

7th
CONTEMPORARY
ARTISTS BOOK
FAIR

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FOREWORD

The Contemporary Artists Book Fair at Dean Clough, Halifax continues to provide a unique opportunity to view book art and related publications and to exchange ideas, presenting national and international production at this regional venue.

Joining the exhibitors from all parts of the UK are participants from France, Holland, Ireland and Spain reflecting the diversity of work within this continually developing genre. Distributors and retailers, 'Artists Books Johan Deumens' and the 'Bookartbookshop', present a multiplicity of work by artists and publishers from across Europe, Japan, New Zealand and the USA.

This year two essays on the subject of collecting and collections have been commissioned, one by a major independent collector, Neil Crawford, a freelance typographer based in London and the other representing a major international institutional collection by AnneDorothee Boehme, Special Collections Librarian at the Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

A series of artists' presentations will highlight the tensions and affinities between the printed page and audio and lens-based media, including new works by Dan Robinson and Melissa Thompson. Through an awareness of medias such as film, video, digital and sound, the status of the book as a medium for art is being continually reassessed .

John McDowall
Chris Taylor

An Artists' Books Collection : Neil Crawford

Back in 1966, just before I went to Liverpool College of Art, Dick Higgins' Something Else Press published Daniel Spoerri's *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, a title I often 'misremember' as *An Annotated Typography of Chance*. From this you may deduce that I'm an ex-art student with an interest in unconventional books, possibly a typographer. You would be correct on all counts, but I must confess that my 'interest in unconventional books' goes further than that: it is an affliction, if not an obsession. Though I would not say that my obsession goes so far as a certain lady whom Havelock Ellis in his *Psychology of Sex* (1906) recorded as: 'entirely normal in other respects' but 'who was conscious of a degree of pleasurable excitement in the presence of leather-bound ledgers'. I'll admit to the pleasurable excitement, but not the leather-bound ledgers.

Let me state from the outset that, despite Stephen Bury's advocations itemised in his 'A note on collecting artists' books' (*Artists' Books*, Scholar Press, 1995, 25–7), my Artists' Books collection has no defined acquisition policy, nor has it (I am ashamed to say) a catalogue as yet. I do, however, attempt to gather information from the artists whose work I collect with this in eventual view.

It was Dick Higgins, together with Alison Knowles (she whose book/installation *Big Book*, 1966–9, was large enough to inhabit), who founded Something Else Press in 1963. From them I acquired Higgins' *A Book About Love & War & Death: Canto One* (1965), Ray Johnson's *The Paper Snake* (1965), as well as Spoerri's opus (recently reissued by Atlas Press). Each of these items, cited in Stephen Bury's catalogue, were bought without any knowledge of them being 'artists' books'. (Note: when I cite *artists' books*, *artist's books* or *artists books*, I do so following the original source.)

Which brings me to the most-frequently-asked questions: What was the first Artists' Book you bought? What's the size of your collection? Who do you collect? (see *beside this essay*) and What is an Artist's Book? (you don't really expect me to go there, do you?). To provide the answers, I will furnish you with a deconstructed *ABC of [Artists'] Book-Collecting* (pace John Carter); however, perversely, let us start with A.

Neil Crawford's collection includes bookart by:

Ackling, Roger
Alcopley
Alexander, Amanda
Alsop, Douglas
Ambeck, Mette-Sophie D
Anderson, Berina
Arnott, Matthew
Artemis, Sophie
Artgoes
Artinian, Emily
Badrocke, Lucy
Baines, Phil
Barker, Dale Devereux
Beattie, Basil
Beckwith, Janet
Begbie, Guy
Bentley, John
Berger, John
Bick, Andrew
Bicknell, Les
Bird, Nicky
Blamey, David
Blaske, Carolin
Bodman, Sarah
Bory, Jean-François
Bossuet, Pierre
Breakwell, Ian

Aspen magazine was the brain-child of Phyllis Johnson, former editor of *Women's Wear Daily* and *Advertising Age*. Commencing publication in Winter 1965, *Aspen* was a subscription-only magazine-in-a-box. Each issue had a different theme and different editor. Section 17 of issue 5+6 (fall & winter/67), a double-issue on serial imagery edited by Brian O'Doherty, was a square 16-page booklet by Sol LeWitt titled *Serial Project #1, 1966* – his first artist's book, and one which I subsequently recognised as such.

