

MAKER : A New Paper Magazine to Look For(ward)

This interview was initially published in the Huffington Post - 05/07/2012

An interview with Alyse Archer-Coïté -- Editor in Chief of MAKER.

AC: You are launching a new paper magazine called MAKER in March subtitled "The conception issue." Can you tell us a bit how creating a new paper magazine came to your mind ?

A A-C: Well, I've always been lucky to be surrounded by loving, kind, and extremely talented friends. People whose work I respect, whose minds intrigue me, and whose private and professional projects I have always taken an interest in. During a time when I was living back at home, in LA, I was trying to make up my mind about whether to get back into the arts and return to NYC, or spend some time exploring eco-politics (which was my second major). And my friend Clem (Clémence Poésy) who had just been in town visiting had left behind a portrait of me in pencil and watercolor, accompanied by a note thanking me for my hospitality. I knew through the time we spent together that she was a talented illustrator and painter, having shared stories of fully illustrated and bound books filled with watercolor paintings she loved to work on during her downtime and late nights on set. She would give them as gifts to loved ones, or leave them as surprises in her stead (as she had done for me). Upon finding my portrait I began to think about the secret and not so secret talents of my friends... and wanted to make a collective sort of blind collaboration between them and myself. I envisioned it as a sort of a curatorial project, my friends as the artists, the pages as the gallery, and myself as the curator.

AC: This magazine feels like a very personal dream becoming true.

A A-C: It most definitely is. A dream I could never have articulated on my own. With the help of the editorial team, and the artists' works, the magazine has come to life in a way I could have never anticipated. In its original materialization, it was an 18 page 'zine... now at 200-plus pages, it is much bigger, more beautiful and inspiring than I could have ever dreamt.

AC: Why MAKER, How did you come up with the name ?

A A-C: A few years ago I was traveling and spent long stretches without a computer or any music. I pretty much lost everything I owned during that trip. What I did have was my Moleskine and a few books. I had been writing and reading Camus' travel diaries; I remember reading writing down words and phrases that I liked and then loosing that too! Which was hugely disappointing for me because it was full of my late night ramblings, early morning lists of things to do, daily inspirations, letters and post cards, ideas for the "future me" and so on. At that time I hadn't conceived the magazine yet, but when it came to be, thoughts of that lost Moleskine and the words on the pages came back to me... and the word I remembered most vividly was "maker" -- and what it meant to me then, why I wrote it, I couldn't tell you, it was so long ago. But when I rediscovered it, I knew it was right. The

magazine is sort of a love letter to that time in my life, and to the things I lost and found because of it.

AC : In this first issue you surrounded yourself with talented people, artists like photographers Rachel Barrett and Martine Barrat, actors like Nora Zehetner, Clémence Poésy or Rupert Friend, musicians, filmmakers, talents from the fashion world as well... How did you choose them? Did you know all of them before ?

A A-C: As I mentioned before, many of the contributors are close friends, and the others are friends of those close friends. I used to joke that it was like a "creative pyramid scheme," because it just kept growing. Every day, a friend would introduce me to a friend of theirs, who was maybe a hairstylist, a writer, or a graphic designer, but who also had an extensive body of work they had been working on privately and were very passionate about. The real beauty of MAKER magazine is its ability to grow itself, like a living organism. It's the shared spirit of creativity that sustains it, giving it momentum which I believe will make it stronger with each issue.

AC: Did you commission specific projects for this first issue ? Or were you open the proposals your contributors did ?

A A-C: Well, some of our works were commissioned for the inaugural issue, for example, a stunning piece by Mario Hugo of Hugo & Marie, a creative agency based in New York. When we first met with Mario, we asked if we could see his unpublished works, things that were more personal to him, and shared with him our vision of the first issue. We told him it was inspired by the very first steps in the process of "making," the point of "conception." He came back to us a few weeks later, and had created a mixed media work on glass and found paper inspired by Greek Mythology and the "shifting form." It is a unique piece, in its content and craftsmanship, but also in its creation.

With Hugo and all of our contributors on this project, we wanted to stay as true as possible to our original vision, which was to articulate the often unexplored, more personal projects and perspectives of contemporary artists. Our input is limited to the decided theme of each issue, which is based on varied definitions of a "maker." The artists work in collaboration with us to interpret and shape this theme through their specific points of view. We encourage them to utilize the pages, to produce unfettered work for public consumption.

