

Schema Projects
92 St Nicholas Ave
Brooklyn NY 11237

DEMI-URGE

Books & Works on Paper by Ward Schumaker

Schema Projects presents works on paper and handmade, hand painted books by San Francisco artist and illustrator Ward Schumaker. With a painter's hand and a love for the printed word, with stroke, by mark, or letter by letter, Schumaker's seduction begins. Paint, paper and page have been his dedicated sphere since art school when he resisted his Professors urge to abandon the use of text in his work. He cited early religious manuscripts as an example of important art that integrated narrative image and text and moved forward in his task. The result of this overlap is a richly evocative world, like a mouth that does not speak but that in some way we feel and read as these "opposites" mix in his painted works. His oeuvre seeks a peaceful reunion of left and right sides of the brain and the viewer is richly rewarded.

In his fine art practice, as opposed to his award winning and prolific illustration practice, there is a sense of lost and found and a willingness to risk everything. Schumaker invents an awake dreamworld filled with a fog without figure. The painted surfaces, washy-brushy, seem at once Asian influenced, Ab-Ex in form, yet also accidental. The feeling is of a private space, where fragments of a sound, a word or a scrap of paper exist together in muted and elegant harmony. While decorative effects are used they are rich and satisfying, where repeated pattern unfolds, there is ample variety. The use of imperfect stenciled letters transports us back in time. A text used as inspiration, exudes a perfume distilled from it. Finish is cultivated. Each painting on paper acknowledges a century of American abstraction yet is a bit of an outlier. The milky feel of layering is due to the unconventional inclusion of book paste binder, which Schumaker incorporates into his paint. Perhaps also, the emotive and dream-like quality of this work is a result of the daily mediation practice that Schumaker continues to follow.

The books works astonish. They began with a workshop he took with his wife, the noted American Illustrator Vivienne Flesher, at the San Francisco Center for the Book. It was here, that his fine art career was born when a gallery dealer from Shanghai saw book covers hanging on the wall to dry and proposed a painting show. Page after page gives us much more than expected and builds in monumentality. We are thrust into the big classic past yet the immediacy of the painted surfaces holds us in the grip of the now moment. His work feels deeply connected with the artistic tradition of San Francisco, Beat poetry, the spoken word, shifting weather patterns.

Ward talks about the books included in our show here: *"In the early 50's, many of us were involved in huge paper collection--to raise money for schools, for example. One year, deep within the tons of books, newspapers, cardboard boxes, I discovered a couple huge wallpaper sample books. I got drunk on the visuals. Later, an older brother introduced me to the output of small, private presses (ex: The Roycrofters) and I collected these out-of-fashion tomes at ten cents each. The bindings, the letter-pressed pages, the flamboyant wallpaper repeats: when I started painting seriously again, after a hiatus of around 35 years, I returned to those memories. Creating books gave me a place to relearn handling a brush, to try new ideas/styles, and to*

keep it in a form that progressed from front-to-back in a way that seemed to make sense to me. Some books are done for the simple reason of creating beauty (ex: Grid Stop), some to record the results of meditation (ex: Being Everyone), and some as an homage to artists I admire (ex: Throat Singing in Drohobycz, which is an homage to writer Bruno Schulz). I think of the books as very different from my paintings and it's rare that I would find a page to be the correct thing to hang on a wall; it's the turn-of-pages that makes it work. Most of all, I simply have to do it. So I do."

Ward Schumaker is an award winning designer and illustrator whose fine art work is regularly shown in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Shanghai. Schumaker's design and illustration work has been featured in The Washington Post, the San Francisco Chronicle, and The New York Times and for The Yolla Bolly Press, Hermès, Paris, and Deutsche Grammophon. He is the author of three children's books (Harcourt Brace and Chronicle Books), and has worked primarily as an illustrator—for The New York Times, The New Yorker, The Washington Post, and others. He has also worked on book covers for major publishers/imprints, including Random House, Knopf, and Simon & Schuster. San Francisco Chronicle art critic Kenneth Baker named Ward's 2013 show at Jack Fisher Gallery one of the ten best exhibitions in San Francisco that year.

Denise Stewart-Sanabria wrote: *"Ward Schumaker has been interpreting text into visual narrative for most of his working life. Though he started out in fine art over 40 years ago, he evolved into an internationally recognized illustrator for most of his career and is still heavily involved in the business. His illustrational style uses text as an integral part of the drawing to identify his clients and their products. Eleven years ago, he journeyed back into his mind to create for himself."*

Ward will talk about his work and "turn some pages" in his books, on Saturday Dec 17th at 3pm.

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