

*Artists*  
*and the Art of the*  
*Book*

Curated by  
Curlee Raven Holton

# Forward

*"People automatically believe in books" John Steinbeck*

The new Binney & Smith Gallery at the Banana Factory is pleased to be the opening venue for the exhibition, *Artists and the Art of the Book*. The mission statement of the Banana Factory—to kindle, support and celebrate the artistic, cultural, and creative spirit of the Lehigh Valley—is furthered by this exhibition of local, national, and international artists. It is an exhibition that kindles the creative spirit by encouraging dialogue between the community and the artist.

Books are avenues of learning—accomplished usually through reading the words. In this exhibition however, the viewer is asked to learn from books in a different way—by touching, by unfolding, and by simply looking. Creating art books challenges our preconceived notion of not only “what is a book” but also “what is art.” *Artists and the Art of the Book*, conceived, created, and curated by Curlee Raven Holton, Director of the Experimental Printmaking Institute at Lafayette College presents an everyday concept that is intuitively understood and asks the viewer to read the information in a very different way.

*Artists and the Art of the Book* is an exploration of innovative artistic expression that brings a freshness and interest to the gallery at the Banana Factory and thus kindles the creative spirit in the pursuit of our mission. I would like to thank Curlee Holton and the Experimental Printmaking Institute at Lafayette College for the vision and energy to make this exhibition possible.

*Diane LaBelle*  
*Director, Banana Factory*

## *You may never look at a book in the same way again. . .*

This January, I offered my interim session course, "The Art and History of the Book," after a long hiatus. As my students and I looked at works from the Lafayette Rare Book Collection ranging across two millennia, from a second century papyrus to medieval manuscript leaves, from early products of the printing press to electronic texts, I was struck more than ever by the remarkably resilient history of the "book" as a genre. Whether tablet, scroll, codex, or byte, humans continue to produce these written records with passion and persistence.

In the last century, the physical book has had its most splendid manifestations in the products of the private press movement, begun by William Morris in the late 1890s; in the artist/writer collaborations of the great *livres d'artiste* of the first half of the twentieth

century; and in the lively, eclectic generation of the artist's book that has been flourishing during the second half of the twentieth century and has moved full-tilt into the twenty-first. At Lafayette, we have recently begun collecting artists' books in earnest, particularly those that bring together art and poetry. One of the reasons for this new collecting focus has been the presence of the Experimental Printmaking Institute on campus, and the opportunity to watch as Curlee Holton, his students, and visiting artists turn out an array of marvelous books, each one representing the unique vision of its creator. In the six short years since it opened, EPI has become a noteworthy contributor to the artist's book movement.

This exhibit showcases some of the best of EPI work as well as the work of

other distinguished book artists across the country. On a recent visit to EPI to examine the volumes that had been arriving for the show, I was particularly taken by the sight of them clustered together in a state of waiting, each carefully wrapped in mylar, wax paper, or cloth protectors. Removing this outer layer revealed another even more intriguing wrapper, be it a traditional binding, a specially-made box, or even a "found" container. The uncovering of this final

layer is the purview of the exhibition itself, so I will not elaborate further, except to guarantee visitors an explosion of color, texture, whimsy, wit, drama, and surprise. For those fortunate enough to see the show, I predict the same thing I did for my students on the first day of class: "you may never look at a book in the same way again."

Diane Windham Shaw  
Special Collections Librarian  
Lafayette College

*"Anyone can make a hole in clay,  
but few can bring beauty and sensitivity to the hole.  
It is the true artists who lift the race in science,  
medicine, and creativity."*

*Beatrice Wood*

## *It is at the end of the story that we truly begin.*

The book has traditionally functioned both as a tool for educating the mind and as a vehicle of information. These time-honored purposes are challenged now, like never before in history. The challenges arrive from two sources: the ubiquitous nature of technology and the idiosyncratic creative impulses of artists. We truly are witnessing a moment in the evolution of man, within the context of technological discoveries, that has altered our way of relating to each other, communicating with each other, and perhaps most importantly, how we document and record our experiences as humans.

