

THE BUNDFOLDER

an e-journal for the book binder and book artist



Bexx Caswell's binding of Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman; Illustrations by Jim Spanfeller. Hallmark, 1969. From the 2009 Bind-O-Rama.

Volume 6, Number 1, Fall 2009

Book Dynamics! Ed Hutchins Turns, Twists and Topples Tradition

(Editions. 2009. Hardcover, 96 pages, 184 color photos. ISBN: 978-0-615-27642-7. US \$40.)

A review by Miriam Schaer.

Book Dynamics! is not your typical artist exhibition catalog. It's much more fun. Created to accompany a traveling exhibition celebrating Ed Hutchins' twenty-plus years making artist books, it's a lot like Ed himself — charming, rambling, engaged, and overflowing with delightful projects. It is also a reflection of the artist's periodic calls for political action, by which he means: for fairness and equality, and for justice in the kind of world in which he assumes we would all like to live.

Part memoir, part testimonial, *Book Dynamics!* is handsomely produced and filled with beautifully photographed depictions of his limited-edition bookworks, many revealing details of their design and assembly. The book also nicely captures Hutchins' eclectic, largely cheerful sensibility, even when his topics are politically charged. Bright colors run rampant, so let those whose tastes hew to the minimal be forewarned.

Extensive introductory materials include brief essays by Bertha Rodgers, founder of the Word and Image Gallery in Bright Hill, New York, and poet laureate of New York's Delaware County; C.J. Grossman, Berkeley-based book artist and activist; and William J. Dane, Keeper of Prints and Works of Art on Paper at the Newark Public Library.

A splendid introduction to those unfamiliar with Ed Hutchins, *Book Dynamics!* serves as a celebration to those already smitten by the Hutchins oeuvre. Within a homey, accessible layout, each featured book, like *Lunch*, is presented

showing different views or, like *Mystery of the Magic Box*, different stages of assembly. A back-story for each book adds to the album-like feeling.

Sprinkled throughout are accounts of Ed's financial ups and downs, as well as brief stories of his struggle to keep making books in the face of numerous obstacles. There are also stories about friends who have passed on, and others who delivered unexpected support. A wedding photo of Ed and his spouse Steve Warren, along with a chapter about a year in Mexico, where they explored the culture, connected with local artists, and spread the gospel of making books, add depth and a

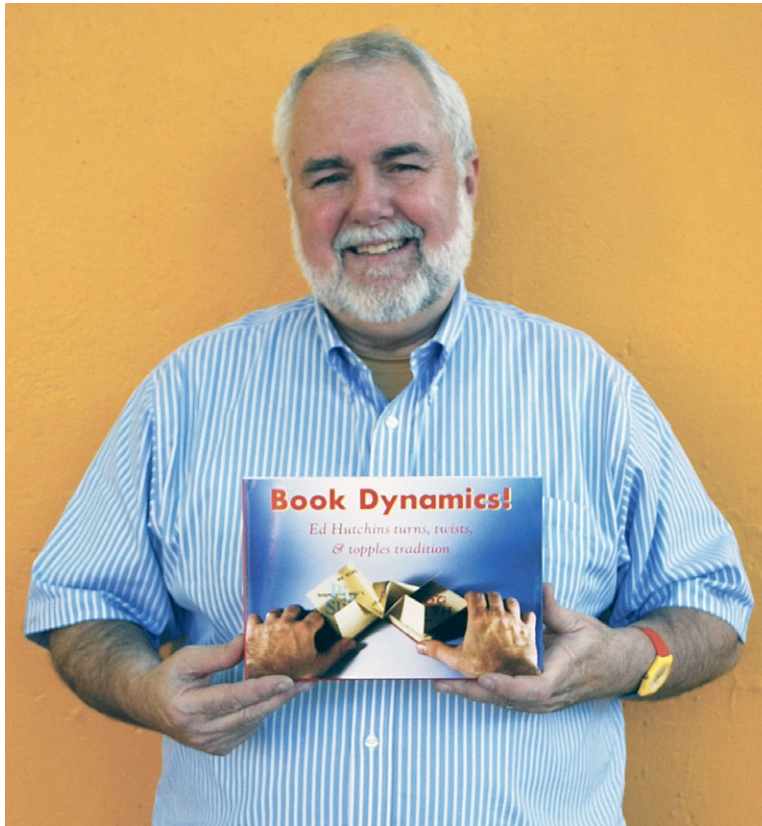
measure of poignancy to this deeply personal catalog.

