

# Defining The Rainbow

When I was granted the privilege of editing The Miniature Book Society *Newsletter*, I promised myself that I would never get into the trap of reviewing miniature books. I call it a trap because as a journalist I am bound to tell the truth. And I take this volunteer 'job' just as seriously as the editor of *The New York Times*. (Note that the *Newsletter* and *The New York Times* are both **bold AND italicized!**)

Then it happened. *Defining The Rainbow* by Rebecca Press crossed my desk and my promise melted like a snowman in a scorching Texas sun. And here is why: I have lots of miniature books. I have been collecting since 1966. Raise your hand if you were even alive in 1966! Ask me how many miniature books I have... Go ahead, ask me...I'm glad you asked me. "I have no idea." They are in big boxes, in an entire library of miniature books, and throughout my house, and storage shed.

So, I have seen thousands of miniature books, but I only have one very small half shelf of my most prized

miniature books. And even they are mostly from friends such as Julian Edison, Neale Albert, Stephen Byrne, and Caroline Brandt. However at the front of that most precious pack is one designed by a fellow I never had the privilege of meeting in person, Joe D'Ambrosio and written by an old friend, Ray Bradbury. It is called *The Stars* and was printed by Gold Stein Press in 1993. If you own a copy, boy, are you a lucky duck.

What I recognized in the crafting of *The Stars* was the same genius that Frank Lloyd Wright espoused in architecture: "form follows function." He would actually yell that phrase at his architects and builders.

D'Ambrosio took Bradbury's words and the form of the pages followed the function and meaning of his beautiful words. Two artistic geniuses collided like two super novas and the stars were literally created from nothing in the universe of miniature books.

I never thought there would be another Joe D'Ambrosio and I still don't think there will ever be another Ray Bradbury, but then BAM, *De-*

*fining The Rainbow* shows up. The only word that I can adequately use is gobsmacked.

I'm fairly jaded about miniature books. I've seen them all and they are merely copies of better books. But not so with Rebecca Bingham's newest creation. Again, the words of Lloyd Wright echo in my ears as I open the package and behold the usually mundane spine of the book. Oh, my God! The Spine! It's just a spine! Yet, I already am experiencing an emotional connection with a miniature book. How unusual. How curious. How...unexpected?

I must explain the phrase 'emotional connection.' It is different with each reader or viewer. It is that thing that takes your breath away, that makes you gasp, that may even bring a tear to one eye. That thing was in the spine of Rebecca Bingham's stunning masterpiece.

And if the mere spine evoked such a strong emotion, what would the book hold for me?

I was in the printing business in one way or another for over forty years. One of the almost magical tricks-of-the-trade is to learn the ancient art of using thumb and the first three fingers

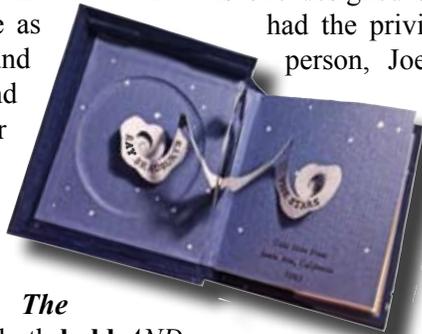
to allow that first light rubbing to feel the paper. The papermaker's art conducts a tactile emotion.

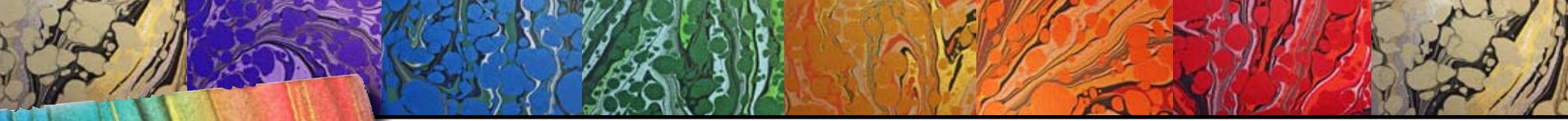
That is why I love the almost lost art of letterpress. Like a blind man I can gently pass my fingers across the page and feel the dried ink on the textured paper. It creates a union of me with words, the printer, and author. It is emotional.