Much has been written about the technological transformation of the book medium as a result of technological advances. Articles and essays have questioned whether or not we are wit-

nessing the end of books and the beginning of the electronic read. The second force that has impacted our notion of what a book traditionally has been and perhaps could be, has been the personal and sometimes eccentric books created by artists. There has been a growing trend of artists choosing to invest their creative energies into making limited edition fine art books as well as unique one of a kind artist books. These books as art objects challenge our preconceived notions of how a book looks and functions. Artists never seem to be satisfied with the role of merely the observer or reader; they prefer to touch, smell, and feel simultaneously. Artists embrace the full meaning of the object held in one's hand. To the artist it is precious and challenging at the same time.

However, we face a time when many artists find that their aesthetic sensibilities are under assault by the world of technology and commerce. The single dimensional quality of digital technology has the power to make us, if we allow it, a shallow civilization that values only principles of economy, efficiency and universal applications. This new aesthetic, where speed and disposability reign, is antithetical to the sensuous and tactile experiences that are embodied in the desire to hold and encounter the book. This encounter is heightened and expanded in the hands of the artist, even when digital processes are employed. This exhibition, titled *Artists and the Art of the Book*, is dedicated to celebrating the encounter of the artist and the book—an embrace that moves far beyond historical meaning and traditional forms.

### **Inspiration and Collaboration**

The Banana Factory, under the guidance of a creative and passionate

director, Diane LaBelle, has continually sought to expand the horizons of the community it serves. This community has grown over the years to not only encircle the artists and immediate community in Bethlehem, but the surrounding cities of Easton and Allentown, Pennsylvania. The reputation of the Banana Factory as a creative and innovative arts facility has now begun to impact the art world well beyond the boundaries of the Lehigh Valley through high quality exhibitions and a wide range of local, regional, and international artists in residency programs. It has taken an advocacy role to reach well beyond its borders to organize exhibitions and collaborative projects with a national scope in mind. The Experimental Printmaking Institute (EPI) at Lafayette College is pleased to have been invited to become part of this exciting, creative, and collaborative vision.

This collaboration began with an invitation in 1998 from Diane LaBelle to organize an exhibition of prints pro-

duced in a number of small workshops with regional artists. This exhibition, titled *Innovative Print Workshop*, brought together artists and works of art produced at three workshops: EPI; Artists Image Resource (AIR), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Zygote Press, Cleveland, Ohio. This exhibition also included seminars and lectures with a second showing at Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania. This current exhibition represents EPI's second collaboration with the Banana Factory and was in large part inspired by an exhibition of artist books (*Where are the Books?*, January 2000) organized by Diane Shaw of the Skillman Library at Lafayette College. *Artists and the Art of the Book* addresses similar concerns regarding the impact of digital technology on the traditional book. This exhibition was enhanced by a series of intensive artist book workshops at EPI from July to December of 2001. The workshop involved a number of Banana Factory artists as well as regional artists.

## Pushing the Boundary; A Creative Challenge

The book arts workshops conducted at Lafayette had but one restriction—no book could exceed 30 inches by 30 inches. The only other boundaries rested in the minds of the artists. I believe the statements by participating artists speak to those individual challenges as well as the potential that exists when one is charged with creating a visual object that also functions as a book. Susan Small, a ceramicist and artist from the Banana Factory, stated at the beginning of the workshop, "I am a ceramic artist, I don't want to make a traditional book that you just open and read. I want to make something more than a book; something that you have to physically participate in." Installation artist Marya first asked, "What is an artist book anyway?" She later explained, "I want to make something that speaks about the loss my friend has suffered from breast

cancer. How do I make a book out of that? Plus, I want to use her old bras as an essential part of it."

