



Felicia Rice of Moving Parts Press explores the role of book artist as performance artist.

# The Book as Immersive Experience

Engagement with the viewer is vital to Felicia Rice of Moving Parts Press

**F**rom traditional letterpress printing of poetry to book-making as performance art, the evolution of Californian Felicia Rice is a tale of serendipity, cultural vision, and commitment to monumental projects. We spoke about her work as a publisher and an educator, how she became involved in the Chicano community, and fast versus slow art making.

**RM: You started Moving Parts Press thirty-eight years ago, when you were a student at the University of**

**California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) studying the art of the book. Who or what inspired you to go that route?**

**FR:** When I was nineteen my mother mistakenly sent me an exciting article about the fine printers of the San Francisco Bay Area that was supposed to go to my older sister. In 1974 Jack Stauffacher was teaching letterpress at UCSC, and I made the bold move of relocating to Santa Cruz to work with him as a student of letterpress printing and typography. I designed an independent major titled "Fine Printing in the 1970s."

**RM: Now, while continuing to create works of book art, you manage the Digital Arts and New Media MFA program (DANM) at UCSC. What's the connection?**

**FR:** After many years of teaching book arts with an emphasis on publishing for UCSC, taking in job work, and selling Moving Parts Press publications, I decided to support myself separately from my work as an artist. I was the director of the UCSC Extension Visual Communication Program for ten years, and then, eleven years ago, I became the program manager at DANM.





*DOC/UNDOC* (2014) is a mixed-media production housed in a hi-tech aluminum case that contains a deluxe edition of Felicia Rice's accordion-fold artist's book with performance texts by artist/writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña and critical commentary by art historian Jennifer González, a video by artist Gustavo Vazquez, and sound art by Zachary Watkins.

IMAGES COURTESY OF FELICIA RICE

Through these positions and my proximity to the Silicon Valley, I came into direct contact with the digital revolution. In the early nineties, I adopted Quark XPress, Photoshop, and other digital tools. Through DANM I've been exposed to electronics and laser cutting, and these have filtered into my current work. I have one foot firmly planted in the nineteenth century and the other in the twenty-first.

**RM: Your early books were fairly straightforward editions of poetry. What motivated you to publish in this format?**

**FR:** In 1980 I printed and published my first book, *For Earthly Survival* by Ellen Bass. Ellen was a feminist writ-

ing poems about the dangers of nuclear war. I sold 500 copies at \$4 each in three months, so I thought I could publish poetry and sell books for a living. Ha! I quickly learned that was a total fluke.

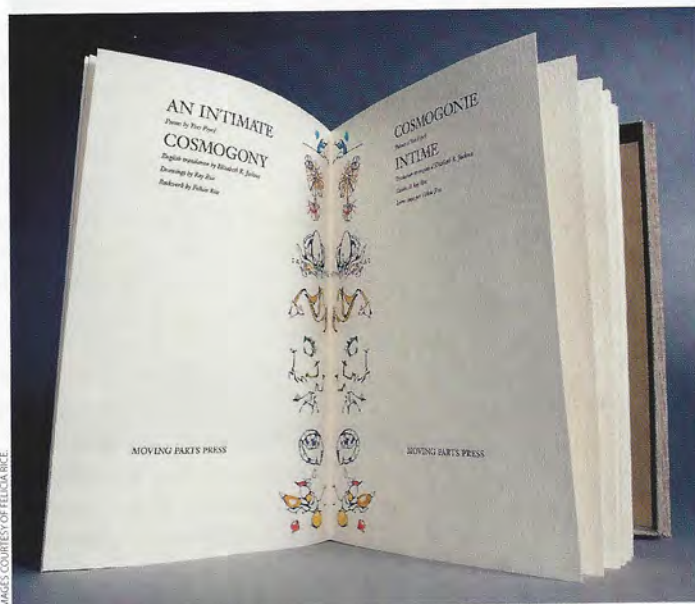
For ten years I letterpress printed my books. I stopped printing these slim volumes of verse by the early nineties. Then I experimented with publishing chapbooks, designed digitally and printed on a laser printer, books on demand. I did several of those, but I didn't have the time to keep it up. I realized that I had all I needed to make beautiful, limited edition letterpress books in smaller numbers and follow that with a trade edition for a larger audience. The first one was *De Amor*

*Oscuro/Of Dark Love*—sixteen homoerotic love poems by Chicano author Francisco X. Alarcón, in English and Spanish, with drawings by my father, Ray Rice. The book won a design award at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1993. I printed the first trade edition offset myself—I was working at that time as an offset press operator.

**RM: Many of your books are political and international in scope. Can you talk about your editorial policy?**

**FR:** I set out to publish voices that would not otherwise be heard. Each community of writers and artists has a different personality, and instead of sticking with feminist poets I kept moving, exploring a range of voices.





(TOP LEFT) *Codex Espangliensis* (1998) is a collaborative artist's book made up of performance texts and poems by Guillermo Gómez-Peña interwoven with collage imagery by Enrique Chagoya shaped into book form by Felicia Rice of Moving Parts Press.

