

Living

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Discovering the undefinable

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What is a collection of bound photographs, all of the same bathroom in an abandoned house, with a knocker for a cover? What about a box designed as a single drawer of a card catalogue, filled with cards that bear an image on one side and details of the place pictured on the other? What about a box containing a notepad scrawled with scribbles and designs, along with tiny yarn objects tucked into the box's compartments? Are they books? Are they art? Are they something else?

This is the question that the Alumnos 47 Foundation asks viewers

to answer for themselves. The foundation's story began three years ago when Moises Cosío, an art collector, wanted to create a public collection of books about art, books by artists and books that are themselves works of art. The foundation has teamed up with the Tamayo Museum to present, every Saturday, limited edition or one-of-a-kind "bookart" by editors and artists, and is developing an extensive library that will soon be open to the public in the San Miguel Chapultepec neighborhood.



hood. The collection includes commercially produced books about art and artists and a selection of books and art objects that defies definition.

When I stopped by in February, Ivan Granados, the Alumnos 47 director, opened up the foundation's treasure chest of "books" that it plans to put on public display for visitors to see and touch. Here are some examples of what can be found in the collection:

- One piece of bookart is paper-bound, with a cover and back, but opens up into an accordion of brightly colored geometric designs. No words, no pages to flip.

- "Compendio de Saber Vivido" by the Seminario de Medios Múltiples collective is the record of a project in which the group worked with the elderly. Participants worked with artists to create something that reflected an important life lesson. It's a conventional book, but with hand-painted illustrations that begin each page like the illuminations you would find in the Book of Kells.

- The abandoned bathroom project is part of the work of Luis Palacios Kaem, who purchased a dilapidated house in San Miguel Chapultepec, Mexico City. He plans to restore the house — as a work of art — and sell it to any Chinese collector willing to ship it across the ocean in sections (so far, no takers). The whole process will be documented;

the documentation will be incorporated into the finished product.

- Artist Alex Dorfsman created a Rolodex in which each card has been printed, front and back, with images he has collected and photos from his life, all in alphabetical order.

The bookart is hard to classify. "Most of these pieces are either one-of-a-kind or limited edition," says Granados. "That's what makes our presentations at the Tamayo so important, not many people get to see (these books)."

Another example is Daniela Edburg's "The Pickled and the Hatched," which she presented at the Tamayo Museum on Feb. 15.

MEASURING THE HOURS IN STITCHES Thought-provoking, playful, obsessive, enchanting — all these words could just as easily describe Edburg's work as the artist herself. She wears old-fashioned glasses that she is fond of peering over

as she talks and her personality is a mix of devilish delight and artistic obsession.

People say knitting is meditation in motion, so one might think that Edburg, who has been knitting and crocheting scenery for her photography for years, would have reached enlightenment by now. She hasn't.

"It's not relaxing," she says in an interview with The News. "I'm always working on some deadline or huge project, thinking if I can just knit one more flower, just one more. ... I count how much I knit in an hour, calculating how long it will take me to finish what I am working on and it's like hours pass, and you haven't gotten up to get a drink of water." She laughs.

She can make a red, crocheted exploding rocket, but don't ask her to knit a sweater that fits.

She's not a fan of patterns, and her creations often explode all over the camera frame as she snaps carefully posed theatrical images. When she shoots, she meticulously stages

people and elements in her photos, then adds weird knit props or scenery. The pieces are influenced by the personality of her models, she said, and she chooses people that will bring their own touches of mania and chaos.

One of Edburg's earlier collections of photographs, called "Drop Dead Gorgeous," featured models in the throes of overindulgence-and-silliness-induced death. Photos like

"Death by Nutella" or "Death by Oreos" share a key element, which Edburg calls "compulsivity to the point of self-destruction. ... That point where your creativity can turn against you, like Frankenstein's monster." She likes extremes. Some of

her more recent photos portray people celebrating disaster, with calm and sometimes excited expressions. Edburg said she plays with the obsession for safety that causes us to lay waste to everything else around us. "Like war," she says.

THE PICKLED AND THE HATCHED Edburg's book at the Alumnos 47 Foundation is a kind of time capsule dedicated to three years of her career (2007-10).

It's also a homage to opposites. Called "The Pickled and the Hatched" because she "likes the way the words roll off your tongue in English," it's a contrast between freezing the growth of something at a particular moment and letting it complete its cycle, hatch and then die, she says.

Opening the book, a richly colored box with a clasp, feels a bit like falling down the rabbit hole. Inside are glass test tubes with knit specimens of "pickled" larva and leeches.

A smaller book of Edburg's photos is tucked neatly into one of the box's compartments, and a wire-and-yarn butterfly is waiting to fly free, tucked into a corner. She has thrown in a crocheted kidney, for good measure, along with several stand-alone portraits of formal-looking models and their crocheted accessories, like a plate of brains, a chicken and a fig. Edburg's book is among the foundation's unique pieces. She says she could never make an exact copy of the original.

The production of the book has allowed her to get close to her work in a new way, she said, explaining that after making the book, she gained a greater appreciation for how viewers interact with her work. She will now be conceptualizing installations, possibly on a smaller scale, that will allow more viewer involvement.

For now, you can see her and other artists' original bookart by appointment at the Alumnos 47 Foundation on Alumnos 47 in San Miguel Chapultepec, and every Saturday at 1 p.m. you can attend the presentation of a new book at the Tamayo Museum. Two photographers, Patricia Lagarde and Cannon Bernaldez, will be presenting their books on March 2.