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Bound ground: Laura Moriarty's book of "geological" sculptures

Posted by Lynn Woods on July 9, 2012 in Art · 2 Comments



Artist Laura Moriarty (studio portrait of by Wayne Montecalvo)

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Many independent filmmakers are funding their projects by raising money through Kickstarter, in which you set a goal and a deadline and offer perks to spur higher donations. The process can also work for visual artists, as sculptor Laura Moriarty discovered in successfully raising the funds to publish her first book, *Table of Contents*.

Moriarty makes encaustic sculptures, whose sediments of brilliant color and coiled, accreted or wedgelike forms reference geologic formations. Wanting to document the substantial body of work that she had developed in recent years, Moriarty decided to produce a catalogue and researched the different options. After discovering US Artists, a foundation based in Los Angeles that offers project grants, she applied and was accepted, partly on the basis of having been a recipient of two Pollock-Krasner Foundation grants (the Pollock-Krasner Foundation is a partner with US Artists).

But rather than fund her project outright, US Artists served as a coach, guiding the artist as to how she could raise the money herself. Through webinars and one-on-one sessions, the organization helped Moriarty position her project so as to attract funders. "They have this platform almost identical to Kickstarter, except it's tax-deductible," said Moriarty. "They teach you how to think about your project in terms of how to present it to the world: What's the hook, how it's relevant to the world today."

In Moriarty's case, the hook was her work's geologic associations, which had potential appeal beyond a fine-art audience. She decided that a catalogue was too self-serving and began thinking about a book using a geology textbook as a conceptual template. More than a clever contrivance, the textbook is an

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element integral to her work: The cutaway diagrams of geology textbooks have inspired her recent sculptures. "I interpret them," she said. "The processes used in making my art – heating and cooling the encaustic and the window of opportunity you have when the wax is at certain temperatures – mimic geologic forces." Presenting works based on textbook diagrams in the form of a textbook thus had a beautiful logic.

Moriarty devised a two-month timeline for the fundraising, preparing images, putting together e-mail lists based on "the different communities you interact with," e-mailing out press releases and following up. US Artists advised "building up momentum gradually. Their philosophy is: If you reach 50 percent of your goal a week before your deadline, you're likely to make it." Moriarty set a minimum goal of \$8,500 and a maximum goal of \$11,400. She succeeded in meeting the maximum. Printing 750 copies of her 62-page softcover book cost approximately \$12,000, with herself kicking in the difference.

The fundraising part was "excruciating," she acknowledged. "It's like childbirth. You go through this awful thing, but in the end get this wonderful thing back." People who donated \$50 were offered a copy of the book (which sells for \$50). Those who gave \$25 received a limited-edition postcard, while \$500 donors got one of her sculptures. A big source of support was the encaustic paint community – Moriarty runs the gallery and workshop program at R & F Handmade Encaustic Paint in Kingston – as well as former students and her collectors. Facebook was a valuable tool, helping spread the word as the posts to her "friends" were sent to their links. She estimates that she received about 160 donations in total.

Money in hand, Moriarty then located several writers to contribute essays. She approached prominent critic and curator Dieter Roelstraete cold by e-mail, and he said "Yes." She found two writers from the media arts group smudge studio, and enlisted her friend educator and writer Kate McCoy as the fourth writer. Suzanne Giovanetti designed the book, in close collaboration with Moriarty. The photos are by Richard Edelman; his talent at capturing her work in photographic images was in part an inspiration for the book, said Moriarty.

Having the book printed locally rather than overseas, despite costing more, was important to her: She chose New York Press and Graphics, based in Albany. Within the constraints of her budget, Moriarty also went for the highest quality: heavy, textured paper, a foil stamp on the cover.

Table of Contents doesn't merely chronicle a body of work, but also newly interprets it in a graphic format. The overall, close-up image of the texture of a sculpture on the end pages mimics old-fashioned marbling. Many of the works are photographed dramatically against a dark background and in exaggerated perspective, as if they were specimens of brilliantly colored Earth forms floating in space. A special foldout section has tinted paper, resembling the faded pages of an old textbook, and a grid of small photos, some depicting small works displayed in divided boxes, as if they were mineral specimens. The section definitely has a retro feel, conjuring up technical scientific texts, which blurs the context, as if the sculptures were indeed geological phenomena.


Another section is coolly Minimalist: Each page, which is gridded like graph paper, features a single photo surrounded by a dark-gray border, with a single white outlined square overlaid on a section of the artwork. The texts, in rather dense art-speak (nowadays, art criticism itself is infused with technical, quasi-scientific language), explore the connection of geology with art and culture.

Moriarty is giving talks at various venues related to the book and also has submitted it to Dia:Beacon and Printed Matter bookstores. The main purpose of the book is "to create content around my work. My highest aspiration is to create a movement where artists think, 'I can do this, too.' A lot of artists want their work to cross into other realms than the art world. For me, it's science and geology."

Moriarty hopes that Table of Contents is a unique curatorial project that she hopes will spur more. The book has also inspired her to think of new ways of printing her sculptures. But it has also been fulfilling for a simpler reason: "Taking an idea and turning it into something concrete is really fun."

For more information on Kingston artist Laura Moriarty's work, log on to www.lauramoriarty.com.


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