

Bound for Beyond

A Brief Look Inside

beyondWORDS: BookFest 2009

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Good artist books, especially those ‘beyond words’, should affect readers in ways difficult to describe *with* words; in ways perhaps more like a slap, a shiver, an extra beat of your heart, an impression as intangible as a fine poem’s, which Archibald

MacLeish memorably said, “should not mean but be.”

The selections in **beyondWORDS: BookFest 2009** give our senses a healthy workout. Several of the books stay faithful to the traditional materials of paper, board, paint and the codex form, including Emily Martin’s artful *Sifting*, a classic codex whose shifting spinal laces stitch together themes of childhood memories; Stephen Daiber’s vigorous *El Mar*, whose pages whirl around their own spine; and Sean Sheehey’s fascinating *Beyond the 6th Extinction: A Fifth Millennium Bestiary*, with its exquisitely crafted bugs poised as if to leap into the reader’s lap.

Accordion books, like Ellen Wiener’s *Ocre Scriptorium*, capture attention through the music of their slowly unfolding visual rhythms, while books like Alice Austin’s magical *Meatball Math*, do the opposite, bursting all at once in assorted directions. Karen Hanmer’s *Celestial Navigations* and Maria Pisano’s pop-up pages in *Girasole* are similarly delightful, using twists and folds to take unexpected journeys.

I am frequently attracted to books employing fabrics, textiles, and other non-traditional materials, as they often add elements of surprise and, sometimes, new levels of meaning. The application of alternative materials informs many works in **beyondWORDS** that seek to explore themes of nature and nurture, home and environment. Alicia Bailey’s *Plant Identification*, for example, embeds plant materials in plastic pages bound with wood covers, a tribute to things vegetal with a nod to medieval binding techniques.

In Mary Howe’s *Specimen #239; Liposcelis Divinatorius (book louse)*, her hand made paper looks freshly plucked from a clothes dryer, and oc-