

## RESOURCES

Arts & Letters Daily has been resurrected after a short respite (18 days) caused by the bankruptcy of its parent company. The Chronicle of Higher Education has taken it over, and Denis Dutton, a philosophy professor in New Zealand, will continue to run it. <http://aldaily.com>

The Wayback Machine, at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org), is the brainchild of Brewster Kahle, a computer scientist responsible for a number of Internet search systems, and also being amazed to see how Alta Vista was storing and indexing everything that was on the Web.

The Wayback Machine downloads and stores every Web page it can put its virtual hands on, excluding sites that require a fee for access or sites that Web masters have asked not to be stored. It thus serves as a Library of the Web, on the Web.

Calvin Tomkins, the New Yorker writer and author of many books on modern art, has donated his research materials to the Museum of Modern Art, including complete interviews with artists like Robert Rauschenberg and curators like Kirk Varnedoe.

The Getty Research Institute, given the Duveen Archive by the Metropolitan Museum of Art four years ago, has finished cataloging it and putting it on microfilm. The archive, records of the celebrated dealers who operated from 1869 to 1964 in London, Paris and New York, will be available at the Getty, and microfilm copies will be given to the Watson Library at the Met, the Witt Library of the Courtauld Institute in London and the Institute of Art History in Paris.

### Electronic Resources

Taking a cue from the Fluxus group, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist asked artists such as Baldessari, Matthew Barney, Bruce Nauman, and Yoko Ono, to submit written or drawing instructions for making art. First appearing in a book published in 1998, titled *Do It*, you can now find 79 artists and their new sets of instructions to the ever-expanding collection at [www.eflux.com/projects/do\\_it/homepage/do\\_it\\_home.html](http://www.eflux.com/projects/do_it/homepage/do_it_home.html)

## BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA OPENS

### REPORT FROM THE LIBRARY ABOUT "Imagining the Book"

*Editor's note: Proposed by the organizers, "The core of the proposed project is a workshop, exhibition and colloquium at the Library of Alexandria that brings together 120 artists and scholars representing different languages and cultures to present the book as art, pushing out the boundaries of the concept of "book" to highlight the role of the imagination in inspiring and documenting our journey towards knowledge and wisdom."*

54 Egyptian artists worked in five different workshops (the Library, the French Cultural Center, the Goethe Institute, the Atelier, Alexandria and the Alex Workshop Center) along with 36 foreign artists and student assistants. The spirit at all the workshops was exceptionally positive. For many, it was the first time to work alongside other artists in an environment free of competition. At the same time it was an opportunity to measure one's work against that of internationally-recognized artists. The energy, the differences, the curiosity all fostered cooperation and friendship that resulted in a high standard of output and forged lasting relationships and contacts among all the artists. For most of the non-Egyptian artists, it was their first contact with Egypt and her artists and their enthusiasm and gratitude was boundless: many are determined to return. A number of artists are meeting their Egyptian counterparts in Cairo, visiting their studios and the Townhouse Gallery and planning future projects in Egypt. Out of this contact a number of future collaborations are developing, such as one-week residencies for foreign artists at Cairo University, more workshops with Egyptian artists at the Alex Workshop Center, invitations to exhibit in Mexico, Lebanon, Germany and others. Finally, the event has generated Egyptian access to new resources, such as the Mail Art network, the Well Project (originating in Germany and Poland, respectively), as well as websites, publications and other events.

A number of art students from Cairo and Alexandria worked as assistants to the foreign artists. It was an unprecedented opportunity for these students to see new ways of working, new materials and new creative possibilities: as one student expressed it, "my eyes were opened-I learned how to see". They also had

the opportunity to express themselves to a larger audience when Dr. Mohamed Abou El Naga steered the Channel S team towards the students, rather than towards the VIPs. The students represent a younger generation of Egyptian artists. Many of them are women and many of them wear the Islamic headscarf and modest dress. Their enthusiasm and curiosity and generosity (many of them invited their "mentors" to their homes, on tours of Alexandria, etc) showed the foreign artists another face of Islamic Egypt, one they would never have seen from media reports or touristic visits. Discussions on politics, religion, culture were all part of the daily work, especially at the communal lunch shared by artists, assistants and workers and all came away enriched by the exchange.

