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Standards of Excellence  
Presentations

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Born Child?  
by Sam Ellenport

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Century Soft-Metal  
Bearing  
by John Nove

And More...





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The Guild of Book Workers is a national organization representing the hand book crafts. There are regional chapters in New England, New York, the Delaware Valley, Washington DC, the Midwest, California, the Rocky Mountains, Texas, the Northwest and the Southeast.

Membership is open to all interested persons and includes a print copy of this Newsletter, among many other benefits. To become a member, please visit the Guild of Book Workers website:

[guildofbookworkers.org](http://guildofbookworkers.org)

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Paper Cutting by Béatrice Coron



## Letter from the President

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DEAR MEMBERS,

Hello! I am happy to be writing my first letter to the membership as President. I was not able to attend the Standards of Excellence Seminar in Atlanta in October, but from everything I have heard, it was a huge success. Congratulations to Jennifer Pellecchia, our Standards Chair, and the local hosts for organizing a wonderful event!

For those of you I don't yet know, I have been a member of the Guild of Book Workers since I started my training at the North Bennet Street School in the fall of 2015. I served as the Program Co-Chair of the New England Chapter from 2016 to 2019, and I am honored to be serving as GBW President. I have some very big shoes to fill following

Bexx, and I am lucky to be joining a wonderful team! I am looking forward to working more with the DEI Committee to broaden and diversify our reach. The past few years have required reevaluation of how we function as an organization and I am excited to see how we can continue to evolve.

I welcome any feedback from you. If you have thoughts you'd like to share or questions for me, please feel free to email me at [president@guildofbookworkers.org](mailto:president@guildofbookworkers.org).

Many thanks,

Kate Levy  
President, Guild of Book Workers

## Letter from the Editors

---

WELCOME, DEAR READERS, to the post-Standards Newsletter! For those of you unable to attend this year's event in peachy Georgia, never fear—a talented group of scholar volunteers has shared with us a taste of the four main presentations. As a special bonus, Sam Ellenport has served up a version of the talk that he gave at the Rose Rare Book Library at Emory University. If you prefer a smorgasbord of the events in Decatur, there are several images from the three-day event for you to savor.

Forgive us for taking this metaphor an extra step. We are offering a second helping of annual reports to you. The California Chapter's report slipped off the tray as we were serving the Guild's reports in the last issue; apologies from the chef and wait staff.

For a non-Standards-related treat, we have an article by John Nove about a piece of equipment that many binders have: a copy-press. John's press is an interesting variant, with an unusual connection between the platen and the screw. Please enjoy a bite—sorry, bit—of metallurgy for those of you with an interest in the history of tools and equipment, which may make you look more closely at your own press.

If that doesn't leave you as satisfied as Thanksgiving leftovers, well, then we haven't dished out enough food puns. *Bon Appétit!*



Photo by Alexander Mills on Unsplash



# Letter from the Standards Chair

---

IT WAS SO wonderful to welcome 140 attendees, presenters, vendors, and volunteers back to the Standards of Excellence Seminar in Decatur, Georgia, in October.

Our local hosts, Ann Frellsen and Kim Norman, were the true embodiment of Southern hospitality, as were the staff at The Robert C. Williams Museum of Papermaking, who hosted two tours and our opening reception, the Emory Libraries Staff, and everyone at the Center for Puppetry Arts.

Special thanks are due to the generous donors—and enthusiastic bidders!—who participated in our live and silent auctions, and who donated directly to the Standards scholarship fund. With your help, we were able to raise \$17,573.08 in scholarship funding for next year.

The GBW board, Standing Committee Chairs, and Chapter Chairs work hard year-round, and often years in advance, to give Standards the support it needs to continue into its fifth decade. The seminar is a true team effort, and it is an honor to serve with you.

Finally, there can be no Standards without presenters, and Béatrice Coron, Erin Fletcher, Dr. Cathleen Baker, and Monique Lallier were true examples of Excellence! Those of you who were unable to attend will be able to read full reports of all four presentations in this issue, and handouts from each presenter are available on the GBW website. Please also see that space for instructions on how to rent or purchase presentation recordings.

I already look forward to September 28–30, 2023, when Standards will be held at Hilton San Francisco, Union Square. Hope to see y’awl there!

Yours in gratitude,

Jennifer Pellecchia  
GBW Standards Chair

## SPONSORS:

Thank you so much to our sponsors for providing additional financial support for Standards:

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Guild of Book Workers, Southeast Chapter  
Harmatan Leather Ltd  
J Hewit & Sons Ltd  
North Bennet Street School  
Patrick Olson Rare Books  
Siegel Leather  
The CODEX Foundation

## VENDORS:

It is often said that Standards is worth attending for the vendor room alone, and we are proud to have hosted the following in 2022:

American Academy of Bookbinding  
Atelier-Galerie A. Piroir  
Bonefolder  
Colophon Book Arts Supply  
Deena Schnitman Designs  
Fine Cut Group/P&S Engraving  
Harmatan Leather  
Herramientas Grosso  
J Hewit & Sons  
Hiromi Paper  
Kristoferson Studio  
The Legacy Press  
Maziarczyk Paperworks  
North Bennet Street School  
Paper Connection International  
Pergamena  
Siegel Leather  
TALAS  
University of Alabama, Book Arts Program

Standards had so much support on the ground in Decatur. Thanks are due to our 2019 auctions, which funded 13 scholarships in 2022, excellent community organizing on the part of the Southeast Chapter, and the generosity of the students at Book Arts Program at the University of Alabama who traveled together to provide extra help.

## VOLUNTEERS:

Aurelius Sutter	Lisa Muccigrosso
Bridget McGraw	Maggi Johnsen
Cheyenne Logan	Michele Taylor
Eliza Gilligan	Séphora Bergiste
Irasema Quezada	Shannon Kerner
Jill Sweetapple	Wilson Allen
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## SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS:

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EJ Youcha	Nicoline Meyer
James Ojascastro	Rachel Payne
Jessica Hudgins	Robin Canham
Katarina Stiller	Tatyana Bessmertnaya
Laura Fedynyszyn	



## News & Notices

### THE LIVE AUCTION LIVES ON

During the live auction at Standards, there was a bit of a snag. A donation of many beautifully cut paper items given by Béatrice Coron was supposed to be auctioned off to raise funds for next year's scholarship students, but it was mislaid; we discovered it while taking things down for the evening.

Béatrice (and those of us running the auction) were all saddened by this. Normally the presenter donations garner the highest number of bids. We intend to mitigate the oversight and give Béatrice the recognition she deserves for both her talk and generous gift. Because Béatrice's talk was so well received, we thought it would only be fair to give everyone the opportunity to purchase one of her contributions. This being the case, we will sell the items online, with proceeds of the sale going into the scholarship fund for Standards 2023. Further updates to follow on the GBW website.

### GROLIER+MET=*PATTERN AND FLOW*

An exhibition at the Grolier Club—*Pattern and Flow: A Golden Age of American Decorated Paper, 1960s to 2000s*—curated by Mindell Dubansky, Museum Librarian for Preservation at

the Thomas J. Watson Library at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, will “celebrate visionary contemporary American artists who revolutionized and re-energized the creative legacy of paper arts.” The works range from those created by contemporary artists, such as a Madeleine McEvilly Durham's paste paper inspired by a desert landscape, to the original marbled Kleenex box.

According to the press release, “[d]ecorated papers will be shown in context with rare books, objects, color recipe books, correspondence, photographs, and hand-tools used by the featured artists.” The Grolier Club's accompanying programming includes a full-day symposium on decorated papers, lunchtime tours, and a virtual exhibition tour. Sign up on their Eventbrite page: [bit.ly/gbw-artoo5](https://bit.ly/gbw-artoo5).

The monograph, of the same title as the exhibition, scheduled to ship in January, outlines the “story of decorated paper arts in America up to the 1960s, followed by a chronological narrative, which surveys the development of the field and introduces the artists working from the 1960s to the 2000s, and an illustrated reference section with essential biographical and professional information for each artist.”

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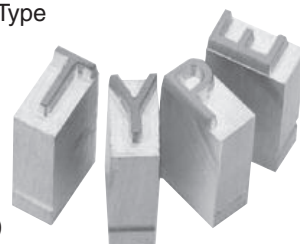
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# Chapter Reports

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## Lone Star

CHAIR: Kim Neiman

The Lone Star Chapter (LSC) has tumbled through fall with several officers making changes, moving home and studio, as life goes on. Our plans for 2023 include officer elections to be held in July, the beginning of our membership year. The open positions are Chairman, Events Coordinator, and Secretary/Treasurer. Current officers Kim, Syd and Craig will fulfill a second term in order to mentor the newly elected officers their first year. If you've ever thought about becoming an officer this is the perfect opportunity. Please make time to think about your nominations. If you have questions, contact LSC Chair Kim Neiman at [neimankim@gmail.com](mailto:neimankim@gmail.com).

