

GUILD OF BOOK WORKERS JOURNAL

VOL. 49



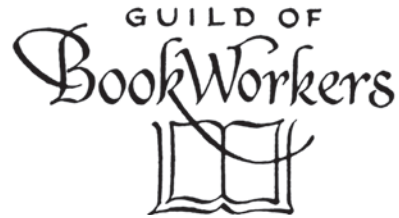
**Empowering Women's Voices: Two projects in the
Caucasus Region**
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GUILD OF BOOK WORKERS JOURNAL VOL.49



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521 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10178-0083

www.guildofbookworkers.org

ISSN 0434-9245

On the front cover:

Hirtz, Lise and Miró, Joan. *Il Était une Petite Pie*. Paris: Editions Jeanne Bucher, 1928. 163/300, copy on Arches paper.

Bound by Ben Elbel in 2017. In the collection of the Royal Library of the Netherlands, The Hague. 32.8 x 26.4 x 9 cm.

Photograph by Torben Raun

Designed by Paula Jull. Layout by Rebecca Chamlee in Trajan, Myriad Pro and Minion Pro.

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The Guild of Book Workers also publishes a bimonthly *Newsletter* as well as catalogs accompanying each of our national traveling exhibitions. Current members of the Guild receive subscriptions to the *Journal* and *Newsletter* as benefits of membership. All of our publications that remain in print are available for order online at www.guildofbookworkers.org; discounts are available to current members. Please visit us at www.guildofbookworkers.org.

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A LEATHER COVERED HARPSICHORD

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45 *The creation of a leather covered harpsichord in the late 1970s is one of those stories that catch our interest, illuminating what we do or are asked to do by patrons and clients. The story also illuminates the odd requests found within our craft, without going beyond the use of common and traditional techniques. If this anecdote can be categorized, it would be under the heading, "Economics of Desire."*

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23 *The author is noted as the creator of innovative bookbinding structures. This article introduces his latest, the Pixel binding, a semi-flexible structure that can be created in any number of materials and material combinations. The article is not a how-to, but rather describes influences and shares examples by the author and others.*

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33 *The processes of covering an object in parchment is an advanced technique that requires respect for this material's demanding nature. After being introduced to parchment work as a hand bookbinder, Sarah Pringle has spent 35 years perfecting parchment applications for custom furniture, architectural panels and sculptures. Here she offers technical expertise and process insights to those interested in gaining a new understanding of parchment.*

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EDITOR'S NOTE

IT WITH GREAT PLEASURE THAT I INTRODUCE A combined issue of volumes 48 and 49 of the Guild of Book Workers' *Journal*. As you hold it in your hands you will notice that the format and structure are novel. This is called a "tête-bêche" (head-tail) that has its roots in the 19th century and was often used for popular (pulp) fiction. A benefit of the structure is that it treats the two titles as equals, without subsuming one into the other. Given the prolonged production process of Volume 48's two articles that were distributed via the Guild's member area on the website, I wanted both issues to stand on their own, with their own covers.

When I began as editor of the *Journal* it was on a hopeful note with article ideas and leads to follow up, ideas that came from a variety of sources and recommendations. Then COVID hit, we were forced to work remotely, and some lost access to the resources they needed for their articles or felt that they could not continue. Disruptions also extended to aspects of the production chain. But, despite these challenges, we found ways to continue and even expand how we communicated, shared, and taught.

Volume 49's articles cover a variety of topics that should find resonance with readers. Melanie Mowinski, Suzi Banks Baum, and Miriam Schaer speak to the book arts as a tool of empowerment and social justice in the Caucasus region. Benjamin Elbel, one of the most innovative bookbinders working today, introduces his "pixel binding" and shares examples of the effects that can be attained using this structure. Finally, there are two articles describing the kind of work bookbinders and extra binding departments in larger trade binderies often completed, works that holistically apply our skill sets and materials, but on non-book items. In one, Sarah Pringle describes how she works with parchment on furniture and related pieces, and in the other Sam Ellenport describes covering and decorating a harpsicord in leather. Volume 48 was distributed to members electronically back in May. These last two articles resonated with me from a historical

standpoint, but also because I was still able to experience aspects of this kind of work still being carried out at Monastery Hill Bindery in late 1980s Chicago where I had my first post-apprenticeship job.

Volume 50 of the *Journal* will be the catalog of *Wild/Life*, the Guild's upcoming national traveling exhibition scheduled to [hopefully] open in June of 2021. While the *Journal* works to help produce the catalog, work will also continue towards soliciting articles and making the *Journal* sustainable. Towards that end a co-editor interested in assuming the editor role when my term ends in October still being sought. The time to step forward is now, as there is much to learn, with opportunities to shape issues into the future.

I am grateful for the support given by the members of the Editorial Board who provided feedback and helped review the articles you see here. I could not have done it without them.

Peter D. Verheyen

Editor

The Guild of Book Workers *Journal*



Two books by Salbi Chopikyan 2019. Photo: Nazik Armenakyan

EMPOWERING WOMEN'S VOICES: TWO PROJECTS IN THE CAUCASUS REGION

MELANIE MOWINSKI WITH SUZI BANKS BAUM, AND MIRIAM SCHAEER

WHEN I RETURNED FROM MY THREE YEARS as a Peace Corps Volunteer over 20 years ago, I immersed myself in theological study, in search of a way to link my practice as an artist with my practice as a human. This journey introduced me to Liberation Theology, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and the beginnings of what we would now label Social Practice. I was cognizant then and now of the importance of empowering others authentically, and how to work with my counterparts and colleagues to create sustainable programs in a way that amplified their voices, not mine. It's a messy undertaking, one where flexibility, forgiveness, and unity allow the process to move forward and to continue long after the work has ended. ¶ When I first learned of Suzi Banks Baum's work, *New Illuminations*, in the Republic of Armenia, I began sharing it with my students and friends for two reasons. One, as an example of the work that one can do in the world as an artist, and two, how one's work as an artist can teach and empower. The work isn't always about an object. I know a number of other projects like this. I seek them out as an artist and scholar to use as examples to share with my students. It is thanks to Suzi that I learned of Miriam Schaer, Melissa Potter, and Clifton Meador's travels to the Republic of Georgia. What I love about these projects is the passion and commitment that the artists bring to them. I sat down with Banks Baum and Schaer during the late spring of 2020 to learn more about their work. While I am the primary author of this document, Banks Baum and Schaer contributed extensively to the editing process.

—MELANIE MOWINSKI

Melanie Mowinski is a Professor of Art at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA). Mowinski holds an MFA from The University of the Arts and an MAR from Yale University. Her books under the imprint PRESS • 29 PRESS can be found in private and public collections around the world.

Suzi Banks Baum dwells at the crossroad of literary and visual arts. A writer, mixed media and book artist, she expresses the holy ordinary. Banks Baum teaches daily creative practice for writers, artists, and creative thinkers in many settings, including as a visiting artist in Gyumri, Armenia and guest faculty in schools and writing conferences. Originally trained as a theater artist, Banks Baum's work can be found in private collections, online, and in such published work as the Walloon Writers Review.

*Miriam Schaer is an artist and educator based in Brooklyn, NY. Her many awards include a New York Foundation for the Arts Artist Fellowship and her work about societal bias against childless women, *Baby (Not) On Board: The Last Prejudice?*, has been exhibited by the International Museum of Women. She was a U.S. Fulbright Scholar to the Republic of Georgia in 2017. Her editioned and unique artist books are in collections in the US and internationally. <http://www.miriamschaer.com>*

WHAT ARE OUR RESPONSIBILITIES as artists, as makers, as educators, as book workers? How do we give voice to those in our community nationally and globally? How do we empower others? Is it even our responsibility? How do the arts provide opportunity and community for populations of women who struggle with lack of employment, poverty, and difficult living conditions? What about women who strain against *patriarchal* social mores? Can the arts become a means to help others feel safe, supplied, connected to community or artistic tradition and thus validated and seen as included in the artistic expression of their people? Perhaps you are like me and ask yourself these questions regularly. Perhaps you are starting to ask yourself these questions now.

Two artists, Suzi Banks Baum and Miriam Schaer, exemplify answers to these questions. They each have taken numerous trips to the part of the world that links the west and the east. Land that has been ravaged by war, earthquake, and disruption for hundreds of years. They each went with a spirit of curiosity, inquiry, and wonder. In many ways both Banks Baum and Schaer “rematriate” skills that originated in Caucasus which are no longer actively pursued. Skills that overlap practices and traditions that we all as book workers know well.



Introductory Workshop Gyumri, Armenia 2019. Photo: Nazik Armenakyan

Think back to the most complicated binding you’ve ever sewn. Maybe it’s an Ethiopian headband or laced case parchment binding. Chances are good you learned it from a master bookbinder, someone who has studied and practiced their craft for years, likely decades. Perhaps you now teach that same headband

or binding to others. As book workers, we practice our craft and art privately and in community through teaching and beyond. Our devotion to the nuances and specialty techniques, especially complicated bindings that take years to master, often inspire us to find ways to use this knowledge. Our regard for their historical origins drives us to lands where the crafts began.

This is the case with Banks Baum, who has traveled to Gyumri in the Republic of Armenia to work with women artists and bookbinders. In the Republic of Georgia, Schaer and colleagues from Columbia College Chicago worked with women felters, chiefly in the Kakheti region in the southeastern part of the country.



Map of the Caucasus Region. Adapted map by Melanie Mowinski

And so begins our story...

SUZI BANKS BAUM TRAVELLED to Gyumri, Armenia as a photojournalist in March 2016, to interview women artists under the guidance of documentary photographers John Stanmeyer, Anush Babajanyan, and Nazik Armenakyan. The trio held an intimate gathering at Villa Kars in central Gyumri and provided the group of 12 photographers the translators and “fixers” necessary to create stories, including Ani Ginosyan who worked with Banks Baum as her translator and later became the Armenian coordinator for *New Illuminations*. With Ginosyan, Banks Baum met with 25 artists over the course of 10 days and learned about their lives in a heavily patriarchal society. She was surprised to find no book artists among the painters, sculptors, poets, dancers, singers, and textile artists with whom she met.



Suzi Banks Baum presenting book covers 2019. Photo: Nazik Armenakyan.

Gyumri is the 2nd largest city and the cultural hub of Armenia. It is near the epicenter of the 1988 earthquake. Over thirty years after the earthquake, the people of Gyumri still live with its aftermath. Electrical wires drape between poles along streets, roadways remain unpaved. Neighborhoods of *domics* are a common site. These metal shipping containers, intended as temporary shelter after the earthquake,



Gyumri Electric Lines 2019. Photo: Suzi Banks Baum.

were converted to homes. Homelessness and poverty continue to plague Gyumri with about 40% of the population living below the poverty line and over 2,000 domics inhabited as primary dwellings. Even so, the drive for artistic expression pulses through the schools, and in music, theatre, and visual arts, present in street art, puppet performances, and exhibitions. (Armenia Fund).



Illustrated page from Ani Khachatryan book. Watercolor and ink. Photo: Suzi Banks Baum.

IF THERE WAS AN INITIAL SPARK that ignited *New Illuminations*, it was a conversation with Nazik Armenakyan with whom Banks Baum shared her burgeoning vision of returning to Gyumri to introduce a group of artists to the book arts. Banks Baum saw the need for instruction on technique and an appetite for a collective artistic community coupled with an instigation to tell stories of the real lives of Armenian women. Armenakyan listened to Banks Baum's vision and said, emphatically, "Yes, yes, you must return. It must be done."



