

MOVABLE STATIONERY

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The Multi-dimensional Dutchman: An interview with Ron van der Meer

Michael Dawson
Ludlow, England

An elderly aunt of mine, to whom we paid regular courtesy visits during the war years, used to look upon my restless antics with a slightly jaundiced eye and declare that I had far too much Super Fluou Energy, a malapropism that became something of a family joke. Time – alas – has drained me of most of this highly charged viscosity but occasionally the phrase returns as being entirely appropriate to a few others I have had the pleasure of knowing.



Ron van der Meer

Ron van der Meer is one such – a man who seems to have Super Fluidity in abundance! Lanky, mercurial, somewhat abrasive; he has the charm and raw

disingenuousness of a perpetual schoolboy. Add to these traits his much-flaunted Dutch origins and you have a quick-witted iconoclast who enjoys confronting problems head-on and solving them with wit and down-to-earth practicality.

As a virtuoso children's book illustrator, designer and producer especially associated with a string of best-selling pop-ups and the internationally successful fun-learning kits such as The art pack¹³, The maths pack¹⁴, and the latest – The brain pack¹⁵ – he is one of Britain's most talented and versatile book-packaging entrepreneurs.

When I arrived at his recently acquired home and studio-complex on the southwestern fringe of London, the ground was trembling as if by his dynamic discharge; in fact, the secluded villa on a bosky rural lane is directly under the Heathrow flight-path and only

a stone's throw from the M4 motorway whose rumble is omnipresent in the distance. He greeted me with red-stained fingers: I'd caught him polishing his trade-mark red shoes! Pictures of this traditional Dutch footwear appear as his logo on note-paper and business cards; at book fairs and publishers' gatherings, the sight (and sound) of pointy red shoes approaching indicate that Van der Meer is near. I asked whether he is still able to buy them off the shelf in Holland: apparently he now has them specially made in batches of three. And I wondered if they were being given a final buff in honor of my presence – but no. They were to be worn for a television session later in the day (an ITV crew were to film him for a schools' broadcast) and on a business trip immediately afterwards, first to the Netherlands (where, with his brother, he is forming a publishing company) and then on to America to clinch a few more deals. No wonder he chose headquarters so near the airport.

We settled around the kitchen table with hard-backed chairs (no executive fripperies here) armed with strong coffee and cheroots, and I began by asking how his interest in book design – especially pop-ups – had begun.

I studied graphic design for four years at the Royal College of Fine Art in The Hague. That was during the '60s. It was a very good course but strongly Bauhaus oriented. You know the sort of thing: your tutor got an orgasm if you put lettering at an angle against a primary colour background. We received an excellent training in basic graphic design and of course it's the sort of thing you never lose. Highly philosophical! Very rarified! But in a way I found it increasingly restrictive – I began to hate it – so when I finished in 1969 I was very anxious to get away.

I wanted to leave Holland and I wanted to get into a different type of design altogether, one where I could apply the skills I'd acquired to other disciplines. I felt it was time to forget about graphic design; I didn't fancy spending my life devising corporate house-styles or company logos. When I was accepted by the Royal College of Art in London it was like entering Valhalla.

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The Movable Book Society

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The College had an enviable reputation in the Netherlands; it was the only place offering a three year master's degree in art anywhere in Europe at the time. In those days it was really tough to get in – I remember when I applied there were 300 applications for the ten places offered. There was three-day interview when you had to show your work and explain it. I loved the experience and was eventually accepted to do Educational Graphics.

What did that entail? Illustrating text-books, designing wall-charts . . . that sort of thing?

Nothing like that at all. In fact, when I started, the course hadn't really been invented! What I was anxious to do was make toys and three-dimensional teaching-aids. I designed a special educational alphabet for children at primary school. I re-designed the international phonetic alphabet. Being a Dutchman – and a cheeky one at that – they allowed me to work in just about every bloody department. Jewelry, sculpture, film-making – it was a marvelously liberating experience. In Holland we hardly had any chance to get away from the drawing-board – I think we were allowed to do a little bit of silk-screen printing – but only once. That was the highlight of our four year course. Whereas in London I was encouraged to devise my own strategy. It was much more open. Much more practical. Much wilder.

My main project at the RCA was to invent a little industrial type of thingy that allowed blind people to draw . . .

To do what? How on earth did you come by that idea?

Well it all occurred because of something I found at a jumble sale. We don't have such things in Holland, you know. There are flea markets, of course, but your jumble sales here are cheaper . . . and much more fun. You have to fight with the old ladies and dive into the crum to find anything there. At one such scramble I found a little carton for 6 pence. Inside was a beautifully made wooden construction which, after experimenting for a while, I discovered was an old fashioned Braille typewriter. So what did I do? I sort of played with it. I sent letters off to my friends in Holland written in Braille – it took them 10 days to translate!

Then I made up my own Braille alphabet because I didn't know the real one. From there, one thing led to another. I thought: how do blind people react to the concept of drawing? So I started planning a simple device that might help.

