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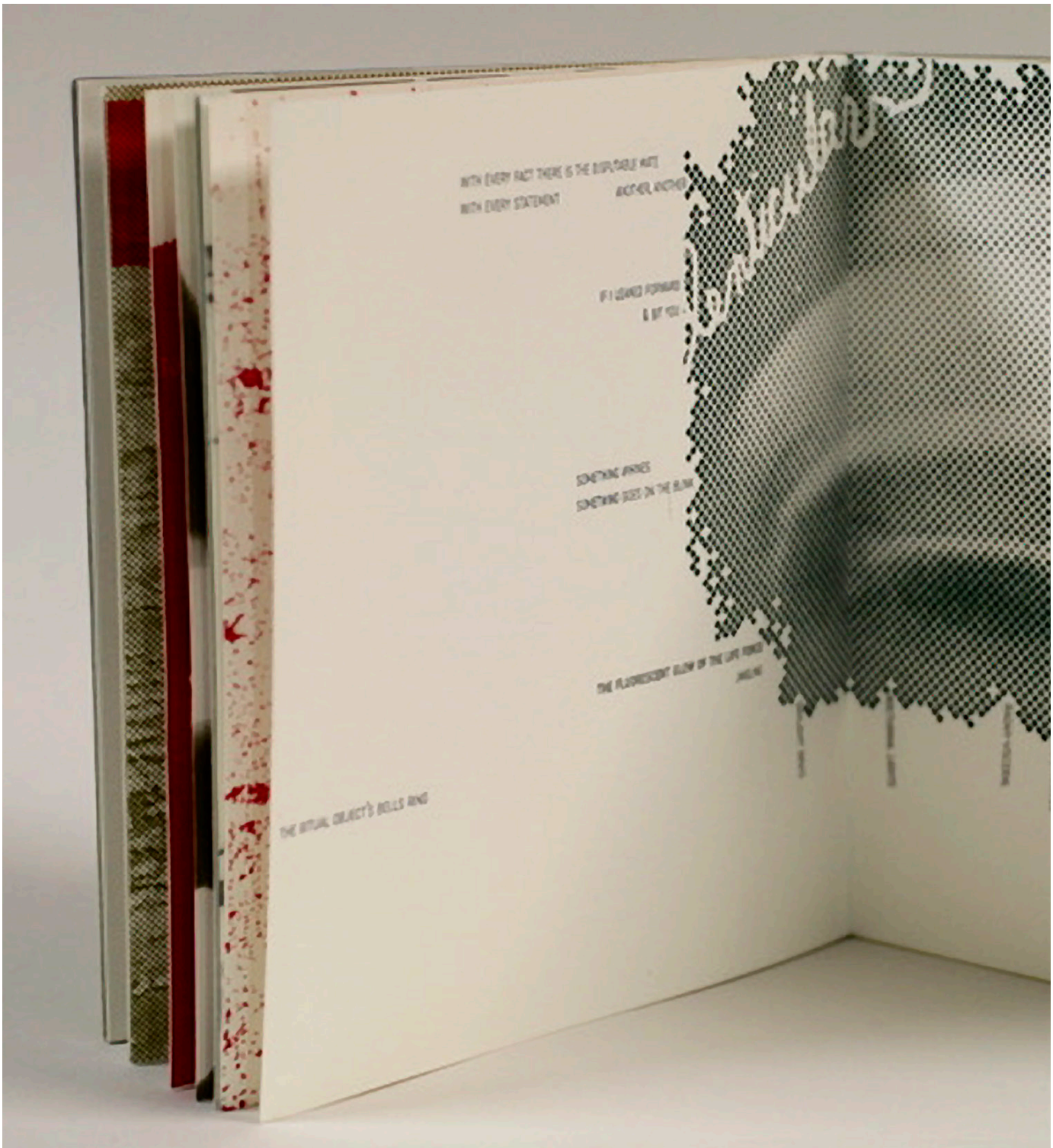
Openings

STUDIES IN BOOK ART



Detail from The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, *a carousel book by Emily Martin.*

FROM THE EDITOR: BOOK WORK / SOCIAL WORK

by Peter J. Tanner

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Peter J. Tanner, PhD, is Associate Instructor, World Languages and Culture, at the University of Utah. He, Him, His, Él, Ele.

THE FRAMEWORKS WE USE TO MAKE sense of the world determine everything we perceive and how we comprehend these observations, but the structures of these frameworks are simultaneously the strictures that bind us. When we are bound, we might not make the best choices, especially when those choices are determined by artificial and arbitrary alternatives that leave out many other possible choices and opportunities.

However, what happens when we apply these concepts to our life and work in the book arts? What does choice have to do with making or analyzing works of book artistry? Lately I have been reading critical theory about photography, and I cannot help but be struck by the parallels between the mechanical nature of photographic image capture and the mechanical nature of book creation. One important article in the history of photography, "Camera Work/Social Work" by Alan Trachtenberg,[1] is particularly relevant to the current moment. In this article, Trachtenberg contrasts the photographic work of Alfred Stieglitz, who is primarily thought of as an artist, and Lewis Hine, who is commonly considered a documentarian motivated by social activism. There are a number of questions germane to the book arts raised in the context of photography in this article, the most salient of which is whether the book arts should focus upon the technically aesthetic or the socially relevant. The answer should be that they work hand in hand and that this dichotomy is artificial and arbitrary.

Openings: STUDIES IN BOOK ART

EDITOR
Peter J. Tanner

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If you are interested in submitting an article or review to the journal, please visit journals.sfu.ca/cbaa or email journal@collegebookart.org.

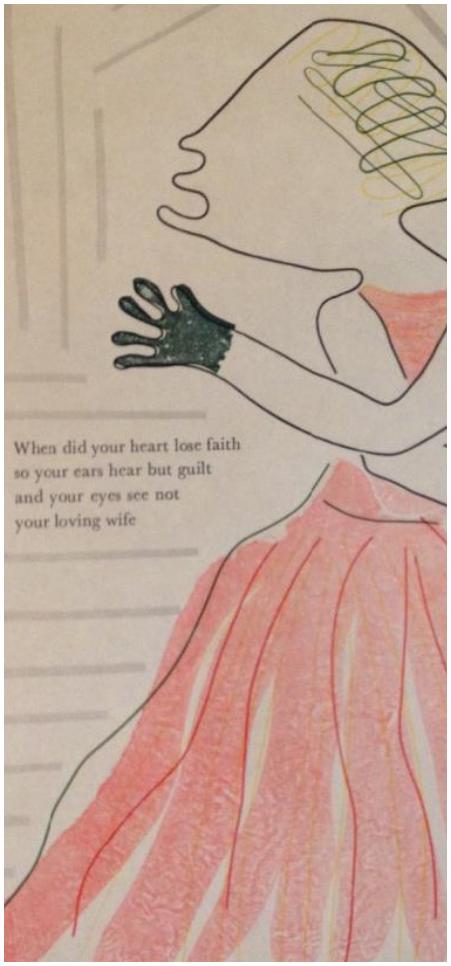
The artist book, as a medium and practice, values change, experimentation, and freedom. It serves the public by questioning and breaking old rules and founding new ones, as if in an aesthetic laboratory. The inquisitive and interrogative nature of this art form is one that postulates new paradigms equally relevant for both new aesthetic expressions and changing social patterns.

When we grapple with the definition of the artist book, we are continuing to wrestle with claims that engage and participate in the vagaries of the aesthetic "legislation of what is and is not art."[2] This overriding question seems to isolate the artist book from its potential as an art object with a social function. Thus, the preoccupation with its incorporation within the canon confirms the hegemony of the discourses that surround the historic and contemporary importance of art and, by extension, book art. The push to place the artist book within the canon, thus sanctioning and containing it within the frameworks of cultural institutions and academies, is actually counterintuitive to its history as a conceptual object whose initial intent was to eschew the materialist nature of the art market and official canon-dom. Therefore, "tradition" is an unreliable guide to this medium's history.

One definition—for artist publications rather than artist books—provided by the Centre for Artists' Publications at the Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst in Weserberg, Germany, states, "Artists' publications are thus also manifestations of information and communication."[3] If this definition is applied consistently, all works of printing by artists can be considered artist publications. Michalis Pichler, in his anthology, *Publishing Manifestos* (2019), chooses instead the more open term, "Publishing or publications as an umbrella term," in order to "include any form of circulating information, including books, zines, loose-leaf collections, flyers, e-books, blog posts, social media, and hybrids, as long as they are (or are meant to be) viewed or read by multiple audiences."[4] It is a brilliant way to open up the genre, making it more inclusive. Nevertheless, both positions will ultimately "fall into the mindless pluralism of anything goes."[5] Further, they overlook the distinction that not all artist publications are books. The ideologies of inclusivity and genre deconstruction fail to account for the needs of metadata to separate, detail, and classify objects. When overly inclusive definitions dissolve what should be obvious distinctions, say that between a print and a book, the need for specificity becomes more apparent.

Regardless of the metadata issues involved with these definitions, it can clearly be seen that both lines of thought lead back to taxonomies of the canon within fine art, connecting to a centuries-long discourse of what is and is not included. At the same time, they attempt to open up the canon through the use of overly inclusive umbrella terms. It appears, at least to me, to be a kind of doublespeak, acknowledging difference, but disavowing the difference of that difference.

