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Art in Review; No More Drama: The Saga Continues

By **HOLLAND COTTER**

The Center for Book Arts
28 West 27th Street, third floor, Chelsea
Through June 24

The Center for Book Arts deserves a lot more attention than it gets. It's a combination of atelier, education workshop and conservation laboratory, with a small exhibition space. Its current group show, "No More Drama: The Saga Continues," fulfills two fundamental goals of the center: it introduces new artists and stretches the definition of book over several media.

The show -- organized by Edwin Ramoran, curator of Longwood Arts Project in the Bronx -- takes its theme from soap opera, as embodied in romance novels, comic books, films and Latin American fotonovelas. The original forms, with their high incidence of sex, violence and lovelorn emoting, might have made a steamy display on their own. But here their heat has been turned up further by artists pushing them in new directions.

Using the tradition of the handmade book, Matias Aguilar, Jaime Cortez, Alex Donis, Ivan Monforte and Domingo Nuño all take the comedic and pornographic potential of popular melodrama to extremes it doesn't usually reach. Chitra Ganesh's "Amnesia Remembers" gives South Asian comics a Sapphic spin, while Edwin González-Ojeda, Derek Jackson and Ethan Shoshan -- working on his own and with Carlo Quispe-Salgado -- leave few variations on gender blending unexplored.

Formally, the results are diverse, sometimes innovative. Lai Chung Poon folds her novels like origami; Claudia Joskowitz prints love stories on T-shirts. A photographic "book" by Emmy Catedral runs up a wall; one by Swati Khurana comes with elaborate frames. There's lots of collaboration: Gary Cap and Luis Serra join forces on an S-and-M guide in cartoon format, Megan Whitmarsh and Caroline Rankin on a line of tiny newsprint chapbooks, Ray Felix and Marcus Jones on a graphic novel some 200 pages long and growing.

As in life, sexual politics is inseparable from other politics. And Jacqueline Salloum's "Planet of the Arabs" makes perfect sense here. A DVD compilation of Arab stereotypes lifted from action films, it's an all-villain affair. Call it a movie or call it a book, but put it on your must-experience summer list.
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