Eventually they allowed me to take it to a special school in North London (*The Chorley Wood School for Girls with little or no sight*) where, every Wednesday evening, I taught blind girls to draw. After three years I felt that I'd built up enough experience to prove that blind people could be taught to express themselves just as well as the sighted. Indeed, one of my girls who was especially talented went on to do a foundation course at Goldsmith's College, then completed a degree in sculpture and was finally accepted at the Royal College to master in Environmental Studies. As far as I know, she's the only blind person in the world who has succeeded in undertaking a proper art education despite her disability. She was tough egg. Very skilled and very tough. Sadly, I've now lost touch with her completely.

I wondered whether this clever "little thingy" had been taken up commercially?

No, never. The BBC has had the design in its "In Touch" catalogue for 10 years and I'm still asked how to construct it. The gadget is very simple really: Anyone can use it. I've had 50 of them made . . . maybe 100, so I usually just send one off to enquirers. At the start, when I was working at Chorley Wood, the device received quite a bit of publicity from newspapers and TV but only the art critic of The Times took it really seriously – wrote about it as an educational tool

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Tucson's A-Poppin'!

By Chuck Murphy
Van Nuys, California

Two hundred and eighteen! That's how many titles were on display at the Tenth Annual Pop-up and Movable Book Exhibit at the University of Arizona library in from December 1, 1997 through February 1998. This represented almost all the pop-up and movable titles released by U.S. publishers for the year.

The curator of the exhibit was Dr. James T. Sinski, Professor Emeritus of the University of Arizona. Dr. Sinski has been collecting pop-ups since he received his first one as a gift in 1974. He assembled his first exhibit at the University of Arizona in 1984 and began the annual exhibit series in 1988. Some highlights of the series include "The Best of 3-D Books, Antique to Contemporary, 1548-1990" and a sampler of the work of V. Kubasta, a name well known to the collecting community.

I was invited by Dr. Sinski to open this year's exhibit with an informal discussion of the processes of designing and producing a pop-up book. Simon and Schuster were sending me on a book tour that included Tucson and Dr. Sinski graciously offered to drive me to my various book signing appointments.

The location for the exhibits is a beautiful and busy working university library. It was interesting to see these books displayed amid the bustling activity of college students rushing to prepare for mid-terms and quite pleasing to see some stop to peruse the world of pop-up books.

The books on exhibit were divided into three display areas. The first and largest display consisted of ten large counter-top style cases. This type of case allows for the best viewing of the opened pop-up spreads. Each of the cases carried a title indicating a category such as: Christmas; The Best of 3-D; Young Children; Science; Interactive / Books Plus; and two cases contained miniature books, most of these being gift books for adults. These displays really showed what pop-up books are all about as there was great variety in engineering complexity and illustration styles. The least interesting as a category was the sentiment / gift mini-books. Notably absent were any Disney titles. They did not respond to requests for exhibit samples, probably couldn't afford the expense.

The second exhibit area was on the third floor of the library. These cases were glass cubes, also at

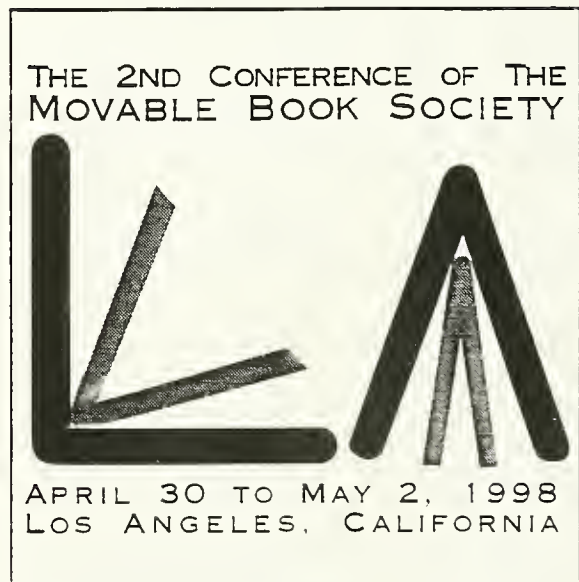
counter height, each large enough to hold two oversized books opened for display. These held the larger more elaborate titles such as *The Architecture Pack*.

The foyer of the Special Collections Annex of the Library was the location of the third exhibit area. This display consisted of pop-up books published by Simon and Schuster and books designed and / or engineered by myself.

A handsome 60-page catalog of the exhibit was designed by Robert Hershoff and included black and white photos of covers or interior art from some of the titles. Copies of the catalog are available for \$10.00 postpaid.

Overall this was a very well organized and attractive exhibit. Previous shows have drawn upwards of 50,00 visitors. If you love those pop-ups and want to see 'em all in one place, and experience the scenic beauty of Tucson as well, get on down to the Eleventh Annual Exhibit.

