Interview with Victoria Bianchetti, artist, Argentina

Sarah Bodman interviewed Victoria Bianchetti by email over November - December 2009

Were you aware that you were making artists' books when you started to make them?

I spent my last year at university making an artist’s book without knowing what I was doing. I remember really enjoying this experience. Two years later I discovered, by chance, what an artist’s book actually was. During an organised visit to a paper mill, its owner, Vicky Sigwald invited me to participate in a study group for artists’ books, together with Patricia Salas, a book artist. To my surprise, I realised that what I had been doing at the university was identical to the work presented to me during this research workshop. Consequently, I made up my mind to focus my university thesis on this topic, which had appealed to me for so long without knowing what it was.

We feel that the content and context of any artist’s book is paramount, we are not so interested in categorising books into separate formats, but do you feel there are things that can or cannot be artists’ books, or should or should not be?

Several years ago this question would have been easier to answer because sometimes, at least in Argentina, books were presented as just folders with some images inside them. There were very few people who really knew what an artist’s book was. Now there are more people working, teaching and writing about the subject. I myself cannot say what an artist’s book should or should not be. It is the artist’s choice to make his or her work turn out as an artist’s book. It does not really matter if it has the format of a book or if it is an object. What really matters is the artist’s intention.

What does the term ‘artists books’ mean to you? How would you describe an artist’s book? What do you think of the term artists’ publishing compared to artists’ books?

An artist’s book is a work of art made in the format of a book solely by an artist.

But also it is a journey. Where? It is a playful journey where the support is the book, where the text and the image coexist, sometimes trespassing from the two-dimensional to become an object. Both the text and the image turn into visual elements capable of generating a sensitive and innovative composition, creating a thousand and one layered stories. These stories offer a non-linear reading/understanding, which leads to a versatile pattern of concepts and ideas that bring us back to the more basic conceptual starting point.

I believe this is the journey. To realise that after going through the pages/spaces of an artist’s book, your intimate, sensitive world is no longer the same, or it has been shifted.

Can you tell us briefly about artists making books in Argentina?

Here in Argentina artists have been making books, probably since 1957, but it has really been only since 1998 they have become popular. Shortly after that year Matilde Martin, a well known artist, presented a seminar about artists’ books, and shortly afterwards one of the attendees of the seminar, Carla Rey, another local artist, founded a group called “Instantes Gráficos”.

I joined the Instantes Gráficos group in 2004. Ever since then the group has not stopped working with artists’ books, holding several exhibitions all over the country and also abroad. Anyhow last year (2008) and this one too (2009) I have seen many more artists working with this format in Argentina, and a lot more exhibitions too.

Why do you think that there are more artists making books now in Argentina? Is it part of a world growth or particular to this country?

For the last ten years several courses, seminars and lectures concerning artists’ books have been held in Buenos Aires. Juan Carlos Romero and Carla Rey have been actively encouraging this form of art there. In the rest of the country there have been several attempts to take this up but with much less organisation, although I have been in contact with some more regional artists recently and discovered some wonderful pieces of art. But as Argentina is so big it is very difficult to get to know them and see the artworks in person.

You have been researching artists’ books yourself, is the subject taught at art schools, and is there much reference material available?

In 2002 I started working on my thesis on “The Artist’s Book in Argentina”. At that time there was hardly any reference material available anywhere just a few brochures and exhibition catalogues.

So for my research I used brochures from bigger exhibitions, the Internet and The Century of Artists’ Books by Johanna Drucker. From then on I have never stopped researching, and from 2004 I have been delivering seminars at university level for artists, art teachers, writers and bookbinders.
Duelo de Mi by Victoria Bianchetti and Patricia Salas, 2009.
With a poem by Bianchetti, the book has been sown by Patricia Salas with cuts as if it were injured.

An exhibition of artists' books during the book fair at the Centro Cultural UNSEL at the province of San Luis, 2008

Victoria Bianchetti (left) in 2008 with Martha Hellion
Are you using digital technologies for books – Internet or screen-based works? Or do you prefer traditional printmaking methods?

I have always used the computer to make sketches and tests. Once I succeed in getting the image I intend to create I stop to analyse which is the best way of presenting it. This might include giving it a specific texture or transparency or it might become a piece of video art. So, some of my books are engravings, others are photographs, drawings, objects and video art. Through the Internet, the artist’s book has become much more popular among artists in Argentina and I think that it is due to online access to information on the subject.

