

OLD MAN CROW

'In the end, all any of us can hope to leave behind in this world are the beautiful things we create and the memories held by those who knew us.' (Peter Cox)



Old Man Crow celebrates four decades of music by singer songwriter Rod Morgan (aka Old Man Crow) and 25 years of collaboration with his partner, illustrator and bookbinder Mo Orkiszewski.

In this book the songwriting of Old Man Crow is honoured with a collection of 38 of Mo's illustrations, bringing to life Crow's heart-felt lyrics seasoned with wry observations of life in Sydney's inner west recorded on four CDs.

Opposite page:

Evaline 1996

*My pulse is racing
my mind's a mess
my body's shaking
with hot and cold sweats
I need a friend
I need a rest
smoking cigarettes like a man possessed
battered and shattered, beaten and bruised
one good thing, I got nothing to lose*

Evaline, Evaline

*I'll make some money
buy a car
we'll go to Queensland
or maybe Mars
stop all day at every beach
drive all night 'til we're out of reach
make a home, wherever we are
I'll kiss your lips under every star*

Evaline, Evaline, Evaline, Evaline

*We'll get to Surfer's
throw the car away
buy a Dodge
open tray
claw-foot bath in the back of the truck
a big gas bottle to heat it up
luxury, all the way
I'll see you naked every day*

Evaline, Evaline, Evaline, Evaline

Mo: 'I first heard 'Life of Crime' in 1977 when Rod's band *Sourpuss* was playing at the George Hotel in Sussex Street. I wanted to illustrate it way back then, and I finally got around to it with this book.'

An artist's proof of *Old Man Crow* (full title *The Illustrated Lyrics of Old Man Crow*) was hand bound in leather by Mo and shown in the Code X Contemporary Bookbinding Exhibition in Canberra in February this year. There is also an edition of one hundred copies digitally printed and perfect bound, each book numbered, individually touched with paint and adorned with a handmade red heart page marker.

Peter Cox, curator of pop culture at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum and a long time friend of Mo and Rod opened the Crow Show at Artsite Gallery in Sydney in September last year when the edition was launched as part of the Sydney Fringe Festival. Cox described *The Lyrics of Old Man Crow* as 'more than an artefact. It's a monument. It is a colossal piece of work, a lifetime of work. It's Rod and Mo's legacy.

'In the end, all any of us can hope to leave behind in this world are the beautiful things we create and the memories held by those who knew us. I want to thank Rod and Mo for the beautiful things they create and look forward to them creating more memories in the coming years.'

Peter Cox: 'Mo makes beautiful books and pictures. She is a tireless visual artist, illustrator, bookbinder, glass engraver, horticulturalist. She ventures deep into every detailed crack and crevice, every feather and tendril.'



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Peter Cox: 'Rod is a three-minute storyteller. His songs are funny, world weary, lusty and bemused, caustic and tender. Some are brand new. Others are marked by dents, scratches and other signs of heavy wear. When you hear his cast-iron voice convey those battered tales, you'd better believe it. I love the way Mo has visualised them.

Peter Cox's opening speech at the Crow Show encapsulated the creative lives of two unusual and talented people in a way which most of us would envy—would that we all had a friend to tell our story in such perceptive and heart-felt terms. Cox described a friendship of many years. 'I remember Christmas Eve. It must have been 1978. I was with friends in the city and we went to a pub to hear a new wave *ska* band called The Klerks. It might have been the Sussex Hotel. After that we crossed the road to check out the band in another pub. They were playing a full-on fast punk version of 'Silent Night'. We thought it was great, maybe slightly scary. I didn't forget the singer, or his nihilistic re-casting of the old Christmas carol.

'A few years later the brilliant and charismatic Chris Clarke... introduced me to a guy he always referred to as Roderick. It took me a while to figure out that this Roderick dude was the punk who sang 'Silent Night'.

'In the Powerhouse Museum's collection is a set of handbills, one from each week of 1978 listing the bands playing at the Civic Hotel.

Illustrated on these pages are *Evaline*, *Bar Room Piano*, *Candlelight* and *Walking Home with Mr. Bones*.

