Guild of Book Workers Journal vol. 51

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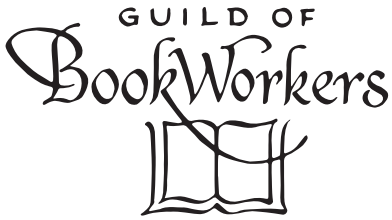

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PUBLICATION POLICY

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The Guild of Book Workers also publishes a *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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EDITOR'S NOTE

IT IS WITH GREAT PRIDE that the editorial team presents volume 51 of the *Guild of Book Workers Journal*. Volume 51 represents the combined effort of an editorial team bringing together authors and contributors from our various book oriented fields. Contributing members of the editorial team include: Victoria Birth, Susie Cobbledick, Martyna Gryko, and myself. Invaluable support was also provided from a team of volunteers and book arts professionals including Eric Alstrom, Rebecca Chamlee, Jill Deiss, and Shawn Douglas. Lastly, the editorial prowess, advice, and continuing support provided by former *GBWJ* editor, Peter Verheyen, has made our current work as an editorial team possible.

The past couple of years have been challenging for all, let alone those of us in the Guild of Book Workers community and its associated book disciplines. When reflecting on all that has happened since the end of 2019 to the present, the editorial board of the *GBWJ* decided that it would be meaningful to devote volume 51 to the documentation of the work our community has engaged in while not only facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic but also addressing long-overdue social justice concerns within our national and global communities. Contributions to volume 51 include articles highlighting hardships, innovations, failures, and triumphs experienced by book arts professionals over the past few years. In addition, several articles have been included that explore elements of practice and documentations of craft and process that transcend current global health and social justice crises.

As previously mentioned, producing volume 51 of the *Guild of Book Workers Journal* would not have been possible without the efforts of a team. Victoria Birth, Susie Cobbledick, and Martyna Gryko were central to the publication of volume 51, tirelessly lending their time and expertise. For that, we should all be grateful. I thought it would be meaningful to include a brief introduction to these three as members of the *GBWJ* editorial board.

Victoria Birth is a book conservator at Brigham Young University and owner of Birth Bindery & Press. She graduated from the MFA Book Arts Program at The University of Alabama in 2018. Her work is either delicate and cute or dark and creepy, perfectly displaying who she is at her core. She recently taught advanced bookbinding at BYU and discovered a passion for teaching. One day, when she regains the energy that her one-year-old has whole-heartedly devoured, she will make cute and creepy work again.

Susie Cobbledick is a bench-trained book and paper conservator with a background in librarianship and the arts. She studied studio arts and crafts at Kent State University (BFA) and then textiles at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia (MFA). A degree in Library Science followed, and she was a librarian for several years before noticing that library culture was increasingly de-emphasizing books and education in favor of electronics and entertainment. With a passion for books and sophisticated hand skills, a transition to book conversation made sense and would allow her to live her values more fully. Cobbledick left librarianship and put together her own program of training that included chemistry classes, reading, workshops, and above all seeking out book conservators who would take her on as an apprentice. She found that practitioners in this field are generous with their knowledge. She studied with Harry Campbell at Ohio State University and Karen Esper in Cleveland before taking a job as Ellerman Book and Paper Conservator at the Peter H Raven Library of the Missouri Botanical Garden. She has been there for 7 years.

Throughout these career moves, Cobbledick has been a practicing and exhibiting artist working in a variety of media, including textiles, paper, colored pencils, and letterpress. She belongs to Art Books Cleveland and regularly exhibits with that group. She also has a long-standing interest in the history of ideas and retains a vivid memory of the first time she read Plato's Republic in a Seattle coffee shop as rain poured outside on a cold winter's day. As a book person who reads philosophy, it is natural that she is also interested in bibliography and the ways that the printed codex reflects and creates modes of thinking and making. Cobbledick is an advocate for paper as the single most effective medium for storing and retrieving information ever devised by humans. Needless to say, she is also a technosketpic.

Martyna Gryko is an artist and bookbinder currently pursuing a Diploma of Bookbinding from the North Bennet Street School. Gryko earned her BFA in Fine Arts from the College for Creative Studies in 2017. She exhibited in juried group shows at the Scarab Club, Hatch Art Gallery, as well as craft fairs in the Metro Detroit area. In January 2020, Gryko attended a month-long residency at Arteles Creative Center in Hämeenkyrö, Finland. While there, she organized a 4-hour workshop on the topic of bookbinding, working with other residents to create one of a kind, binding model. Gryko is a multimedia artist and enjoys photography, fiber arts, landscape painting, and jewelry making.

As many of you know, the Guild of Book Workers is actively seeking to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within book centered disciplines. With this in mind, the *GBWJ* editorial team has dedicated volume 52 of the *Journal* to highlighting voices of historically underrepresented communities within the associated book arts and craft disciplines. We are actively welcoming articles, photo essays, and creative works for publication by authors belonging to underrepresented groups including those belonging to BIPOC communities, LGBTQ+ communities, those living with disabilities, among others. While the theme of volume 52 will be centered around uplifting underrepresented voices, submissions on other topics will also be considered. We welcome a diversity of topics, subjects, and creative explorations of the handmade book and book related media in all of their forms. The deadline for submission to volume 52 of the *Guild of Book Workers Journal* is March 2023. If you are interested in submitting, please reach out to me at journal@guildofbookworkers.org

Kyle Anthony Clark
EDITOR
Guild of Book Workers Journal

Figure intro 1. Soldering iron, thermostat foils and tool heads.

