## On the road again: Travelling with the Artist’s Book Triennial Vilnius

I spoke with Lithuanian-based artist Kestutis Vasiliunas, curator of the Artist’s Book Triennial Vilnius as it celebrated its 30th year with a touring exhibition and events programme for its 10th edition, themed: “To Be”. The aim of the Triennial is to promote artists' books and their makers and to build connections with galleries, publishers, printmakers, the public and collectors.

Vasiliunas remembers the excitement of the first artist’s book exhibition in Vilnius, in Lithuania in 1991 in which he participated. Within two years he had gone on to organise and open the *First International Artist’s Book Exhibition* in August 1993 at the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius. Since then, the Triennial has grown into a successful international event attracting entries from book artists around the world. It forms part of the Circle “Bokartas”, under which Vasiliunas has organised more than 50 international artist’s book exhibitions, workshops, symposiums and lectures in Lithuania, Germany, Austria, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, France and the USA.

Vasiliunas is passionate about how the Triennial connects artists from different countries and backgrounds, from South Korea, Japan and Colombia, Uruguay and Finland to the Ukraine and USA. There is a diverse range of geographical creativity represented with an emphasis on works that celebrate the materiality and physicality of the book. You can look back online at works from past Triennials to view some of the breadth of examples. Many are rooted in traditional printmaking which also echoes the interests of Vilnius Graphic Art Centre, a printmaking studio utilised by local artists but also hosting and organising international exhibitions and projects.

Vasiliunas is dedicated to making the Triennial series a success, which take an enormous amount of time and energy for one person to organise, especially without official funding: “I have met many wonderful artists thanks to the Triennials, I see how different artists’ books can be. We get more and more unique bookworks submitted for the Triennials, this year the jurors – from Denmark, Lithuania, Norway and the USA spent days examining and discussing each of the submissions which amounted to an incredible volume of 4m2 of packaged books sent in from 43 countries.”

“The best thing about organising a large-scale project like this is that gives artists the chance to be together in a meaningful, curated exhibition. It’s always nice to see the variety of works that arrive from so many places, some very small works, some large, traditional books or completely surprising book objects. As a jury panel we look for works of high quality and sensitivity, works that can confirm or challenge the ideas of what books can "Be". These books are chosen to travel together for each Triennial, becoming a collective that stays together over one or two years. So they form a kind of family unit as they go on the road”.

One of Vasiliunas's ways of keeping costs down is to deliver the books himself wherever possible - you can watch videos on YouTube of some of their journeys across countries. A kind of artists' books version of *Trains, Planes and Automobiles*, switching to whichever means is most effective during the two-year timetable. His energy for and enjoyment of this aspect of the tour is palpable**:** “When I started organising the Triennial, I dreamt of living on the road, the way musicians tour – travelling around America or other far-flung countries. Staying in cheap motels, performing in good (and not so good) concert halls. And I started to travel in the same way, with my art and then with these artists’ books with my car, in cheap hotels, sometimes even sleeping in the car, or in friends’ houses or occasionally good hotels. The books have been installed in simple art galleries or wonderful museums and libraries. For more than 30 years, I have lived according to the Triennial’s exhibition calendar, I travel wherever the venues I organise take me, together with my wife or daughter and our extended family of artists’ books. We have travelled around Europe, the USA, arrived by boat in Venice and driven the books in my car across the snow-capped mountains and borders of the Austrian, Swiss and Italian Alps. "

After theTriennial comes back to Lithuania and then Köln, Germany for exhibitions to close this year, Vasiliunas will be off again on a tour of America taking in Evanston, Fredonia (NY) and Cleveland USA from January - May 2025, then down to Spain for the final venue in Granada in October 2025. Truly a case of books on the road again…

# https://artistsbook-museum.lt/