Bar room piano 2006

Footsteps in the rain
it's freezing again
stairs going down
to heat and sound

There were people of all nationalities
and different religious beliefs
drinking and eating and smoking
and playing the slot machines
there were some had bones through their noses
others in nice looking suits
and those inbetween, these extremes
were engaged in mysterious pursuits

Over in a corner
by the pool table next to a wall
was the Saturday night entertainment
doing what they were paying him for

Playing bar room piano
in a corner 'gainst the wall
rolling them notes out
giving comfort to the poor
keeping one eye on the customers
the other on the door
playing bar room piano

Tropical heat
on a different street
in a different town
different sights and sounds

There were people of all nationalities
and different religious beliefs
tourists, folk from all over
and rapists and robbers and thieves
some in tattoos and t-shirts
others in tropical suits
and those inbetween, these extremes
were engaged in mysterious pursuits

Over in a corner
by the pool table next to a wall
was the Saturday night entertainment
doing what they were paying him for

Playing bar room piano
in a corner 'gainst the wall
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Rod is a three-minute storyteller. His songs are funny, world weary, lusty and bemused, caustic and tender. Some are brand new. Others are marked by dents, scratches and other signs of heavy wear.

'This was the height of the pub rock boom, so a typical week at the Civic might have on Monday night Flowers (before they became Icehouse), Cold Chisel on Tuesday night, Midnight Oil on Wednesday night, Mental as Anything were always there on Thursday nights, On the weekends the Civic hired less famous bands and this name *Sourpuss* frequently appears there on the handbills. This was Roderick's band, the one that played 'Silent Night'. He was lurking

on the fringe of the pub rock scene, and you will note the emerging feline tendencies in the name *Sourpuss*.

'Things got even fringe-ier in the mid 90s when Rod, Chris and I formed a semi-acoustic pop blues trio called CPR. Chris and Rod were drawn together as musical opposites. At the Bald Rock Hotel we played cover versions of 1960s pop songs to please the crowd, but the main reason Rod was there was to perform his own songs, which we did, in a fairly uncompromising way. When I say uncompromising I mean, well, the Welsh are famous for contrary behaviour. Artistically, he pleases himself. Art requires a kind of honesty. It has to please the artist before it can mean something or be any good. Any





Walking home with Mr. Bones 2007

He's got a stylish way of walking, eyes black as coal
 got a way of looking at you like he sees into your soul
 he's older than your mother, still dances on his toes
 I say 'You're looking good Bones' ...
 he says ...
 'I know'

Walking home, with Mr. Bones
 Walking home, with Mr. Bones

We talk about the weather, how the nights are getting cold
 smile and greet the ladies, 'Nice evening for a stroll'
 take time to smell the roses, pick flowers from a vine
 we get to where his house is ...
 he says ...
 'That's mine'

Walking home, with Mr. Bones
 Walking home, with Mr. Bones

We could get there so much quicker, if we just picked up the pace
 Bones' smile is just a flicker, he says 'Life is not a race,
 it's a song that's in the making, a story being told,
 a glass of sipping liquor ...
 besides ...
 I'm old'

Walking home, with Mr. Bones
 Walking home, with Mr. Bones

sort of pretension results in mediocrity. Pleasing
 the audience is a mere side effect. They can take
 it or leave it as far as Rod is concerned. That's his
 integrity: Can't be sold, can't be bought.

'So at the Bald Rock we sang songs he had
 written like 'I Got the Blues', 'Beauty', 'Paradise',
 'A Life of Crime', 'Sweet Mary-Anne', 'Evaline', 'Fly
 Away'. He wrote a song called 'Turn the Page' in
 which one verse was about locals who came
 to see us, and not in a flattering way. Rod didn't
 care. He cared about putting across his songs.'

All of these songs Peter Cox refers to above
 appear in *The Illustrated Lyrics of Old Man Crow*
 and on the CDs which are part of the book.