Anna Yeghohyan Interview at Cafe Nancy 2016. Photo: Knar Babayan.

Banks Baum’s alliance with Armenakyan and her colleagues of the 4 Plus photo group in Yerevan (the capital of Armenia) provides an important sense of context. Armenakyan serves as a cultural interpreter for Banks Baum, who is determined to put her Western values aside and act as a resource for technique and an incubator of community. 4 Plus has hosted public talks about *New Illuminations* in Yerevan and supplies *New Illuminations* with photographers. Through *New Illuminations*, Banks Baum cultivates a teaching and listening practice that allows Armenian women to grow within a part of their cultural tradition that hasn’t been open to women before, as an expression not only of the self but of the art of the book as an extension of Armenian culture.

In the fall of 2016, Banks Baum raised funds through private donations and received a special grant from WAM Theatre of the Berkshires which enabled her to return to Gyumri to introduce Armenian women artists to the book arts.



Arev Art Gallery New Illuminations exhibition Yerevan, Armenia. Photo: Arev Art Gallery.

Banks Baum has since conducted four teaching residencies in Gyumri, ranging 3–4 weeks in duration. Each residency includes both introductory and advanced workshops. Participants are college aged and older; some are students at the Academy of Fine Arts, many have children, others have full-time jobs. The advanced workshop empowers them to become fully established makers of artist books while using ancient traditional bindings. There is a growing group of advanced artists that assist in teaching the introductory workshop every year. Over the years, two artists have developed their confidence and teaching skills to the point where they have exported their expertise, working towards a sustainable teaching practice. There is shared momentum in this community of women who come together to expand their skills, sell new work, and lift each other up. The role of this project in these individual women’s lives is evident.



SBB in demo 2019. Photo: Vaghinak Ghazaryan.

“*New Illuminations* is not only an extension of the chronology of Armenian book arts into the twenty-first century and a return to the collaborative nature of traditional Armenian book production, but as a whole, the project takes a giant step in carving out a space for women to contribute to and evolve the practice of bookmaking in Armenia today.”¹

Through a network of connections to Gyumri, Banks Baum made two other important alliances that have shaped the foundation of *New Illuminations*. In 2017 she met Sylvie Merian, a leading expert on Armenian manuscripts, who is based at the Morgan Library in New York City. Merian shared her research on the traditional Armenian binding.²



Stack of Coptic Stitch Books for exhibition 2019. Photo: Suzi Banks Baum.

She also shared Jane Greenfield and Jenny Hille's book, *Endbands From East to West: How to Work Them*. Initially, Banks Baum taught the Coptic Stitch binding. But once Banks Baum learned that the traditional Armenian binding was a treasured practice among Armenian book art, she wanted to study it. This binding has origins deep in the ancestral blood of Armenia, but is difficult to learn, and even more difficult to find instruction. Without actual instruction, Banks Baum was stymied by how to transfer this technique to the artists of *New Illuminations*.

Fortunately, Anna Gargarian, founder of the HAYP Pop Up Gallery in Yerevan, who curated the first exhibition of *New Illuminations* in November 2016, introduced Banks Baum to two prominent faculty at the Matenadaran. Dr. Erna-Manea Shirinyan and Dr. Gayane Eliazyan were generous in sharing knowledge with Banks Baum. They arranged for the artists to have an in-depth tour of the conservation laboratory in 2017. The Matenadaran (a compound word from 'matean' or book/manuscript

and 'daran' repository), also known as the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts³, holds the world's largest collection of Armenian manuscripts and is located in Yerevan, Armenia.

In November 2018, Dr. Eliazyan sent Mariya Gabrielyan from the conservation laboratory of the Matenadaran to Gyumri to teach Banks Baum and the artists of *New Illuminations* the traditional binding. The technique creates a double row of end band stitching typically rendered in three colors of silk thread: vordan red, black, and yellow gold. Improvisation is necessary in the workshop, as Banks Baum carries supplies from

the US, including one wooden sewing frame. For the past two years, the artists have inverted benches on their work tables to make a sewing frame from the bench legs. While many of the supplies for the workshop are sourced from local art stores, advanced book arts supplies must come from abroad. The Matenadaran obtains most of the materials for their conservation work from Europe, Japan, and the US.



Three samples of traditional Armenian Binding by New Illuminations artists. Photo: Vaghinak Ghazaryan.



Mariya Gabrielyan demonstrates to New Illuminations artists 2019. Photo: Vaghinak Ghazaryan

At the close of every residency, *New Illuminations* mounts a pop-up exhibition at a café in central Gyumri. In 2019, Arev Petrosyan, owner of Arev Art Gallery in central Yerevan, the only woman-owned art gallery in Armenia, hosted an evening event for *New Illuminations* in which over 60 books were shown and celebrated by art patrons, artists, and members of the United States Embassy, including the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, Lynne M. Tracey (who bought several of the books). Each exhibition gives the artists exposure to the public, the opportunity to sell their work, and in the case of the exhibit at Arev Art, the opportunity to be seen by a wider audience and thereby become more integrated into the art world of contemporary Armenia.

Upon her return from the 2017 residency in Armenia, Banks Baum traveled to the Center for Book Arts in New York City in her quest to learn if



Advanced artists use benches as sewing frames 2019. Photo: Vaghinak Ghazaryan.



Arev Art Gallery exhibition 2019. Photo: Arev Art Gallery.

anyone in the New York bookbinding community knew the Armenian Binding. Director Alexander Campos talked with Banks Baum and listened as she described *New Illuminations*. With some urgency he pressed her to contact Miriam Schaer, who had recently returned from similar work in the Republic of Georgia. Banks Baum and Schaer discovered their shared desire to learn about ancient practices in craft, the community of makers who carry them forward, and how they each might contribute to this process.

In December 2012 Schaer traveled to Georgia with two colleagues from Columbia College Chicago, Professors Clifton Meador and Melissa Hilliard Potter, to begin a project they called *Crafting Women's Stories: Lives in Georgian Felt*.⁴ Like many projects, this one evolved out of conversations prompted by a call for applications by a funding organization, The Soros Foundation.⁵ Schaer and Potter both had years of experience working in the Balkans. They drew on this past work and brainstormed an idea to travel to the Republic of Georgia to work with women through a series of workshops linking the traditional Georgian



Advanced Artists of *New Illuminations* including Ani Ginosyan, translator, center. With US Embassy Representatives Hasmik B. Mikaelyan & Anthony M Tranchina at NAREG Foundation, Gyumri, Armenia 2018. Photo: Knar Babayan.

craft of felt-making with book arts. They applied for and received a Soros Foundation grant for cultural innovation projects which allowed them to begin



Workshop in progress, Napareuli Art Center. Photo: Clifton Meador.
Crafting Women's Stories.

Potter believed that going into the Republic of Georgia without any connections would doom *Crafting Women's Stories* to failure. The group wondered how to begin. Potter understood the challenges of working in the Caucasus region from her experience of working in the Balkans. She had three

Fulbright Scholar grants there, an experience that gave her a familiarity with the Republic of Georgia, as well as connections to help launch this project there. Her online research directed her to the Women's Fund in Georgia. She called them via Skype after emails went unanswered. The executive director and founder, Nana Pantsulaia, answered the phone, providing the necessary entry to begin.

Contacts were shared and five two-day workshops were arranged before they even left the United States. This sounds so easy! Once they arrived the workshops had to be rescheduled because of various



Workshop 1, USAID offices in Telavi, Republic of Georgia. Group 1 participants. Photo: Clifton Meador.



Workshop 4 in Alvani. Photo: Clifton Meador.

complications. Ida Bakhturidze, who holds an MA in Gender Studies from Tbilisi State University, was assigned to work with the artists. Bakhturidze was the perfect partner. Engaged in feminist activism, but also from Akhmeta, one of the small towns in the Republic of Georgia where the workshops ran, her insight, expertise, and access was critical to the project's success.

In addition to Bakhturidze, Nana Magradze joined the team as the project translator. She was so moved by the dire circumstances of some of the local artisans, she began raising funds to create a union of women artisans to promote good business practices in the Kakheti. She also met with Peace Corps business



Workshop 6, sharing artist books with students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tbilisi. Photo: Melissa Potter.

volunteers to develop an artisan bazaar in Telavi, the state capital.

Like many countries in the world, women in the

Republic of Georgia are expected to bear children, tend to their husbands, and lead lives dictated by those obligations. Domestic violence, lack of equal pay for equal work, and limited access to health care—especially that critical to female health—are common experiences for women. Participating in feminist activity, like the programs offered through the Women's Fund, can be dangerous. Many artists and women in the younger generation are aware of the



Workshop 1, USAID offices in Telavi, Republic of Georgia. Setting up felting and demonstration. Photo: Clifton Meador.

gender-based problems and see participation in this work as a way to move towards change. But for many, it likely comes with a cost.

The *Crafting Women's Stories: Lives in Georgian Felt* workshops built on programs already established to address the issue of domestic violence, and subversively wove into their curriculum a path to express not only domestic violence, but the participants' entire lived experience as women. The Women's Fund felt it was critical for Schaer and her colleagues to participate in a day-long training session, led by Mariam Gagoshashvili, now working with the Astreaea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, to learn more about what life as a woman in the Republic of Georgia is like. They learned that domestic abuse is rampant. Women often don't feel safe in the street or even in their own homes. Domestic abuse is considered a family issue and is not talked about. This understanding built on their pre-departure research and grounded their practice and thoughts going forward.

Then the work began. Schaer and her colleagues led workshops in the towns of Alvani, Napareuli, Telavi



One-page felted book, featuring traditional Georgian Foods created in the Napareuli workshop. Photo: Clifton Meador.

and Akhmeta that combined traditional felting, with exercises to use felt to make expressive, artistic objects, especially one-of-a-kind books. The initial response was overwhelming. Diverse in occupation, age, and situation, participants included professional felters, teachers, a gynecologist, a social worker, a student with hearing loss, and teens in foster care. (Potter 2015, 22) The motivation to participate varied, but Schaer knew her motivation was to give women the tools to tell their stories, not just to make felt, but to infuse their creations with their honest expression.

Georgian women do not enjoy the rights that women in the west do. Schaer and her colleagues introduced feminist concepts gently, often relying on Bakhturidze, who had more ‘credibility’ to bring up these topics. Percolation of ideas among the participants led the discussion of feminism. A more forceful or top down approach could have eliminated the possibility of even broaching the topic.

Prior to the journey to the Republic of Georgia, Schaer had started a body of work called *Babies (not) on Board* to explore societal prejudice against women without children. *Babies (not) on Board* evolved out of her experience with infertility and her ultimate acceptance of her situation.

In the west, and the United States, women experience pressure to reproduce. But in places like the Republic of Georgia, not having babies may result in a woman being shunned, denied food, and considered a failure. Schaer’s understanding of this motivated her to explore issues of infertility and childlessness in the Republic of Georgia, alongside the creative process in the workshops.