I want to thank Dr. James Sinski for making my visit so very enjoyable. Thanks also to Alex Britain for his considerable culinary skills and to Robert Hershoff for allowing me to view some wonderful books from the special collections.



MOVABLE REVIEWS

ROBERT SABUDA

- 1 ☆ - AWFUL
- 2 ☆ - POOR
- 3 ☆ - OK
- 4 ☆ - GOOD
- 5 ☆ - SUPERB



ABC Fun. David Pelham. Dutton. 0-525 45827-1. \$10.99 US. 16x16cm. 13 spreads. 1 pop, 14 tab mechs. Art: Simple, bright, computer generated flat colors. Plot: Learning the ABC's in a very conceptual way. Each spread opens to show 2 letters and one image. Tab mech. reveals the relationship from 1st to 2nd letter. The Orange reveals that it has a Peel, the Queen reveals that she wears a Robe. Very nice. Paper Eng: Simple.



The ancient Egyptian Pack. Concept, Paper Eng. & Ill: Christos Kondeatis, Written by Sara Maitland. Bulfinch Press. 0-8212-2327-5. \$40.00 US, \$54.00 Can, 25.00 UK. 27x27cm. 6 spreads. 3 pops (1 removable), 1 (very complex) mask to construct, 1 game of Senet with plastic pieces and die, 1 paper coffin and mummy, 1 paper hieroglyphic scroll, 3 paper amulets, one 64-page, black & white booklet. Art: Realistic photos, watercolors, and reproductions of antique prints. Plot: "A three-dimensional celebration of Egyptian mythology, culture, art, life and the afterlife" (Whew!). Pop of the Sphinx is cool, lots to read but playing pieces for Senet look like checkers played with a die. Caliber not of the Van der Meer series, but nicely put together. Paper Eng: Complex.



Big silver space shuttle. Text: David Bennett Books Ltd. Ill: Ken Wilson-Max. Paper Eng: Uncredited. Cartwheel Books. 0-590-10081-5. \$14.95 US, \$18.99 Can. 29x26cm. 6 spreads. 16 pull tabs. Art: Bright, brushy simple paintings. Plot: How the space shuttle work. Lots of hands on activity for very young readers. Love the paintings, but the "Sturdy Pull Tabs" advertised aren't so sturdy. Paper Eng: Simple.



Can you do what dog can do? In the morning. By Jo Lodge. Paper Eng: Uncredited. Barrons. 0-7641-5069-3. \$5.95 US, \$7.50 Can. 16x16cm. 12 pgs. 6 tab mechs. Art: Very bright, very simple, flat lines and colors. Plot: Primer for youngsters that shows how to get up, get dressed, get going, etc. demonstrated by animals. Cute and basic, for very young readers. Paper Eng: Very simple. Also: **Could you do what rabbit can do? In the evening,** 0-7641-5070-7



The Consumate Cigar Book – A Three-Dimensional Reference Guide. By Robert Kemp. Ill: John Rowe. Paper Eng: Rives. Pop-up Press. 1-888443-22-7. \$45.00 US, \$63.00 Can. 31x26x5cm (constructed like an actual cigar box). 9 spreads. 8 pops, 7 flaps, 1 paper journal, 1 paper guillotine cutter. Art: Realistic colored pencil & airbrush. Plot: Everything you want to know about the current revival of the absolutely revolting (hey, it's my column, I can say what I want) leisure activity. Beautifully designed and illustrated. I shudder at how many will buy it as a gift to give. But at \$45.00 it's expensive for what you get (just like smoking!) Paper Eng: Somewhat complex.



Edward plants a garden. By Dale Gottlieb. Paper Eng: Uncredited. Envision. 1-890633-04-6. \$7.95 US, \$11.25 Can. 16x17cm. 10 pgs. 6 tab mechs, 5 flaps. Art: "Maisy"-like brushy, bright paintings. Plot: Edward the rabbit (who looks suspiciously like "Maisy's" brother) shows us how a garden grows. For very young readers, although I love the line "Chicken poop helps make the garden grow." Paper Eng: Very simple. Also: **Tulip builds a birdhouse,** 1-890633-05-4.



The great Pyramid. By Roscoe Cooper. Ill: Carolyn Croll. Paper Eng: Vicki Teague-Cooper. Bridgewater Books. 0-8167-4390-8. \$18.95 US, \$26.50 Can. 36x36x36cm (triangular). 5 spreads. 5 pops, 1 tab mech, 8 flaps, 4 book-like accordions, 9 puzzle pieces, 2 paper necklaces. Art: realistic watercolor. Plot: Understanding ancient Egypt, pyramids, gods, pharaohs, etc. Well written and illustrated, but pops could be a little more exciting. Paper Eng: Somewhat complex.



