Book Artists Honor Storied FAU Archivist
BY JOHN THOMASON

The number of original works on display at the Jaffe Center for the Book Arts' new exhibition at FAU's Wimberly Library seems to coordinate perfectly with the show's subject: Ninety pieces of art, celebrating the 90th birthday of the book-arts center's cofounder, Arthur Jaffe. But according to John Cutrone, the newly appointed director of the center, this pleasant symmetry was a happy accident.

It just so happens that 90 renowned local, national and international book artists responded to Cutrone's inquiries — unknown to Arthur — for an original piece of work to be donated and dedicated to Jaffe on this recent, momentous birthday. Cutrone knows of his mentor's importance in the book-arts world, but he was taken aback by the outpour of response his call ushered. Some artists even submitted pieces without being invited; they just happened to hear about the exhibit (for the record, a 91st piece just arrived, breaking that synchronicity).

The result is titled "Time Flies When You're Having Fun," and, like most exhibitions at the Jaffe Center, it takes space on the first three floors of the library. Running through Aug. 10, the exhibition makes for a great survey of that esoteric, flexible medium known as book art. For those new to the concept, book art is like most forms of visual art, except that the artists use books as their canvas. There are 6,000 such works in the Jaffe Center database.

"Time Flies When You're Having Fun" is a varied, colorful, multimedia showcase, from Susan Joy Share's "Two Spiked Books," which feature the titular spiked artworks jutting from the spines of books like the stiff hairs of hedgehogs, to Marilyn Rosenberg's "Moment By Moment Messages," a veritable modern-art sculpture under the auspices of a book. One of my favorite pieces in the show is Jessica Poo's "Pharmacy of Crippling Hope," which features text on tiny pieces of paper tucked inside tablets in a prescription pill bottle.

Many of the works spotlight Jaffe directly in their visual aesthetic, and some include notes of gratitude and birthday wishes to Jaffe, who had a significant hand in launching some of their careers. It all blends well with the rest of the exhibition: a collection of ephemera from Jaffe's personal life, from passports, yearbooks and report cards to dog tags, military ID cards and war medals (He served this country with distinction in World War II and for the Israelis shortly thereafter).

The exhibition is intended to celebrate not only Jaffe's 90th birthday but also his retirement from the center he founded with his late wife, Mata. However, Jaffe, who donated his original collection of books as aesthetic objects to the university 13 years ago, is not showing signs of slowing down.

"He hasn't taken a day off since he retired," Cutrone says.

Check back here next week for more on Jaffe's "retirement," his memories and his philosophies in an extensive interview.

Posted: Thursday, June 2nd, 2011 @ 1:48 pm
Categories: Arts & Events
Tags: Arthur Jaffe, Florida Atlantic University, jaffe center for book arts.