Schaer recorded and photographed women in Tbilisi who were willing to speak about the pressures to reproduce. In certain

parts of the Jewish community in which Schaer was raised, there is pressure to have at least three children, two to replace the parents and one to grow the community that was lost in the Holocaust. Women in the Republic of Georgia shared a similar proverb with her:

*One child-no child
Two children-imaginary children
Three children-real children*

These stories touched Schaer like no others. They led her to embroider their words onto Georgian baby garments (in Georgian and English) as an extension of her *Babies (not) on Board* project. In exchange for the help the women gave her, she made baby-shaped boxes as a gift.

In *feltreports*, a Tumblr blog that documented the project day by day, Schaer wrote:

There has been some back and forth conversation about the place of men in this conversation. What does it matter to them, should they even care? As humans, we do tend to care about issues that serve our own self-interest. However, also,



Nino's Book, created at the Napareuli Workshop by Khatia Suikhanishvilia to commemorate the sudden death of her young daughter. Cover Shown. Photo: Clifton Meador.



Nino's Book, created at the Napareuli Workshop by Khatia Suikhanishvilia to commemorate the sudden death of her young daughter. Photo: Clifton Meador.

we have the ability to understand that what affects others plays into our own issues as well. The rights and issues that oppress women also oppress men: issues of rape, abuse, and sometimes murder of women. Change cannot happen until men come to realize that this behavior negatively impacts their ability to live complete lives as well. (<https://feltreports.tumblr.com/page/6>)

While not at the forefront of the workshops, these words motivated Schaer and her colleagues as they felted and designed, listened and talked, side by side with the participants of the workshops.

The energy from these conversations hummed subversively through the group. Through the workshops, the women learned a new way to apply the traditional and endangered Georgian craft of felting, but to do so as newly founded agents of their own stories.

Schaer and her colleagues introduced innovative felt making processes which resulted in deeply expressive one-of-a-kind artist books which examine the hardships they experience. More than 70 women participated in the workshops. The new spin on felting introduced by Schaer and her colleagues has sparked ideas for increasing revenue through craft and the book arts. At the end of the workshops the work was exhibited in both the Republic of Georgia and the United States. In addition, new alliances in the Republic of Georgia were made among cultural and social organizations, the Peace Corps, independent artists, the Ministry of Education, the Women's Fund in Georgia, and U.S.-based institutions like the Center for Book and Paper, paving the way for future collaborations both in the United States and in the Republic of Georgia.

To value women, to value the work they do, to value yourself when your culture pressures you to believe otherwise, is a central theme in the work created by



Nino's Book, created at the Napareuli Workshop by Khatia Suikhanishvilia to commemorate the sudden death of her young daughter. Photo: Clifton Meador.

Georgia it was partially to learn and further develop their techniques in order to make money. In Gyumri, Armenia it began as an opportunity to learn a traditional craft but evolved into an opportunity to develop a transferable skill and to see self-expression as valuable to every artist's life. In both, it was an opportunity of empowerment. How does self-expression, which includes all aspects of a woman's life, take root when society reminds her daily of the myriad ways she is "less than"? Banks Baum and Schaer, and countless other innovators like them, work to amplify voices. Both are sincere in their efforts, and each anticipates further exploration of the ways in which craft practices and artistic empowerment can improve the

the women in both Schaer's and Banks Baum's programs. The women in these workshops participated for a variety of reasons – in the Republic of

lives of women artists worldwide.

How do you amplify voices? Where might you weave into your practice as an artist, a maker, an



Baby Talk #1, by Miriam Schaer (I have 3 children and 2 daughters. 10 x 23 inches. Hand embroidered text in English and Georgian on infant shirt.



Baby Talk: Interview with Ia Bakhtadze. Photo: Miriam Schaeer, 2014.

educator, a book worker, the amplification of unheard voices? May these stories inspire you to find your own answers to these questions.

NOTES:

- 1 Erin Piñon was a Fulbright Scholar at the Matenadaran in 2016 and delivered her research at a public event at the HAYP *New Illuminations* exhibition. She continues her graduate work at Princeton University, NJ, and specializes in Medieval and Early Modern Armenian works on paper and parchment.
- 2 The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City hosted the first ever large-scale exhibition of Byzantine Armenian art, *Armenia!*, curated by Dr. Helen Evans, which opened in the fall of 2018. The show featured many Armenian manuscripts

on loan from collections all over the world. Both Sylvie Merian and Erin Piñon contributed to the book published to accompany the exhibition.

“Armenia!” metmuseum.org. Accessed July 2, 2020. <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2018/armenia>.

- 3 The Matenadaran should be on every book artists bucket list. The museum holds thousands of books from 942 B.C. until the Genocide. Under the skilled guidance of Dr. Gayane Eliazyan, a team of specialists conserve the ancient manuscripts with a variety of masterful skills. The collection at the museum reveals the religious and intellectual fervor that continues to shape Armenian culture as it has for generations. Stories about the books within the collection and the countless books

destroyed in the Genocide are filled with details about materials used, natural pigments, leather and ornate silver work. It is a legacy of artistry that expresses the development of Armenian culture in the book form itself and through the materials used.

- 4 Two journals were created to document the work in the Republic of Georgia and are available to download or as hard copies.

Download

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- 5 The Soros Foundation was founded by Hungarian-born American businessman and philanthropist George Soros. His foundations fund programs, especially those in the arts, that foster dialogue and address issues of health care, human rights, and education in former states of the U.S.S.R where artistic expression is suppressed.

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Fig. 1

PIXEL BINDING

SEMI FLEXIBLE BINDING STYLES

BEN ELBEL

ONE OF THE WAYS TO CLASSIFY BOOK BINDINGS is by dividing them into two groups: stiff ones (hard-cover, or hard-back), and flexible ones (soft-cover, soft-back, or 'limp'). Somewhere in between is what I call 'semi-flexible' bindings. Those are not flexible due to the flexibility of the covering material itself but rather because they are made of stiff panels hinging with one another. ¶ Although recent, I would say that there is a tradition for this kind of binding. The Dutch bookbinder Pau Groenendijk has specialized in them, and for a while, so has Jean De Gonet. In a way, Andrea Odametey's *Daedalus et Icarus* (the winning binding of the 2017 Designer Bookbinders international competition) also falls into this category, and I'm sure there are plenty of other examples that I am not thinking about right now. ¶ I love the element of surprise and the playfulness that comes with handling such a semi-flexible binding, and, being a forwarder at heart, I appreciate that this type of binding offers design features and has a unique personality before any decoration is applied.

Benjamin Elbel (French nationality, 1983) has a background in illustration and trained as a bookbinder at the 'Centro del bel libro' in Ascona (Switzerland), and at the bench of various fine bookbinding firms in Germany and England, before setting up his own business in 2012, first in London and since 2015 in Haarlem, Netherlands. His studio provides services to bibliophiles, antiquarian book dealers as well as the hospitality industry, and aims at creating contemporary looking work executed at the highest possible standards. He also has a passion for sharing knowledge, to his own team members, in workshops, and via 'bookbinding out of the box', his platform dedicated to innovation in hand bookbinding. He is online at www.elbel-libro.com and www.bookbinding-outofthebox.com.

DEVELOPING MY OWN

I BECAME INTERESTED in semi-flexible binding styles in 2016, after seeing and handling some of the bindings mentioned above.

At first, I created covers made of vertical panels hinging with one another, similar to the kind that Pau Groenendijk calls *lamellen band*. (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2)



Fig. 2

Then, out of curiosity, I started introducing horizontal hinges as well. (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4) Soon after I was making boards composed of a multitude of little squares, which I now call “pixels”. (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6)

AS SHOWN IN THE IMAGES, the first two stages of my research were simple case bindings with flat spines, but I moved away from this structure when I realized that the multiple grooves caused the boards to shrink considerably after casing in, causing the text block to end up wider than the case—I had to re-trim the fore-edge in the first two examples! I have now settled on two structures more suitable in my view because they provide a type of cover-to-text attachment by



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

which the flyleaf is disconnected from the board paper. This way, the shrinking can be anticipated and realized before connecting the cover with the text-block.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

JAPANESE BINDING STYLE

JUST AS IN A TRADITIONAL JAPANESE BINDING, this structure (Fig. 7) is suitable for books with a layout presenting enough margins in the gutter, and printed on paper with enough drape to function well as a stab binding. The grooves adjacent to the spine provide a logical place to run the sewing thread; the thread can be in a matching color if the goal is to blend it in, or in a contrasting color if the opposite effect is wanted. In any case, the threads will be recessed, which is very satisfying, and the sewing pattern is automatically integrated into the composition.

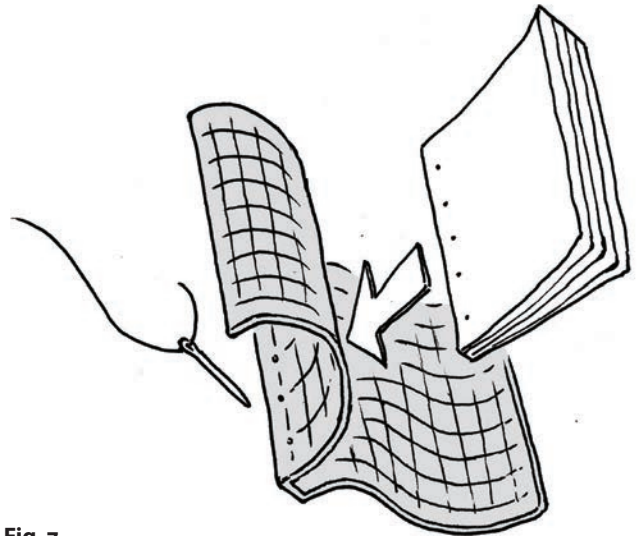


Fig. 7

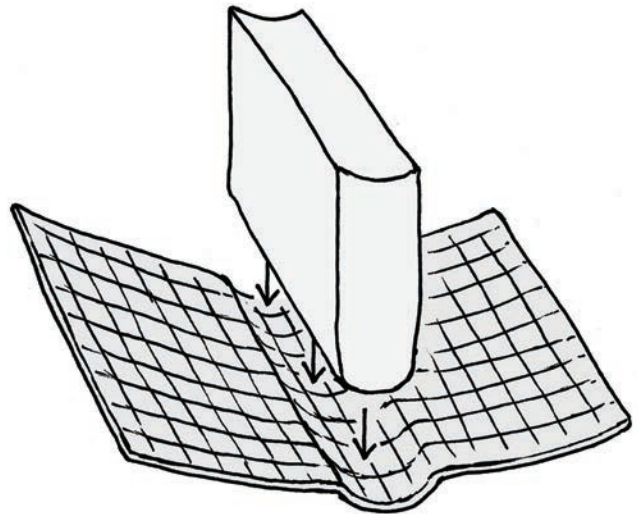


Fig. 8

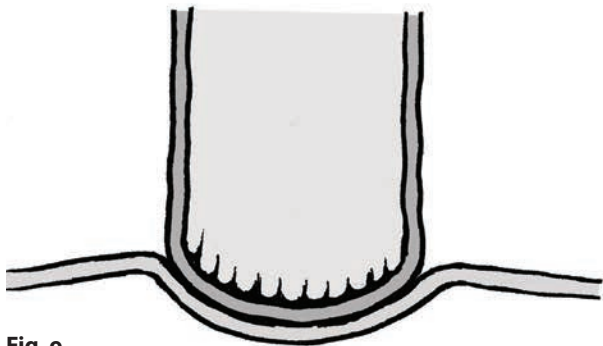
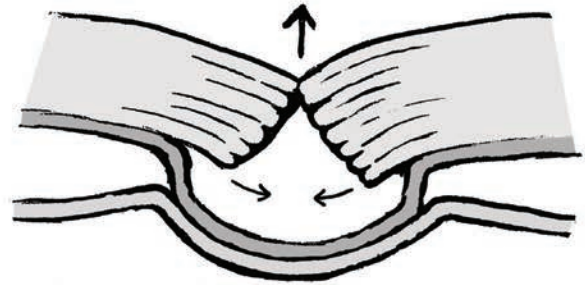


Fig. 9

TARAL METHOD

THE TARAL METHOD consists of wrapping the text-block in a piece of suede (unglued in the spine area) (Fig. 8), and connecting the text-block to the cover via the spine (Fig. 9). It has become one of my favorite constructions of late, and I have used it in different shapes or forms for my Elbum and Paniel structures. The form I use in combination with the Pixel binding is borrowed from Alain Taral, who developed it with Sün Evrard for his wooden bindings, and taught it to me back in 2008. This construction looks great (visually non-intrusive), is strong, and provides excellent opening to the text-block with no tensions at all. The only limitation I see is that with



the cover-to-text attachment taking place in the spine only, this method may not be suitable for very thin books.

