

## ***Orna Feinstein: In Full Bloom***

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*Papellibrium* is the most recent culmination of Orna Feinstein's explorations into materiality, process, and space. Formally trained as a scientist, the artist became preoccupied with visual material early during her formative years. The desire to move beyond the laboratory or, better yet, expand upon science through visual reference later evolved into a career-shifting epiphany. Upon her arrival in Houston nearly three decades ago, Feinstein has been relentless in making up for lost time. She immediately set upon a studio practice path with formal studies that earned her a certificate in studio arts from the Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and an undergraduate degree in sculpture from the University of Houston.

When I first met the artist as a student, she already possessed a maturity and visual articulation, matched only by her unyielding exploration into process-oriented art and its presentation. Working primarily in printmaking, she has explored a range of materials from monoprints on paper to multi-layered relief and freestanding works combining fiber and print on Plexiglas. Her compositions, while abstract in nature, integrate the visual language of her former endeavor as a scientist. In encountering her work as a viewer, your unconscious mind bends around the almost imperceptible beauty of the molecular cells and alchemical symbols she renders in relief. The effect is often aligned with that of Op Art or Optical Art, where movement of the static image is optically rendered through the creation of patterns, color, and/or compositions. The artist, however, is less interested in "implied movement" than the nearly invisible biology that exists around us. And, it is from this conceptual frame that the artist has persisted in creating discrete two-dimensional works as well as more large-scale installation work.

In her recent survey, *Orna Feinstein: Now and Zen – Fifteen Years of Contemporary Printmaking*, the artist has proved that her evolution has been a seamless one that has focused on the immutable nature that surrounds us. The survey has also served to bring more focus on the totality of the artist's work beyond the pristine gallery. Not featured in the survey was Feinstein's more playful approach toward material and

process using found and appropriated materials. In truth, the artist's experimentation with appropriating ordinary material objects has existed in tandem with her more iconic work. For almost a decade, Feinstein has probed the use of installation work as a mode of responding to the character of architectural space rather than architecture as simply a venue where existing work is presented. The catalyst of her "call and response" to space began in 2008 when invitations to her exhibition at the Museum of Printing History in Houston were rendered useless due to the impact of Hurricane Ike. Rather than simply trash the invitations, the artist recycled them as material objects, sewing nearly 10,000 of the invitations into a vivid and imaginative garden.

In 2012, the artist produced another site-specific installation entitled *Multi-librium* at Box 13, an alternative art space in Houston. And, over the course of the four years since the presentation of *Multi-librium*, the artist has accumulated thousands more of outdated invitations pulled from shelves of art galleries, alternative spaces, and museums. *Papellibrium* is the most expansive of the series to date and draws upon the lifecycle of nature and material. Variations in the geometry, shape, and color in the installation have affirmed the artist's predilection toward the organic and the alchemy of the natural world. As with her more discrete works, Feinstein is quick to incorporate color and composition in the service of optical wonderment.

Rather than the implied movement of optical art, the artist's installation embraces the immutable and imperceptible rhythm of the natural world. The singular material object—postcard, exhibition announcement, and invitation—dissolves into the vastness of space where it literally and figuratively transforms into a sea of wild flowers amid a backdrop of blue. The timing of the exhibition's opening to coincide with the advent of spring helps to complete the transformative moment and brief suspension of belief. The artist's nuanced, yet pointed discourse on the fragility of our ecology, though not readily apparent, lies just below the surface of wonder.

The artist's love of process and material in response to the architecture of space overrides the intentionality of dogmatic politics, but it is precisely the use of this material or, rather, the sheer quantity of it that calls into question the creation of waste in the service of art. Luckily for us, Feinstein has honed her skill in the

appropriation of this material with such a deftness that we want for it. While *Papellibrium* distinguishes itself from her more signature style, it is no doubt an extension of Feinstein's pursuit to overlay the totality of her experiences as both scientist and artist into new territory. The act of playing upon the senses—of transforming space and the material object through a longing for the organic (and in this case, advent of spring)—proves that we are all yearning for the beauty of the natural world. This longing gives way to an agency of unlimited possibilities that not only influences how we move through the world, but also what we leave behind.

As the latest iteration in the artist's ongoing series, *Papellibrium* is the artist's most ambitious installation to date. While the scale has shifted, Feinstein's conceptual underpinnings remain deeply rooted in an artistic investigation that creatively stitches the visual language of organic science to explorations into material, process, and space. The culmination of the artist's journey thus far has not distanced itself from her earlier endeavors in the alchemical sciences, but rather strengthened its place as the very foundation of her creative vision. The resulting imprint of that vision as rendered in this project is a pulsating and vivid imitation of the natural world in bloom.