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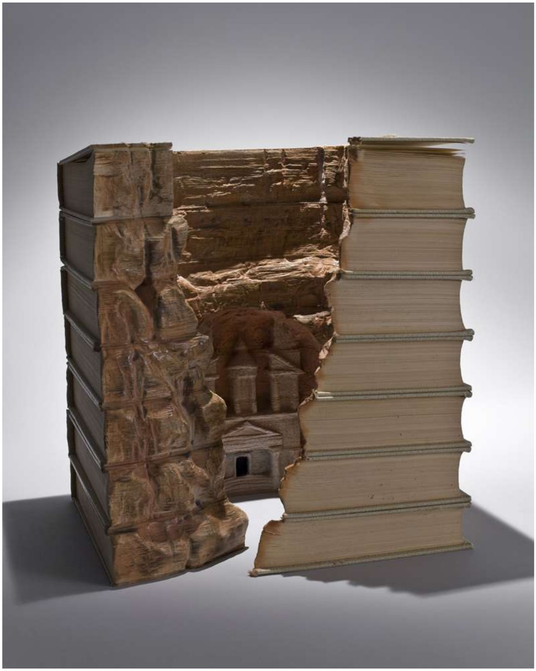
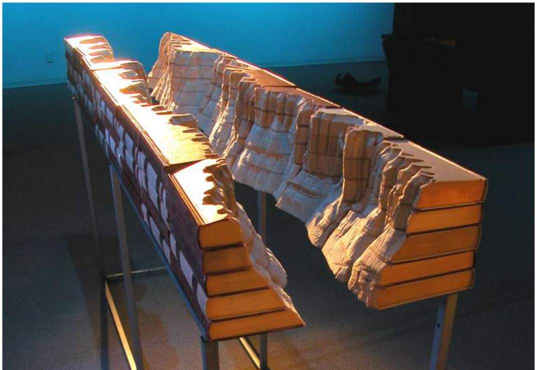
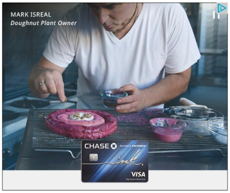
# Artist Interview: Guy Laramee's Carved Book Sculptures

by **Evan La Ruffa**







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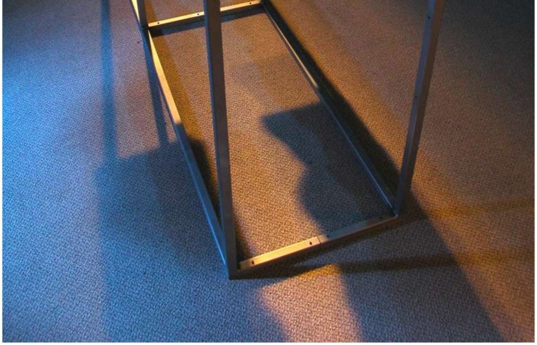

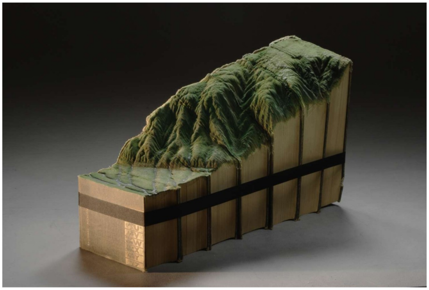

Guy Laramee is the exception to well, any rule. He's versed in theater writing and directing, contemporary music composition, musical instrument design and building, singing, video, scenography, installation, painting, literature and sculpture. What have you done lately?

It's particularly his carved sculptures that caught our eye, however a glance at his CV reveals enough accomplishment for multiple creative lifetimes. He's an anthropologist, has traveled to the Peruvian Amazon, and is clearly someone who lives richly in any endeavor he undertakes. Applying a critical eye, after all, is the job of the anthropologists and ethnographers, but also the musicians and artists of in any medium. After interviewing Guy, its clear he lives for the process, constantly examining from new angles and creating in the way that best brings his latest idea to life.

