

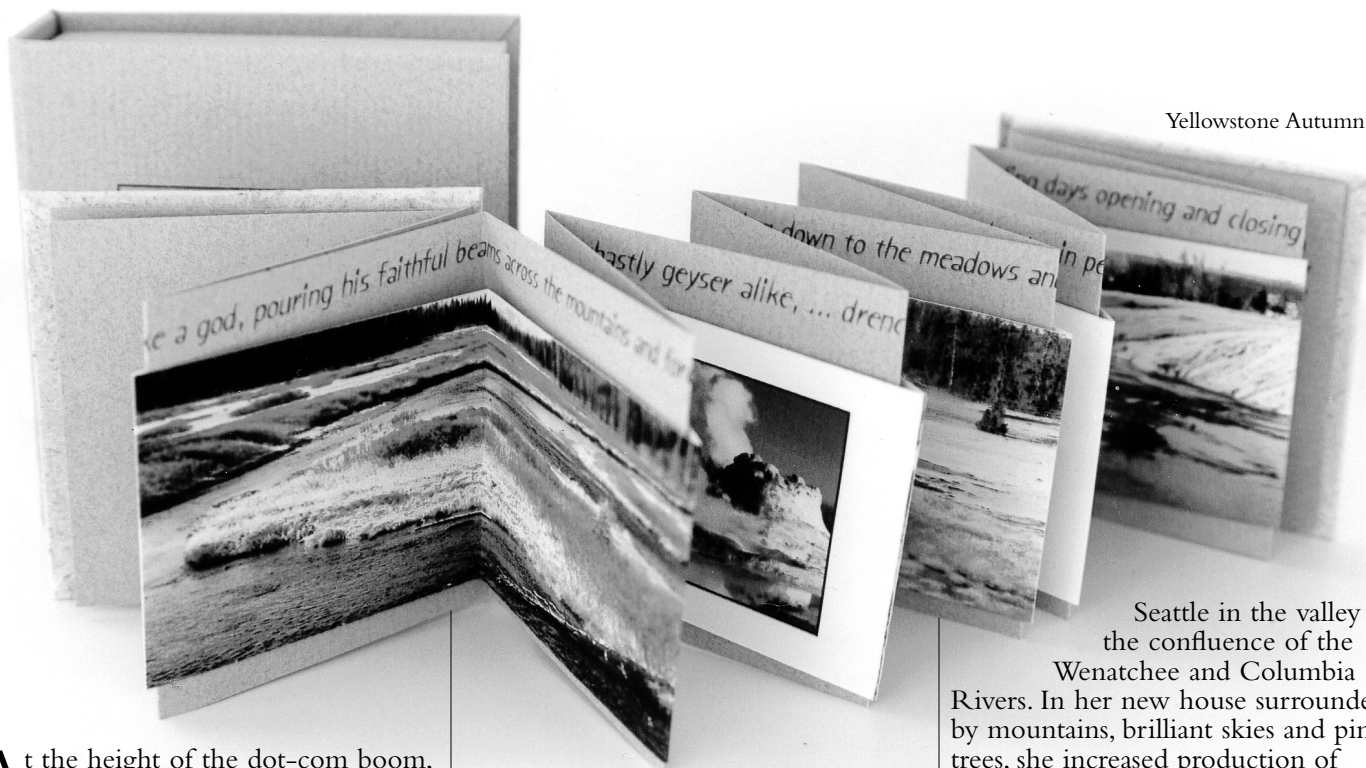


An Intimate Experience

Jill Timm Tackles Big Subjects in Small Books

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By Linda Castellitto and Scott Brown



Yellowstone Autumn

At the height of the dot-com boom, Jill Timm quit her steady job with IBM to make hand-made books. It was her second career change. After working in photography and graphic design for nearly 20 years, she had gone back to college in the early 1990s to study interactive media design and obtained a certificate in human-computer interaction. After finishing a Master's degree, she joined IBM where she developed CD-ROM training programs for the company's software products. But the computer work was too cerebral, and she knew something wasn't right. "I was doing interactive multimedia programs, work that was all in my head. I wasn't using my hands, and I felt a void," she said.