While there is no record of such taxonomic debates happening in reference to painting, there is a clear historical precedent in the discipline of photography. The photograph has varyingly been viewed as both artistic and not artistic because it is captured directly from nature, by the "pencil of light"[6] and using a mechanical means that, because of its scientific nature, is theoretically free of any mediation by the artist's mind and hand (though that is also understood to never have been the case, due to the fact that the photographic recording process has always been crafted by the eye of the photographer selecting what does and does not fall within the recording field of their impartial device). This long debate took approximately a century to finalize and is well documented in many of the various



Detail from Desdemona In Her Own Words, *by Emily Martin.*

histories of photography. Which brings us back to Stieglitz and Hine and whether or not the mechanized reproduction of art is conducive to technically aesthetic work and social work functioning in unison.

The history of book art is still under construction. Therefore, the desire to receive institutional recognition has dominated the culture and explains the constant need to define and redefine what book art is—and is not—in order to facilitate its inclusion in the canonical histories of art.

Books have always performed a social function as tools of instruction, indoctrination, and education. They have also contributed to cultural labors to justify racism, eugenics, and racial superiority, as well as to maintain class and social status. As such it must be recognized that this labor performed by books, and by association book art, has done damage to countless individuals throughout history. This is the reasoning behind the need for book work to be social work: to correct, repair, and mitigate the damage done by previous books, making the world a better place.

As a means to address this work, the printed page must be considered as the inheritor of a social history, especially in its attempts to connect to and separate from canon and market forces.

In order to pursue these questions, I am including here some interesting points, which I quote from Trachtenberg and which seem particularly relevant to the social work of the book arts:

> The aim [is] to subordinate the machine, symbol of all that [is] wrong and inhuman in industrial society, to individual will.[7]
>
> The insistence that "treatment" rather than subject or content mattered most . . . [and] would save art . . . from the fate of unskilled factory laborers chained to the machines by ignorance and surrender of will.[8]
>
> "The . . . apparatus" . . . can be "pliant tools and not mechanical tyrants." Science, in short, in service to art.[9]
>
> The signs of style, of individuality, are found on the surface of the print, in its rendering of "tonal-values," and in its "correctness of composition."[10]
>
> The legibility of . . . [books] as meaningful representations depends upon the specific structures of meaning in which we see them.[11]

We perform our artistic and academic labors within institutional frameworks; there are pressures in our world that require that our art take notice of social conflict. Our outlook should be toward change fostered by enlightened and activated public opinion. This means that we should promote an artistic ideal of the world through book works in order to reshape reality in a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive image. As such, the greatest work that book art can perform is that of illuminating the contradictions between rhetoric and reality.

NOTES

1. Alan Trachtenberg, "Camera Work/Social Work," in *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 164–230.

2. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 175.

3. "What Are Artists' Publications?" (Weserburg, Germany). Accessed at weserburg.de/en/centre-for-artists-publications/what-are-artists-publications

4. Michalis Pichler, *Publishing Manifestos: An International Anthology from Artists and Writers* (Berlin/Cambridge, Massachusetts: Miss Read: The Berlin Art Book Fair/The MIT Press, 2019). 15.

5. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, ix.

6. Carol Armstrong, "Cupid's Pencil of Light: Julia Margaret Cameron and the Maternalization of Photography," *October* vol. 76 (Spring 1996): 115–41.

7. Trachtenberg, "Camera Work/Social Work," 182.

8. Ibid., 182.

9. Ibid., 181.

10. Ibid., 181–2.

11. Ibid., 180–1. The word, "books," has been substituted for "photographs" here.

Cut/Copy/Paste: Fragments from the History of Bookwork

by Whitney Trettien
University of Minnesota Press, 2021 • 328 pages • ISBN 978-1-5179-0409-8

Reviewed by Michael Hampton

ON OCCASIONS A PUBLISHER'S BLURB can act as far more than a sales pitch and actually provoke a conversation—even better, offer up an entry point to not only understand, but to use a text critically. Blurbs matter, one could say, and when they do, they can also summarily aid any review process which might be called for. This one is pithy, and gets the ball rolling:

In *Cut/Copy/Paste*, Whitney Trettien journeys to the fringes of the London print trade to uncover makerspaces and collaboratories where paper media were cut up and reassembled into radical, bespoke publications.

Thanks to the University of Minnesota Press, Trettien's *Cut/Copy/Paste* comes in three distinct versions: clothbound for libraries, paperback, and as an online, open-source text via Manifold. When my commissioning editor at CBAA presented a short list of possible review titles for a future *Openings*, I initially chose to read *C/C/P* in its online version. I wanted to challenge myself as a reader, but more importantly hoped to see if any sort of nontraditional review format might be generated by this novel application with its interactive tools (allowing you to highlight, bookmark, annotate, etc.) and clickable access to supplementary hand-curated digital resources. After investigation though, and reaching a neurological threshold in terms of online eye strain, I ordered a physical copy too, satisfying a deep-seated craving for "real" books. So this review is the product of a hybrid reader response, suitably impure given Trettien's chosen historical terrain at the junction of manuscript culture and movable type, and tuned to her mission statement, posited in the introduction called "This Book" to be "fundamentally recuperative."

The book is divided into three sections, namely "Cut," "Copy," and "Paste." Each is focused on an emblematic English literary figure or figures, and cleverly these chapter headings also combine to provide the title of Trettien's book—a bibliographical novelty in itself. "Cut" is an extended study of the methodological procedures adopted at the remote seventeenth-century Anglican community of Little Gidding, Cambridgeshire, specifically championing the exquisite scissorwork of Mary and Ann Colet and their daring recombinant practice, effected by cutting and pasting both words and imagery from the blackletter 1611 King James Bible's four books of the apostles, in order to construct novel and multiple readings that enable devotional user pathways. "Copy" attempts to rescue from oblivion the Essex-based curator/poet Edward Benlowes, specifically his patchwork collection of queered verse, *Theophila* (1652). Finally, "Paste" profiles the controversial, yet utterly charming, Restoration-era, magpie collector of ephemera, John Bagford, drawing on his two great bespoke folios, *Fragmenta manuscripta* and *Fragmenta varia*.

Trettien is passionately engaged with the radical practices (radical, at least, from a contemporary, normative perspective) detailed in these three case studies, but her feminist credentials find the greatest traction in "Cut," which homes in on Little Gidding's acts of collective decoupage and its boutique concordances or "Harmonies." In the schismatic context of England in the mid-1630s, the novel "makerspace" (Trettien visualizes this

Michael Hampton is a freelance writer who is based in London and has written extensively about artists' publishing. A regular contributor to Art Monthly *since 2009, his groundbreaking study,* Unshelf-marked: Reconceiving the Artists' Book, *came out in 2015.* Against Decorum, *a hybrid collection of word reliefs and bibliographic fragments, was published by Information as Material in 2022.*

workshop with its hand tools, marbled paper, leather, miscellaneous typefaces, and rolling presses), run by Nicholas Ferrar, relied upon the artisanal and craft skills of his female relatives. These staff, whose handiwork was so refined that readers were often unable to distinguish between collage and the printed volume, were empowered to hack up a codex or religious engraving imported from the Low Countries in order to blithely "transform its prismatic sequences of folds and juxtapositions into a protofeminist technology capable of synthesizing religious dissonance and resolving interpersonal conflict." Trettien identifies this productive urge as a convivial antecedent to the materiality of today's unique artist book, in other words, female-gendered, "context-attentive" editing.

Edward Benlowes, the subject of "Copy," emerges incrementally as a Caroline-era gentleman poet, patron-publisher, library donor, and ultimately transmedia assembleur, someone who benefited from how the "Jacobean grand tour helped to flood the literary landscape with new verse, new emblems, new icons, and new ways of thinking about the relationship between text and image and sound." His main claim to fame is the complex verse sequence, *Theophilia, or Love's Sacrifice*, which showcases the ways his baroque imagination resulted in a "materialist poetics." Very much a project, it resembles a hybrid box file of "orphaned prints," interleaved plates and cuts, and even random frontispieces and scored music. Trettien (who in an act of sustained research has examined twenty-six copies of the forty-five in existence), views *Theophilia* as a subtle affront to heteronormativity, and her modulated reading between digital facsimile and object per se discerns the work's queer logic, helping to save Benlowes, who earned the dubious honour of being mocked in Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*, from complete oblivion.

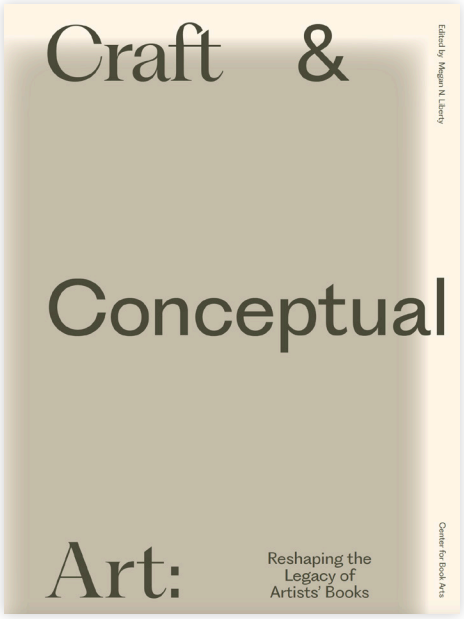
Many of these threads come together in "Paste," a profile of the arch–scrapbook maker John Bagford. Described by Trettien as a "voracious scavenger," Bagford pursued a career that coincided with the advent of the first London coffee/auction houses, places he frequented in order to network and pick up commissions from wealthy patrons. A runner or bookfinder who collected the most abject, disregarded materials, or in Gabriel Naudé's words, "Libels, Placarts, Theses, Fragments, Proofs and the like" (an interesting dialectic emerges in *C/C/P* between Naudé's inclusive librarianship and Thomas Bodley's highbrow disdain of "Baggage Books"), Bagford bridged the historical transition between manuscript and printed word, his ambition nothing less than a complete history of the book, purveyed through scraps. However, because of an erratic methodology, Bagford came to be viewed as a monster by Victorian bookmen such as William Blades, who labelled him "a wicked old biblioclast." Trettien utterly rejects this smear campaign, redeems Bagford's "bibliographic malpractice," and situates him at the basis of "modern anglophone bibliography."