TOOLING WITH FOILS
AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

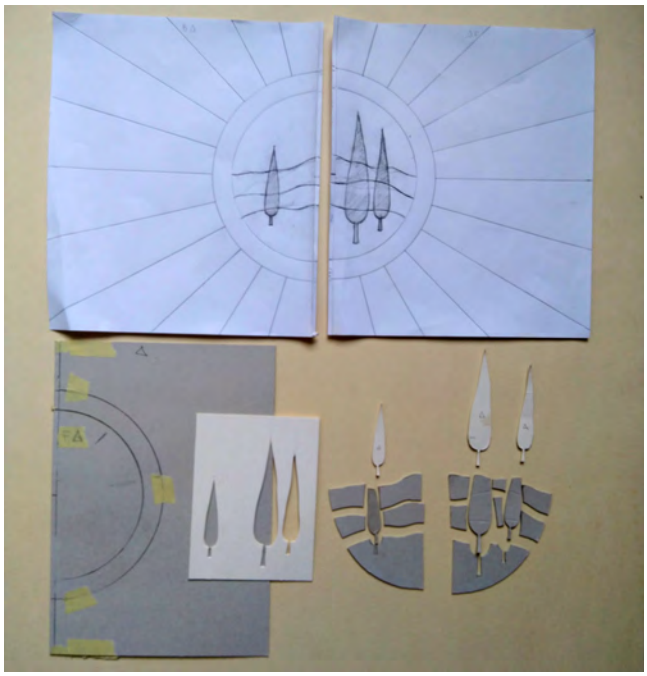
Roger Green

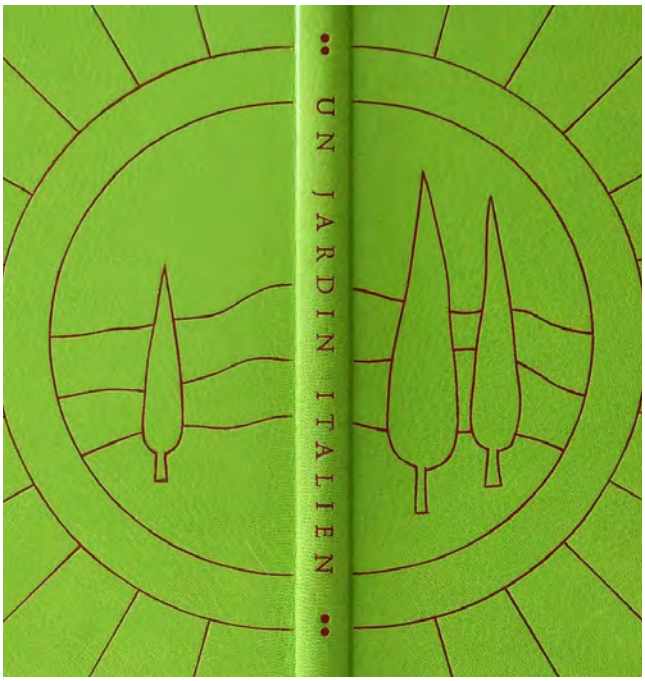
IN THIS ARTICLE I WOULD LIKE TO PRESENT some different, and for many, new methods of tooling with heat release foils, not just with gold, but with all the various colors. There are two basic aspects involved here: using a rather unconventional set of tools and the extensive usage of cardboard templates. All the methods, processes, and techniques described are, in principle, really quite simple, and with some practice and experience, facilitate the creation of remarkably complex patterns and images. Furthermore, the resulting designs would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to attain using "traditional" methods and tools. ¶ It was, in part, my frustration and exasperation at what I considered to be the unnecessarily difficult, and indeed, illogical, accepted techniques, that resulted in my development of these alternatives in the first place. I should emphasize here, that I am only considering foils and not gold leaf, as this is a different process; however, some of what I will present here, may even have its relevance there. Interestingly, after I found another and, for me, more amenable way to execute tooling using modified tools, the ease and surety with which results were then obtained, resulted in the development of the usage of templates. As tooling became much easier, and actually fun, I was then motivated to further expand its possibilities.

—ROGER GREEN

Roger Green, born 1959 in London, is an English/German bookbinder, artist, photographer, teacher, writer, and poet. He first received a degree (BA Hons) in Psychology from the University of Sussex, before deciding to study Bookbinding under Faith Shannon at the Art College in Brighton. After being self-employed there as a bookbinder for 3 years he moved in 1989 to Wuppertal in Germany, where he has since been running a successful bindery. He has mainly concentrated on fine and designer bindings, book restoration, box making and limited edition work with various Artists. Many of his fine and designer bindings are owned by collectors. He has also been teaching bookbinding for the last thirty years and has written many articles on a range of bookbinding and box making structures and styles, which have been published in the Society of Bookbinders magazine, and particularly, in Art et Metiers du Livre.