We have noticed that mobile phone novels are very popular in Asia now, and e-books continue to join the market are you aware of any artists making books using mobile phone or e-book technology in Argentina?

I am afraid I have not have the opportunity to meet any artist focused on this field or seen it in any exhibition or art fair here in Argentina yet.

Are Argentinian artists using the book as a social or political artwork?
Are they perceived as democratic multiples – cheap, spreading a message, or are they seen as a luxurious artwork?

Artists use different ways of expressing their messages, and in Argentina in particular there is a great number of them whose work has been both social and political in subject. Sometimes these pieces of work are unique, but very often they have the layout of a newspaper or a magazine, echoing mass-produced media. Examples of this are Ferrari, Romero, Santoro and the group “Escombros”.

Your latest work “Veintiocho Casillas de Seguridad” references the style of the American artist Ed Ruscha, is this artist a particular focus for you or were you inspired just to produce a one-off book?

My most recent book rests on the concept of the democratic multiple, and of the use of modern methods of editing, printing, publishing and commercialisation of books. I took as my inspiration Ed Ruscha’s Twentysix Gasoline Stations, and I began observing my daily drive to the supermarket, taking the kids to school and on my way to work. As I looked around me, I noticed the security posts located at every corner, they have become part of the urban geography.

In 2005 I began to photograph them. What first caught my attention was the way in which these guards took up their spaces in the security posts, and how the posts follow their neighbourhood’s architectural characteristics; in terms of the colours of the walls, the design of their tiny gardens, the materials with which were built. As I kept on with my investigation, I noticed a close relationship, between the years in which they were installed and until 1970, there was a significant link between the main political and economic events of the country, the increase of poverty and the rise in crime alongside the rise in the number of these security posts. Having photographed these habitable spaces as portraits and presented them in the style of Ed Ruscha’s Twentysix Gasoline Stations, you will notice in my book that the naïve look of these security posts does not at all reflect the reason for their existence.

Do you think there is any limit to the definition of an artist’s book?

There are as many definitions of artists’ books today as there are artists. I believe the starting point is: The artist’s book is a piece of art with the format of a book. But artists always do what they do best, break the limits and break the rules. Now, especially, artists’ books are a mixed media artwork, and so I believe, because of this, there cannot be any limit to the definition of an artist’s book.

Veintiocho Casillas de Seguridad by Victoria Bianchetti was published in November 2009. You can preview her book online at: www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/963037

Victoria Bianchetti: http://artecreatividad.blogspot.com
Veintiocho Casillas de Seguridad
Victoria Bianchetti, November 2009

Above and below: Veintiocho Casillas de Seguridad
Victoria Bianchetti, November 2009
Some information on Argentinian artists’ books

Artempresa Gallery, directed by Marie Elena Kravetz in Cordoba has an interest in artists’ books.
www.mariaelenakravetzgallery.com

Fundación PROA in Buenos Aires, shows exhibitions of artists’ books: www.proa.org

Con Guantes Blancos / With White Gloves was an exhibition of artists’ books shown at VVV Gallery in Buenos Aires in August 2009 as part of the 8th Artists Photo Book Fair organised by Espacio Ecléctico: www.vvvgallery.com/exhibitions/conGuantesBlancos.html


You can read an essay: ARTISTS’ BOOKS FROM LATIN AMERICA by Martha Hellion, published online by Printed Matter at:
http://printedmatter.org/researchroom/essays/latin.cfm

An Unorthodox Odyssey: Argentinian artist Ral Veroni’s political and personal publications by Linda Neilson was first published in Printmaking Today Vol. 8 No 2 Summer 1999. You can read the essay online at http://www.indeprintent.com/prensa/odissey.htm

All of Ral Veroni’s works are also online at http://www.indeprintent.com and you can download a case study of the artist in Artists’ Books Creative Production and Marketing: 2nd Edition 2007 at:
http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/surv07.htm

Vortice Argentina publishes artists’ books, visual poetry and mail art: http://www.vorticeargentina.com.ar

Read related essays on experimental visual poetry by South American artists and poets at: www.poesiavisual.com.ar/escritos/visual_poetry.html

Jorge Pirozzi:
http://www.papelerapalermo.com/arte/pirozzi.asp

Carla Rey: http://carlarey.blogspot.com and http://instantesgraficos.blogspot.com