

# OTIS

Otis College of Art and Design  
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## A BOOK ABOUT DEATH

The Emily Harvey Foundation - 537 Broadway, NYC NY 10012 -  
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[www.emilyharveyfoundation.org/](http://www.emilyharveyfoundation.org/)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

OCTOBER 6 2009

**A BOOK ABOUT DEATH: AN UNBOUND BOOK ON THE SUBJECT OF DEATH**

**DATES:** October 11 -31 2009

**WHERE:** Otis College of Art and Design, Galef, 1st FL, 9045 Lincoln Blvd., LA, CA 90045.

**WEBSITES:**

<http://abookaboutdeath.blogspot.com>

<http://abookaboutdeath.net/>

<http://abookaboutdeatharchive.blogspot.com/>

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**LOS ANGELES, CA** - THE Otis College of Art and Design is pleased to open A Book About Death, an exhibition launched at The Emily Harvey Foundation in New York City on September 10, 2009. The Otis exhibition is a continuation of the a sprawling, collaborative unbound "book" on the subject of death. Nearly 500 artists participated in this global exhibition that honors the late artist Ray Johnson (1927-1995), whose own work inspired this exhibition; Emily Harvey (1941-2004); and the artists themselves, who have presented their unique visions of the subject through combinations of art, photography, and text.

Conceived and organized by Matthew Rose, a Paris-based American artist, A Book About Death is comprised of artists' postcards from original art created specifically for the exhibit. These pieces collectively form the pages of the "book." While many of the artists involved in the exhibition are internationally known - Yoko Ono, Eric Andersen, Geoffrey Hendricks, Peter Schuyff, Rodney Alan Greenblat - all of the artists share the stage equally. Each artist has contributed 500 postcards to the exhibit, and visitors to the gallery are encouraged to take "pages" away with them to create their own book about death. The exhibit is thus designed to "disappear" on its own schedule as people attend the exhibit.

As the exhibition finished on September 22, 2009 a new phase in the project began. A small army of artists associated with the project initiated a number actions to disperse the works throughout New York

City, Los Angeles and other parts of the world via mail, guerrilla placement, planned exhibitions and random acts of art. These actions have been documented by the artist and will appear on the archive site: <http://abookaboutdeatharchive.blogspot.com/>

A large shipment of nearly 50 of each of the artists works was sent and delivered to the Otis School of Art and Design in Los Angeles, a project spearheaded by artist Mara Thompson. These works will be featured in an exhibition at the art and design school, and students and others in the Los Angeles area will be invited to attend and collect the works. **The show will run from October 11 - 31 or until the postcards are gone, whichever comes first.**

Another artist has turned to the Internet for a different kind of exhibition, and is planning on placing an entire set of all the works (486 pieces) on the auction site eBay. That initiative will be photographed and documented as well. In addition, several exhibitions are planned in Louisiana, Mexicali (Baja California), Boston, Belgium and Princeton, NJ in following the close of the exhibition in NYC. Other individual pieces are being handed out on the streets of New York City, placed clandestinely in galleries, art centers, museums and other locales by the artists themselves in an effort to continue the distribution of the whole body of art works. Additionally, several art institutions, such as The Museum of Modern Art has acquired (free, through the efforts of one artist, Deven Marriner), the entire and complete set of works from A Book About Death.

"It's the exhibition that keeps on giving," says Matthew Rose. "Artists have taken the show on the road and put it into the world. It's unlike any other art exhibition in that all the nearly 250,000 works are freely given away. And of course, the content is unique, and the edition of the entire book is limited to 500 complete copies." Indeed, this is a bit of mail art play very much in line with the late artist who inspired the name of the project, Ray Johnson.

All exhibitions and manifestations of this moving body of art work will be archived on the web site/blog: <http://abookaboutdeatharchive.blogspot.com/>

## RAY JOHNSON

"Ray Johnson is part of the history and spirit of The Emily Harvey Gallery, now The Emily Harvey Foundation," explains Christian Xatrec, EHF NYC director. "Taking the title from Ray Johnson, Matthew Rose's A Book About Death project refers to Ray's groundbreaking-work in the ephemeral, expanded field of correspondence art. However, this show sets those key Johnsonian concepts on a new course, in sync with the evolving interests of the Emily Harvey Foundation program today. The developing mission of the Foundation, and Rose's show, refuse the notion of hierarchy and the buttressing of institutional framings."