Mallarmé was important, not because of his endlessly quoted assertion that everything in the world exists in order to end up in a book, but because his *Poème: Un Coup De Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*, of which I had spent seven years producing a typographic translation, was instrumental in introducing me to producers and publishers of artists' books such as John Christie of the Circle Press and Ian Tyson of Tetrad Press. It was John Christie, who I serendipitously met at a Coracle Press private view in 1982, who put me in touch with Ian Tyson, then contemplating a bookwork inspired by Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*. Our subsequent Tetrad Press collaboration was eventually launched at Matthew and Hannah Tyson's Imprints London gallery in 1985.

Meanwhile in 1984, the year that saw the landmark exhibition *British Artists' Books 1970–1983* (Atlantis Gallery), **BookWorks** was established at Green Dragon Court Arches. One of its founding directors was Jane Rolo, whom I knew through membership of the Society of Designer Bookbinders. She invited me to become a friend of BookWorks and to contribute to the second issue of their newsletter a review of a debate between Ken Campbell and David Sellars. In it I quoted from Marshall McLuhan's *Counterblast* (1969, 98): 'It would be a mistake to suppose that the trend of culture toward the oral and the acoustic means that the book is becoming obsolete. It means rather that the book, as it loses its monopoly as a cultural form, will acquire new roles.' Those new roles were soon to be shown in exhibits at BookWorks by artists such as Susan Johanknecht (little did we know where she would be in almost twenty years' time...), Jake Tilson, and Langlands & Bell.

One of Cathy Courtney's first reviews of artists' books (by 1986 *artists books*, then back to *artists'*

Brennan, Tim
 Bruce, Marian
 Bulloch, Angela
 Burns, Bill
 Bush, Tracey
 Bustin, Jane
 Caine, Michael
 Campbell, Ken
 Carraro, Paolo
 Castelli, Matteo
 Catling, Brian
 Cha, Jeong-In
 Chaimowicz, Marc
 Camille
 Charlston, Lin
 Chopin, Henri
 Christie, John
 Clark, Thomas A
 Clarke, Imogen
 Cockburn, Julie
 Coleman, Les
 Coleman, Robert
 Collings, Matthew
 Colverson, Ian
 Cooper, Thomas Joshua
 Cox, Hannah Oaks
 Cox, Lizzie
 Cronin, Marian
 Cutts, Simon
 Dawson, Chris
 Demeure, Jean-François

books in 1994) in *Art Monthly* was of the inaugural exhibition at BookWorks, shortly followed by one on the opening of Imprints gallery. My debt to Cathy Courtney in informing my taste in artists' books, and in encouraging the breadth of my collection, is immeasurable. Her collected reviews were published by estampe as *Private Views & other Containers* (1992/1995).

Imprints London was the source of many items in my collection acquired in the '80s, some no doubt due to Matthew Tyson's persuasive salesmanship and willingness to sell books on the installment plan. He introduced me to work by James Hugonin, Michael Caine, book sculptor Chris Dawson and, of course, Matthew and Ian Tyson; the latter being an artist whose work now forms a major part of my artists' books collection.

In was in 1986, when giving a paper on 'Typography and French Livre d'Artiste' at a symposium coinciding with the *From Delacroix to Dubuffet: French Prints and Livres d'Artistes* exhibition at the University of Canterbury at Kent, that I first met Mel Gooding. It is rare to find a poet/author with such an intuitive rapport with artists such as Bruce McClean (their Knife Edge Press collaborations were early purchases from the Eagle Gallery) and Jane Joseph (whose *A Simple Flora* I had the privilege of styling typographically).

Typography is the so-called 'invisible art': you're only supposed to notice it when it is bad. My translation of Federico Garcia Lorca's *Llanto por Ignacio Sanchez Mejias*, made to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of his assassination, was anchored on the page by a typeface chosen for its italics. To maintain the steady flow of the lament, a font was required whose italic, while maintaining the integrity of the emphatic character, would also slow the reader's eye to the desired pace; the generous proportions of Fournier's italic – almost a sloped roman – provided the solution. Sandy Sykes' five powerful woodcuts were the distillation of over one hundred preparatory drawings, in the final selection of which she generously let me help.

Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias was shown at the Hardware Gallery in April 1988, and thus it was I met Déirdre and Grainne Kelly. Initially dealing primarily in contemporary printworks, they soon made a positive commitment to the book as an artform, subsequently curating the *Curved*

Dibbets, Jan
 Douglas, Helen
 Durka, Damian
 E
 Faithfull, David
 Farley, Kate
 Farrer, Julia
 Fessler, Anne
 Fields, Anne-Bryony
 Filiou, Robert
 Finlay, Alec
 Finlay, Ian Hamilton
 Fletcher, Corinna
 Fredrickson, Laurel
 Frontzek, Anett
 Gbadamosi, Raimi
 General Idea
 Gooding, Mel
 Grey, Jenni
 Harrak, Emilie
 Harrison, Lucy
 Higgins, Dick
 Hill, Emma
 Hiller, Susan
 Hoskins, Stephen
 Hudson, Mark
 Hugonin, James
 Irvine, Zoë
 Jackson, Vanessa
 Jacobs, Sarah
 Jarman, Derek

Space: Recent British Livres d'Artiste with Matthew Tyson. When the gallery moved to Archway Road, minutes from my London flat, it was only natural to frequent their premises on a Saturday afternoon. The Hardware held a permanent selection of artists' bookworks available for inspection, and was also a place where I could discover new work and meet other collectors and artists. It was there I was introduced to new work by Sophie Artemis, Marion Bruce and Paolo Carraro, the latter being someone whose books I have collected extensively. In fact, my first encounter with Deb **R**indl was at the Hardware when we both admired the same exhibit. On learning that I collected artists' books, she arranged to show me her work; I'm told my subsequent purchase was her first by a collector.

One item I bought by Sophie Artemis was a **O**ne-off, or unique bookwork titled *Setting Boundaries*. With a unique object one has no way of telling how complete it is by comparing it, say, with others in an edition, so I was bemused to discover that this work comprising seven terracotta clay tablet page-bricks, the act of turning which equates to constructing a symbolic barrier, the cumulative text reading: 'I am building a wall between myself and you', was not quite what it should be. It was only after reading a catalogue entry for this work in *Facing the page: British Artists' Books, A Survey 1983-1993* that I discovered that the text had originally read: 'I am *gradually* building a wall between myself and you'. Perhaps I really am one brick short of a wall.

Any serious collector of artists' books cannot fail to acknowledge the influence of Ron **K**ing of the Circle Press. My initial contact was through John Christie, but it was Ron whose enthusiastic approaches finally lured me down to Notting Hill. I remember buying three of four items on that visit, but I was surprised on perusing his retrospective catalogue/bookwork, *Cooking the Books*, that I now possess over two-thirds of bookworks he has published. While on the letter *K*, I cannot refrain from mentioning Tony Kemplen, whose oblique take on the art scene has delighted me for ages. I fondly recall commissioning a pizza from him: it was his habit to buy a Sainsbury's pizza on the way home from work on a Tuesday evening (I think), and eat it while watching the news. From the resulting empty cartons he made books. Tony agreed to purchase a pizza with my funds and eat

Johanknecht, Susan
 Johnson, Ray
 Jones, Allen
 Jubb, Daniel
 Kahle, Birgit
 Katue, Kitasono
 Kelly, Mary
 Kemplen, Tony
 Kenny, Chris
 Kerler, Frieder
 Kern, Kate
 King, Ron
 Kirby, Dave
 Kitaj, Ron
 Kivland, Sharon
 Knowles, Jane
 Kosuth, Joseph
 Langlands & Bell
 Large, Valerie
 Law, Andy
 Law, Elspeth
 Lax, Robert
 Lewith, Nichola
 LeWitt, Sol
 Lijn, Liliane
 Little, Lotte
 Lloyd, Matthew
 Lodge, Jean
 London, John
 Long, Richard
 Longeville, Tim

it in my 'honour'; but more than just a bookwork resulted since it arrived accompanied by a pie-chart (or should that be a pizza-chart?) detailing just what news announcement was being made with each bite of pizza eaten.