Attitudes change slowly though, and even today, most librarians remain stuck inside a nineteenth-century paradigm, wary of remix culture, the sort of Early Modern bibliographic hip-hop represented by Bagford's oeuvre. For instance, James Waddell recently griped (in "Manuscript men," in the *Times Literary Supplement*, November 11, 2022) that "Robert Cotton, the Elizabethan antiquarian whose manuscript collection formed the nucleus of what would later become the British Library, whiled away his evenings cutting up and rebinding fragments of eighth-century Anglo-Saxon books, according to his own aesthetic whims." This cut-and-paste practice is one which most resonates with today's digital scholarship: the unsettled literary categories of the seventeenth century are a rich source and retrospective mirror of today's interdisciplinary humanities and their hybrid technological means. Exquisitely written, *C/C/P* is a handbook that opens up new cognitive pathways, ones shown to join up with and validate absolutely contemporary phenomena such as certain types of perversely unoriginal writing, the appropriative energies of internet meme culture, mashed up underground zines, and so on. By excavating a largely forgotten past, Trettien's well-argued book gives a long overdue respectability to the artist as assembleur (rather than deviant), even obliquely sketching out a precursor status—in these seventeenth-century practitioners of recombinance—for the Romantic genius still to come, while putting pressure on how humanities curricula are currently designed and taught. A delightful, dangerous reading experience. ■

Craft & Conceptual Art: Reshaping the Legacy of Artists' Books

Edited by Megan N. Liberty
Center for Book Arts, 2023 • 120 pages • ISBN 978-1-951163-12-9

Reviewed by Christopher M. Reeves



CRAFT & CONCEPTUAL ART: *Reshaping the Legacy of Artists' Books* is the accompanying catalog for a traveling exhibition of the same name, and explores in greater detail the show's larger thematic concern: artist books that exist in the seemingly incompatible networks of craft and conceptual art. Like its parent exhibition, the catalog aims to reconcile this divide by positing the artist book (as well as its makers and dedicated institutions) as a form that can pay equal attention to the potency of conceptual art benchmarks—for example, dematerialization, ephemerality, and process—and the formal preciousness of craft. While vanguard notions of idea art translated into meticulously fabricated, artist-produced books or journals have existed since at least the early twentieth century (see Dada and Surrealism), *Craft & Conceptual Art* covers artist books from around the early 1960s to the mid-1990s. On account of this, much of the material discussed and shown in this catalog was made during Conceptualism's halcyon days of the 1970s and '80s, a time that coincided with the founding of now legendary book art institutions such as Printed Matter, Minnesota Center for Book Arts, and Franklin Furnace.

The catalog explores major themes and developments around the relationship of artist books to conceptual art and crafts through three broad sections: commissioned essays, archival interviews and materials, and photoreproductions of artist books from the exhibition. Of the collected essays, Kayleigh Perkov's "Slipping off the Pink-Collar: The Feminist Subversion of Photocopier Technology circa 1965–1980" and Tara Aisha Willis's "Performance and the Page: The Instructional Score and Conceptual Bookmaking" are particularly generative in moving the thesis of craft and conceptual reconciliation through artist books into more expansive terrain. Perkov locates the Xerox machine, ubiquitous in postwar offices across the United States, as a symbol of gendered labor. The copy machine was largely handled by, but also displaced, the enormous influx of female clerical workers in the postwar workplace. Perkov notes that the creative repurposing of the copy machine's function by artists was a way to counter or comment on automation's alienating effects, and uses Barbara T. Smith's "Coffin" series (1965–67) and Sas Colby's *Lifebook: 1939–1976* (1976–77) as exemplars.

Willis's text is notable for its focus on the work of Benjamin Patterson and Alison Knowles, foundational figures in the Fluxus group who have only very recently gotten overdue art historical attention. Both Patterson and Knowles crafted performances from verbal text instructions that could be collected in book format. Discussed here are the former's *Methods and Processes* (1962), which was self-published, and the latter's by Alison Knowles (1965), published by Dick Higgins's Great Bear/Something Else Press. Willis discusses the possibilities of scores in these collections, as well as in Knowles's more formally ambitious Bean Rolls series, and their potential to serve as objects for activation in their hermeneutic propositions—re-performance by readers—and draw the reader in with their formal properties as book objects.

While it is refreshing to read a text that largely focuses on the work of Patterson and Knowles (there are also a few paragraphs dedicated to *Mariana Valencia's Album* (2019)

Christopher M. Reeves is a creative researcher and professor of art history living and working in Chicago. He received his PhD in Art History from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the coeditor of The World's Worst: A Guide to the Portsmouth Sinfonia, *published by Soberscove Press in 2020. Other writings include pieces on Benjamin Patterson's Fluxus excess, Suzanne Ciani's voice in a pinball machine, art and skateboarding, and Dick Higgins's Something Else Press.*

as a contemporary heir), the author misses an opportunity to discuss these works in their historical context. At the time of their inceptions, Patterson's and Knowles's scores were published and re-performed less from Methods or by than from Fluxus editions. Patterson's decision to self-publish and Knowles's appearance in Higgins's "cheap offset" pamphlet branch of his larger, more exorbitant Something Else Press editions means something for the why of their given book forms. These self-publishing endeavors were a means for Fluxus adjacent artists to assert some independence over Maciunas' generous but occasionally imposing design and authorial overreach with Fluxus editions.[1] Acknowledging the importance of these particular score collections relative to the (admittedly far more thematically appropriate to this exhibition on conceptual book forms and craft) Fluxus book editions published and designed by George Maciunas could alert the reader to ways Patterson and Knowles so often exceed the Fluxus category in their own published book work (particularly Knowles's *Big Book* (1967) and *Book of Bean* (1981)).

The archival interviews and materials complement the commissioned texts in an almost annotative way, bookending each writer's thematic essay with historically salient material. These interviews and materials are one of the most attractive elements of the catalog, providing indispensable reading and resources for those interested in the more granular aspects of artist book-making. Excerpts of interviews and ephemera culled from the Center for Book Arts' publication *Book Art Review* and the Franklin Furnace and Center for Book Arts archives, as well as transcripts from remarks given at book art conferences, provide the reader with a sprawling look at the various ways in which individual artists and thinkers approach the line between concept and craft in their book works through a range of voices, from mainstays like Charles Harrison to the oft-overlooked Reginald Walker.

The photo documentation is as generous as possible. Attempting to provide the reader with an image of an object that exists to be handled, read, experienced, or altered will always make for a difficult translation. Nonetheless, the documentation functions like much of the catalog does, providing an access point through which interested readers might continue their own research, exposing them to lesser-known book artists or compelling them to visit a local special collection to view a copy of one of the books photographed. In this regard, the catalog is exemplary, an introductory manual that provokes and inspires as much as it exists as a record of an exhibition.

Given the myriad detours, individual expressions, and mostly 1970s–80s archival ephemera, I am not sure the catalog will convince anyone already interested or academically engaged that it is doing anything so holistic as "reshaping the legacy of artists books." By their formal virtues, or at the very least in their nomenclature, artist books exist as formal responses, a subcategory of "book" meant to exceed that category. This quality is what makes the artist book exceptional, but like any form designed to push the boundaries of the possible, it also makes questions of "legacy" difficult to contend with. Legacy questions are most often taken up by the academically interested, which is largely the audience for this catalog (although the casually interested will find something compelling in its pages). However, the catalog's central and admirable provocation is broad enough to be taken up by anyone interested, from academics to the book artist at a copy machine with a stapler: What is it that artist books do?

■

NOTE

1. For more on the distinction between Fluxus and Something Else Press publications see, Chris Reeves, "Alloturgies in the Annex: Something Else Press and the Fluxus Mode of Production," Counter Signals No.2, ed. Jack Henrie Fisher, 2017. https://www.academia.edu/35109693/Alloturgies_in_the_Annex_Something_Else_Press_and_the_Fluxus_Mode_of_Production.

wood+paper+box, Mise-en-Scène *(2023 Beach Museum of Art Gift Print), 2020–2022, clamshell box, mokuhanga (Japanese woodblock), oil-based woodblock, letterpress, lithograph, and inkjet, dimensions variable, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, photo: Kansas State University, Communications and Marketing*

wood+paper+box in your hands

October 3, 2023–April 6, 2024
Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Manhattan, Kansas

Reviewed by Kimi Kitada

AN INVITATION: PLACE BOX HERE FOR UNPACKING. Use the other pedestal to create your own arrangement.