(BOTTOM LEFT) *Cosmogonie Intime* (2005) is an accordion-fold book that extends to eighteen feet in which Rice has printed five poems by French poet Yves Peyré, in both French and English, accompanied by drawings by Ray Rice.

(RIGHT) Felicia Rice printed *De Amor Oscuro/Of Dark Love* (1991), a bilingual English-Spanish collection of homoerotic sonnets by Francisco X. Alarcón accompanied by pen-and-ink drawings by Ray Rice, in both a limited letterpress edition and a trade edition. In 1993 the book received one of eighteen international design awards from among the "600 Best Designed Books in the World" exhibit mounted by Stiftung Buchkunst at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

IMAGES COURTESY OF FELICIA RICE

My parents were artists living on the edge of a brand new California subdivision, so at school I was always an outsider. Unintentionally I've sought out that outsider role, so have been comfortable—and uncomfortable—in many communities without being part of them. Twenty years ago I settled on the Latino-Chicano arts community. It's a wonderful group of people doing important work on serious political issues. Now I am working on collaborating with the poet laureate Juan Felipe Herrera, a long-time member of this community.

**RM:** In the last year you completed a seven-year project, *DOC/UNDOC* ([docundoc.com](http://docundoc.com)), a collaboration with

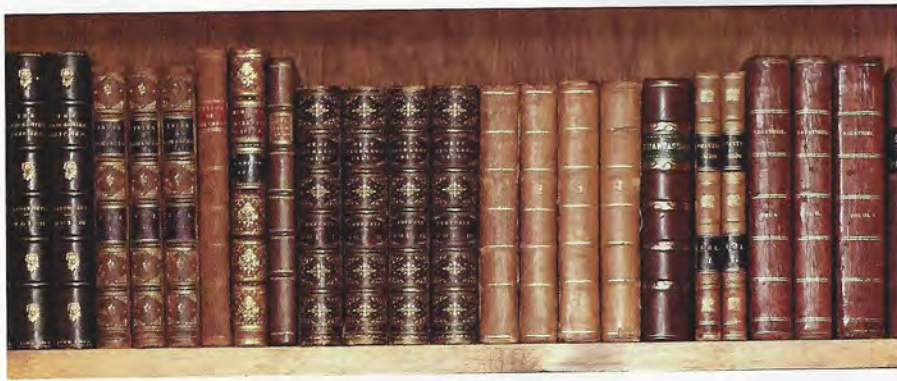
performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and three others incorporating a thirty-foot long book, video, and sound that you called a "traveling case of apprentice shamans." How did this come about, and when did you start seeing the book as an immersive experience?

**FR:** In the last twenty years I've done three major books. I call this work slow art—four to seven years working with the same group of collaborators on a project. I may never undertake something as complex as *DOC/UNDOC* again. I'd like to create some fast art, and publish a new project every year.

The artists' book, *DOC/UNDOC*, includes a deluxe edition of printed

books residing in an interactive electronic aluminum case. The first subtitle of the book, *Documentado/Undocumented*, refers to the difference between being documented and undocumented in the United States and Mexico, explored in the video by Gustavo Vazquez and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. The second subtitle, *Ars Shamánica Performática*, refers to our invitation to join in a transformative experience by watching the video, interacting with the printed book, pressing blinking buttons that trigger a soundscape by Zachary Watkins, and handling objects in the case's cabinet of curiosities. One of our collaborators is art historian Jennifer González, who took us back to the history of





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museums, cabinets of curiosities, personal altars and the freak show of the traveling circus. In the video you see Gómez-Peña press a hot iron on his chest, and you see the burn mark, and then he presses it on his cheek. People don't want to see this, but it's part of who we are.

The book developed as a sequel to the 1998 work *Codex Espangliensis*. In the earlier book I wrapped the text around the image and warped the fonts. Fifteen years later I subsumed the text in the image, referencing Marshall McLuhan's observation in the seventies that the world is becoming less literate and more visual. The project also prompted me to take a performance workshop with Gómez-Peña's troupe in 2011 as research into the book as performance art. As soon as it began I realized that I was there to explore the book artist as performance artist. Performance has taken root in my life, and has become part of my evolution as an artist.

**RM: What are your five favorite projects from the last thirty-eight years and why?**

**FR:** Right now I'm working on a compendium of six of my favorite books, titled *Autodidactica: A Chronicle of Cars and Books*, a four-foot scroll with poems and images from the books on one side and pages from the encyclopedia overprinted with drawings of the five cars I've owned. Instead of a seven-year project, it's a seven-week project. Fast art.

**RM: Are all of the books you publish collaborations or do you also do solo works?**

**FR:** I am first a publisher, which is inherently collaborative. The work is text driven and it begins with the word. My book work is also performative—the book performing the text in the absence of the writer. And this journey has led me to explore most recently the book artist as performance artist in a piece titled, *Collaboration and Metamorphosis*. 

Richard Minsky is a book artist and is the founder of the Center for Book Arts in New York City (1974).