



Thoughts from the Gallery Curator



As a first-generation Italian-American, I often find myself embracing all things Italian: the food, the wine, the music, the art and architecture, the history, the people. All these elements are just a few that contribute to the beautiful experiences of “being” in Italy, and the memories that are so well and deeply ingrained in my psyche, and in my cultural, spiritual and emotional development. Like many Americans, and many of the LA-based artists in this show, I am an Italophile. It started at a very young age when my parents took me on a three-month camping adventure throughout Europe where, when in “our beloved Italy”, I got to see Michelangelo’s *David*, the Sistine Ceiling, Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* and *La primavera* at the Uffizi and experience the oculus of the Pantheon on a rainy day, all by the age of seven. We visited my grandfather’s Pugliese birthplace and got to meet family members that were either long-lost, or previously unknown to me, and it all felt like the most intense and submersive feeling of love that a child’s memory can hold: a zest for life, and love for family, friendship, food, art and place. As an adolescent, young adult, and later on, in my middle age—and a half-dozen visits later—my “childhood crush” has turned into a “love affair” via my continued explorations into this grand land, bringing new family members to this magical place, while maintaining the relationships with those family and friends that have spanned decades of my lifetime to date.

This life-long romance with Italy, for me, is why the opportunity to facilitate an exhibition that brings together Los Angeles-based artists with Italian-based artists was so important to me....it is, in some small way, my “love letter” to a place I care deeply for—and will always. Moreover, it represents a “window” into the worlds and minds of others who are a little different from ourselves, and yet share so many commonalities which are voiced in a gorgeous publication, and in this collaboratively co-curated exhibition.

Each artists' varied works surprisingly (or not) focus on many overlapping themes. Many of the artists represented here address the concept of evolution, and metamorphosis, while also probing for knowledge, history and truth. The “book” is so often recognized as a vessel for knowledge, whether it is lost knowledge, old, new, yet undiscovered, or newly re-discovered. The “artist book” in all its sundry forms, are also often affected by other forms of existing art and literature: these are oftentimes places and repositories for storytelling, invention and re-imagination. Literary inspiration often reflects the shared freedom of expression and truth-telling that comes from our two “civilized societies”. The questions surrounding truth, and truth-telling, knowledge and (mis)information have been irrevocably tested in the US over these last few years. Perhaps this desire to retain and embrace truth, history and knowledge through the creation of these works reflect the artist’s zealously in expressing it. Through the act of saving and

collecting written materials, letters, mementos, clippings, travel postcards, keepsakes, and other collected objects the artist displays the “artifacts” of truth. The exploration of words, phrases and ideas is a catalyst for the evolving but sedimentary foundation for truth to continuously be built upon. It cannot therefore be unraveled by the threat of lies and tropes. Interwoven disciplines, including popular culture, fashion, commercial photography, graphic design, advertising, anthropological artifacts, religious offerings, history, art history and architecture each inform the various works of these diverse artists. The transition from the two-dimensional page, into the three-dimensionality that these books become, conveys its passage from flatwork into sculpture, and in turn, sculpture as structure. So naturally, architectural and -tectonic forms emanate from these art-forms. Some works capture this action through referencing sociologically and historically relevant structures, or utilizing the iconic landscape or interactions with nature with, or in the absence of, architecture or the human footprint. In doing so, these artist’s express both assimilation and a transformative evolution, with connections between the ancient and modernism, or the abstract.

The traditional bookmaking of ink on bound paper might be at the basis of a book creation, or distilled, or completely transformed. Letterpress and offset printing might also be at the root of many artists’ book creations. Hand-drawing and painting on handmade papers, or hand-binding and sewing are also often utilized as traditional bookmaking processes. But it does not end here. These artists, while pushing the boundaries of bookmaking techniques and the artist book creation process, also push boundaries where there are no boundaries. A diversity of media from these artists’ books extends from the traditional into accordion- and scroll-based books that come alive as space-transformative sculpture; printmaking book-bound prints, and prints displayed in handmade boxes or clamshells delightfully reflect a compulsion toward detail; the innovative assembly of books-within-a-book, and vessels nesting inside vessels with the use of mixed media, collage, found object, fiber and textile art, embroidery and layered weaving, are used in both constructed and deconstructed ways. The use of technology and incorporation of photography into books (digital and non-), the creation of photobooks, and use of photocopy art, digital collage, collaboration, hand-animated stop-motion, video and collaborative video production demonstrate the vast extent that each of these artists will go in order to honor their goal through the language of visual expression and the conduit that is artist book creation.

Many thanks to John for his great friendship and for sharing the vision of this exhibition with me several years ago. Along with him, co-curators Stefania and Raffaella, and all the artists that represent both LA and Italy: I thank you all for sharing this vision and your work with our campus community—on a campus where artist-faculty members not only make artist books themselves, but also empower our students by teaching the skills of bookmaking, in its various forms, during their pedagogical tenure. Thanks to all for your tenacity and perseverance in continuing to give this artform the air it needs and deserves, especially during a global pandemic, and a controversial, socio-political time in the US that was, and still is, often smothered by a lack of it. May books live on in all forms, in all places, so that our futures can be better for it!

Michele Cairella Fillmore, Curator
Kellogg & Huntley Galleries, Cal Poly Pomona