Although he has never worked directly as a psychologist, the subject has always influenced his way of thinking and analysing. After moving to Germany, he became involved in teaching bookbinding as a therapeutic medium to occupational therapy students — a perfect way to combine his two professions. This work helped form his interest in the cognitive and emotional processes that influence how we work, and particularly, how our creative energy and potential can best be rejuvenated and developed. On the basis of his teaching and 35 years of experience as a bookbinder, he has developed many new theories, methods, and techniques.





Figures intro 2 and 3. Templates and results.

TOOLS

What really bothered me with the traditional way of tooling was the rather illogical way in which tools were heated. If you heat a tool on an electric stove, then you have only rough control as to how hot it becomes. Yes, with experience and pressing the tool into moist cotton wool to remove excess heat (the hissing test), you can become quite adept at knowing just when the right temperature for foil is achieved; however, this temperature will not remain steady, but rather decrease fairly quickly. On the other hand, foils have a relatively small temperature "window" in which they work—too hot and the foil melts, too cold and nothing happens, the gold, silver, or color film will not be released. In combination then, this means that you are attempting tooling using a foil with a narrow temperature working range and a tool that will not hold its heat and which will thus quite quickly cool down to a temperature outside of this range. This may be okay if you are just doing single stamp images, but even then, if you have to do many, you will at the very least waste lots of time reheating the tool. More critical is the situation when tooling lines—will the tool remain in the temperature window long enough so that the line can be completed? Maybe, but there again, maybe not. I soon found this method too arbitrary and inconsistent, as well as being unnecessarily difficult and illogical. What was needed was a tool with a fixed temperature that stayed inside the working range of a foil. Given that the stove is heated electrically anyway, why not plug the power source directly into the tool? Such tools have existed for a while, the main problem being that the temperature is just that, fixed—but not all foils work at the same temperatures. They are also often quite cumbersome and heavy to handle (fig. 1-1). This is when I came up with the idea of using a soldering iron—which is then attached to a thermostat (fig. intro-1). The fixed temperature of a soldering iron is far too hot for foil, but in conjunction with the thermostat this can be easily regulated downwards to the required temperature of a specific foil and then kept at a steady and predictable heat. This then enables continuous tooling with the knowledge that the temperature is right and will remain so. Obviously this will mean taking the traditional hand held tools apart, in that the head is removed from the wooden handle (fig. 1-2). If this is done carefully, the process can easily be reversed and the tool restored to its original state. It is important to note that the soldering iron is of the older type, with a wide opening at one end (ca. 0.8 mm), into which the stems of the tool heads can be placed (fig. 1-3). Some tool heads may have a smaller stem, in which case you can simply make a

Figure 1-1. Older, fixed temperature tools.

metal sleeve to decrease the diameter of the hole (also fig.1-2). As I only work like this now, the tool heads that I use most frequently are not returned, but rather stored ready to be used (also fig. intro-1). So that this method works exactly as required, all that is necessary is to do some testing beforehand to find the correct setting on the thermostat, depending on which tool head, which foil, and which material is being used.

Figure 1-2. Soldering iron, sleeve, and tool head.

Figure 1-3. Opening at end of soldering iron. Older, fixed temperature tools.

As single tools are not cheap to acquire, another possibility, at least for simple geometric shapes, is to make them yourself. Six-inch nails with big flat heads can easily be cut and filed down to a variety of forms, with the round stem fitting well into the soldering iron (fig. 1-4). This possibility is also relevant for those who do not wish to, or perhaps cannot, remove the heads from the handle of their existing tools.

Figure 1-4. Self-made tool heads.

TEMPLATES—DOTS AND OTHER SIMPLE GEOMETRIC FORMS

PATTERNS OF DOTS

THE SIMPLEST FORM OF TOOLING is the dot, whereby even this can be fraught with difficulty. The two main potential problems are: exact position and repeatability in case the first attempt is not good enough (dot not complete or filled out). If, say, a dot is to be placed on the spine of a book and centered in relation to the spine's width, then a misplacement of only 1 mm will be quite visible and annoying.

If the first attempt needs to be improved, then once the foil is again put in place, where exactly do

Figure 2-1. Multi-hole puncher.

you tool? One way is to quickly slide the tool over the surface until it sinks into the original indentation, only then is pressure applied. There is, however, no guarantee that this method will not result in a double image, which is even more annoying than if the position is not quite correct! The solution to both problems is really quite simple. All you need is a piece of photo card and a hole puncher (fig. 2-1). Select the right size to fit the dot tool head and then

Figure 2-2. Template for tooling a dot.

punch a hole in the middle of a strip of photo card. This can then be correctly positioned, fixed in place with masking tape, and a strip of foil slid underneath (fig. 2-2). Using the tool head in the thermostatically controlled soldering iron, you just have to press it quickly, but also relatively firmly, into the hole. For the durability of foil tooling, it is generally a good idea to do it at least twice, so here, the foil is then moved slightly to one side and the process repeated. The foil is then removed, allowing a view through the hole to see if the "dot" has been satisfactorily tooled. If yes, then the photo card template can be removed to one side (fig. 2-3)—if necessary it can still be replaced and the dot tooled again.