Thanks to Esther Kibby, LSC Communications Director, the Lone Star Chapter's new website looks awesome. If you want to know what is currently going on or what you missed check it out at [gbwlonestarchapter.wordpress.com](http://gbwlonestarchapter.wordpress.com)

Syd Webb, LSC Events Coordinator, produces Colophone, our monthly informal Zoom gathering. Syd has been archiving the amazing information that we have shared over the past two years.

Stay tuned for the LSC 2023 Annual Workshop LOCATION! Rebecca Chamlee has agreed to teach the "The Book Artist as Naturalist" workshop. Thank you RC!

And again thank you Syd Webb, LSC Events Coordinator! The "Suminagashi Edge Marbling" workshop with Juliayn Coleman was a success. The next Mini Workshop on Zoom, "Moravian Star" with Tish Brewer, is December 8<sup>th</sup>, just in time for the holidays. The paper stars are a Christmas decoration common in Germany and Scandinavia. These workshops are FREE to Lone Star Chapter members.

Craig Kubic, LSC Secretary/Treasurer, produces "Ex Libris," a quarterly member interview and exhibition. Can't wait to see who's up next. If you are a member and would like to be interviewed, contact Craig at [ckubic@swbts.edu](mailto:ckubic@swbts.edu).

Valentines Print Exchange information will post soon. Let's give love a chance!

Follow us on Facebook @lonestarchaptergbw & Instagram @gbwlonestarchapter.

## Midwest

CHAIR: Lisa Muccigrosso

It was a pleasure connecting with members who were able to attend Standards in Decatur! We're happy to have been able to sponsor two scholarships for first-time attendees, awarded to James Ojascastro at Washington University in St. Louis, and Rachel Payne, a Midwest native at North Bennet Street School.

Earlier this year we sent a poll to Midwest members about what kind of activities you'd like to participate in. Of the 83 members we had at that time, 29 responded. Not surprisingly, folks are burnt out on virtual activities and would like to see more in-person events. Exhibitions are also high on the list, and there's interest in the return of in-person annual meetings, both of which we're excited about.

The Midwest Board is meeting to decide what's next. We recently held a virtual Tips & Tricks session, led by Danielle Creech and attended by about a dozen members. It was great to see faces, hear voices, and learn about tools and techniques from everyone who presented. Thank you to those who attended and presented—it's a small step, but one we'll use to propel us to the next guild event, and the next one, and the next one.

We have a member mailing list! It's [midwestmembers@guildofbookworkers.org](mailto:midwestmembers@guildofbookworkers.org). Any member can post to the list, we just ask that you abide by the Guild's Code of Conduct when doing so. Think of it as a regional Book-Arts-L listserv.

## Northwest

CHAIR: Jodee Fenton

In October, the Northwest Chapter finished its "Getting Down to Business" series of presentations and discussions about the world of book arts with Johanna Drucker and Carletta Carrington Wilson. The year-long series was the last programming organized by Bonnie Thompson Norman as our Events Coordinator. Thank you, Bonnie, for several years of great events and programs for our members and guests. We also want to thank Ealasaid Haas, who has been providing invaluable technical support for all our programs. With our new Event Coordinator, Paula Jull, we are lining up artists, curators, and critics to bring their perspectives on the work they do in book arts. Our January speaker will be Don Glaister, who will talk to us about his edition work.

In the first part of 2023, we will be focusing on membership growth. In particular, we would like to convey to guests who attend our events how the Guild of Book Workers and local chapters can support and promote their work and interests in book arts.

## Potomac

CHAIR: Shannon Kerner

SECRETARY: Nora Lockshin

Frederick Book Arts Center is steadily moving back into the building after a fire in June. While not all the equipment is moved back just yet, they are still able to host classes as well as printing and binding events in the studio. FBAC looks forward to rebuilding their community and invites



anyone who would like to contribute as an instructor to contact them as they start to refill the schedule with classes and experiences.

## Southeast

CHAIR: Kim Norman

COMMUNICATIONS: Jill Sweetapple

The Southeast Chapter was happy to welcome Guild members to Decatur for 2022 Standards! We hope everyone was able to attend sessions, take tours, socialize in person, and also enjoy the city of Decatur.

We hope many of you attended the closing reception that the Decatur Library held for *The Book as Art*. Library staff put a lot of effort into the whole event for us, and the works on display were excellent. We thank Joe Davich and the staff for such a good time.

If you were unable to attend 2022 Standards, we hope to see you next year in San Francisco. Remember, you can always visit us here just for fun!

Anyone may sign up for our GBW-SE Chapter listserv by emailing your request to:

southeast@guildofbookworkers.org.

Thank you!

Jill Sweetapple



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## GBW Annual Report 2021–2022: California Chapter

*Due to a glitch in our email delivery system, the California Chapter annual report, though submitted on time, never made it into the October 2022 issue of the Newsletter. To rectify the situation we are printing the report here, and it is now included with the full annual report posted on the GBW website.*

### CALIFORNIA

#### OFFICERS

Co-Chairs: Marlyn Bonaventure & Rebecca Chamlee

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Secretary: Debra Disman

Treasurer: Vicke Selk

Programs: Clair Emma Smith and Farida Sunada

Communications: Rebecca Chamlee

Exhibitions: Carolee Campbell

Newsletter: Jean Gillingwaters

#### GENERAL

Election for board members for the 2022–2024 term was held in July. We will present before the membership for approval on August 20, 2022.

#### MEMBERSHIP

107 California chapter members as of July 2022.

#### EVENTS

August—Materials and Art Swap with the Hand Bookbinders of California.

September 11, 2021—Bookbinding Tools and Materials Sale from Barbara Wood Studio; sale proceeds gifted to GBW-CA by the family of Barbara Wood.

April 23, 2022—Virtual talk with Michelle Sullivan, “Iron Gall and Other Historical Inks Used for Drawing: A Review and Demonstration.”

May 7, 2022—Virtual talk with Bonnie Thompson Norman, “Creating Collaborative Books.”

#### WORKSHOPS

July 2, 2022—In-person workshop with Coleen Curry at SFCB, “Leather Surface Decoration,” co-sponsored by GBW-CA.

#### EXHIBITIONS

June 11, 2022—August 28, 2022, “Book/Art/Artifact,” third member exhibition opened at San Francisco Center for the Book.

#### NEWSLETTER

Virtual chapter newsletters May 1, 2022 and November 14, 2022.

#### WEB

[gbwcaliforniachapter.wordpress.com](http://gbwcaliforniachapter.wordpress.com)

## STANDARDS REPORT

# Béatrice Coron's “Art in 1000 cuts: The Path of the Blade”

by Louisa Easterly

FOR BÉATRICE CORON, all art is about storytelling, and all stories create books. While she doesn't often use the codex form to create a 'book,' she claims that anything can be an artist book, even a dress, a quote, a sculpture, or a mask. For her media, she has chosen paper, metal, Tyvek, plastics, and negative space. Drawing on an ancient global tradition of paper cutting, her visual narratives enhance public spaces and share the stories of people around her. Her art now graces bus stations, schools, and museums, making the tradition more accessible than ever.

She began her presentation with a description of the history of the paper cutting craft, spanning many countries and centuries. In each locale she discussed, she took the basic form of her art (removing material to create patterns and pictures), and adapted it to suit local traditions, resources, and ideologies. Ancient Chinese artists used bark and leaves even before the invention of paper; their descendants now use thin tissue paper cut with a hammer and chisel. In Mexico, cut paper decorations form an essential part of Dia de los Muertos celebrations, often cut with chisels in stacks. Jewish paper cutting was first recorded by a Spanish Rabbi in the Middle Ages. In France, paper cutting was originally a religious tradition, with convents creating art as a method of praying through the work of your hands. Paper cut in black and white was the origin of silhouette, which has since expanded into many genres.

Because the theory of this art form is so straightforward, the execution is different for every artist and every situation. Coron claims that paper cutting is under the surface everywhere, but each area has its own flavor and focus. The work of modern artists draws on this varied tradition, competing to create complicated patterns and textures. Street art stencils, letters cut with tiny scissors, dioramas, models, masks, fashion pieces: all are part of the paper cutting renaissance seen today.

Coron's own life has been full of diverse experiences. Born and raised in France, she has worked as a shepherdess, a truck driver, and a tour guide, among other things. She had the opportunity to travel the world, including living for a year at a time in Egypt and Mexico, and two years in China. This varied experience gave her the opportunity to





hear many stories that she now weaves into her art, as well as a better understanding of different global artistic traditions.

Coron's work is the central focus of her life. She confessed that when she receives a commission for a museum or public art piece, she works obsessively until the project is finished, often months before the deadline. Working at a standing desk, in her workshop filled with rolls of Tyvek, her "hands of steel" often do 12–15 hour shifts as she buries herself in art. Starting with the most difficult sections (in case she messes up), she usually works from the top left to the bottom right, letting the material flow off the edge of the table if it gets too big.

The time she spends on a project is divided into thirds. The first third is thinking about the project. This can be done while showering, running, even sleeping. The second third is designing, whether on a computer or in a physical sketchbook. The final third is actual cutting. After putting on a podcast, she works with her wrist flat on the table, sometimes with inflatable pillows to support her elbow after many hours. She usually cuts through three or four layers of Tyvek, creating duplicate images that she can either sell or hoard. ("I like to be able to sell art and also keep it for myself," she says.)

