

Background

In 2012, as part of the Kildare Readers Festival, artists at all stages of their development were invited to participate in the KRF: 1 Artist Notebook Project 2012. Each artist was given an A5 moleskine notebook which they were invited to fill in a creative way.

To date, one hundred and nine notebooks have been donated to the project, forming the basis of a permanent touring exhibition which has already visited Kildare and Limerick, and will travel to Drogheda in 2013.

Introduction

At its most literal, an artist's notebook is a book in which an artist makes notes. The hope of a project such as KRF: 1 Artist Notebook Project 2012 is that the participating artists will provide works which stretch that definition to its limits, and beyond.

The following 'lexicon' of types of artist's notebook, based on this exhibition, aims to show the many ways in which artists can interpret the concept. For some, the conventions of the (note)book have shaped their approach – they have worked within the limits of a book. For others, it has been a starting point, a new way to explore their art.

For the viewer, it can be an insight into the mind, the life, the experience, the process, the techniques and the work of artists, amateur and professional, new and well-established.

I hope this artist's notebook will enhance your enjoyment of all the others.

Mary Catherine Nolan 2012

The artist's notebook – a lexicon

The artist's notebook as personal exploration

To some degree, all art is an exploration of self and an artist's notebook provides a handy way in which to record this. Cuttings, sayings, quotes, original writings, personal reflection, an intimate diary, a testimony to friendship – all these can be found in this type of notebook. Its interest is primarily for the creator – who can comment on another's personal journey? – but it can invite the viewer to speculate as to the direction the artist may take as they develop.

The artist's notebook as artistic exploration

Artists provide a different view of the world. To do so, they constantly need to explore that world, as well as their methods of presenting it. An artist's notebook is an opportunity to take and make visual notes: rough sketches, technical reminders – what colours create a particular effect – or visual details such as shading experiments. These notebooks may also record artistic influences: quotes from favourite artists, details of their techniques, images of their work. For the artist, this notebook is a tool, a *vade mecum* of sorts. Its interest is primarily for the artist, therefore, but it can be a valuable insight for the viewer into technique and process.

The artist's notebook as a book of illustrations

Some artists use the notebook as a professional calling card, an informal catalogue of their own work, presented in an organized way. Finished sketches or paintings, often grouped thematically, occasionally titled or given a brief line or two of explanation, fill the pages and provide the viewer with a glimpse of the artist's themes, preferred media and personality.

The artist's notebook as an illustrated book

Visual artists, by definition, communicate visually rather than verbally. The notebook offers a chance to explore a different side of their creativity; the artist introduces a narrative, a series of chronological events, either fictional or factual (eg, a diary). In this case, the artwork is a complement to the written word, it is driven by the story rather than existing independently of it. It lets the viewer see the artist in a new light.

The artist's notebook as animation

The 'flip' book or 'flick' book, where flipping the pages very quickly creates an animated effect, is in a sense a combination of the book of illustrations and the illustrated book. The physical form and manipulation of the book are crucial, as are the illustrations. Together they create a narrative whose aim is to entertain the viewer.

The artist's notebook as an 'altered book'

In an 'altered' book the physical conventions and constrictions of a book have been challenged in some way. When an artist folds the pages using origami techniques or does delicate cutouts on the pages, they are subverting the expectations of the viewer. Here the interest lies not in what the book contains, but in how its form has been manipulated. The artist is asking the viewer to question their assumptions.

The artist's notebook as art piece

The artist who sees the book as material for their creativity, rather than a repository for it, who takes it and works on it and with it, creates an art piece. The book no longer has a linear structure – a beginning, a middle and an end. In many cases, it no longer even looks like a book: the pages have been removed and reshaped, the cover has been taken off and remodelled. Here the interest lies in the techniques and media used (paint; stitch; ink; paste), the effect created, the reaction evoked. This is a direct, wordless, continual exchange between the artist and the viewer – pure visual art.

The artist's notebook as – ?

See Fifi Smith's piece!