

William Wiley: *Kali-fornia Dreamin*

In 2006, Magnolia Editions teamed with genre-busting maverick and California legend William Wiley to create an unprecedented edition of fine art buttons. Wiley is principally known for paintings and drawings that mingle surreal imagery with sly, philosophical and often hilarious bursts of text. An accomplished print-maker and sculptor who has created six tapestries to date with the Magnolia Tapestry Project, Wiley is a tireless innovator. His continued exploration of the intersections of various media is exemplified by the blend of written, painted, and printed elements in *Kali-fornia Dreamin*.

The work -- informally referred to around the studio as "Wiley's button box" -- arose from a serendipitous series of button-related phenomena. Magnolia co-director Donald Farnsworth lost his favorite political button and was unable to find a replacement. Young artist and button aficionado Mike Nava informed Farnsworth that button-making machines were available on the internet. Days later, Wiley visited Magnolia and mentioned that he had decorated a color proof of his *Creative War Map* tapestry with political buttons. It was only a matter of weeks before Magnolia's button-making operation commenced. On his next visit to the studio, Wiley was presented with a hardground etching plate inscribed with 40 button-size circles, inside each of which he placed a unique drawing. An edition of 40 etchings was printed from this plate, 20 of



From left: *40 Button Etching*, 2006, copper plate etching w/ watercolor, edition of 20; *Kali-fornia Dreamin*, 2006, etching & watercolor on buttons w/ leather box, 11 x 17 x 1.2 in. (with 1.75 in. buttons), edition of 20.

which were then hand-painted in watercolor by the artist. Ten of the color prints and ten of the black and white prints will be made into *Kali-fornia Dreamin* box sets; 20 will remain intact as the *40 Button Etching*.

In the case of the former, the individual circles are cut out and pressed into buttons at Magnolia using no adhesives. Wiley signs each steel pinback using an engraving tool. The buttons are then placed into protective plastic boxes and re-assembled in order inside custom boxes resembling books. These book boxes were created by John DeMerritt, the president of Hand Bookbinders of California. Each one is unique, using different colored leather and book cloth salvaged from past projects. The natural edge of the leather hide was used to create a non-traditional binding. Inside, a painted texture by Wiley has been digitally

reproduced as the background for a series of numbered phrases, each corresponding to a particular button. The texts can be read one by one as captions accompanying the images; they also flow into one another, creating a single, continuous poem.

From beginning ("& So we may weigh cup in the Morning...") to end ("To blessed sleep... the dream that Engulfs us All"), Wiley's box imagines the course of human existence within the span of a single day. Touching on classic Wiley themes of beauty, creativity, human ambition, transcendence, mortality and identity, *Kali-fornia Dreamin* strikes a balance between the epic nature of its content and the personal, unassuming scale of the button medium. Each individual button is a work of art; the complete set provides a fascinating survey of the universe as seen through Wiley's eyes. ■