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## A Review by Love of Matchbook, Volume Four

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## A Review by Love of *Matchbook*, Volume Four

Part of the journal section “Reviews and Responses”

B. J. Love, *Matchbook*, Volume Four. Small Fires Press,  
\$6.00, <http://www.smallfirespress.com/shop/matchbook-volume-4>

Reviewed by B. J. Love

A Review of *Matchbook*, Volume Four by B.J. Love



1. 15 years ago, Friedrich Kerksieck and I were English undergrads at UNI with the kind of change-the-world ideas that I think are actually requirements for most degree-granting institutions. We were in the basement of the old Baker Hall for Men, at a table in the offices for the *North American Review*, when Kerksieck excitedly pulled a matchbook out of his pocket and held it up for me. “I’m starting a lit journal,” he said...probably. “Everything will fit inside here.” He was looking at the matchbook. I was looking at him. I was pretty sure he’d recently lost his mind.

2. We talked a lot back then (sorry we don’t talk more now, FK!) about how to disrupt conceptions of contemporary American poetry. Granted, this tiny journal wasn’t as wild as some of the ideas we tossed around, but that didn’t make it any less impossible in my mind. Namely, how in the world do you fit anything of substance into such an inconsequential space? I’d seen,

held, and tried to read mini-books, and found the whole experience wanting. In short, how could a literary journal so small ever be a satisfying read?

3. A few months later, Kerksieck slipped the first issue of *Matchbook* into my hand. It was beautiful; an antique matchbook wrapped around an impossibly easy to read magazine stuffed with poems I read over and over. I STILL read that magazine, all these years later. Holding issue one, flipping through its pages, I looked up at Kerksieck with a level of awe you usually only see kids give their parents after they open a jar on the first try, or quickly run through a long-division problem. Standing there, dumb, I did only what could be expected of me...I begged him to let me into the next issue.

4. And I was, but then, Kerksieck went on to other things. He rode a bike across America. Got an MFA in Book Arts. He bought his own letterpress. He made book after book that reimagined what books could be (check out the [Small Fires Press](#) website to see what I mean). I was certain *Matchbook* was done. The two issues a testament that the ridiculous ideas of twentysomethings could be realized and effective and beautiful.

5. That would have been a great legacy...but then, a few years ago, a third issue came out, and now, here's a [fourth](#). It is my absolute pleasure to tell you the format still works, the micro-magazine still beautiful, the poems and art inside still haunting.

6. The poems in *Matchbook* Volume Four are slight, but in form only. What I find compelling about the work included in this journal, going back to the very first issue, is how easily the poems slot into my life like a puzzle piece I didn't realize was missing. I found myself, just the other day, in fact, realizing that one my favorite memories, an image I return to so often (a cooled mailbox steaming in the sun), was actually a poem from an earlier volume of this journal. As I was reading through all the previous issues to prepare for this review, I kept running into moments on the pages that I had fully incorporated into my own life.

7. I'm sure there's a scientific reason for this, something to do with how the similarities in acquiring both language and memories, but I'm just as sure that a neurologist would think I was an idiot for saying so. What I can say is that the poems in *Matchbook*, all four volumes, have a way of ingraining themselves on your existence.

8. I think of them like the trinkets and tchotchkes I have collected throughout the years; I move a lot, about every 2-3 years, and when I do, I purge all my furniture (the bed, couch, dining table, etc.), but I keep that little stuff, the things that are pretty useless in daily life...they have proven to be the only things I can't bring myself to part with. That's what the poems in *Matchbook* are like, they the minutia of life that, overtime, become your life, or, at least a relatively apt representation of your life.

9. This, I believe, is what makes *Matchbook*, the idea, the magazine, so unique and utterly worth what little space it takes up in the world; where most poems simply enhance our lives by

bringing joy, import, activism, and possibility, the best poems in Friedrich Kerksieck's journal become your life, your memories.

10. And yeah, maybe this is an experience unique to me, but if you really want to know for sure, you're just going to have to go get the magazine yourself and prove me wrong.



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