Both methods are case bindings, allowing the covers to be created completely off the book, which is something I greatly appreciate.

So far I have used only paper and leather as covering materials. The execution with these two materials is quite different but either works very well. I love to use suede (real or imitation) for the flyleaves, because the grid pattern of the cover, which is present on the interior, casts its impression into it.



Van Capelleveen, Paul. *De Complete Verzameling: Notities over het einde van boekencollecties*

BINDINGS

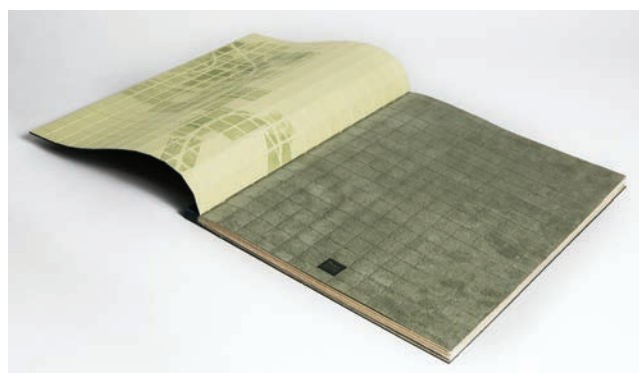
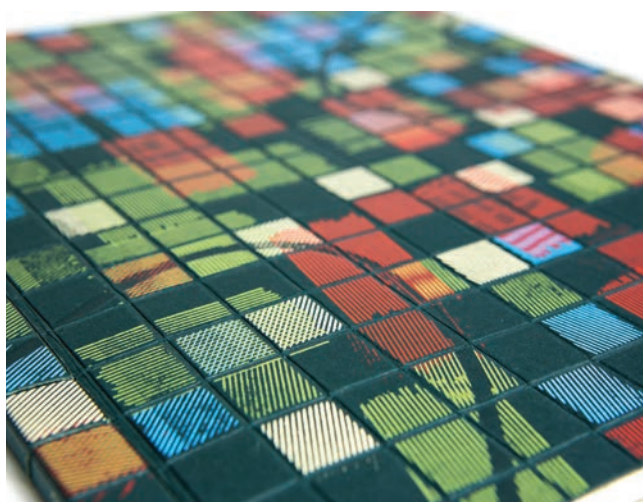
Van Capelleveen, Paul. *De Complete Verzameling: Notities over het einde van boekencollecties*. Amsterdam: De Buitenkant Publishers, 2016.
Bound in 2017. In the collection of the binder. 24.3 x 17 x 1.9 cm (height x width x thickness).

This is a Pixel binding in full paper, with suede flyleaves and Taral-type board attachment.

This book deals with a dark subject—the end of book collections—and I went for an almost-all-black composition: black paper for the cover and suede for the flyleaves, graphite on the cover and on the edges, and very sparse accents of orange in the lettering and leather endbands. I keep this binding in my bindery, and love to show it to people and see their reactions when I tell them it's made of paper. Their natural instinct usually tells them it's leather, or rubber.



Hirtz, Lise and Miró, Joan. *Il Était une Petite Pie*. Paris: Editions Jeanne Bucher, 1928. 163/300, copy on Arches paper. Bound in 2017. In the collection of the Royal Library of the Netherlands, The Hague. 32.8 x 26.4 x 9 cm. Photographs by Torben Raun

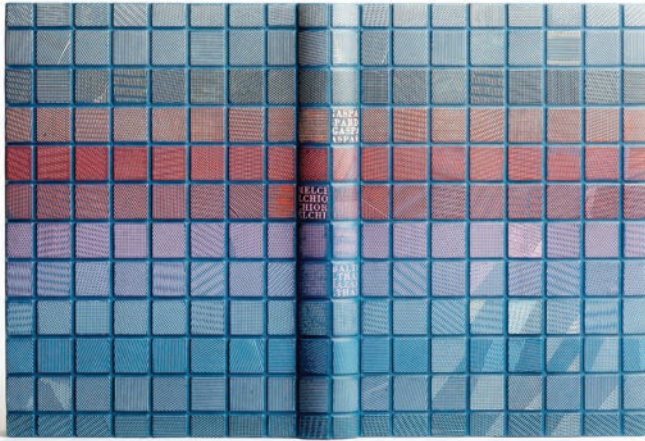


This is a full paper Pixel binding with suede flyleaves and Japanese structure. This is my first experiment with multiple line stamping, which is something I used on the next two bindings showcased in this article, and that I'm certainly not done exploring yet. The boards were first blind stamped with thick curved lines on the front board, back board and across the spine (echoing Miró's illustrations), then tooled all over with a single stamp using 4 different foil colors. Sometimes the stamp was applied to individual squares only, sometimes across several squares, and often overlapping each other, generating new colors. The board papers are tooled as well, but sparingly and with only one color.

The entire design was created in a kind of trance in one afternoon, with high energy and very little premeditation except the intent to create a colorful, playful and at the same time slightly eerie atmosphere to suit this weird and wonderful surrealist children's book for adults.



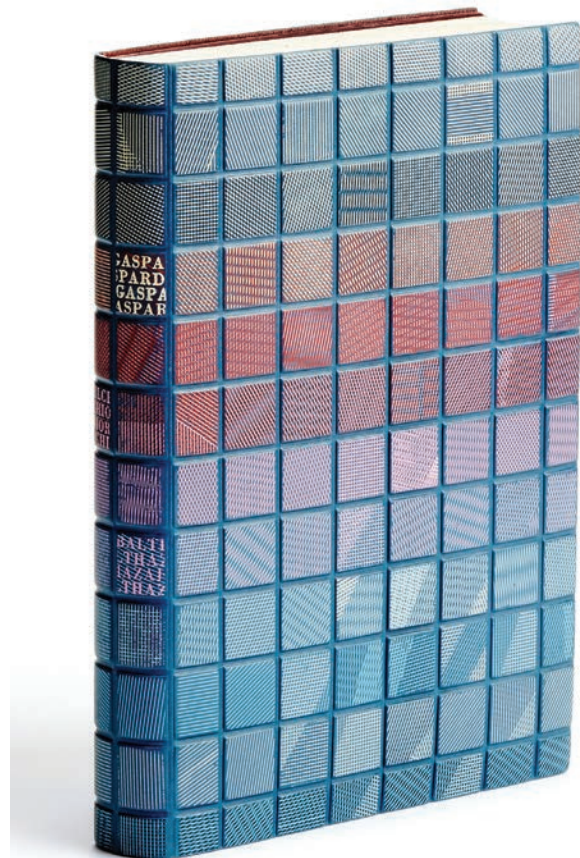
Tournier, Michel. *Gaspard, Melchior et Balthazar*. Paris: Gallimard, 1980.
Bound in 2019. In private collection (France). 21.8 x 15.6 x 3.2 cm.
Photographs by Dirk Wolf



of the leather and on top of each other. This time I restricted the stamping to the area of each square, one square at a time (no stamping across several squares). Each row has the same color combinations from left to right, and the same amount of impressions (between one and three), but there are variations in the direction of the lines and the angle between the various impressions, resulting in various textures and vibrating qualities from one square to the next. Some 'free-style' stamping was added here and there to introduce some more life into the composition. The lettering was executed on the same principle, with letters instead of lines.



Pixel binding in full calfskin with calfskin doublures, suede flyleaves and Taral-type board attachment. The design, based on selected colors in the book's only illustration, is a horizontal composition moving from blue (bottom) to green (top), with various shades of purples and reds in between. The background color is the same cobalt blue calf everywhere, and so the colors are obtained by stamping colored lines on top

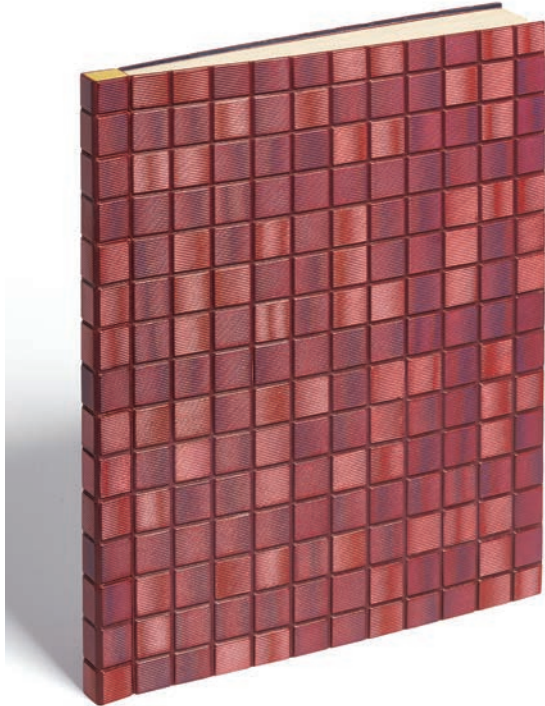


Laforge, Lucien. ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ. Paris: Henri Goulet, 1924.

Bound in 2019. This binding is in a private collection (France). 28.4 x 29.5 x 2 cm.

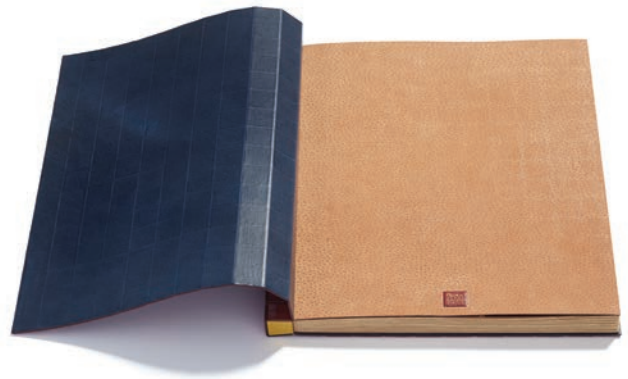
Photographs by Jan Van Schooten and Kieke Schaaper.