Meanwhile Matthew Tyson had established a partnership with Isabella Oulton; out of Imprints *Ka!* was born, and they moved to France. While I undertook to be a founding subscriber to *Ka!* Editions, Imprints UK stock was assigned to the **Eagle** Gallery. Thus I met one Emma Hill, a meeting which resulted, on discovering her commitment to the potential of the book as art form – "I am less interested in debating what an artists' book is than in finding out what an artists' book can be." (Emma Hill, 'Making Books', *Annual Artist's Yearbook*, 2003–2005, 95) – in my being only too delighted to offer my typographic skills to the gallery, and to become a founding subscriber with, among others, Stephen Bury of Chelsea School of Art, to an ambitious EMH Arts publishing project comprising collaborations between such leading contemporary artists and writers as Jane Bustin, Julia Farrer, Basil Beattie, Andrew Renton, Judith Thurman, and Marina Warner.

It was my sister-in-law, Jennie Crawford, then librarian at Jacob Kramer (Leeds College of Art), who put me on Chris Taylor's mailing list, and thus it was that a family visit was timed to coincide with a 1993 exhibition in Ilkley titled *Bookies & Boxers*. Apart from meeting Chris for the first time, I came away with a Les Bicknell and a Janet Beckwith (*Kisses + Crosses*). I know it was 1998 when the first **Dean Clough Contemporary Artists' Book Fair** was held as I've got the flyer in my archive. Though unable to purchase his work at the time, I was sufficiently impressed by Stuart Mugridge's talent that subsequently I have acquired much of his output, usually attempting to beat the Tate Library to his stall. Dean Clough was where I had the pleasure of first making the acquaintance of Mr Smith, whose *Comfort Tin* (my first purchase from him) is a thing of humour and a joke forever.

I can't remember at which bookfair I first met Alec **Finlay**, but as a student at Liverpool College of Art in the '60s I had been interested in concrete poetry and acquired items by Hansjörg Mayer, Emmett Williams, as well as a certain Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Canal Game* and *Ocean Stripe 5*. I haven't yet made it up to Dundee to the Centre for Artist's

Longmire, Tertia
Loubières, Jean-Claude
Lucey, Conor
Lurie, Toby
Mac Low, Jackson
Mackenna, Tracey
Maidment, Janet Hillis
Mathieu, Didier
Matthews, Stephen
Maufe, Imi
Mayer, Hansjörg
McDowall, John
McLean, Bruce
Meynell, Katharine
Mills, Stuart
Monk, Jonathan
Monro, Niall
Morris, Simon
Mugridge, Stuart
Nesbit, Tony
Nevin, Pete
Norris, Andrew
Nowakowski, Radoslaw
Olbrich, Jürgen
Owens, Rachel
Paolozzi, Eduardo
Patterson, Simon
Phillips, Tom
Pinkney, Richard
Queneau, Raymond
Redford, Philip

Books, but I do find a certain morbid satisfaction in being long-lived and enthusiastic enough to collect work by both father and son.

Nineteen-ninety-five saw the birth of the *Artist's Book Yearbook* under the prime editorship of one Tanya Peixoto. For anyone concerned with producing, promoting or collecting artists' books it has become an indispensable resource. Tanya went on to establish *bookartbookshop*, a non-profit venture to provide a venue for artists' books, small press publications, and bookart exhibitions. Since it is a non-profit enterprise, I subsequently offered my typographic services *pro bono*. Tanya's editorship was taken over by Sarah Bodman at UWE, who now runs a lively exhibitions programme with accompanying newsletter, and who has even tempted me down to Bristol.

It was an invitation in 1995 by Marcus Campbell to contribute a talk on my Artists' Book collection at the Annual London Artists' Book Fair, which he organises, that gave me the opportunity to attempt to photograph bookworks in a way that conveyed the excitement I feel each time I open one. It also made me aware that certain themes inform my collection: minimalist imagery, typography, land/environmental art, psychology/ physiology, and humour. But, initially, whenever I approach a bookwork where text plays a part, I am swayed by the quality of the typesetting. Marcus, knowing of my typographic expertise and my then situation (a deskpace in a reproduction company above a printworks), asked me if I would oversee the typographic design of Eduardo Paolozzi's boxed suite of prints, *The Studio*. Presumably he was pleased enough with the result to ask Geoff Winston – the designer responsible for his corporate identity – to contact me regarding the printing of his stationery and publicity material.