She described in detail the process of making one art installation for the New York Historical Society, entitled *Hi Five! Stories from the Five Boroughs*. First, she chose the format, beginning with a small sketch. Then she created a second sketch with a more literal interpretation. Because of her experience as a tour guide in New York City for many years, and her love for biking through the different neighborhoods, she is familiar with some of the interesting stories and secrets

of the city. As each sketch got bigger, she focused on the most important details, the most fascinating stories. When she made it to the full-size sketch, the space was filled with images of museum artifacts, little detective stories, narratives from the past, the present, and the future. A dedicated viewer can even see Coron herself at her desk, cutting away. The giant pieces hung side by side in her studio, giving a glimpse of how they would look in the final exhibit space. While they were on display, the museum described this collection as, "A unique take on the dynamic synergy of the City."

Much of Coron's work is done in collaboration with other artists. If you can do it in paper, she says, you can transfer it to other mediums, like metal or plastic. For a project like a metal sculpture of a tree for a school playground, she begins with a sketch in paper to make sure the sculpture can stand up. After 3D printing a small model, she goes to a manufacturer, who helps her decide on materials, scale, and method. Since public art needs to be easy to install and cheap to maintain, she often uses stainless steel. Though she enjoys forging herself, oftentimes the scale or material of a commission requires specialized machinery. But as she better understands the machinery and knows the people who work with it, more creative avenues open to her.

Collaborating with bookbinders is always particularly enjoyable to her. She sometimes makes design books of her work after an exhibition, either with a laser cutter or by hand. When she works with a bookbinder, the books actually turn out straight, she says.

Several of her projects have been pieces of wearable fashion (though they still count as artists books to her). For example, during the pandemic, she created a set of pieces representing viruses personified as women's fashion. For wearable pieces, she works with a designer, who creates a pattern according to the visual effect Coron wants to have, and gives parameters for where cuts or folds can be placed. Once they are cut out of Tyvek, the dresses are actually quite solid. Their best effect is on a model, where they can have life and opportunity to tell breathing stories. This idea of creating something living from something inanimate is what led her to collaborating on stop motion animated short films.

Interspersed with descriptions of projects and methods, Coron gave advice applicable to anyone, whether paper cutters or not. "Mistakes," she says, "are the fabric of life. Eventually, you discover that you can always make a bigger hole. If you make a big mistake, you take a breath and say, 'if I've done it once, I can make it again,' and start over. Some mistakes are more costly than others, but you get through."

This presentation was a fascinating look into how a bookbinder's favorite medium (paper) can become something entirely different and unique with a few snips and a bit of ingenuity. In the hands of Béatrice Coron, nearly anything is possible.



Béatrice Coron at the 2022 Standards of Excellence Seminar.  
Image © 2022 Tatyana Bessmertnaya

## STANDARDS REPORT

# Erin Fletcher's “Stitching through History: Embroidered Bindings from 14th C. to Today”

by Abra Mueller

**T**HOUGH SHE WORKS in an abundance of mediums, Erin Fletcher's name has become synonymous with intricate and whimsical embroidered bindings. This centuries-old technique of book decoration has seen a modern resurgence and Erin has been a pivotal figure in the revival of the craft. Fletcher's lecture for the 2022 Guild of Book Workers Standards of Excellence Seminar, *Stitching Through History: Embroidered Bindings From The 14<sup>th</sup> Century to Today*, showcased historic examples of the craft, as well as highlighted her own extraordinary work.

From a young age, Erin was exposed to needlework of all kinds. As she grew, she began to explore embroidery and machine sewing and by the time she started college, she had begun making her own clothing. During her time at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she was introduced to bookbinding by her professor, Susannah Kite Strang. At that point, she knew that she had found a craft that spoke to her artistic sensibilities. In 2010 she began a two-year diploma program in bookbinding at the North Bennet Street School in Boston, MA. It was during this time, under the tutelage of Jeff Altepeter, that Erin found a way to meld her passion for needlework with her skills as a bookbinder. She produced her first embroidered binding on Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, for the exhibition *One Book, Many Interpretations* at the Chicago Public Library. When her book won Best Binding, she knew that she was onto something.

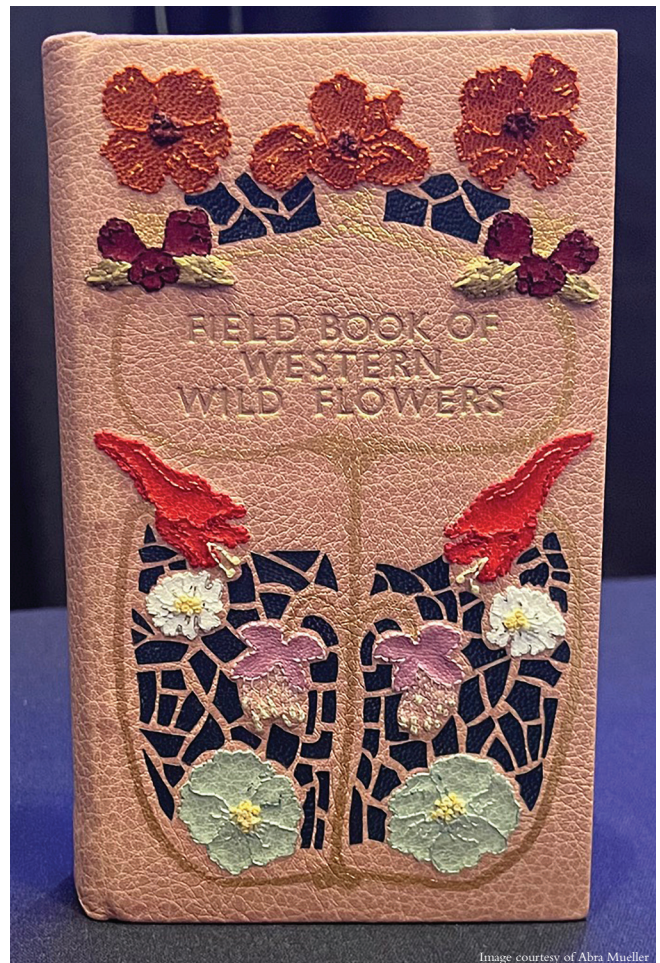


Image courtesy of Abra Mueller



After giving the audience a brief history of her journey into embroidered bindings, Erin next summarized the history of the craft in the Western world. She began with the *Felbrigg Psalter*, the oldest surviving embroidered binding in England. The binding was completed in the early 14<sup>th</sup>-century, though the manuscript itself is likely half a century older. It is an exquisite medieval example of the technique. Sadly, it has mostly been destroyed by an all-too-familiar 19<sup>th</sup>-century conservation disaster involving a thick layer of varnish.

Continuing through the ages, Erin showcased bindings from the 1500s, where velvet became a popular ground, the base fabric onto which the artist would embroider their design. In order to emphasize this valuable and highly sought-after material, embroidered forms became more open, to reveal the sensuous fabric underneath.

Embroidered bindings have come in and out of fashion over their 600-year history, but they saw a significant resurgence in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. May Morris, daughter of William Morris, is often credited with this revival, though many women were creating embroidered covers and bindings during this time. As part of the larger Arts and Crafts movement, many organizations began to emerge for women in craft, such as the Ladies Work Society, the Working Ladies Guild and the Royal School of Art Needlework. Even before this, there was a cultural push to teach embroidery skills to young girls, consequently creating a greater divide between genders in the craft of bookbinding. Erin took this moment to meditate on her own concerns about the gendered nature of needlework, especially as a

modern binder. Embroidery is commonly seen as “women’s work,” but should that designation feel demeaning? Or empowering? Both? Erin’s fears, which echo those of many craftspeople, are that using embroidery in her work could be perceived as frivolous, instead of proving her to be an especially skilled and multi-talented binder.

It is clear that Erin’s audience believed the latter. As we trickled back into the auditorium after our mid-lecture coffee break, the seats were just as full as they had been an hour and a half earlier. At this point, she gave us what we had all been waiting for—a review of her own work. Before she dug into her repertoire, though, she made plenty of room to discuss the work of her contemporaries. Hannah Brown, Sue Doggett, Odette Drapeau, and Jenni Grey have all explored embroidered binding in their own unique styles, and Erin shared some of those design elements with the audience.

Erin then broke down a bit of her creative process. During the planning stages, she makes a point to develop a design sympathetic to the content of the book. For her, the idea is to find a way to use images to capture a feeling and to add context to the content of the book. Erin believes that we have a unique opportunity as binders to add our own voice to the text. She encouraged the audience to consider that whether we agree with or oppose the content of the book we are binding, we are empowered to express those thoughts in our design.

