

## **Press & Release Exhibition of Artists' Books**

**Phoenix Brighton, 27 April – 9 June 2013**  
**[www.phoenixbrighton.org](http://www.phoenixbrighton.org)**

By Stephen Drennan, May 2013

I've been to Phoenix Brighton to see a groundbreaking exhibition of international artists' books in what one hopes will become a long-running sequence of special projects devoted to this unique and wide-ranging art form. Curated by Karin Mori, *Press & Release* includes artists from China, the United States, Australia and South Africa joining many from much closer to home - in the case of Iain Paxon, whose work fills the building's long corridor, as close as five minutes' walk away. It's a winning combination, providing an opportunity for local contributors and other visitors to view work they mightn't otherwise encounter, and to feel inspired, whether they're already established in the book arts field, discovering potential exciting new directions, techniques and subject areas, or were never before aware of the fascinating world of the artist-made book.

There's a refreshing lack of museumy hands-off-ness in *Press & Release*; that we-know-what's-best stuffiness and stiffness where books are impenetrably glass-topped-coffined, each a dead thing opened at a never-changing, curator/"expert"-selected spread. The majority of the works here don't appear clipped-winged but are browsable, can be left open at one's own favourite pages, one viewer having a "Wow! Look at this!" say in the initial impact of an individual work upon the next gallery-goer who encounters it. This wonderful accessibility allows each book to almost feel like an exhibition in its own right.

Never common-or-garden, the artists' books at this beguiling exhibition come in a multitude of sizes, shapes and a diverse range of production levels, from the instant and cheaply Xeroxed (silently communicating that yes, *you* could do this too) to the expensive, beautifully bound hardback one's a little afraid to engage with.

If an artist's record can lack the traditional continuous groove, instead having a multiplicity of dead ends which create absolute mayhem for one's delicate stylus, then why not an artist's book resembling a child's construction toy, with interlocking printed components to be slotted together however one wishes to form a mind-boggling number of "texts" ? At *Press & Release*, books are whatever their creators want them to be. Until you actually turn its cover aside, it's almost a disappointment if a book here superficially looks like you'd expect, resembles a conventional book.

Thumbing through isn't the half of it. Torches can be shone into holes bored in a mysterious box; whilst the gallery's corridor doubles as a gigantic picture book. Works are suspended from the ceiling, hang from a bird feeder, and lay open invitingly upon a zigzagged plinth. A tabletop has books fastened along both of its long sides, and there are special glass-fronted viewing boxes one can reach inside. Sculptor Ben Thomson, the exhibition's designer, certainly has been busy.

Perusing exhibits in this environment is a tremendously exhilarating process; seldom has engaging with a book felt less routine, mundane, due to the presentation, the sheer variety of physical actions required of the viewer. The effort we put in mirrors the hard work of the artists, the designer and the curator.

Visitors unwittingly reflect the sheer variety of the hundred-plus exhibits, becoming temporary sculptural forms ourselves in a whole host of positions, experiencing books not just in traditional gallery mode, by standing or sitting, but also by stooping, bending double, crouching, or kneeling solemnly upon the special black-covered logo-bearing cushions provided to prevent sore knees and dusty trousers, within the intentionally wheelchair-

friendly layout - something especially appropriate for particular intensely personal works such as Tony Gammidge's film.

Several unfurled concertina books, their many folds too fragile to withstand six weeks' constant handling, must instead be read by the spectator walking the full length of their resting places.

One can imagine, after lights out, the various tomes chuckling mischievously to one another, swapping tales of us humans' undignified poses, our inadequate attempts to prevent the occasional overbalance. It's almost as though we're an exhibition ourselves, as we interact with them, for *their* benefit and high amusement.

It's a show to which one can keep returning, for further exploration - the lack of admission charge helps here, encouraging multiple visits. It's an archipelago of small islands amongst which to make further sets of pleasing discoveries, voyaging to the more subtle, less shouty, not so exhibitionistic pieces we might have overlooked first time round in favour of obvious eyeball-pleasers, instant hits, e.g. Jonny Hannah's seductively bright hues and hand-drawn letterforms and cultural references, or a work resembling a star, attracting us on our initial walk around by the novelty of its shape.