The effect of the event on the teaching of art in Egyptian institutions has been both unexpected and profound: it is the first time that an exhibition in Egypt has had an influence on curriculum and teaching methods. Supported by the enthusiastic testimonies of both government and academic officials, teachers from the Faculty of Arts at Alexandria and Cairo Universities have made the exhibition a part of their program, as field trip and as study and have accepted the field of Book Art into the official curriculum

It is generally recognized that the event has contributed to the development of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina as a significant venue for learning, translating vision into concrete action. It is also generally acknowledged that the event has attracted interest to the city of Alexandria and bestowed an enhanced status on the cultural activity in that city. It is not, therefore, surprising that the event has been officially adopted by Mohamed Abou El Naga, Dr. Ismail Serragaldin, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina announced at the opening reception and again at the colloquium that henceforth the event would be part of the program of this institution, as a "biennale" of Book Art.

#### REPORT FROM ANNE HICKS SIBERELL

In September, I arrived in Egypt to participate in the opening of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. The new library, a UNESCO project, was built as a contemporary replacement of Alexander's magnificent library that existed more than 2000 years ago. For its first exhibition titled "Imagining the Book: International Contemporary Art Encounter", the library invited 54 Egyptian artists and 36 artists

from around the world to take part in a workshop prior to the opening in October. The five different workshops were assisted by students and library staff. In all, 125 artists contributed to an exhibition, which was shown in two huge halls and venues throughout the city.

The library sent a car to meet me at the airport about 3 .am. On 13 September, and it was almost dawn by the time I got situated in the hotel. At 9:30 that morning (and for the next few days), a bus picked up those of us who were staying in the hotel and delivered us back in the late afternoon.

We were assigned working areas in a cooperative that had once been a factory complex. Medium and size of project determined placement in studios that allowed us to work alongside artists from other countries. During work time many languages wafted about, mostly English, Arabic, French, Japanese, Swedish and Italian, Turkish and Polish. Each day we received a hot-boxed lunch and water which we needed in the 97-degree heat.

Because the book exhibition was a first to be mounted in the halls, some equipment was in short demand. At one point I needed two tiny nails to complete the hanging. When the nails did arrive hours later, I had my choice of every possible shape and size.

In looking back on how the exhibition got mounted, it seems a miracle! The exhibition hall was still in completion, while spaces in the huge empty galleries (and for outdoor installations) were being designated for each artist's work.

The show filled two exhibition halls, with some installations mounted outdoors, and at additional venues so that all books could be accommodated regardless of size. At the reception artists were relieved to have our work finally out of our hands, library directors and staff seemed pleased and proud, and the viewers were receptive to the mysteries of the artist's book. Many Egyptians had never seen such an exhibition.

In addition to the show there was a symposium, programs by artists, critics, journalists and scholars. The feeling was that the ambitious plan had met its goal.

## REPORT FROM ERICH PAPROTH

An Interview with Erich Paproth by Franciska Wilcken: (Berlin, November, 2002)

### The Participants

The consensus spurring us on to astonishing work was itself astonishing; there was no competition, no fighting for a prize. Good work was done in a manifold global context; an all-encompassing unity arose and developed the life and, above all, the work of the artists from more than twenty different countries. A cultural exchange emerged, yet a cultural identity as well, one which did not fracture at political or religious boundaries. Being different was always courageous and openness and thus freedom for a continuation which was then represented in the exhibition following the workshop. The artists comprised and were supported by excellent organization – of space and room, of foreignness and proximity, of security and joy.

### The Exhibition

*Q: How was the exhibition?*

A: In the studio environment, work with the materials was so easy for me that I at first expected to find other results materially and technically closer to my own work in the exhibition. In particular, Mohamed Abu El Naga's work impressed me: in its material proximity and size it is really a work about the book as object of the imaginary. The commission "imagining the book" became for me, as I sought distance, "imaging the book". I especially remember the installation of dancing dervishes on canvas and the "belly" dancer with "house" background music. The music alone creates desire, and in this presentation! It was certainly the most impressive work. I really treasured some of the works that at first glance seem plain and appear small and – typical for book art – of course could not be suitably presented, will never experience a comparable estimation. The exhibition was good and courageous: courageous because it focused on the book, and clearly supports the book as a contribution to artistic work (without begging for recognition). Each book work was artistically unique and natural and evidenced impressive artistic debate. A truly international exhibition, then! And we are excitedly looking forward to its catalogue which we hope will, and we imagine can, be many places in this world.

*Q: Did you create a library?*

A: No. Most were single works that were then gathered together in the exhibition and then certainly touched on the "library" horizon, but not in themselves created for the purpose of "library-izing". Certainly now and then the aspect of collecting of traces. Those are of course contributions, characteristics of a library's being. Unfortunately, or perhaps thank goodness, the theme library was not required, not even "Biblioteca Alexandrina". The commission was "imagining the book", from which I developed "imaging the book".