"Understanding death in any complete sense, doesn't seem at all possible if you're alive, but these artists have fleshed out many hundreds of approaches," says Matthew Rose. The artist pays tribute to his own mother, Doris, who died during the project, with a photograph of her taken on her wedding day, January 18, 1948. "I'm pleasantly astonished at the intellectual breadth and high humor of the works, and I think both Ray and Emily – and even my mother – would be, too. It's a fascinating book."

"Between March 1963 and early 1965, Ray Johnson sent out an unbound 'book' in the mail one page at a time," explains Mark Bloch, one of 13 speakers and performers for the opening night. "It was a largely unnoticed milestone in the history of books. To make things even more interesting, like much of Johnson's art, it took as its subject 'death'. Now almost 15 years after the mysterious death of Johnson himself, a huge cross-section of international artists have been asked to revisit Johnson's original strategy by submitting one page each to a new 'Book About Death.'"

"I think it's going to be a real 1960s-style Happening for the new millennium," adds Bloch. That "happening" will also be webcast live – to fit the 21st century and the global nature of this project.

"This project has been compelling for its sheer openness on a topic that is universal," says Caterina Verde, artist and website designer of the "wall" style site for A Book About Death. "To see the images submitted from around the world and the cultural permutations of the subject, the variations of temperament, thoughts, aesthetics – is as we observe ourselves walking through life : Ordinary and extraordinary."

"The distribution of art and ideas was very much Ray Johnson's thing," says Denver-based photographer Mark Sink, who contributed a photograph of his mother, a three-time cancer survivor, to the exhibition. "It's very exciting to see him and the concept honored in this exhibition." Sink noted that when first confronted with the project, he drew a blank on death. Then, with some time, the ideas came rushing in. "Life is all about death – Freud's dissertation of the human drive – sex or death and 'the death of analog...the death of our culture...the slaughter of self-aware sea mammals, and of course, our dying earth. Now I can't stop thinking about it!"

Verde, for one, is "surprised to see that there are no images – besides David Rager's poster – that touch upon 9/11, as the opening is the day before the anniversary. Perhaps," she muses, "this is still a taboo subject."

"A Book About Death has become a book about life," adds Joan Harrison, artist, writer. "I have the strangest sense I can hear Ray (Johnson) chuckling over my shoulder every time I work on anything involved with this project!"

Posters especially produced for the exhibition by designers Julia Hoffmann, Robert Mars, Cecil Touchon, Caterina Verde, Matthew Rose, David Rager and Osiris Hertz have been offered free as high-resolution PDFs on the web site: <http://abookaboutdeath.blogspot.com/>. Visitors to the site are encouraged to download the posters and print them at home.

### **SOCIAL VIRAL ARTWORLD**

The project has taken off in a viral way via FaceBook, e-mail, Twitter and word of mouth in artist communities from Spain and Belgium to Australia and Brooklyn. FaceBook was a particularly powerful organizing medium: a group was formed and an event page was created. Artists began to network, talk to each other and collaborate on performances, posters and, of course getting feedback on their works. Very much Ray Johnson-envisioned, this exhibition is a collage of people, some living some dead, all very much a part of this very special happening.

With projects like A Book About Death, a collaborative work involving creative acts from all directions, the Emily Harvey Foundation concerns itself with supporting ideas resistant to boundaries of easy legibility," explains Xatrec. "Our emphasis is on giving voice, and momentary material form, to discursive and process-based practices," he says. "Show by show, we aim to move within the vicissitudes of collaborative and cross-disciplinary approaches, generating alternatives to other more solid frameworks for contemporary practice."

For more details, please see the links for the live webcast, sponsors, posters the opening program, and other information, as well as the "wall" of all the art works on both <http://abookaboutdeath.blogspot.com/> and <http://abookaboutdeath.net/>

**NOTE TO EDITORS: YOU ARE FREE TO SOURCE THE VIDEOS, IMAGES, TEXTS AND FREE POSTERS ON THE WEBSITES FOR YOUR READERS AND PUBLICATIONS. ALL WE ASK IS THAT YOU CREDIT THE WORKS WITH THE ARTISTS' NAMES AND COURTESY: EMILY HARVEY FOUNDATION/OTIS COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN**

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**FOR IMAGES, INTERVIEWS AND OTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:**

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