The result should be perfectly tooled, centered, and

Figure 2-3. Tooled dot on spine.

positioned. If a dot(s) is(are) required on the front and back surface of the binding, the procedure is the same, except it is then advisable to punch the hole near one end of the photo card (fig. 2-4). This way it will be easier to fix in position (fig. 2-5), whilst allowing for the hole end to be lifted up to view the tooling—without the card slipping. Using this method, a very high degree of accuracy in positioning is achievable (fig. 2-6). The template can be quickly repositioned, and another point tooled. The tooling

Figure 2-4. Positioning the template.

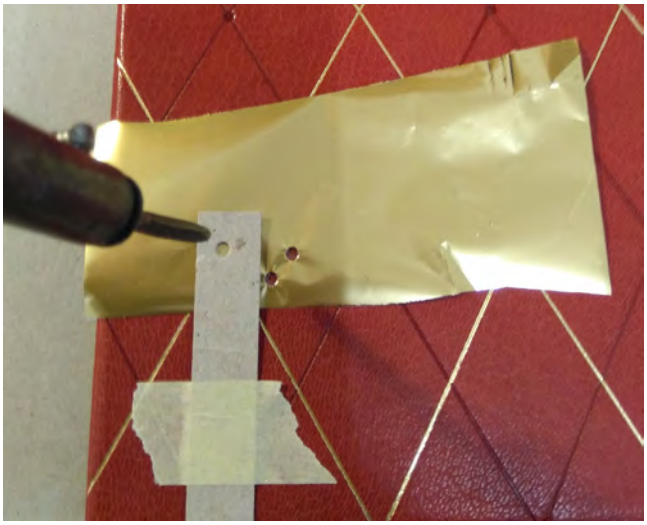


Figure 2-5. Tooling through the template.

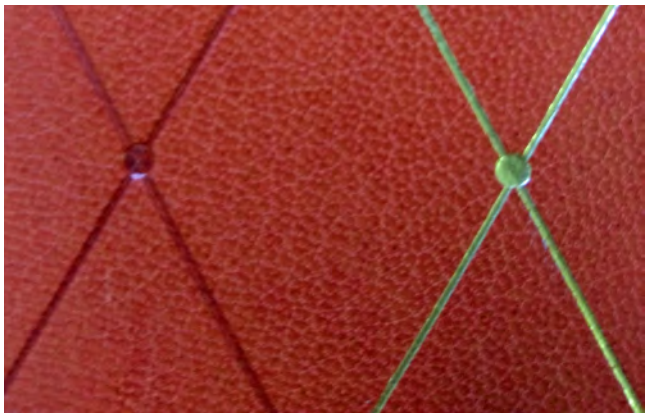


Figure 2-6. Perfectly tooled and positioned dots.

of each dot will take little more than a minute in all - remembering that the heated tool can be used continuously, without interruption.

When using tools with small geometric shapes, the hole punch is obviously of no use; instead the tool head is pressed into the photo card, leaving an indentation of its shape which can then be accurately cut out with a scalpel. The process is then exactly the same as with the dots.

TEMPLATES—COMPLEX PATTERNS OF DOTS

THIS IS WHERE USING TEMPLATES starts to open up some very interesting possibilities. As they make the tooling process much easier and produce reliably good results, you can trust yourself to experiment and try out design patterns that look quite complex.

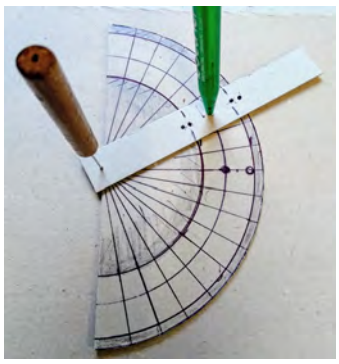


Figure 3-1. Cardboard "compass."

The template is really the critical component here, and its planning and preparation can be a time-consuming process and yet certainly not one to hurry. Thereafter, the tooling can be executed surprisingly quickly. Depending on the exact usage, I generally use either photo card or 1 mm board. I often use circles in my design work, and to facilitate the construction of the required templates, I use a strip of 2 mm board. This is held in place at the fulcrum with a pin or needle and with holes punched in it at various distances for the respective radii (fig. 3-1). Although the card or thin board is quite stable, it is also easy enough to punch in it holes of various diameters to match the tool heads that will be used (fig. 3-2). These templates can also be simply cut out either with scissors or a scalpel.

The correct positioning of a template is, again, a step which should be done diligently and without hurry. It can best be fixed in place with masking tape and small weights (fig. 3-3). The desired foil is then slid underneath, and the tooling can begin. Particularly with small diameter dots, you should be careful not to apply too much pressure to avoid too deep an indentation. After the dots have been tooled, first only the foil is removed, thus allowing for the results to be checked—visible through the template holes. If some dots need to be retooled, then a new piece of foil is slid underneath and the process repeated, without fear that double imaging will occur. The template is only removed when you are sure that all the dots are as required. Of course, templates can just as easily be used for blind tooling, their usage still being necessary to produce accurate and correct positioning (fig. 3-4).

