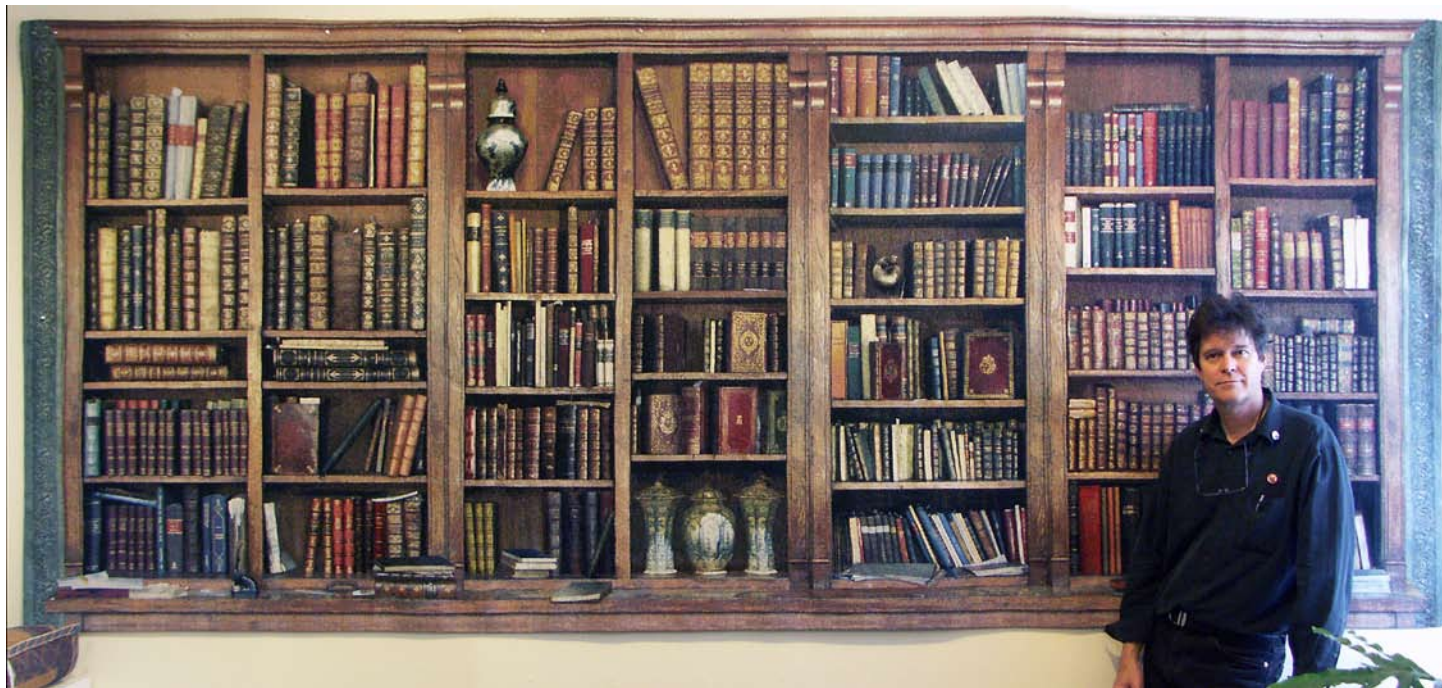


# Donald Farnsworth: *Antiquarian Library Triptych*



Donald Farnsworth with *Antiquarian Library Triptych* (2005)

Jacquard tapestry

Edition of 18

62 x 154 in.

(Left panel : 62 x 45 in

Center panel: 62 x 65 in

Right panel: 62 x 44 in)

Trompe-l'oeil flourished in fifteenth-century Belgium, where oil paint and colored varnishes enabled artists to make their brushstrokes invisible, blend their colors, and render their subjects with a startlingly life-like brilliance. Six hundred years later, Donald Farnsworth achieves the same effect via the continuous, interlaced texture and rich thread palette of a tapestry. Woven at a Flemish mill, Farnsworth's *Antiquarian Library Triptych* pays its respects to the trompe-l'oeil tradition in a thoroughly modern way.

The *Triptych* exemplifies the artist's gift for using contemporary technology to re-imagine antique and classical forms. The work was created entirely from digital imagery: over a period of three months, Farnsworth combined digital photographs of objects selected from museums and collections in Antwerp, Paris, London and San Francisco to generate a seamless assortment of treasures. Scale and perspective were flexible, and composition took precedence over strict realism. Consequently, what was originally an enormous Buddha statue is reborn here as a hand-held figurine; elsewhere, books are casually but strategically placed to obscure areas where the artist has subtly subverted the laws of physics.

From the gleam of gilt-bound editions to the soft highlights in the wooden molding, Farnsworth's use of gold and silver weft threads and a rich, painterly chiaroscuro infuse every element with a mesmerizing depth and radiance. At the same time, the collection's abundance of bookmarks and nonchalant arrangement indicate a library that is well-loved and appreciated for more than just its aesthetic value. Each object has its own history, rich in personal significance: Farnsworth describes the work as containing "a million vignettes." The work finds a literary analog in Jorge Luis Borges's "Library of Babel," a universal library that catalogs all information and all possible permutations of language—but where the infinite dimensions of Borges's library suggest an impersonal vastness, Farnsworth's virtual library is a more intimate and optimistic document. Like the artist's *Darwin: Origin of the Species* series, *Antiquarian Library Triptych* evokes a spirit of playfulness and wonder, revealing Farnsworth's affection for the human capacity for intellectual discovery. ■