

Detour

THE MOLESKINE
CITY NOTEBOOK
EXPERIENCE

London, 9-22 october 2006

REPORTS FROM AN ITINERANT OPENING

“Detour” is a four-stage exploration, set in the city of London, through the works of seventy artists who have illustrated, written, drawn, stuck, painted, scribbled, sewn, cut out, engraved, carved and sculpted Moleskine notebooks. Four strategic locations in London (Stanfords, a historic bookshop, the huge Waterstones bookstore, Artwords, the bookshop of an extremely happening art gallery, and Conran, the design shop), are home to the various artistic Moleskines, contained in showcases complete with an opening to allow visitors to leaf through them. The exhibition was curated by Raffaella Guidobono, installed by the designer Lucio Lazzara and promoted by Moleskine to mark the launch of its new collection with an urban theme, the City Notebooks.





Stanfords - MAPS, paper, atlas, dreams.

Our visit starts on the evening of the 9th of October, the official opening event, at Stanfords, one of London's oldest bookshops, dedicated to maps and travel books. Although it was a private viewing, the bookshop was packed out. The London-based artists selected by the curator (after a tireless scouting expedition at leading art schools) were all enthusiastic about the overall impact of their works. One of them, Chris Dent, a young author of an intense illustrated sketchbook with an urban theme, describes his passion for drawing large cities, his predilection for highly detailed graphic descriptions and his inspired obsession with New York. Antoine Cossé, a French illustrator, admits to having used Moleskines for years and that he had no problems at all in producing the work for the exhibition: all he had to do was supply his notebook bulging with ideas for pictures. Simonetta Capecchi, presenting her Ustica Diary, painted on a Moleskine containing watercolour paper, mentions her passion for travel diaries, which she has even transferred onto the web, creating a blog entitled [inviaggiocoltaccuino](#). One of the most popular works at this event was the Japanese notebook by the Iranian Maira Kalman, that walks slowly on tiptoe, page after page, with different pair of shoes, right foot/left foot. Among the visitors, a young architect, flicking through the notebooks with interest, says "the great thing about this kind of exhibition is its sensory, tactile appeal. You're never asked to touch the works of art you see, in fact it's usually prohibited. Here you're asked to look through them, nose around, and it's great to be able to feel the actual texture of a work of art".



The Conran Shop – SUGGESTIONS, tales, sketches, letters.

The public opening was in the Conran Shop on the evening of Tuesday, the 10th of October. The atmosphere, less cosy than at Stanfords, was more like a traditional vernissage, perhaps because of the aesthetic power emanating from each item on display. There's rather a crowd in front of the showcases, perhaps because it takes a fair amount of time to look at some of the notebooks; one example is the poetry selection by Anne Freud – including the wonderful *Les plaisirs de la porte* by Francis Ponge. Yet we are also captivated by the notebook of the director and composer Mike Figgis, a real hotbed of ideas, and by the entertaining sentimental diary about London of the Argentine graphic designer Nerina Fernandez. She admits to having discarded her previous work (about the Falklands War), because she felt it was “too antagonistic”. And again, the notebook of Javier Marías shows the stream of consciousness of his thoughts: the handwritten Moleskine of the famous Spanish writer has no specific pathway, but it's rather a small literature event, a metaphor of space that invites us to imagine the layered strata of a dream, resisting the unavoidable eternal loss of memory. The Italian artist Girolamo Marri presents an uncut Moleskine installed on a small scale that registers no weight. When we ask him about it, he says that it represents the lack of weight on the support of a work that has not yet been created.

At the Conran Shop there are also long showcases containing individual works produced on fold-out notebooks which deserved to be displayed “unfolded”. They include the Moleskine of Stefano Faravelli, with illustrations of an enchanting diary about a trip to the Far East, and the inspired work by Abigail Hunt, who cut the paper according to the twists and turns of the River Thames and other water courses based on the routes taken from the A to Z of London. It is very easy to lose yourself among all the pages that make up this unusual, multi-faceted portrait of London. Walter Benjamin would have been enthusiastic about this.