It must have been fate, since I had previously admired Rebecca Salter's work (Geoff's partner) and have been given a woodcut by her (*Four Arcs III*) as a birthday present. On informing him of the coincidence – we both had a Rebecca Salter in our bedroom, only his was the real one – he said we must meet. Over a very pleasant dinner I learned that Rebecca was writing a book on *Japanese Woodblock Printing* (A&C Black, 2001). I just happened to have one of Hokusai's woodblock print volumes of *Manga, Military Arts* (volume 6) in my collection, and impulsively offered it to Rebecca,

Reimer, Karen
Relf, Renée
Rindl, Deb
Rogers, Martin
Rolande, Childe
Roth, Dieter
Rowe, Julian
Sackett, Colin
Salt & Shaw
Salter, Rebecca
Schofield, Lucy May
Senior, Gordon
Sergent, Jean-Jaques
Shrigley, David
Sicka, Anja
Simpkins, Rosemary V
Skiöld, Birgit
Smallhorn, Sophie
Smith, Cindy
Smith, Mr
Smith, Terry
Sowden, Tom
Spoerri, Daniel
Stokes, Telfer
Sutton, Trevor
Sykes, Sandy
Tankard, Jeremy
Taylor, Chris
Thanchookiet, Phantipa
Tilson, Jake
Trimble, Celeste

since I'd enjoyed it for the past 30 years – a woodcut from it is illustrated on page 70 of her monograph. Unwilling to accept it as a gift outright, I suggested that it could be part payment of a bookwork by her titled *Rondo*, a work I'd been very impressed by, but which I could not afford at the time. Its 30 rich, woodcut panels, varying in both colour and texture, seem capable of endless permutations; for me it's one of the prides of my collection. Generously, Rebecca insisted in not only exchanging *Rondo* for Hokusai, but promised another bookwork in addition.

On a trip to Chicago in 2001, organised by ARLIS, I took the opportunity to visit the Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and was pleasantly surprised to discover that: 'Walk-in visitors are welcome and can be accommodated unless there is a class using the collection'. On learning that I had not been aware of many works on sexuality or gender politics, I was regaled for the next two-and-half hours with an seemingly endless stream of books presented to me in turn by two members of staff. I don't think many UK collections could be that spontaneous and user-friendly.

As far as **X**-rated artists' books are concerned, I was offered a paean in praise of the penis once by the Hardware Gallery, however, I passed; though I have recently acquired an item by Helen Ward, who is completing an MA in Book Arts at Camberwell, and whose work is informed by gender expectations and its effects upon woman (it comes complete with disposable rubber glove).

Curiously, I have yet to acquire a work by an artist whose surname commences with **Z**; or even **E**, surprisingly. And I still haven't got round to **N**, **Q**, **V** and **W**...

Neil Crawford is a freelance typographer and Art Director of *Traveller* magazine. Neil established the Murton/Crawford Award for Book Art, presented to a graduating artist of the Camberwell School of Arts MA Book Arts course in 2002. The first recipient was Amanda Alexander. The award was presented as a commission prize in 2003 to Lucy Badrocke.

Turnbull, Alison
 Tyson, Ian
 Tyson, Matthew
 Unica T/USUS
 Valoch, Jiri
 Van Horn, Erica
 Van Vliet, Claire
 Waanders, Hans
 Ward, Helen
 Ward, Jonathan
 Webb, Matthew
 Weiner, Lawrence
 Wellman, Kelly
 Westen, Jeroen V
 Weston, Heather
 Whiteford, Kate
 Wilks, Claire Weissman
 Willats, Stephen
 Wolff, Christian
 Words & Pictures
 X
 Yong, Gladys
 Yunos, Rozi
 Z

The Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection

AnneDorothee Boehme

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago's library has been collecting artists' books since the early 1960s, somewhat parallel to the nascence of this art form in the US. Since the city was in the 1970s and 80s a very lively center of artists' book production, initial acquisition efforts concentrated on local output but then quickly went on to incorporate international production. In the early 1990s, money from a memorial fund honoring the late Joan Flasch, a faculty member here at the school, allowed for the purchase of furniture and equipment and eventually led to the inauguration of a separate study room.