Brighton's Jackie Batey (Damp Flat Books) thrives on irony and contradiction. She has an obvious appreciation for car boot sale and flea market fare, drawing inspiration from old-fashioned printed matter such as tissue paper-interleaved glossy souvenir postcards and picture card albums. Jackie gave an interesting presentation one Saturday afternoon about her wryly humorous, satirical work, exhibited here in a glazed booth the viewer can place their hands inside. Cocking a snook at advertisers who invoke nature unthinkingly to try to sell us things, *Menthol Daze*, produced by an invented cigarette brand, is a fold-out picture card album. Fourteen colour cards and explanatory texts show the contrast between the idyllic countryside and nature's more terrifying aspects - lakes teem with bacteria, conceal rocks we dive onto. Springtime brings unwanted allergies; peppermint in too-large quantities *aggravates* rather than alleviates heartburn. That Great Outdoors with which the cigarette company's identifying itself isn't *that* healthy after all. *Battered* compiles fish and chip shop signboards on the left, a plateful of ketchup-decorated chips opposite being demolished gradually with each page turn. Its plastic yellow gingham cover looks chopped from a chippy's tablecloth, and it comes with a chip fork and red celluloid fortune teller fish, all housed in a white paper food bag with a jolly-looking fish silkscreen. At the back's a warning, a Greenpeace quote, about diminishing cod stocks. We're losing the tradition of the seas being full of that particular fish because of our ongoing determination to perpetuate another tradition - the guzzling of that seaside meal. There's a dual-language book on kitschy plastic holiday souvenirs; Jackie talked of how they're possibly all made in the *onefactory*, but wind up in tourist spots worldwide. Snowdomes in Kuala Lumpur tickled her funny bone; a landmark building from that city, on a par status-wise with own Brighton Pavilion, has that flaky white substance surrounding it despite Kuala Lumpur never experiencing that particular weather condition. Out-of-order technology's another of Jackie's interests : malfunctioning computers, vending machines, cash machines, ticket barriers, plus the less hi-tech lavatory, appearing via cameraphone in her photo book, all conspire to make life that little less easier than it might be. *Null & Void* is a many-paged concertina on nothing, Fanny Adams, zero etc.; whilst another work, *Read*, based on a Dickens novel, comes with built-in bookmark and, also bound in, a handheld red filter enabling one to discover, amidst the red text, a green-printed Dickens quote about reading. For five years, Jackie has produced her art 'zine *Future Fantasteek !*, crammed full of social comment on topics such as royal weddings, the credit crunch, and MPs' expenses, with much hand-drawn lettering, illustration, and spoof advertisements.

In *Artists' Book Yearbook* editor Sarah Bodman's witty spiral-bound book *Masdevallia*, named for an orchid, beautiful but dangerous plants such as the infamous carnivorous Venus flytrap have been given their own advertising slogans, mocking the language with which manufacturers of perfumes and beauty products promote their wares. Also spiral-

bound, her excellent *GM Future* is a commentary on humans' manipulation of (or interference in) nature, and the various consequences of that - identical and perfect fruit, more efficient (thus cheaper) flowers, and slow-growing grass (less mowing); but also new viruses for us, the extinction of ladybirds, crop shortages and other horrors. Interspersed with the text pages are colourful images gleaned from old gardening books, making each copy within this 200-edition multiple a unique object.

One glazed cabinet houses some of Sarah's favourite picks from her collection, which pairs of visitors can examine, one seated either side, reading through the glass as pages are turned, hands thrust through special gloved slots which keep the exhibits clean. Included in Sarah's selection are works by Colin Sackett; the late great Les Coleman (his classic wrong-hand drawings of small everyday objects, along with its cover version by Coracle Press's Erica Van Horn); and David Shrigley - plus *Applicant* (found photographs relating to a 1960s biology Ph.D); and Simon Kentgens' postcard book of Dutch packaging-sourced landscapes; as well as a trio of anonymous volumes of found homemade record sleeves.