A fine example of this type of artistic expression can be seen in Erin’s binding of *Dark Archives* by Megan Rosenbloom, a history of books bound in human skin. There is a risk, when approaching a concept as grisly as this one, to create something sensational. Erin hoped to approach the subject with grace and compassion, as the author had done. To that end, she chose to acknowledge the women who have died for the advancement of science and medicine, often without being willing participants. Embroidered across the cover are varieties of mushrooms that pull their nutrients from decaying organic material, spreading those nutrients through their root systems to sustain living plants nearby. Within the root systems are written the names of women who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Finally, the audience was treated to a well-crafted demo of the embroidery process. Erin brought along multiple examples of the same design in different stages of completion, which was especially helpful for an audience who might not want to watch PVA dry. For her design, Erin chose imagery from the U.S. Mint’s Georgia quarter coin, giving center stage to its quintessential peach. She used paper and leather onlays, gouache, and a ground of buffalo leather attached to a wooden panel. Handmade paper and buffalo are two materials that are especially suited for embroidery work, because they are sturdy enough to hold up to sewing.



Erin Fletcher at the 2022 Standards of Excellence Seminar.  
Image © 2022 Tatyana Bessmertnaya

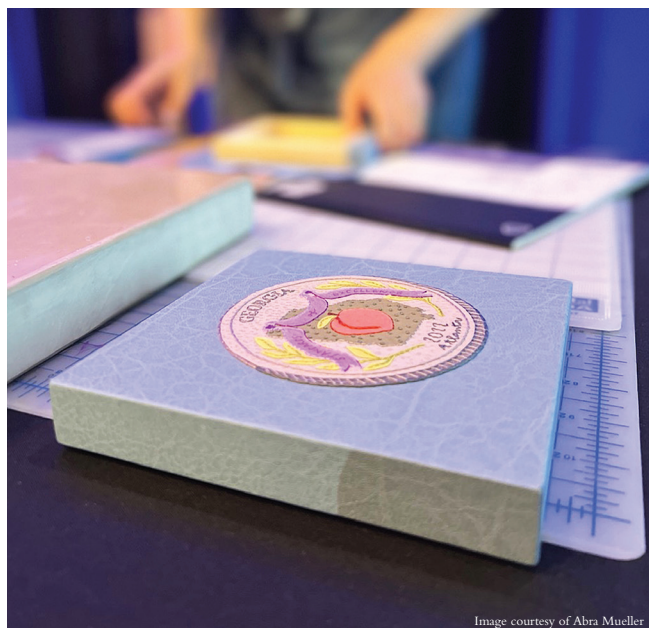


Image courtesy of Abra Mueller

After Erin's onlays were set and the paint was dry, the canvas was ready for embroidery. She added color with a colored pencil in selected areas before sewing began, so that it would appear under the embroidery. Using a template as a guide and a piece of foam sandwiched between her work and a cutting mat, she pre-punched holes into the leather for the embroidery thread. Erin introduced us to simple, traditional embroidery techniques such as couching, backstitch, and French knots. In addition to her technical expertise, she made sure to share wisdom from her many years of trial and error. For instance, it is wise to clean up the back of your work as you go, rather than waiting until the end, to prevent a buildup of thread underneath the leather. Little tips like this can be the difference between a mediocre product and one of exceptional quality, and they are part of what make Erin's work so special.

When the work was complete, it was pressed between foam and press boards to ensure that the material was compressed but not crushed. The final product was a beautiful and charming celebration of our time in Decatur, an homage to time spent with friends and colleagues after years of separation. The finished piece sold at the Standards auction for an incredible \$700.

With over a decade of work on display, Erin highlighted how her art has grown and shifted, how she has learned from mistakes, experimented with new materials, and found her voice in a field already quite saturated with talent. Newness can be difficult to achieve in a craft so steeped in tradition, but Erin has found a way to harness centuries-old techniques and give them new life. It was clear that the audience—gathered around the display table after her lecture—left the hall inspired to create, reimagine, and revive their own art, thanks to Erin's thoughtful presentation.



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## STANDARDS REPORT

# Cathleen A. Baker's “Adhesives for Book Artists and Conservators”

by Rachel Payne

CATHLEEN A. BAKER is known for her fifty years of conservation work, as well as her publication of academic works on the art, science, and history of bookbinding through Legacy Press. On Saturday morning, she gave a presentation on adhesives used in Book Arts and Conservation.

Many book artists and bookbinders struggle to know when to use which adhesive and why. Cathleen's presentation provided the information needed to make informed decisions. She covered the most common adhesives used in the book world, what their properties are, some applications for those properties, and, since “the best adhesives are the ones you make yourself,” she also explained how to make them.

Almost at the very beginning, Cathleen said “I love cellulose ethers.” Cellulose ethers include methylcellulose (aka MC, Methocel, or Culminal), sodium carboxymethylcellulose (aka SCMC, Aqualon, or Cellofas), and hydroxypropyl cellulose (aka HPC, Klucel G, or Cellugel). While they have similar properties, they are not interchangeable. Her analogy comparing cellulose ethers to fruit was talked about all through the break. My favorite comparison she made when talking about choosing the right adhesive for the job was, “don't try to make orange cake out of apples.”

Picking the right adhesive is about matching its properties to what you are trying to achieve. Viscosity, for example, affects an adhesive's ability to bond with

paper fibers. The viscosity of a solution is related to the molecular weight of the adhesive, its concentration, and the solvent in which it is dissolved. If a solution has a low molecular weight, then its molecular chains are relatively short, unstable, and, as an adhesive, can penetrate the surface of paper easily. If the solution has high molecular weight, then its molecular chains are fairly long and stable. In this case, while it doesn't penetrate paper easily, it can be wiped off the surface without leaving a residue.

### Cellulose Ethers – Think of them as fruit, all kinds of fruit



Methylcellulose (MC)



METHOCEL A4M/A4C



Culminal



Sodium carboxy-  
methylcellulose (SCMC)



Aqualon CMC 7H3SF Pharma



Cellofas B3500



Hydroxypropylcellulose  
(HPC)



Klucel G



Image courtesy of Cathleen Baker

Cathleen went into the differences between Methylcellulose and Sodium Carboxymethylcellulose, then into the details of PVA and starch pastes. The table on the following page is a summary of the general properties of these adhesives. For more details see her handout ([bit.ly/gbw-st202201](http://bit.ly/gbw-st202201)) for a comprehensive summary of the most commonly used adhesives in the book art and conservation worlds.

She explained how cellulose ethers can be used for remoistenable adhesives, cleaning agents (maps, papers, etc), tissue repairs, and as solvent delivery substrates.

For her demonstration she showed us how to make remoistenable adhesive tissue. This a Japanese tissue that allows you to line, fill, or repair an object with adhesive flexibility, very little water, and little to no adhesive shrinkage.

- Prepare the remoistenable tissue
  - Preparation
    - Sand a large sheet of mylar (4" larger than the tissue in all directions)
    - Tape the mylar to the table
    - Center a fiberglass screen (2" larger than the tissue in all directions) over the mylar
  - Apply a 3% MC or 3% SCMC to the mylar through the screen, squeegee off excess
  - Remove the screen (rip off like a bandaid)
  - Wet the tissue
    - Spray the air with a spray bottle, put tissue under falling spray
    - Flip tissue and repeat
    - Roll it up to humidify
  - Lay tissue on adhesive
  - Lay overlapping sheets of Reemay over tissue
  - Allow to air dry
  - Store on or off the mylar



- Usage
  - Cut tissue to size
  - Spray water in air, put tissue under the spray, repeat until a corner of the tissue sticks to your finger
  - Apply tissue to the object
    - Along the edges, tissue should hang off and be folded back again to the edge of the object to prevent cockling
  - Allow to air dry
  - Trim tissue off edge of document as needed

**On the Edge**  
Endbands in the Bookbinding Traditions  
of the Eastern Mediterranean  
Georgios Boudalis  
The Legacy Press

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	Cellulose Ethers		Klucel G	PVA	Starch Pastes (gluten/protein removed)	Protein Glues
	MC	SCMC				
Viscosity	High	High				
Ionic (detergent properties)	Non-ionic	Ionic				
Bond Strength	Weak	Strong		Strong	Very strong, even when diluted	
Water Soluble Temp	Insoluble >80 degrees C	Hot or cold			Hot	Hot
Surface Activity	High/"Wet"	Low/"Dry"				
pH	Neutral	Neutral				
Spoils	Stock container in fridge can last over a decade	Stock container in fridge lasts years			1 Week	
Dried Film	Flexible	Flexible			Not very flexible if concentrated	
Reversible	Small amount of water	Small amount of water		Very difficult	Water, MC, or SCMC	
Off Gasses				Yes		
Uses	Sizing agent, consolidant, surface cleanser, weak adhesive, solvent-delivery substrate	Adhesive, surface cleanser, poultice, solvent delivery substrate, consolidant	Consolidant for red-rot	Adhesive, great for boxes, use release layers for conservation work	Strong adhesive, often too strong for conservation uses	Sizing agent, consolidant

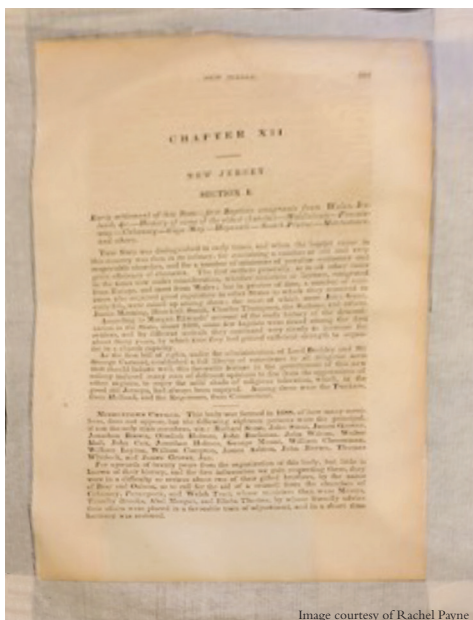


Image courtesy of Rachel Payne

The presentation was a great success, with lots of questions at the Q&A. The audience talked about the presentation throughout lunch, including planning how and when to use remoistenable tissue in their own work.

