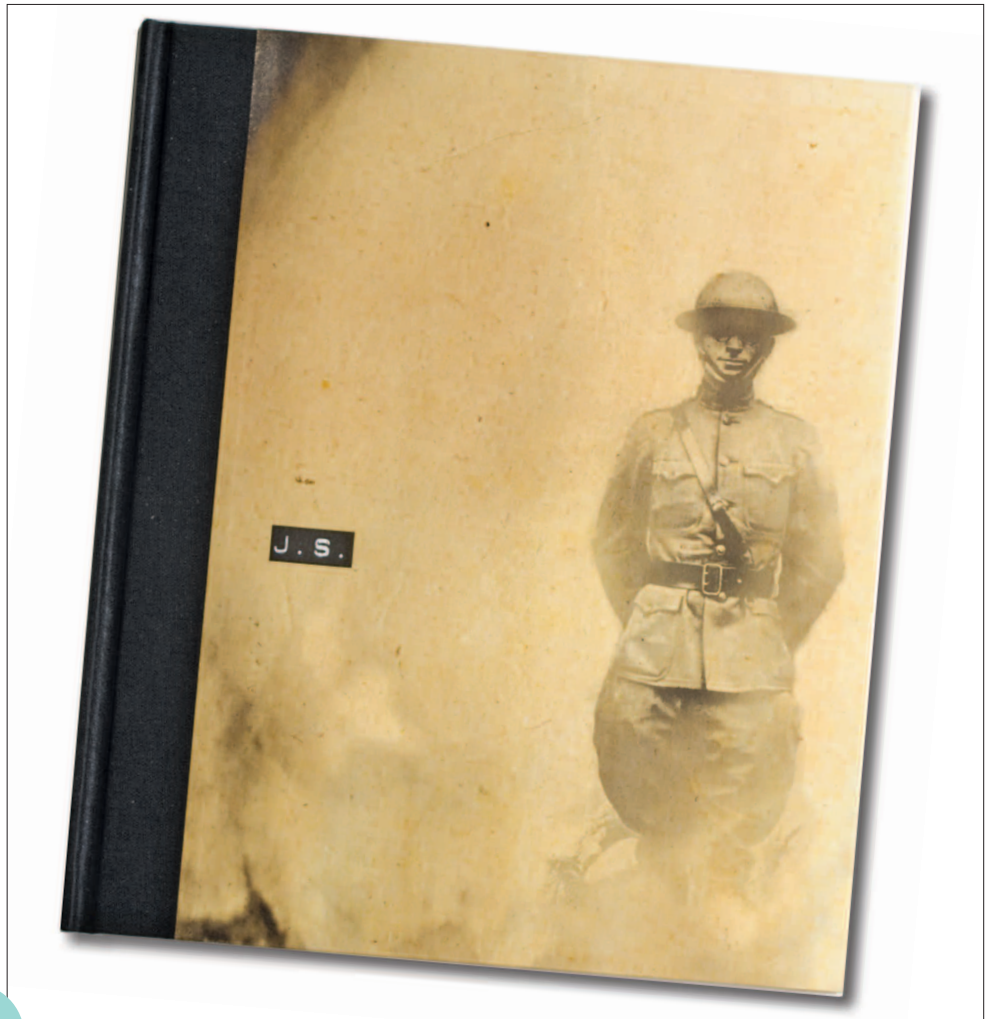


**PRIZE FOR BOOK
PROTOTYPE, MEXICO**

Juan Antonio Sánchez Rull
Jorge the Soldier,
19 x 22 cm, 2009.

Illustrated account of how,
on returning home after
an endless war, a soldier
inexplicably begins to
disappear. War and Hell
are the same.



PHOTOGRAPHY IN A BOOK

Ileri de la Peña*

This year, devotees of Fotoseptiembre, one of Mexico's main photographic festivals, organized by the Center of the Image, had a chance to go to the first International Artist's-Book Fair. Gloved in cotton, visitors leafed through and savored more than 200 one-of-a-kind

volumes (called "uniques") or small, numbered, hand-bound editions laid out in a large room of the Mexico Library. So, for the first time in Mexico, artist's books of Mexican photographers' work, as well as by photographers from the guest of honor country, Argentina, were exhibited in a single venue.

These handmade books contain little stories, sometimes autobiographical, sometimes the reflection of personal obsessions or intimate manifestations of the author's vision. Gen-

* Mexican photographer.



Silvia Castro
Ask Me If I Saw It
On the Navel of the Moon
 12 x 19 cm, 2008.

Fragments of a journey around the Mexico of today.



Clara Rosson
Afternoon
 15 x 20 cm, 2009.

The artist and her family's story about her father's disappearance under Argentina's last military dictatorship.



Julieta Escardó
N# 002
 18 x 13 cm, 2009.