Pixel binding in full calfskin, with calfskin doublures



and suede flyleaves, in the Japanese binding structure. The decorative technique is similar to the previous binding showcased: line stamping limited to the square area. For this binding, I chose an effect that could be described as “moiré”, where I stamped each square twice, each time in a more or less horizontal fashion but with a slight angle between the two impressions; this technique created a vibrating effect, slightly different every time. I used two different color combinations in the same color family, one being lighter (pink + red) than the other one (red + purple), and distributed them throughout the back board, spine and front board in such a way that a full stylized alphabet would emerge from the composition, however at second glance only.

The covering leather is Burgundy veg-tanned calf, edge to edge doublures are in the same calf in Petrol blue, and flyleaves are orange pig suede lined with Burgundy paper. The head and tail panels were made in yellow goat and the sewing thread was dyed



as close as possible to the covering leather so it would blend into the composition and not stand out. There are 375 squares in total, including on the spine, and the cover is made out of one piece; this was not the case in the Miró binding, which had an additional spine piece.

Another interesting contrast with the Miró binding is the fact that in this binding everything was premeditated and nothing left to chance, which probably accounts for a more polished appearance. I like both approaches. What do you think?



WHAT'S NEXT?

I HAVE BEEN TOYING WITH THE IDEA of using other shapes than the square. The triangle, the diamond, the parallelogram—actually any shape which generates a grid of some sort with straight lines when combined could be used in a very similar way to the four bindings presented in this article. This would probably be rather fun to attempt, and maybe I'll do it at some point – but at the moment I am more interested in exploring decorative techniques applied to the basic square grid.

Together with my colleagues at Elbel Libro, we are currently working on an edition that will use the Pixel binding structure. The publisher reached out to us because he felt that this structure's futuristic outlook would suit the content particularly well: a science fiction book. We are extremely grateful for the opportunity, and for the chance to learn a lot more about this structure by making lots of them.

For those of you who are interested in learning about this structure in more technical detail, a workshop will be offered based on the structure in paper, with suede flyleaves and Taral board attachment. It will include the use of graphite on the edges, and as a powerful decorative feature on the boards.

A list of workshops can be viewed at www.bookbindingoutofthebox.com/pages/workshop-calendar.

Bind well and stay safe.

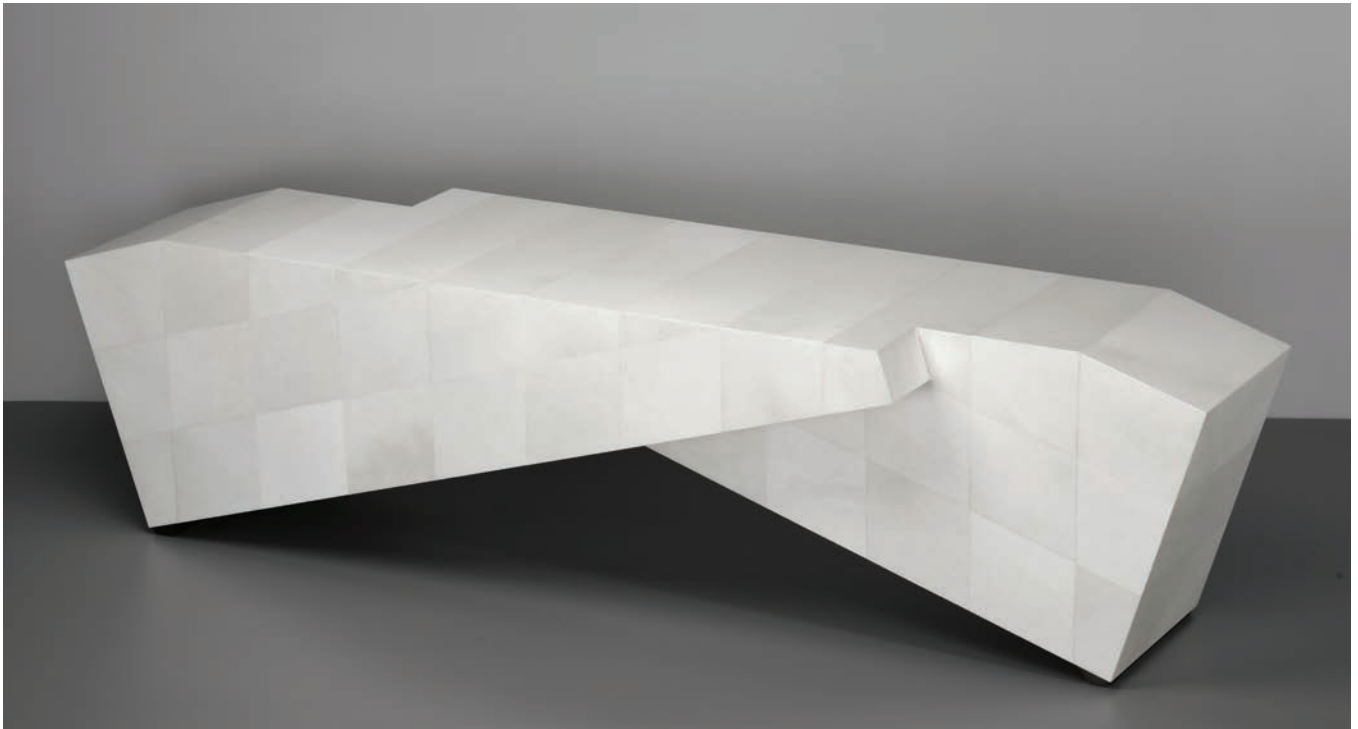


Fig. 1: Goatskin Vellum Bench 2014
English goatskin vellum, patinated brass custom feet. 66" W x 15.75" D x 17.5" H. John Polak Photography.

NOTES ON WORKING WITH PARCHMENT FROM AN ALLIED CRAFT

SARAH PRINGLE

PARCHMENT AND VELLUM are commonly thought to be difficult materials to work with. Some even say ornery, “that the skin always wants to go back to its shape on the animal.” I don’t really see it that way. While I’ve had some epic failures with it, I’ve also come to understand, from years of working with the material, that if you do what it needs it will be a strong, versatile, exquisite surface that can be worked into unconventional, beautiful design solutions.

I’VE BEEN WORKING WITH PARCHMENT AND VELLUM for over 35 years: Starting as a hand bookbinder and then pivoting to working on custom furniture and architectural elements for the interior design trade, (Figs. 1-3) I now design and produce furniture and objects that incorporate surface finishes of parchment, water gilding, and leather work. I also teach the techniques I work with to emerging and professional creatives.

Here’s what I’ve found to be true (so far). When moisture, such as adhesive, is applied to the skins of parchment or vellum it is going to swell, and as it dries will have a significant amount of pull. When not accounted for, that tension of the skin’s pull will cause warping and adhesion issues—of impressive effect—usually not in a good way. It is important when working with this material to understand how to mitigate this trait. Here’s how I look at it: swell and pull aren’t bad, they’re just facts one has to adapt to and work with. I find that if what parchment work needs is taken into account, and designed accordingly, I can get the outcome wanted.

Philosophically, I’m interested in sharing techniques, particularly techniques that are hard to find information about, in any language! Except for a few insights from kind people, I am self-taught in parchment work. This article provides a brief introduction to the materials and offers practical, experiential information about how I approach working with parchment on rigid panels and furniture. While obviously not books, I believe there are in-common handling techniques and practices with parchment I’ve come to rely on that could be of interest to traditional bookbinders and book artists. My hope is to provide some technical

Called the doyenne of vellum, Sarah Pringle has spent thirty years working with animal skin parchment, gold leaf, and pigments, creating contemporary furniture and objects that are pristine, functional, and exquisite. Her work has appeared in Architectural Digest, Interior Design, Vogue Living and at PAD Paris. A worker-bee, alchemist and daydreamer, she creates, innovates, and teaches out of her sunlit studio in Western Massachusetts. Her expertise is the result of love for these materials, patience, and dedication and commitment to a sophisticated aesthetic — to producing architectural pieces whose integrity and beauty enhance the soul of their surroundings. She can be found online at <http://pringle.studio/>.



Fig. 2: Goatskin Vellum Screen 2016. English goatskin vellum, rift white oak veneer, dyed solid oak, patinated brass custom feet and double action hinges. 77.37" H. John Polak Photography.



Fig. 3: Cylinder Sculpture 2020. Fish parchment, water gilded 22K Moon gold leaf on custom violet bole. 13.75" H x 3.75" dia. Photograph by the author.

insight to facilitate a successful start to, or continued enjoyment of working with parchment.

For simplifying writing, I will be conflating the terms vellum and parchment to parchment. The information in this article can be worked on both parchment and vellum.



Fig. 4: Skin stretched on hearse. Photograph by the author.

MATERIALS + TOOLS

Parchment

PARCHMENT IS PREPARED FROM THE SKIN of an animal, typically goat, calf, and sheep - less typically deer, ostrich, horse, pig, alligator, and fish, among others. The mammalian skins are processed in a lime bath and (usually) de-haired. The pelt is then dried at room temperature being stretched and held under tension on a frame; in some cultures it's called a hearse (old English spelling) (Fig. 4). This mechanical process, stretching the wet pelt while it is drying, is what distinguishes parchment from leather. During stretching some of the fibers are broken under the

tension allowing the remaining fibers to become aligned into layers parallel to the grain and flesh surfaces. While the pelt dries the fibers are set into the stretched alignment by a pelt fluid, endemic to the skin, which acts as an adhesive. Once dry, the fibers do not revert to their soft, relaxed state but create a highly taut sheet which is smooth, strong and semi-elastic.¹

Today parchment is manufactured on six of seven continents with Antarctica being the exception. For those of us here in the Americas, parchment is typically sourced domestically or from Europe. It is available from both tannery manufacturers and wholesale/retail businesses (*see Resource and Vendor List*).

It is my preference to buy from and support tannery manufacturers. Because they are the source, they have knowledge and experiential understanding about animal skins; they can be specific about sourcing, process, what their inventory is, and credibly assist with custom orders. It's a huge benefit to develop good relationships with the businesses that produce the parchment not only to be more involved with selecting for quality and project specifications but also for insight into the business and craft of parchment making.

Culling through inventory and selecting in person is the best way to obtain skins and can be done (by appointment) at some tannery manufacturers and retail businesses. This is also a great way to pick up anomaly skins, one-of-a-kind skins that can be of particular interest for a single use project such as a design binding or small object. If you are not able to select skins in person and have to order a shipment, I would suggest ordering a percentage of extra skins to assure that you will end up with the selection that ideally suits your project. When I bid for jobs I include 10% - 25% for extra skins, the range reflecting the type of skin specified (some skin types have more consistency than others) and how discerning the client is.

Adhesive

TALAS WHEAT PASTE NO. 301, a precooked powder which dissolves easily in cold water, is my go-to adhesive for adhering parchment to a substrate. The attributes I like about this paste include: if prepared and applied properly, the paste has the strength to adhere parchment to a substrate; it is compatible with

substrates that are porous; compatibility with the protein structure of traditionally processed parchment skins; it stays open (workable), which allows for a thorough and relaxed (well, most of the time) glue up session; it dries transparently; it doesn't introduce heat; it's easy to make in small or large quantities; and it is nontoxic, inexpensive, and easily sourced. Ultimately, I love the way paste handles and how the parchment looks and feels when it is dry.