Here are some practical tips and tricks that I picked up from Cathleen's presentation:

1. Use wooden sticks to remove adhesive from stock containers. Throw the sticks away after use.
2. MC in a stock container can last over a decade in the fridge (don't freeze it)
3. Wet anything that paste will touch beforehand, it will make it easier to clean
4. If you keep all your tools in a glass pan on the table you can't knock your adhesive over onto what you are working on
5. Wood pottery edges work great for picking up layers of old tissue/guards
6. Use suitable, clean containers, pure solvents, and good labeling (Adhesive, % of solution, date made, by whom, and if desired, what it is used for. For example: 2.5% Methocel A4C, 1/1/2021 by Jane Doe, Methylcellulose for resizing paper)

## STANDARDS REPORT

# Monique Lallier's “My Life as a Bookbinder: Fifty Years of Creativity, Challenges, Experimentations, Frustrations & Pure Joy”

by Jessica Hudgins

FOR THOSE UNABLE to attend Standards this year, much of Monique Lallier's talk, "My life as a bookbinder: 50 years of creativity, experimentations, challenges, frustrations and pure joy," is available in *Monique Lallier: A Retrospective*, an exhibition catalog published by Oak Knoll Press and Guilford College Art Gallery in 2018. In the last line of the handout Lallier prepared, she wrote, "Creativity keeps you happy, sane, and healthy."

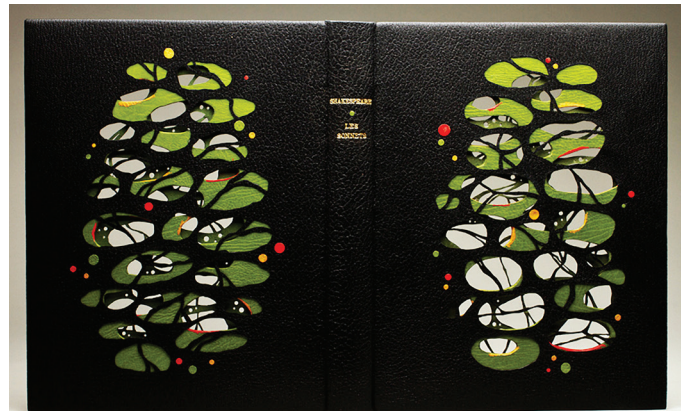
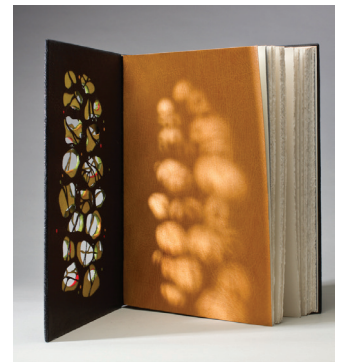
In the talk, Lallier shared some reflections on her own bindings and gave some advice to the audience. For example, when binding multiple books of the same title, she likes the bindings to relate to one another in some way. She recommended always signing and dating your work.

Lallier recalled a teacher who laughed at a preliminary sketch of a binding design that required tucking in the tip of each leaf segment of multiple maple leaves into the covering leather. Monique's reflection on the project: "I learned how to tuck corners." She described fixing the color of the interior edge of every cut-out made by a laser cutter for her binding of *The Interpreter of Maladies*, having received the piece from the laser cutter just three days before it was due for an exhibition (see pg. 19).

Lallier's favorite piece is *Shakespeare: Les Sonnets*, which she bound in 2012 (right). In the exhibition catalog, Lallier writes, "This is one of my favorite bindings, as I was very much carried away after reading the sonnets. This design is a reflection of the complex, simple, moving, inspiring and touching aspects of the sonnets." In the talk, she described

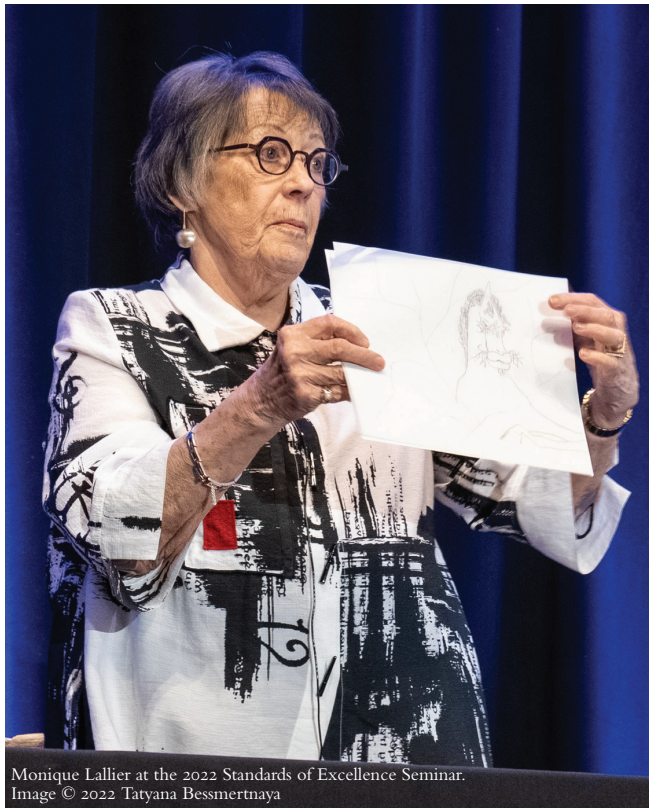
how she woke up with the images of holes and a see-through surface. The covers feature a group of lace-thin ovals and tendril-like lines, too delicate to be laser-cut.

These shapes form the outermost layer, covered in black Moroccan leather and lined with Japanese paper. Other ovals made from boards lined with green goat skin and Japanese paper run beneath the cover. When you open the book, these overlapping layers throw shadows on the endpapers.



Lallier's binding of *Shakespeare: Les Sonnets*. Image courtesy of Monique Lallier.





Monique Lallier at the 2022 Standards of Excellence Seminar.  
Image © 2022 Tatyana Bessmertnaya

Lallier's binding of Alvey L. Jones' *The Drawings of Caravaggio* (2006) has red goatskin covers with snakeskin onlays and rectangular cut outs, one vertical and one horizontal, on the front and back covers. Wires span portions of the cut outs.

While she was describing her work on this book, Lallier asked the audience how many of her former students were in the audience. About a third of the room raised their hands, and one of them was in a class with her when she was working on this book. This student asked Lallier whether

the edges of the cutouts were lined with leather, and Lallier was pleased—they were.

As a newcomer to Lallier's work, and to the world of bookbinding in general, the sense I got of Lallier was of an artist whose almost punishing commitment to her work is combined with a cheerful faith in serendipity. She described a moment when a client asked for a deep-sea scene. She didn't know how she could create a binding that appeared to be underwater, so she went into her kitchen, where a contractor was working, and asked him. It just so happened that he was a scuba diver, as well as being an electrician. He helped her develop the book, which included an on-off switch.

Lallier said, "I'm always on the lookout for... anything. Because I may use it." In her binding of *The Private Typecaster*, Lallier stamped the cover with metal letter stamps that she happened to have, and made the endpapers from paper already printed with letters. She said, "I had this paper that is all letters in my drawer for many years. This is a good book for that paper." Another book, *Le Papier le Livre*, has a paper wasp's nest onlay. Lallier said, "Like everything else, I waited for the right time to use it...I don't remember what I treated it with but it was something Don said to do." "Don" being Don Etherington, her spouse who, too, is a well-known bookbinder.

In her demo, Lallier walked us through the steps of collaging and sanding small pieces of leather. This is a good use for leather scraps, she said, and is a good solution for working with a client on a budget. Lallier gave the following instructions:

1. Cover a board with mylar.
2. Add a layer of Japanese paper.
3. Add a layer of very thin leather, crinkling it to create lines and texture.
4. Cover with other thin scraps of leathers.
5. Sand. It creates a beautiful pattern. If you don't like how it looks, keep sanding.
6. Take your design, maybe a shape cut out of it.
7. Put this shape over the sanded leather and you'll see patterns you didn't before.
8. If you don't like it yet, keep sanding!