Photographs of beloved places.



Eugenia Rodeyro
Box of Candy
 25 x 20 cm, 2008.

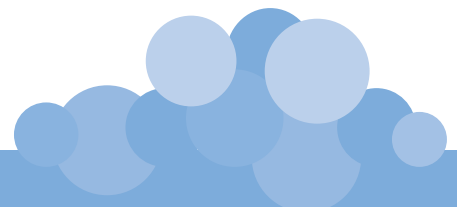
A small-format collection of photographs of trips to Mexico and Argentina.

erally they enjoy very limited circulation and exhibiting them involves risks since, in order to see what is inside, visitors have to be able to handle them: that is the only way they can discover how photographers of different schools and generations construct intimacies and fictions, how they capture their surroundings and their metaphors and how they delve into reality.

Fair curator Mariana Gruener, herself a young Mexican photographer, says that these books' richness is that they "take on the most diverse forms and, compared to photographs hung on a wall, they create an experience closer to the reader-viewer because he/she can touch, handle and feel them. In these artist's books, the stories take on meaning because the physical form contains a discourse in space-time sequences." Also, the freedom of format allows the

photographer to create a complete project, while conventional photography exhibitions very often are insufficient to show the entire work.

The idea is not new. It was born in Argentina eight years ago, in a small independent space called Espacio Ecléctico (Eclectic Space). Explaining its origins, Julieta Escardó, one of its curators, says, "It has to do with how to foster an encounter between the book and people. At one point, we asked ourselves how to make the books of many artists known to people, so that people could see them and enjoy them at their leisure. For the first fair, we invited several photographers who up to then had only circulated their work among a very small group of friends. We got a pick-up truck and went around to the houses of our acquaintances, emptying them of their armchairs, beds and chairs, and with that,





Maia Debowicz
**Eroticism, Advertising's
 Hidden Language**
 18 x 16 cm, 2008.

Nothing more necessary
 for selling a product than
 creating consumer desire.



Vivian Galbán
Two at a Time
 12 x 8 cm, 2008

A story of two.



Patricia Lagarde
K
 33 x 21 x 2 cm, 2007

I ask myself: in Kafka's
Metamorphosis, what did the
 only portrait hanging in the
 room look like? Did Gregorio
 ever see a nude woman?
 What could you see out the
 window?



Marta Tradatti
On the Road
 15 x 23 cm, 2008

Shots of a trip to Japan combined with
 subtle sketches, an encounter with the other.
 Being on the road is not just a fact, it's an
 attitude, a permanent window.

we set up an immense living room that was really very cozy. We thought up a system of librarians who passed out and collected the books so that we could be sure they wouldn't be damaged: the authors themselves. They acted as librarians, making it possible to establish a dialogue between the author and the public."

The first fair was a grand success, even though it only lasted three days. With time, both the number of participating authors and the number of visitors grew, but the idea has been to always try to preserve the initial spirit: a warm space, with armchairs and tables to be able to enjoy the books. Also, since it is a private space, the books can be sold, thus fostering collecting.

The Mexican fair was the brainchild of Alejandro Castellanos, the director of the Center for the Image, who eight

years ago attended the first Artist's-Book Fair in the Espacio Ecléctico. The experience convinced him that a similar project would be feasible and well accepted in Mexico's photographic community. Given the experience garnered by the Espacio Ecléctico's curators after eight fairs, Argentina was invited as the first guest country to bring a selection of 100 books.

When planning her work, curator Mariana Gruener sought to bring together Mexican artists from different generations and schools to reflect about what is currently happening in photography in Mexico. The fair presented the public with a total of 235 artist's books: 108 in the guest hall, 27 selected by open competition, plus the 100 Argentinean volumes. "I was asked to create the guest hall using my own criteria. I managed to bring together 108 volumes. Also, we made a



HONORABLE MENTION, BOOK PROTOTYPE

Eduardo Carrera

Museum of Love

20 x 20 cm, 2005.

Stories and mementos of love and its disappointment, its contemporary forms and expressions. Exhibited with other objects in display cases to resemble a “real” museum.



Mariana Pardal

Japan, I Love You

20 x 25 cm, 2009.

Photographs of a trip to Japan.

call nationwide so no interesting projects would be left out. We created a national panel of judges, which picked 27 projects. The call was made a month before the deadline, and 80 entries were sent. With more time, we certainly would have received many more. The idea is that the next fair be prepared at least a year ahead of time.”