In typical, self-congratulatory Chicago fashion, where buildings, airports and pizzas are always tallest, busiest, or deepest (in this order), we claim that our collection allows for the least inhibited access to its holdings and at the same time offers an unparalleled and astounding variety of artistic approaches. Anyone (clean hands assumed) can just walk in the door during opening hours and view as much of the material as he or she can possibly take in. Even if the above claim would ever prove to be exaggerated, our name definitely understates the scope of the collection. While officially called the Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection (JFABC), a more accurate title, albeit too lengthy, would include not only artists' books, but also multiples, numerous archives of book art related ephemera, mail-, stamp-, and contemporary net/web-art.

The collection's mission has been, from the beginning, to exemplify divergent concepts of all these art historical phenomena and to make readily available to the public seminal examples of the artists' book movement within a study collection that is as comprehensive as possible. We deliberately do not enforce any of the purity laws of artists' book making that most other institutions live by (e.g. offset printed only, minimum edition sizes, narrow price ranges). Nor do we

pursue the establishment of clear-cut and binding parameters of what the term "artists' books" could ultimately stand for. No doubt that it remains an unsatisfactory label for critics, collectors and practitioners alike. To this day it is being loosely applied to any publication that one or more artists have been involved in, even if marginally - stretching all the way to sculptural objects that only visually resemble, or make use of, the codex format.

Unfortunately the often strained efforts to advance public recognition for this art form and the attempt to come to any compendious definition of its characteristics have been stagnant for years, all-the-while artists' books seem to have positioned themselves within an ever more visible and clearly acknowledged segment of contemporary visual arts production. It seems wasteful to spend any more time whining about a perceived lack of recognition when practitioners continue to broaden the boundaries so successfully.

At the moment around 5000 pieces within JFABC's holdings have been catalogued, most of them accessible through an in-house database that was specifically designed for this material and accommodates even specific research needs. Numerous reference books as well as ephemera files on individual presses, publishers or artists complement the collection, as do two separate archives: Book Space, a Chicago artists' book publishing venue in the 1980s and the papers of Tony Zwicker, an artists' book dealer in New York, active from 1982 to 99. Additional archives are currently being processed, thanks to a collaboration with art administration students and library interns.

We have greatly expanded our holdings of exhibition catalogs and can make available hundreds of examples that accompanied past artists' book shows. In addition there are works that fall into a category which clearly departs from the catalogue's usual function as mere memory of a transient event. Those catalogues, designed and produced to accompany a show rather than to sum it up, function as independent works of art and provide an additional exhibition space in themselves.

Lastly, we collect artist-produced 'zines, examples of mail art and artists' stamps and provide a plethora of performance documentation. Since early acquisition efforts included seminal Fluxus objects, multiples have continuously been added to the collection, albeit on a smaller scale than the book works. By enabling chance encounters between such different objects and time periods, the dialogue between work and audience potentially becomes more satisfying.

Our current acquisition parameters are broad, although closely tied to curricular activities, and basically cover any endeavor where a single artist or a collaborative group has been involved in at least one of the activities that lead to a book work, i.e. the conception, writing, design, publishing, printing, or construction of the book. These pieces, investigating and challenging the traditional book form, may have been produced in any number of copies, from unique to open editions; they might come from artists who choose the book form as only one appropriate medium for their ideas among many others or from artists who focus exclusively on this format.

Generally excluded - with few exceptions - are posters and broadsides as well as sculptural work that merely alludes to the book's physical qualities but otherwise does not engage into a discussion with this medium's intrinsic qualities of time-based and sequential viewing. Further considerations when acquiring a piece are of course its affordability and the item's physical ability to withstand the type of access and frequent use that it inevitably will be subjected to. We avoid items that put sole emphasis on the craft aspects of book making and demonstrate mere technical skills, even if successfully so. Illustrated poetry and what is commonly referred to as "livres d'artistes" are better suited for one of the region's fine-print collections.

