

THIS BOOKMAKER THINKS SMALL — PERFECTLY SMALL

Jill Timm is a bookmaker — not the Vegas sports gambler kind, but the (very small) publishing company kind. She makes “artists books.”

Her first attempt in the fifth grade used a board, cardboard and staples, and she later dabbled in variations on the craft. The books created today with her array of lifetime art skills are bought up by private collectors, corporations, museums and libraries.

What defines Jill’s books is that they are tiny. Miniscule. Diminutive. Small.

These hand-held artworks are striking in their originality and why-can’t-I-do-that simplicity. They push our common definition of “book” by radically altering the viewing process, size, type, materials and binding we’re used to. Form melds with content; you can feel the subject as you gaze with wonder at whatever clever medium stands for pages.

Why small? Why few? Jill admits to a short attention span: “One-of-a-kind books really suit me; once I solve the initial problem I’m ready to bounce on to something else.”

She opens an exquisite dark brown suede box, revealing an arrowhead imbedded in a rock-textured clay cover. Then she unfolds, accordion style, a series of colorful palm-sized depictions of Southwest cliff art.

Another book holds transparent photo plates of tree leaves, another reveals surreally digitized train cars. Ironically straightforward, most contain only her original art, minimal



accompanying text, and the colophon — an inscription showing the title, artist and date.

The thrill is in the imaginative shape and tactile touch to the hand.

And the size matters: whatever we find charming about new kittens and puppies applies to these little gems.

The pale and carpeted (small) studio in Jill’s (compact) Wenatchee home is spotless and organized down to the pencil tip, the x-acto blade. Bins of books-in-progress reach to the ceiling, work tools and materials like wood, leather, leaves, shells, handmade paper, cloth, sand and beads are in reach.

Jill (also compact) learned via local rockhounds how to find, cut flat, hone and polish exactly the right-sized rocks for a multi-edition project. They became (matchbook-sized) book covers.

After working as artist and art teacher, Jill earned an MFA that landed her a plum position with IBM in Austin Texas, with “the biggest paycheck I’d ever imagined.” But then she wandered into a life-changing convention of book artists, admired the

genre she’d sidelined for decades, and was hooked again on the creative possibilities.

Her bookmaking restarted in a burst of confidence, and reflected her love of the natural world. She zigzagged the country doing research, contacting buyers.

Jill says, “I was free to live anywhere I wanted, so any place I traveled to, selling my books, I viewed as a potential home.” One late summer afternoon in 2002, cresting the ridge on Highway 2 and first glimpsing the Columbia River Valley, “I had an intuitive feeling that this was a really neat place.”

She’s watched Wenatchee flourish as newcomers like herself made the good choice. Balancing the business and the pleasure of art, hiking the close-by hills — Jill stays busy at work making this her home, and making perfect little books.

See www.mysticalplaces.com for more about Jill’s work and an assortment of her artists books. The downtown Wenatchee library is also displaying several of her pieces this winter.

— by Susan Lagsdin