

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

DELANO

THE BOOK THAT BLOWS MIND

June 2, 2018



On 31 May, the renowned, New York based photographic artist Accra Shepp inaugurated his latest project, “The Windbook”, in the courtyard of the National Library of Luxembourg. Until November 2018, visitors can contemplate the unique, large-scale book, exposed outdoors and at the mercy of Mother Nature's elements.

It all started in 2014 when former board members at the International School in Luxembourg (ISL), Bill and Kelly Weber-Jones, financially sponsored the American photographer to teach a course on his craft. “I’ve been living in Luxembourg for 10 years, I wanted to give something back to the community,” Bill told Delano.

Shepp worked with 20 ISL students where he instructed them on how to photograph people in public squares and collect short narratives from them about their personal lives and backgrounds. “I thought it was a very interesting idea for Accra to explore the local mentality in terms of how people feel about different topics that he covers in the book,” explained Bill. “Hopefully if it also helps the local Luxembourgish community understand the expat community more, and vice versa, that’s a good thing,” he added.

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

For four years, the artist whose work can be found in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the New York Public Library and numerous other locations, gathered hundreds of ISL students' narratives. Ten stories were selected and put together in the 900-page book. "The school was really interested, and I was really interested in exploring the concept of national identity and ethnicity because Luxembourg is trying to sort that out. [...] What does it mean to be European? I selected the narratives that seem to work with that topic," Shepp said at the exhibit opening.

The stories--comprised of photos, narratives, drawings and postcards--can be understood discontinuously. Therefore, no matter how many pages the wind turns, the story can still be understood. Pages are different but at the same time very similar and linked to each other.

One of the stories is about an elderly woman from Mondorf-les-Bains who played guitar and sang along in a park. Because she mentioned the World War II during her childhood, Shepp found out about the Camp Ashcan, a prisoner of war camp where Nazis were held. The photographer incorporated the story of Ashcan in the woman's story. "I found it interesting there is this other context or subtext of this woman's history," he explained, adding: "I took this kind of liberty when I created the book, it's not exactly as the people spoke but it is true nevertheless."

Shepp insisted that only the wind can turn the pages. The book does not obey people's bidding but instead the larger forces of the world, thereby serving as reminders of human limitation. "Years ago, I was living in Chicago where there is a lot of wind and I imagined a book outside, waiting for the wind to turn the pages. Something in dialogue with nature," explained Shepp.

One of the ISL students, Maylee Goïot, who worked with Shepp in 2014, told Delano, "My experience with Accra was very interesting, as his approach was much more free spirited than the constraints you have in a high school art class. I learned about the different angles of photography and focusing on little details." When asked about "The Windbook", Goïot said, "It not only shows the concept of a book standing out in its true form, but it contains the emotions and feelings of an international community and what they experienced at that time."

Once the pages have fused together in November 2018, "The Windbook" will be exhibited as a work of art at the new National Library of Luxembourg in Kirchberg.

A webcam will also be part of the project, allowing viewers to see images of the book remotely.