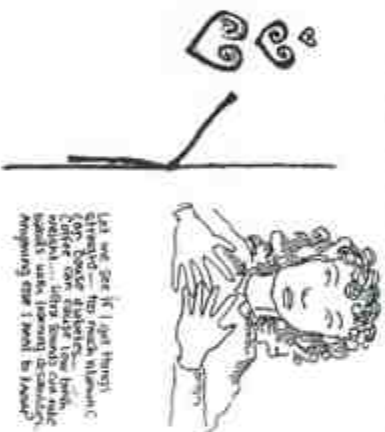


DESCANT 90  
 RECENT CANADIAN ARTISTS BOOKS  
 PETER O'BRIEN - FALL 1995

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finished a five-book series called *The Adventures of My Inner Child* which traces her recent pregnancy and the birth of her daughter Celeste: "This series has grown from my real feelings and experiences," she says. "In the process I've discovered the true meaning of emotions as I dance from awe and joy to repudiation. A definite labour of love — dedicated to those who share my growing pains. This is PART 2 of a series that may end when my baby is born." Her books also re-tell encoded maxims and folk tales. Erella Vent has produced approximately fifty books over the years, all from her tumultuous house, whose every room is virtually bursting with colour, objects, books, food, music, and artwork. She has been one of Canada's most active book artists for many years and has been a supporter and publisher, through her Droplit Books, of other artists who produce books. Most of her books are very small, measuring from 2 1/2 x 2", to 4 1/2 x 2 3/4", and are meant to be held and read, not treated as precious objects. Her books could all quite easily fit, as she says, in one shoebox.



Erella Vent, *The Adventures of My Inner Child* (1994).

**D** — For Toronto artist Julie Voyce, the book format is an inexpensive way to disseminate her art. She wants her books to be accessible, "a routine attachment to one's life...it's not a problem if the covers get frayed or a little bacon grease gets

spilled on them." Her books are dreamy, magical narratives with the words and images intertwined on the page. Her book *1957 (04-05) 1993-2037* (1993, edition of 250) is a collection of snippets of her life: shopping, looking in on wealth, friends, the vicissitudes of living in a "flat on the top floor." *The Last Woman of San Clemente* (1994, edition of 271) is a poetic free-fall of visions and bodily mysteries: "I paced then stewed, one of my helpers slipped into a fold. She resided as a thin film of magic between all my skin and veins in bloody meat. She parked herself at the foot of my soul just before dreams bid my eyes to close." The physicality of Voyce's books is an essential complement to the narratives: the colourful covers are dry and flat to the touch, the pages inside an explosion of image and text. The pages are frenetic, boisterous, scattered, with the covers a colour-saturated way to gather the words inside. For Voyce, as with Erella Vent and Doug Gaultford, the mark of the hand, the imprint of the artist, is an essential element of their book art. The books are a way to minimize the distance between artists and audience. As Voyce says, "Books are about people holding on to them."

In contrast to these intimate and personal books, Calgary-based artist Alan Dunning generates books that are an assault on meaning, interpretation and linearity. Dunning's texts seem to come from everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. The words in *The Grey* (1990, edition of 200), for example, are amassed from an encyclopedic database that he created, with the texts coming from the Internet and a variety of other sources, including Wordsworth, Terry Eagleton and Chinua Achebe. This database, a "slew" of languages, eventually grew to "a few million words long." Reading *The Grey*, if that is possible, brings on a sort of intellectual vertigo, a sense of allusion with no end or conclusion in sight. At the top of every page there is a computer-generated image of the world that haltingly rotates, seemingly oblivious to the torrent of words below. In *Words about Words about Words*, Murray Kruger refers to the "equivivalence" among all texts, which makes terminology such as "primary" and "secondary," or "privileged" and "dependent" texts obsolete.<sup>5</sup> There is present in *The Grey* a perpetual mutation of language, as though each and every word has its own pedigree, its own self-reliant swagger, and yet is also an insignificant scratch mark on