

FLIPPANCY

I use one word "Flipbook" to indicate its unique status as 4 Dimensional art, not merely a type of book. Flipped pages create a viewer-activated, synthetic time zone in any orientation, direction, speed. It's really a form of enchantment. There are no esthetic rules for page content (photo, drawing, painting, image or not). I drew as a child and have never stopped, but didn't make a flipbook until 24, while I was an apprentice in a cartoon studio. Drawing on a memo pad was a form of play between the real work of animating. It took very little time to draw small and see the flipped motion in the palm of my hand. Traditional animators need motion picture technology (camera, sprockets, gears, film just to see a "pencil test"). Later, I experimented with paper (shape, size, weight, printed one-side or two), and drawing styles (pencil, ink, brush). These options continue to open up a universe of possibilities.

What if I flipped backwards? Stopped on one page for a longer look? Or dropped all the unnumbered pages on the floor, out of order? Laws of Chance worked for Hans Arp, and they can affect how we *make*, *manipulate*, and then see the art. A good example is Masahi Kawamura's "Rainbow in Your Hand" which has the same image on all pages (a band of color samples on a black field). When flipped, it produces a ghostly arc of blurry, soft colors, between the pages, visible only to the viewer when flipped at a particular angle of light.

My first independent film using a flipbook (Triofilm III, 1973) shows a real hand drawing and flipping in real-time, then shows, frame-by-frame, the flipbook's pulsating world of linear clouds and buildings. It mingles and confronts both reality and fantasy as a "documentation," an "anti-cartoon." In later films I reverse the process by shooting simple gestures, like sneezing or grotesque facial expressions, or a walk around the block. The strips of frames are copied by a microfilm printer, then cut apart to become simple, stapled flippers. And in one case I mount the prints on a hand-cranked mutoscope which goes flipping and shooting frames around the same block: film>book>flip>film.

Concurrently I began to publish flipbooks in limited editions. Just as film-making allows one to experiment while working with laboratories and cameras, printing is also a collaboration — with printers, binders, and their

massive machinery, learning what can be attempted outside the conventional forms. *L'AGE DOOR* (1975, 180 pages, 4.5 cm thick, bound by two aluminum screws at the top) was produced as a signed edition of 100, boxed together with a 16mm film of the animation. One lesson learned: flipbooks shouldn't be too thick. But now, I like to experiment by using just one screw in the middle of the pages to let the viewer rotate the pages, even re-assemble them in different orders to flicker both ways.

I like to call the flipbook "concrete animation," hand-held, haptic art that must be played: caressed, fondled, scrubbed to make a vision of motion. It's like a wizard's magic wand. Yes, it's a perfect medium for a child before writing, reading, or naturalistic drawing, and it can seduce an artist of any age who wants to rediscover elements of motion, design, and materials. When he was 29, Robert Breer published his abstract flipbook, *IMAGE PAR IMAGES*, while painting and animating in Paris. In *Frames: a selection of Drawings and Statements by Independent American Animators*, which I published in 1978, over half of the contributors (including Breer) submitted animated sequences which could be cut out and flipped. Thus, while one book might die, many others would spring to life. To my delight, in Olivier Cotte's 2018 *Techniques du Cinéma d'Animation* my little page corner can be flipped into life (without hurting the pages).

It began as a 19th century novelty toy to amuse parlor guests with brief sight gags, sports, education, naughty amusement, advertising, and now Internet sites that can reproduce smart-phone "selfies." But as a kinetic art form the flipbook offers so much more for us to explore, invent, and above all, to enjoy with every flip of the finger.



Move-On, 2007, Pratt Institute Gallery