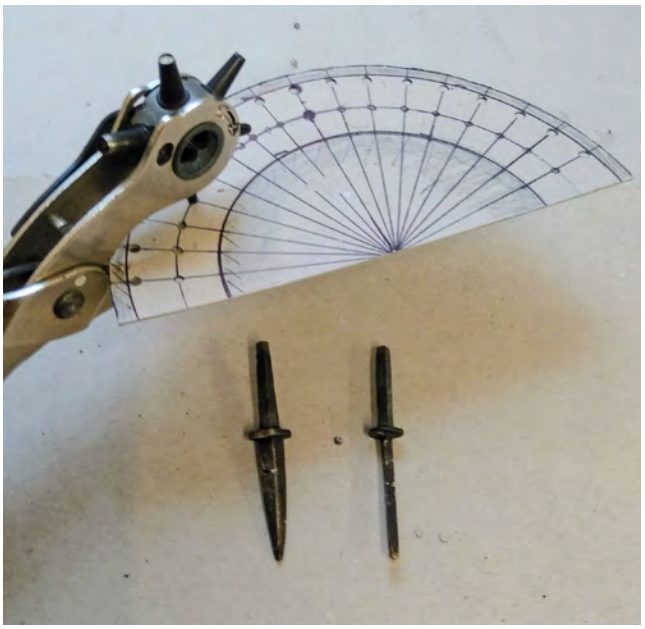


Figure 3-2. Punching out the relevant sized holes.

For all my binding designs I prepare a full-size master drawing or plan. These can themselves be used directly as templates for the whole cover surface (fig. 3-5). As you cannot use a hole punch to make holes that far from an edge, it is advisable to only use photo

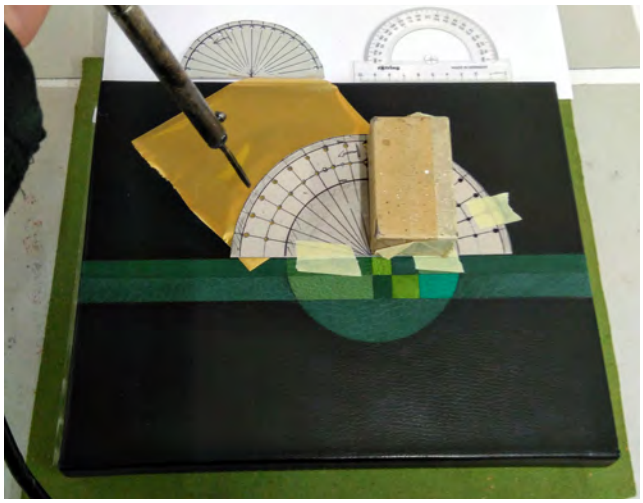


Figure 3-3. Tooling multiple dots with gold foil.

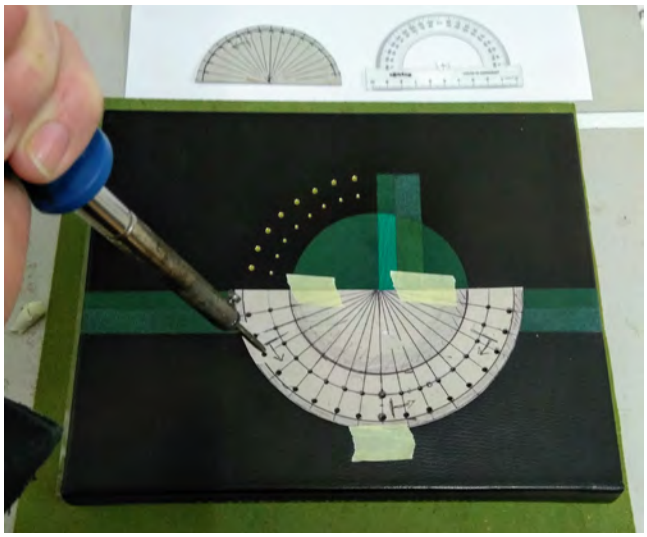


Figure 3-4. Blind tooling multiple dots.

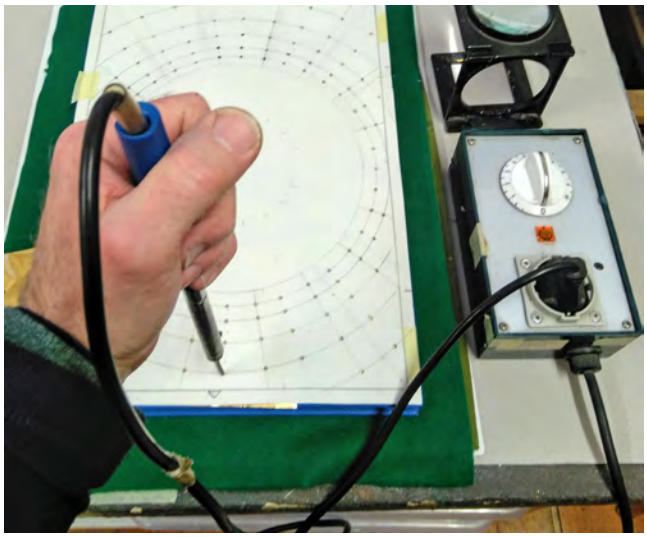


Figure 3-5. Master drawing as template.

