

CENTRAL BOOKING

M A G A Z I N E

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A Guide to the Art of the Book... and Beyond

SPECIAL ISSUE: *PRINTMAKING & THE ARTIST'S BOOK*

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Working With Collagraphs

Catalog: SGCI Exhibition

The Print Booked

P R I N T M A K I N G O D Y S S E Y

HOW DETOURS THROUGH THE PRINTSHOP
LED ME TO NEW WAYS TO MAKE BOOKS

M I R I A M S C H A E R

Artists come to their practices from a variety of disciplines and directions. My path led through the printshop, where I acquired skills and techniques that have significantly informed my primary medium—the artist book. I have always been drawn to the book as an art object in itself, and to its unlimited combinations of text and textural richness as well as functional design.



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In the late seventies, when I was in art school, few programs were dedicated to book arts. Art schools offered no more than a scattering of classes in the principal techniques of bookbinding, letterpress and papermaking and the few that existed were in printmaking departments. I entered one of these departments under the misguided assumption that by learning traditional printmaking I would have the skills to entirely create my book projects.

My earliest experiences with printmaking were a disaster. The technical demands of the process were initially at odds with my chaotic, eclectic sensibility. More times than I care to remember, the coatings on my silkscreens failed to hold their form or, if they did, would inevitably result in ink seeping out the edges of the screen.

In the early Eighties, Susan Rostow, then master printer at the Lower East Side Printshop (LESP), now the owner of Akua Color Waterbased Ink, encouraged me to apply for the LESP’s new Special Editions grant. I was terrified, as my printmaking experiences up to that point had been so unsuccessful. I decided to submit a proposal for an etching with chine collé. As chine collé is a process that allows the artist to adhere materials to the surface of the paper before printing so that the additional colors and textures become part of the finished effort, it made sense to me, given my work in collage. Susan looked at the samples I had made for my print and immediately declared they would be perfect as silkscreens.

Thus began my true journey into printmaking. For the grant, I created thirty-four copies of a five-color screenprint that included the carbonized flat bottom of a hot clothing iron I hand-burned into each sheet of paper. After the grant, I began taking printmaking classes at LESP. I utilized the techniques I learned there to create my first editioned book, *Theater of War*, in which each page contained a pop-up television screen filled with collaged images from the first Gulf War.

Above: Miriam Schaer, *Of The Errors of My Heart Too Numerous to Count*, 2010, transformed Girdle, mixed media, with inset heart shaped book with original poem by Stan Pinkwas, Xerox transfer on washi, 28 x 15 x 10 inches.

Opposite (left to right): Miriam Schaer, *Columbine*, 2000, girdle, mixed media; digitally printed inset book contains text from Wm. Shakespeare, sonnet 129. 11 x 8 x 8 inches; Miriam Schaer, *Princess Almost Perfect*, 2005, inset crown shaped book 5 x 7, digital printing and collage. toddler’s dress, acrylic, ink, silk, printed matter, found objects, printed matter, 13 x 9.5 x 9 inches

Mixed media, mixed techniques became my practice. Early on, I began to use a combination of photographic and amberlith films to create images. *Apartment Life*, a large one-of-a-kind book I made, was bound into two church-like, five-foot high wood window frames found discarded on the streets of the East Village. The book depicts a dream common to many New Yorkers: the revelation of a secret door in their apartment that opens up onto previously unknown rooms, doubling their apartment's size. *We Are Happy to Serve You*, an edition in which each volume was hand-bound with a different hostess apron, featured life-size, apron-shaped pages, printed in gum with amberlith images, over a film backdrop created from coins, credit cards and receipts.

In a monoprint class at LESP taught by Judy Hoffman, I began using all the clothing I had made into book structures more purposely. Any garments that would fit through the press, I ran through it: girdles, bustiers, gloves, baby clothing, and the like, became my printing plates. Monoprints ensued.

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I began experimenting with Xerox-transfer techniques, of which there are surprisingly many, to use on various surfaces such as fabric, paper, glass and clay. In the *Rules of Engagement* series, Xerox transfer images on hostess aprons portraying idealized women from the Sixties, is used in tandem with hand-embroidered quotes from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, applying military theory in a domestic context.

At this time, I was earning a living chiefly by preparing mechanicals for print production, expanding to freelance graphic design and illustration. As computers conquered publishing, and mechanicals disappeared as a viable means of support, I began to learn my way around Quark, then InDesign, Photoshop and other computer programs. I realized, with color ink-jet printers becoming archival and affordable, the new processes I was learning to earn my living could also be applied to producing my artist books, as well as for creating materials to promote and distribute this work.

As I became more fluent with the new expanding universe of digital technologies, I realized I could combine unique books with a multiples component. A one-of-a-kind sculptural book could be inset with a smaller artist book that could be reproduced digitally. In *Columbine*, a book that combines images of students' horrified reactions to the massacre at Columbine High with a Shakespearean sonnet, a digitally printed semi-circular book is inset into the larger body of the sculptural work—a red bustier covered with broken glass. In *Altars of the Invisible and Hush*, the editions helped support the larger sculptural pieces. *Altars of the Invisible* transforms a full-size wedding dress into a self-standing sculpture that opens to reveal shaped compartments filled with various objects. Around the waist area is a hardbound trapezoidal accordion book, with kozo-backed painted silk that also appears throughout the sculpture, contained within a paper slipcase, also digitally printed.



The latest print influence in my work is print on demand, which, like offset printing, allows artists the opportunity to create larger multiples in editions, yet is more affordable and accessible than offset printing. Websites such as lulu.com and blurb.com can be invaluable in helping artists create and distribute their work. Coming full circle, through print on demand, I produced an artist book version of *Rules of Engagement*, begun years earlier as a series of twenty individually hand printed hostess aprons. I had always envisioned a book version of this series that would collect all the aprons in one place, thereby forming a narrative whole.

With digital printing and print on demand, it is even practical for sculptural books to be re-contextualized and easily reproduced. As digital media opens the doors of creativity ever wider, I look forward to seeing what it will offer to the ancient craft of hand-made books.



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