Reaching for the clamshell box, I felt a tinge of anticipation. What would emerge from this box, and what would the condition of its contents be? After opening the lid, a bright orange Tyvek netting revealed itself, slightly disheveled at the edges. At that moment, I contemplated the level of trust that the artists gave to their audiences. While the wall label clearly states, "handling copy," museumgoers do not often hold and unpack artworks.

The unboxing process required time and close investigation. The artist collective, wood+paper+box, consists of three artists: Katie Baldwin, Mariko Jesse, and Yoonmi Nam. Each artist contributed several material elements to the box, and I was curious about which works were attributed to an individual artist. Every artwork was folded and resting precisely in its place. Some of the works on paper inhabited a small envelope, and the viewer would open it with a sense of delight and wonder. After I had unwrapped multiple artworks and placed them gingerly onto the pedestal, I was awestruck by the sheer number of pieces that fit neatly into this box. When I finally reached the last object, I composed a simple arrangement for the #woodpaperbox visual archive.

The exhibition title, *wood+paper+box in your hands*, references the tactile experience of holding the artworks using the handling copy, as well as the artists' process of mailing each other pieces to inspire and inform the next works. Curated by Aileen June Wang, the exhibition compels viewers to consider the artist book in an expanded manner and prioritizes a collaborative spirit of making.

Kimi Kitada is a curator based in Kansas City. She is currently the Gallery & Programs Manager at Charlotte Street. Previously, she was Curatorial Assistant at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2019–2020, where she assisted on Xu Zhen: In Just a Blink of an Eye. *From 2014 to 2018, she served as Public Programs & Research Coordinator at Independent Curators International in New York. Kitada received a BA in art history and classics from Bucknell University and an MA in museum studies from NYU.*

wood+paper+box, (un)fold, *2017–2023*, *clamshell box*, *mokuhanga (Japanese woodblock)*, *relief printing*, *pressure printing*, *digital print*, *pochoir*; *dimensions variable*, *photo: Kansas State University, Communications and Marketing*

The selected works of the wood+paper+box collective function as open-ended, printed material. The works are not bound or mass-produced, but rather are hand printed in a limited edition. Instead of taking the form of traditional printed matter, these pieces push boundaries relating to graphic design, illustration, and printmaking, among other techniques. All the artists display an exceptional attention to detail, especially working on a miniature scale. The petite "Thank You" bag by Yoonmi Nam, the letterpress details on a small lid by Katie Baldwin, and the Meyer lemon seeds packet hand lettered by Mariko Jesse exemplify this careful, concise attention to detail.

The artworks of Baldwin, Jesse, and Nam visually harmonize, and each wood+paper+box project ties together in a cohesive way. The artists met in 2004 at the Nagasawa Art Park residency in Awaji, Japan. The *wood+paper+box in your hands* exhibition spans a period from 2013 to 2023, and includes four large display cases, titled *wood+paper+box*; *(un)fold*; *AL>CA>KS*; and *Mise-en-Scène*. From an exhibition design standpoint, the color of each wooden display case mirrors the color of that project's box. This aesthetic choice creates a unified experience throughout the exhibition space and alludes to a sense of play in the work. Notably, in the project, *(un)fold* (2017–23), the artists investigate the revealing and concealing of space using a variety of paper folding ideas. Baldwin experiments with relief and pressure printing, while Jesse uses paper folding to conceal a mokuhanga (Japanese woodblock) flower print. The artists communicate this idea of play by testing different printmaking techniques and making work for each other in a joyful way.

At the onset of this collaboration, the artists marked their ten-year friendship and chose to create works on paper inspired by working, learning, and living together in Japan. The organizing principle of friendship carries through each display case, and touches on the art historical precedent of mail art—specifically, the postcard series of artist On Kawara, titled *I Got Up*, which was a continuous piece from 1968 to 1979 in which the artist sent postcards to friends, stamped with the exact time that he woke up on that day. The personal nature of Kawara's work connects to the intimate friendships of the wood+paper+box collective. For the project, *AL>CA>KS* (2015–2016), the artists mailed works to each other in order to connect across vast distances and maintain their personal ties over the years.

wood+paper+box, AL>CA>KS, *2015–2016*, *clamshell box*, *mokuhanga (Japanese woodblock)*, *letterpress*, *reductive linoleum*, *screen print*, *etching and color transfer*, *lithograph*, *vintage handkerchief*, *dimensions variable*, *photo: Kansas State University, Communications and Marketing*

Handling copy of Mise-en-Scène, 2023 Beach Museum of Art Gift Print at the interactive station of the exhibition, photo: Kansas State University, Communications and Marketing

In the printed exhibition brochure, Wang expresses her admiration for the collective: "I find their mutual respect to be a breath of fresh air within a mainstream art world that often elevates individual artists." The artists dispel the emphasis on an individual practice and expound on their identity as an artist collective. The spirit of collaborative art-making truly extends to the viewer, who is invited as a participant in the *Mise-en-Scène* (2023) box. The artists of the wood+paper+box collective are not concerned with artistic authorship or singular genius, but instead encourage viewers to become coauthors—to touch, hold, and choreograph a scene using the original artworks. This invitation guides the audience's creative impulses, and at the same time, the act of touching pieces in a museum space is a rare privilege and a radical gesture. ■

Cover, I Am Here Vol. I, The Flowers in Her Room, *2021*, *Artist Book*, *Ed. 500*

I.AM.HERE: AN INTERVIEW WITH ANA ESTRADA

Interview by Sara Reiger

ANA ESTRADA DE ISOLBI

I am an artist and researcher based in Meanjin / Brisbane, Australia. My work and PhD research investigate how art practices can contribute to the creation of safe spaces for dialogue in aged care. I am interested in applying storytelling as a crucial tool for vocalising visions and ideas of aged care workers and residents. Over the years, my books featuring aged care stories have received recognition and awards, including the SLQ Siganto Fellowship, the AAANZ best book award, the APPA silver award, the Ian Turnbull Memorial Award, Libris Award, and a commendation from the Australian Photobook Award of the Year to mention a few.
Website: www.anaestrada.au

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

Sara Rieger is a book artist and art educator. She graduated from Iowa State University with a BFA in Drawing and Painting. She received her MFA in book arts from the University of Iowa Center for the Book in 2021 where she was the recipient of an Iowa Arts Fellowship. She currently resides in Iowa.

Could you tell me a little bit about your history and how you got into the book arts?

I'm Mexican, but I came to live in Brisbane about twelve years ago. My undergrad degree was in visual arts back in Mexico. I came to live here in Australia, and I started working. One of the first cultural shocks that I experienced was looking at a lot of older people living on their own or just being on their own in the street for their daily tasks.

Coming from Mexico, made me notice and wonder why they were on their own. What's happening with this demographic in this country? And I got very curious. I started volunteering for different organizations and visiting older people in their homes, and eventually started writing about their life stories.

I always liked books, but I was not really into artist books. My background is in documentary photography. The way I was presenting my stories was more formal, in gallery spaces, with the photograph and the caption or the photographs and the story. But eventually I ended up applying for an artist book fellowship. And the application that I put forward was *Memorandum*, an artist book about stories that I have been collecting.

That opened my experience to the world of artist books. I started researching. They have a huge collection in the State Library of Queensland. I started going into the library as part of my fellowship and just getting my hands on these amazing books. And that's how I started.

So you found the book arts organically through printmaking classes?

You could say that, yes. Tim Mosely, who is the head of Printmaking at Queensland College of Art, is very well recognized in the artist books field in Australia (and overseas). He runs a few artist book courses as part of the curriculum. He was my supervisor for my Masters, and now for my PhD.

But I think the real closeness I felt to the artist book came from the need for what I wanted to say in my work. I was working with, as I said, portraying older people. I was portraying an older woman. I had the camera on the tripod, and I was using a cord to photograph.

While we were talking, I am shooting many, many portraits in a row. And then when I was editing and selecting which portrait to pick, I noticed a movement, like a very slight movement in her face. And I thought, oh my God, that movement is her breathing. I could see her whole body, like going up and down a little bit. And I thought, oh, that movement, it's coming to life and I want to capture it. But I knew that it was difficult to capture using only still photography. I thought I could maybe create a series of portraits where I use a sequence of photographs. That is exactly when I knew that I needed to make a book. I made a few photo books before this that were almost like a 'coffee table-book', where you can see photos and captions and that's it. But then when I realized that the book could actually give me a little bit more to express something else, that's when I got really excited about the book.

The artist book is a perfect medium for me to actually show these small differences in gestures. That's how I came to the book. And that's exactly what I did for my grant: I took my photography off the wall and used the book format instead which allowed me to show movement.

Can you talk about how your work has evolved over time? From your thesis and commercial printing to work that has more evidence of the artist's hand?

For my thesis, I was very conscious about how I was using the book. Like what are the things that the book can give us that you cannot find in any other medium, like time and sequencing and layering. For example, the fact that when you make a hole, you are on one page, but you're also allowing the viewer to see a tiny bit of whatever is coming next became a device. And then cutouts became a part of my vocabulary.

I was experimenting in the studio, discovering all those devices, and it was really fun to just understand the language of the book.

After my thesis project, I got really obsessed with papermaking. I started thinking about paper as more than just a surface where you can put things and content. The paper itself can contain information. I moved into a space where I started experimenting with paper, which led to making paper from clothes.

I made a book with my ex's clothes that he left behind when he moved out (*I Cannot See You*, 2019). For me, it was the same "aha" moment I had with the book—the paper was a new discovery. It allowed me to say more things.

