

ARTS | LONG ISLAND

Printed Books Are Alive and Sometimes Weird



Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times

Works on display in "New York Bound: International Book Art Biennial" include, clockwise from left: "American Dream" (2013), by Tmima Z; "The Boy Had Brown Hair and Wore a Blue Shirt" (2013), by Maria Macedonio-Ritter; "113 Ripples: Mist" (2012), by Chris Perry; and "Nothing Is as It Seems" (2013), by Lauren Monte.

By AILEEN JACOBSON
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The news about books today is often centered on the shift from print to digital, from paper to electronic devices. At the [Islip Art Museum](#), entirely different kinds of transformations are on display, and none of them are electronic.

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Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times
Dorothea Fleiss, left, is the curator of the exhibition, and Beth Giacommo is the Islip Art Museum's exhibition director and curator.

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"New York Bound: International Book Art Biennial," which runs through Dec. 29, contains more than 150 works by 70 artists from around the world who interpret the idea of a book in many ways, from accordion-style sculptures, to letters of the alphabet hanging from a ceiling, to a scene evoking a dollhouse. The artists were chosen from among 325 who submitted more than 800 images of their pieces in response to the museum's request.

The invitation to submit works suggested "unconventional ideas about books" and asked artists to "explore the book as an object." It quoted Dorothea Fleiss, the exhibition's curator, citing "the century of technology, of computers and mass media, all of which are separating us and our children from the written word."

"I thought that books were disappearing," Ms. Fleiss said last month during a visit to the exhibition, referring to the reason behind it. An artist and freelance curator, Ms. Fleiss was born in Romania and now lives in Stuttgart, Germany.

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Kathy Kmonicek for The New York Times
"Match Book" (2003) by Sarah Hogan.

She makes book-inspired art herself, she said, including painted diaries and mummified books, and wanted to approach the subject in a broader way.

To that end, she said, she started a [European International Book Art Biennale](#) in 2010 at the [Art Museum in Satu Mare, Romania](#), followed by another there in 2012.

Beth Giacommo, the Islip museum's exhibition director and curator, met Ms. Fleiss and learned about her work in 2011 at a [Conference on International Opportunities in the Arts](#) at Boston University, Ms. Giacommo said.

The two women decided to collaborate on a project on Long Island, combining Ms. Fleiss's book theme and international outreach with the Islip museum's annual "open call" for artworks.

They also organized a residency program that brought 11 artists from as far away as Romania, Germany, Spain, Turkey, Poland and Japan to Islip for 10 days in early fall. During their time there, the participants created art that is on view in a separate show in one of the museum's galleries, also through Dec. 29.

Ms. Fleiss, who selected the pieces for the book exhibition, said that although electronic art was not specifically ruled out, no one submitted any. "All artists who make book art do so because they love books" in their more tactile forms, she said. Ms. Fleiss said she was open to any interpretation — and she got a wide variety.

On a wall near the museum entrance is a nail-studded piece called "The Book of Hope — Page 8 (Re-Nature)" by Darlene Charneco, who lives in Southampton. The nails are hammered in at different lengths and appear in specific sequences, Ms. Charneco said in a phone interview. They represent a text about reconnecting with nature, as the title suggests, which she encourages viewers to "read" by touch.

"I am hoping the feeling will come through," she said. "I want it to be touched and felt, not have all the words picked apart."

Ms. Charneco has produced a page for her "Book of Hope" series every few years since 1999, she said. Page 8, completed in 2012, is the most recent. "I would like to continue for the rest of my life," she said. Also in the hallway area is an accordionlike book, "Ochre Scriptorium Grand" by Ellen Wiener, a Southold artist who teaches at Stony Brook University. It is 32 feet long when totally flat; folded up, it is only 14 by 20 inches. "It has a very specific theme, which is self-orientation," Ms. Wiener said in a phone interview. Intricate drawings of protractors, compasses, surveyors' tools and similar instruments are interspersed with quotations in eight languages. By depicting physical tools and languages, the artist said, she linked two "devices for finding our way in the world."

Lauren Monte's "Nothing Is as It Seems," a 2013 mixed-media work, is more lighthearted. Huge blue eyes peer out from inside a hole created by peeled-back pages of a black book. A three-dimensional blue-skinned hand reaches out of the opening, too. Ms. Monte recently graduated from Briarcliffe College in Patchogue, where she lives, said Ms. Giacommo, who taught her at the college. "American Dream," one of three robotlike statues with bodies made of stacked books, stands guard by a fireplace in the museum, which was once a private mansion. The sculpture was made by a Bellmore artist who calls herself Tmima Z, as were its companion pieces, "Travel Journal" and "Introduction."

Another work, "Things Girls Like to Do" by Tamar Stone, features an antique doll bed covered in a vintage lace-trimmed cotton comforter that has a "bedmaking song" embroidered on it. A pillow and other layers of the coverlet are also filled with words and images.

The piece that perhaps looks least like a conventional book is "The Boy Had Brown Hair and Wore a Blue Shirt," in which latex letters that dangle individually on strings attached to the ceiling spell out the title. It is by Maria Macedonio-Ritter, who lives in Blue Point. In a wall text, she wrote that she "struggled with reading comprehension" and that the

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“distorted letters symbolize the fragility between text and visualization and, ultimately, comprehension.”

About a third of the artists are from other countries. Among them is Mikhail Pogarsky of Moscow, who created “The Globe.” He covered a globe he found with white paper pulp, Ms. Giacommo said, and then applied printed phrases expressing his feelings about books, like “Books bring people together.”

Anne Marie Akdime Garzon, who is from Casablanca, Morocco, created a book in the round called “The Rainbow.” It recounts in its circle of wooden pages a Berber legend, using paintings and a handwritten language that the artist apparently invented. A booklet hanging below the piece includes a key to the symbols she used.

The entire exhibition, Ms. Wiener said, slows people down as they pay attention to details.

“They read and look,” she said. “People stay a long time in book shows.”

“*New York Bound: International Book Art Biennial*,” through Dec. 29, Islip Art Museum, 50 Irish Lane, East Islip. Information: (631) 224-5402 or islipartmuseum.org.

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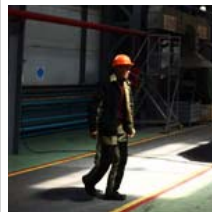


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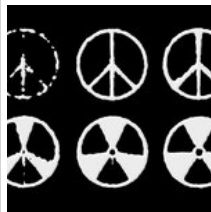
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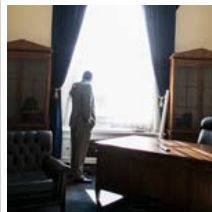
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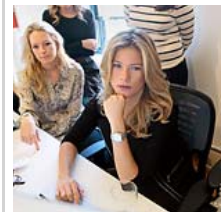


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