Make a joyful noise – A pop-up book of Christmas carols. Ill: Francesca Crespi. Musical arrangements: Frances Lincoln Ltd. Paper Eng: Uncredited. Little Simon. 0-689-81526-3. \$14.95 US. 20x27cm. 5 spreads. 5 multi-piece pops, 1 tab mech, 2 rotating/dissolving wheels, 1 flap. Art: Folk-art type watercolors. Plot: 6 holiday songs to play and/or sing. Very nice art, classy and understated book. Paper Eng: Somewhat complex.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art – Masks. Design & Paper Eng: Heather Simmons & Olivier Charbonnel. DK Ink. 0-7894-2454-1. \$19.95 US. 22x31cm. 5 spreads. 5 pop-up masks that can be removed and worn. Art: Color photos. Plot: The history and purpose of masks

in 5 different cultures. Well written and beautifully designed. Masks are very good. Paper Eng: Complex.



Play and count in Patche's house. By Jo Lodge. Paper Eng: Uncredited. Red Wagon Books/Harcourt Brace & Co. 0-15-2016651. \$11.95 US. 19x29cm (house shaped). 4 section wrap-around playset, ties open with ribbon. 3 pops, 6 tab mechs, 4 flaps. Art: Very bright, very simple flat lines and color. Plot: It's a busy day with Patches (the dog) and all his friends at his house. Humorous, but no paper pieces to remove and play with in the house. For very young readers. Paper Eng: Very simple.



There's a bug in my mug! By Kent Salisbury. Paper Eng: Dave Werner. McClanahan. 1-56293-931-9. \$6.99 US, \$9.99 Can. 19x24cm. 6 spreads. 6 identical push tabs. Art: Humorous, computer generated. Plot: Push the tab and the image and word change. "Wig" becomes "Pig," etc. Fun concept with surprisingly good art from the computer. Paper Eng: Simple. Also: **My nose is a hose!** 1-56293-930-0.

The Conservation Center

Ann Montanaro
East Brunswick, NJ

A reoccurring question posed by collectors is "Where can I get books repaired?" The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia is one place where that work is done. I recently had the opportunity to visit the Center and was graciously greeted by the Co-Director Glen Ruzicka who showed me their facilities and some current restoration and repair projects. Ten professionals and four technicians are employed by the Center and they combine technical expertise and respect for the artistic and historic integrity of all of the objects being treated.

Treatment services are available for any work of art or historic artifact on paper. During my visit I saw a variety of items undergoing repair and restoration: an album of family photographs being restored following water damage; a huge Rauschenberg print on tar paper undergoing conservation to save it from self destruction; and a small, vibrant portrait constructed of tiny toothpick-size, colored sticks being restored with rolled paper pieces replacing missing sticks. In addition there was a 13th Century Bible which had split wood covers which were being repaired and an historic Regency print which

was being removed from the glass originally intended to protect it. I was also shown several Beatrix Potter books being repaired for the Free Library of Philadelphia including the pop-up *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, part of the Mrs. Strang's Playbooks series.

The repair and restoration work done by the Center is superb. The first step of their work is to evaluate items needing repair and to make written recommendations about options for treatment. The charge for the evaluation is \$75 per hour for one item or group of items. They produce slides before and after treatment is done and their aim is to make all of their work reversible. The work is professional and thorough but not inexpensive. I took a book for review which was in quite good condition but was lacking the spine cover. The spine cover had come off and I had it in two pieces. Their recommended treatment for that particular book included cleaning both covers, strengthening the text block, and fixing the spine at an estimated cost of between \$300 and \$500. The Center also prepares clamshell storage boxes for individual items at a cost of between \$175 and \$200. Four-flap covers are also available, designed and produced for specific, individual books.

Any book sent to the Center for consideration must be insured and sent by Federal Express. The Center has Fine Art insurance for the item while it is on their premises and the owner is required to pay for the insurance. The Center's clients range from individual collectors sending one book to the Library of Congress. For more information contact the Center at 264 South 23rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103 or call 215-545-0613.

If books in your collection need repair, that work should be done professionally to ensure that it is done correctly and that the repair will not eventually further damage the book. If repair is not immediately available or if safe storage is needed, an alternative is acid-free, archival storage boxes. Three companies supply boxes and information about conservation and preservation. The catalog "Archival Quality Materials for Conservation, Restoration, and Preservation," is available from University Products, 517 Main St., P.O. 101, Holyoke, MA 01041-0101. Light Impressions calls itself "The leading resource for archival supplies." The address for their catalog is 439 Monroe Ave., P.O. Box 940, Rochester, NY 14603-0940. Gaylord Bros., a library supplier, has a catalog "Gaylord Archival: Storage materials and conservation supplies." It is available at P.O. Box 4901, Syracuse, New York 13221-4901.