In *I Cannot See You*, the whole project was about absence and presence. I was talking about someone who was not here anymore, but I still had the clothes. I was trying to let the person go, but I was also keeping their clothes and then questioning: is he still here or not? And I think the cutouts worked really well for that because I was saying something through empty space.

Zoom conversation between Joan Nolan and Ana Estrada, from I Am Here II, *2021*

With the paper, I was discovering I could grab something from the world and transform it, and then give it to the reader, and they take it with them; they are actually taking something with them that belonged to something (someone) else.

I think that transformation was really useful for me in that project because it was about grieving and it was about transforming and it was also about conveying my emotions through making. And that was the first project I did with paper.

I've been very slow with my practice since then because I started working in an aged care facility. I've been collecting stories and also receiving clothes, and then pulping these clothes, and then making paper. I've been working on my most current project with Tim Mosely and I still don't know where it's going yet.

You're collecting more clothes for paper for your current work?

I started my PhD about three or four years ago. I had the idea of using paper and exploring touch, and then continuing to tell stories of older people. I was thinking about how we could use touch to create connectedness between aged care residents and the community. That was the original idea. I started volunteering in a care facility, and then COVID hit, and they were like, no, you can't come in anymore.

That put my whole idea of touch in question, right? It's like, okay, now we're going through this massive crisis and we cannot touch each other. How can I still talk about touch in a more metaphorical way? As a result of COVID, I moved away from papermaking because I just couldn't go into the paper studio.

I also couldn't go into the care facility. I started meeting aged care residents online. They were in their rooms completely isolated, and I was now talking to them through the screen. At the beginning, I was completely against it. I thought it was going to be a failure. I thought, no way you could connect with someone through the screen. Like, no way. But eventually, it was fascinating.

I have talked to one resident, for example, for two years.

Copies of I Am Here Vol. I *at an aged care home, 2023*

Every Tuesday morning, they would have the iPad in front of her and we would chat. We connected so well. To the point that she would offer me whatever she was eating. It was like, oh, do you want some cake?

Then I was recording the conversations and transcribing. With this project, it stopped being like a documentary project or just me recording oral histories. It was more about a relationship. I started being part of the work: it's like, this is also about me. It's about me building these relationships, and it's about me observing the world and capturing the stories and listening to someone. And it's about the whole process. Which was a huge change in my work. The writing changed—the tone changed completely. It became way more poetic.

I started using very similar physical strategies to what I had used with the book. I applied that to the writing itself. So there was a lot of repetition. There were places where you would read something and then you would read it again, and then that would take you to another part of the story.

I spent about two years working on those two different books, *I Am Here*, *Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2*. They were printed through the Visual Studies Workshop. I worked with Tate Shaw very closely, which was an amazing collaboration, even though we've never met in person. Everything was done through the screen.

Afterward, the idea was to deliver these books into the aged care homes and make people understand the stories behind the walls, right? My question was still how could we connect the aged care community to the outside community? And how could we connect people within the same aged care facility, the staff and the residents?

After publishing, walking in the facility, I have staff members stopping me, saying, "Oh my God, I can't believe, you know, Joan's story. Like, I've been caring for her for more than ten years, and I never knew that she was such a feminist." And I realized, oh my God, this is the power of storytelling. The staff were all so busy in their daily lives, and they might not have had the chance to sit down and listen to the stories of the people they care for, but art does that very well. Art connects us to people who can be close or on the other side of the world.

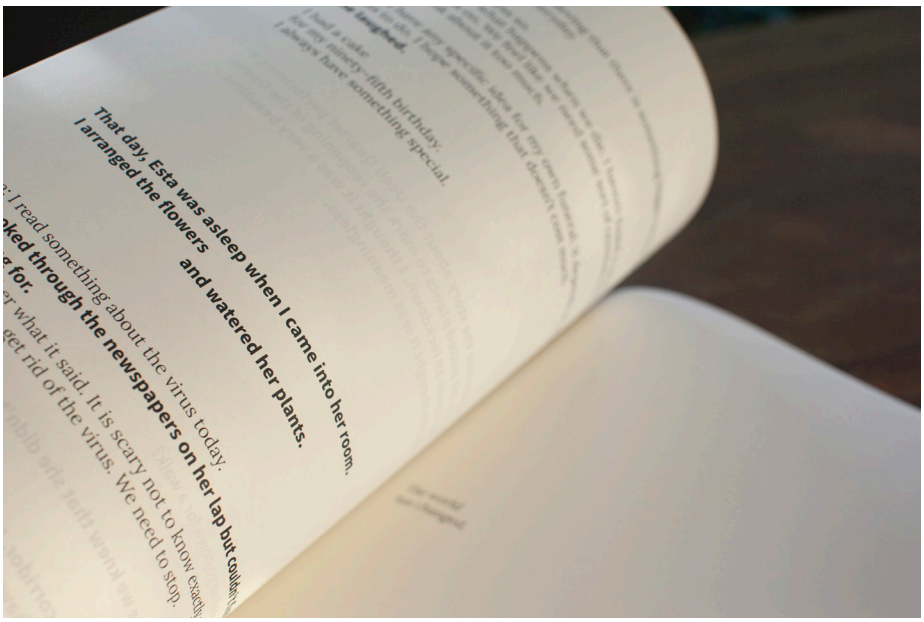
This organization that the care facility belongs to has many, many different facilities across the country. Somehow my publication was there on a table during a meeting and managers started reading. They called me, asking if I wanted to meet the state manager. I came into that meeting and I sat with her and we chatted and liked each other right away. I told her we need soft skills in this industry. And artists. I think sometimes we underappreciate the skills that creative people have because creative people have a very different way of moving in the world.

She offered me a job and it was a very, like, non-artistic job [laughs] and it was challenging.

I spent almost two years working in that facility, bringing creative solutions to problems that we had.

It's very easy to think that the artist book belongs to the artist book niche. That it's a small niche and that we make books for collections and for artists. What I found is that the medium is actually so approachable and so generous that anyone could actually get to the content.

Also, artists and what we do can actually make changes in other spaces as well, which was a nice thing to experience firsthand.



I Am Here Vol. I, The Flowers in Her Room, *2021*, *Artist Book*, *Ed. 500*

At the moment, I'm working on a new artist book project with residents in the facility. It won't just be me designing the book. It's going to be some sort of newsletter. The residents are writing their own stories. Each resident will have a little bit more input into how their story is portrayed physically. They're also photographing, we are involving volunteers, and it's going to be a community project.

We formed a newsletter committee. For example, one resident is in charge of fiction. She actually started writing her biography, and then at some point she was like, "Oh no, I started lying. So it's not my biography anymore. Now it's fiction" [laughs]. She's writing a story about this girl who grew up on a farm and had plenty of dogs, and it's now a fictional short story.

Another guy is obsessed with birds. He's writing an article on birds. It's very interesting because they want to tell their own stories. I'm pretty much just facilitating the space now.

How often will that newsletter be published?

At the moment, it's in a strange space. I was working in the facility, and we were meeting every Wednesday to discuss details. Every time we met, it was a disaster. It was like, we want it to be short, we want it to be long. We decided we were going to publish every four months. But I'm not working there anymore. I gave it a three-week break. Now I have to go back and restart things.

I would like to apply for a grant so the publication can actually be completely independent from the organization.

It's interesting to consider an autobiography turning into fiction. In Esta's book, (I Was There, Vol. 1 *and* I Am Here Vol. 1), *you wrote in your thesis that she had three different first memories. You couldn't figure out which was the real first memory, so you put them all in the book. But in a way, we fictionalize our memories every time we remember them [laughs].*

That's true. I think we're really good at drafting our own narrative.

It's interesting. When you hear the same person talking about their memories, especially someone who has dementia. You see how well they know their story still. The way they tell the story can sound as if they are improvising, but it's like, no, no, they're using exactly the same words as when they've told the story before. We craft our own lives very similarly to how we craft our memories.

One thing you have talked about is the concept of the irrelevant but important details. As you work on this project as part of your PhD, are you talking to the residents about your thoughts and process?

No, I think work is very organic. I don't plan much, even when the work seems quite defined on everything. I don't plan much in terms of how the conversations go. With *I Was There*, I was just coming into their homes, sitting, drinking coffee, and we would just talk. Sometimes I would ask questions, but in the same way I would if talking with a friend who's telling me about their childhood. Not in a prescriptive way.

I got very lucky. With Esta, who was the subject of *I Was There* and *I Am Here*, we got really, really close. We met weekly for more than three years. We became family. There was no more like, oh, I'm an artist working on a project.

We were friends. We loved meeting. She was a very intelligent woman. She was an observer. She would notice all the nuances and I was fascinated by that. Every time she said something perceptive, I was trying to capture that to bring it into the work. There's this part in the book where she talks about this memory where she had breakfast for the first time in a hotel, which was in the middle of nowhere in Australia. She sat down and the waitress brought a plate of butter to her that had been formed into beautiful shapes. And she was fascinated by the butter.

And for me, listening to someone who's almost one hundred years old, talking about the beauty of the shapes in the butter that she saw when she was six, it's like, that's beautiful. It's easy to think that we are going to get to ninety and we're going to talk about our professions and all the big things we did. But it's not always the case. When we hear a memory like Esta's with the butter, we think, why would you remember?

