

NOVEL ABSTRACTIONS

Reyes + Davis Independent Exhibitions
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KEN BOTNICK

Clarence Morgan Sketchbooks is a visual documentation of the way an artist thinks and goes about his practice. Clarence Morgan's sketchbooks had been left at Botnick's home, and the visible, candid thought processes on the pages appealed to Botnick as an entree into an inquisitive mind. The content was lifted, curated, manipulated and recast in new materials. The melodies of the artist's imagination interact with the pulse and thrum of everyday detail. The reader receives few contextual clues — certain quotes are emphasized, scales of sketches are changed, and outside voices appear.

Kamini is a lilting composition of Indian poetry, selections from Jayaveda's *Gita Govinda*, presented in both English and Sanskrit (translated by Andrew Schelling). The text appears with Botnick's meditative photographs of northern India. The arrangements occur on a backdrop of twenty blues to symbolize the manifestations of Krishna. Several moods are spun: reverent, longing, erotic.

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ENRIQUE CHAGOYA

Anachronisms, clashing entities and warring tones — a mix of comic, political, and pornographic — fill Chagoya's *The Misadventures of the Romantic Cannibals*. Menageries of iconography, engravings, cultural stereotypes, money, Mayan temples, serpents, and more are master-printed on handmade Ivory Amate paper. The book reads from right to left in the pre-Columbian style, and is in codex format.

Juxtapositions of cultural values and natural points of interest are at play in *Histoire Naturelle des Espèces*, a zoetrope of creatures both living and extinct as well as distinctly modern, affected humans. The viewer sees, among others, a venture capitalist, a dinosaur, a Marxist monkey, a Creationist monkey, Superwoman, an editor, a bird.

Chagoya presents the chaos of economic collapse in *Illegal Alien's Guide to the Concept of Relative Surplus* as a flood of images from all sides of the catastrophe. Many cultures are represented. The arrangement is disorienting but full of luscious decay; items are rendered useless by the mess and symbols are stripped of their full meanings.

La Portentosa Vida y la Muerte, the exhibit's only print, is an exquisite, stylized portrayal of the story of Adam and Eve, a rumination on mortality.

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KATE CLARK

Clark created *Echolalia* as a field for inquiry, presented in the form of traditional Chinese scrolls on aged Japanese washi paper. The reader unwinds the scroll and the story unfolds like an animation, with simple images designed to prompt inward conversation. The imagery begins as a black, round shape that takes on human moods and traits as the story progresses. The unrolling of scrolls is an ancient Eastern family tradition, Clark says, that's both communal and introspective — a spiritual contrast to the modern practice of sitting around the television. Clark credits Shel Silverstein's *The Missing Piece* as an inspiration. Each scroll is painted and printed by hand, with unique variations arriving in each meeting of ink and paper.

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SUE JOHNSON

The two selections shown from Johnson's series *The Inventories*, *Fridge* and *Rain*, explore two often opposing ways the mind organizes — associatively and categorically. Items and stylized words or brand names show up in the accordion-style books. Each hand-painted image is delivered in plenty of white space, allowing it to be a strong single note. The almost moodless miscellanies of items in a minimal palette have the feel of simple documentation. Presented this way, viewers see common situations of beauty, humor, and near-surreal variety occurring on such an eye level that they generally slip by undetected.

Birds Commonly Mistaken for Other Things is another kind of taxonomy — the pairing of unusual associations within a single imagined creature. Here, Johnson presents hybrids in rich detail, sparking curious narratives that interact with the viewer's prior associations.

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ELLEN KNUDSON

Knudson, whose specialty is letterpress, presents poetry by Leah Eisenbeis embedded with vibrant, gestural images of animals and plants in *A Strawberry in the Snow*. The graphics inflect the text, providing motion and mood. Each clothbound, French-sewn book comes in a clamshell box with decorative hand stitching.

The kind rhythms that occur while propelling the body through water are present in *How Swimming Saved My Life*, a book for which Knudson also wrote the text. It's a plain-spoken homage to an elegant method of self-help, full of meditative images and words.