The Booklyn Artists Alliance have a similar glazed cabinet for very precious works including a remarkable one-off embroidered, text-filled composition book, lined and with red margins, and a two-in-one, turn-it-upside-down children's illustrated book. More conventionally accessed titles, some their own publications, sit on two ledges behind the exhibition shop : illustrated true-life reference library tales; Buenos Aires street art examined; a haiku anthology; a Xeroxed "queer male" 'zine, an antidote to the unidentifiable-with glossy, upmarket, acceptable gay mags of the mainstream; and the famous pocket-sized red-covered fanzine-makers' manual/bible *Stolen Sharpie Revolution*.

If we consumed text as we do food, what if the words disappeared? Sylvia Waltering's 2012 version of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* in paperback omits the text, leaving the page numbers and the margins' numerous pencil notes - perhaps a comment on how a multiple, out of its author's hands, becomes individualised via the physical traces its owner or user leaves, as well as through each reader's own personal interpretation.

*Roadkill*, by Waltering's partner in Battenburg Press, Lucy May Schofield, opens a little like a child's paper fortune teller, to shock and sadden by revealing an illustration of the sorry fate experienced by a vehicle-struck bird. Her silkscreened accordion book about time spent in Hebden Bridge features inventive typewritten artwork.

Leslie Wilson-Rutterford has reworked a year-of-birth *American Heritage* volume as a means of reconnecting with the country she left behind, adding foldouts, collage and inserts such as little flag decorations for wonderfully rich spreads on various aspects of American life : state flags and flora, the abundance of and reliance upon cars (using registration plate imagery), Lincoln's clothes, the 4th of July, blues singers, eagles, George Washington, the oil industry. The 1957 book has been transformed into something five times its original thickness. A novel has been reworked too, its pages painted in transparent white rendering the text still visible. We see stitching, photographs, pictures, maps, movable items on split pins, a takeaway menu, a mirror, a bookmark. Leslie's receipt book, by way of contrast, outwardly resembles a formal stationery item of similar dimensions to a cheque book. All of her accumulated qualities, desirable and less so, acquired via tuition, experience, inheritance or however, are listed and dated.

Brighton Book Art Collective member Dorry Smallman's altered a fragile, 125-year-old seaside volume, housed inside a box fitted into an opened hardback. Bookmarks, insertions and overlays enhance the Victorian piece, with some pages cut to resemble waves. On a wall, a Inuit art-influenced painted garment covered in colourful dots is attached by a thread to a 1980 dressmaking manual, recalling a time of motherhood, worked upon in subject-appropriate manner : sewn-together pages, a real zip, embroidery, and clothes label and pattern fragment extras.

Sarah Bryant (Big Jump Press) is the other Brighton Book Art Collective member

represented here. One of *Press & Release's* centrepieces is undoubtedly her magnificent boxed green and yellow book depicting a life-size female skeleton, which, when completely unfolded, fills Ben Thomson's specially constructed shelf, which doubles as a bench at which to sit and contemplate Sarah's other publications, which are housed in shallow alcoves above. In one, thin strips of paper (representing life's fragility ?) between covers communicate, in two scripts, the identities of those killed by a Baghdad car bomb in that city's bookselling centre; whilst *Biography* informs us of which elements humans are composed, then examining where else said elements crop up, whether beneficial to us (sea water, medicines, tools) or destructive (weapons).

Deborah Boardman's very recent painted book *Magnetism* features amidst its texts many pages redolent of vintage wallpaper : great designs in inoffensive gouache shades - pale pink, muted green, beige - with lines diagonal and radiating from corners, diamond panes, snowstormy dots. Almost in its entirety, the gallery's back wall is papered with large sheets which reflect the contents of the book, with a similar assortment of patterns and silver-painted texts.

