



American gothic

ARTISTS' BOOKS Emma Hill looks at pop-up images of deserted dungeons and dark stairways and considers warnings of an approaching storm

Sometimes ideas are hard won. *Shadow of Descent* – a collaboration between the American artist and curator Maddy Rosenberg and the Austrian artist Hubert Sommerauer, has been almost five years in the making. A small, black and white pop-up book combines the artists' drawings with extracts from a late 19th century short story *Pickman's Model* by H P Lovecraft. The story is set in the city of Boston and describes the work of an artist whose paintings depict the horror of the city's slums and the depravity that lurks within them. Rosenberg and Sommerauer have removed the references to the literal place so that the excerpt becomes a more dreamlike narrative, located in no particular time frame. The text is printed on different folds of a square page binding, which opens out rather like a Rubix cube, forcing the reader to turn the book this way and that, to reveal different vistas of the deserted city portrayed.

The engineering involved in making the publication is marvellous. Five separate pages of digitally printed drawings have been hand-assembled and cut, so that the book leads you through a series of sombre archways, down Escher-like stairways, into darkened cellars and

dungeons. Rosenberg's individual works have often had this rather gothic atmosphere. The tiny book *Grotesque, London* is the shape and size of a stone and contains a series of hand drawn stone gargoyle heads, each one irregular and bound together with a leather string, while *Reptiles* utilizes a series of architectural details, reproduced by hand-litho and cut through to frame a pair of baroque, carved reptile heads. In *Shadow of Descent*, the artists' graphic language is so complementary and the book designed to give so many multi-faceted viewpoints, that it takes some time to distinguish that the visual passages have in fact been drawn as two individual, panoramic sections, placed back to back. The book benefits from being kept, in all other senses, simple. The austere black and white images, with their different textures and grey tones, reinforce a sense of this cold and forbidding, imagined city. The juxtapositions are seamless and enormously clever, creating a three-dimensional landscape through which the mind can wander.

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Both artists' books are available from the Bookartbookshop, Pitfield Street, London N1 6HB, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 7608 1333 www.bookartbookshop.com

Images, left to right
Shadow of Descent 2004 by Maddy Rosenberg
Spread from *Projected Fears of the Broken*
Elderly 2004 by A. C. Berkeiser