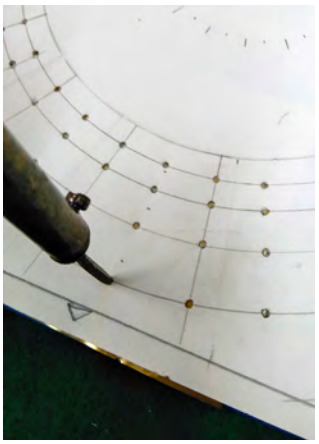


Figure 3-6. Tooling through the master drawing.

card, or even just a thick, stable paper, ca. 170 gm². The holes will then need to be carefully made with an awl or the like. In the case of small diameter tool heads, they can themselves be used as a sort of hole punch to make their own holes. With templates that cover the whole surface, it is a good idea to only fix them on two sides, thus allowing for them to be partially lifted up to check the tooling results without the danger of them slipping out of place. This is particularly necessary in the case of designs which cover the whole surface and require a lot of tooling, as new pieces of foil will continually need to be placed underneath, and progress will need to be tracked. Patience, concentration, and a steady hand can then lead to extremely pleasing results (figs. 3-6 and 3-7).

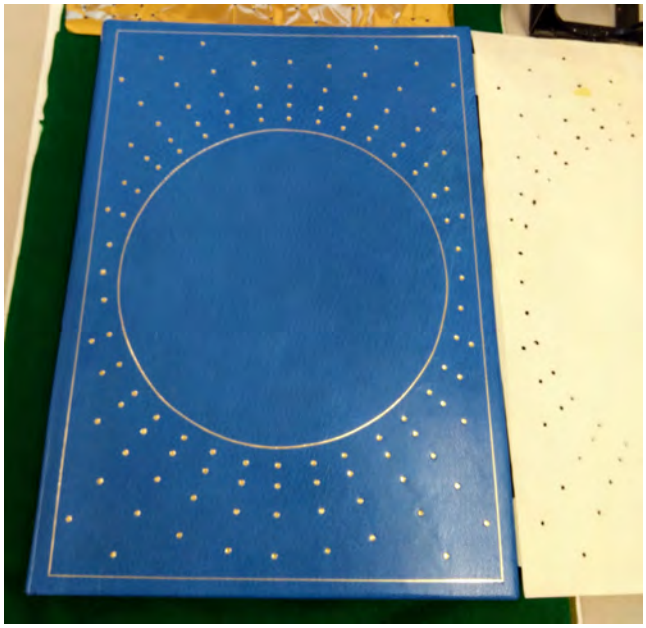


Figure 3-7. Complex tooling pattern.

A further variation of this type of template is one where the holes are not cut out at all, but rather the temperature set slightly higher, so that you can tool directly through the paper. This is a rather more tricky and difficult version but can be necessary when clusters of dots need to be tooled very close

Figure 3-8. Tooling directly into a master drawing.

together—possibly with the added difficulty that the dots also vary in size (fig. 3-8). Obviously, in this case the holes cannot be punched in advance, as the close proximity to one another would cause the template to fall apart. Although there are no holes in the template, the process of tooling will leave an imprint in the paper which can be used as a guide should any retooling be necessary. Whatever type of template you use, it is always advisable to do some extensive testing in advance to obtain the correct working temperature for the soldering iron.

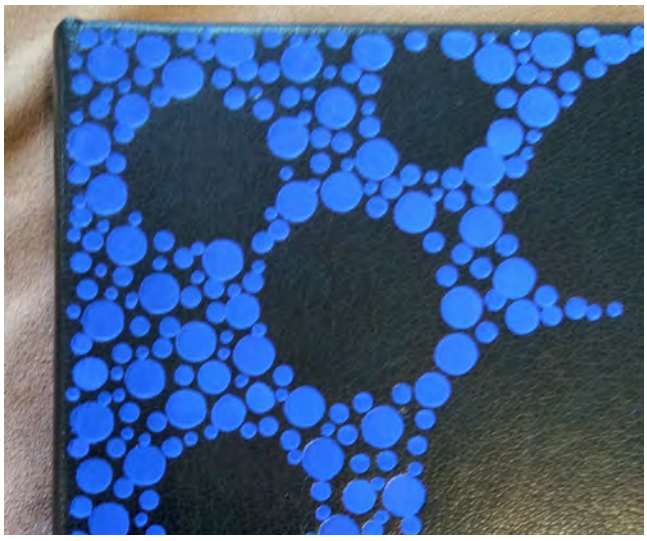


Figure 3-9. Visual and haptic structure.

This is particularly relevant for this further version as retooling, although possible, is not easy. It is simply better when everything works well the first time, which with these techniques, is quite possible. When successful, the tooled clustered dots produce an interesting effect, both visually and haptically (fig. 3-9).

Figure 4-1. Filet heads, varying size, and thickness.

TEMPLATES—LINES STRAIGHT, WAVY, AND CIRCULAR

THE TOOL HEADS USED FOR LINES ARE FILETS, which can be used in varying thicknesses and lengths, depending upon what is necessary or just works best (fig. 4-1). Generally, I use a fairly small filet, which is about 0.5 mm thick (second from bottom). The smallest filet at the bottom is very useful for short lines and tighter curves. Strictly speaking, sometimes for straight lines a template is not necessary, just a metal ruler—whereby perhaps in this case it can also

Figure 4-2. Pre-imprinting through a template.

