

Karen Langlois

A Story

found book, fabric, thread, glue, gesso (book may be handled and paged through)

20 x 14 x 3.5 cm, 2014

Hello this is Karen Langlois. I'd like to tell you about my piece. It's called *A Story*. It is an altered book. I made it from a novel that I found on a library discard table. I've altered it using fabric, thread, glue and gesso. The book is quite old and worn. The cover is a faded wine-colour. I have removed the title from the front cover and the spine, and replaced it with wine and gold-coloured leather from another old book, *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens. Opening the cover of the book, we see a series of inscriptions. The first one is written in beautiful handwriting in black ink. It looks like it was done with a fountain pen. It says, "presented to June Sampson for spellings in grade five". It's signed by a "D. Ferguson, teacher 1949-1950". Scrawled beside that in pencil says, "Susan, from Dad". Then on the opposite page is written in blue ink, "read by Susan", and I can't make out the last name, in "1960 October". Turning the page, the next two pages are blank and we see that the paper in this book has aged to a beautiful golden wheat colour, and it's quite muddled and stained. Some pages in the book have been removed, but there are still more than 200 pages. So for this description, I will detail a few pages in the beginning and a few pages at the end to give you a sense of the types of alterations that I've done. Turning the next page there is, on the left, a pen and ink illustration of a happy couple being pulled in a horse-drawn wagon. Then on the right hand side is the title page, which reads "Nan of the Gypsies by Grace May North". Turning to the overleaf we see the copyright date which is 1926. Then the right hand page reads "Nan of the Gypsies Chapter I". A square of white cotton has been sewn over the rest of the text on that page. There is a row of stitching at the top, and a row of stitching on the bottom. Turning the page, the overleaf has been unaltered except we can see the two lines of stitching. The right hand page has been altered in a similar fashion, except that this piece of white cotton has been burned; leaving two amorphous openings in the fabric through which we can see disjointed bits of text. The next page has again been altered with a piece of cotton, which has been tea stained and sewn onto the page. On the cotton we can also see faded handwriting in blue ink. Across the bottom of the piece of cotton is one row of blue stitching. The blue threads hang down to the bottom of the page. Turning that page, the overleaf, again, has the stitching from the previous page which forms a rectangle. Inside the rectangle is highlighted the original next reading, "Chapter II The Garden-All-Aglow". The right hand page has been altered in a similar way, except instead of fabric it is a blank page which has been cut from the back of the book and sewn on to cover the text. Two phrases have been cut from elsewhere in the book and glued onto the blank page. They read "the story opened upon the garden". This pattern of intervention is repeated with many variations throughout the book. The original text is still visible, but much of it is missing, obscured, or attached to a different page with glue or thread. A phrase might be lifted from its place to sit by itself on a blank page. For example, one page reads, "a bundle tied in a red handkerchief". Another page reads "a thick slice of brown bread". Phrases are combined to create new meanings. One page reads, "Nan had scrubbed and in the afternoon the sunny windows a lilac bush a cup of steaming coffee". Toward the back of the book a series of white cloth fragments bears an image of a woman's face that becomes increasingly faded and distorted as the pages are turned. The image is from an etching of 19th century French artist, James Tissot. At the novel's end a piece of stained, machine-embroidered white cotton has been sewn over much of the text so that only the last paragraph is visible. It

reads, "Then together, hand in hand, they went down the trail and soon the tinkling of bells was heard as the gypsy van slowly crossed over the ridge and down another mountain road, where, at sunset, these two would make camp in a picturesque canyon called Happy Valley".
The end.