

Designing authors: the intersection of writing and designing a book

THE ANNUAL ALCUIN Book Design Awards can be a slightly confusing event for people accustomed to literary awards focusing on the text of a book (i.e., the work of the author), rather than how the text has been handled (i.e., the work of the designer). It is the latter that the Alcuin awards celebrate, and they are the only national awards for book design in Canada. The winners named every year frequently are unfamiliar to people outside the graphic arts profession, who may be left looking for titles or author names they recognize. But there is one category in which the authors, and frequently the publishers as well, often are also the designer honoured: limited editions. This is in many ways an odd category among the eight; the other categories are dominated by trade publishers and the kinds of books one can find in most any bookstore. But the limited editions may be seen by only a few dozen people, not just because of their limitation, but also because of the lack of any system for these kinds of books to be distributed, seen and sold in Canada. So *Ampora* decided to ask the two winning designers in the limited edition category for 2006 who were also the authors of the books, about their projects...

Apikoros Sleuth

By Robert Majzels. Jim Roberts & Robert Majzels, designers. Moveable Inc., 2006.

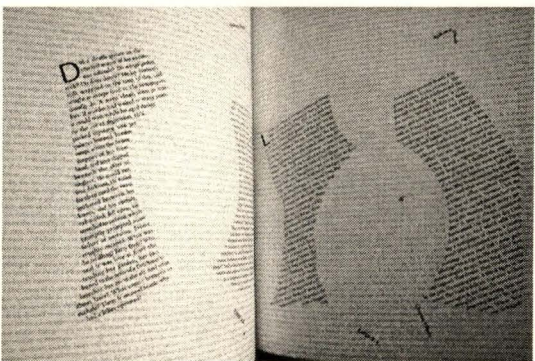
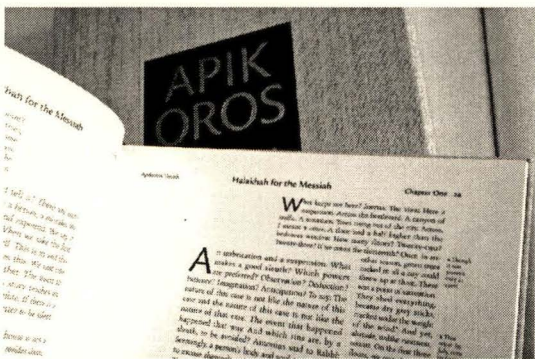
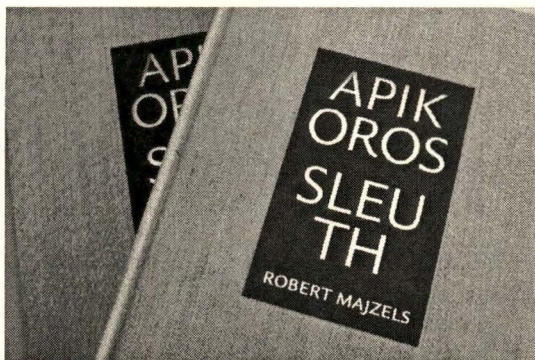
Edition of 231 copies, cased in boards with matching slipcase.

CONCEIVED and constructed on the model of a sacred text—an engine of magic—this is the second edition of *Apikoros Sleuth*. The first (Mercury, 2005) was also designed and set by Toronto-based Moveable Inc., but they and the author were ultimately unhappy with the printed result and felt that it didn't do the book justice. "That's when we decided to produce a limited edition featuring larger pages, nicer stock, more use of colour, a redesigned cover, cloth binding and a slipcase," says Joe Kotler of Moveable Inc.

"The limited edition gives it the weight, size, the white space and borders on the page, and the texture I wanted from the beginning but could not hope to get in a commercial edition," says author Robert Majzels. "It took me five years to write the novel, and another two years after it was published in a commercial edition to do the limited edition. We printed 231 copies, one for each of the 231 gates to paradise. The book is a manual to carry the reader up to and through those gates, assuming that the reader is pure in heart and cleansed of her or his sins."

Moveable considered printing the limited edition digitally, but that couldn't produce the texture and quality they wanted, so they went with offset. Majzels was intimately involved in the design, which includes elaborate and

Photos: Jason Miles Vanderhill





engaging shaped text blocks on the pages, and he worked closely with long-time Moveable designer Jim Roberts (who is also a published poet, part-time book collector and bookseller specializing in first editions).

“Everything I know about book design is self-taught, from reading, and learned from the people at Moveable,” Majzels says. “In designing the book, I was very much influenced by the polyvocal structure of the oldest Western texts, the Talmud in particular. The final result, the painstaking exactitude and overall look of the book has to be credited to Jim Roberts, and to Joe Kotler and the staff of Moveable.”

Asked about the interaction between writing and designing, Majzels says: “As a writer, I don’t think I ascribe to the idea of the book as a mere shell in which the text is contained. I see no separation between form and content. Words are plastic, letters (Edmond Jabès says) are like tiny animals, squirrels darting in the forest, the text is a material. I wrote and designed each page of *Apikoros Sleuth* simultaneously, adjusting the story, the lines and the language to the shape of the page. Once Jim Roberts became involved in the editing and fine-tuning of the pages, I made occasional further changes in the text to allow for justification, spacing, line breaks, etc. So I think, yes, designing the book, thinking of a book as a kind of language machine, absolutely changes the way one writes.”

Apikoros Sleuth (\$231) can be purchased from Moveable Inc. Contact publisher Joe Kotler at jkotler@moveable.com or call 416.532.5690.

Smoking With My Mother

By Dawna Rose. Dawna Rose & Betsy Rosenwald, designers. JackPine Press, 2006.
Edition of 75 copies, coil bound.

JACKPINE Press is a Saskatchewan collective whose mandate is “to challenge conventional notions of book design and publishing by publishing books that engage the reader both visually and literarily and that consider all aspects of design, including text, paper, binding, cover stock, typography and arrangement.” Dawna Rose’s book—a story that started out as a two-minute, stop-motion Super 8 film animation project—hit the mark with the design award judges.

“In trying to discover the sequences, or drawings I needed to animate, I did a number of drawings with text on a 9-by-12-inch sketchbook. These later became the basis for the book,” Rose says. The book includes a copy of the short film on a DVD.

“The DVD and book complement each other and tell slightly different aspects of the story. I was happy and surprised by how well they fit, and I think I will use this format again for other projects.”

The sketches were modified using Photoshop, and the final layouts were done using InDesign. The file was output to a Xerox printer, using Xerox cover and text papers. The sheets were then wire coil bound. *Smoking With My Mother* is Rose’s first book and her second animated film. *Smoking With My Mother* (\$40) is available through the publisher at www.jackpinepress.com.