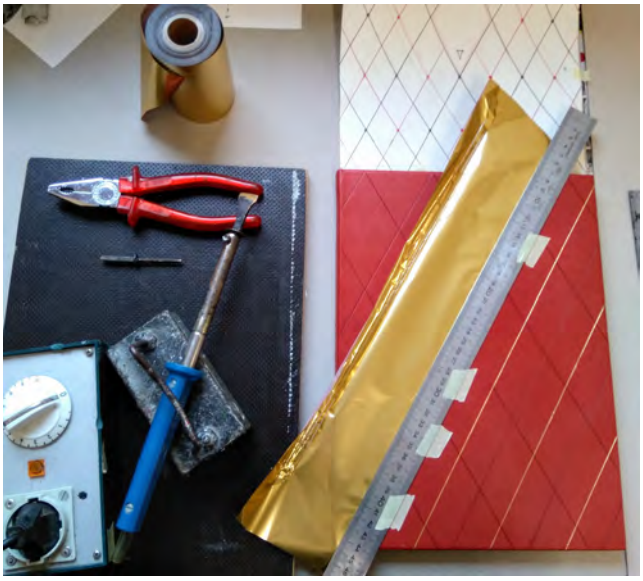


Figure 4-3. Tooling a line with a ruler.

be seen as a sort of template. More often though, I use a paper template in conjunction with a ruler. The template is also the master drawing, through which the intended lines can be pre-pressed into the leather cover (fig. 4-2). The template can then be removed and the ruler fixed in place, so that the line imprint is just visible outside one edge. Foil is then laid underneath, and the line can be tooled (fig. 4-3). As with tooling dots, first only the foil is carefully removed to see if the line is satisfactory. If not, the foil can be replaced (but moved slightly to one side to present a fresh area) and the line tooled again, making sure that the ruler, despite being fixed in place, does not slip. It is often the case that the lines do not go from one edge of the cover to the other, but rather stop somewhere in between. Indeed, they may even end against another line, where great care then needs to be taken that they do not overshoot. Either way, the solution is to use masking tape as an "end stop" (fig. 4-4). Care still needs to be taken not to overshoot, as the masking tape may not completely prevent the tool head from leaving a blind imprint. It is advisable to take note at which points the line starts and stops on the ruler scale.

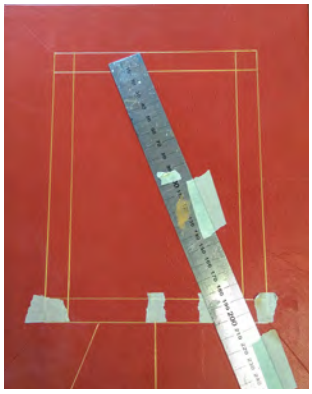


Figure 4-4. Masking tape used for "end-stops."

Tooling "zig-zag" lines and wavy lines, although using much the same principles as straight lines, is more involved and requires the use of specifically cut templates (figs, 4-5 and 4- 7). These are usually made of 1 mm board, which provides a sufficiently defined edge that the filet can follow, at the same time not being too thick to cut out smoothly and easily. The templates are always fixed with masking tape at one edge to allow them to be lifted up to check the lines, without them moving in case they need to be placed down again and the line be partially, if not completely, retooled. As already mentioned, for short lines or tighter curves it is advisable to use a (very) small filet head for greater maneuverability. Another tip is to cut the card for the waves longer than necessary—this way it can be used in different positions and from both sides. The templates are

