Travels inspire FAU instructor’s homemade books

Andrew Binder has been making books for the past 20 years.

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JUPITER — The first rule in a museum is don’t touch anything in a museum.

Andrew Binder’s art isn’t like that.

A maker of homemade artist books, Binder likes his art to be touchable. He routinely lets people thumb through the pages of his books. Many of the books, in fact, are “pop-up” for adults, which makes them not only tangible but a surprise.

“I could have it pop up 2 feet and it’s like fireworks go off in your face,” he said.

Eighteen of Binder’s books are on display at Florida Atlantic University’s John D. MacArthur Campus in Jupiter until May 14. The exhibit, Handmade Artists Books (2002-2009), features several books from Binder’s World Heritage Series, which reflect a decade of his world travel.

Binder, who is an instructor in FAU’s College of Education, has been making books for about 20 years. He studied printmaking in college, earning a bachelor’s degree from FAU and a master’s degree from the University of Miami. He now is a doctoral student at FAU.

His interest in printmaking “just kind of naturally evolved into making books” while he was still an undergraduate student, he said. He liked the intimacy of the art form — it could be held and paged through — and its variety. As mass-produced items, books tend to look alike. Handmade books can be made with a wide variety of materials, in different sizes, with moveable parts even.

“I like complexity when I make art,” he said.

At the time, no one was really doing that kind of work at FAU, he said. The art form had been recognized as such only in the 1970s and was still considered relatively new.

Now, that’s changed. “The digital revolution has really touched off a lot of people making the things,” he said.

Lately, Binder has used his travels as the inspiration for his books. In 2003, he set a goal of visiting all of the UNESCO world heritage sites, which are natural or cultural sites designated as worthy of preservation because of their unique meaning to all mankind. Sites include Australia’s Great Barrier Reef and the pyramids in Egypt.

Binder, who travels in the summer, has been to about 27 countries and about 50 sites. He’s made about five books from those trips and has a backlog of about five more, he said.

Some of the books are about a particular country, while others are based on a theme. He created one about Egypt and another about the cultural influences between Cambodia and Thailand evident in the architecture of the two countries.

The sites, much like art, are universal. “They all belong to us,” he said.

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