AC: To me, this first issue resembles a giant collage condensed in a book, it is quite heterogeneous and surprises keep popping along while reading.

A A-C: That is what I hoped for! I wanted the pages to be rich, and saturated with color. For the images to feel multi-dimensional, and draw the reader in. We have published such an array of work, from a very diverse group of artists, it would really have been impossible to force them to lay flat on the page. It reads as an art book more than a magazine. It is something you want to keep for a long time, collect more of, and refer to for inspiration over time. You leave it out on your coffee table, add it to your library, this isn't a magazine you stuff into your purse for a quick train read.

AC: It is quite brave and not very conformist to launch a paper magazine these days. Is there something you wish to stand for or against through MAKER ?

A A-C: One of my favorite smells is the smell of an old book, or a library full of them. There is something about the weight of the book, tracing the spine with your fingers, the sounds of a turning pages in an otherwise silent room. I really do believe that print will never die and I believe in the tangibility of art, and taking care to do it justice while also making it accessible.

It's funny, because when I first explained the concept to the team, they kept asking me what I wanted it to be like, they wanted a strict explanation, so they could be sure to get it right. All I could muster was 'I want it to be like a tangible image tumblr... do you know what I mean' and believe it or not they did! So there are aspects of it that are derived from a digital platform, but the concept is anchored in ink on paper and bound by collaboration.

AC: Did you have in mind other publications while putting together MAKER ?

A A-C: We stayed inspired and it wasn't hard, since we are based in New York City. It's like sensory overload in the magazine rack of my corner bodega. Some of my favorites are 10, Tar, Journal, Cura, Whitewall, WAD, I Love You... I mean, MAKER went through so many incarnations, all of which came from research and collection of books and magazines that spoke to us creatively, whether it be their content, their graphic elements, the paper they are printed on, or the writing style.

But MAKER is unique in its vision and its execution. A fact I am proud of, and I feel is undeniable once you turn the pages.

AC: It seems to me amazing that you could carry out this issue on the side of your full-time job and living in an intense city like New York. What is your secret of keeping sane while making MAKER ?

A A-C: You know, I sometimes look at what we've created here, what it has become and I can't believe the amount of work it took. I used to feel worn out when I was at university, since I was working full-time at Sotheby's at the time and going to my classes at night, but now I realize that was amateur hour compared to my schedule now. There were these Nike ads around the city that really summed up the attitude that kept me and the team going; the tagline was something like "people who are busier than you are running right now"... and that's how we moved forward. The entire team works full-time in creative fields, and have demanding and unpredictable hours, so in the months just before going to print, we would meet after work, order take-out and organize a stash of cigarettes, dark chocolates and Kombuchas. We would all gather around a table and work until about 4 or 5 a.m., go to sleep in shifts and then wake up for our day jobs. It wasn't pretty, but we got it done, and I think we all have a new appreciation for the amount of hours in a day.

AC: Does New York inspire you? Are there other places that do too?

A A-C: New York is undeniably inspiring! And I think every city I've ever lived in holds something special for me, and I unconsciously refer to them for new inspirations. Berlin and Copenhagen are two of my favorite cities, for completely different reasons and I think the influence of both can be seen in the magazine.

Copenhagen was more about the color palette. Mostly blues, grays, soft pinks, peach and black, very classic and subdued -- which is prevalent throughout the pages of the magazine. Berlin supplied the first few pages of issue one : We have an "Unknown" section, which re-appropriates the concept of a milk carton ad. I found a work of art while living in Berlin; I don't know what about it attracted me exactly, but it reminded me of home. All the text was in Arabic, and it had no signature, no title, and no provenance. I kept it with me and brought it back to the U.S., tucked into my journal. It now has a full spread in the magazine, imploring the readers to help us find the artist !

AC: One last question, where will we find MAKER beside my bedside table ?

A A-C: Glad to hear it will be on your bedside ! But you will also find it in Creatures of Comfort, Phillips de Pury & Co. Design Shop, Fab.com, and we have been in talks with Opening Ceremony, Saturdays Surf, Colette, Shakespeare & Co (Paris), Hunting & Collecting, Bookmarc, and many other boutiques internationally.