

Queer It Yourself

Alternative publishing thrives in Portland BY WAYNE BUND

The dream of the artist's book is alive in Portland.

The Guerrilla Girls' *The Guerrilla Girls' Art Museum Activity Book*. Scott Treleaven's *The Salvation Army Black Book*. A poster by artist collective Fierce Pussy that reads, "I AM A lezzie butch pervert feminist amazon bulldagger dyke AND SO ARE YOU."

These are a few of the gems on exhibition in *Learn to Read Art: A History of Printed Matter*, showing at the Pacific Northwest College of Art (1241 NW Johnson St.) until June 17. The exhibit, curated by the illustrious AA Bronson, chronicles over 40 years of history of Printed Matter, the famed New York City bookshop that moonlights as the world's largest nonprofit dedicated to selling publications made by artists. Other well-known artists whose works are on display include John Baldessari, Martin Kippenberger, Rita McBride, Yoko Ono and Martha Rosler.

Yet, defining exactly what an artist book is can be tricky. In an interview printed as part of the PNCA exhibit between Lucy R. Lippard and Julie Ault, Lippard offers this simple advice: "Artist's book meant a book by an artist. I hate it when they are called 'artist books,' which is ungrammatical and meaningless."

If anything, the Printed Matter show at PNCA mirrors a thriving ecosystem of alternative publishing in Portland. There are places of learning how to write and make books: the Independent Publishing Resource Center. There are printers who help mass-produce work: Container Corps and Publication Studio. There are the stores to sell the books: Counter Media, Powell's Books and Reading Frenzy.

It comes as no surprise that many of the people involved at each step of the way are LGBTQ individuals. The following is a small cross section of some of the people in Portland who help make the alternative printing scene a process of QIY: queering it yourself.



Rethinking Paper and Ink

"Portland has a plethora of educated, progressive individuals who are active in these amazing nonprofits and grassroots organizations," says Jessie Carver, author of *Rethinking Paper and Ink*, a book on sustainable practices within the publishing industry, "so it makes sense that alternative modes of production are really thriving here, which is also really exciting to me."

Carver is a recent graduate of the Masters in Publishing program from Portland State University. She used to consider herself mainly a writer until she started attending the program at PSU.

"As an editor, my first priority is to harness and finesse the author's voice, story and characters," says Carver, "but this is concomitant with my responsibility to the reader to ensure that these elements are delivered accurately."

Little Read Writers

"Last summer I was kicking around the idea of starting a writer's group that didn't involve



Left: Sights from PNCA's *Learn to Read Art: A History of Printed Matter*

Above: Flipping through *Death: a magazine for the enthusiast and non-enthusiast alike*

writing a piece and then reading it aloud back to the group," says Mark Searcy, one of the creators of Little Read Writers. The collective, which includes Bowen Ames, Greg Berman, Tristan Bynum and John Wilmot, strives "to use words like art," explains Searcy.

There are currently five pocket books in the LRW roster, including the third, *Legend of the Swifts*—which is, according to Searcy, "a book of art and writing that explores a trip to the Chapman School to see the legendary swarm of Vaux Swifts." The books are on sale at littlereadwriters.com.

Independent Publishing Resource Center

Having worked at the IPRC for four years, A.M. O'Malley knows a thing or two about self-publishing.

"I am the program director," admits O'Malley. "I am in charge of all in-house workshops, events and happenings. I also spend about 60 percent of my time teaching independent publishing in schools all over Portland and the surrounding area."

The IPRC seeks to provide a creative outlet and promote individuals to make independently published media and art.

"It is important for people in our culture to become creators of media," says O'Malley, "rather

than just consumers. This is especially true for people and voices who are not reflected at all or reflected accurately in the mainstream media."

Container Corps

"My shop is centered around a small offset printing press," says Gary Robbins, the man behind Container Corps. "It's a versatile printing method, can quickly make a lot of copies of something and is relatively cheap."

Operating out of a small office on N. Killingsworth, Robbins runs a one-person shop. "Container Corps is a publication design studio, print shop, bindery and exhibition space that serves as a platform for the creation, distribution and discussion of new arts publications."

Robbins, who is also a visual artist, extends his practice into his printing press. "I think of the publishing projects as a part of my art practice," he says.

Death Magazine

"I obsessed over my own imminent death as a kid," observes Forrest Martin, the publisher, creator and editor of *Death: a magazine for the enthusiast and non-enthusiast alike*. "It was a combination of being an agnostic raised by a hypochondriac and gay shame."

Death's first issue came out in winter 2010, and Martin recently released its third issue. Contributors have included Tom Spanbauer, Shawn Records and Lynda Barry. *Death* exists outside of mainstream publishing, Martin explains, in that "there are no ads, it's printed on demand and the whole operation is made possible by donated time and work."

A designer at a local ad agency, Martin puts together *Death* in his free time. He wants people to check out the website for *Death* (deathmag.com), as "the splash page, for instance, was done entirely for free by the most remarkable website experience creator I know, Luciano Foglia, and if you spend a little time with it, will take you down a rabbit hole." ☐

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