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Art

ARTIST AS PUBLISHER FUN AND GAMES (AND SUCH...)

Through Sept. 13

The Center for Book Arts

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Editor and publisher Scott Hug's large glass case was stuffed with original artworks by people and reproduced in his magazines, "K48" and "Straight To Hell."

DIY and BYOB (Bring Your Own Books)

Energy and independence electrify The Center for Book Arts

By Jeffrey Cyphers Wright

As an outlaw poet, I've always admired the avant-garde Russians for their clandestine Samizdat publications. The underground scene in the United States went through a similar mimeo revolution. Championing that "do-it-yourself" tradition, the Center for Book Arts has mounted twin shows for the summer.

In a move to highlight the vitality of autonomous publishing by artists, director Alexander Campos asked independent curator Omar Lopez-Chahoud to put together "Artist as Publisher." Omar then asked other curating teams to set up three "reading rooms." In the end, more than 60 artists from around the world were included. Omar explained that the show got huge "because when you invite these groups it expands exponentially."

Simultaneously, Campos co-curated the other show, called "Fun and Games" with Julie Chen. Chen is an artist in San Francisco and a faculty member at Mills College, famous for bookmaking.

The upshot of all this curating is a delightful abundance of zines, posters, CDs, video, and of course—handmade books. There must've been two hundred people at the opening.

Omar (a Cuban) invited fellow Latinos Rodrigo Salinas, a director of La Nueva Grafica Chilena, Diego Fernandez of New York and Felipe Mujica of Galeria Chilena, which is actually in Mexico. Rounding out the international flair, Ivan Navarro and Ian Szydowski of the Instituto Divorciado finished off this "reading room."

A defiant little rag called "Gringo" jumped out from the rows of comics and artists books. "Red Mota" magazine proclaimed "Na Na Na Nation" and was jammed with pen and ink cartoons. Ivan Navarro's just-produced fourth musical CD was on display.

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A tasty comic by Salinas was fetchingly titled “La Isla del No No.” A German book, “Plum & Pomp: fur flora und fauna” was a naughty gem, with nudes in black-and-white.

Just one thing guys—next time how about more females? (I don’t know, maybe they just don’t crank this stuff out.)

Circus Gallery’s John Knuth from Los Angeles and Rachel Mason from New York curated another section. Sprawled all over a big table were some “great nuggets,” enthused Knuth. “Like ‘Beautiful/Decayed’ magazines. He [publisher Amir H. Fallah] was all into graffiti, punk and hip-hop and started when he was still living at his parents’ house in DC in ’96. It went from crappy zine style to glossy when he moved to LA.”

Other success stories included “Battery” and “Archive” magazines. “Archive” was full of rock and roll posters and album covers. The revolutionary graphics advertised such legends as Elliot Smith, The Mountain Goats, and Modest Mouse, who were playing at La Zona Rosa in Austin.

LA’s resident art celebrity Paul McCarthy was also represented with his mag in a bag—“Corona”—full of CDs and other goodies.

Curators Billy Miller and Scott Hug headed up the other section. They had wallpapered their area, giving it an all-over helter-skelter feel. Miller had used sheets of red and white while Hug made “bricks” out of black and white Xeroxes.

Miller publishes and edits two magazines with a decidedly sexy aesthetic. “No Milk Today” and “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” both boast some serious reproduction values. He also brought in lots of photographers, like Jan Wandrag and an African American artist whose vintage work Miller had found in a box.

Scott Hug also publishes and edits two handsome magazines (“K48” and “Straight To Hell”) and has been part of the buzz around John Connelly Projects. Talk about doing it yourself. Hug’s large glass case was stuffed with original artworks by people and reproduced in his magazines. Ever provocative, “Sperm Donor” scrawled on a yellow sticky and put in a frame challenges our assumptions about what art should be.

I asked Hug if anyone had helped pave the way for him. “No one paved the way for me. I did it myself,” he replied definitively. And therein you have the nexus of a determined bunch of artists represented here.

The “Fun and Games” show had marvelous constructions by some of the best known book artists. Esther and Dikko Faust’s handmade book had pockets that held a variety of amusements. Karen Hanmer’s interactive piece invited viewers to blindfold themselves and attach a pen/arrow to a world map. Their aim was to indicate the next country America might help to attain democracy—parodying our vision as a nation.

On Wednesday, July 30 at 6:30 p.m., the Center will present a panel on the “Artist as Publisher.” Alexander Campos will host a panel discussion for the “Fun and Games” show at 6:30 on Wednesday, August 6. Suggested donation is \$10 for each event.

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