Archival Paste Brushes

USE GOOD QUALITY BRUSHES designed for working with paste: hog hair bristles, string bound, with no metal parts. My preferred paste brush company is Shepherds, but Talas also sells good archival paste brushes. Typically, I use #6 and #18 and, when needed, a #28 for large scale work. Brushes need to be big enough to easily hold and distribute the paste for the scale that you typically work at. New brushes should be soaked overnight and rinsed and cleaned with a high-quality brush soap before first using them. It is common for new brushes to shed. Brush hairs are the bane of vellum work; look at your surfaces for stray brush hairs before laying down the skin! If used and cared for properly, a Shepherds brush will last for decades.

Small Tools, Materials, Equipment

MY CACHE OF HAND TOOLS includes Teflon folders small and large and a large Teflon bar folder 3" x 7" x .25" with one of the long sides rounded. I made this bar folder years ago but Bonefolder.com makes an interesting large folder – 'Extra Large Ergo Square Non-Stick Bone Folder' which I think would work similarly. Additional important small tools include bone folders, scalpel and blades, tweezers, Casselli spatulas, HB pencil, and a clean pink pearl eraser (do not use kneaded erasers).

Other supplies include Mylar, Hollitex, barrier paper (I use barrier paper instead of blotter paper because the texture of blotter embosses the parchment leaving an undesirable uneven surface), and good quality sandpaper. You'll also need two, two-liter capacity Pyrex bowls, two clean sponges—one a (gentle) scrubby sponge, the other just a sponge—both designated for this purpose only, filtered or spring water, and paper towel or scrap paper.

BENCH AND WORK AREA SETUP

IMPORTANT FEATURES FOR A PREPARED work area are good overall lighting, including good backlighting, a smooth waterproof work surface, and ample area for work surface—clear the decks!

Good light sources are imperative for seeing the nuances of the materials during the covering process. Position yourself so the light supports your ability to work precisely.

My work benches are over 30 years old and no longer waterproof (too many scratches in the finish of the MDF). I've covered the entire top of my benches with Dura-Lar which is a frosted matte Mylar. I like this solution for a number of reasons: it's a light background, waterproof, easy to clean and replace when needed, impervious to the few solvents I use, and non-reflective so when I take process photographs the frosted Mylar provides a great matte background. At .005"/5 mil thick it provides a smooth even surface on my old bench top.

The need for a water-resistant surface becomes self-evident when pasting up and cleaning paste residue. Dampening the parchment makes it tacky, so it is easier to pull it up and handle from a waterproof surface. Pasting up parchment requires saturating the entire piece of skin which gets messy. A waterproof work surface can quickly and easily be scrubbed, wiped clean, and dried.

SELECTING A CUT (PIECE) FROM A SKIN

A day or two before you'll be looking over the parchment, unroll the skin(s), place the curl face down, and weight the edges or put a board on top to encourage the skin to relax and flatten. Don't be aggressive with the weight, just enough to encourage flattening.

Determine the size of the cut the parchment needs to be, and whether you are counter-warping with parchment or paper. You'll want to account for the



Fig. 5: Viewing the backlit skin. Photograph by Geoff McKonly.

overall size of the object, including edges or turn-ins, plus some extra to work with. For example, when I'm covering the front of a panel, I add at least .75" all around, beyond the overall size I want, so that I can pull the parchment with my thumb and index finger across and onto the edge of the panel. An additional benefit to having this extra material is if the skin swells unevenly—unpredictable things happen when you add moisture to parchment; if there is extra material it is easier to adjust the placement of the skin.

Working with good overall indirect light and a bright direct light source, I rely on two procedures for assessing a skin. First, run your hands over the entire skin surface, both grain side and flesh side, to feel how beautiful it is but more importantly at this stage, to feel for defects in the skin. Touch is another way of seeing. Hold the skin up so it's back lit, (Fig. 5) and look, on both sides of the skin, for natural anomalies such as tick and inoculation scars, holes, scraping marks, pigment variations, gunk, problematically thin areas or unusual spine alignment. With an HB pencil (don't use a soft pencil lead because it smudges and is hard to remove) on the GRAIN side, lightly circle/mark anything you want to avoid.

Second, with the skin on a low table, alternating between a light and dark background, white and dark paper can be slid underneath the skin. Assess the surfaces for any other areas you want to avoid. Note those in pencil on the grain side of the skin. Looking at the skin on both a dark and light background provides good insight into how the character of the skin will likely look on your object.

There are a couple of techniques I can share to remedy simple anomalies in a skin. I highly recommend testing these techniques on a scrap piece of parchment to practice and understand the finesse for using a scalpel blade and/or sandpaper.

If there is a rough area or a piece of dried flesh on the flesh side of the skin, you can use P220 or P320 sandpaper to sand the area smooth. If you come across an embedded hair or speck of something—on the flesh



Fig. 6: Removing embedded defects with scalpel. Photograph by Geoff McKonly.

side—use a scalpel blade (Fig. 6) and try to scrape the suede and gently remove what's embedded. Gently sand the area to smooth. These attempts don't always result in success but often they're worth a try.

It is important to take the time to know what's happening in the skin before cutting the piece you need. When I do these steps, I'm literally reading skin to predict how it will behave and ultimately look once it has gone through the covering process.

MAKING THE SELECTION

Using the overall dimensions of the object to be covered I make 4-ply window mats for front and back parchment selection. The mats are marked with reference lines for the front, edges, and flange as well

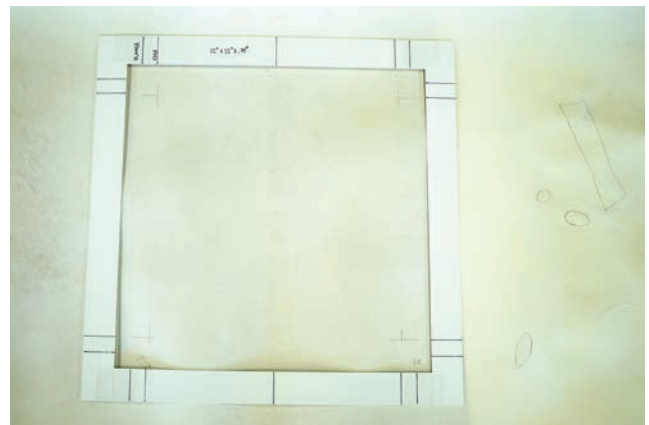


Fig. 7: The window mat used to select areas of the skin. Photograph by Geoff McKonly.

as the center point for aligning the spine if needed. The mats provide a way to easily see the whole of the cut needed.

Looking at the grain side of the skin and noting with pencil marks anything you want to avoid, use the window mats to select the cuts you want. Weight the mat down to hold it in place, and using a pencil, mark the outermost dimensions. Next, draw lines representing the corners for lining up the cut piece on the panel, and add lines at top and bottom for the spine. Note the lower right corner to easily reference the orientation of the cut piece (Fig.7).

COVERING

WHEN WORKING ON PANELS, I cover and counter-warp them in the same day in a continuous start-to-finish process to facilitate keeping the panel flat and true. If I'm covering a panel such as a case piece door that will be seen both front and back, I cover the entire panel in parchment - back, front, and edges, in that order. The pieces meet at the edges with adhesion integrity (see below for definition) and the beauty of a seamless edge. Skin easily sticks to itself and bonds. One parchment surface will readily bond and seal to another parchment surface provided surfaces are clean, that the paste is fresh and applied properly, and that pressure is applied to set the skin in place.

If the panel is for a case piece where the back doesn't show, I'll counter warp the back with strong handmade paper to save money and material while still achieving the desired counter warping properties. I find that Twinrocker Handmade Abaca Paper is a great paper that has similar strength to parchment and can be applied using the same techniques.

About adhesion integrity—if a panel is covered on one face and trimmed flush, the tension at the edge, around the perimeter, is highly susceptible to adhesion failure which results in the parchment delaminating from the substrate or sometimes delaminating and taking the substrate with it. It's alarming how strong the pull of parchment can be! (Fig. 8)

By covering the back, then front, then edges, essentially encasing the substrate, the tension is diminished by the parchment wrapping onto the edge and butting to itself. The paste, in conjunction with the natural adhesive properties of damp parchment and the application of pressure, bonds the skin where the



Fig. 8: The pull of the drying skin can delaminate the substrate. Photograph by the author.

edges of parchment meet and in doing that it relieves the tension at the edges. Put simply, it's risky trimming a surface flush to the edge. Always wrap onto the edges to ensure adhesion integrity.

SETTING UP TO COVER

USING THE RECIPE included at the end of this article, I prepare the wheat paste a day or two before covering, and then strain the entire batch and store it in the refrigerator until I'm ready to use it.

I prefer to work with materials at room temperature so the paste and the skin are the same temperature when I start to cover. About an hour before covering, decant some prepared paste. Prime the hog hair paste brush by soaking it in clean water for about 5 minutes, then flick out the excess water. Test the viscosity of the paste using the paste brush. Gently pounce the brush into the paste and stir. It's likely to be a bit too thick, so I add small amounts of water to thin the paste to about the thickness of stirred yogurt. You want body in the paste, and a consistency that will lay down a smooth even layer on the parchment. The paste recipe I use is about 90% water; don't over-thin the paste or there will likely be adhesion issues. Keep the brush in the paste when not in use.



Fig. 9: Tools and other supplies set out on the bench. Photograph by Geoff McKonly.

The workbench setup consists of:

- Two bowls of clean water, one with a clean sponge (this is the “clean” water) and the other with a clean combo sponge scrubby (this is the “dirty” water.)
- Clean towels, one right in front of the water bowls. A couple other towels within arm’s reach for drying the work surface
- Clean hand tools within reach, as well as a piece of Mylar cut-to-size (about 1" all around larger than the panel)
- Keep Hollitex and barrier paper (both pre-cut about 1" all around larger than the panel for the project) close by

COVERING A PANEL

DAMPEN THE GRAIN SIDE of the skin before applying the paste. The purpose of dampening the grain side is to introduce moisture to balance the moisture of the paste that is applied to the flesh side of the skin. Dampening the grain side initiates swelling of the skin and helps the paste absorb into the flesh side. This increases the pliability and working properties of the skin but also thoroughly infuses the skin with paste. The more paste absorbed into the fibers of the flesh side, the better the adhesion of the skin to the substrate.

The flesh side of the skin is pasted up in the standard technique, working from the center outwards off the perimeter of the skin. You want to apply enough paste to the parchment that it will soak into the flesh side for several minutes but also have some paste on the skin for the glue up. If it fully absorbs into the skin, evenly apply a thin coat of additional paste. This allows for time to prepare the substrate, too. Large pieces of parchment may require putting weight on the corners (I use clean stones) to keep the skin from curling onto itself. It’s

important to examine the pasted panel and the skin, to thoroughly inspect for brush hairs or gunk which can be removed using tweezers (Fig. 10). Anything that is dimensional, left between the skin and the substrate, will telegraph through and be apparent when the parchment is dry, so be vigilant! Also check for even coverage of the paste, that there are no dry areas that would cause an air bubble. Evenly apply more paste if needed.

To work the parchment down, I toggle between dampening the parchment with a wrung-out sponge to keep the surface workable and working the parchment down through Mylar using a Teflon bar folder. After



Fig. 10: Removing stray brush hairs from the paste with tweezers. Photograph by Geoff McKonly.