You remember, because probably in that place you felt really alive. And she was very present, and it was very special and it stayed. Certain things can stay in our minds, because they were just amazing for our senses. With her story, there was this play. I moved from the big narrative to this irrelevant information that really shaped her life and her personality as well.

When she passed away from COVID, her family invited me to the funeral, and I sat at the front with her daughters, and it was a lovely celebration.

When her family were reading the books, they were laughing at all the irrelevant things, and they were like, "Oh yeah, of course my mom said that." Another thing that happened with Esta is that there was something very important in her story that her family was not aware of until I started making the books.

I Am Here Vol. II, The Tiny Little Things, *2022, Artist Book, Ed. 500*

I actually had to talk to them. I said, "Your mom mentioned this and I don't know if I should put it in the book." And they were convinced that it had never happened in her life. We ended up meeting with Esta, and it became like a family topic and they resolved it. The book also allowed their family to go through this sort of healing process, which was really lovely.

That's amazing. Going back to your current project and how you've moved into handmade paper, are you going to be using clothing or items from the residents for your books?

No, I think at the moment I'm working on a couple different things. One thing is the newsletter, and that will be made digitally and reproduced in somewhat low quality because we want to print as many as we can. The other thing is that I've been just making paper from the residents' clothes. I can't visualize yet what I'm going to do with it.

As far as publishing, do you think you will continue in a mix of more commercial publishing methods and handmade publishing methods? Or are you moving away from commercially publishing your work?

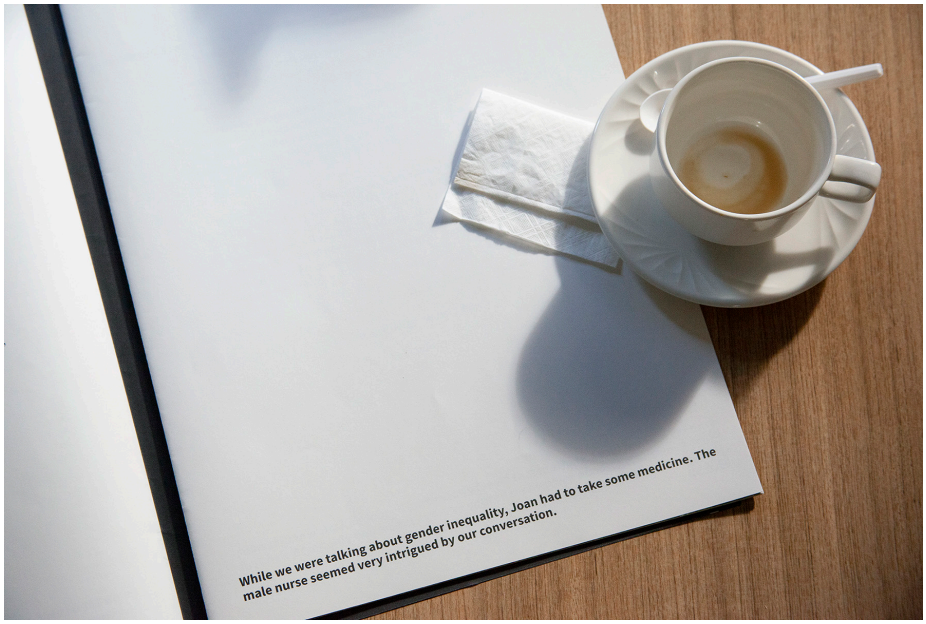
No, I don't think I'm moving away from it. I think I don't mind if it's commercial or if it's handmade. I'm not romanticizing my craft or my practice or anything. What matters to me is that I find the right medium for what I want to say. So in terms of giving agency to residents and giving them the tools for them to tell their own stories, it needs to be commercially printed because it is easier.

I think for my other project, it's more about touch and it's also about my relationship with the residents. It's a bit more personal or political. I think that it makes sense that it's handmade. And it makes sense that it's only a few pieces because they're very special and I'm not interested in having thousands of people looking at that book. The method depends on the needs of the story.

Can you speak to the questions of ethics that you bring up in your discussion about your work in your thesis?

The ethical issues that I have encountered while working have actually shaped the way I work a lot. From being in the facility every day, I see how difficult it is for people to move from their own home into a care facility and how difficult it is being isolated and institutionalized.

I feel that my responsibility as an artist is to share the tools with the residents. They can't go into the studio and make paper. So do I "steal" things and go out, make my own work, and build my own career with the things that I took from a community? Or do I want to bring the tools into the community and enable them to tell their own stories?



I Am Here Vol. II, The Tiny Little Things, *2022*, *Artist Book*, *Ed. 500*

So that's the direction I'm heading more and more. The hard part is that you have to let go of some qualities of the work. And that's difficult. If you're very precious with your practice, then of course you cannot do this type of community work, because you lack many controls over the end result.

In your previous work, there was a strong element of the interconnectedness of image/photograph and text. How are you moving forward with imagery in these new works?

That's a hard one. I haven't been photographing. It's crazy how sometimes we move almost outside of our own space or something. And then we come back and we're like, do I need a camera? Do I actually need to make images? And I think for maybe like a year, I thought I would never make photography again. At the moment, I'm actually visualizing and I still don't know if that's exactly where the project is going to go
.
I've been thinking of making a film. I would like to have very formal portraits with care residents where they are sitting, looking at the camera very still, just having a conversation about something. And I'm thinking that I would love, when we launch the newsletter, to have massive stacks of newsletters everywhere in a gallery space. Maybe a gallery space, but in the facility, in the home, and then having screens around.

I think the relationship between text and image is going to be in the actual physical space rather than playing in the book. More of an immersive or like immediate experience where you could be reading the stories and then also looking at the screen and seeing other stories or looking at someone looking at you.

That makes sense. I was thinking about how for I Was There, *you're in someone's home drinking coffee, and everything you are seeing and experiencing gets translated or transformed. Sometimes into a pretty austere page, which isn't quite the same as the experience you or they were having.*

Yes, and the new work is like the next step of that. All those questions, I try to approach them or resolve them in the next publication with Joan, who is one of the women who I was talking to every week through the screen. Every time we saw each other, the screen would open and she would say, "Oh, your face looks so lovely. You're so lovely. I love your smile." And then she would look at the window because she had a window next to her bed, and she would say something about the color of the paint in the house in front of hers. And then she would describe it to me because I couldn't see it.

She would say, "It's like a pale green, but then there's like this very pale pink on top of it, and the combination is just beautiful. I wonder what the painter was thinking." Every single time she would describe the color of the house, and there was one point when I

thought, there is no way I can translate this. There is no way I could ever, ever explain to someone how beautiful the experience was for me just to be sitting there so present with someone who is not with me physically.

And yet I get to hear this very poetic description of a house that is in front of a window. I tried many different things in the book. How could I translate this "thing?" And because it's so abstract, that's exactly the outcome of the work. I get to experience these amazing moments, and I need to learn different languages and tools for me to be able to translate them and to share them with an audience. And sometimes they don't do justice to the real thing. ∎

Figure 1: The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, *letterpress printed on 100 lb. Mohawk Superfine paper, 9 × 9 inches, 2012*

DOWN THE SHAKESPEARE RABBIT HOLE

By Emily Martin

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Martin earned an MFA degree in painting, from the University of Iowa in 1979 and made her first artist's books at that time. Martin joined the faculty of the University of Iowa Center for the Book in 1998 where she teaches artists books, paper engineering, and traditional bookbinding classes. She lives in Iowa City. Website: ***emilymartin.com***

I STARTED AS A PAINTER, earning an MFA from the University of Iowa School of Art and Art History in 1979. I made my first artist books while still in graduate school. After graduating, I began making more prints, at first with intaglio before experimenting with photocopies and early desktop publishing to produce more artist books. I used various residencies to have access to letterpress printing, finally getting my own Vandercook SP15 proof press in 2001. I have always been interested in telling the viewer a story. For a long time, the story was drawn from my life, but in more recent years I've also incorporated themes such as the theater, social observations, current events, and sometimes all those things in the same story. I often use humor to draw in the viewer.

In 2011, I felt like I had been mining my own life for material long enough. I was also feeling a bit stuck. At the Codex Book Fair that year, Richard Ovenden of the Bodleian Libraries encouraged the entry of artist books into a Shakespeare-themed bookbinding competition. I made note but didn't really give it much thought. Later that fall, I was at the Guild of Book Workers Standards of Excellence Seminar in Hand Bookbinding in Boston, where a call for the exhibit was included in the conference packet. The call folder had a pop-up in the center and somehow that made the idea of entering seem more appropriate for me. I decided that this was the something different and challenging that I would take on. Little did I know where it would lead. The call detailed some specifics regarding size and explained that it was a designer book competition, but that it was open to all formats and materials. I had never made a designer bookbinding and I wasn't interested in the traditional approach, using leather, tooling, and other conventions of the genre.

I decided on carousel book format early on and the play *The Tragedy Romeo and Juliet* (figure 1) for my artist book of the same name: five segments for the five acts, mimicking theater-in-the-round like the Globe Theater, the original site of the performances. I was never interested in reproducing the entire play. I knew the plot and had read it in high school and seen it on stage and in movie adaptations. Now I read and reread it, selecting the excerpts after these new readings: one line of dialogue to represent the story being told in each of the acts. I had not remembered the chorus from previous readings of *Romeo and Juliet*, and chose to emphasize the timelessness of the play through repetition of the chorus and insertion of modern equivalents for Verona, such as Bosnia and Israel. I also added a commentary of my own beneath the repeated chorus.