This show isn't just about bookform work or illustrations on walls. Music, moving images, documentary sound recording and photographic evidence all play their part in this wonderful exhibition, which, one Saturday, had its own evening of book-related performances, *Shaking the Shelf*.

Xelis de Toro was outstanding at that Saturday event. Each wearing clothes with old books attached flapping like caught birds, he and a female partner danced to the death, reading aloud fragments from each other's outfits. In the exhibit for Xelis's *Shoot Reading*, we're shown random pages from several shot books bound to create a unique new bookwork. Dice were thrown to select pages from this new book, from which have been gleaned bullethole-adjacent words to form a text. This ought to be designated a multi-authored work in the sense that more than one person was involved in the shooting process. The book and resultant piece are augmented here by audible filmed documentation; whilst in the adjacent space, Ed Briggs' minidisc player contains a set of location recordings with books being read both aloud and silently.

"Poetry is the ultimate goal," states Carolina Diaz, whose book-inspired dance performance for the *Shaking The Shelf* event saw her emerge, feathered-armed, out of a large tissue paper-paged volume to singing bowl and flute accompaniment courtesy of the great Geoff Leigh, a one-time Henry Cow player. Diaz's *Living Books* project is documented in a tome concerning her various intriguing experiments with putting cress and poppy seeds inside books and placing book objects in natural environments, using photography to record these ephemeral and fragile pieces, the photographs becoming her art.

Watching Tony Gammidge's compelling short film *The Tragic Tale Of Tim Grim* is designed to be a solitary endeavour, an intimate one-to-one with his mother, her eyewitness narration heard via one single set of headphones whilst kneeling reverentially on a cushion up close to the screen in the specially designed enclosure. It's an account of the 1957 death of Gammidge's would-have-been older brother, killed aged five in a car accident prior to the artist's birth. A series of books on shelves are displayed in the space, with a torch supplied with which to view them. A toy ambulance and a music box in the ten-minute film are evocative of childhood, the former also representing one element of the day's terrible events. For Duncan Bullen and Jamie Crofts' *Chromatic Fields* project, a limited edition book of visuals - patterned formations of coloured dots - accompanies performance scores and a CD, audible via headphones, of piano compositions which include each of the instrument's 88 available notes.

Sumi Perera's beautiful, striking books sometimes have repositionable pages to allow the viewer to create their own narrative. Her topics include literary figures - Pushkin, Tennyson, Sterne - and architecture, her work involving printmaking, laser cutting, embroidery and

embossing, the process and the end product being of equal importance to her. Printed with burnt dust, the exquisite prizewinning *Building Blocks* incorporates foldouts, pleats and tags, with Sumi drawing with the laser beam, controlling it manually. Her Pushkin book explores the subjects of translation and transliteration - the use of a different writing system, and includes a page showing a non-western keyboard in red on black.

Brighton-based Italian artist Chiara Bianchi uses old books and clay to form sculptures - we're required to manipulate torches on chains to see these 3-D forms inside a box with holes of various sizes cut into it. The darkness surrounding the lit-up works gives them an air of mystery. Figures in sharply pleated paper dresses greet us, as do paper trees. An altered book lies open outside the box. A black and white photograph can be seen behind a window cut in one page, with thread overlaid.

Australian Heather Matthew's silkscreened bookworks with their night sky blue hue take a Victorian-era Scottish theoretical physicist's equations as their starting point. One piece, with strips of paper woven to form pages of an accordion book, is suspended from the gallery's ceiling and rests on a plinth to form a sort of arch, casting an interesting shadow on the wall behind it. Another has very delicate laser cuts, its pages able to be folded upwards at a diagonal as if ready to take flight.

South African book artist Estelle Liebenberg-Barkhuisen's one piece, standing upright, is a unique object, a double-layered star which contains a third layer; a clear plastic bookmark is star-shaped too. Windows are cut in double-page spreads to reveal images behind. Shells and jigsaw pieces can be seen as we walk around the work, or utilise the kneeling cushion for a closer examination of this book with its appealing elements of bright colour leaping out amidst the monochrome.

