

ARTISTS' BOOKS

Brocade

Aleksandra Mir's *The How Not to Cookbook* is an anti-cookbook, reproducing in varying type sizes and weights, and illustrated by Mir, advice on how not to cook from 1,000 people worldwide, both anonymous and named: 'Never cook broccoli in cold water' 'Do not ask an artist to cook for you when they are busy' or 'Do not allow babies close to the oven' It is the trade edition of a limited edition first published in 2009 by the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh. Some might maintain that the latter is the artist's book rather than the Rizzoli edition, but ever since Ed Ruscha's desire to have copies of his books for sale in every supermarket artists have looked to the widest possible distribution of their work.

I have maintained in the past that the artist should choose the artist's book format when it is the medium most suited to the particular idea. Mir, as also in her Hello project (Artists' Books AM270), manifests her projects both as books and as installations concurrently. Mir also employs a sort of 'crowd sourcing' Her website www.hownotto.info allows anyone to contribute to her ongoing series of 'how not to' books: future subjects include art, pets, work and romance.

Brocade, shuttle-woven richly decorated silks, often with silver and gold threads, shares its etymology with broccoli. It is the theme of Helen Douglas's *A Venetian Brocade*. The book is ergonomically pleasing as you hold it. Offset printed on 130gsm Hello Extra Matt paper and produced in an edition of 1,000, it is bound in Ratchfords Inspiration with foil blocking to imitate the book's title. The dimensions of the book are 13x18cm, allowing it to open in a landscape/canalscape format Canaletto's *vedute* through the windows of a 21st-century *vaporetto*. It begins with the uncurtained tomb of Doge Tommaso Mocenigo, from whose death in 1422 Ruskin dated the decline of Venice. The images bleed over the gutter of the book, and continuities of colour or texture provide a narrative across several page spreads. Just as present-day Venice overlies its Byzantine, Gothic, Renaissance, Grand Tour, Ruskinian and Proustian pasts, many of the photographs have ghost and superimposed images within them. A frame of brick, marble, mosaic,

brocade, water, sky and even picture frames runs through the book to give it both continuity and a sense of distance.

A Venetian Brocade also contains an eight-page story by Marina Warner, 'From the Archives of the Biblioteca Marciana: MS. Minuscule 1588' a fictional account of the visit of four Japanese boys from the Jesuit mission in Japan. On Papal orders, their ceremonial samurai robes are replaced by strawberry-coloured brocade. Only one of the boys, Pius, becomes a novice with the Society of Jesus, and his letter 'home' reveals an obsession with the Venus in Correggio's 'School of Love' Does this story interrupt Douglas's narrative? I have never really liked artists' books that have a preface, introduction or a text from another author, but I must confess it works here. The text becomes the illustration to Douglas's visual narrative, and Warner's embroidered tale itself becomes a brocade-like thread, intaglio'd in the book.

Venice is the place of publication of Christoforo Armeno's *The Peregrinaggio of the Three Princes of Serendip*, 1557, which led, on his later discovery of the book, to Horace Walpole coining the word serendipity in 1754. Serendipity is the motivating principle of Tim O'Riley's *Accidental Journey*. The artist's book format is the perfect medium for the account of a journey. O'Riley (www.timoriley.net) is obsessed with the moon and, in particular, the Apollo moon landing of 20 July 1969. It leads him to camp at the site of the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory during a thunderstorm, and then to discover an Irish flag that travelled on board Apollo 11 at the semi-derelict Dunsink Observatory near Dublin. O'Riley's attempt to understand why it was there is a leitmotif of the book: when Michael Collins, the astronaut, eventually responds to O'Riley's repeated requests for more information about the flag's journey, bathetically he cannot remember. O'Riley's photographs supplement documentary shots, historical footnotes and personal reminiscences. The angle of text to image reminds me of the work of WG Sebald. It is published in an edition of 500.

Baring Antebellum by Susan Johanknecht is inkjet printed onto Zerkall laid paper and hand-sewn into vintage brown marbled ledger papers: coloured lines refer to bank ledgers and were produced using Adobe InDesign. Text in regular and italic varies

across the book, and spreads with their exploitation of blank space recall Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, 1897. But is the US writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, creator of *The Marble Faun* or *Transformation*, 1860, who is Johanknecht's author. His diarised life as the US Consul for Liverpool 1853-57 (which allowed him to save enough money to travel to Rome and research *The Marble Faun*) provides one voice of the dialogue. The other side is the banker Joseph Bates, hired from Boston (Mass) to be a senior partner in Baring Brothers, setting up the company's Liverpool office to exploit the cotton trade ('the oil of the 19th century'). There is no evidence that they ever met, despite common interests Hawthorne laid the cornerstone of Liverpool City Library and Bates funded the Boston Public Library. Their ledger/diary entries are intertwined with Johanknecht's musings and observations on her journey over London Bridge to the City to visit the Barings Archive. In an edition of 100, *Baring Antebellum* was published on the occasion of the touring exhibition 're: SEARCHING playing the archive' a collaboration between CCW (Chelsea, Camberwell and Wimbledon Colleges of Art Graduate Programme) and the Baring Archive: the fascination of archives for artists is one of the major trends of art over the past ten years.

On page 25, the entries for banker Bates allow his wife 150 (presumably guineas) for her dress, while, below, the artist (Hawthorne) serendipitously refers to his artist wife as: 'Sophia in starred brocade. ■

Helen Douglas, *A Venetian Brocade*, Weproductions, Yarrow, 2010, 180pp, 166 col illus, hb, £25, 978 0 95509871 0.

Susan Johanknecht, *Baring Antebellum*, Gefn Press, London, 2010, 38pp, pb, £10, 978 1 902596 31 5.

Aleksandra Mir, *The How Not to Cookbook: Lessons Learned the Hard Way*, Rizzoli, New York, 2010, 320pp, b&w illus, hb, £20, 978 0 8478 3499 0.

Tim O'Riley, *Accidental Journey*, Ponsonby Press, London, 2010, 108pp, col illus, pb, £9, 978 0 9562286 0 4.

STEPHEN BURY is Andrew W Mellon Chief Librarian of the Frick Art Reference Library/The Frick Collection, New York.

9 July – 4 September

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