In *Wild Girls Redux: An Operator's Manual*, exquisite, outsized graphics of pinup girls are layered with tactile, low-budget items — a doily, flocked paper, a leaf of ledger paper. The text is a tongue-in-cheek field guide for both “being” and “operating” a wild woman, and brings to mind issues of gender and safety, and the constraints of sexism present even in the seemingly boundless environment of the open road.

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CLIFTON MEADOR

Kora was inspired by Meador's travels to Derge Parkhang in Tibetan China, where he saw their traditional methods of book production, still practiced and cherished by the people. He created a digital font from his line drawings of pilgrims he watched there, who seemed to embody the soul of the place. *Kora* uses this font on its pages, which are loose and long, in the style of the tradition it honors. The book is wrapped in Tibetan cloth.

The highway built to link Georgia and Russia is used as a narrative device for *Avalanche*, which chronicles, in poetic form, the fall of communism. The book unfolds to take the form of a mountain that images scale and slide down over the story's course. The typography has cadence within the composition, beginning heavy, offset, and dark. By the book's end, hints of sunset colors are present and the tone resolves to a somber note that contains traces of the recent chaos.

Crossing the Oxus is a view to a literal sea change — the intentional eradication of the Aral Sea. The powers that were manipulated the water supply from the Amu Darya, then known as the Oxus, which fed into the sea. The source was eventually drained and the sea dried too. The book, filled with photographs of Meador's trip to the place, explores ecological devastation at the hands of power in Central Asia.

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STEVE MILLER

The Dogs of Havana is the result of an attentive collaboration that began with photographs Miller took of feral dogs in Cuba. He brought the photographs to an artist, Julio Peralta, who drew intricate, evocative skeletons from the photos. Cade Collum wrote new poems inspired by Peralta's drawings of the bones. The linocut images were arranged with the letterpress poetry, and Miller hand-bound each book. The concept for the book "cooked" slowly over several years, growing richer with each ingredient added and each stage entered: seed, subject, images, text, and finally arrangement and execution.

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JOHANNA MUELLER

Creature Alterations, Myths & Transformations presents deeply detailed animals with agendas and implicit fairy-tale ancestries. It asks the viewer to confront the possibility of magic, and suggests that it might live between the spaces of known and idealized worlds.

In a heavier mood, *Something Wicked* takes the reader from creature to creature, each lush with texture as well as layered intentions. The book's title was taken from Shel Silverstein's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Bright color strokes and a sense of wonder counterpoint the ominous tone of the pages.

Hide is a leather-bound book derived from one of Mueller's prints. It explores the contrasting acts of searching and looking on. The main character, Inubis, is a half-man half-dog who steals eyes (and with them, souls) and places them in a jar. An ancient binding technique was used, and Inubis himself is adapted from old legends and given a new story.

The Most Beautiful Girls in the World combines fragments of poetry with images both contemplative and celebratory, opening up full ranges of moods within single, emergent scenes.

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ROBBIN AMI SILVERBERG

Perspectival, spiritual, and practical issues with human identity are explored in *Affidavit*, a “plain” book whose story was written by a Hungarian man who felt hapless and fraudulent in his life. For each page, Silverberg brought forged statements of identity — statements of fraudulence — to be notarized. The process often spurred talks with the notaries about identity and fraud. Each notary interaction is logged and described.

The Four Cs is a vivid collection of misogynist proverbs, plucked from many cultures and presented as a swatch book. Each page is cut, with pinked edges, from a different paper. The title refers to the historically assumed duties of women: childcare, cleaning, cookery and craft. Tonal shifts occur; many are dark, some are funny. Silverberg prints the same proverbs on paper and spins them into thread for *Staffs*. The “books” are tall thread spools, and the whirled threads are emblematic of rote repetition — a concept that applies to the passing-down of outmoded proverbs as well as notions of women’s work.

Clew is a meditation on a Hindu ritual. Young women who wish to get married tie red string around a tree, and walk ceremoniously around and around the tree while saying a prayer. Diagonal text represents the act of wrapping the tree, and the book’s end contains a prize — a “husband” bound with thread.

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