In Mexico, artist’s books, particularly of photographs, are only rarely exhibited. It is hard to know which photographers actually use this format as the ultimate goal of their projects, which is why the large number of works at the fair is surprising. Even more enthusiasm resulted when the quality, wealth and creativity of many proposals emerged. The exhibition was organized around five themes: constructions and fictions, intimacies, documentaries, the surroundings and their metaphors and inquiries. It opened the door to some-

thing *sui generis*, volumes forged in the classic format of a printed book next to pieces in the form of a concertina or that were almost sculpture. Kitch boxes in pastel colors sat side by side with sober or playful or minimalist or frankly transgressional volumes; there were also aestheticist volumes or others that were a kind of tropical baroque typical of our latitudes. There were limits: they could not be larger than two meters across once opened up, and they could not weigh more than 10 kilograms, just enough to allow for truly alternative books.

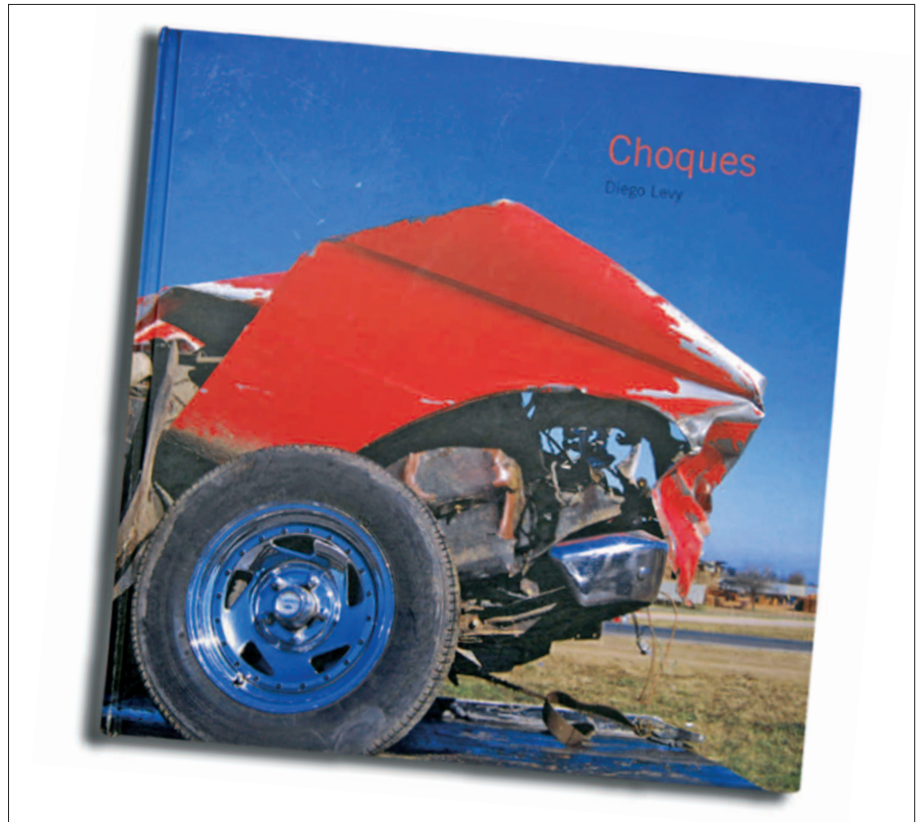
In addition to presenting the public with the rich, varied production of artist’s books, the fair’s other goal was to foster greater proximity between authors and possible publishers, as well as to encourage sales of some of these works as collector’s items. This is why prototypical books, already





Mariana Daniela Szulman
Venice Biennial 1993
 15 x 20 cm, 2009.

Photos, texts and quotes from
 the 1993 Venice Biennial.



PRIZE FOR BOOK PROTOTYPE, ARGENTINA
 Diego Levy
Collisions
 30 x 30 cm, 2008.

Photo essay about traffic
 accidents in Buenos Aires.



set up and capable of being printed in larger runs, were differentiated from those whose format made them one-of-a-kind, unrepeatable pieces. This division led to two prizes being given. In the category “book-object,” the judges picked a work by Sebastián Friedman from Argentina, *Family and Maid* as the winner. In the category of “book prototype,” two works tied: *Jorge the Soldier*, by Mexican Juan Antonio Sánchez Rull, and *Collisions*, presented by Argentinean Diego Levy. Six honorable mentions were also given out.

The Center of the Image invited a large number of publishers, representatives of cultural institutions and Mexican private collectors to look at the works shown. The next fair will

be opened up to international publishers and collectors to foster greater dissemination and presence of Mexican artists in global forums. Mariana Gruener adds that the fair must aim to be something more than a place to enjoy and see our artists. “Two main things [should be fostered]: collecting artist’s books, which doesn’t exist in Mexico or is very rare, given that many people don’t understand why they should pay a large sum of money for a book that you can’t hang on a wall, even if it’s a work of art, a collectable piece with a limited edition.... And the other aim is to foster the publication of more books of photography, since today only three or four publishing houses in the country are interested in the topic.” **MM**