

ELAINE INTERVIEWING ELENA AND OTTO

ELENA

We came from England – I have to say that it was a great place to be and to explore, I have beautiful memories, we have our friends. At the same time came a moment that we had to decide and just to be adventurous. Otto and me speak French fluently and we love French culture. When I was 18 I spent a month with a lovely French family with the family of my pen pal, that was near Nantes. That was where I had a first opinion about it. We decided we would like to live in Brittany after several trips – discovering the culture and the beauty of the place – Morbihan, Finistère, Cotes d’Armor. Landscapes, little villages, the small towns – everything was pretty for us. We even created small sketches in a book to remember where we passed by. Where many artists, painters, poets have passed by and were inspired by Brittany and they created work. I loved a very particular place we passed by – the area is called Camaret-sur-Mer. It is in Finistère. I recommend if anyone wants something different, to pass by. So there are ruins with part of the structure of a very particular building in the Baroque style, and part of the ruins is a structure of a window and as you approach the place, it’s a manor, you see a frame with a part of a seascape. The view is breath-taking. It’s a panoramic view of the seaside, beaches, rocks, trees and the place belonged to a poet – a symbolist poet [????] and he welcomed artists and writers. What happened to his life was a bit bad and he died of a broken heart.... But it’s a nice place to visit.

And I would like to mention also, the place of Carnac where [???] the poet lived. He has collected an amazing poetic collection. And I would like to mention an artist’s book with 12 poems and a collaboration with the artist [???].

OTTO

Gouarec was the first place we came to pretty much. We liked the village – we thought it was a bit more lively than the other villages – there seemed to be a bit more going on. People in the streets and things. A café, a small restaurant, and a campsite and cycling tourists, so it had a bit of sort of cultural dimension to it.

ELAINE

So I gather you’ve got 2 businesses here. Elena with Editions ??????? and Otto, your printing of the folded books which almost look like origami. Elena perhaps you could tell us about your...

ELENA

My practice? So I am an artist, painter, print-maker and book artist like Otto. Editions ??????? is referring to a limited edition of artists books and prints. I can tell you about my last work which I was creating during the confinement. It is an artist’s book of 24 coloured, hand-painted ????????. It is visual poetry with references to life and memory. ??????? or stencil is a very traditional French hand-painting method that allows you to create multiples. It can be found in French art and illustrations in rare books. This process is close to my ability in expression because I can create textures and painting in shapes.

ELAINE

So, Otto, what do you call your business by the way?

OTTO

The Workshop is called Salamandre. The reason why it is called Salamandre is because we found Salamanders in the garage and they lived underneath the floor and things like that. This is what we converted to a print-making workshop. I had a print-making workshop in England as well – but this one is bigger and better. So fairly large screen printing presses and various other equipment for making books. So I'm a book artist, meaning that I make all aspects of the book. I write, I make the images, I print and I bind and I distribute as well – so I'm the publisher as well. I'm an illustrator from what I've learned at university and that sort of developed into book-making, because it's nice to be able to put your work into a context like a book, and then be able to produce it in certain amounts – so we're talking about editions of maybe 50 or 100 or 200, something like that. So this is what we are trying to make here now. As well as that, once the place is all set up, there's a gîte next to it – a small place where people can live. So we are hoping that in time, people will come, other artists will come for residencies and they will maybe stay here for a week or two or something, maybe during the summer and do some work using the machines.

ELENA

And in addition to artists residencies, we'll soon be doing print-making courses for people living around who are interested to get a deeper knowledge of print-making techniques, lino-cuts, wood-cuts and other techniques.

ELAINE

So, just to go back, both of you working here in your different aspects of printing and book-making... but have you ever considered collaborating on a book together?

OTTO

The short answer is no. I mean the thing is we both do pretty much the same kind of thing. We're visual artists. We make a bit of text, we make prints, we make books. The more likely scenario for collaboration for us would be to find, let's say, a writer or poet possibly in French or in Breton even, to get involved with the local culture and collaborate in that way, or possibly musicians, you know, that would make a more interesting collaboration for us as well as I suppose, rather than competing on the same sort of project if you like. So, for example, I made this book about Gouarec, I was thinking of text for it possibly. At the moment it is just images, but I quite like working with text as well. It would be nice, for example, to have somebody who knows some stories to do with Gouarec.

ELAINE

Bearing in mind the restrictions that have been going on, where and how do you sell your books? It's obviously difficult at the moment when you haven't got any book fairs.

ELENA

We usually exhibit our work in galleries – mostly me, because of the nature of my work. There will soon be exhibitions where I have sent my work. It is mostly mini-print exhibitions. One is in Switzerland and also another one in Japan.

OTTO

Well, as you say artist's book fairs have not been going on since the beginning of last year, but having said that I still have a distributor that sells books to shops, so that is still happening. The web sites are obviously still there with books for sale, and some people know about that. Then there is obviously Instagram. It's not the same – I mean with the book fairs there's a physical... the tactile thing is very important and we very much looking forward to getting back to that.

ELAINE

So how can we find out more about what you're doing here?

ELENA

If they are interested to see our work and our books, they can visit our web site which is editions?????.fr for me and www.ottographic.fr

ELAINE

Well thank you very much for your time.

ELENA AND OTTO

Thank you.