The carousel book used a variation that I devised to allow for scenes and separate text panels. The spine tabbing, also of my devising, functioned to both hold the book together and balance the thickness at the fore edge. I decided on an edition of nine because I had nine sheets of a paper made by Mary Hark. I thought of all the books as auditioning to be the one entered in the competition.

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet had an unexpected result: my book was not only accepted, but it also won a prize. The process had been an interesting and very fun challenge. I enjoyed all the research and the deep dive into materials and ideas. I also enjoyed that while it came from my thinking, it was less in my head than autobiographical work. I decided to do another Shakespeare book where I was the one making the rules. I found that having a collaborator who is long dead worked for me. I had always been reluctant to use other people's writing because I inevitably end up messing around with it and understandably most writers aren't okay with that.

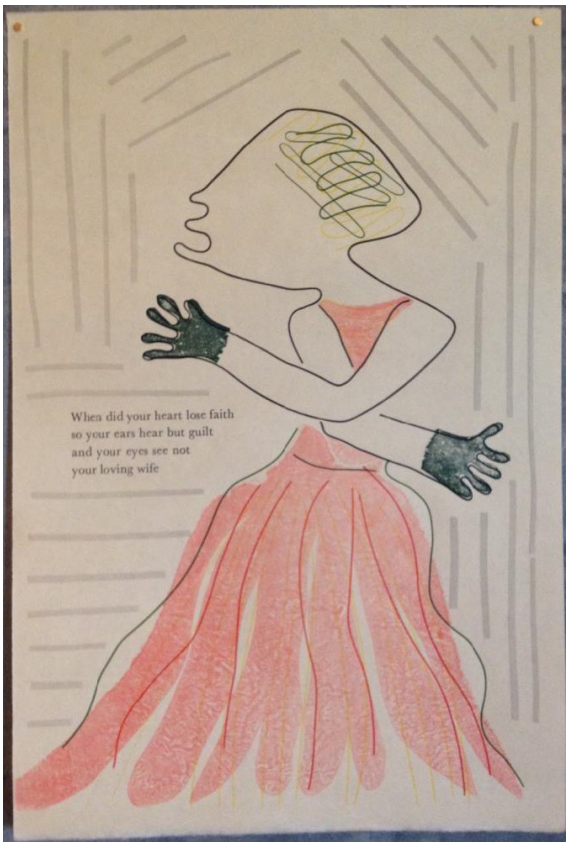


Figure 2: Desdemona in Her Own Words, *letterpress printed on Sakamoto paper, 19 × 13 inches, 2015*

For my next book I chose *Othello*. Again I spent a lot of time with the play before beginning. I got really frustrated with Desdemona and her appalling passivity. So I decided I would see what else I could have her say using only words from her existing lines. I spent the summer of 2015 riding my bike and physically sorting her words, and I eventually decided on seven sentences. I made magnets of her more than seven hundred words to facilitate moving them around, not initially intending to include the magnets in the finished book. I also made a two-dimensional puppet of her to test out various postures and gestures. The Desdemona images are quite large at nineteen by thirteen inches (figure 2). I felt like she needed space to thrash about.

I had a winter residency at Penland School of Craft, where I spent my two weeks printing the text lines and developing the images of Desdemona. I printed her form with wire on a magnetic base, using three figures of wire that could be flipped and manipulated for differences between the seven figures. I kept the edition size small because the prints were developed on the press and could have failed at any time during printing. I made folders for the individual sheets to specify the order of viewing, labeled prelude, acts 1–5 and coda. Late in the project I realized the word magnets were essential to the finished book, and I felt compelled to make a clamshell box lined with sheet metal. Viewers can use the word magnets to create new lines of text.

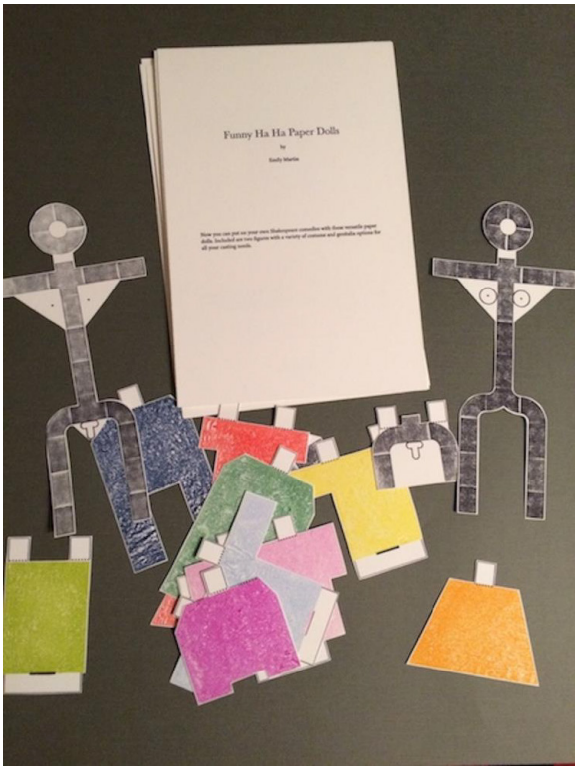


Figure 3 (left): Funny Peculiar Funny Ha Ha, *letterpress printed on Domestic Etch and Pescia papers, 12 × 10 inches, 2017*

Figure 4 (right): Funny Peculiar Funny Ha Ha, *letterpress printed on Lettra paper, 10 × 8 inches, 2017*

Having made a puppet of Desdemona, I decided to make more of the characters for a video using stop-motion animation. Desdemona is still the only character that gets to speak. The video is about two minutes long and can be seen on YouTube. Because the characters come from a play, it seemed a natural extension to have them actually perform. And because of the animation, I decided I wanted a specific order for the prints and made folders for them using the same designations for the scenes in the animation: a prelude, acts one through five, and a coda.

After that I was kind of on a roll. I was going to go to Venice and wanted to read *The Merchant of Venice*. I was surprised to discover that the play was considered a comedy. That took me down a whole new rabbit hole of the Problem Comedies and led to my book, *Funny Peculiar Funny Ha Ha*, in 2017 (figure 3). I made an extended study of all of Shakespeare's comedies. Among other things, I was surprised to learn that the plays that end in one or more weddings are categorized as comedies, and the tragedies are the plays that end in one or more deaths. These designations were made at the time of the printing of the first folio, after Shakespeare's death. Some of the comedies individually are enjoyable but there is a sameness to many of the plots that caused me to mix them up in my head: so much mistaken identity, gender confusion, and various other contrivances while romping their way to a fifth-act wedding or two.

Even more problematic are the decidedly unfunny themes that are common in many of these same comedies: hypocrisy, sexual harassment, intolerance, sexism, misogyny, and anti-Semitism. I struggled for a long time to integrate all these ideas. I finally realized that what I needed to do was to address each aspect separately, thus a dos-à-dos book.

In *Funny Ha Ha Funny Peculiar*, each side of the dos-à-dos got its own focus and treatment. The characters are the same in both books. They were printed using the P22 Blox, a set of modular shapes that can be interchanged to create a range of body postures and gestures (figure 4). The P22 Blox allowed the presentation of the characters to be interchangeable with each other as well. *Funny Peculiar* is a drum leaf book and presents selected lines from five plays delivered by characters on a stage set. *Funny Ha Ha* is a slice book that allows the viewer to mix and match the costumes and genders of the characters in a variety of postures.

Figure 5: King Leer, *assorted materials, approximately. 9 inches tall, 2018*

The book was funded in part by a grant from the College Book Art Association. Because it ended up having an expensive price point, I decided to make a cheaper companion consisting of a letterpress printed set of two paper dolls and a variety of costumes and genitalia options for all casting needs when enacting new Shakespeare comedies.

I began reading *King Lear* after the 2016 presidential election, in part because the play was often mentioned in connection with the newly elected president. I decided to make two separate projects. *King Leer: A Tragedy in Five Puppets* (figure 5) was more focused on the personality and behavior of the president while *The Tragedy of King Lear* (figure 6) was drawn more directly from the play.

The project, *King Leer: A Tragedy in Five Puppets*, started with the spontaneous making of a beanbag puppet as a tension reliever in the winter of 2016. The remaining four puppets were developed slowly in 2017 after my decision to make a separate project. The boxed set holds five different kinds of puppets, including a beanbag, a robot, a sock puppet, a jump-up, and a flapping mouth. They present various aspects of the behaviors and language of our forty-fifth president. Each puppet was made with the materials appropriate to its nature: three are constructed from Chancery paper, one is cloth, and the other is a repurposed sock. All are around eight to nine inches tall. The font used throughout is Arial Black with Apple Chancery for the opposite side of the jump-up tab, all printed letterpress on a Vandercook SP15. Chancery paper, a hemp and cotton blend, was made by Tim Barrett and a team of student papermakers at the University of Iowa Center for the Book.

