is what you wear when you get an X-ray. It is a protective shield. Truthfully, a lead apron protects the sexual and reproductive organs, which create life. So my thinking was that LEADAPRON protects the work of the workers and carries it safely into the future with this protective shield. I didn't want the business to be Jonathan Brown, as it's not about me.

**You had been informally dealing and collecting rare books for years before you opened your space formally, but you had a different career. Can you talk about what you did?**

Yes, I had a lot of careers, which in many ways make sense with what I do now. In brief, I studied architecture and philosophy, then worked for an architectural firm, directed theater, was a journalist and writer, and then spent 15 years as a neuropsychologist of sorts.

**You took on a physical space for LEADAPRON amid the chaos of living with a baby—that resonates with me rather strongly as I've got an almost-one-year-old myself. I can't imagine trying to keep a home with kids as carefully and cleanly designed as your space, of course. What guided your vision for the design of the store and gallery?**

Well, my house was the first real space from which I worked. I remember having people over and quickly putting the baby toys and strollers away and cleaning the place up in a mad obsessive swirling manner. Aside from the indescribable joy of having children, having them changes you and motivates you. Your life is not entirely your own anymore and some aboriginal, ancestral part of you kicks in and echoes that you have to provide and kicks you into gear ... that's what happened to me, and after leaving a field in which I wasn't ultimately satisfied and spent so many years in, I had this explosion of energy to devote to

what I do now. I was always interested in beauty and design and objects, and that was my defense against so much reality that was indifferent, cruel, violent, etc. Having children was the event that basically got me out of the house and into a gallery space, and my vision was nothing more than an expression of my own interests and enthusiasm.

**So what are some of the qualities and factors that go into a book being rare and valued? It isn't simply being a "limited edition" or being out of print?**

I wish I had a more florid and exciting answer, but something becomes rare when there are few extant copies. It boils down to supply and demand. If 500 copies of a book are printed, as in the case of *Ballet* by Alexey Brodovitch, and 3,000 people want that book, then it's bound to become rare. I know I sound didactic, but you are looking for an answer beyond the truth. There are shades of rare, and in this case, if you read an article about this beautiful book *Ballet* and the amazing typography and haunting photos, and wanted to run down to your local bookstore to buy a copy, you would be disappointed. Could you eventually find one? Yes, in all likelihood, but would you pay the price? It's very similar to classic Porsches and Ferraris, and old Patek Philippe watches and Romanée Conti wines and Cuban cigars. There were only so many produced at a given time. Age helps rarity, but then again a new Air Jordan sneaker hits the market and it's sold out in minutes ... it's a bit like finding a unicorn.

**I imagine you must enjoy the chase and the digging. Can you tell a story of a find that was the sort of discovery that keeps you doing what you do?**

Every great find was the result of hundreds of hours I spent learning and searching and turning up nothing, so that so-called "score" was nothing more than delayed payment. There are innumerable great objects and items out there waiting to be unearthed, dusted off and placed under gallery lights, to draw an archaeological comparison. One needs to acknowledge that if you see a rare item in a gallery, the person who selected or decided to place it there has curated their space and presented this wonderful object for you to buy, and furthermore, there was an entire history to the relationship the dealer has had with this object. So if you go into a space and see something and run home to find it on the Internet you are essentially stealing the dealer's work and disregarding their time and profession and putting a patch over their eye and branding them the pirate when in fact it is you. This is why there are no more bookstores and most galleries struggle. I am very optimistic and don't mean to sound vindictive or angry because I am not. I love what I do and feel very fortunate to be doing it and just hope to continue doing it. As for the story, swing by my place, hold something in your hands, smell it or gaze at it and if you love it and want it I will tell you the story: the story from its nativity and creation to the journey it made to find its way to you.

