

Big visions writ small

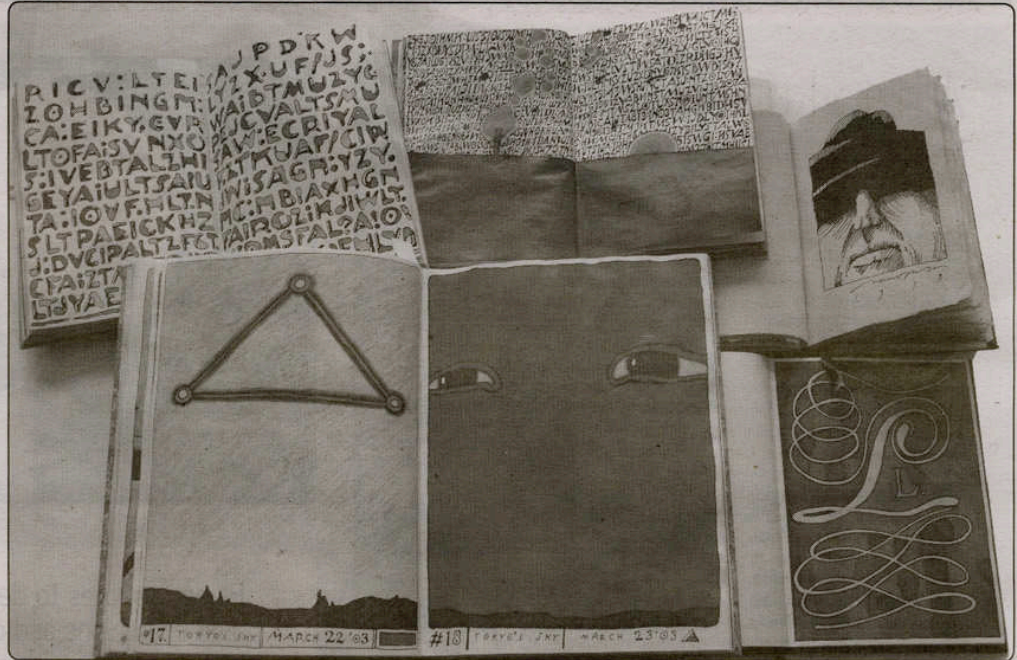
ARTIST JAN SAWKA'S JOURNALS ON VIEW AT BARD COLLEGE LIBRARY BEGINNING NOVEMBER 1

Polish-born High Falls artist Jan Sawka liked to think big: big ideas, big projects. Big as in the sets for the Grateful Dead's 25th anniversary tour in the 1980s. Big as in a peace monument in Jerusalem that would forge the three monotheistic religions into one great thrust to the heavens. Big as in an entire cultural complex on an island off Abu Dhabi in the Persian Gulf. Big as in a Tower of Light out in the desert sands in the United Arab Emirates. And big as in his *Voyage*, a multimedia extravaganza that Sawka was preparing when he passed away last August at age 65.

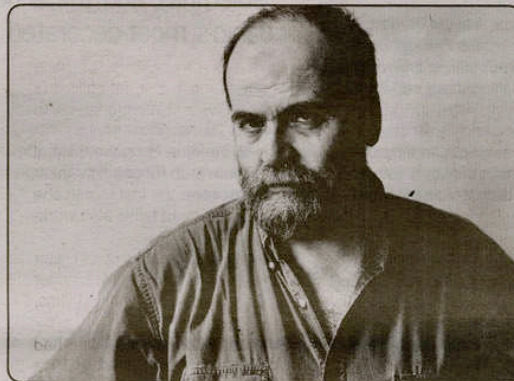
The *Voyage*, consisting of 1,202 drawings that morph in and out on a huge stadium-size screen, was Sawka's homage to humankind from the dawn of creation through its twists and turns through the millennia to our present sometimes-beautiful, sometimes-horrifying state of civilization. It's a 90-minute color-saturated journey through his – and our – personal and collective zeitgeist. Longtime Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart collaborated with the score, with Sawka's filmmaker daughter Hanna doing the editing.

But these projects are just the end products of a swirling, brilliant, unorthodox mind that weathered the numbing repression of Communist Poland and came out the other side a potent artist with some amazing things to say. And in this vein, an unusual treat is in store for anyone venturing to the Bard College Library starting Monday, November 1 (through December 15), as the genesis for many of Sawka's big projects – and also his thousands of "smaller" ones: paintings, posters, prints, sculpture, set designs for theater (the good fellow was extremely prolific) – will be on display in the form of his journals that in many ways reveal the inner workings of that prodigious mind.

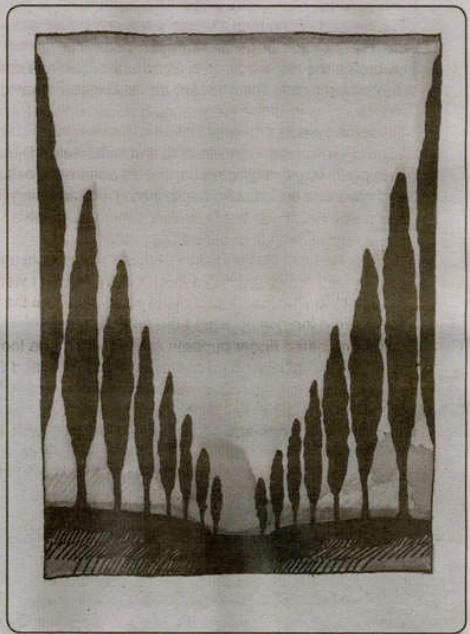
The journals were created over the years between travels and work on larger projects, and are fully illustrated in ink drawings and of course color – lots of color. The images and themes are all Sawka, reaching across the various disciplines that he had mastered. One journal (dedicated to wife



THE JOURNALS AND ART OF JAN SAWKA (COPYRIGHT JAN SAWKA)



ARTIST JAN SAWKA



Hanka) focuses on the art of calligraphy, another on typography. Others explore his travels, real and imagined; another is a study of human faces. Another (dedicated to daughter Hanna) is of the figure. Most times they are just Sawka's fecund imagination gone wild, the images resonating as you turn the pages.

There are over 25 of them, and they are, besides allowing us to look into the

emotions and visions of a wonderful artist, just plain visually amazing. Sawka had more than 70 individual exhibitions of his work at museums and major galleries all over the world, but these personal journals have never been exhibited (or even seen by anyone outside his family). They would have been overlooked amid his large-scale projects and works.

Besides the large-scale projects, Sawka won the Gold Medal at the Florence Biennial of Contemporary Art in the Multimedia category in 2003, and won an Excellence in Architecture Award in the Unbuilt category for the Jerusalem Peace Monument design in 2011. In the past he was an Osaka Award finalist in Architecture, and his *Book of Fiction* – a Beckettlike book of Sawka "word-images" in dry-point etchings – won a *New York Times* Book of the Year Award. The Polish National Museum in historic

Krakow – which had a show of his work called "The Return" in the 1990s, after the fall of the Communist government in Poland – is at present organizing a memorial retrospective for its native son in the coming year.

@ Rich Corozine

"Personal Equilibrium: The Private Journals of Jan Sawka" will be on view in the Stevenson Library Lobby Display Cases at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson from Monday, November 1 through December 15. The opening reception will take place on Wednesday, November 7 from 4 to 6