Waterstones – DISCOVERIES, portraits, inventions, photography.

On the third floor of the huge Waterstones in Piccadilly, a stage of Detour is dedicated to discoveries, portraits and photographs.

Of all the Moleskines on show, one that stands out is the incredible collection of portraits by Antonio Jorge Gonçalves, created by cutting out the profiles of faces from the edges of the pages in this journal, renamed the City Nosebook.

The Swedish fashion designer Liselotte Watkins depicted a day in her life with dog and boyfriend, in a highly sophisticated Moleskine storyboard that every girl would like to own.

The sculptor Patrick Goddard, author of an autobiographical notebook with shady undertones, is thrilled. “What comes out of the sum total of all these works put together is just amazing” he says as he walks around the showcases.

A young editor from a publishing house specialising in graphic novels asks what will happen to the notebooks after the event. She is told that some will be returned to their owners, others have been donated to the non-profit organisation [lettera27](#) recently founded to support the right to education, training and more generally access to knowledge, particularly in disadvantaged areas of the world.





Artwords – TRACKS, memory, details.

The notebook of May Cornet is in a well-deserved position all on its own, at Artwords, the small, sophisticated art bookshop in the Whitechapel Art Gallery. In her notebook, May, a young and talented conceptual artist (if blood is thicker than water she should fulfil her promise, because she is the granddaughter of Lucien Freud) displays a series of faces cut out of the centre of each page, each surrounded by a different mane of hair, usually in a flurry of inky swirls.

Just now at the Victoria and Albert Museum there is an exhibition of the notebooks of Leonardo, which in a certain sense is a kind of complement to the Detour Experience, a kind of continuation towards the roots of human intelligence contained in a notebook.

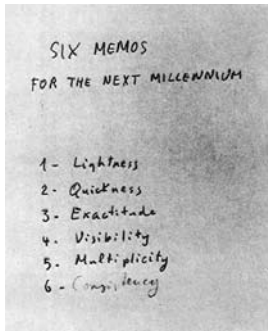
It is strange, but faced with Leonardo's sketch, "Water pouring from a culvert" depicting jets of water, we cannot fail to notice its resemblance to the curls of hair drawn by Cornet. No coincidence that the showcase in which her notebook is kept bears this verse by T. S. Eliot: "And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time".



Notes for this millennium

At the end of the Detour Experience, the page of another notebook comes to mind. The page reproduced at the beginning of Norton Lectures by Italo Calvino, containing his six proposals for the current millennium:

SIX MEMOS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM



Lightness

Quickness

Exactitude

Visibility

Multiplicity

Consistency



If the connections are not casual but the result of forms of intelligence rebounding through time and space, we could say that Calvino's timeless advice is perfectly summarised in the Detour Experience. **Multiplicity**, then, seventy variations on a theme, seventy completely different answers to the question posed by the blank pages. Lightness: a concept that recurs, sometimes in a metaphysical sense, as in Hunt's work in which material was taken away, or in concrete representations such as Marri's Moleskine on scale. Again, **Quickness**, denoted by the rapid steps of Maira Kalman or by the rapid strokes of the notes taken for an exhibition on fragility by the architect Alessandro Mendini. Then **Exactitude**, which is revealed in works such as the extremely well-chosen poetry anthology selected by Anne Freud, or the ink details by Celia Squire. And **Visibility**, a concept that reappears everywhere, starting from the very concept of this exhibition which reveals what is not generally visible, such as an artist's notebook, and then goes further, including the works of people who have visualised their experiences through travel diaries and illustrated journals. Finally, there is **Consistency**, which comes from those who have worked on the subject, proving that a notebook is an infinitely creative medium, something you really can do anything with. Like Caterina Nelli, who made her Moleskine into a circular sculpture, or Henrik Potter who set a little bottle in the middle of the pages, or even Birgit Brenner who wove a canvas into the paper, sewing words and coloured yarns that go beyond the pages and come together in a ball of memories kept in the notebook's inner pocket.

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