Cox says: 'Mo's drawings display succinct
 observations and pithy domestic details,
 transformed by her imagination. These are not
 literal interpretations of the lyrics. For a start

there aren't quite so many crows in the song
 lyrics. The crows have a kind of allegorical
 relationship to the people in the songs'

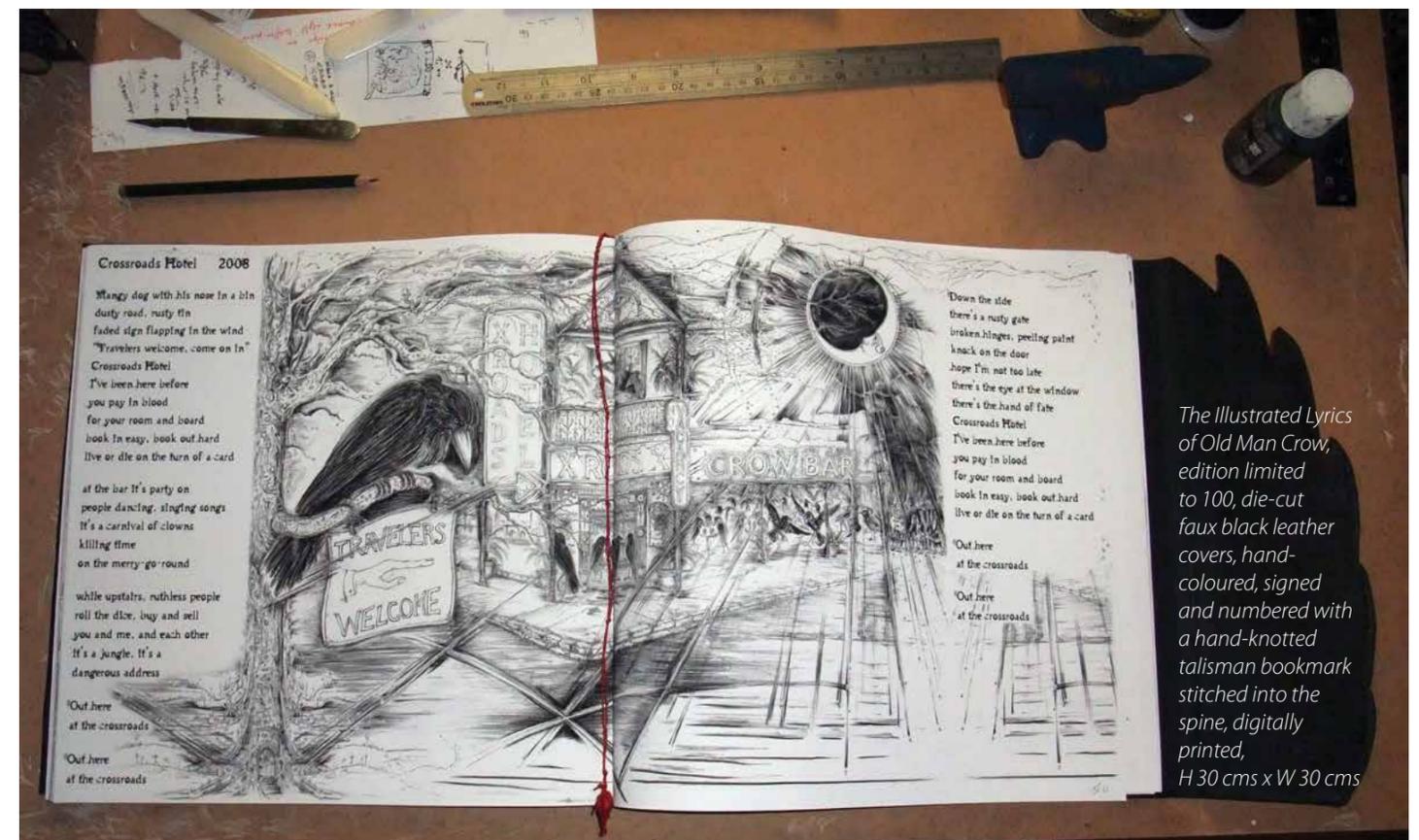
'Rod is a three-minute storyteller. His songs are
 funny, world weary, lusty and bemused, caustic
 and tender. Some are brand new. Others are
 marked by dents, scratches and other signs
 of heavy wear. When you hear his cast-iron
 voice convey those battered tales, you'd better
 believe it. I love the way Mo has visualised
 them. Let the crow fly!'

