

Thorsten Dennerline and Susan Sgorbati

by *Julie Bernatz*, from *Volume 7, Number 6*

Edition Review

Thorsten Dennerline and Susan Sgorbati, *Emergent Forms: Visual Improvisation* (2017)

Letterpress, woodblock and stone lithography, with linen, foil-stamped cover and elements resting on a CNC basswood-milled box, 9 1/2 x 15 1/4 inches. Edition of 30 sets, plus 10 as individual volumes. Includes *Pattern*, letterpress flip book, 3 x 6 inches; *Memory*, woodcut and letterpress folded paper sculpture, 8 x 6 inches; *Landscape*, five-page book, stone lithography, 3 3/4 x 8 1/2 inches (closed), 37 inches (open); and *Dream*, letterpress on gampi paper, 6 x 12 inches. Printed and published by The Bird Press, Bennington, VT, with additional letterpress by Tank Graphics, Hadley, MA. Price on request.

The artist Thorsten Dennerline has a particular vision and vocabulary—visceral, dreamy and intentionally open-ended. “I try to deal with unexpected, grotesque and/or poetic subjects,” he explains.¹ Painfully personal, and also surreal, his work can take the form of naked anguished figures contorting in space, disconnected body parts, sinister animal heads and menacing housewares.

The format of a book calms and organizes this pain, and requests engagement. Books beg to be touched, their contours examined, their pages turned. Dennerline likes to create this temptation. He revels in the details of fine paper, texture, edge and the gathering of all into a whole. His books frequently involve other contributors (his treatment of the poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky won *Art in Print’s* 21st Prix de Print (Jan–Feb 2017)). His new work, *Emergent Forms*, is a collaboration with the choreographer Susan Sgorbati, whose work has focused on “emergent improvisation”—the way structures arise spontaneously in certain complex systems. (She cites evolution as one example.)²

Lift the linen cover to find a written introduction and a wooden platform on which four publications lie crisscrossed: *Pattern*,



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Memory, Landscape and Dream.

Pattern is a letterpress flipbook in which amorphous shapes in three pale colors move, split and grow, transforming at whatever speed is chosen by the viewer/handler.

Memory is a woodcut and letterpress sheet splashed with large pale pink spirals. It is meant to be assembled into an irregular paper sculpture. When viewed from above or from the side, the shapes are visible, but they shift and disappear as the sculpture is turned. From one angle the piece resembles the head of an animal (a wolf? a pig? a bird?). From other angles, fun-house spaces are created where the imagination can wander.

Landscape employs stone lithography to produce five translucent pages. The dark shapes are set off slightly to create a cloudy perspective when the booklet is closed. When the booklet is opened to its full width, “a movement is initiated”—as the book’s description reads—“an extended arm gesture as the horizon is pulled and expanded.”

In *Dream*, colored, letterpress-printed shapes (serpents? fossils?) dance on and through the sheer pages; as they are turned the shapes appear to jump around, resembling human arms and legs in motion.

Artist’s books create small theaters of private experience. *Emergent Forms* is a lengthy show: the unboxing, the turn of the cover, the lifting and handling of each piece; flipping of pages; the demands of instructions; folding, sharing, stepping back, interacting again; the careful cleanup; the invisible pull of the magnetic closure. It is a performance to experience over and over.



1. Artist’s Statement: <http://centralbookingnyc.com/galleries/gallery-1-artist-books-prints/artists-work/thorsten-dennerline/> [↔]
2. <http://emergentimprovisation.org/Essay-on-Emergent-Improvisation.html> [↔]

