

Nothing Moments: Holding onto a Whale

Celebrating writing, art, and design equally

By Annie Buckley ('03 MFA)

Sometimes, in the middle of a very long stretch of writing, the process feels like trying to hold onto a whale—elusive and too big to handle, but filled with a curiosity and wonder that keeps me going. Working with artists Steven Hull and Tami Demaree (MFA, '03) and designer Jon Sueda on the art/literature/design hybrid, "Nothing Moments," was a similar experience.

What fascinates me most about this project is its potentially impossible insistence on placing literature, art, and design on a level playing field. Rather than position design in the service of text, or art in the service of story, this series of books and art seeks to celebrate writing, art, and design equally within one whole; both process and result are dependent on the ability to see beyond established boundaries and hierarchies.

In the summer of 2006, I received an email from fellow Otis grad, Tami Demaree. It read something along the lines of "send me your stories, now!!!" with the kind of enthusiasm generally reserved for coveted concert tickets, not unpublished fiction. I attached my manuscript, pressed send, and hoped for the best.

Later that summer, Tami replied that she and Steven wanted to publish my stories and explained the gist of the "Nothing Moments" project. First, writers write fiction, then artists make drawings inspired by the stories, and

finally, designers create an original book design from these elements. I was intrigued and offered to help read the mounting pile of manuscripts submitted to the project.

Over the next few months, I collaborated with Tami, Steven, and Jon on reading manuscripts, communicating with participants, checking proofs, and found myself composing my own emails to writers—filled with dates and deadlines, if decidedly less flair. Slowly but surely, the project came together.

What was originally conceived of as a few books, inspired by the relay-like process of Steven's previous projects, eventually grew into a series of 24 books that included the contributions of 101 writers, artists, and designers. The size of the group added to the project's steadfast resistance to categorization by style, discipline, or venue. You can find the project on the ever-accessible Amazon as well as in a gallery, and no one person or vision dictated the type of fiction, art, or design to include. Rather, the series is defined by the contributions of all the participants, producing an amalgam of options that would not likely be found within a traditional editorial format.

The results challenge widely accepted notions predicating a singular style or position in favor of the more unwieldy and multifarious chorus of voices. If it sounds utopic, it is in a

way, with attendant frustrations and imperfections; both participants and organizers gave up a certain amount of control over the outcome. But the push-and-pull of working with so many people on one project created a multi-handed organism—or perhaps a metaphorical whale—for readers and viewers to determine how and in what context to hold.

Editor's Note: "Nothing Moments" consists of 24 limited-edition books and more than 400 original drawings by 101 artists, designers and writers. In October 2007, the project was shown at Steve Turner Contemporary in L.A. and launched at MOCA at the Pacific Design Center. It has been shown in San Francisco and Dallas, and will travel to Chicago. Other Otis participants in the "Nothing Moments" project are Graduate Fine Arts faculty members Renee Petropoulos and Benjamin Weissman; Communication Arts faculty members Yasmin Khan and Penny Pehl; LAS faculty member Marsha Hopkins ('97, '04 MFA), and alumni Jesse Benson: ('03 MFA), Tami Demaree ('03 MFA), Jacob Melchi ('03 MFA), and Colin Roberts ('01) Rheana Rafferty now Wilson ('05 MFA Writing), and Mary Younakof ('06 MFA). ●

