

Paper Cuts

MICHAEL WILSON ON THE PAPER SCULPTURE BOOK

THE PAPER SCULPTURE BOOK WAS PUBLISHED ON THE OCCASION OF A TOURING EXHIBITION, "THE PAPER SCULPTURE SHOW," THAT OPENED THIS FALL AT SCULPTURECENTER IN LONG ISLAND CITY, NEW YORK. BUT IT'S NO MERE CATALOGUE. IT NOT ONLY

documents the exhibition; it *contains* it. Inviting the reader to excise and assemble an eclectic collection of works by twenty-nine artists, this book effectively extends the show's touring itinerary into the home of anyone who buys it. As New York writer and *Artforum* contributor Frances Richard concludes in her contextualizing essay, *The Paper Sculpture Book* is "almost endlessly flexible," folding ideas both serious and silly into the most approachable and portable of formats. Perhaps only Hans-Ulrich Obrist's "Do It" (1988), an interactive website and book-cum-exhibition, outdoes it for sheer democracy.

In their comically formatted, "multiple-choice" introduction, curators Mary Ceruti, Matt Freedman, and Sina Najafi cheerfully admit to the possibility that many readers of *The Paper Sculpture Book* will never make the slightest attempt to carry out any of its instructions. "In some ways," they write, "the participating artists' ideal viewer is one who chooses not to build any sculptures at all, but simply to look at the untouched designs and dream of what they would be if completed." Still, while it may be possible to appreciate what the contributors to this volume of cut-and-paste projects are driving at without actually getting one's fingers covered in glue, it doesn't seem like half as much fun. With this in

of contributions dependent on fairly precise construction, this takes some time and looks rather smart but fails utterly to yield the implied optical effect. In a matter of seconds and with substantially less effort, Fred achieves a more satisfying result from one of the simplest works, Charles Goldman's *Night in Day*. Take a pin, poke a few holes in a sheet of black paper, tape it to a window, and you too can re-create a pattern of stars in the night sky. The Art Guys' *Paper Stunts* is similarly undemanding, leaving me with a basic paper plane, a poster of a goofy face, and a floor carpeted in punched-out confetti. The test is on.

As we flip through the book for our second-round choices, it becomes clear that while a number of the artists anticipate a degree of reverence for their instructions, others have elected to poke fun at the whole idea. David Shrigley's list begins straightforwardly enough ("1. Fold the paper lengthways with the sheen outer") but almost immediately degenerates into archaic obscurity ("3. Tear the remaining [port] half slightly to the right and curve the thus-created ridge between the heel of your other hand [reverse if you are east-handed] and forefinger") and ends, infuriatingly, in futility ("22. Unfold"). Janine Antoni's *Crumple*, a flattened mountain range, has only four written instructions



Above: Taking license with the Art Guys' *Paper Stunts* at SculptureCenter, Long Island City, NY. Below: Nicole Eisenman, *Witch Hunt*, parts 1 and 2.

(again not one that we feel the need to realize) is communicated through a single diagram, but Ware's written instructions, a roster of general advice and motherly admonitions, nag on and on: "Listen, don't talk. Do not assume. Set your watch ahead. Try something new . . ."

Leaving these aside, Emily takes on another rather involved but attractive work in the shape of Francis Cape and Liza Phillips's *No. 7*, while Fred begins Akiko Sakaizumi's curious *Tailspin* and I have a crack at Glenn Ligon's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The last is one of a pair of model gallery spaces in the book, the other being Allan Wexler's schematics for the construction of the work and display stations used at the SculptureCenter show. Reproducing the exhibition space at New York's D'Amelio Terras gallery in simplified, miniaturized form, Ligon also provides a cutout, chin-stroking viewer to place amid the installation of shrunken canvases. Someone had to do it. *No. 7* reproduces—in a similar style, though using drawn rather than photographic imagery—an urban rooftop complete with doorway, skylight, and sunbathing accoutrements. Sakaizumi's *Tailspin* is an altogether stranger proposition, a kind of biomorphic fighter plane that leaves us applauding Fred's dexterity with scissors but none the wiser as to the artist's intentions.

There are a couple of attempts to reinterpret conventional gallery sculpture in the book, but, perhaps unsurprisingly, they don't quite make the grade. Helen Mirra's *Stage/Levee* and Spencer Finch's *Untitled (Samuel Beckett)* look flimsy by comparison with Paul St. George's *Minumentals* (desktop reworkings of famous works of modern and contemporary sculpture), which, were they made of paper, would have been a better inclusion. Effective mini-Minimalism would seem to need a bit more material substance in order to appear convincing, or even cute. That said,

notably absent from *The Paper Sculpture Book* is British artist Martin Creed, whose work no. 88, a sheet of A4 paper crumpled into a ball from 1994 would have perfectly fit the bill.

A final flip-through sees Fred select Nicole Eisenman's *Witch Hunt* and Emily pick out a simple, hand-drawn signpost by Olav Westphalen, while I go for Eve Sussman's *Goggles for Kaleidoscope Eyes*. Following Eisenman's instructions, Fred rolls a page of drawings of witches into a tube and places it in the center of a drawing of a fairy-tale village. The idea is now to set the whole thing alight, but we decide to hold off on this final stage for the safety of all concerned, especially as we are by now ankle-deep in discarded scraps. Sussman's psychedelic shades look sharp in plan form, and the reference to 3-D glasses is neat, but either I'm losing concentration or the instructions are not quite complete. Westphalen's rough placard, on the other hand, which bears the words HOW MUCH IS NOT ENOUGH? looks initially like a too-easy cop-out but, once built, has an appealing three-dimensional cartoonish quality that makes for a fitting last blast.

Paper sculpture is not a new idea—after all, origami has been around for centuries—but *The Paper Sculpture Book* does a useful and, not incidentally, highly enjoyable job of repositioning it within a multiplicity of debates about authorship and ownership, creativity and craft, criticality and play. It is often pleasantly nostalgic but also proves to be a rather stringent test—not only of the reader/user's dexterity with an X-Acto knife but of the artists involved and the mutability of their various practices. Some may come off looking lazy or po-faced, but those who rise to the challenge make us their willing collaborators. Yes, you can set this volume on your coffee table and admire its utilitarian design (look, they've even perforated the pages)—but keep a cutting mat close at hand, just in case. □

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mind, I decide to enlist friends Emily and Fred to assist in a thorough road test.

We open a bottle of wine, and Emily launches straight into one of the more complicated projects, David Brody's *Rental Truck Camera Obscura*. One of a number

This column explores recent offerings in artist's books.



but requires the patient execution of 585 separate folds. In Chris Ware's typically mournful comic strip, a woman recounts her liking for paper dolls as we observe her lonely passage from unborn child to doddering old maid. Like Russian nesting dolls, the figures are scaled to allow each one to contain the next until all seventeen are encased inside the largest. This potentiality