*Q: Memories?*

A: The participants were extremely present in their ability and in their perception – most were well prepared and possessed great technical artistic competence for creating a large work, to participate in it. But what artistic work is possible without memory?

*Q: How was interaction with the site?*

A: For me, the site was fantastic. As artist and historian, I was facing an enormously complex challenge, represented in the work, and one I was able to confront (at least I think so!). The timeline and thus the (diachronic) path of the "Biblioteca Alexandrina" could actually be realized in a search for traces. My work bears the title: "From the New to the Old Library" and consists of the results of actually recording traces of the topography of the "historically objective" path from the new to the old library. A fabulous approach to a work

### The Lecture:

Too bad – it could have really become an inspired theoretical discourse if the participants had been capable of such. Unfortunately not, and thus the lectures were sometimes embarrassingly failed self-presentations by the invited artists. Sadly, more and more people backed off from this obligation. It would have been great if a qualified person had worked with the artists: interviews and a challenge to participate in a discourse on the topic. It wouldn't have been so important to distinguish between "imagining" and "imaging" here.

**Conclusion:**

A great event – it created a strong transcontinental artistic dialogue and was quite influential for my work. A continuation of the event would certainly show interesting developments in all our work and the Book Art. I will continue.

**REPORT FROM SEAN KERNAN**

Let me share my view with you. I am writing from the verandah of the Old Cataract Hotel, looking out over the Nile at Aswan. It is a great place to sit for a moment and write you about this trip across time and cultures, far into the realm of art.

I am relaxing after having just finished up 10 days work at the Alexandrian Library. The original library was built by Alexander the Great in about 350 BC. It housed the greatest collection of books in the world, and philosophers, mathematicians and other thinkers gathered there to read, talk to each other and generally try get to the bottom of everything. It was more like a think tank than what we think of as a library. You didn't borrow the books and there was no Children's Story Hour. That Library was destroyed sometime around 300 AD, as the Roman Empire collapsed in on itself.

Then 30 years ago someone came up with the idea of building a new library just next to where the old one stood. It would become a center of learning and scholarship for Egypt and the world, a repository for books but also a high-tech internet-based information node. Now the building has just opened open, a spectacular architectural statement that rivals the Gehry Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.

The exhibition that opened it was *Imagining the Book*, the first large-scale event at the library. Thirty artists from all over the world as well as from all around Egypt came and worked for a week making art about books. At the end of the week, we hauled what we had made from our studios on the edge of town over to the museum and installed it, along with other work sent by a hundred other artists from around the globe.

The show, called *Imagining the Book*, filled two huge halls, the plaza in front of the library, and

several other venues around town. The installation was wonderful to see, but for me the real fun was in making the work. Artists usually work in solitude, so this kind of beehive atmosphere was an incredible experience, a cross between sleep-away camp and art school. The days were incredibly long and focused, and at the end of them we'd all eat together and talk about everything you can think of.

(An odd moment for me came when I presented what I wanted to do to the organizers, and they just said, 'Whatever you like.' I kept pushing for them to approve my concept, but they just wouldn't. Then I realized that they really meant that I should go ahead. I have worked so long in the commercial environment that I was expecting them to behave like clients and sign off on it. Finally I just went ahead.)

The piece I did was a still life made from a mosaic of 72 Polaroid prints, each one of a different part of the set-up, toned on the spot and fixed directly on the Library wall. (Polaroid very kindly donated all the film.) It took me 5 days to make the one piece...five days! I also included two pieces of sculpted images and three photos from my monograph *The Secret Books*.

(And, in fact I was the only photographer. My sponsor confided that the committee had reservations about even inviting a photographer. They wanted someone who made things, something of clay or wood or paint and metal, not just images. But he argued and prevailed. I'm so grateful that he did.)

And just to answer the question that nearly everyone asks: No, I was never worried. Given the state of the world and the position of our government in the Middle East, it is a fair question, but everyone I met was simply wonderful—warm, welcoming and helpful—and the team of organizers, led by an artist named Mohamed Abou el Naga, did an amazing job of keeping things running smoothly. It was impossible to feel anything other than harmony with the whole group.

All in all, it was one of the highpoints of my artistic life. And as a bonus I came back home with an idea for a new project. I hope to travel back to Egypt within the next year or so to work on it. I don't want to say too much about it here. It's not a done deal, and besides I want to keep it floating in my minds eye for as long as I can to see where it goes. But here's a hint: its working title is *The Museum of Dust*.