Many of Lallier's bindings use collaged leather, including a set of three bindings of *Forger L'Effroi* (example on facing page; examples of lacunose samples displayed at Lallier's talk at Standards are also pictured at left). Lallier suggested creating Christmas-ornament books each year, noting that they only take a few hours to make. She recommended using them to record the gifts you get and the people you see. She said, "We now have 30 or so. It takes a long time to put up the tree every year. It brings back memories that we have forgotten."

Throughout Lallier's talk, it was clear how important her work, as a bookbinder and as a teacher, is to her. It was also



Lacunose made by Monique Lallier. Images courtesy of herself.

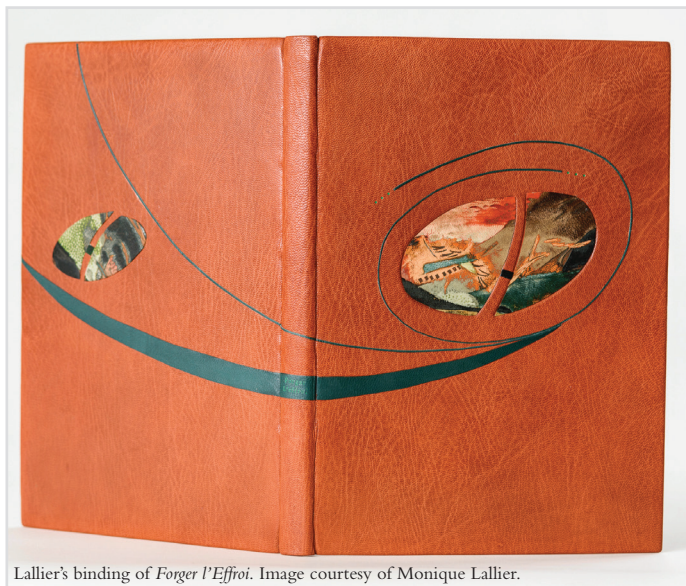


clear that many people in the audience could speak directly to the strength of the relationships that grew from her work. I left the talk with a sense of how lucky and strange it was that we were all able to be in Atlanta together, hearing Lallier's stories.

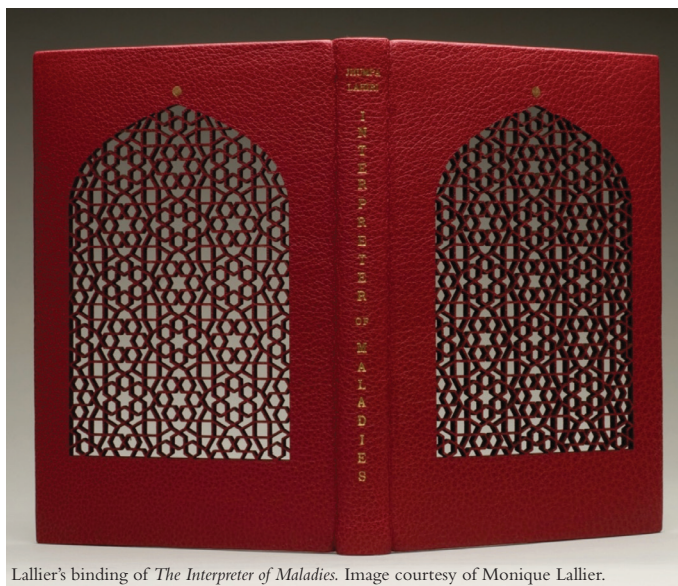
I'll leave you all with two final examples from Lallier's life as a bookbinder. If you were in the audience, I hope they'll

remind you of the wonderful stories we heard that night and, if you weren't, I hope they'll help you imagine them.

Lallier described showing a colleague a miniature book. When she told him the title, *Pensées Féminines*, (Women's Thoughts), he exclaimed, "Oh, that's why it's so small!" Describing her memory of working on *Chanson Brassens*, a book about a French singer she listened to growing up, she said, "It took me a long time to sew this book because I was



Lallier's binding of *Forger l'Effroi*. Image courtesy of Monique Lallier.



Lallier's binding of *The Interpreter of Maladies*. Image courtesy of Monique Lallier.

singing all the pages."

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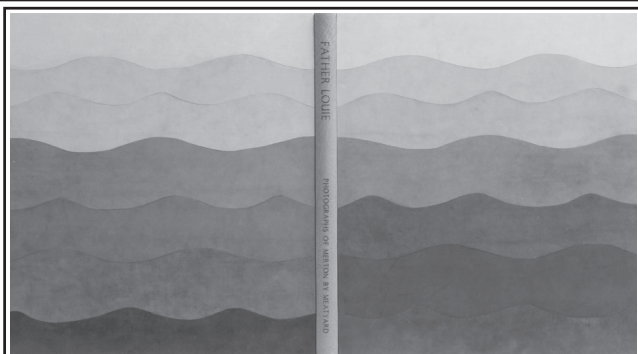
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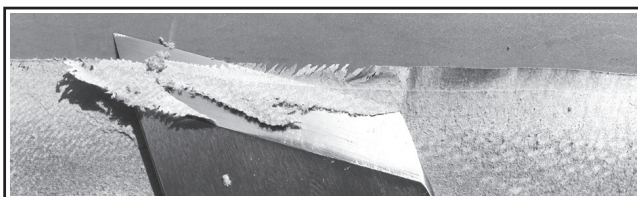
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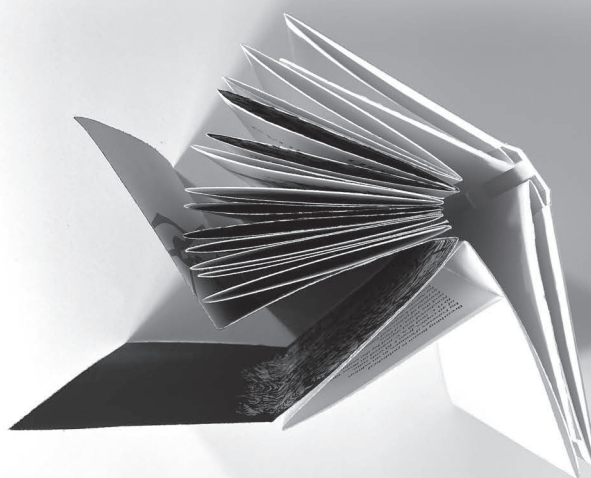
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# What Use is a



## New Born Child?

by Sam Ellenport

*This is a reworked version of the talk Sam Ellenport gave on October 20<sup>th</sup> at the Rose Rare Book Library at Emory University, where his library collection of books on binding and book arts now resides. The talk was given at the GBW Standards Conference in 2022. As no recording was made, the following is being presented in the Newsletter for wider circulation, a testament to its prescience and popularity.*

THE TITLE OF my talk comes from a short Ben Franklin anecdote. After watching a failed ballooning attempt in France, he was asked by his companion of what use were these experiments with such toys? His reply was, “of what use is a new born child?” And my answer is the same regarding a library collection. At first, in its infancy, it is demanding. It requires cataloguing, shelving, advertising, maintenance, additions, and so on. But even if unused for decades, it is a repository of what has been and how it developed, and it provides for the prepared mind a way to interpret the past.

Let me tell you a little about how my library collection came about. In an earlier life I taught history at Suffolk and Brown Universities before I discovered bookbinding at The Harcourt Bindery in Boston. I was hired by what was then, and remained throughout my career, the largest commercial hand-bookbindery in the US. To put this in perspective, the shop in 1971 had five employees in a world where most of the competition had disappeared. There were no apprenticeship programs, probably none since

WWII, no lengthy trade school instruction leading to a qualification, and few workshops, if any. Skilled binders trained novices on the bench, though this training was offered in very few places. By 1984 I had built the shop up to over 20 employees, producing, on average, about 75 full and  $\frac{3}{4}$  leather bindings a week, in addition to restoration work, boxmaking, and cloth binding. Initially I had no idea of how long it took to bind a book in leather. The routine that I was taught seemed sensible. Cover 10–15 books in the morning, constantly reworking the wet leather until about noon. Then, after lunch, back, round, and line another batch, cut and pare leather, meanwhile putting the morning’s work under weights as the leather began to dry. Using this process we produced 1,200–1,500 Harvard Prize books in  $\frac{3}{4}$  morocco with gilt tops and raised bands each year, usually 48 per day. The largest job I recall was binding 2,400 full bottle-green morocco bindings—the complete works of Thomas Hardy, 100 sets of 24 volumes each. I made a DVD of how this was accomplished, which is still in print and I believe it is still one of the best available showing practical and traditional techniques used, with only slight modifications, over centuries.

And through all this, I was fascinated by the history of our craft, beyond what my mentors at Harcourt could explain to me. I wanted to know why certain techniques were used, not just that such methods were always used. So I began collecting and reading how-to manuals, many dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I looked at the pictures in



catalogues, since almost no library was cataloging books by their bindings, making it almost impossible to know what to call for from the stacks. And I began collecting books about materials, as well as sample books, all now at the Rose Special Collections Library at Emory University.