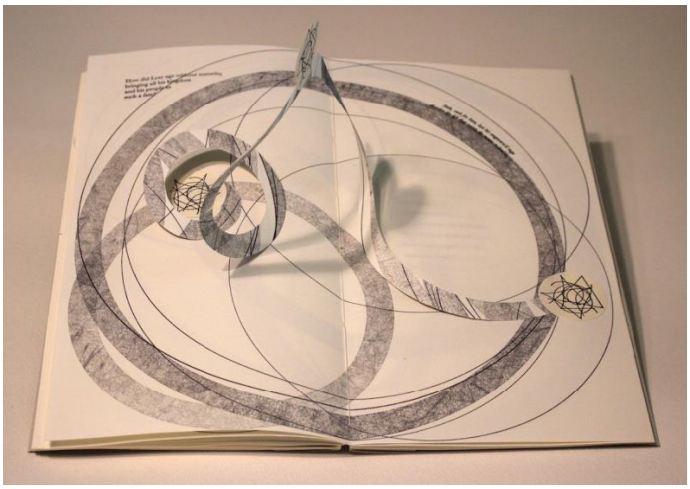


Figure 6: King Lear, *letterpress printed on Arches Text wove paper, 12" x 6", 2019*

I returned to Shakespeare's play. As I read and reread the play, I tried to focus only on the themes of the tragedy. There are many differences between this play and current events, but there are also some similarities. The vanity and folly of an aging man is a family tragedy. When that man is also the leader of a nation it becomes a tragedy for the whole country.

I represented the main characters of the play as abstract symbols printed on disks of pale yellow paper, and then attached them to the pages with thread and/or glue. Each page spread has a question or observation that came to mind as I read, resulting in a quote from one of the many main characters in the play followed by an interaction between the characters that reflects the substance of that quotation.

I always thought of King Lear as the sun around whom all the other characters orbit. Some of the characters have others orbiting around them too, such as Gloucester with his sons and the daughters with their husbands. The characters are not identified specifically, but context makes clear who is who. I did a lot of research and reading related to all the plays as I worked on them. The book was begun in 2016 and fully completed in early 2019 in an edition of twenty-five.

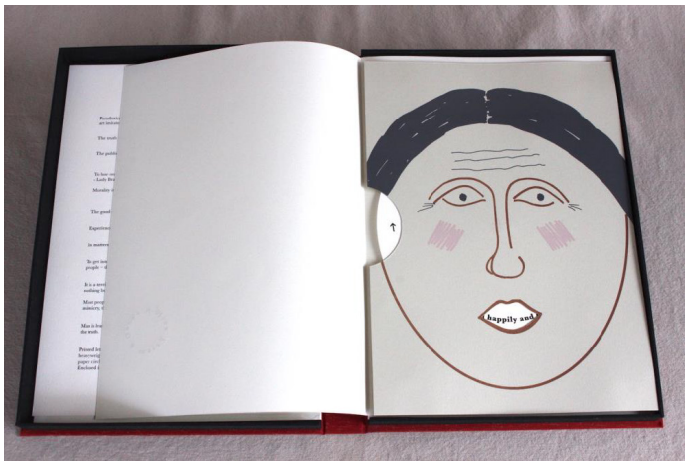


Figure 7 (top): Oscar Wilde: In Earnest and Out, *letterpress printed on Rives BFK, 13 × 9 inches, 2020*

Figure 8 (bottom): Solitude Squadron, *assorted papers and washi tapes, 12 inches tall, 2020*

At this point, I felt I needed to give Shakespeare a rest and turned instead to another deceased collaborator in the public domain whom I have always been fond of: Oscar Wilde. I think I like working with plays because their performances and interpretations are meant to vary with each production. Oscar Wilde may not be quite as well-known as Shakespeare, but his social commentaries are very relevant to today's world. *Oscar Wilde: In Earnest and Out* (figure 7) is a set of five volvelles portraying five faces of Oscar Wilde backing five faces of characters from Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The inner wheels turn to allow the reading of lines from the play, as well as excerpts from Wilde's other writings, all emitted from the characters' mouths. Each volvelle is housed in a folder, and the set, along with an introductory panel and line citations, is enclosed in a clamshell box. This is a sample pairing of lines:

> ALGERNON. The truth is rarely pure and never simple.[1]
> OSCAR. The public has an insatiable curiosity to know everything except what is worth knowing.[2]

Just as I was finishing *Oscar*, the pandemic started. At the start of isolation, having no idea how long it would last, I started making a paper puppet each day as a comforting ritual that evoked a sense of companionship. I used trace monoprinting, a wide assortment of Japanese decorated papers, and fancy washi tapes. I was using offcuts for the base paper and I had enough sheets for about two or three weeks; as the isolation continued, I started piecing the paper together until I was making the puppets limb by limb. At sixty days, as it became clear the pandemic would stretch on far longer than I originally expected, I stopped. I posted images of each piece to Instagram. Somewhere along the way, Shanna Leino, a wonderful toolmaker among other things, named my collection of paper puppets the *Solitude Squadron* (figure 8).

At the start of the pandemic, I also discovered early on, to my horror, that I was too unsettled to read anything, including *Hamlet*, the source text for my intended next project. I had all this time and was just too anxious. Somewhat in desperation, appropriately on April 1, 2020, I started copying the play by hand onto a scroll of Unryu paper that had been knocking around my studio for at least fifteen years. That activity I kept to myself, partly because it seemed so nutty and partly because I didn't know how long I would keep doing it. I made it all the way to the end of the play sometime in July 2020. As I continued to copy out the play, I made paper puppets of eight of the main characters from *Hamlet*.

They eventually got their own costumes constructed from paper of wheat straw, sisal, and daylily fibers, as well as abaca paste papers all made by Andrea Peterson.

In the summer of 2021, I agreed to participate in the portfolio project for the Fine Press Book Association's *Parenthesis* deluxe publication. I decided Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, would have her own outing as a one-off print with one of her lines of dialogue from the play. I used up a stash of offcuts of Sakamoto paper. While printing the portfolio for FPPA I realized that there was more I wanted to do with this idea beyond my submission for that publication. I printed the remaining offcuts with her image and then developed a new text combining questions I wrote for her and lines from other characters of the play. The result was *Gertrude Has a Few Questions* (figure 9).

Figure 9: Gertrude Has a Few Questions, *letterpress printed on Sakamoto paper, 6.5 × 8.5 inches, 2020*

I based the text on the fact that many women have discovered as they get older that they become invisible. While it may be a relief to be spared certain unwanted attentions, it can also be disconcerting to discover that one has completely disappeared from general notice. Gertrude is the Queen of Denmark, yet she is more a part of the scenery, a pawn maneuvered by her husband and son rather than an active player. I gave her a turn at center stage and she wanted some answers.

For those unfamiliar with the play, *Hamlet*, I offer this very brief and very incomplete synopsis. Before the play opens, the King, who is Gertrude's first husband and Hamlet's father, is dead. Gertrude is remarried to Claudius, the King's brother. Hamlet proceeds to see his father's ghost, believes Claudius is responsible for the King's death, murders another character after mistaking him for Claudius, and both berates and belittles his mother, Gertrude. Claudius has his own series of deadly machinations throughout the play. By the end of Act Five, all the main players, except Horatio, Hamlet's buddy, are dead by stabbing, drowning, or poison.

The set of prints pairs five questions with lines from the play. For example, Horatio proclaims near the end of Act Five,

> So you shall hear of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, of accidental judgements, casual slaughters, of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause, and in this upshot, purposes mistook fall'n on th' inventors heads.

And Gertrude responds,

> Is this entire play an example of toxic masculinity?

Figure 10: Madness: Reading Hamlet in the Time of Covid-19 and Other Plagues, *letterpress printed on Arches Text Wove paper, 11 × 8 inches, 2022*

I kept grappling with how to make any sense of *Hamlet* amid everything that was happening in the world, and eventually the result was *Madness: Reading Hamlet in the Time of Covid-19 and Other Plagues* (figure 10). Created in 2022 as the pandemic continued, *Madness* went through many iterations before it achieved its final form. Its appearance and content were very much shaped by my time in isolation. The project kept changing as events swirled around me. The text became a crazy-quilt arrangement of lines from *Hamlet* and my own writing on repeating themes of fear, disease, Black Lives Matter, Asian hate crimes, the insurrection, so much death and isolation, and more. Underneath is a background pattern of my renderings of tears, drops of blood, Covid-19 particles, and bullet holes.

I have learned to not question my inclinations too much anymore. For whatever reason, I keep returning to making puppets in one way or another. I had several of the printed puppets left over from the edition of *Madness*, so I gave them new life as a performing troupe. The puppets have stick supports so they can be played with, performed with, or just admired as a gaggle of interesting costumed characters. I added Horatio, who is only quoted in *Madness*, but does not appear in the book. He is costumed differently from the other eight: whereas the others have their soft underbellies exposed, he is more covered up and possibly armored. After all, Horatio is also the only one left alive at the end of the play. A booklet with selected lines for each of the characters is included. The booklet, seven sets of puppets, and the support sticks are housed in a clamshell box. I made a short video, viewable on YouTube, combining the puppets from *Madness* with the lines from *Gertrude Has a Few Questions*, and featuring Russell Maret, printer; Eric Ensley, librarian; and Joe Baldrige, son-in-law, voicing the male characters, and myself providing the voice of Gertrude. All the *Madness* projects were funded in part by a grant from the College Book Art Association.

In closing I would like to revisit a time long ago at a gallery talk, when I was asked why I became an artist and I answered, only partly facetiously, that it was because I was better at it than my sister. I wish I had gone on to say that I didn't excel at a lot as a kid, and art class was the one place where I was good—not brilliant, but good. And that encouraged me to keep at it and to work hard, and I've been able to keep doing it all this time. ∎

NOTES

1. Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 362.

2. Ibid., 1189.