The first touch was on the front lid or cover. The paste papers made by Madeleine Durham were soft like a rainbow. It was like touching an image in the sky as my fingers sailed across the multicolored cover. I looked down to see what my fingers were experiencing and I beheld

a section of that very rainbow with streaks of gold and the word Rainbow gently and elegantly inscribed in the same gold. A more perfect blend of font, color, and texture I had seldom beheld. Again, my breath was taken away. Another emotional connection and I had not even opened the book!

We are all familiar with the phrase, "You can't judge a book by its cover." And that is true with most books and especially miniature books. The space is so small to convey any kind of a message that most publishers are happy to just be able to quickly gold





stamp a short title.

Not so with Ms. Bingham. She employs every pica of her publication to express the emotion of color. Again, I harken back to Joe D’Ambrosio. His publications utilized every possible venue to evoke an emotion in the reader / viewer. D’Ambrosio and Bingham both speak to the soul of the reader. Like an arrow their message goes directly to the heart and spreads a warmth throughout the body that one seldom feels in a mere publication. And they perform this feat of magic through meaningful design.

Again, ‘form follows function’ echos in my mind.

Now, I must admit that I am a sucker for marbled endsheets. I would say that I own several hundred very large marbled sheets that I have promised to put in my miniature books some day. Alas, they stayed rolled up until once in a while, I dig them out and allow myself to drift into the magic of the swirls and fans.

*Defining the Rainbow* begins with a lovely marbled endsheet but the eye is immediately drawn to the title page. The designer is in total control

of where I will look and what I see. We have an immediate and emotional relationship. She is in charge and she is going to tell me her story of color and I WILL listen. I have no other choice, as the genius of design demands it.

My eye is drawn to a half circle (rainbow) of swirls of color. It is a petite marbled canvas attached to the title page and the colors compel my attention. It is married to the title of the book set at a rainbowsque angle. The designer has set a hook and I have been caught. I am now into the book and I can sense that I am about to go down the rabbit hole and experience whatever this modern day Alice demands of my emotions.

As I open the first page of the book my publisher’s eye goes right to what I perceive as a flaw! I’m crestfallen to think that this may just be another miniature book. The ‘flaw’ is in the gutter of the double page spread and it is the white thread that dangles uncut and in my mind unkept.

But I look closer and see, to my delight, that I am wrong. This is intelligent design. The thread is in the form of a bow. This is a gift from Ms. Bingham directly to Mr. Hill. And as I will find out the thread color changes with each new color. The simple gutter is used to convey emotion. Genius. Sheer genius.

I am suddenly struck with the realization that were it not for members such as Barbara Williamson and oth-

ers, Rebecca Saady Bingham might still be doing her daily household chores and washing the dishes rather than creating art. Williamson encouraged Bingham to get back into the miniature book game after an absence of two decades. So, KUDOS to Barbara Williamson and others who encouraged Rebecca Bingham. Your dedication to miniature books has paid off with a huge win for the future of miniature books. Can we give Barb a second Glasgow Cup?

But my mind wandered away from the book. Excuse me.

My fingers gently ply between the pages of the text. I can barely feel the lettering which means the amount of ink used was near perfect and my fingers recognize a rag paper that is possibly linen in origin. I flip to the colophon to find out but alas, Ms. Bingham has not granted us the privilege of knowing the genealogy of the paper. But my fingers usually do not lie and I am fairly confident in



what they have told me. An excellent quality paper that is not too thick and not too thin. And one that will last the ages.

There are eight signatures (sewn together sections) in the book. And

each signature is a different color of the rainbow. The divider between each signature is a heavier cardstock paper with a marbled cover that closes the last color and then on the other side opens the next color. The marbled divider pages were created by Jemma Lewis and she did her magic with great skill.

Having tried my hand at the art of marbling I know some of the difficulties. My own marbled papers adorn some of the finest trash can liners in our house. So, I try to figure out how one gets a two sided marbled page? The answer is one doesn’t. The book artist has skillfully attached two different thin sheets to a card stock divider. It takes me several minutes to pry just a tiny edge apart to confirm my suspicion. Genius.

Form follows function. The words are simple. Merely different words used to describe a color. But many of the words contain emotional triggers. I am sure that they are meant to evoke a unique emotion in each individual reader / viewer. And that trigger word is then amplified with the visual stimulation of the striking marbled dividers.

When I closed the book and returned to the spine, I had an epiphany. This is not just another miniature book; this is art. There’s not another Joe D’Ambrosio. But there is a Rebecca Bingham. And like the rainbow, she brings joy and magic to the eye and soul. 