Auction Results

Ann Montanaro
East Brunswick, NJ

The Swann Galleries auction held in New York on January 8, 1998, included a large number of movables, transformations, and pop-ups which were sold for quite high prices. Books were auctioned individually and in lots of up to 40 books. The on-site participation was small with no more than 50 people in the audience, but many bidders had submitted offers in advance and others participated over the telephone. These are representative prices realized from some of the individual items sold at the auction:

Always jolly! Meggendorfer. [1890]. \$1,200.
Clown putty face. Meggendorfer. [1895]. Minimum price not met.
Comic actors. Meggendorfer. [1900]. \$1,700.
Dean's new book of dissolving scenes [1862]. \$950.
Hopalong Cassidy and Lucky at the Double X Ranch. [1950]. \$80.
Lebende bilder. Meggendorfer. [1878]. \$950.
Magic pictures: A book of changing scenes. Nister. [1890]. \$425.
Pantomime Pictures Nister. [1895]. \$700.
The pop-up Minnie Mouse and The Pop-up Mickey Mouse. [1933]. \$750.
Touch and go. Nister. [1890]. \$375.
Travels of little Lord Thumb and his man Damian. Meggendorfer. [1892]. \$1,900. **Shown Below**



Questions

Q. I have tried to purchase *Choo-Choo Charlie* listed in the December issue of *Movable Stationery* but have been unable to find a copy. Could you help me locate this title?

Kay Wise
Ravenna, Ohio

A. *Choo-Choo Charlie* is available for \$24.95 but it may be difficult to find as it is a playset and may not be carried by all bookstores. It has a story and pop-up village. Both Borders and Barnes & Noble carry the title as does Amazon.com.

Q. In Tony Sarg's book *Treasure Island*, a pirate on an island is looking for the treasure. There is a long, shallow pocket. What did it hold?

Ellen Rubin
Scarsdale, New York

A. I had the Tony Sarg book as a child. I recently found it again, but it also does not have anything in the shallow pocket on the pirate page. I recall it being a small bag - muslin, I think, tied with a string. Inside were a few gold play coins.

Betty Tisinger
Moneta, Virginia

Q. *Theodore Brown's Magic Pictures* was reviewed in the December issue. Is it available in the US?

Sue Rothwell
Salt Lake City, Utah

A. George Hall is distributing this book in the US. The price is \$58 including postage. Make checks payable to George Hall, P.O. Box 64246, Tucson, Arizona 85728.

1998 Book Arts Jamboree

The Book Arts Jamboree is five days of instruction in making pop-ups, boxes, tunnel books, wearable books, and paper engineering. Held at the Cedar Terrace Resort in the Catskill Mountains of New York, the jamboree will feature instruction by Carolyn Cadwick, Ed Hutchins, Robert Sabuda, and Miriam Schaefer. The dates are June 7-12, 1998 and the cost is \$550. For more information telephone 518-622-0113 or send email to queerbooks@aol.com.

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rather than the basis for a sentimental story. Later I contacted 150 blind schools throughout Britain, trying to interest staff in the possibilities of its use for teaching maths and geography as well as art itself – but I received no response.

So, a slightly disappointed conclusion to your endeavours whilst at the Royal College. What next?

Well at first I wanted to return to Holland but I hadn't any useful contacts there in my specialization. No one at the RCA could help me either. So I had to go outside – to London University, to educational manufacturers – to ask for advice and help. And to get criticism of the work I had been doing. At the same time, I started getting part-time jobs at places like Goldsmith's and St. Martin's art schools teaching graphic design, typography, illustration, photography, animation . . . you name it. I taught it! But I always preferred the opportunities for working in three dimensions. Then I was approached by someone who was a senior lecturer at London University who was a specialist in severely handicapped children. He told me that he and a colleague were planning a new reading scheme for primary education and asked whether I would like to join. At that stage there was no money; no publisher; no certainty of commercial application. I said: "Terrific! When do I begin?"

I worked on the project for six months and then we found a publisher (the Educational Supply Association in Harlow) and getting the whole thing into production kept me busy for the next two years. It was a complete reading system packed into an enormous box for which I did all the illustrations and devised the various flash cards, display sheets, pockets and envelopes that were needed. It was a forerunner of several similar teaching aids that came out in the early '70s. It sold quite well, I remember, and may still be in print for all I know.

That led on to a number of commissions designing toys and board games. For instance, I devised a traffic game in co-operation with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents; I did some jigsaw puzzles for the Toy Trumpet Company and the MacMillan's (Educational) asked me to design board games to help in the teaching of mathematics. At about that time – the mid-70s – I also illustrated a number of reading primers for the same firm, eight titles in the Fred. Maggs and Creep¹ series.

