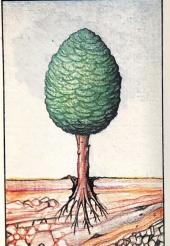
# CODEX SERAPHIANUS





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Codex Seraphinianus is an artist book by Luigi Serafini, published in 1981 in Italy by Franco Maria Ricci. The second edition of the book went on to be published in Germany, the United States, and the Netherlands.

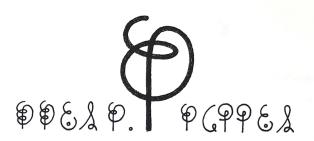
The book is a fantastical codex of creatures, plants, microscopic beings, sciences, cultures and more from another world. The book appropriates form science and history textbooks in its format. Some of the imagery seems like a fantastical version of Earth, but some of it is hardly recognizable, and is more abstract. It could be implied that everything in the book belongs to the same universe, even though there is very little overlap between sections.

There are only two simple components that make up the inside of the book: text and colored pencil illustration. Using these, Serafini guides us through this strange world in a concise and direct way.



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 One key aspect of Codex is its text which is completely hand generated as beautiful, clean calligraphy. However, all the text inside the book is in a fictitious language of Serafini's creation. He includes titles, labels for diagrams, page numbers, and paragraphs with bolded first words. All of it is fake. In places where text usually clarifies an image, Serafini's text only begs more questions.

The only places in the book that include readable language, are the cover, and a small booklet in the back cover entitled "Decodex"

What I want my alphabet to convey to the reader is the sensation that children feel in front of books they cannot yet understand.' He insists that there is no code to the language, and it truly does not translate to anything, despite readers' attempts to decode it.

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This spread is one of many comprised entirely of text. Although we are presented with an entire spread full of text, we cannot read or understand any of it. However, we do get some hints about what we are looking at because of the formatting. Throughout the book, it is often more important to know that something is being explained than to know what it is, and this is communicated through the format...

These spreads also strengthens the book's resemblance to academic books, since academic writing often prioritizes text over image.

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This spread is an excellent example of how the text and image aid the understanding of the book. Serafini appropriates an academic book format without conveying anything academic at all.

On the left-hand page, paragraphs are interrupted by charts and lists. We recognize these for what they are just by text placement, and there is no real reading required.

On the right-hand page, we see several drawings of strange entities with pieces of text underneath them. Without being able to identify a singe thing on the page, we can tell that these are specimens with labels.

Understanding what the page

would tell us is more important

on the page.

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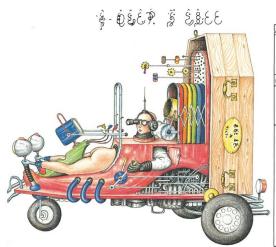
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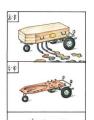
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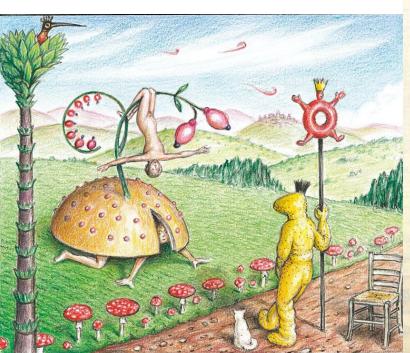
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The illustrations also mimic scientific drawings in their level of detail, color palette and medium. (colored pencil)

