

Getty, Getty, Good

— Carol Es

by Joshua Stecker
photos provided by Carol Es



Artists want their work noticed, period. It's rare to find an artist who keeps their work hidden from the rest of the world. Art is expression, and to have others be able to experience that expression, to appreciate it, is the greatest reward for an artist's work. Fortunately, for local artist Carol Es, one such institution took notice of her work – The Getty Museum. The Getty Museum recently purchased one of her artist books for their permanent collection at the Getty Research Center.

"It was pretty hot," she said excitedly. The 37-year-old native from Los Angeles (who doesn't look a day over 30), was shocked and elated when word came that The Getty, of all places, would be interested in her work.

"I approached them," she said. "I started with writing them an email. It was a long process. It took about 4 months. I basically wrote to every single museum you can think of."

Just like any business, marketing is a key component in advancing one's career. For an artist, having good business acumen and a knack for selling yourself and your work puts you ahead of the game. Es approached as many galleries and museums she could find, hoping someone – anyone – would be interested in her work. When The Getty Museum responded back, it was a bit of a shocker.

"I had no idea the Getty would even consider buying one. The lady at the Getty said she really loved it."

So what is it the Getty actually bought? According to Es, an artist book is a handmade book comprised of all original work. Es' book, however, skewed away from the original process, she filled her artist book with not only original pieces, but also reproduced photographs of some pieces, essays by two LA art critics, and letterpress work.

"It's a handmade book with some original pieces in it," she said, "and it has inkjet prints on archival paper. Some of it is pictures of some of my work. And then there are two essays by two LA art critics commenting on my work. Then there are a couple of original-type pieces. There's a quote of mine that's letter-pressed with really old font from the 1800s. Some of it is hand pressed, some of it was done on the computer, and there are a couple of linoleum prints you can pull out."

Es produced 50 artist books, all original. The first 10 are her artist proofs which she will not sell, the others are currently being shopped around to local galleries and museums.

"The cover is die-cut on a press," she said. "Each one has an original painting. They're all different. Some purists won't

consider it an artist's book, but whatever."

The letterpress used is an old press dating back to the 1800s. Es purchased it for her boyfriend, Michael Phillips, who assisted in the production of the pages using the old-style, 1800-era fonts.

"Michael's background is in printing," she explained, "and I got him this old letterpress from the turn of the century. He really got into it, with all the lead letters. It's a very physical thing. If I didn't have him to help me with it, I couldn't have printed it. Even with all my weight on it, I couldn't get it to press. You have to be pretty strong. It's how they used to print newspapers back in the day."

Aside from the artist book, the rest of Es' artwork is inspired by her days working with her brother as a pattern cutter in LA's garment district when she should have been in junior high. Her father was a pattern maker. She has consciously, and sometimes unconsciously, recalled those days in various pieces of her art. From using sleeve patterns to form something completely unique to using surreal images of scissors to convey emotion, her work is so original that anyone who is familiar with it can spot a "Carol Es piece" right away.

As with many artists, Es openly admits she's lived a hard life. On her own at the age of 14 and moving to more than 40 homes in the span of her short life, Es lived fast during her teens and twenties, finally getting it all out of her system and settling in San Pedro at 30.

"I should look much more haggard than I am," she said with a smile. "I don't remember making a decision to become an artist. When I was a kid, I was always withdrawn and not social. Just crazy shy. I just colored and drew, it was just sort of my thing. I was also a musician, a drummer, I was everything at one point or another."

When she and Phillips finally settled in San Pedro, she knew this place would become her true home. "I love this place more than anybody," she proudly exclaimed.

Looking back on her own life, and thinking about the trouble she went through, the pain she's faced and the challenges she suffered, Es is proud to finally say that it was worth it. Those experiences shaped her to what she is today – a successful artist... with a piece in The Getty Museum. The thought of that puts a smile on her face.

"To be able to say that I have a piece in The Getty Museum is pretty awesome."

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For more information on Carol Es, visit her website at esart.com.