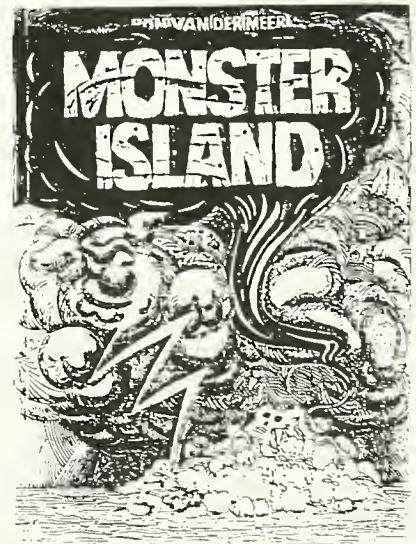
Then, in 1978, I saw my first pop-ups. As a matter of fact, a friend lent them to me but he never got them back! I feel a bit bad about it, really, but they came as such a revelation. They were those tall thin ones produced by

Graphics International and published in America by Random House: The titles were *The many mice of Mr. Brice* (by Theo LeSieg, 1973) and *The action fun book of opposites*. I had never seen anything like them before. I hadn't come across the Bookano annuals (*Published in the UK between 1932-52 which feature "stand-up models"*) nor Kubašta's Czechoslovakian pop-ups (*distributed by Bancroft in London and widely available throughout Europe and America during the '60s and '70s*). This was my first encounter with paper engineering and I thought it was amazing. I knew at once it was what I wanted to do.

I asked how he had gone about reinventing himself as a maker of pop-ups?

Well, it took a fair time to prepare. I had the idea for a book about two little children who take a balloon trip to an exotic island inhabited by weird (but mostly friendly) creatures. They have some unusual encounters before flying safely off again. The publishers, Hamish Hamilton, liked my outline but had no means of producing a three-dimensional book themselves. So they brought in Intervisual Communications, the California-based packager, to help with design and engineering. That's Wally Hunt's company, of course: He's the man who has completely revitalized pop-ups over the last three decades. He liked the concept and agreed to take it on.

Of course, I had my own ideas about how things could work, but two far more experienced paper engineers, John Strejan and Tor Lokvig, were assigned to the project by Intervisual to help knock my preliminary treatment into shape. From then on we worked closely together; I started playing with effects but not knowing enough about it came up with too many complexities: cutting some parts so finely that they could snag in production; including unnecessary gluing points that would merely add to the costs. Obviously you can only learn about such things from experience.



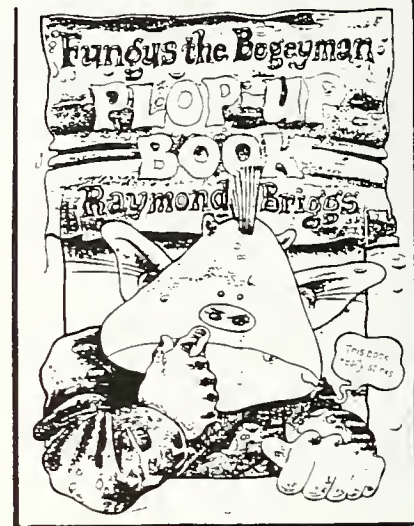
I had enormous fun with it and gained a lot. Really all I was interested in was using a whole variety of colourful monsters; land monsters, sea monsters, flying monsters, as an excuse for establishing myself in a medium that – for me – was quite new. I'm glad to say that the book – inevitably called *Monster Island*² – proved a great success all over the world: one of Wally's all-time greats. It has been translated into French, German, Spanish . . . even Japanese. And, do you know, it's still in print?

*Sometimes it is difficult to follow-up an initial best-seller of this sort, since people just expect more of the same. In fact Van der Meer went on quite a different tack. With the team from Intervisual he produced The pop-up games book³, which provided young players with four rather peculiar dimensional challenges of skill (mostly variations on tiddlywinks!) Within the covers of a book. A similar compendium, Magic tricks pop-up book⁴, which he devised, designed, illustrated, wrote and engineered himself was an attempt to incorporate a range of simple illusions for the junior magician into the same fold-away format. Neither of them hit the jackpot in quite the same way as *Monster Island* but provided their originator with sufficient confidence to go independent – to become not only a designer/engineer but a packager as well. I asked how this came about.*

I'd been talking with Raymond Briggs about adapting his *Fungus the Bogeyman* as a pop-up. It had first appeared in 1977 as sort of a weird comic book about a family of troglodytes, published by Hamish Hamilton. This original version contained lots of handwritten text and cartoon pictures which had to be adapted and simplified to fit the new format. Raymond initially suggested quite a different storyline: he wanted me to do a sort of Shakespearian restaurant that was run by his troll. So we sat opposite each other for about three weeks, fiddling and playing with the idea. I took his drawings and cut them up, trying to make something that would work in three dimensions and as a movable. We just made it up as we went along. When we were both happy with the new version of our little green monster, we took a mock-up to Hamish Hamilton expecting Wally Hunt at Intervisual to snap up the rights. In fact he didn't want to know about it. And no one else – none of the other packagers – liked the idea of our smelly sewer-dweller who picked his nose and pulled his filthy trousers down to go to the lavatory! But Hamish Hamilton still wanted to publish and asked "Can you produce it yourself?" I replied that I'd never done it before, but I *thought* I could tackle it. So that's how Van der Meer Designs became Van der Meer Productions.

The book appeared as *Fungus the Bogeyman plop-up book*⁵ in 1982 and was a runaway success. I remember that when it first came out we put piles in little dump-bins and then invited the sales reps from the big distributors like W.H. Smiths and Book Club Associates to

come and meet us. As soon as buyers came in they spotted the distinctive cover and were immediately intrigued.