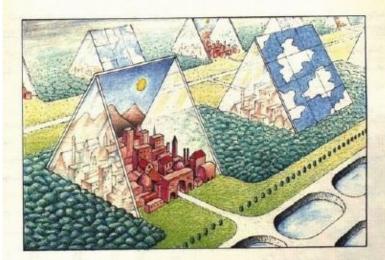




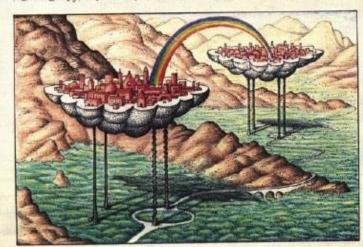
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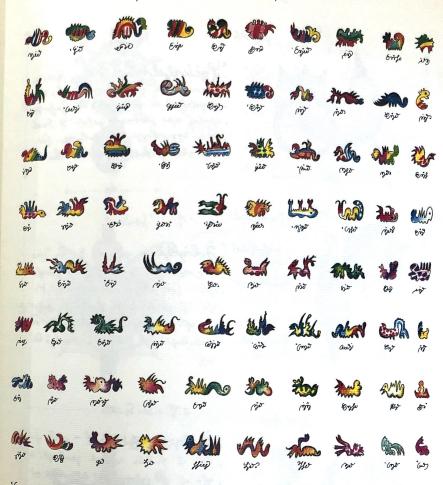
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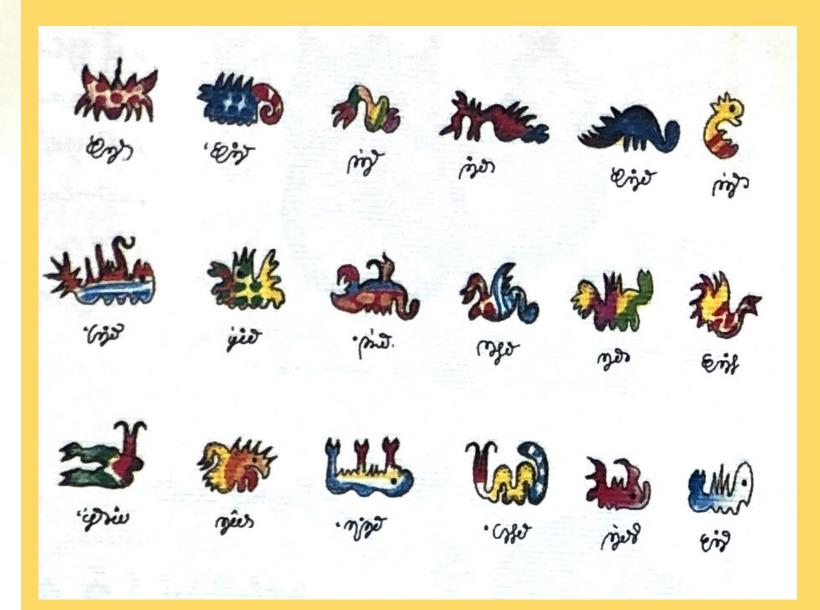
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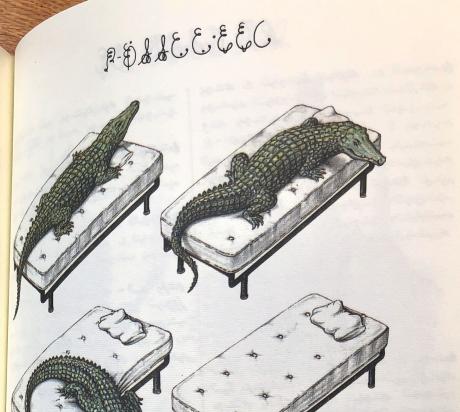


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Some drugs were taken during the making of this book, but according to Serafini, they did not help, as they took away his capacity for criticism.

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Here we have the most infamous spread of the book: a couple sexual exchange transforming into an alligator as a result of sexual exchange. Perhaps this is a common occurrence or an anomaly. It is hard to say.

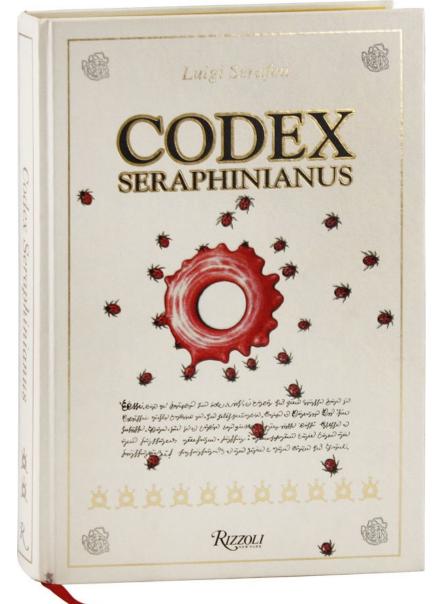
Once again, the text does nothing to help us understand what is going on.

Instead, the sequential images give us a step-by-step view of the phenomenon. This adds humor to the book, something one would not find in an academic book. The addition of the text jokingly implies that there must be an explanation, but alas the answers are unreadable, so we are forced to draw our own conclusions.

The sheer size of the book makes it stand out. The first edition of the book comes in two volumes, another scientific trend that implies the volume of information is so great, it must be split in two.



All versions of the cover display illustrations from the inside of the book as well as gold serif font titles, and a short passage of the unreadable text. The covers are designed to be elegant but not too flashy, which works well with the aesthetic of the inside of the book, while maintaining the encyclopedic look.



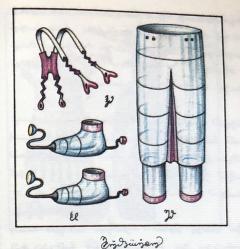
The SMFA Library has a second revised edition presented as one volume.

The goals of Codex Seraphinianus are not obvious. The book is not satirical, nor is it completely serious. The book brings up a lot of questions with little to no answers. Even the Decodex in the back does not answer all of the questions. However, I think the book is successful in creating curiosity and pushing the imagination. The book format is very mature, but the content is very childlike in its boldness. It draws in interest, and invites the reader to share content with others, even just to say, "what the hell is that??" facilitating the exchange of ideas, and inspiring creation in others. In that way, it succeeds.

Personally, I think this book is a fantastic example of world building. The images alone tell a story of a strange world that we can partially relate to but includes elements that are beyond comprehension. The inclusion of false writing elevates the book beyond a collection of wacky drawings. It suggests understanding of complex systems, histories, and life, even if we do not understand any of it. The academic style format is also a very nice choice because it forces you to fill in the blanks of the narrative. As a storyteller, I find it incredibly inspirational to see how Serafini has created language and narratives in such an indirect manor. Not to mention, the colored pencil drawings are beautiful to look at. They beg you to picture yourself within the universe of Codex, which creatures would be your friends, which would be scary. It draws the imagination on and on.

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