Let's face it, our craft has changed since I began binding in 1970. When I wrote *The Future of Hand Bookbinding* 30 years ago, in 1993, the world was just coming out of a deep recession, and luxury items such as leather bookbindings took a beating. The saving grace at that time for our craft was that university libraries began building in-house binding areas to take care of their own needs. There was renewed interest in the craft among individuals. The North Bennet Street School bookbinding program, which I helped start in 1986, found jobs for many of its graduates in institutional binderies. Others developed skills through an increasing number of workshops. Nevertheless, formal training in large shops and apprenticeships was past, and I was not too sanguine about the craft maintaining a high level of traditional skill in the future.

But look what has happened. The larger binderies have all but disappeared, and most binders outside of institutional binderies now work as individuals. There are consequences for this. Putting aside the institutional aspect of the craft, individual binders must be able to forward and cover a text. This takes training, time and skill. In the shops of the past there was a division of labor: a sewing and prep area, a forwarding area, and a finishing area...plus of

course a management, sales, and clerical area. The current individual binder cannot easily master all aspects of the craft when working alone. They must do the prep work and the forwarding, but the clear conclusion is that responsibility for decoration has changed. And that is where we are today...a world that depends on the work of dead binders for the more formal or traditional bindings, but which patronizes contemporary binders for their artistic vision and merit. Most of these binders of today work on individual projects or very short run editions; few employ traditional gold tooling for their designs, and many use new materials in new ways. The upside is that there is great excitement, and there are new markets, yet the downside is the loss of any quantity. Where my shop alone pumped out thousands of leather bindings a year, most individual binders, wearing many hats, produce a fraction of that output. The issue I still see, and the question we should all ask, is whether or not the current model is "sustainable."

And that is where a library collection such as this comes in. For by understanding the past—its traditions, techniques, shortcuts, and business practices—and by examining images of prior styles, one can redefine just what his/her vision is.

Modern exhibitions and even catalogs are now often viewed online, or on some electronic platform. Many get bookmarked and saved, but few are looked at again. With brick and mortar bookstores in decline, fewer people see and handle specially bound books. They depend on visuals. My library collection has a multitude of hard copy catalogs, and



Sam Ellenport. Image courtesy of himself.

I often print out current virtual catalogs from booksellers who specialize in bindings, such as Bayntun's of Bath, auction catalogs, and the like. What is lacking, though, is the physicality of the bindings and their context. A library collection such as this provides that context.

Another area of use for my library collection is academic. Social, cultural, and industrial archaeologists now use such library collections to learn about book structure, and work out the social, economic, and other non-craft studies of how binding and book production fit into and interact with a wider society. Christopher De Hamel has done work in this area, looking particularly at sewing techniques, as has Michael Suarez of the Rare Book School in Virginia.

Currently 21<sup>st</sup>-century binding has been pushing limits, in many cases exploring new ways to use traditional techniques, but also by experimenting with structure, materials, and design that does not necessarily use gold leaf. Onlays, embroidery, fish skin, metals, and plastics all lay a new foundation for modern design. My question remains—is this sustainable in the sense that it will provide incentive to master aspects of the craft, reach a marketplace that can support a healthy craft, and reach a wider audience which will acquire such work at a price that provides an adequate living for binders? In my mind that has still to be played out.

What is also interesting about a library collection on bookbinding is the assumption behind it. It is assumed that books are of value, assumed that they are worthy of artistry, production, protection, and collection...that they are the keys to knowledge as well as information. Just as new binding techniques challenge 500 years of binding traditions, new information pathways challenge the acquisition and sharing of knowledge and information. Again going back to *The Future of Hand Bookbinding*, what I did not foresee was the continuing and even growing interest in the craft, and that it would be given new life by an influx of young creative artisans, eager to learn and share information, and willing to experiment by visualizing bookbinding as an art form. This encouragement and support for what are now termed art bindings or artist books continue to come from a new group of public admirers and collectors.

While the current trends in bookbinding are filled with vitality, and traditional book structures are reconfigured in exciting ways, a second question remains: can we support our craft while our audience is changing and while visibility and markets are narrowing through the loss of physical bookshops? The power of the internet is still to be determined.

I am proud to be linked to people such as Don Etherington, and many of the other recent greats of our craft who worked on the bench as apprentices: Bill Anthony, Arno Werner, Tini Miura, Chris Clarkson, Bernard Middleton and several other grey heads. These influenced our lives as they lived through and represented the crest of

the sea change within our craft, a change that began in a tentative way in the mid-twentieth century, and has become the dominant tide of transformation. All have shown an interest in teaching and sharing information and helping create a young generation of dedicated binders.

Forces driving this change come from both within the craft itself and from a change in the marketplace for fine books. The first trend is easier to discern. With the loss of larger shops and apprenticeship programs, skills are more purposefully learned through workshops, experimentation, sharing of techniques on platforms such as YouTube as well as self-imposed projects, even if many of these avenues are not critically vetted. The second force is less visible until one looks to see how much altered is the role of bookshops, of book collecting, and the cachet of giving traditional leather bindings as gifts or using a personal library of bindings to impart the idea of literary competency and acumen. The internet has had a role to play in providing access to rarer materials, and we are still competing with the army of highly skilled bookbinders from the past whose excellent work is so often discounted in the marketplace.

For these reasons my library collection at Emory is a valid summary of both where our craft has been and what it is becoming. I think the jury is still out over whether the current enthusiasms will be enough to increase the role of bookbinding as a vital, viable, and valuable mainstay of cultural life...as I hope it will be. Or whether bookbinding will become more like modern poetry and music—performed and created for a shrinking audience of those whose patronage and appreciation sustains and encourages individual talent. Now at Emory University there is a library collection which attests to this dictum by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.: “A mind stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.”

To view the Samuel B. Ellenport Papers, 1915–2019 at Rose Rare Book Library/Emory visit: [bit.ly/gbw-art004](http://bit.ly/gbw-art004).

SAM ELLENPORT has been a hand-bookbinder since he bought The Harcourt Bindery in Boston in 1971. Trained as an historian and a passionate collector of books on binding, he has written and lectured about the history of the craft throughout the U.S. and in England. Sam began giving workshops at Harcourt in the 1970s and, committed to education, helped establish the bookbinding program at the North Bennet Street School in 1986 where he remains an advisor. He has served in various positions among book-related organizations including the GBW. As a witness to the great sea-change occurring today in the book arts, Sam remains a defender of the classic aesthetic developed around the physical book. He is also an avid reader, enthusiastic gardener, and has taken up the piano after a 70 year hiatus.



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# Re-creating a 19th Century Soft-Metal Bearing

by John Nove

WHEN I ATTEMPTED to raise the platen on my nipping press recently, the screw turned but the platen didn't budge. The bottom of the screw had become detached (Fig. 1). Thinking it was easily repairable, I looked for something to tighten, adjust, or at worst, replace, that would rejoin the two pieces, but there was nothing visible: just the screw that ended in a shiny, wasp-waisted rounded bottom and the collar atop the platen which had a similarly shiny interior.

I quickly did what any reasonable binder would do: I emailed Jeff Peachey with a photo. He responded saying he had no instant fix or advice, other than to search Book-Arts-L for others who might have encountered the same problem. I also started looking for answers in other workshops. Visits to four binderies in Easthampton, MA revealed that, unlike mine, their presses showed variations on a different theme: a collar attached to the top of the platen with bolts to which the bottom of the screw was mechanically attached (Fig. 2).

A word of background about my press: it was a gift ten years ago from my Old Yankee friend, mentor, and neighbor Bill Streeter. Bill ran The Silver Maple Bindery in Northampton, MA for many years, trained apprentices, and was co-author, with Barbara Rhodes, of "Beyond Photocopying," the definitive book on the history and design of copy presses. These were devices first patented in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which, when copying technology changed, were repurposed as book and nipping presses.



Fig. 1

Image courtesy of John Nove





Image courtesy of John Nove

Fig. 2

They were originally used in making single replicas of important documents employing a system with special ink, papers and pressure. Unfortunately, my press, without a maker's mark, couldn't be referenced in the book.

At this point, I took advantage of another neighbor—Jim Terapane, a retired machinist who maintains a shop in his garage across the street from my bindery in South Deerfield, MA. Jim is involved with the Museum of Our Industrial Heritage in Greenfield, MA and is well-versed in historical tool technology. On first examination of the press, he was puzzled, but soon suggested that perhaps we were dealing with a *babbitt bearing*. Babbitt is an alloy—a mixture of two or more metals—that was formulated and patented by Isaac Babbitt in 1839. It was composed (in the original patent formulation) of 89.3% tin, 7.1% antimony and 3.6% copper, three relatively soft metals. The role of a soft-metal bearing, still used in machinery today, is to create a contact area between a pair of rotating metal parts where the 'softness' of one metal reduces the friction between it and its harder metal counterpart. (Ball bearings, a more familiar type, accomplish this same task in a purely mechanical way.) In the case of my old press, the soft-metal bearing provided an attachment between the bottom of the screw of the press and the upper platen: the screw could turn freely within the bearing while still transferring the force of the turned handle

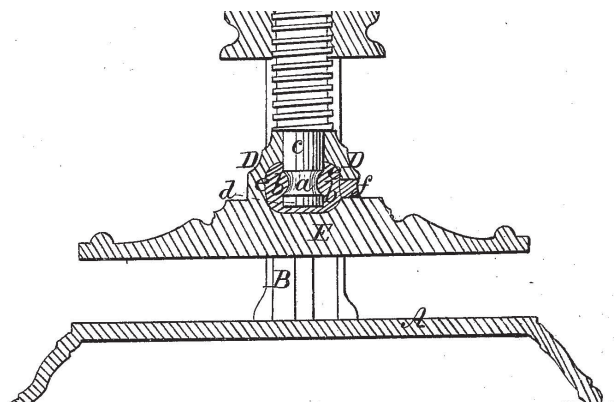
to move the platen up and down. Jim's plan was to attempt to repair the press by entirely re-casting the bearing using slices of babbitt he planned to scavenge and melt down from the head of a one-inch wide metalworker's 'soft' hammer he had in his shop.