A largish, colourful work displayed like a six-pointed star is by Christina Mitrentse, who, using her book collection as raw material, cleverly formed emblems such as a hammer and sickle, a swastika, a star, a wheatsheaf, and the Olympic rings, then photographing these book-arrangements.

A well-known and highly respected figure in the Brighton music community, Iain Paxon ensures that each release with his group Hamilton Yarns has a visual element of equal importance to the recording it's attached to. A cabinet contains numerous booklets of words along with Iain's distinctive paper cut-outs and pencil drawings. For his corridor piece, a book of his words rests upon a tree stump ready to be consulted if one so wishes as the images on wall, floor and windows are examined: eyes, bricks, apples, an axe-wielding hand, a rather human-looking tree trunk. For the *Shaking The Shelfevening*, for which Iain dressed as the title character, Prince Volume, crown on head, a story was narrated to ship's piano accompaniment, and augmented with slide-sized illustrations blown up to fill the wall they were projected onto, making a virtue of all the usually unnoticed accidentals and imperfections occurring when work of such a minuscule scale is undertaken, limitations turned into something delightful. These illustrations are loaded with a similar beauty and charm as found in early cinema.

Mutter Matter are Jane Fox and Irene Mensah, who collaborated to produce delightful concertina books inspired by domestic tomes of similar vintage inherited from their grandmothers. Each started at one end, heading towards the centre page (a coming together symbolic of their flowering friendship) for which they worked jointly on a text. One concertina is bookended here by jars of homemade jam; the other has whisks standing in saucers of flour at either end. The books' reworked texts have a deliciously absurd humour, mischievously pricking the stuffy pomposity of certain instructions and admonitions of a bygone age. Also here are some of Jane's solo accordion books, one incorporating an antique sieve with a fork with text on its handle.

Where we live reveals who we are; likewise the objects with which we choose to represent ourselves. Previous occupants as well as our ancestors leave evidence of their existences

too. Using letterpress, silkscreen and digital print, plus manual typewriter, with buttons, badges, stickers, rubber stamping and stitched-in envelopes, Angie Butler and Philippa Wood have created a two-volume set of very personal 24-page works whose numbers signify specific places. Their recent collaborative project on "domestic archaeology" saw each give the other an online guided tour of her home. Memories of occasions when a set of cake decorations was used; inherited 1950s Homemaker and lady-with-poodle crockery; a treasured spoon rest; a noticeboard's several layers of accumulated day-to-day-living bump; tape measures; a contemporary kitchen table mapped out; floorboards... "SIT UP STRAIGHT ELBOWS OFF THE TABLE," admonishes one page in authoritative, shouty uppercase, jerking us all back to our childhoods wearing guilty expressions.

We've all heard the old joke, "When is a door not a door? When it's ajar." But when is a book not a book? If something's conceived as a book, described by its maker as such, then that's its status. In one large lit cabinet are displayed intriguing, compelling and boundary-testing works by fifteen Beijing students, from a Sumi Perera-run artists' book course exploring paper engineering and experimental structure. Wan Qian Ge's *Paper Cellulose* is a book-shaped/proportioned but unopenable block of layered clear sticky tape, shiny and mysterious and strangely beautiful - unexpectedly so considering the medium's banality and seeming unpromisingness. It may well be the piece in this exhibition I'd most love to own. The twelve-piece printed-strip construction toy-style *The Maze Book* (Zhou Wen Jun) symbolises how readers connect different elements of texts to create their own sense of them. The Chinese lettering renders this piece pleasingly mysterious to me, though it communicates its message most excellently. Another book in the cabinet has burns throughout; whilst a light box illuminates, for gallery-goers to view them to their optimum effect, the layered separate pages of the delicate, subtle *Press Studs*, incorporating those very fastening devices. *Thinking Plaster Tape* (Zhai Win Si) dispenses with the traditional typical book form, is a ball of assorted types of tape inside a zipped cover representing a brain, and is unravelled into an almost never-ending strip, seen here in a breathtaking spaghetti-ish tangle. Another work shows just book covers and spines, a comment, perhaps, on how books are cultural signifiers, sometimes shown off on shelves unread to promote a particular image (wealth; erudition; taste). These red gilded Shakespeare covers house empty space.