Timm got the first inkling of how she might fill that void when on vacation she stumbled across a book show. The event hall was filled with publishers and dealers specializing in miniatures, traditionally defined as books measuring no more than three inches in any dimension. When she walked into the room, she knew in her gut what she wanted to do. Looking back, she realized that she had been making miniature books for years as gifts for friends or as projects in design school.

When she returned home, Timm went right to it, making miniature books after work and on weekends. She experimented with techniques and practiced making identical copies of the same book—a significant change from the individual books she had made before. She attended other miniature book conferences, trading her first efforts with other bookmakers, and then daring to offer a few for sale. When it became clear that her books had a market, she planned her departure from IBM, saving money and looking for a new place to live.

In 2002, she settled in Wenatchee, Washington, about 130 miles east of

Seattle in the valley at the confluence of the Wenatchee and Columbia Rivers. In her new house surrounded by mountains, brilliant skies and pine trees, she increased production of small-format books. Under her Mystical Places Press imprint, Timm has completed editions of more than 20 books.

As the name of her press suggests, most of Timm's work is inspired by wilderness areas in the United States, and her books, which often have no text, bring the outdoors to the reader through sequences of nature photographs and seriographs. Timm says she hopes that her work will make people more aware of the environment. "By showing people spots of nature I happen to love, maybe they'll think about it before damming up a valley, or think about it when they go to vote," she said.

She sees herself as part of the environmentalist tradition of her heroes, activist and writer John Muir and photographer Ansel Adams. Like Adams, Timm uses photography to convey the essence of the wilderness. She works mostly in color and reproduces her pictures using the Giclée process. Giclée prints are permanent, high-resolution ink jet images that when printed on watercolor paper have an appearance that blends elements of silkscreen and photography. The new



technology allows Timm to “use photographs in color without going to offset printing and color separation.” The quality of the images and their relative low cost offers new possibilities for the miniature book.

The typical Timm book is a record of a visit to a wilderness area in the Western United States. Her books are devoted to Yellowstone; Sedona, Arizona; White Sands, New Mexico; and the Hill Country of central Texas, among other locations. Most consist of a series of color photographs, but that doesn't stop Timm from seeing herself as a storyteller. “I love telling a story. I like going beyond just one image to tell that story, or to convey a sense of a place, to have an effect, to change the reader in some way,” she explains. “A lot of people say that my books have minimal text. But after all, if a picture is worth a thousand words and you have ten pictures, why do you need another word?”



Timm's commitment to nature themes has attracted some of her most ardent collectors. Dr. Sandra Still, the English and Women's Studies Librarian at Emory University in Atlanta and a member of the Miniature Book Society, is a Mystical Places Press customer and aficionado. The university library owns 81 miniature books, 14 of which are by Timm. Her focus on nature makes the books particularly appealing, said Still. “There is a growing interest in our university in environmental issues, and Jill's work certainly complements that concern.”

Emory's collection is displayed throughout the library. It is, Still says, “useful for students and anyone interested in the art of the book to be able

to compare different types of books and publishers, as well as different titles in the work of one producer.” Timm's work attracted her not only because of the artist's creativity and innovation, but because, “I don't know of any other miniature book publishers working with photography the way Jill does. The digital printing process she uses, Giclée, results in the most incredible depth and clarity in her images.”

Like Still, other collectors are also intrigued by her use of technology and materials. Neale Albert, the current president of the Miniature Book Society, has all of Timm's miniatures because her books “are a little different from what most miniature books are. They don't look like a miniature version of a traditional book—they're more creative in the subject matter, how she makes them, how she illustrates them.”

Some of Timm's most popular books belong to her Yellowstone series,

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a set of four books that depict the park during each season. The books are bound accordion-style, with the pages forming a continuous band folded to fit into covers. Each page displays an individual photograph that can be viewed in sequence as they are turned, or the reader can unfold the entire book and see it all at once. A quotation about the park runs across the top of the pages, unifying the contents.

Unusual book forms particularly interest Timm: "I love the challenge of figuring out new structures," she says. *The Beach* hides a central clear plastic box filled with shells and sand, revealed only as the picture-covered sides and top are unfolded. One of her newest books, *Ship Wreck* also posed a technical challenge. The body of the book is a collection of photographs of the *Peter Iredale*, a ship that ran aground on the coast of Oregon in 1906 and remains today as a decaying hulk. "I couldn't put a traditional cover on it," Timm says. "The cover had to convey the essence of the ship... In my mind I wanted a piece of the ship." She wondered how to put that idea into reality.