He's amazed us with his topographical literary sculptures, showing just how much he truly focuses on the intricate details. Whether chainsaw blades or brushes and hand tools, Guy finds the proper approach for each minute cut, giving dimension and stunning vibrance to sculptural canvases that not many had ever imagined. An idiom he offered, which I will always remember, says *"Each project dictates its medium."* Besides ringing true as an utter testament to that keen creative eye some of us learn to grow within ourselves, it proves that learning along the way is the basis for creative expression. Carving visual, sonic, and oftentimes three dimensional touch points that so beautifully ask questions while relaying experience, is precisely the process of a true artist. Guy Laramee is certainly such, and ahead he tells us more about the ideas, technicality, and creative process of actualizing worlds in the pages of a book.

**We have to start with your artist statement, it's truly stunning. You say, *"My work, in 3D as well as in painting, originates from the very idea that ultimate knowledge could very well be an erosion instead of an accumulation."* Go on a rant for us… The idea is clearly superb, but the technical aspect of carving books is impressive too. What's the process look like? What tools do you use?**

The process is long, but the longest part is to receive, so to speak, the inspiration. Which book, which type of landscape, and above all, what will be the spirit of this/these new pieces. For example I was heading towards a new series of mountain landscape when the misfortune of a trip to Ecuador riveted me to bed with a novel of Saramaga (A carverna / The Cave). It shifted the whole agenda. I had always wondered why people felt specially attracted to my little caverns. Now I know (lol).

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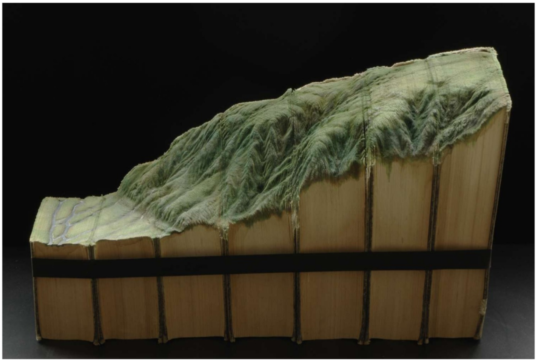
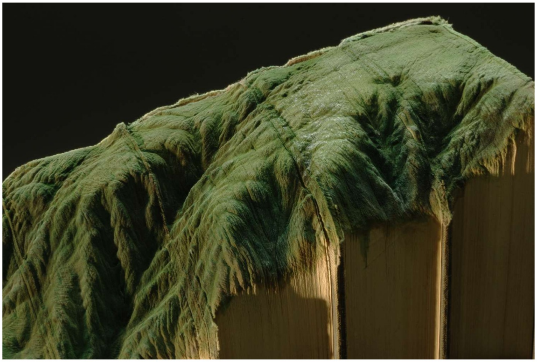
The carving itself is heavy work, but it is nothing compared to the sheer anguish of knowing what to do next. I use a whole array of tools, from chainsaw blades mounted on grinder wheels, to various burs mounted on a flexible shaft carver, to brushes and hand tools.



**How long does it take you to complete these topographical literary etchings?**

From 3 days to 3 months. It all depends. Again, maybe the virtuosity impresses, but it certainly hits a mark because the works are inspired. Not all of them, but I try to keep away of commercial art as much as possible. Each piece is the result of my penetrating our basic existential dilemma.



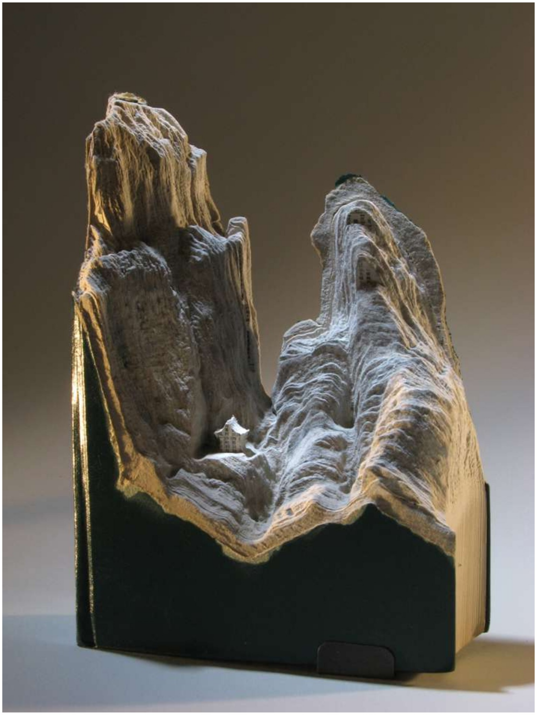
**You've done theater writing and directing, contemporary music composition, musical instrument design and building, singing, video, scenography, sculpture, installation, painting, and literature. Your experience seems like a testament to creativity being a way of life as opposed to defined by any specific medium. How do you see it?**

