

Thomas

Millroth

ARTISTS'

BOOKS

FROM A

SWEDISH

POINT

OF VIEW

WITH

SPECIAL

ATTENTION

PAID TO

THE CON-

TRIBUTIONS

OF DENMARK

AND GDR

ellerströms/tragus

ARTISTS' BOOKS FROM A SWEDISH POINT OF VIEW

**WITH SPECIAL
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Essays by Thomas Millroth

ellerströms/tragus

Books made by artists, artists' books, tell a story of their own. But what is an artists' book? It is difficult to draw boundaries although the phenomenon has played important roles in many art movements—from constructivism to situationism and underground. But, as many say, of all the new representational methods that entered the art world artists' books were the only one with the capacity to include such widely differing forms of expression as text, drawing, poetry, prose, painting, transcriptions, instructions, music, collages and documentation—and these books can even be performative. This transnational genre of art exists outside institutions and galleries. And even if its history is not so obvious, one thing is sure, it is alive and well, thriving particularly in workshops, studios and at our art schools in neighbouring countries like Denmark and Germany, thus influencing the Swedish scene. It is a story about *codex*, the book, bringing the experiences of the old printing offices into contemporary art life.

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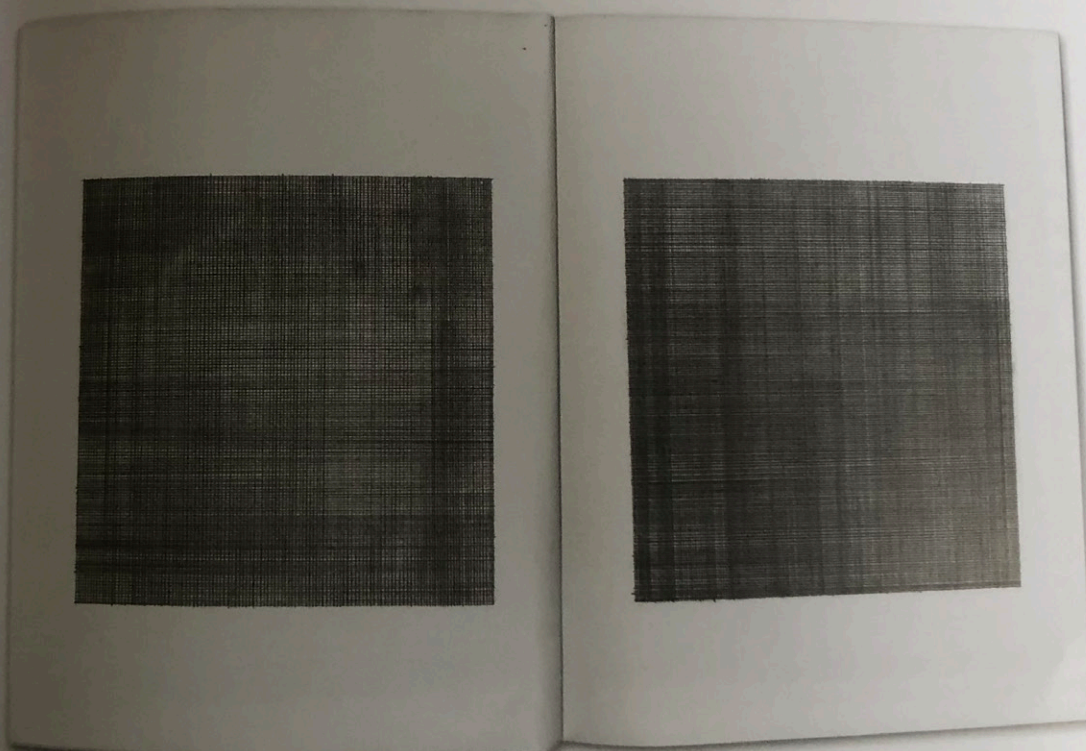
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the lines on a whole tennis court. Here the starting point for an artistic reflection and physical palpability are two of which I cannot defend myself," as Olof 17, 6 November 2016. And the fact that boundaries and separation, came at a time of refugee reception were being discussed meaning, a political one. In that light, the definitive lines could be seen as borderlines, fences, boundaries. The

book creates opportunities for a narrative after page in a set sequence lays an the artist to create a kind of flow. To a part of it as a structure.