Fig. 11: Working down the parchment with a sturdy Teflon bar. Photograph by Geoff McKonly.

placing the pasted skin on the substrate, I dampen then lay a piece of Mylar on the parchment and from the center out, work the parchment down moving the Teflon bar at an angle (Fig. 11) sweeping it towards, away, and side to side. Work lightly at first and if the parchment needs more moisture, lightly dampen the skin - but always work with the Mylar in place before working it down with the Teflon folder.

The Mylar is dense and displaces the edges of the Teflon folder. Because it is transparent, it is easy to see air bubbles or wrinkles (this usually only happens with large panels) that need coaxing to flatten. The protective Mylar facilitates multiple passes of the folder without leaving behind tracks and Teflon particulates in the parchment.

Now, a bit more detail on how hard to push the folder across the surface. You don't want to 'starve the glue up'; meaning you don't want to push out too much paste and compromise the adhesion. Look and feel to know that the parchment is completely down - no air bubbles or wrinkles - and that the paste is even and smooth under the surface of the skin. With the Mylar off, move your hand over the surface. Hold the panel up to raking light and assess the flatness of the parchment. Re-work through the Mylar if need be but don't overdo it. In this process of taking the Mylar on and off, the Mylar may stick to the parchment or appear to be drying too fast. In that case, lightly dampen the grain side as needed to resolve.

PRESSING A PANEL
IF THE PANEL IS SMALL (10" × 10" or smaller), I don't tend to press it; working the parchment down through Mylar is usually enough to ensure good adhesion. If I'm working on a series of panels or if they are large, I'll press the panel in my vacuum table. It's important to distinguish pressing versus weight. Weight isn't effective with a freshly covered panel. Pressure, though, will ensure adhesion and leveling the paste under the parchment. If pressing, sandwich the panel

between Hollitex and barrier paper on both sides (the Hollitex against the parchment) and put it in the press, parchment side down, for about 20 minutes. The skin is somewhat fragile at this point from all the moisture. I do not strong arm the pressure or press for an extended period. Pressing parchment panels for long periods of time is unnecessary and can contribute to warping. Excessive pressure can bruise the skin and push out the paste, compromising the glue up.

After pressing, slit the flange (Fig. 12): this is the excess parchment that will eventually get trimmed away. Slitting the parchment keeps the parchment from lifting off the panel by relieving tension on the edge as the parchment dries.

Before continuing with the covering, let the panel dry propped on top of a sturdy object for about 30 minutes to let the parchment set a bit. It's important to have air circulation around the whole panel to minimize warping.



Fig. 12: Slitting excess material at the flange. Photograph by Geoff McKonly.



Fig. 13: Pulling the parchment onto the edge.

To cover the edges, re-paste the parchment flange and the board edge. Work with the panel vertical with the pasted flange towards you. Using your fingers and thumbs, pull the parchment onto the edge, (Fig. 13) making sure the parchment is taut across the corner and panel edge. Then, work the parchment down with a Mylar strip and Teflon folder, working from the center to the ends, and being careful to not push the paste onto the front of the panel. Clean up excess paste and let it dry for at least 30 minutes before trimming back.

CLEAN UP AND FINAL CHECK

CAREFULLY TRIM AWAY ANY EXCESS parchment with a scalpel, being meticulous not to undercut and trim too much (Fig. 14). Better to leave a bit of excess parchment and sand it back once it's completely dry than inadvertently over cut.

Corners and the apex of edges can be sanded with P320 or P400 sandpaper on a sanding block. Gently sand edges to slightly round them. Don't overdo it or you could sand through the parchment, especially on corners. DO NOT sand the grain of sheep or goatskin. It will remove the upper dermal layer and change the surface characteristic—usually not in a good way. Calfskin, on the other hand, can be sanded and polished with the clean outside cheek of the palm of your hand.

To finish the edges and corners put some spit (one's saliva needs to be clean—no coffee, nicotine, or

pesto mouth) on a finger or thumb and moisten the sanded edges, moving your finger/thumb back and forth to smooth the parchment (Fig. 15). It might become sticky as the skin dries. Buff the surface with the clean outside cheek of the palm of your hand – skin to skin contact. The hand polishes the animal skin beautifully.

This spit technique can be used elsewhere on the panel to smooth rough spots.

Protective Finish

Parchment can be left unfinished but is susceptible to the influence of moisture and sunlight, changing over time to reflect the conditions and care it has



Fig. 14: Trimming the excess parchment away.



Fig. 15: Smoothing the parchment edges.

experienced. High quality wax can be applied, but this ‘finish’ does little to protect parchment. The parchment work that is made in my workshop is finished with a coat of M.L. Campbell Vinyl Sealer and one to two coats M.L. Campbell HP WW Conversion Varnish Clear - Flat Sheen.

IN CONCLUSION, A TECHNICAL RECAP to encourage your creative success.

Teach yourself how to look at skins. There’s a story there of an animal’s life. Species, gender, age, nutrition, health, geography—it can be pretty interesting.

Don’t be afraid of water, be it on a sponge or in the paste. Parchment becoming and staying malleable is of great help to having the time to work with it as well as ensuring adhesion integrity.

Counter warp as soon as the skin is dry enough to handle for the counter warping process. Treating all sides similarly and in timely sequence hinders the panel from warping and drying in that warped state. It’s much harder (and honestly sometimes not entirely successful) to pull a warped panel back from a dry state than to counter warp before the panel has dried completely.

Be careful handling and pressing damp parchment. It is skin, and in a dampened state is susceptible to bruising or becoming transparent. This of course could be used to an interesting advantage, so, if you wish, disregard the previous sentence and experiment!

WHEAT PASTE RECIPE

Materials & Tools:

Wheat Paste powder, calcium carbonate*, cold spring or filtered water, scale, milliliter measuring containers, Pyrex container, spatula, glass or ceramic storage container.

Material Source:

Wheat Starch 301 - Talas item # TAD002010, talasonline.com

Calcium Carbonate - Kremer Pigments # 58000, kremerpigments.com

Measures Conversion Chart

LIQUID:	VOLUME:
15 ml. = 1 T.	6 g. wheat paste powder = 1 T.
30 ml. = 1 oz.	10 g. calcium carbonate = 1 T.

YIELD	WHEAT PASTE	CALCIUM CARBONATE	COLD WATER
125 ml.	13 grams	3 g.	125 ml.
250 ml.	25 grams	5 g.	250 ml.
500 ml.	50 grams	10 g.	500 ml.
750 ml.	75 grams	15 g.	750 ml.
1000 ml.	100 grams	20 g.	1000 ml.

Preparation Instructions

Weigh wheat paste powder and calcium carbonate powder. Measure cold water.

Gently sprinkle wheat paste and calcium carbonate* onto cold water. Do not stir. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

The next day, stir well but gently. “Chop” the clumps with a spatula to break them up.

Let the paste sit at room temperature for 30-60 minutes. Stir again.

Strain well so the paste is completely smooth in texture. This is a stock solution of paste. Label and date. Keep refrigerated when not in use. Lasts about 4-6 days. Discard if it starts to smell rotten.

At the time of use, decant desired amount and adjust the consistency by adding water.

* 20% Calcium Carbonate is added to buffer the PH of the acidic wheat paste (pH 6-6.5).

Parchment Vendor List

PARCHMENT MANUFACTURERS & VENDORS – USA:
Pergamena; www.pergamena.net

Stern Tanning; www.sterntanning.com

PARCHMENT VENDORS – USA:
Dualoy; www.dualoy.com

Keleen Leathers; www.keleenleathers.com

MacPherson Leather Company; macphersonleather.com/index.html

Talas; talasonline.com

PARCHMENT MANUFACTURERS AND
VENDORS – EUROPE:
Altenburger; www.pergament-trommelfell.de/english/unternehmen.html

Bodin Joyeux; bodinjoeux.com/nos-cuir/parchemin/

Dumas Tannerie Parcheminerie; www.tanneriedumas.com/en/

William Cowley Parchment and Vellum Works; www.williamcowley.co.uk

REFERENCE

- 1 Reed, Ronald. *The Nature and Making of Parchment*. Leeds: The Elmete Press, 1975. Print. (pg. 44)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I fortunately had the help of three people and an industry in writing this article. Thank you to Peter Verheyen and Rebecca Staley for reviewing the drafts and offering much improved edits; I am very appreciative to have had your help. Geoff McKonly was beyond kind to come to my workshop and photograph the process during this COVID summer of 2020. Thank you for your willingness to document and for all the beautiful images. And lastly, thank you to the people who manufacture parchment and vellum. It is a messy, smelly, laborious artistry to come up with such exquisite material. Every time I purchase skins I am grateful there are businesses that continue to make this rare material.



Fig. 1: Leather covered harpsichord from the collection at The Victoria and Albert Museum.
(See reference note 1)

A LEATHER COVERED HARPSICHORD

SAMUEL B. ELLENPORT

THE HISTORY OF OUR CRAFT is usually expressed in a straightforward way. There are lists of individual binders' dates and biographies, descriptions of decorative styles by time periods or locales, listings of work done by place, date, and name, binding provenance, and other tracings of ownership. Manuals of technique take the same linear approach. Yet it is often the anecdotal stories that catch our interest, illuminating what we do or are asked to do by patrons and clients. The creation of a leather covered harpsichord is such a story. It took place in the late 1970s, and sheds light on how discrete some areas of collecting can be. The story also illuminates the odd requests found within our craft, without going beyond the use of common and traditional techniques. If this anecdote can be categorized, it would be under the heading "Economics of Desire."

THE HARCOURT BINDERY WAS A QUALITY SHOP located in Boston since its founding in 1900, and enjoyed a national reputation and clientele. When I bought the company in 1970 from Fred Young there were four employees. Yet even then it was the largest commercial hand bindery in the United States doing fine leather work. Its clientele was roughly divided into thirds: $\frac{1}{3}$ were publishers, gifting authors with leather bound copies of their books and doing some limited edition work in leather; $\frac{1}{3}$ was comprised of rare book dealers for whom we did restorations and boxes, as well as high-end bookstores such as Brentano's, Scribners, Marshall Fields, and Lauriat's who sold leather bound books as gifts. The final third was a catch-all third including churches, individuals, universities and schools (prize books mostly), and a few other odd categories such as leather wine lists and menu covers. Harcourt did not produce necessities, working for a refined and sometimes rarefied clientele. The business was heavily dependent on the strength of the economy.

The oil crisis between October, 1973 and March, 1974 saw the U.S. economy contract swiftly. Dependent on a luxury market, companies such as Harcourt felt the effects dramatically. The stock market continued to fall and at best stabilized through the rest of the 1970s, and I felt the need to find new revenue streams. I expanded Harcourt's effort to capture new

Samuel Ellenport (b.1943) was educated at Amherst College, Brown University, and Oxford. He taught history at Suffolk University before buying The Harcourt Bindery in Boston in 1971 which he ran until it was sold in 2008. Sam continues binding, writing, and teaching from his studio now named Chagford Antiquarians. Sam remains an active book collector with a deep interest in the history of our craft; his extensive library of bookbinding materials is now at Emory University. Among his writings are The Future of Hand Bookbinding (1993) and Reflections of Two Craftsmen (2012). Sam was instrumental in establishing the bookbinding program at the North Bennet Street School in Boston. As the Chair of the New England Chapter of the Guild of Book Workers he helped formulate the Chapter's development during the 1970s and 1980s. Sam was awarded the Guild of Book Workers' Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014.