Well, a testament… or a birth certificate…! You see, I had no choice. The gamut of medium was never a choice. Each project dictates its medium. Each line of work has its voice. I often resist to that, thinking that I'm just another dilettante. Sometimes I have to resist, because I see that it's just some play of the mind, the mind trying to escape the difficulties and challenge of a given work. In fact, the whole "work", any work, is precisely that, it seems : a struggle between continuity and change. Knowing when to keep on and when to change is called wisdom, they say, and I am far from it…

**As someone who's been active creatively for decades, how do you view the emergence and evolution of technology in an age of fast information? Help or hindrance? How has it affected the way you interact with fans of your work?**

That is a big question. The "progresses" in information technologies just reflect the evolution of our minds. We have more and more what can be called an "arborescent mind". We delight in the content of it, and we forget that there is an "outside" so to speak, to the content of mind.

Of course, one of the consequences of the evolution of our mind is the over-abundance of information. There is too much of it. As a consequence, we have more and more difficulty staying put, and thus we are less and less capable of seeing the mind per say, in all its convolutions. We are chained to content, and we reject everything that is not content. It will have some grave consequences in the future.

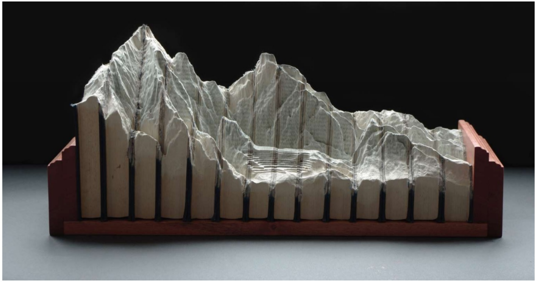


Regarding the reception of my work, well, now we have people who buy work on the net… Before it was through catalogue, now it is through electronically mediated images. Nothing changed, really. Its just that now the power of the image is titanic. One of the consequences is that people might have problems dealing with the actual work, any sculptural work – and even painting. Because, of course, the actual work does not move. You cannot zap it. Or lets say, you can but less easily. The force of visual art is that it may draw upon you the realization that you are the creator of the show. It is YOUR eye that makes it all, that jouneys through here and there in and around the artwork.

**That's certainly a worthy take. The speed of information definitely feels overwhelming to me too. It's also interesting to hear you refer to the viewer, who closes that loop or art and art appreciation; I couldn't agree more.**

**While your carvings are getting deserved attention, what of your creative output do you view as the most successful? I word it in that way only because often times I feel the resulting feeling one takes away from having created something is often a perception of the process as much as the final work…**

I personally think that my paintings are more authentic, more powerful, artistically speaking. They reach a more tenuous, more existential aspect of life, and are thus more demanding. Also, paintings can hardly be assessed on the web. You have to be with them, face to face.



**“Grand Larouse” and “El amor por las montanas” both make google maps on the new iPad look like Sim City circa 1995. Many kudos man… they are truly incredible. What has eroded from your mind/psyche that has allowed you to live a better life?**

What gradually eroded from my mental life is the fascination for knowledge. I mean, the obsession with facts. I wrote a 352 pages thesis in anthropology and that was it. The title of one of my pieces is “All Ideas Look Alike”. Once you see ideas for what they are – bubble in the surface of your mind – you no longer can believe any of them as you used to do. If I would suggest an antidote to fanaticism and dogmatism, try this one. Try seeing the common flavor that runs through all ideas, regardless of their content, shape or provenance. It gives the creeps at first, you can even get seriously depressed. After all, what we call “the world” or “our world” is nothing but a set of belief.

But the good news is that if you get just a snippet of that feeling, you get a new life. You get a new ground. Perception, direct perception – percepts without concepts – is first the face of this new ground. Then you realize that even perception is always tinted with ideas. And then you get REAL depressed. But this is the price of freedom. Depression should be accepted and lived through, without pills as much as possible. For what we call “depression” is but the face of getting to term with the Unknowable.