

Future Past and Tense

I talked to Ioannis Anastasiou and Majka Dokudowicz online from their studio in Wrocław, Poland. Both are PhD researchers at the E. Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, actively exhibiting their prints and artists' books nationally and internationally, until the pandemic struck. We spoke about their experiences of making during lockdown and how things have changed over the last year.

Anastasiou and Dokudowicz began making artists' books together in 2015 when they collaborated on a piece for a project in Thessaloniki. They each enjoy manipulating materials and expanding the potential of movement between two and three dimensions in prints and books. For example, Anastasiou prints on metal to create sculptural 3D pieces, and Dokudowicz experiments with the representation of print on paper through capturing substrates between original plant and pulped product to print on in their midway-state.

They began the bookwork *The Faded Future Archive* in the middle of the first lockdown in Poland in March 2020. As with many staff and students within art colleges, the closures were swift, leaving little time to understand what was happening or plan ahead. Dokudowicz rushed back from presenting their works at the Dresden Art Fair just before the print studios closed whilst Anastasiou was busily gathering as many creative supplies as he could carry back to their apartment. Lockdown came with no indication of how long it would last and it was only later that we all realised this was going to be more than a few weeks of home working. They began to produce artworks at home, working out ways to print and bind books within the confines of apartment living. Permitted walks each evening led them along foggy river banks near home, through deserted streets, past empty trams. It was the unease of this strange and seemingly never-ending situation that led to conversations about the present and the future. All news coverage focused on the pandemic, yet still around the world, wars raged on, economies collapsed, people suffered injustices and everything already in ruins continued to be, from Belarus to Syria, Lebanon to Gaza. Lockdown was - and still is - overwhelming for so many people - the local streets were deserted, but what would be the future of the world's education system, of ways of living, of humanity?

The Faded Future Archive began to take shape during these discussions. It emerged as a container of the 'devastatingly chaotic placed within a system of controlled order, a cataloguing of disaster presented as an illusion of normality'. Anastasiou and Dokudowicz began the project by searching online for 'photos showing ruins of buildings from areas of intense conflict, from World War I to the present day', but this in itself proved too much - the sheer volume of destruction hard to digest. They then categorised images in an attempt to sift through; rejecting those where surrounding buildings were still standing, or with a human presence. This helped to reduce the selection, but as they noted, their search was only from the 20th Century onwards. Construction of the archive during lockdown meant that it had to be made from materials and processes to hand, attempting to expose contact prints in the (rare) hours of sunlight, hand printing over 100 images, constructing and covering the box to house the archive's folders. As access to public print studios remained impossible they gradually negotiated to rent and establish their own independent space to complete the book and print new editions, adding more equipment as the year went forward. As a positive outcome they now share the studio in 2021 with three other artists. *The Faded Future Archive* is as they explain: 'quite peculiar - it has no exact dates, descriptions, is not arranged chronologically or geographically, has no legible information or accurate dates. All images share uniform characteristics, the same washed-out aesthetic, a collection of constantly recurring "todays"'. This archive could be infinite. Its purpose is to show us the results of not considering our communal future, to ask if humanity can improve upon itself post pandemic. If, rather than being so good at destruction we might review the past, think about the future and how we might work towards a better one.

Two copies from the edition of *The Faded Future Archive* are currently in Italy and Poland awaiting the opening of the postponed Oggetto Libro Biennale, ADI Design Museum, Milan now due in

September 2021, and a forthcoming exhibition of works made during lockdown at the Book Art Museum, Łódź, this autumn. I hope by the time you read this they will have reached their future audiences.