Convinced that soft-metal bearings had to be mentioned somewhere in the Rhodes/Streeter book, I undertook a figure-by-figure examination. My efforts were rewarded on page 257, where I found a tiny drawing of a press with a screw-end that looked a lot like mine (Fig. 3). It was from Francis Hovey's 1864 U.S. Patent #42,141 for a "copying press." The complete patent and larger versions of the illustrations were easily located on Google Patents. Hovey's invention called for

... pouring zinc or other easily fusible metal into the said groove through a hole provided in the bottom of the foot-piece before the latter is attached to the platen. The object of my invention is to make a cheaper connection between the screw and the platen; and to this end it consists in having the upper surface of the platen, at its center, provided with a chamber for receiving the soft metal.

Although the patent did not specifically mention babbitt, it contained the concept of using a soft metal alloy to create a bearing which would connect the screw of the press to the upper platen. The patent also offered a visual roadmap for what lay ahead: we would be attempting to pour our molten babbitt into the collar of the upper patten so that it would fill the space labeled "b" on the patent drawing by using the pour/overflow hole marked "f." The 'wasp-waist'—"a"—would hold the bearing in place.

In early June we all met at Eric Dennis' blacksmith shop in Greenfield, MA. Eric generously provided tools, workspace and know-how along with a coal-burning forge and oxyacetylene torch. Jim's strategy called for removing any babbitt that remained inside the collar of the platen, as well as any that remained inside the 1/4" pour/overflow hole on the side of the collar. This hole is diagnostic of a soft-metal bearing. In the case of my press, it was invisible from



Copying Press, United States of America, US42,141A, issued March 29, 1864. [patents.google.com/patent/US42141A](https://patents.google.com/patent/US42141A).

Fig. 3





Fig. 4

the outside, because of years of grime and paint, and was revealed only by probing from the inside. The cleaning was carried out with an oxyacetylene torch whose intense flame would liquefy any remaining babbitt but not be hot enough to melt the cast iron of the platen. The fill/overflow hole was reamed out with an electric drill and the shavings saved for future analysis of the original bearing.

Before melting Jim's babbitt, the (unthreaded) bottom of the screw around which the new bearing would be cast was dipped into finely-ground graphite. The graphite would act as a lubricant and insure that the end of the screw, once surrounded by the new babbitt, would turn freely within the bearing. The babbitt was melted in the forge in a small metal ladle with a pouring spout (Fig. 4). At the same time, the platen, which had been removed from the press, was propped up at a ninety-degree angle on a metal workbench with the pour/overflow hole directed upward. The collar of the platen was heated with the torch so that when the molten babbitt was introduced it wouldn't instantly solidify (Fig. 5). Once the babbitt was poured into the collar (Fig. 6), the platen was returned to a horizontal position. The graphite-coated screw end was inserted into the collar, given several turns, and then propped in a vertical position until the babbitt hardened. Note that none of the threads of the screw are part of the bearing. When this was done, excess molten babbitt weeped out of the overflow hole (Fig. 7). Once the platen thoroughly cooled, the press

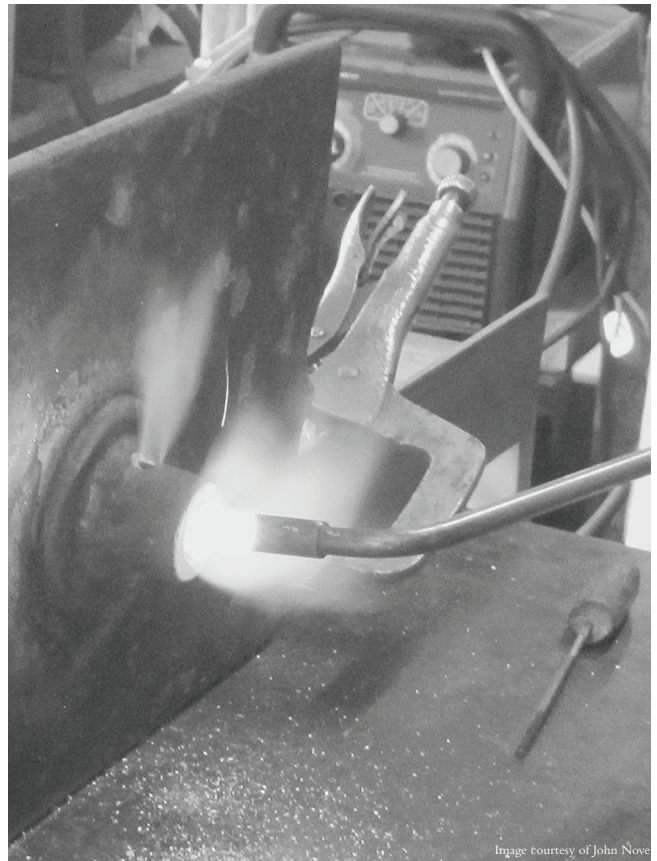


Fig. 5

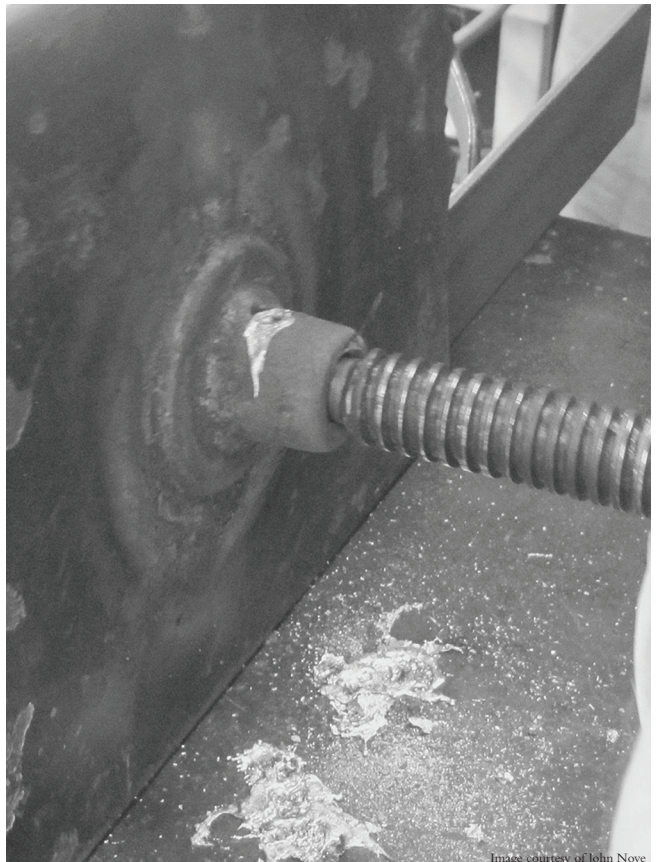


Fig. 6





Fig. 7

was reassembled and tested. My nipping press had been repaired (Fig. 8).

To better understand how my press was originally made, I had the original bearing material analyzed. Metal shavings that were collected when the fill/overflow hole was reamed out were submitted to Dr. Steven Eyles, who generously agreed to do the analysis. He is director of the University of Massachusetts Mass Spectrometry Core Facility in Amherst, MA. The sample was dissolved in acid and then introduced into an Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometer. This device ionizes the sample (6000 degrees K!) into its constitutive elements and then identifies those elements based on their atomic mass. It also determines their relative proportion to one another. Dr. Eyles's analysis revealed that my sample consisted of zinc (92%) along with lead (5%) and tin (1%).

The composition of the press's original bearing was NOT babbitt, but instead a soft-metal alloy similar to the one mentioned in the Hovey patent.

This analysis marked the end of a technological journey in which I came to better understand a piece of equipment I had often taken for granted. By participating in re-creating the soft-metal bearing which was at the heart of the press I felt that my relationship with this tool—MY nipping press—had changed—AND I made some new friends along the way!

*This article is not meant to be a how-to guide: interacting with molten metal is best left to trained professionals working in their specialized spaces with their specialized tools.*



Fig. 8

JOHN NOVE, a graduate of the North Bennet St. School, is proprietor of the Grey Seal Bindery in the Connecticut River Valley of MA. His work focuses on repair and conservation of books for local institutions, book dealers and individuals as well as binding small editions. John can be reached at [nove.john@gmail.com](mailto:nove.john@gmail.com).



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