The remaining mixture of production methods and levels of sophistication, despite these omissions, serves us well. The general public, artists, collectors, students, all clearly seem to benefit from a back and forth movement between different artistic approaches and

solutions, from the vibrant juxtaposition of artists' books that are text-based with work that is primarily visual. Items on view may include audio, visual, or digital media and can come from established publishers, like Book Works or Nexus Press, or from those that self-publish in small print-runs. Copier and mail art from the 70s is positioned next to examples of contemporary web-based practices. This latter type of work does not even exist in any physical format, but uses the Internet as its sole site of conception, production, distribution and existence. The works have of course nothing "bookish" about them - what is a "virtual" book anyway - but they are nevertheless closely related to the political dimensions of early artists' book production and continue further the "dematerialization of the art object" that began in the 1960s. They renew an attempt to circumvent centralized art markets, they are frequently of collaborative nature, and might mark temporary, communicative events that lack any commodity status and/or the aura of a finite art piece. Previously untested ways of distribution and radically different visual conventions are thus making their way into our holdings and facilitate our audience's discussion of the most current artistic concepts.

Book works reach me in a variety of ways: they are either sent directly by the artist(s), come from presses and dealers with whom we are in a continuous working relationship or are purchased through the bookstores and fairs that handle this material. There is no uniform way to find good work and I benefit from accidental discoveries and the few magazines that provide insightful and reliable reviews.

Our reading room itself is fairly humble in size and visually not as enticing as we would wish for. However, once the table is filled up with an eclectic array of material, the collection's energy, the cacophony of more than one pitch, comes to flow and inspire - even if some of these voices are comparatively less mature than others (as artists we have all learned from "bad" examples.)

Here at the School of the Art Institute, four artists' book classes within the Printmaking Department currently

teach beginning and advanced technical skills, while emphasis remains on the ideation of the book, not its technical aspects. Many of the other graduate programmes rely on extensive access to our holdings, e.g. the Departments of Writing, Photography, Fiber and Material Studies, Art Education, Art Therapy, Performance, Art History, Theory and Criticism and Visual Communications. The institutional culture favours collaborative projects and cross-pollination between differing fields of study, at least on a conceptual level; interesting and novel artistic routes are bound to develop and the production of book works could readily involve artists from a variety of disciplines.

As I write these thoughts, a new semester has just begun, with its daily flurry of visiting course sessions; of artists who are stuck within a project of their own and come in looking for new ideas; of collectors, dealers and art lovers traveling here from as far away as Russia or South Africa. We cater to many thousands of visitors and researchers on an annual basis and they are all well served in Chicago: in addition to our holdings, they can also visit the Newberry Library's Wing Foundation on the History of Printing, one of the world's leading collections in its field, or go by Columbia College's Center for Book and Paper Art, with its excellent facilities, lecture series and exhibition programs.

Successful efforts to expand the local book arts audience have taken a variety of forms. In our role to educate and to raise awareness and knowledge about this type of work we have mounted two large exhibitions in the School's Betty Rymer Gallery within the last few years (installation shots from "The Consistency of Shadows - Exhibition Catalogs as Autonomous Works of Art" can be found under <http://www.artic.edu/saic/art/flasch/>. A catalog of this show is still available). Due to the fact that the majority of the material was mounted onto tables and was thus available for browsing, interest within a broad audience was easily stirred; visitors included not only practicing book artists, but anyone involved in the making, curating or critiquing of contemporary visual art.

It does seem to be possible to exhibit book works in a meaningful and exciting way that stays true to each items' need for reader interaction.

Furthermore I've given many presentations of material from the book room within the city's public school system - and if the children can't make a trip here I've taken a suitcase full of books to their classroom. We actively encourage visits not only by the other institutions of higher learning that surround us but also by members of the community who are usually not eager to engage into a discourse with contemporary art: we have hosted groups of mentally disabled citizens, of non-sighted people, of inhabitants from local retirement homes, amongst others.

Book artists and collectors, institutional or private, might still be occupying the less glamorous margins of contemporary art practices but it is an area within which I gladly situate myself. It has provided us for more than four decades with a constant and stable flow of thoughtful and experimental work. The pieces neither concern themselves with the question of what constitutes the most fashionable art topic of the year nor do they show interest in whether a certain medium is currently acceptable to the art market and will yield the highest sales prices. We at the Joan Flasch Artists' Book Collection remain strongly committed to the entire book arts community and hope to continue enabling meaningful encounters between work and public in the foreseeable future.

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