

Codex 5

Probably many of us have tried our hand at our own book design, chapbooks, magazines, computer generated and printed. Some of us have even taken a course or two in bookmaking workshops with handset type, so we have some idea of the exhaustive work it takes to produce even a page of type. A clean page. Unsmudged, with the letters all facing the correct way. Then, imagine illustrating said page, reprinting it, this time with a woodcut or etching. Now imagine a huge vaulted many-windowed room full of these books; all sizes, shapes, papers, bindings, etc. from all over the world. This is Codex , the international book fair and symposium, held this year at the Craneway Pavillion in Richmond, California. The pavilion is a former Ford assembly plant, and is adjacent to the Rosie the Riveter museum, commemorating the women and African Americans who worked in the Ford plant during WWII. It's a beautiful building full of light, and a perfect place to admire the beautiful work of the approximately 190 tables of exhibitors. This is the 5th year for the Codex fair which is held biennially, and I am a later arrival; I saw the 2011 fair when it was still located on the Berkeley campus, but I missed the 2013 fair, so this is my first experience in the splendid Craneway.

The books exhibited here are not “rare” books, not old; they have as yet very little “provenance,” but they are rare in any other sense. They are made by hand, by dedicated book artists, many of whom have spent their lives in printing, binding, illustrating, and/or making paper to create beautiful, very limited edition books. Many of the books are what most of us would call expensive, but the prices reflect only a tiny fraction of the time and money and creative thought put into these works of art. And, as with the rare book market, some of these books are beginning to be sought after. According to an article in the Richmond Confidential, representatives of libraries, including the Library of Congress, and collectors who are willing to pay upwards of \$100,000, were seen “roaming the floor.”ⁱ But one need not be wealthy to acquire beautiful work. If you love it, you will find a way to get it. I did some pretty quick rationalizing (I could spend this much on furniture) amortizing (if you break this up into monthly sums for a year, it's reasonable) and promising of self-abnegation (really do not need all those lattes, can watch films on Netflix, etc.).

Because I have been to the fair once before, I recognize some of the exhibitors. In fact, in 2011, I ordered and bought my first bound and cased octavo book from Quebec-based printer and book artist, Denise LaPointe, who with partner David Carruthers produces beautiful, richly colored papers at the Papeterie St. Armand in Montreal. That small book, called *La Fatigue du Matériau* (The Fatigue of Materials) was a poem with abstract designs, literally printed with found pieces of rusty machinery. It was a book in honor of a dancer friend who had died. This year, LaPointe has gone from small to portfolio sized, with a piece printed from wood grain, again with a poem, this time by a young friend. <http://www.st-armand.com>



Not all of the books at the fair use only handset type. I was also looking for Peter Malutzki and Ines Von Ketelhodt, with whom I had briefly corresponded. Peter had made two books based on the work of Ilse Aichinger, now in her 90s and living in Vienna; a conceptual writer virtually unknown in the U.S. When I met Peter in 2011, he had included a one page translation in English of part of the German text. I liked the work so much that I emailed him. He told me he had found only one English translation of her work in a second hand bookstore, and he gave me the information. I was lucky to find it, an incredible work of poetry, prose and plays from 1983, published in Durango,

Colorado. One of many of Peter's own books, *Five Proposals*, from his prospectus: "Aichinger's text makes five proposals, starting with "a lady in a gray dress with a red collar on it" and ending with "little Edison who is lolling about in our shed." The 25 collages by Peter Malutzki (made up with found material from magazines and advertisements) are proposals themselves, five for each of the five texts...9 numbered and signed copies (in terms of the collages each copy is different.)"

Ines Von Ketelhodt was a speaker at the symposium this year, but I had not gotten tickets to the sold-out event. One of her projects is called *Color Change* and consists of 6 volumes; here is a description of *Grun* (green). "It contains a text passage from Virginia Woolf's "To the Lighthouse". In the green book I have tried to visualize the topic of dissolved shapes, abstract symbols, the recognition of a letter's shape and the form of words. All letters were cut individually into two parts so that the fragments of each letter look different. Then the two fragmented levels were printed digitally in different shades of green on two transparent foils. Finally in the bound book they are lying over each other, but the fragments are a bit shifted, so the reader can shift the foils until they converge, thus making the text legible."

Among their many books, separately and together, Von Ketelhodt and Malutzki have created a major work they call their attempt to reconstruct The Second Encyclopedia of Tlon, from the Jorge Luis Borges tale, "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." This imaginary encyclopedia consists of 12 volumes of handset type, photocopies, polymer plate, offset photo prints, with, for example "photos and text on the topic "walking" in different languages and by several authors," or "...the topic of reading: Five well-known novels of world literature in their original languages were treated as follows: First a certain edition of the novel was chosen. From every page of this copy were taken only the first and last word. The thus reduced text depends, of course, upon the used edition." And so much, much more; inventive and beautiful. I have the full-color bound catalogue, because the encyclopedia itself is 12000 euros. <http://www.tloen-enzyklopaedie.de>



One of the big sensations at the fair this year, due in only a small part to a New York Times article, was the book artist Gaylord Schanilec of Wisconsin, “ a self-taught wood engraver and fine printer who seamlessly uses traditional techniques to modern ends, [who] acquired a Lund fishing boat and retrofitted it with a drawing table and library so that he could create while pondering the lake.” “The result is the 76 page *Lac des Pleurs* that took seven years to create. Schanilec created his own engraved woodcuts of flora and fauna on the lake, and included his own commentary on readings from other people who had traveled the lake, including Thoreau, Zebulon Pike, Mark Twain. Also included is a fold out map of Lake Pepin, entirely engraved and printed on handmade kozo paper. The intricacy and commitment of this project and the stunning product are difficult to believe without seeing. Take a look: <http://www.midnightpapersales.com>