Mo Orkiszewski has a long history of making
 books—*Cooking with Cats*, *An Illuminated Book
 of Cats* and then there is the *Cat Abecedary*—
 inspiration Ariel. Mo's most recent book, *The
 Book of Honesty*, is a work in progress and, she
 says, 'I love making books, this is the most
 elegant one yet!' Every project and every step
 of the creative process is recorded on her
 website—a generous gift which she shares with
 anyone who wishes to join her at work in her
 artist's world.



Above: Old Man Crow (aka Rod Morgan)
 at the Crow Show opening, Artsite Gallery,
 September 2016

Below: A spread from *The Illustrated Lyrics of
 Old Man Crow*

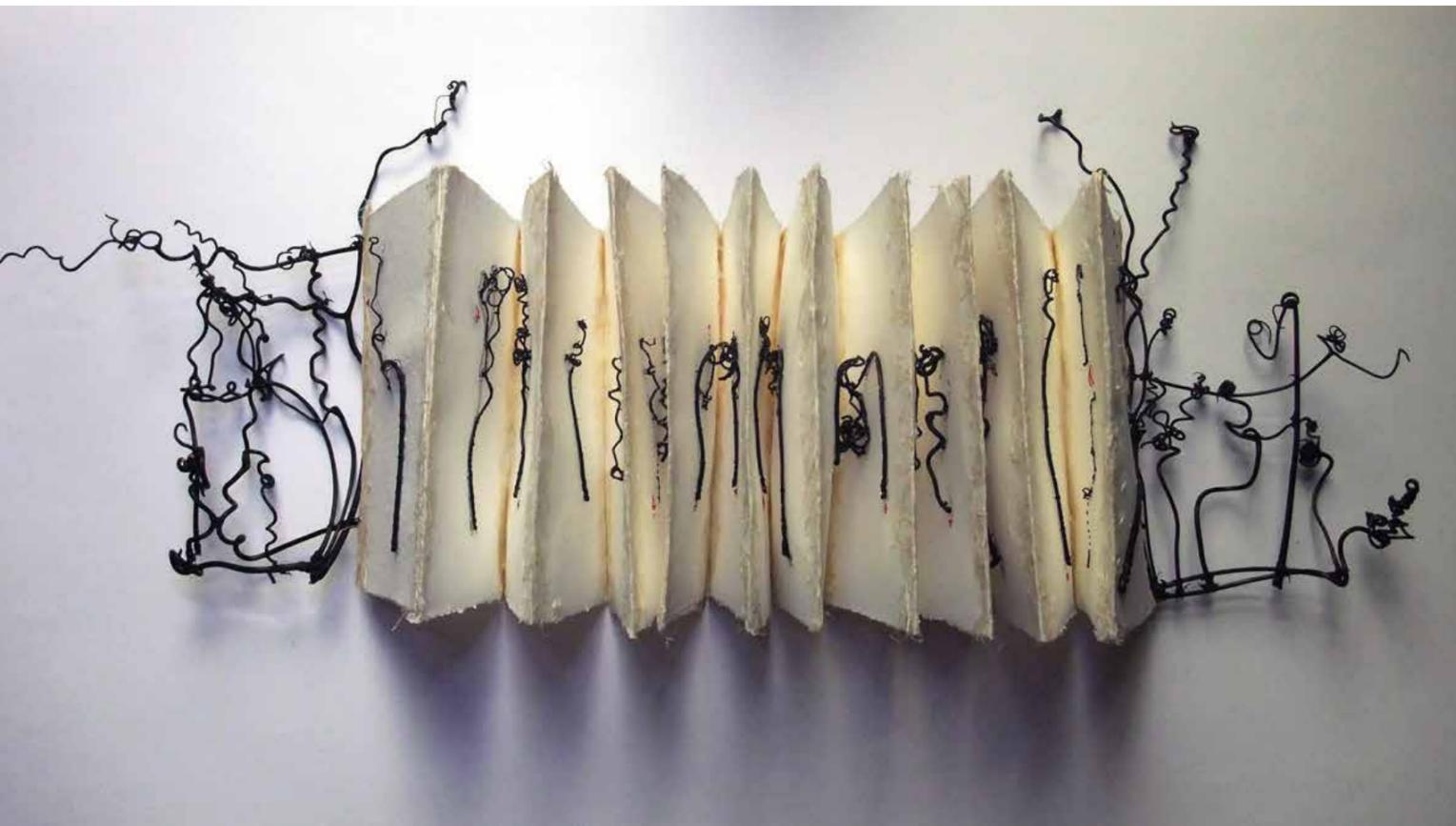
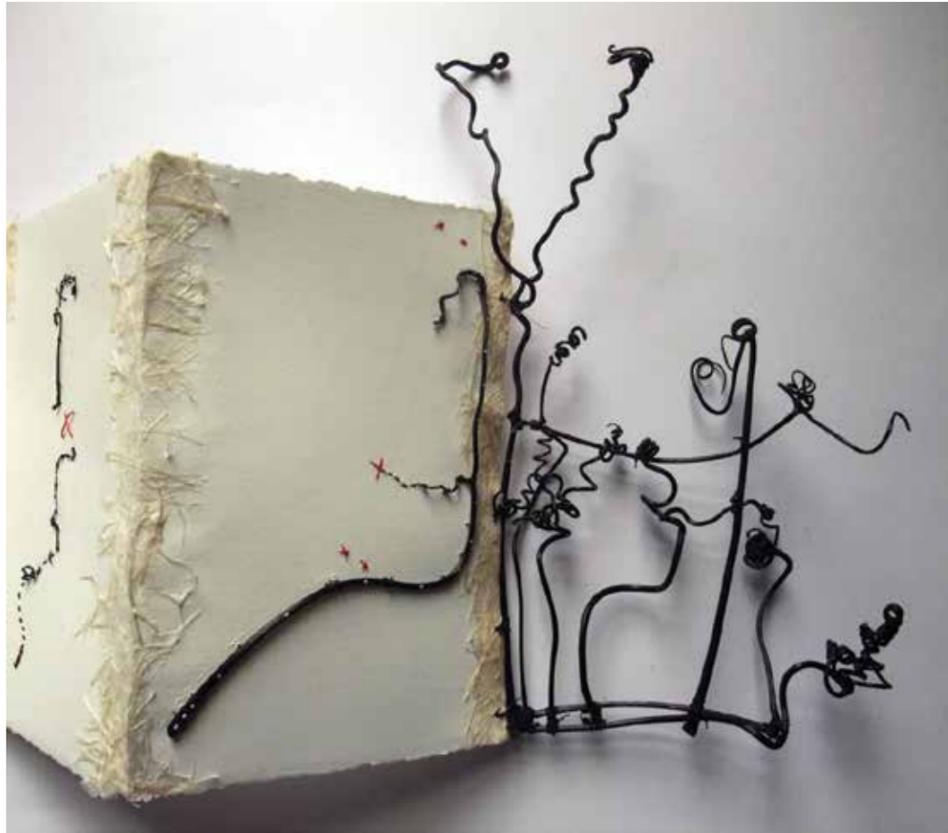


*The Illustrated Lyrics
 of Old Man Crow*,
 edition limited
 to 100, die-cut
 faux black leather
 covers, hand-
 coloured, signed
 and numbered with
 a hand-knotted
 talisman bookmark
 stitched into the
 spine, digitally
 printed,
 H 30 cms x W 30 cms

Recent projects include *A Tentative Conversation to begin the New Year*, accordion book (grape vine tendrils on Japanese Abaca paper) exhibited at this year's Manly Library Artists' Book Awards and participation with 'Moon Ladder' in a group exhibition *The GPS has no idea where I am going!* recently at Artsite Gallery in Sydney.

www.etsy.com/shop/ItsCrowTime
itscrowtime.wordpress.com/

A Tentative Conversation to begin the New Year, accordion book
260 cm W x 17cm H (grape-vine tendrils on Japanese Abaca paper)



Candlelight 1973

*I gave my love
by candlelight
where white is black and black is white
and the things about me
were not real
and the dreams that I dreamt she made me feel*