Artists involved in the workshop (or affiliated with EPI) were from New York, New Jersey, Tennessee, Chicago, Ohio, Mexico, and Costa Rica. These artists have produced one of a kind artist books or made one especially for this exhibition. Some spoke of the creative excitement and challenge of this project and their reflections on the resulting exhibition. Some of their comments follow:

**Maritza Mosquera:** "I am Ecuadorian, a painter, and a women. These things are natural to me, they are givens. In this project I had to structure the way I was thinking. The layout of a book is new to me, the words are not. I think of this project as an installation with words and images.

I did not know what an artist book looked like. I knew that I wanted to create an installation that was human scale and comprised of metals. I had no idea

how to work with metal, so I thought about using silver paint and wood. I was compensating, but I did not have to back out of my thinking, the engineering department at Lafayette College gave me that opportunity. I worked closely with engineering to create a book that satisfied my needs as a sculptor also."

**Jim Toia:** "I did a series of books in the early 1990s, sculptural in form, and free standing. Curlee suggested that I participate in this project and create a book. People mostly think of me as a sculptor because I mostly address material as my impetus for creating. I have no working definition of a book. If I did it would be so widespread, so broad, that it could really be anything. The one factor that really holds true is that it is made up of many parts and is meant to be audience participatory. The book helps to change the way people look at art, and that is always a good thing. I created my book by pressing lead under underlying elements. *Détente* is the name of the book, which is an agreement be-



tween warring factions. This book revolves and evolves around nature and life cycles—it is symbolic of these relationships coming to an agreement.”

**Chris Tague:** “To me an artist book is a vessel. It is a container of information, which can be very personal, even autobiographical. Ultimately it is a container of meaning. My book emphasizes this meaning. The book is titled the *Story of Icharus*, and it is a contemporary retelling of the story of Icharus and his father Dadelus. The actual book is a ten-inch Plexiglas cube that contains a mylar scroll that was digitally produced. I think it is important to apply the same rigor that one does to painting to a digital piece. I think that there is a misconception that because something is created on the computer that it is easier to produce—in reality it often takes the same amount of effort as traditional media.”

## Where Do We Go From Here?

This exhibition will travel to a number of venues including Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Cleveland, Ohio and San José, Costa Rica. Other sites are under consideration in the United States and abroad. Each new venue will invite a number of artists from that area to be included in the exhibition and when it travels to the next location. This will increase the number of books on view and the participation of artists from around the country. We are beginning with one hundred unique handmade books in this exhibition. Who knows where it will end. In conclusion the most exciting element of this project is the creative possibilities that exist when bringing into concert the challenge of such a project as this and the creative potentials of over 50 contemporary artists.

*Curlee Raven Holton*  
*Associate Professor, Lafayette College*  
*Director, Experimental Printmaking Institute*

# Artist List

Rebeca Alpízar

Carlos Andrade & Todd Ayoung

Salma Arastu

Hernan Arevelo

Robert Beckman

Katie Behler

Iris Bogaert

Barbara Bullock

Carolee Campbell

Rosemarie Chiarlone

William E. Christine

Gregory Coates

Melissa Jay Craig

Thomas Cooney Crawford

Roy Crosse

Tara Czujak

Georgia Deal

Helen Frank

Chris Giordani

Miguel Angel Godínez

Jerushia L. Graham

Don Harvey

Gail Ann Herring

Curlee Raven Holton

Shellie Jacobson

Leroy Johnson

Martina Johnson-Allen

Linda Klopp

Kumi Korf

Michael Loderstedt

Trudi Y. Ludwig

Craig Matis

Nicole Maynard-Sahar  
Allison MacKenzie  
Michele Merchadal  
Patricia Mighell  
MaryAnn Miller  
Liz Mitchell  
Lois Morrison  
Maritza Mosquera  
Alberto Murillo  
Karima Muyaes  
Bonnie Thompson Norman  
Pamela Paulsrud  
Janet Taylor Pickett  
Maria G. Pisano  
Susan Pollack  
John Thomas Pusateri  
Maryann Riker

Faith Ringgold  
Carol Rosen  
Valerie Roybal  
Fay Ryu  
Kristen Scheoner  
Marya  
Ian Short  
Jose Maria Sicilia  
Susan Small  
R. H. Starr, Jr.  
Christopher Tague  
Cynthia Thompson  
Anna Tsantir  
Jim Toia  
Nancy Vachon  
Peter Verheyen  
Purvis Young