You know how irresistible the book is? I'd say "Pull the tab and see the Bogeyman pissing his pants!" There had never been anything like it before . . . the orders rolled in. Of course little boys especially enjoyed it. It was the first contemporary pop-up that had been commissioned by a publisher.

During all this time he continued teaching at art schools on a part-time basis: not only at Goldsmith's and St. Martin's but at Middlesex Polytechnic, Coventry and elsewhere. In 1975 he was invited to return to the Royal College as a tutor in the Graphics Information Department, a position he continued to hold until four years ago. I asked him what this entailed?

Basically it was teaching students how to find the correct approach to design problems. Normally, a graphic artist tends to undertake a job with the idea of imposing his (or her) own aesthetic criteria on it, making a distinctive, personal impression. Certainly that's how I was trained: everything had to conform to *my* ideas. The reason I was asked to teach at the RCA was because I now believe that every design problem should generate its own unique response. Style should be subservient to practicalities not the other way round. That's the difference between me and some other paper engineers – I don't design pop-ups just to make pretty things. We use pop-up techniques only when we think we can explain things better, making concepts more explicit. . . perhaps even tell funnier jokes . . . by working dimensionally. All of this applies particularly to the series of educational packs I've produced in recent years – each of them poses particular design problems that demand to be resolved individually. Much of my work at the RCA was along similar lines: asking students to find solutions that answer specific needs.

At one point I was offered the chance to set up a paper engineering course at the Royal College but I said: "No." For one thing, there wouldn't be enough work for graduates. And for another, I didn't want to create too much competition! I sometimes think that paper engineers are born rather than trained. There are only about 10 or 12 good ones in the world – people who still possess the ability to surprise. In my view, the best of them all – I mean of the older ones – are Ib Pennick and John Strejan. They are both getting on now, of course, probably between 65 and 70, but the really amazing thing about them both is that they are still like little boys. If they show you something new that they have done, they bubble over with excitement. They haven't become cynical or disillusioned with the business. Especially John . . . in terms of pure paper engineering, he's still the very best. I could ring him any time to say "John, I've got a problem, how can I fold this and make it work?" and he'll sit there, smoking (a typical Californian with chains hanging all over and jeans tight enough to make your eyes water) and he'll fold and snip with a little pair of scissors, working very fast, until he's teased out the perfect answer. "Silver Blades" he calls himself – silver hair and his nail scissors. I just call him The Maestro!

Once established as an up-and-coming production house, the Van der Meer machine went into gear with a string of notable international successes: Sailing ships⁶, Majesty in flight⁷, The working camera⁸, Snow man pop-up⁹ (another collaboration with Raymond Briggs), Great movies live¹⁰, Phantom of the opera¹¹, Hugh Johnson's pop-up wine book¹² and many more novelties, gift books, primers, adaptations, promotional items and greeting cards. Increasingly he drew in other talented illustrators such as Babette Cole, Lesley Anne Ivory, and Fran Thatcher to supply the graphics, enabling him to concentrate more on designing the mechanics and steering the books through production – a gradual shift from the creative to the administrative side that he obviously relishes with only minor regrets.

Unlike many other paper engineers, I've got to think both as an editor and a designer – look at books as a whole. What happens on the first page, the second and so on, ensuring there's a good flow through them all. Are we suing too many gluing-points at the beginning? How can we spread the effects out to produce a satisfying whole? At the same time, I am thinking: "What production problems are we going to run up against? What market are we aiming at? How much can we sell this for?" All these considerations make my work different from that of a straightforward engineer. In the past I've been approached by many publishers who say "We've got a terrific idea . . . can you make it into a pop-up?" And I always say "No" because that would take the fun out of it. Now I'm on my own and I want control of everything. Indeed, I'm presently setting up as a publisher too, so that in future I will be in charge right from the drawing board to the bookshop display racks.

As Van der Meer Publishing Ltd emerges as a full-fledged publisher, the trend seems set towards adult titles such as The brain pack (which appeared in America last fall) and The architecture pack which (on the evidence of the dummies that were being worked on when I was there) is likely to be a superb addition to the lengthening series when it appears in America and possible in the UK later this year.

Yes, it's true. We *are* deliberately moving more into the adult market, though we still plan to continue doing five or six for children each year. It's a natural development for us. There's so much competition now in the field of pop-ups for youngsters and I'm not really interested in fighting for the middle ground. So I've come back to the educational side, which after all is where I began. Maybe it's something to do with my Calvinist upbringing . . . "Thou shall not have fun unless it's got a serious purpose" . . . or something like that. The first of the learning kits was *The art pack* and setting that up proved an enormous gamble. Almost everyone predicted a flop. But I managed to prove to the doubters that a market exists for seriously-intentioned pop-ups – and that it was a big one, even when you have to charge £20 a time and more. You call them adult books but we're aiming at bright 15-year-olds – enquiring minds, those who are looking for a new slant on subjects that sometimes appear boring. The books are packed with models, diagrams, moving parts, pull-out accessories and even cassettes where appropriate: we try to engage all the senses in a way that just isn't possible from a CD-ROM, for instance. The books exist in real space and time. You can feel things, touch them, experiment. We've done research that suggests that if you read and experience one of our Packs, up to 70% of the information is retained. Yet apparently it is difficult to remember more than 20% of the facts in an ordinary textbook.