enlisted the aid of the computer to works based on simple elements. Fran- era Molnár (b. 1924) are two French minimalist, concrete variation work the pages shine and sparkle. Also (b. 1945). A centre for the devel- context was the Labo de Psycho- é de Paris, Centre St Charles. In book works were created where the highly condensed structures. ves/Linjepermutationer in 1978 for years later Vera Molnár's *Un pour* Ein Prozent Unordnung was pub- sheets with simple geometric com-

197. SOPHIE TOTTIE Spread from *Bilder (Images)*, 1994.

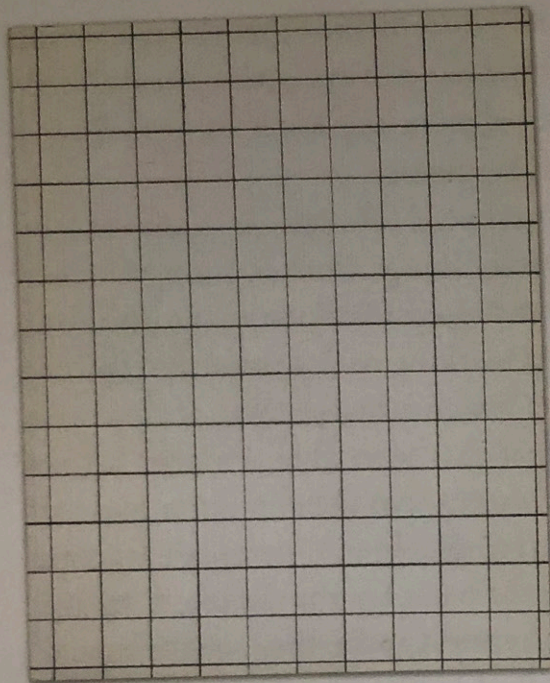


when Torsten Ridell used computers for his works at the same time.

If we see Ridell's or Molnár's serial pictures, their minimalist expression, it is obvious how they take the space of the book or the page to its extreme. From that point of view Sophie Tottie (b. 1964) belongs in a discussion of minimalism.

The immediate expression is not enough to give an understanding. Tottie's *Bilder (Images)* contains everything that can be desired of a well-executed artists' book. Everything from the feel of the paper quality to the sequence of works, which open towards memory and oblivion and—not least of all—the texts by others that she has selected as parallels to the pictures. She makes regular and irregular drawings whose basic character is simple but with ample

ARTISTS' BOOKS FROM A SWEDISH P...



198. SOPHIE TOTTIE Cover from
Bilder (Images), 1994.

room for shifting and condensation. Occasionally she lets drawings resembling industrial, repetitive structures be superimposed like a screen over other pictures. She removes iconological references from a space/page and the pictures that remain expand. And when different kinds of drawing cover pictures, the same effect arises. Space is exploded. Then time staggers too. Tottie plays in a highly deliberate way against the limitations of space and the book. Her book simultaneously reminds me of the tension between oblivion and memory. With openings towards the world, towards violence. Agnes Heller writes in her text in *Bilder* of how the violence continues.

“Totalitarian violence is pure in the sense that it is not instrumental in the way that force or power tends to be. Nothing except the use of force can be achieved through this kind of violence. No sacred goal will be justified through it, no new judicial order will be introduced. The violence will just carry on with undiminished force, and it will give birth to new violence without proving anything but its own power.”

The Danish artist Marie Raffn (b. 1991) trained at Malmö Art Academy and works in Copenhagen. She both seeks and shatters the concrete expression and the minimalism of form in *Horizontal and Vertical Lines Meet at Certain Points* (2014). Here we have 96 pages of squared paper, where horizontal and vertical lines meet. Raffn



659. CARL FRIEDRICH CLAUS Sprach-
Mitter, "Waterways/Wasserwege".
Photographic editing: Ben Thompson.
Walds Kunstmuseum, 1998.

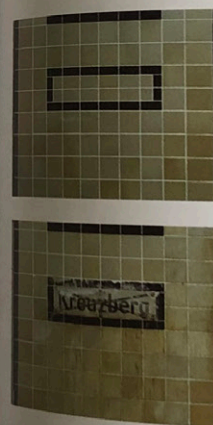
OUT INTO SPACE

As I now leave the physical place that is Berlin, with its influential past and its creative present, to let the books claim "space" more generally, Sophie Tottie's *For the Vicinity of Concord* (2001) is a natural transition; she combines both the specific place "Berlin" and other spaces. The book reaches far beyond its covers, and she has been careful to formulate it as an independent work. Admittedly, she had a high-profile exhibition with the same title as the book in DAAD Galerie in Berlin (28 September–11 November 2001), but although the theme is partly the same, she has striven for independence in this concentrated artist-made book.