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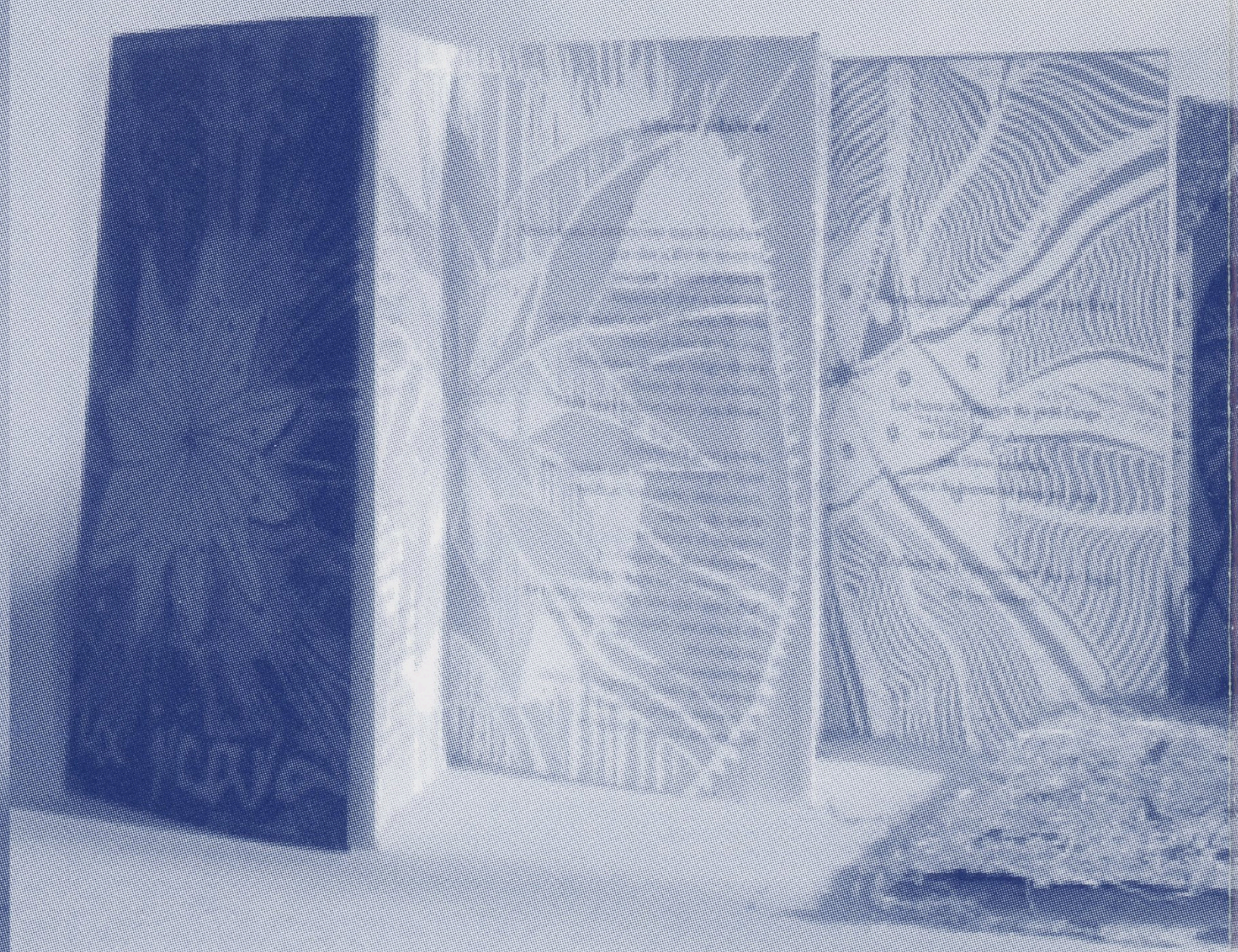