"It was a struggle, it took a long time. I tried a lot of different things and ways," said Timm. "But in the end



Winter Elk

I found the perfect solution and I love the way it came out. The covers are real rusted iron." Another book, *Cliff Village*, showcases photographs of Indian cliff dwellings in New Mexico and is bound in clay. For *White Sands*—about the White Sands National Monument in New Mexico—Timm created a clear plastic frame partially filled with sand to simulate dunes, and as she says, to "make the book alive."

The way the reader relates to the book is particularly important to Timm, reflecting her background in interactive design. Her subject matter is frequently large open spaces presented in a small format book. She doesn't see this as a contradiction—she believes the interaction with a miniature book can be more powerful than with a larger tome. "If you have a big picture book with a scenic image you tend to hold it farther away from you to get it all in. When

you look at a miniature book scene you hold it closer and look more intently. In both cases, the image fills the reader's viewing frame."

Books published by Mystical Places Press are not limited to miniatures. Timm is willing to experiment in form and size, based on the needs

of the project. "There are limits [to miniatures] and that is why I also do bigger books. I always think of the content and how the viewer sees it. Some ideas just will not work little." She uses *Winter Elk* as an example. The book is a small—five inches by seven inches—tunnel book. The cover slides off, revealing a three-dimensional herd of bachelor elk crowned with antlers grazing in a snow-covered clearing. The elk are individually cut out and placed on the background at varying distances from the viewer. Timm says that she couldn't do the book as a miniature because the images would be too small. "The book works by having the viewers look into and around the book and that needs some depth and space."

Timm is still early in her career as a bookmaker but her innovations in form and subject matter, particularly in



miniature books, has landed her work in many major collections, including several that had never seriously considered



miniatures before. Since Timm came to the book arts after years of experience in graphic and interactive computer design, she is free to explore the idea of the book without the constraints of tradition. Her books might be best described as an interactive multimedia

presentation on paper. The effect on the viewer or reader is palpable: "Just watch anyone who looks at a miniature," Timm said,

"It's an intimate experience." ■

⇒ *Linda Castellitto* writes frequently on book-related topics for a variety of publications. *Scott Brown* is a bookseller and the publisher of *OP Magazine*.

Photographs courtesy of Jill Timm and Mystical Places Press (www.mysticalplaces.com).

Raising the *Calico Ghosts*

Jill Timm's books focus on the majesty of the natural world—in other words, you won't find any people. Except, that is, for her *Calico Ghosts*. But do ghosts really count as people?

The subject of the book is Calico, an old mining town located not far from Timm's former residence in San Diego. She photographed the town on three occasions but never did anything with the images until she recently unearthed the negatives and transparencies and decided to put them in a book. But, she says, "When I laid them out without people, they felt really empty, and I felt a ghost town should have people in it."

She searched photographic archives from the mining era, and was surprised at what she found. "I thought I was going to get a lot of gold miners, and not a varied population." Luckily, says Timm, "Calico was an unusual town and ghost town in that it was not...all mining

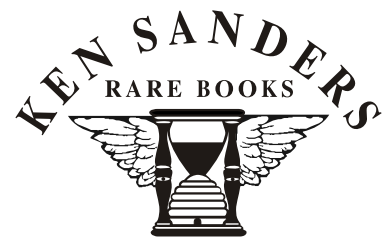
and drinking, but was family-based. I was amazed at the variety of images I got."

She populated the book with people appropriate to each scene: ladies with bustled dresses in front of the mercantile, children playing and the like. One special find was a photo of a "Chinese laundryman with his hand in such a position that it fit right on my photo of the laundry and a wash bucket. It was a million-in-one chance, and it just fell into place." The images of people are printed on translucent paper that overlay Timm's own photographs of the town.

Timm says the \$250 item (a clamshell case is \$75 more) is historic on two levels: "It shows the town the way it was in the late 1800s, and on another level, because the

town of Calico no longer exists. I shot [my photographs] in the 1970s, before the town became what it is now—an amusement park."

Linda Castellitto



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