Book Dynamics! is not a large-scale book, but it feels expansive and devotes at least one or two pages to each of Hutchins' artist books. Hutchins has dedicated himself to making editions, mostly small scale, often with a sculptural element, like a found object, incorporated into the book. In *Do Sit Down*, an accordion book lifts out of the seat of a miniature chair. In *Words for the World*, a small tin box printed with a world map houses a suite of pencils.

Each pencil conveys a message — such as “We

all live under the same sky,” “It doesn't hurt to listen” or “You are part of the plan” — printed on one side in a foreign language like Zulu, Korean or Afrikaans, and on another side in English.

Where Hutchins excels though, is in his complicated folding structures which materialize in an assortment of tunnel books — such as *New York City Transit*, an edition of 15 made from postcards and subway maps — and flexigons, as in *Voces de Mexico* and *Album*. Many of his folded structures interpret and expand on existing forms. *World Peace*, for example, made in response to the first gulf war, is a four-part book made of modified star books arranged to form a circle. Another examples is *Twisted*. A playful reworking



Photograph by Joe Freedman

of the star book form, it required attaching the sections by twisting, then gluing them one quarter turn off axis, causing the pages to rotate as they unfold.

The Magic of the Mystery Box, commissioned as a catalog for an exhibition at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art that celebrated the box as an art form, takes the idea of making a book from a single sheet of paper to an entirely new level. Ed started with a two by three foot sheet of paper, offset printed in four colors on one side and one color on the other (to stay in budget). The sheet was then die-cut and scored so that when folded it transforms into a three-inch square, 17-page book with pop ups, fold outs, and turn downs, plus front and back covers that double as a one-inch deep book box. Magic indeed.

Hutchins' works display a remarkable geniality, even when they have a political edge. It's anti-pretension and unafraid to score points at the expense, or maybe employing the armor, of sweetness. *Gay Myths*, for example, is a small, simple, hand-sewn pamphlet with multiple fold-outs. It was created after the 1993 March on Washington for Gay Rights, and re-issued in 2002. Hutchins uses clip art to illustrate such gay myths as "You can pick us out!... We all love opera!... We hate straights!" and so on.

Hutchins has distributed thousands of copies of *Gay Myths*. They have been included in such publications as *Artsoregon* and the *Lesbian and Gay Employees Newsletter for United Airlines*. And no wonder. Using directness and humor, Ed's simple pamphlet disarms and engages both those who have and have not thought twice about these issues, coaxing readers to consider the lives, feelings and rights of others. It is this quality of benign engagement that makes so many of the books in *Book Dynamics!* worth a closer look.

Hutchins' books appeal to a broad audience. Their idiosyncratic blend of whimsy and social commentary, and affordable prices, often make one of them the first artist book experienced by many of his readers — including children, for whom they hold an undeniable appeal. His books speak directly to kids and are without an ounce of condescension, probably because, like *The Simpsons*, they're written for adults.

Ed himself recounts a day in Tapachula, Mexico when he and Steve, killing time waiting for a bus, decided to get their shoes polished. Besides paying the shoeshine boy, they gave him a copy of *Voces de Mexico*. And off he went, seeking new customers. A little while later, they were besieged by a dozen other kids, all asking for copies of their own.

Book Dynamics! can be ordered online at <<http://www.artistbooks.com/>>.

Miriam Schaer is a multimedia book artist. She has exhibited steadily and extensively in solo and group exhibitions, and her work has been mentioned in a long list of articles and reviews. She is a recipient of a NYFA Artists Fellowship and her work has been included in the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series at Douglass Library, the oldest and longest-running exhibition series dedicated to showcasing women artists in the United States. Her work can be seen in many public collections including Arts of the Book at Yale University, The Mata & Arthur Jaffe Collection: Book as Aesthetic Object at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida, The Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture at Duke University in Durham NC. Her work can be seen on-line in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for the Feminist Art Base at the Brooklyn Museum, and at <<http://www.miriamschaer.com>>.

the school for formal bookbinding

- > professional level instruction in all aspects of hand binding
- > two- and five-day classes from march to september 2008
- > classes taught by don rash
- > 5 student maximum for all classes
- > fully equipped studio
- > extensive reference library
- > affordable housing available for all students
- > located in beautiful n.e. pennsylvania
- > easily accessible by car, bus or air
- > for further information visit the website:
- > www.donrashfinebookbinder.com

50 burke street, plains, pennsylvania 18705 usa
email: sfb@donrashfinebookbinder.com
telephone: 1.570.821.7050