

# ALARM

## Roz Leibowitz

By Emma Tramposch

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In Roz Leibowitz's estimation, making art is about "being in [correct] alignment to the cosmic show." However, her intricate pencil drawings and collages are not portrayals of a fantastical realm but rather depict a curious blend of vernacular culture relating to folk art and folk belief.

In particular, she is influenced by the Victorian sensibility of ideas and interiors. Her work is compelled by notions of womanhood as expressed in the pseudo-sciences of that period, a time when scientific rationality was emerging as a dominant world view.

She pays homage to the leading role of women in fringe movements like phrenology, spiritualism, utopianism, mental healing, mesmerism, and table rapping by casting them as the central characters in her work.

Leibowitz invokes simple formal devices that mimic Victorian illustration such as borders and captions, but the finished pieces do not attempt to be windows to another era. Instead, each of her images portrays an intimacy with history, memory and the past – themes running through the body of her work. In pencil-drawn snapshots like *Flower of the Eternal Imagination*, ornate frames reminiscent of lockets or pendants features scenes from an alternative visual family tree.

Having worked for several years as a librarian and reading specialist, Leibowitz's professional background in history, literature, and library science is a clear influence. She is an avid collector of books from the nineteenth-century occult and is inspired by European and American printed broadsides, pamphlets, and other ephemera like anonymous photographs. Several of her pieces are drawn on vintage paper with typing or previous drawings or sketches.

In *Advanced Course Lesson XV: Vibration* (2006), two women are enclosed in a circular border while selected text above their heads is edited by blackened pencil. These forms of erasure and inclusion from an inextricable link between the past life of the paper and its material present.

In Leibowitz's current pieces, there has been experimentation with paper piercing and incorporation of vintage sketches. She describes including these parts of previous drawings as

“vestiges” and “my form of collaboration with the past.” Cut-up text becomes the material for long skirts worn by the women in the *Dreambook* (2007). The paper in this piece is set like joinery and the vintage paper at the center is pierced to reveal the outline of a small dog in a tub.

Leibowitz has a personal blog that serves as a visual record of her work and an extension of her literary interests in the form of a sort of digital collage. Under one posting, an admirer has left a comment asking if she can be “pen friends” with the artist. Leibowitz kindly declines and graciously replies, “Thanks you, but I don’t have pen friends.” Considering her work, however, one imagines that in fact she has multiple personal acquaintances in pencil and paper – characters that she contacts on a regular basis. Leibowitz is in a friendly dialogue with paper ghosts.