John Bently is the man behind that series of thirty small box-books with painted portrait covers placed over by a window - open these boxes to reveal a sheet of overheard south London conversation fragments relating to each character depicted. For *Shaking The Shelf*, John's band Bones & The Aft, with amazing passion, performed two stunning sets of narration-filled songs rooted in texts published by his long-running (49 handmade publications in thirty years) Liver & Lights imprint. A world of forlorn high streets whose junk shops stock records in the wrong sleeves; outsider schoolmates; cheap travel. Mining a broadly similar seam of Englishness to the late great Kevin Coyne, perhaps. One of John's costumes had ears printed all over, and he wore a gold jacket too; whilst towards the end of the band's second set, John dressed as a skeleton. One book on sale is a collection of found words from the streets of Harlow, John's portrait of that new town at a particular point in its history told through discarded or lost scraps of paper never intended for public consumption.

One of Bently's favourite book artists, the ultra-prolific Andi McGarry of Sun Moon & Stars Press, an 'eighties Brighton graduate, has become one of my favourites too. He supplies some gorgeous torn-edged books, displayed hanging off a bird feeder. A set of six tiny (A8) volumes celebrates a visiting blackbird. McGarry often uses painted or marbled pages with text and illustration in black, simple and direct. He lives by the sea, a major source of inspiration for him: witness his *To The Blaskets*, for instance. Rough-hewn meets beautifully composed. Each book is a unique item as he physically hand-makes from scratch every copy within an edition, based on a master copy, rather than reproducing identical copies churned out via a computer printer - like when you were a kid in the era before the ubiquity of the photocopier in newsagent's shops and supermarkets, creating

your own comic and then, laboriously and in blissful ignorance, drawing identical ones for friends.

Also on a bird theme, thirty-six monoprinted bird-shaped cut-outs by Janet Allsebrook fly the length of the main gallery just beneath the ceiling, each bearing words pertaining to human objects, values or whatever, anything birds can manage well enough without : examples are shopping centres, styrofoam, celebrities, glam rock - and wars. Paper nesting boxes are hung in the space, a comment on the uselessness of the manner in which humans intersect with nature. Our interference means trees are felled for timber for boxes unpopular with birds and simply left to rot.

Lee Shearman of the local Borbonesa collective - who formed sometime around the turn of the millennium and gave an illuminating talk about their work, explaining their background in collage and assemblage, their collaborations and multi-authored texts - offers a boxed set of six miniature eight-pagers, showing black-on-white silhouettes of complicated-looking engines based on nineteenth century industrial machines. The group's Ian Whitmore's amazing screenprinted *Othello* bestiary is an eighteen-foot, 54-page "squeezebox" book, its illustrations all hand-cut from paper, with layout by his Borbonesa partners Shearman and Matt Fleming. All of the creatures mentioned by Shakespeare, both actual and metaphorical, are shown in the sequence in which they appear in the drama. Also there's a beautiful, intricate sculptural work, a pop-up which, most surprisingly, folds flat, having one examining it most carefully from different angles, scratching one's head, trying to work out exactly how this can possibly be.

With inspirations including Ben Shahn and Edward Bawden on the visual side, as well as figures from music, literature and cinema, illustrator Jonny Hannah runs Cakes & Ale Press. Alongside more conventional works, his imprint "publishes" a series of one-off non-functional books : found volumes glued shut, their covers and spines painted, things mass-produced turned into unique artworks. It's Magritte's "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (but *arepresentation* of one, i.e.) taken to the next level: is a *painting* of a book *on* an existing book a book ? These fun and paradoxical objects are absent, on display elsewhere in town, so Hannah is represented at *Press & Release* by twenty-one wall-mounted flat pieces referencing subjects such as experimental filmmaker and folk music collector Harry Smith, bluesman Blind Lemon Jefferson, Minstrel of the Appalachians Bascom Lamar Lunsford, and the Titanic, all highly effective standing out against the black background which they've been given.

