

## **PRESS & RELEASE 2016: Technology and the Evolution of the Artist's Book**

**Phoenix Brighton**

**30 April – 12 June, 2016**

**Open Wednesday – Sunday 11 am – 5 pm**

**Weekend of events: Saturday and Sunday, 14 & 15 May**

**Full details of exhibition and events at [www.phoenixbrighton.org](http://www.phoenixbrighton.org)**

### *Exhibition Preview by Dany Louise*

The world of artists' book is highly distinct, attracting artists and makers who produce varied and often unique works, using a surprising range of technologies, styles and thematic concerns. We might currently be obsessed with digital and non-material forms in our daily lives, but the drive to make and exhibit artists' books suggests that there is still a strong attraction to the tactile nature of books as physical objects. Since the 1980s, it has become an increasingly popular genre, recognised as its own artform within mainstream contemporary art, and becoming highly collectable. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, for example, has a department that holds the largest collection of international artists' books in the UK.

In May 2016, audiences on the south coast will have the opportunity to explore this form for themselves with "Press & Release 2016: Technology and the Evolution of the Artist's Book", an exhibition of works being shown at Phoenix Brighton. One of the world's leading experts, New York based artist and curator Maddy Rosenberg, has been invited to select an international presentation of artists' books for display. Complementing the exhibition contents, Brighton-based design team Curious Space is creating the exhibition design, in order to show the work in ways that maximise its impact but also allows the audience to interact with it as much as possible.

The curated exhibition in the large gallery will be accompanied by a selection of work by local book artists the small gallery and a weekend of events featuring Brighton based book art collectives including Fabula, Sussex Book Arts Collective, and artists based in the studios at Phoenix Brighton.

Articulating her vision for the show, Rosenberg says: "This is an exhibition of contemporary artists who work with the book as an art form. These international artists incorporate old and new technology, and materials that may or may not include paper, and may or may not include printing. I really want to show a general and art audience that within the genre of book art, it doesn't have to look like a book art exhibition. I focus on how artists like to work with the book, to really open people's eyes to what an artist book can be, and to how artists are working to push the boundaries of the form. The artists I work with come from the literary world and segue into the art world. In book art, you have artists who are

coming from all different mediums and there is much more experimentation going on, so much that is fresh and vibrant.”

Rosenberg is bringing together work from about twenty notable artists from across the world, focusing on hand-made, exquisitely crafted sculptural objects and installations. The show will include the beautiful “Curved-Crease Sculpture” of Eric and Martin Demaine; the exquisite, delicate and evocative work of Mary Ting (“So much to remember, so much I long to forget”); and the smart, highly finished compositions of intellectuals and artists Liberateure. It will also include a selection of work from the Book Art Museum in Lodz, Poland. Organised into three distinct sections, one will centre around the work of Marianne Petit and her concept of “breathing books”. A second section will show Jay Bolotin's unique, animated operatic film “The Jackleg Testament Part 1: The Story of Jack & Eve” in which he has created the woodcut images, animated them, and written and performed the soundtrack. A third space is loosely termed “a reading room”, allowing visitors the opportunity to properly study and interact with the books, although Curious Space are keen to point out that this will not be a classic “reading room” approach but a more joyful experience for visitors.

Rosenberg has been involved with artist's books all her working life and sees it as her mission to bring them into the heart of the contemporary fine art world. “We're at a very exciting time because when I started making them, people didn't understand what an artist book was,” explains Rosenberg. “Now you get mainstream exhibitions and there are a couple of artists' books being shown. It's not being considered as a peripheral artform anymore. We're now at the place where photography was before it became co-opted into the mainstream.”

“The area of artist's books is very inclusive and inspires people working across a range of disciplines” says Karin Mori, Artistic Programme Manager at Phoenix Brighton. “It's a wonderful format for collaboration, invention, pushing boundaries and subversion. As a practice, artists are using a huge range of styles, technologies, formats and sizes to realise their visions. Consequently, one of the aims for Phoenix is to celebrate the gallery as a special, immersive space where visitors can encounter these physical objects in a very direct and memorable way”. By inviting Rosenberg to curate – she is one of the world's foremost authorities on artists' books, and runs CENTRAL BOOKING in New York, a space devoted to the genre – Phoenix is extending the range of works it can present, and bringing international quality works to Brighton.

This is the third in the “Press and Release” sequence of exhibitions and events devoted to artists' books. The first two projects took place in 2008 and 2013, both curated by Mori and designed and constructed by artist Ben Thomson. These were fantastically successful, enabling audiences to explore the rich genre of art-book-object making in some detail, as well as connecting the gallery with Brighton's various sub-cultures centering around independent publishing, comics, 'zines, and illustration.

Mori is particularly concerned that the exhibition design fully complements and maximises the impact of the books. “Apparently, what we've done in the previous two exhibitions, bringing together artist's books and exhibition design into an integrated whole, is quite unique in the world” she says. Both these exhibitions embraced the challenge of enabling visitors to handle the books, feel textures, unravel and turn pages where appropriate, and this same challenge is part of the brief for exhibition designers Curious Space in 2016, who must also ensure that the artworks are protected from damage.

"We will be designing the space to have its own personality, which will underpin the exhibition" says Curious Space co-director Anna Jones. "The audience will be immersed in the exhibition as soon as they walk in. The idea is that we will make a kind of 'complete experience' for the audience who can then get lost in exploring the works."

"We were asked to design the exhibition space because we specialise in creating interactive, immersive exhibition spaces" she continues. "We've been resident designers at the Museum of Ethnography in Switzerland since 2006 and our last project there was to design a site specific promenade around the town's exhibition spaces, which we did as a kind of treasure hunt. We're quite unusual in what we do".

It's an exciting concept that is juxtaposing different experts to create a more resonant whole. "Maddy really knows her artists' books" says Mori "it's her life and she's got an impressive, in-depth knowledge of the international artist book world. This exhibition will bring something really special to Brighton and the region, which would not otherwise be seen here". She is excited about the opening: "I hope people will enjoy a leisurely visit, lose track of time and come away feeling inspired"

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