Four different narratives are interleaved with photographs. As an extra booklet she has inserted Carlos Basualdo's text (2003), which refers to her work, but he is careful to preserve the artistic integrity of the main book. His narrative alternates with essayistic reflections on Tottie's themes. His two parallel texts illuminate each other. In *For the Vicinity of Concord* there are quite a lot of cityscapes, decaying or dilapidated surfaces. A clock stands still, a metro station is abandoned. Everything is like a whisper, something from the past, half-forgotten. A streak of contemporary angst and restlessness runs through the pages. As an epigraph Tottie has chosen to quote the author Mike Nicol (*Cape Town*, 1998):

"Otherwise, life continues with fluctuating levels of paranoia. Sometimes we feel we are under siege, sometimes we think it's all a matter of perception except that some mighty horrendous things do happen."

This flow between perception and powerful experiences runs through the entire book, but with Tottie choosing not to let the succession



630. SOPHIE TOTTE Images from *For the Vicinity of Concord* (details), 2001.

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630. SOPHIE TOTTIE Images from *For the Vicinity of Concord* (details), 2001.



631. SOPHIE TOTTIE *For the Vicinity of Concord*, 2001.

of pages indicate a chronological process or a narrative, each spread is an opening in a room, a layer over unknown worlds and experiences, which remain the book's enduring secrets. This is not to say that it is introvert and enclosed. For there are real rooms to connect to. One is the closed, and thus inaccessible, U-Bahn station Kreuzberg. And here Tottie—who lived and worked in Berlin—brings in the classic tiled modernity of the Berlin transport network. Tiles were often used in the U-Bahn to create symmetry, rational patterns that invoked classical antiquity. Look at how the engineer and designer Alfred Grenander turned the underground at Alexanderplatz into tiled colonnades.

This rational strictness, so fraught with associations, can also be found in Tottie, although she disrupts the symmetry, pushes the given associations aside to make new discoveries. The chronology does not fit, but in retrospect I can see parts of the book in the light of the major commemoration of Alfred Grenander in 2006, when Sven-Åke Johansson used modernist/classicizing tiles as sources of sound in a performative piece of music.

While I can point out pictures in *For the Vicinity of Concord* as fragments from Berlin, the images are so much more, they let the book reach into the room, into space in the broadest sense.



632. CO HULTÉN *Pop-up book*, c. 1959.

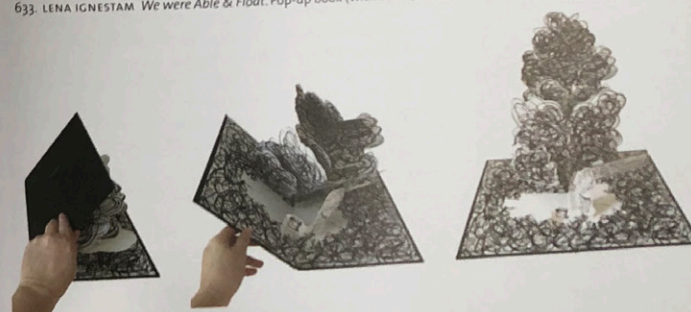
The book thus wants to get out into space, each page is an opening outward.

When I write "out into space", my thoughts go to a button that can be pushed so that the covers open and small stages are set up. In other words, pop-up books. Like what Lena Ignestam (b. 1965) and Christina Bredahl Duelund (b. 1967) do when they let different news stories—floods, disasters, protests—escape from their books. It is not just the book breaking into the room—the world and current political events in turn penetrate into the book. Pop-ups are mostly used in children's books, but not as commonly in artists' books. In the late 1950s, however, CO Hultén turned children's books into fantasy scenes with scissors, paste and paint. Ignestam's and Duelund's pop-up books are packed with drama, conflicting with the neutral covers of the books.

When I began a discussion with the gallery owner Gunar Barthel about how artists' books claim space, he immediately mentioned Carlfriedrich Claus's name. Claus started with his language sheets, *Sprachblätter*, in 1958 (see p. 402). They were intended to occupy space. The foundation was his pictures of writing, a "coarticulation" between what is read and what is read aloud, an optical text of writing and sounds, based on acoustics. Here is how he described "the perfect simultaneous coarticulation":



633. LENA IGNESTAM *We were Able & Float. Pop-up book (with detail)*, 2014.



634. CHRISTINA BRED AHL DUELUND *Submarine. Pop-up book*, 2012.



631. SOPHIE TOTTIE *For the Vicinity of Concord*, 2001.

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