

New Art Examiner, Jan/Feb 2019

Artistic Collaboration Today by Victor M. Cassidy
McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, Oct 4, 2018
ISBN 978-1-4766-7447-6
Paperback, 200 pages

Bruce Thorn

© Bruce Thorn, all rights reserved



Artistic Collaboration Today

*Profiles of Creative
Teams in Diverse Media*

VICTOR M. CASSIDY

Photo courtesy of MacFarland Publishers, Jefferson, NC

Visual arts often get stereotyped as pursuits of individual genius and expression. What often gets overlooked are creative groups or teams working together to produce art that could not possibly come from a solo practitioner's workshop, but only through the synergy of a group making creative decisions together. Victory M. Cassidy's new book from McFarland, *Artistic Collaboration Today*, shines a welcome and engaging light on the subject.

The subtitle, "Profiles of Creative Teams in Diverse Media", is an accurate description of what the book delivers: a scholarly and significant introduction to a subject that hasn't received much coverage. *Artistic Collaboration Today* was an enormous research accomplishment, from the selection of artists to travel plans and miles, interviews and four years of days devoured by libraries.

As Cassidy points out, production and marketing teams are not artistic collaborations at the point of creative invention, brainstorming and authorship. With this parameter as a basic requirement for journalistic inclusion, the author presents chapters organized by fields of endeavor: *Collaboration in Three Dimensions*; *Paintings and Collagraphs*; *Printmakers*; *Photographers*; *Artists and Architects*; and *Artists and Performers*.

Cassidy considered well over a hundred collaborative teams for inclusion and narrowed it down to just a few for each chapter. Most readers will not be familiar with the entire list of artists chosen and this helps to keep the book fresh and interesting. The author is consistently able to provide fascinating details about each project by conducting studio

visits and interviews, sometimes in other countries, and even hosting guest artists at his home in Chicago.

Cassidy stays focused on facts while offering descriptions of artists and their work. Many readers will be grateful for the lack of dreaded “art speak.” A comprehensive study of *Artistic Collaboration Today* will require reading in front of a computer and doing Internet image searches as you contemplate each collaborative project.

The art works are literally and figuratively all over the place, well chosen, beautiful and engaging; however this is a paperback, not a coffee table book; there can't be enough reproductions and image quality is quotidian. There is a nice little collection of color inserts in the center of the book, but several images omit artist credits and those of us who are fond of prying open art books to look at the pictures will be stymied and sent back to the text each time.

A corporate model dominates and structures all facets of contemporary life, so is it possible, desirable or necessary for artists to avoid it? Collaboration is a whole different kind of work than solitary studio practice and lends itself naturally to combinations of media, such as artists working with architects or performers. Painters usually fly solo and aren't often keen on sharing authorship.

As to painters, William Wiley's “Three Amigos” (William Wiley, Robert Hudson and Richard Shaw) are described as a brief threesome art fling that never went anywhere. It may have been that Wiley's own overflowing world always co-opts every inch of space, leaving no room to share with others. In a more fruitful marriage of talents, Californian painter Sam Francis, between 1974 and 1988, extensively and successfully explored monotype collaborations with print

maker and painter Garner Tullis, who didn't just do the grunt work of pulling prints, but participated in the creative investigations; still, more readers will think Sam Francis rather than Garner Tullis.

Gerda Steiner and Jorg Lenslinger create site-specific installations that they describe as “sculptural assemblage.” Their materials include living plants, grown crystals, rubber snakes, pigs' teeth, seeds and all kinds of stuff. In 2013, Cassidy traveled to the small Swiss farm village of Langenbruk to meet the couple and view their installation *National Park* in nearby Chur, Switzerland. The installation was commissioned as the final exhibition for a soon to be demolished and rebuilt addition to the Chur City Art Museum, so the artists were free to alter the walls, floors and ceilings. I won't be a spoiler, just go to the Internet and search for Steiner and Lenslinger National Park. It's wonderful.

In 2000, art dealer and curator Lance Fung considered organizing an exhibition of snow and ice structures in Lapland, Finland. Millions of dollars would be needed to pull it off, so Fung invited two art teams to Lapland for a trial run: sculptor and draftsman Jene Highstein and architect Steven Holl; and Finnish artist Osmo Rauhala, partnered with Hani Rashid and Lise Anne Couture (known together as Asymptote).

Ground rules for invited teams included material composition of at least 80% ice and snow and not to exceed 1,000 square feet. This *Snow Show* was a hit; Fung was able to raise the millions that were needed to mount a full-scale *Snow Show* in 2003-04, presenting fifteen structures made of snow and ice.

Other collaborative art teams covered in *Artistic Collaboration Today* include: Patricia Leighton and Del Geist; Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel; Nicholas Kahn and Richard Selesnick; Gulnara Kasmalieva and Muratbek Djumaliev; Wolfgang Buttress, Mark Braund and Tristan Simmonds; Barbara Cooper and Jan Bartoszek; and Catherine Lee and Shay Ishii.

In addition to all of the above-mentioned teams and others presented in six chapters, a collection of several brief descriptions of *already* well known collaborative teams receive mention in the *Appendix: Other Artistic Collaborators*. This includes: Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat; Edward Keinholz and Nancy Reddin; Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen; Chris Ofili and David Adaye; and Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly and Jasper Johns.

Artistic Collaboration Today is a fun and informative introduction to joint artistic production that illuminates several contemporary artistic teams and will inspire readers to explore more works by these artists. Throughout the book, there is so much insider information that the reader is left marveling at how in the world Cassidy got the stories. The detailed *Bibliography* and *Chapter Notes* will be very useful to scholars and this book will no doubt become a resource for other students of artistic collaboration.



Oblong Voidspace, 2000, by Jene Highstein and Steven Holl; photo courtesy Lance Fung