Brighton-based artist Jim Sanders' many-faced totem pole-esque structure incorporates a hardbacked art book between two of its sections; also a small sketchbook is sandwiched between two tree trunk segments, a set of pencils sprouting from the tree seemingly responsible for an area of gallery wall scribble. One isn't quite certain if this defacement of the pristine white surface has been authorised by gallery bigwigs, or if it's some naughty after-dark vandalism.

The award-winning, highly regarded graphic artist/illustrator (*Guardian*, *TES*, *Economist*) Otto Dettmer's screenprinted picture books are amongst my favourites here. Several rest open in a line upon a zigzagged wooden plinth by a window, where they benefit from the natural light, with others opened out and suspended and viewable from both sides. One work sees Otto, who numbers Russian Constructivism amongst his influences, interpreting a darkly amusing Benjamin Heathcote verse on the grisly fates various creatures would wish to see befall us humans, fitting neatly with the homo sapiens-versus-nature theme prevalent throughout this show. One of those smaller hanging books, *Visa and Solo* (just two colours on yellow card, highly eye-catching as well as economic to produce), concerns supermarket shopping : trolleys, security guard at the turnstiles, stacked tins, consumers' selection of products, the checkout queue - gorgeous, but alas - and scarcely surprisingly - sold out. A large *Peter and Jane*-style children's book on invasive species, with a lovely fold-out centre spread, shows again Otto's canny employment of the hue of the paper

stock: it's in grey, white and, for the pressed weeds, green, printed onto brown undercarpet lining paper.

Making a virtue of limitations in a similar manner to Otto is Oddstock Books' Karen Morgan, who puts the scrumptious colours of cheap sugar paper to use as backgrounds for her bold, appealing stencil art-style commentary on some of the more awful aspects of contemporary existence, such as xenophobia. "Modern life" *might* be "rubbish", but at the end she implores us to do something to change things.

From award-winning American Harold Graves, who's kept an ongoing sketchbook-journal for over thirty years, come two amazing handpainted one-offs, one velvet-covered, They're chock-full of faces, letterforms, spots and spirals, plus a hand in outline, a skull... a mixture of abstracts and portraits. Stuck-down pieces of cut and torn paper are visible beneath the paint, with postage stamps, maps, cards and a comic panel amongst the collaged additions. One spread resembles a Rorschach inkblot test. One of several exciting new discoveries for me.

Roz Cran works in a variety of media, producing books as an element of each project. Here we see a zigzag book of chalk-on-blackboard drawings of different types of pillar.

seekers of lice is a self-publishing poet/artist who creates lowercase texts which sometimes appear on transparent pages. Her books, externally quiet and unassuming, some with lovely Japanese-style side binding with thread, are actually rather startling once you're inside, one including colour photographs, another incorporating several pages where she's painted onto see-through paper. In a flick book for sale in the shop are set out in word form the calls of British birds. Usefully, the shop, situated in the centre of the main gallery, doubles as an extra exhibition space as it stocks titles which don't appear in *Press & Release* itself, some by otherwise unrepresented artists. New books are brought in regularly, so more than just a single visit is recommended.

The weekly *Swings & Roundabouts* workshops run by Carol Quinn see the construction of park-themed books - dog-walking, playing, wildlife - by individual visitors, or contributions of single pages for later compilation into group works. These cheerfully spontaneous books, often by folk completely new to the artists' books concept, join the painstakingly assembled ones by the well established to become part of the overall exhibition too.

With all of the inventiveness on offer at *Press & Release*, how could one be absolutely certain, from a fleeting glance from a distance, that the bunch of keys some unfortunate chap left behind inadvertently wasn't an exhibit with a text or image engraved on the back of each component? Hmm, now there's food for thought, a possible concept for next time...

***Stephen Drennan is a Brighton-based cultural historian, D.J., collector and occasional exhibitor.***