

Artists' Publications – Andi McGarry

BACKGROUND

The title of my talk is Artists' Publications. I'd like to start by giving a bit of background about myself and my activities. In 1986 I formed the Sun Moon and Stars Press having graduated from Brighton two years previously. I'd fallen in love with a girl who lived in Wexford and I spent a long time trying to convince her of my intentions. This involved a lot of travelling back and forth to Ireland and eventually moving over. During that summer I'd been working on a fishing boat in the Irish sea and had produced along with a few boxes of fish - a catch of poems. My first book was born - Rhyme of the unseasoned mariner. I made the book by hand physically typing each copy then hand painting each illustration and stapling the spine. I had worked up a master copy from which all the books were subsequently generated - a bit like a mad monk. Each copy was a version - similar but different to every other version. A unique edition in fact. Making a copy from the master copy was a method that worked for me. This set up the modus operandi for future sun moon and stars press book production.

Between 1986 and 2007 I produced 180 titles using this method. My mission statement in 1986 was to "Circulate Organic Ideas" - what I meant by that was I was going to produce books with my take on things, made in such a way that the evolution of the works and Ideas and means of production would all be connected via strong themes and a recognisable house style. I was the most cookie publishing house that I knew.

WHY PUBLISH AT ALL?

I wanted to test the water - I felt I was on to something and using the book form seemed appropriate. I received some interest in my publications via reviews particularly Stephanie Brown's column in Artists' Newsletter, there were also cheques in the post and publicity. This was great encouragement and feedback. I decided to explore other Ideas in book formats. I quickly established certain themes and styles in the books.

The books featured figurative scenes with words tumbling alongside. Words of a poetic nature - but not necessarily poems. Images and words combined sometimes a little haphazardly. Juxtaposed maybe.

My books were certainly recognisable - the papers I used I tore down from big sheets creating a characteristic (a false deckle I would call it) Hand typing and writing the words ensured plenty of typos and spelling mistakes.

For me the content and the format of the publication are all parts of the same circle. In book terms "Totality" in the words of Keith Smith not just the content, binding, paper, covers how it moves everything and I would even include the marketing in that.

Being in charge of the totality of the book was essential in my book making activities. In most of the 180 titles created I was the Author illustrator poet bookmaker.

Being involved in all stages of production in the commercial book world is unusual.

Organising a book is a bit like organising a film there are many parts elements that all need to come together to make it work as one. I like putting a thing together.

When I started making books they were priced at £2 each. Today they might be £50-£300. My anvil has been constantly clanging with new Ideas and a hotly forged book can sometimes be made within hours of the inspiration happening. I revel in this idea of "speedy production", no queues or waiting in lines, I had recipes sorted for "Insta-book cooking." "Speedy books" in the words of Radoslaw Nowakowski. Sometimes a book would grow out of several different experiences over a long period.

CONTENT

The figurative elements would usually be some form of depiction of humans in the landscape and this remained fairly constant through the years- inky figures in landscape paddling boats across a horizon, or jumping cracks on the Burren, maybe figures in love running and leaping with fiery desire. These figures have been teeming through the pages gallivanting cavorting singing dancing and drinking and dishing out kisses via twists and turns just as in life. My narratives have twizzled around these figures never shy of poetry or humour.

The themes and Ideas bore some resemblance to my situation, the current landscape, the state of mind, they might loosely describe events they are often disguised with a little poetics, or a little invention for flavour or spice.

MARKETING WORK

Via the Wexford Artists Book exhibition which I conceived and co organised for 10 years I was able to see a lot of Artists Books 1st hand. This exposure had quite an influence and effect on my practice and my continued involvement in Book arts. I also went to lots of Artists book fairs in London-I liked the fact that my own works were nicely different from most other makers. I took a stand at Frankfurt Bookfair in 2000 and also went to Seoul in Korea. Selling work behind a table is quite hard, but marketing/networking is an important part of the process and at the end you see a work go all the way thru from Idea to sale-You certainly need a hard head and be in for the long haul.

Such testing encounters really do call into question why an artist would go to such lengths to publish at all?

I think it comes with the territory, it's a part of their remit, part of their artistic licence, like lettered rock they will strut their stuff - because they need to/ want to /have to. Exhibitionists is a word containing exhibition. We need to show others fellows strangers colleagues- that we are alive and kicking- Did I show you this yet? Exhibitions are often called "Shows" and it is the showing that the other magic ingredient is finally released and realised - when the people see the creation.

SEA CHANGE

In 2007 several things occurred which changed the way I was publishing, what I published and how I published it.

Sarah Bodman had sent me a questionnaire asking me amongst other things "Did I think computers would impact on the way I produced work?" the Luddite in me chortled as I picked up the quill pen to produce another hand made copy.

Then I won a folkatronics bursary with Visual Arts Ireland, this enabled me to run some Ideas in a DVD Video format and produce a DVD with a soundtrack. The DVD featured lots of underwater imagery and was also turned into a book- but this got me

thinking - making movies was such fun, and there were a host of new challenges.

Simultaneous acquisition of a laptop and a digital camera allowed me to explore the possibilities of movie making using a simple editing programme (movie maker) it had all become possible. I began making movies at a feverish rate.

A trip to Geordie land for a birthday to go play with the old band, stirred up longings for music making. On my return to Ireland I said to my partner "I wish there was someone here to make music with." The next morning as the fates would have it a guy approached me asking would I like to form a band to do a benefit. Working with other people making music has all kinds of bonus features - a perfect antidote for isolationists, as collaboration is the order of the day - and the house is filled with music

With in a year, and after several band reformations, recording music, coupled with movie making, creating soundtracks, editing the film and producing DVDs, and then publishing them- sun moon and stars press films swung into production and has produced 30 DVD films to date. Visual Publications in the form of DVD movies opens up whole new area of possibilities.

NEW OLD THEMES

In my films I often use myself as the figure running through the landscape. Further collaborations are required in movie making finding a good cinematographer for example. The figure moves through animating the landscape providing a focus. Running jumping leaping walking. There are still elements of fun humour and like all good artists books - surprises. My ideas always want to be blurring our side outdoors taking you some place you didn't quite expect.

The movie camera allows for a different kind of landscape appreciation, via editing and with inclusion of sound track the synthesizer makes an entirely new form of artwork. I want my films to retain a notebook scrapbook journal feel. In my film "flag man" it was the soundtrack that I decided upon first- we then went out and filmed the Ideas that came from those words. I think of the music as an audio narrative- in lieu of acting and drama perhaps.

I have published a number of films on you tube and as an outlet you tube and similar sites are an interesting starting point. The work is available for free - thus the return of a kind of cheap multiple.

I love seeing my work on a big screen too at festivals and in new situations, there is lots of potential for these visual publications-and this makes the making worth while. Its great to follow a thing through from Idea to consumption.

My most recent film *Gone in 38 seconds* was a commissioned documentary film featuring a guy who bought his partner a double-decker bus, the shortened version you will see contains lots of the elements of fun and landscape which interest me.

I intend to develop my interest in documentary films as a route for uncovering other ideas.

In September 2009 I am co organising 1st Wexford ~Independent Documentary Film Festival - which will take place in the village where I live.

I am delighted in the films and what is now possible with simple equipment. These are indeed exciting times for artists to be publishing in.

Andi McGarry 2009