

REGULA HUEGLI: bookmaker from basle

Regula Huegli spent a few weeks in Los Angeles in April and agreed to be interviewed by Umbrella, since the editor and Regula had met last year in Basle and again in Freiburg. This interview took place in Pasadena on 18 April.

Were you always an artist?

Yes.

When did you get interested in books?

About 15 years ago. I watched people in the bus, and I looked at them and at home, I drew those people in a little book.

What did you do before?

I always drew and painted from the age of two. When I was 20 years old, I went to Zurich for a few years to a school of art, and when I was 19, I spent one year in Paris. That was the first time that art became for me sincerely important after having finished my school years. I went to the Academie Chaumière and came back to Switzerland and spent four years in Zurich, going to art school. At the same time, I started University following archeology and the history of art. Then I left art and decided to be a painter. I, then, had difficulties with my family. They didn't want to have an artist in the family, so I told them I would be a teacher of drawing, but I never was. Then 10 years of private life with family and children, and what I did then was not special: books for children, furniture for children.

15 years ago, just before the birth of my last child, I had the first exhibition in Basle—that was 1969—of paintings and drawings based on the theme of the alphabet. I found my own signs to express my feelings. It was something to do with signs and writing (close to the book theme even then). Then I made postcards and envelopes. About two years of painting was enough. Once I received a beautiful envelope from Brazil with a wonderful stamp, and once in the night I made a copy of the envelope and put it on the table. My husband was working the whole night. And when my husband came home, he asked what had I been doing that night, and I told him to look on the table, that there is something, and he said, "There is no drawing there, only an envelope." And I said, "That was the drawing." He didn't see it, but that was the first envelope of a series which emphasized envelopes, stamps and letters. I put enormous letters into envelopes—that was the drawing. I did that work in 1972-73. Then by doing these envelopes all the time, I was known in Basle as the Artist of the Envelopes and the Letters.

During an Exposition, I made an enormous envelope measuring 6 meters x 3 meters high. I went to the Exposition everyday, while I was having a very hard time at home. It was a hard domestic situation. I felt that was the last envelope I would ever do, and then I would leave home. The envelope was the symbol of my house, and I would leave that house. That was in 1976, when I built that envelope, and that was the last envelope I would do. I left that home and didn't do any envelopes again.

I then changed my whole life. Even in 1969, I had these little black-bound blank books (just like the one I just bought here in Los Angeles) with dreams, ideas, and what I

have seen. These books became my diary.

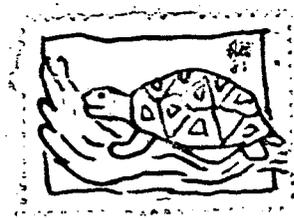
In 1977, I had such a terrible time, so unhappy, so I put all my feelings in these books, but only for myself—a continuing diary with very expressive drawings for myself. Never before did I draw himself, but I began to make my face and my body in the books. Yet I showed them to no one. The books I used for these self-portraits were old printed books which I recycled. 6 months later I showed them to my friends, and they liked them very much, asking why I did not show them, but I felt they were too intimate.

At that time, the books gave me much comfort and much help in this terrible time. I worked the whole day on these books, and I was not alone because of those books. This ended in 1978.

I really became interested in books, and I saw the possibility to work with the book format, since the open book is a female symbol. I didn't show the books until 1979. In 1979 I began to make book objects, which I am doing to this day.

How about your postage stamps?

The stamps I have been doing since 1976. I have collected stamps from the envelopes sent to me through the mail. I take them off the envelopes. I have been doing this all the time, since I oftentimes have the need to play or do recreational art.



What about the symbols—the snakes, intertwining; ancient, classical portrait heads?

I had a very strange thing happen to me in the Southwest Museum here in Los Angeles. I saw that there exists a dance of the Snakes with the Indian. I feel an affinity with that dance, and although I don't know what that is, I have something to do with it. I saw a man with snakes in his mouth — which I have never seen either for real or in facsimile. And yesterday I understood that that comes out of me unconsciously. It comes out of me, flowing out of me subconsciously. When I do it, I don't understand, but a year or two later, I understand it only when I am given a frame of reference. That's very interesting to me. When I saw the priests with their snakes in their mouths, I wanted to make a drawing. Really strange.

Where do you find your old printed books?

I find them in flea markets or friends have an old grandmother with old books and people give me a book from their collections. People also send me books through the mail. In Switzerland, churches have bazaars and benefits, and I always find old books—cheap because religious books have little or no value now anymore. I find that these old religious books have much life in them left over from the

owners, really read, really used.

In the Hollywood Cemetery which I visited this week, I saw closed books, books of the dead, and my books are open. I can make books all my life, and when the book is closed, I am dead. An interesting thing is that I would never like to make a closed book.

Umbrella then gave Regula Huegli a gift, a rubber stamp depicting an open book.