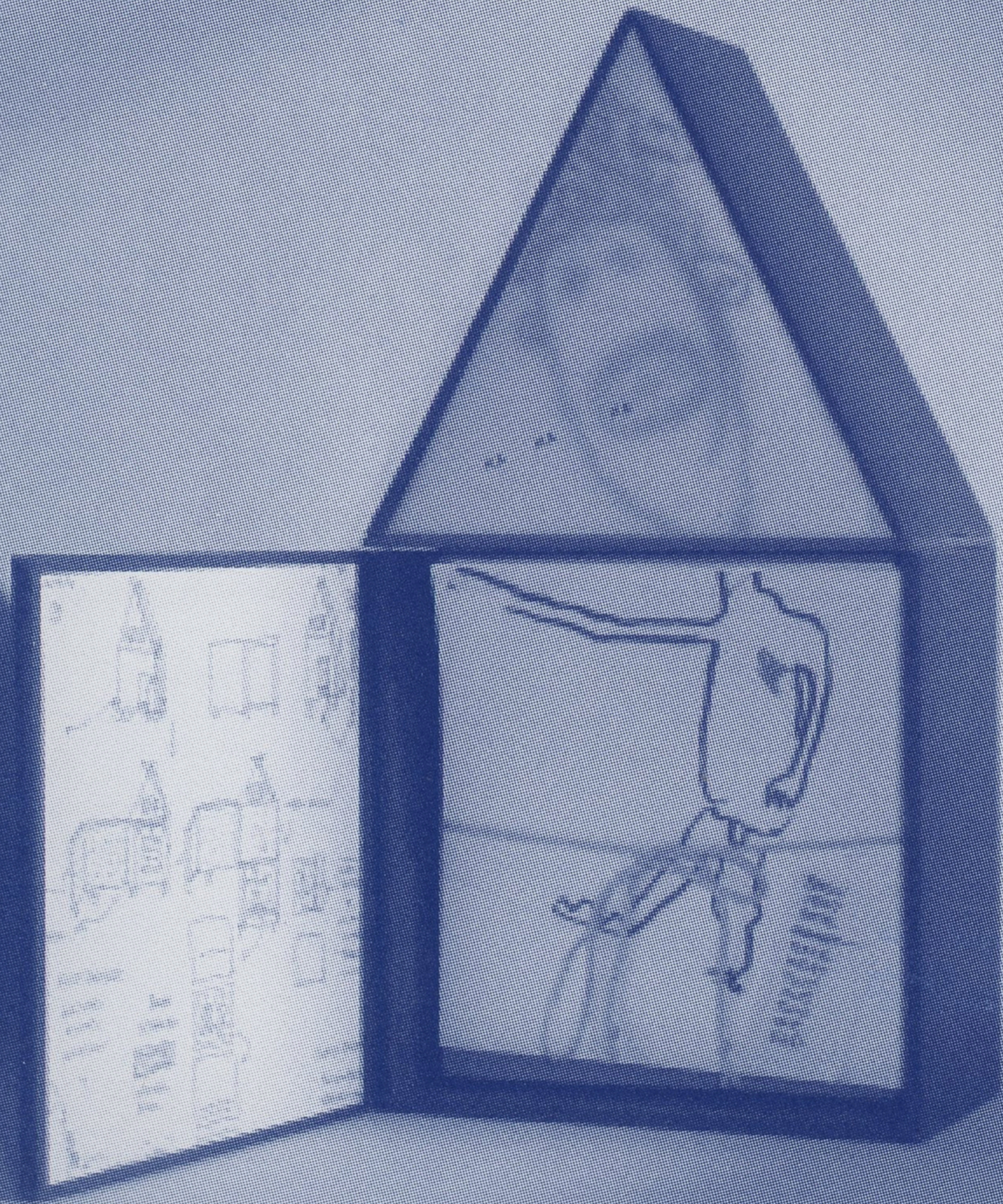
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Ochun  
Karima Muyaes