A major figure in the book art world, Claire Van Vliet of Janus Press (started in Monterey in 1954) was sitting behind the table for her press. Van Vliet is known for her innovations in every aspect of the creation of book art, and was the recipient of the first MacArthur genius grant for book arts in 1989. She has worked with writers such as Seamus Heaney and Denise Levertov, to name just two. Because you can readily find her work online, I will just mention that the trade version of a great book arts teaching text, *Woven and Interlocking Book Structures from the Janus, Steiner and Gefn presses* is affordable and exciting, if you are making your own books. Also, if you happen to be in the area, an exhibition celebrating the 60th anniversary of Janus Press will be held at San Francisco Center for the Book from February 14 through May 24.



Japanese book artist Kyoko Matsunaga, from Kyoto, also makes innovative book structures. One foldout, *Ingestion*, contains a quote from Alice in Wonderland and a packaged soy bean. “Who are you?” says the caterpillar. Matsunaga’s reply is that eating a soybean replaces cells, and thus “sways identity.” www.kyokomatsunaga.com Mills College’s Book Arts program had a table, and I bought two small pieces by artists Ariel Hansen Strong, and Keri Miki-Jani Schroeder. Intricately folded and beautifully printed, these books represent an emphasis on the visual concept side of the book arts.

Reinhard Scheuble and Gisela Mott-Dreizler, from Witzwort, Germany, are the book artists of Questsche. Like many of the book artists at Codex, they have accrued many awards and accolades and have been practicing their trade for many years. Scheuble is the printer and bookbinder and Mott-Dreizler is often the artist, although they also print other artists’ work. Her lithographs are exuberant, colorful and joyous. The texts are chosen from authors such as Brecht, Isaac Singer, Pushkin, Christa Wolf, as well as contemporary authors they know. www.quetsche-witzwort.de

From the Bay area, Lisa Rappoport of Littoral Press, in addition to designing and printing her own work, has been for a number of years the printer of the broadsides for the Squaw Valley Writers’ Workshop, and thus has for sale a number of beautiful small works by W.S. Merwin, Jean Valentine, Lucille Clifton and other well-known poets. <http://www.littoralpress.com> There were book artists from Israel, South Korea, France, China. The Salvage Press (Jamie Murphy) from Dublin had available a broadside of a Samuel Beckett piece.

One of the few artists with a political point of view, from Chile, Maria Veronica San Martin brought two beautiful and powerful pieces, one of which, *Memory and Landscape: Unveiling the Historic Truths of Chile, 1973-1990*, uses photocopies of the faces of tortured students and others, juxtaposed against snow capped mountains near the Villa Grimaldi, likened to Abu Graib (Wikipedia) as a site of torture. The second book operates as two accordion-style books joined in one: the front book opening onto vistas of snow, and the back to painted scenes of torture in shades of blue, as if perpetrated in the dark. I asked her if she can show her work in Chile, and she said that the Villa is now a national memorial site and had helped underwrite her work. craftpressechile.tumblr.com

For me, one of the most moving book artists at Codex was Jule Claudia Mahn from Leipzig, Germany. Among her original works, beautifully handset typed, bound, written and illustrated, was a handmade file of 20 “passports” each with a separate story of a Latvian citizen who had been displaced in the long occupation by Russia. Each passport was printed to look official with an imaginary map attached to each of the districts in which the actual person might have resided. *Garten* is a book of photos of Mahn’s own garden in winter, dedicated to the memory of Gertrude Kolmar, a poet from Berlin, who died in Auschwitz in 1943, and including a letter and a poem by Kolmar. Mahn created the book in 2013, the 70th anniversary of Kolmar’s death. *Related Children* is a book project about two childhoods: Mahn’s and her father’s. Mahn wrote her father four letters,

each containing a question about his childhood growing up in Germany during WWII. While she waited for his reply, she wrote about her own childhood. The result is 4 slim volumes in one open case, illustrated with abstract drawings printed from polymer plates. *Grasnarbe* (grass) is a book of dreams of “the road not taken” by six people of different ages. In addition to being exquisite examples of the art of bookmaking, Mahn’s work is about memory, the things we cannot forget and the things we should not forget.

www.verwandte-objekte.de

The definition of the word codex has expanded. It’s a story in text, a story in pictures, or both. It’s text only, handset on beautiful paper and bound; or a cut-out, a painting, a geometrically folded digital print. In our era, the definition of story is also expandable. As a writer, maybe you believe that one word can encompass vast troves of story. Maybe you believe that books themselves are the only real keepers of history, records of all our intelligence, beauty and horror. Maybe you believe that we could get along without the wheel, but not without books. If so, Codex 6 is planned for 2017. Put it on your calendar.





ⁱ <http://richmondconfidential.org/2015/02/09/codex-book-fair-the-largest-of-its-type-in-the-world-visits-richmond/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/arts/design/artists-find-an-audience-for-painstaking-letterpress-printing.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&smid=nytimesarts>

Photo credits: artist websites

Denise LaPointe

<http://www.printeresting.org/2011/11/22/papeterie-saint-armand/>