The Packs sell an average of 200,000 copies worldwide – some do a lot better. *The maths pack* has sold over 300,000 and did especially well in America. All of them go phenomenally well over there, whereas on this side of the Atlantic they are a disappointment. Maybe it's the cost. Or perhaps the poor publicity. *The art pack* didn't get a single review in the UK. No one takes pop-ups seriously here!

Despite these local difficulties, Ron van der Meer, illustrator, designer, paper engineer, packager – and now publisher – seems poised for global lift-off. The next prestigious project, he told me, was to be a series of three dimensional national guides starting with one about Holland (despite the apparent dichotomy, where else?). High-level sponsorship for this is in the offing and should he again bring his magic touch to the venture – as seems eminently likely – then the world should truly become his oyster. I finished by asking whether he ever felt the need to test-market any of these ideas? Never, he replied. I always

instinctively know if something will work.

Of course, I realised (as I made way for the TV crew who were already setting up their camera to film him) Ron van der Meer has exactly those qualities of the typically bright, mischievous, hyperactive 15-year-old that he creates his work for. For one with the Super Fluous energy. He is his own control! Someone who has succeeded in designed a life that exactly matches his needs – and offers limitless further opportunities for exploration.

Books illustrated, designed, engineered, and/or packaged by Ron van der Meer mentioned in the text.

1. *Fred, Maggs and Creep* series of 8 titles, MacMillan (Educational), London, 1976.

2. *Monster Island*, Hamish Hamilton. London, [also Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, USA] 1981.

3. *The world's first pop-up games book*, Heinemann, London, [also Delacourt, USA] 1982.

4. *The pop-up book of magic tricks*, Heinemann, London, [also Viking, USA] 1983.

5. *Fungus the Bogeyman pop-up book*. Hamish Hamilton, London, 1982.

6. *Sailing ships*, Penguin Books, London, [also Viking, USA] 1984.

7. *Majesty in flight*, The Abbeville Press, USA, 1984.

8. *The working camera*, Angus and Robertson, UK, [also Harmony, USA] 1986.

9. *The snowman pop-up*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1986.

10. *Great movies live!* Ebury Press, London, [also Simon & Schuster, USA] 1987.

11. *The phantom of the opera*, Aurum Press, UK, [also Harper & Row, USA] 1988.

12. *Hugh Johnson's pop-up wine book*. Octopus Books, UK, [also Harper & Row, USA] 1989.

13. *The art pack*, Ebury Press, UK, [also Knopf, USA] 1992.

14. *The maths pack*. Jonathan Cape. London. [also: *The math kit*, Scribners, USA] 1994.

15. *The brain pack*, Running Press, USA, 1996.

16. *The architecture pack*, Knopf, USA, 1997.

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Catalogs Received

Catalog 56. Aleph-Bet Books. 218 Waters Edge, Valley Cottage, NY 10989. Phone: 914-268-7410. Fax: 914-268-5942. Email: alephbet@ix.netcom.com.

Selective Catalogue - New Year 1998. Ampersand Books. Ludford Mill. Ludlow, Shropshire Sy8 1PP UK. Phone: 01584 877813. Fax: 01584 877519. Email: ampersand.books@mcm.com.

Catalogue Number 4. Thomas and Mary Jo Barron. 120 Lismore Ave., Glenside, PA 19038. Phone: 215-572-6293.

Catalogue 23. A. Dalrymple. 1791 Graefield, Birmingham, MI 48009. Phone: 810-649-2149.

Happy Christmas to all and to all a good night. Catalog 17. Books of the Ages. Gary J. Overmann. Maple Ridge Manor. 4764 Silverwood Dr., Batavia, Ohio 45103. Phone: 513-732-3456.

Jo Ann Reisler, Ltd. Catalogues 40, 41, and 42. 360 Glyndon St., NE, Vienna VA. Phone: 703-938-2967. Fax: 703-938-9057. Email: Reisler@clark.net.

New Publications

The following titles have been identified from pre-publication publicity, publisher's catalogs, or advertising. All titles include pop-ups unless otherwise identified. Titles reviewed in Robert Sabuda's "Movable Reviews" column are not included in this list.

Curious critters: A pop-up menagerie. David Carter. Little Simon. May. 9" x 9". 5 spreads. \$16.95. 0-689-81586-7.

Lest we forget: A three-dimensional interactive book with photographs and documents from the Black Holocaust Museum. Crown Publishing. 10" x 10". 32 pages. \$29.95. 0-609-60030-3.

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