

## Open Book

### *An international survey of experimental books*

They say you can't judge a book by its cover. What about when a book has no cover, or does not resemble a book at all? This is just one of the questions posed by the exhibit *Open Book: An International Survey of Experimental Books* on view through June 15 at EMU's University Gallery. Employing the very loosest of definitions, curators Leslie Atzmon and Ryan Molloy have assembled a selection of twenty-eight works that explode conventional notions of the book by imaginatively re-visioning the printed word.

The works incorporate a wide variety of materials, everything from computer animation to glass. The most successful deal with books as physical objects, like Noriko Ambe's *A Thousand of Self*. Ambe makes skillful cuts to a book of portraits so that a face becomes a landscape of deep fissures, a bundle of eyes that is simultaneously disturbing and exquisite. Brian Dettmer accomplishes a similar effect with *Philosophiae*, a scientific tome transformed by the intricate removal of text into a diorama of equations and geometric designs. *Javascriptorium*, a video by Ariel Malka, takes the book-as-landscape metaphor to a literal extreme. In this piece histori-



EMU University Gallery (center) and several works in the Open Book exhibit

cal and biblical writings become mountainous digital landscapes revealed over time. We seem to float through a world made entirely of text.

Other artists explore more recognizable

models. Catarina Leitão, for instance, has created an artistic variation of the ever-popular children's pop-up book. *Uplift* appears to be a sci-fi adventure tale, portraying a journey to an alien planet or life in a post-apocalyptic city. But rather than provide a recognizable narrative, Leitão supplies only a few, choice scenes composed of finely detailed drawings and blobs of Japanese *sumi* ink. The incompleteness of the story allows viewers to essentially make up the tale however they see fit.

This kind of interactive reading is a theme that runs through the entire show. With the rise of e-books and the proclaimed death of print, traditional ways of reading may give way to more participatory ones. Jason Nelson's *i made this. you play this. we are enemies.* presents one possible outcome: he turns the book into a video game. A more compelling transformation is achieved by Christopher Baker's *Murmur Study*, a real-time transcription of Twitter posts on eight separate printers aligned on a wall. Viewers are able to follow the mundane conversations of people as well as review past conversations by scavenging through the collected printouts on the floor. Baker takes a momentary means of communication and conserves it into a story. The result is subtle, profound, and alone worth a visit to this captivating exhibition.

—Grant Mandarinino