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## REVIEWS & PRESS

Alison Knowles. *Footnotes*. Granary Books, 2000.



**Schuman, Joan. "Stepping Stones: *Footnotes* Offers Fresh Glimpses Into Life." *Tucson Weekly*.**

It would seem an easy exercise to write one's observations of the world, sprinkle in found texts or images, collage these journal entries with Scotch tape, accompany them with abstract line drawings and call it a book as Alison Knowles has done with her newest work, *Footnotes: Collage Journal 30 Years*. But when the quotidian of life is exposed, there's a question of motivation. Who will care to share your minutia? You might scrap the idea altogether.

Ever the intrepid conceptual artist, Knowles has braved this task to completion. She has taken the flotsam of her life, her travels, her aleatory snippets about things as unremarkable as a street sign, and coalesced them into a stunning and accessible art book. She is enamored enough of the world as it passes by her—or she, through it—to expose the joys often missed. And we, her thirsty readers, surreptitiously delight in voyeurism not often permitted.

Knowles' work sits squarely within the realm of artists and writers who are fascinated with the mundane—whether it is the found object or the dredged emotion. Joseph Cornell's art boxes of dead birds and beach detritus come to mind as do May Sarton's published journals. This kind of work has flourished in the last 40 years as the art and literary worlds have loosened their formal boundaries. New ways of aesthetic communication have evolved with installations, performances, constructions and especially books that skewer the convention of narrative.

Knowles was a pioneer of this formal and conceptual restructuring. Beginning in the 1960s, the locus of her art-making was with Fluxus and Something Else Press—performances and installations in the streets of America and Europe as well as artist books offering a range of innovations. Throughout her career, from her monumentally scaled, walk-through homes (*Big Book*, *The Book of Bean*) to her computer-instigated dwelling ("The House of Dust"), Knowles has been an honored member of the avant-garde.

*Footnotes* is the tracing of where her feet—as well as her hands, mind, eyes and ears—have taken her for 30 years. It is a collection of stolen glossolalia, eavesdropped from her travels through her neighborhood or to such far-flung places as Japan and Germany. These "voices," as well as purloined images and text, have been tucked into red Windsor and Newton notebooks. For this publication, the 5-by-7-inch pages have been torn out of the original journals, attached to clean sheets of paper, and enhanced by drawing around the tape. A further enhancement is the addition, on the facing page of

each of these tiny collages, of a range of new materials: road sign text, instructions on how to fold an envelope, recipes, warnings written on street cars, and words from other languages.

Knowles explains that these pages—sparse text on white paper—exist to give the collages breathing space. At the bottom of many of these facing pages are the "footnotes" that provide a context for the events recorded.

Knowles is clearly fascinated with what her senses can consume of the world around her. By collecting a fragment of conversation not intended for recording, she exposes the irony and pathos of communication: "What time is it?" we asked. "I don't know, I only work here part-time."

My favorite entry of hers reveals a familiar urban rite, quite within the viewer's propriety of shared space. "Footnote 18" is a scruffy, handwritten memory, similar to the other 93 included in this work:

September, 11 p.m.: subway uptown... glancing down from the book/ I see shoes opposite/...phone # on shoes/ with her first and last name... young black girl...

Another entry recalls a simple African proverb: "if you don't know where you're going/ any road can take you/ there." This tear-out is accompanied by circular diagrams—stolen from book pages with the faint shadow of text behind it.

Knowles' quotes from writers (Breton, Cage, Stein); her recounting of dreams (voyeuristic, surreal, and filmic); her photo of an object embedded in street tar; her "blind drawings" where she looks away from the paper, sketching rapidly or slowly, make for a collection that reflects the mundane process of life. Knowles' art-making is fueled by the dissection of this process charting such familiar themes as presence and absence, memory and time.

What makes this book inviting to savor rather than a tedious insular collection of someone's diary pages is twofold. The visual tear-outs from her handwritten journals beckon us to taste her feast of life. But more than guilt-free voyeurism, *Footnotes* is not unlike a book of affirmations. Each time you flip through it, a different entry—despite its statement of the obvious—startles you to view the world anew.

**Princenthal, Nancy. "Review of *Footnotes*." *Art On Paper* (January/February 2001): 95.**

Alison Knowles's *Footnotes* (New York, Granary 2000, \$45) is also a travelogue of sorts. Subtitled "Collage Journal 30 Years," it is, Jerome Rothenberg writes in a "pre-face," an "accounting of where her feet (and hands and mind) have taken her" over that time. Pages from the notebooks that served as Knowles's visual/conceptual diary—they include drawings, written notes, and found material—were cut out and Scotch-taped to fresh sheets of paper for this book. They were further augmented with new material collected on a recent trip to Europe and annotated with explanatory footnotes (as promised in the title). A wordwork written for Knowles by John Cage in 1992 introduces this book and establishes its character, which, in keeping with Knowles's longstanding affiliations (Fluxus, Something Else Press), is playful, epigrammatic, chancy, and incisive.

*Nancy Princenthal regularly contributes this column to Art On Paper.*