Fig. 2: Detail of the gold tooling. The Victoria and Albert Museum.

markets by establishing a school to teach binding through classes and workshops, a forerunner to the program at the North Bennet Street School in Boston. I began buying larger quantities of materials, retailing surplus supplies to the individual binders who had difficulty importing small quantities of quality materials from Europe. When the economy stabilized in the late 1970s, Harcourt had survived and grown to 8 employees with a clear need to expand its business further. I approached camera shops in regard to making leather bellows for large cameras, as well as organ making shops (bellows again). We made a few for larger, commercial cameras. Harcourt made small leather gift boxes with onlays which I tried to market to jewelry outlets. And we sold vellum to harpsichord makers for use in their soundboard roses.

A local harpsichord maker in 1978 put us in touch with a collector of unique musical instruments. He was in the process of negotiating the commission of a copy of an early harpsichord which he wanted covered with gold-tooled morocco. Harcourt was asked to cover the carcass of the instrument with leather before the final keyboard was completed. As a harpsichord player, I expressed the opinion that the leather would possibly alter the sound, and that I had

never seen a leather covered harpsichord nor heard of one. He agreed that the sound might be a problem, and confirmed that his research also had discovered no such leather covering...which would make this instrument unique.

The harpsichord was duly commissioned. While waiting for the shell to be completed, I took a trip to England to visit suppliers. As the largest American client of Hewit and Sons they were definitely on my list, and I duly paid a visit to Hewit's London office which was adjacent to the knackers' shops around Farringdon St. near the old City Walls.

I also bought leather from Harrold Leather Works, one of several tanners of exotic leathers working in Bermondsey (South London); they and others were later forced to leave that area over environmental issues due to the disposal of their tanning liquors. Another stop on my list was a visit to Simon Lawrence, who ran his incredible paper supply shop located in Bleeding Heart Yard, just off Hatton Garden. And on that trip I also stopped by St. Bride's Printing Library just off Fleet Street, and duly paid homage to the collections at the British Library and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

At the V&A Museum I was gobsmacked when I saw what appeared to be a gold tooled, leather-covered harpsichord displayed in the music room! I sought out the docent who told me that historic harpsichords were often housed in decorated cases which protected them during travel. As they say in England, "the penny dropped" and things now made sense. A band of musicians would move from court to court, or concert to concert, pack up their instruments in a suitably decorated case against the vagaries of travel, then remove them and set them up when they prepared to play. The cases were really fancy valises, decorated and shiny, reflective of the status of their patrons. This harpsichord and case (Fig. 1 & 2) is in the V&A's collection.

Returning to Boston with this new information, I called my client and the harpsichord maker. I explained the purpose of the fancy protective instrument case and offered to create one similar to what I had seen. The mystery of a harpsichord covered in leather seemed to have been solved. But the answer came back a resounding NO. In my client's eyes, a leather covered instrument would be unique. I worked out our leather needs with my foreman, the late Joe Newman, and ordered nine skins of bottle-green morocco, a color complementing the artistic designs on the soundboard, from Mr. Barlee at Hewit and Sons.

The following pictures were taken during the process of covering and decorating the harpsichord's shell, also known as a "carcass," Fig. 3. The project took a week, including drying time.

There are no goatskins large enough to cover the lengths of the carcass, so beveled joints had to be made where pieces of leather were joined. Fig. 4 shows the



Fig. 3: The "carcass" of the harpsichord as received, with painted soundboard.



Fig. 4: The author skiving the leather.

author skiving a 45-degree angle at the end of each length of leather. The ruler serves two purposes. It is a guide for the knife, a technique used when paring bevels for inlays and doublures. The ruler also keeps the leather flat over the length of a long skive.

Figures 5 and 6 show the placement of the pasted leather on the harpsichord shell by the author and Joe Newman. Pasting the leather with wheat paste was similar to pasting leather for bindings. The leather in Fig. 5 is held in place by masking tape which blends so well with the wood that the leather appears to have a ragged edge.

I was not aware of Coe's wheels at this time, so all the gold leaf was cut by hand and transferred from the gold cushion to the leather in the traditional manner. A Coe's wheel uses ribbon gold, available in widths from 1/8" to 3 1/8". In use, it allows the gold leaf to unspool onto the prepared surface; the size helps pull the leaf from the roller. For long narrow borders this technique is ideal as there are huge savings in time with a minimum of wasted gold lost in trying to cut thin strips from sheets of gold and transferring them

to the leather. The rolls of ribbon gold leaf, regardless of width, are 66 feet long. One can roll a length up to 66 feet in less than a minute.

Fig 13 shows Joe bringing up a shine on the leather using a heated barrel polisher. It is worth noting that the barrel polisher is barrel shaped and is not



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

cylindrical. When used correctly, the barrel shape makes it easier to avoid a mark, as the ends of the polisher should never touch the leather. You cannot see in the still image that the polisher is used in a figure 8 motion, to avoid streak marks.

The project offered no particular challenge aside from the care necessary in handling the harpsichord's shell. Most time-consuming was planning the layout of the design for tooling. The leather attached with paste to the wooden shell was very similar to leather on books; no special tooling adjustments had to be made. We did not make templates, but marked out the design patterns directly on the leather, just as we had been doing on book covers of the shop's full leather bindings. The design repeated, so careful measurement was more important than any other aspect of the project.

In retrospect, this seems a senseless project. Yet it was a harmless one. No book was altered, damaged or defaced. I saw no ethical issues with the project which simply pleased one man's ego in his following the dictates of the economics of desire.

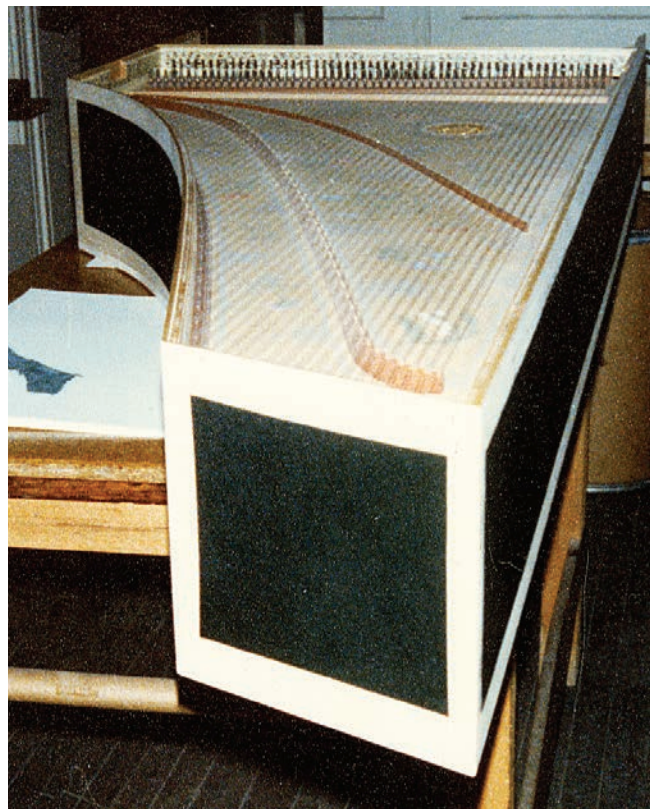


Fig. 7: The pasted panels on the shell of the harpsichord.



Fig. 8: Joe paste washing the leather before applying a traditional egg-white size prior to laying gold leaf and tooling.



Fig. 10: Joe laying gold leaf by hand after the leather was sized.



Fig. 9: Joe laying gold leaf on the gold cushion. Note that the gold cushion is long enough to comfortably lay out 4 leaves at one time.



Fig. 11: Joe tooling a series of repeated center tools onto the leather.



Fig. 12: Joe using a decorated roll to tool a border.



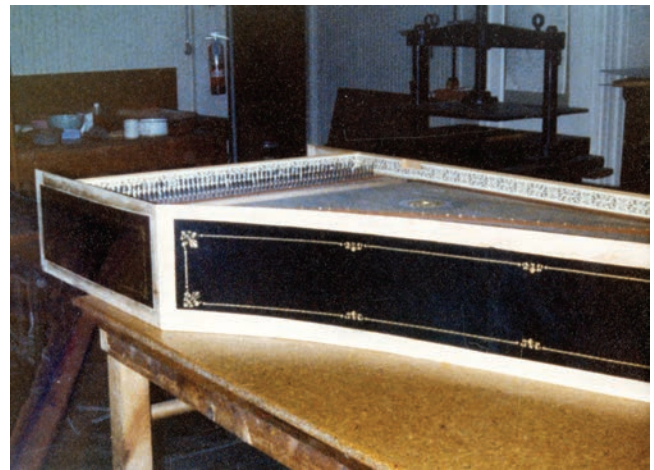
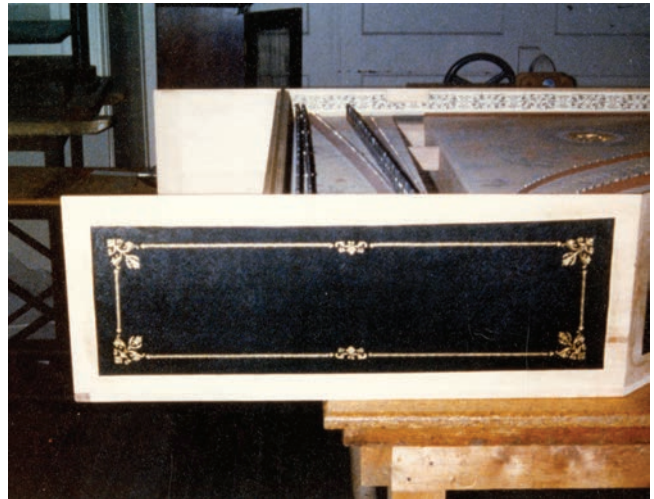
Fig. 13: Joe polishing the tooled leather after removing excess leaf.

REFERENCE & PHOTO CREDITS:

1 ©Victoria & Albert Museum, London. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O58980/harpsichord-jerome-of-bologna/> (accessed 9 April 2020).

2 ©Victoria & Albert Museum, London. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O58980/harpsichord-jerome-of-bologna/> (accessed 9 April 2020).

3 – 6 author's photographs.



Figures 14 and 15 show finished panels in their shining glory.



Fig. 16: Joe (left) and the author with the decorated leather shell.

GUILD OF BOOK WORKERS JOURNAL

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[Book] Reference: Middleton, Bernard C. 1963. *A History of English Craft Bookbinding Technique*. New York and London: Hafner Publishing Co.

Citation: (Middleton 1963: 114–116)

[Article] Reference: Smith, Keith A. 1991. "Syntactical Pages." *The New Bookbinder* 11: 54–66. /

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[Electronic article] Reference: Drucker, Johanna. 2005. Critical Issues/Exemplary Works. *The Bonefolder* 1, no. 2 (Spring): 3–15. <http://www.philobiblon.com/bonefolder/vol1no2contents.htm>.

Citation: (Drucker 2005, 4–5)

Reference: Frost, Gary. "we pause." BookNews. <http://www.futureofthebook.com/2008/08/31>.

Citation: (Frost, BookNews, comment posted August 31, 2008)

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