

paper art

photography

writing

isabenz
buell



Isabell has been a member of *PaperWEIGHT* since 2002 and was the newsletter editor from November 2005 until summer 2010. A few years ago *PaperWEIGHT* members were asked to answer some questions for publication in the newsletters. The following are Isabell's answers from 2006:

**How long have you been using and playing with paper?
What made you start in the first place?**

I blame my Dad. Firstly, he trained as a painter and decorator and had made a beautiful sample book during his apprenticeship. His class was trained by a local artist and this book of samples was like a treasure: I was only allowed to look at it on special occasions but I often thought of the book and the images and it inspired me when I was a small child.

Later my Dad re-trained and worked for the local newspaper. We always had huge rolls of waste paper from his work in the house and early on I became fascinated with the idea of making all sorts of things from paper and discarded newspapers. I still have one of my first craft books: 'Basteln mit Zeitungspapier' which I bought in 1975!



**What do you create with/ from paper?
Do you produce work in a series or one-offs?**

I make artists' books and paper sculptures. Most of my pieces are one-offs.

**Did you start artistic life with a different medium?
Are you still using other media?**

My background is in expressive arts, using dance, drama and other art forms in counselling and self-development, working with individuals and groups. I started to be interested in photography in my late teens and taught darkroom techniques and photography in a rehab centre for disabled adults in Germany in the 80's. I also write poetry, stories, flash fiction etc and use both, my own text and images in most of my paper art.



What are the qualities you like about paper?

The variety, the feel of it, how versatile it is, its unexpected strength...

What is your workspace like? Are you neat and precise in your work environment or is it creative chaos?

Most of the time there is a small path through all sorts of stuff that leads to my computer and my work surface. Every now and then I attempt to sort my studio into a neat and tidy environment but give up when it all gets too overwhelming! This is so embarrassing.

How do the seasons effect your work: is winter a useful time for certain things and spring etc. for others?

If I'm busy I prefer it if it's bad weather, never mind what time of year. It's difficult for me to work outside: either bits of paper get blown away or it is too sunny to see my laptop screen properly. Either way I don't get anything done when it's nice. Fortunately I live in Scotland!!!

The only exception is my photographic work. I do that in any weather and have often come home completely drenched.

Do you have themes and if you do, what are they? Have they chosen you?!

Themes can be influenced by a lot of different elements: it could be the quality of a sheet of paper or the colour of it. Often I am interested in a subject which I then research and explore. Some things I make just because I think it'll be fun to do (like my paper stilettos).



What is the most challenging piece of work you have made and why?

Always the one I work on at present. I want to move on to the next as I don't like the making part of being an artist. Ideally I would have a group of 'little helpers' that complete the work for me.

More challenging than that: 'Seashell on a Sea Shore', a one-off artists' book: Each page had to be cut 1 mm smaller than the other, I think there are 248 pages, or maybe 272!? They then had to be sewn onto two ribbons. I would have loved to have given up a few times.

What is your most favourite piece and why?

Usually the piece of work I'm planning. I love that stage when anything is possible and I can spend a lot of time thinking about the way I want to start the project and how to proceed. In my mind it can be complicated, time-consuming and sometimes takes over my life. Reality usually hits me when I start looking for the material: I then have to admit that I don't like making things and I try to cut corners.

There are exceptions though and some of my boxes 'The Chocolate Journey', my 'Egyptian Treasures' and 'Love Letters' are all part of that. Possibly because I didn't have deadlines, there was no brief and no expectations.



Have you had any ridiculous/ bizarre/ strange experiences as a result of doing your artwork? Please give examples.

Yes, an incident that my partner and I refer to as 'near death by chocolate!' I was finishing the book for the 'Chocolate Journey' piece, sewing the final binding. One minute my partner walked past me in the kitchen and everything was fine. Just seconds later he could hear me scream for help. When he came running back there was blood everywhere. I had stuck the end of a pair of scissors under the thread to tighten it and pulled so hard that the thread broke. I had put so much effort into my attempt that the scissors shot up and went straight into my nose. It was horrendous and painful but I was quick enough not to spill any blood on the book!

Is art your sole source of income? How much time do you spend on your art work?

I have a part-time job in Edinburgh, the number of days vary. I do my art work on my days off and often at weekends.

If you could choose a famous artist, current or historical, to paint your portrait, who would it be?

Banksy: He's done it already!!!

Who inspires you and why?

Michael Flatley (River Dance) – an enormously driven person who does not give up and pushes himself and his team to the limit. A bit extreme for my liking, but I would love to be a bit more energetic at times.



What keeps you motivated?

I always have ideas; they never seem to stop and even though there are too many to follow through, they keep me going. American book artist Keith Smith describes this 'problem' well: "No matter how fast I work I can never make all the books dancing in my head". There are also always new projects coming up, too tempting not to get involved.