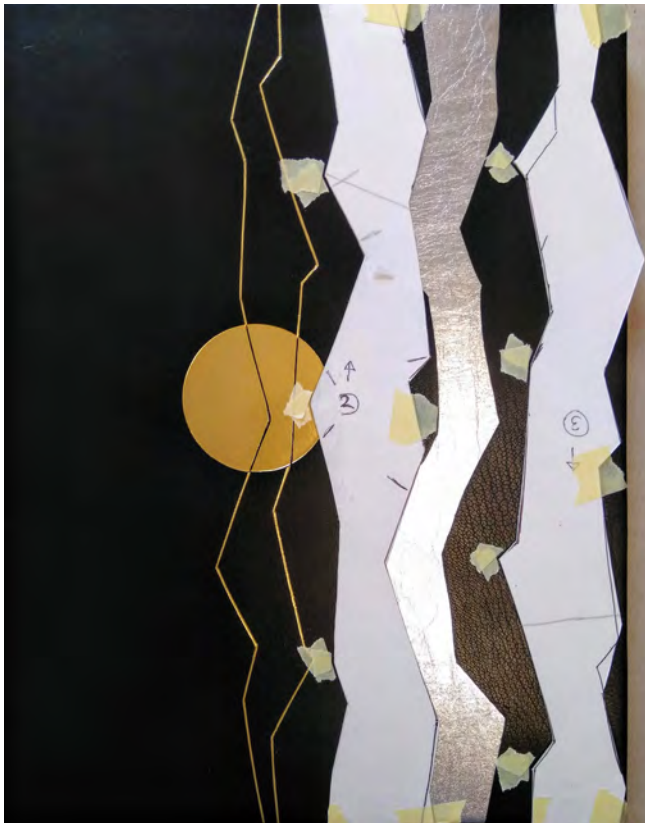


Figure 4-5. Tooling "zig zag" lines

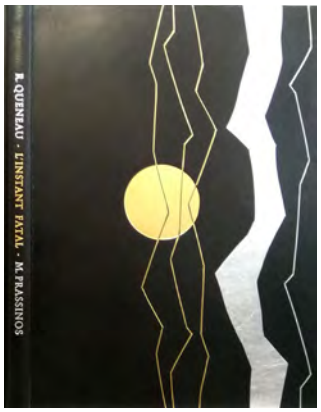


Figure 4-6. Finished tooled lines.

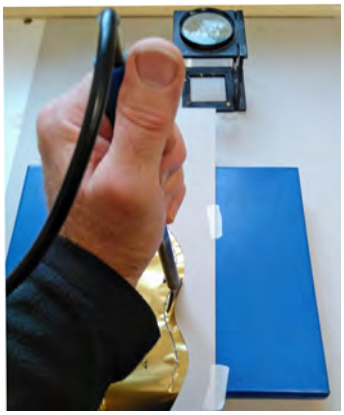


Figure 4-7. Tooling wavy lines.

cut out with a scalpel, which if it is new will be fairly simple. Still, particularly in the case of wavy lines, it is necessary to carefully consider and practice movements as to which direction you will cut, so that your arm and shoulder can move freely and produce smoothly flowing curves. Generally speaking, the initial drawing can be best done with left handers drawing from right to left, and right handers from left to right. When cutting out the template though, I tend to cut perpendicular to my middle, moving the scalpel towards myself—this way you have more strength and control by cutting. These may sound like rather minor points, but they can make a great difference as to how well a template flows and is cut out, which will then reflect upon the quality of the tooled lines (figs. 4-5 and 4-8).

Circular templates are drawn and cut out as already

Figure 4-8. Extra-long template.

shown in Step 3. As the card disks are now used as a guide for tooling, it is however, now necessary to ensure that the edges are smooth and flowing (fig. 4-9). You can follow the edge with your fingers, and

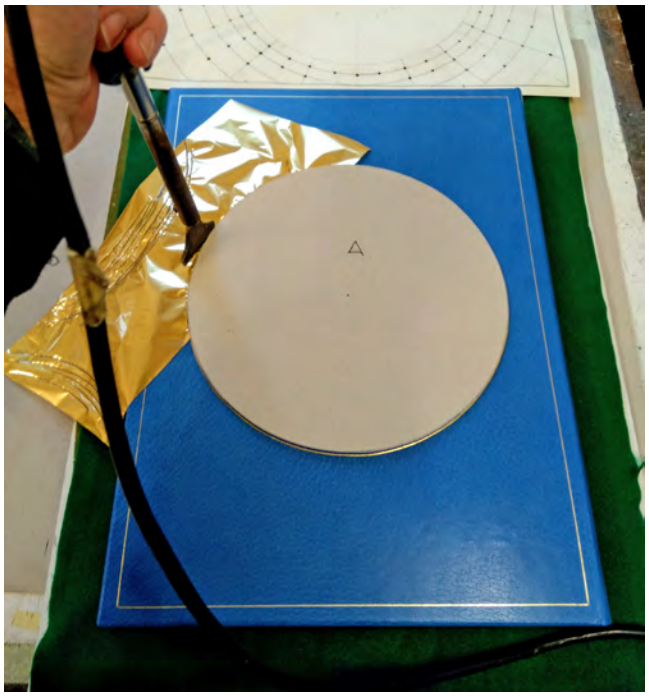


Figure 4-9. Circular template.

feeling for any bumps or incongruities, sand them smooth, always making sure the curvature flows correctly. If successfully executed, a near perfect circle is possible (Fig. 4-10).

Figure 4-10. Tooled circle.

TEMPLATES—MULTIPLE AND PROGRESSIVELY CUT OUT

THESE LAST APPLICATIONS of my tooling methods are undoubtedly the most difficult and require a lot of thought, planning, and practice. It is about using tooling as a medium with which to draw.

Templates are often multiple, but here I mean it in the sense that they are not all cut out from one piece of cardboard, but from several. Using a bone folder, the outline of each template can be pressed through the master drawing, leaving imprints on several separate pieces of card/board (fig. 5-1). The cut-out templates can then, if desired, overlap each other (fig. 5-2). Thought obviously needs to be given as to which template is to be tooled around first, as the

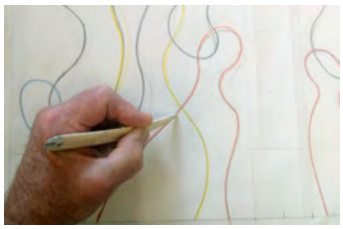


Figure 5-1. Pre-imprinting through paper.

line from subsequent templates will run over them (figs. 5-3 and 5-4). With complex template work like this, it can easily happen that the planning and preparation take longer than the actual execution of the design. When tooling around the sides of a template as depicted in figure 5-3,

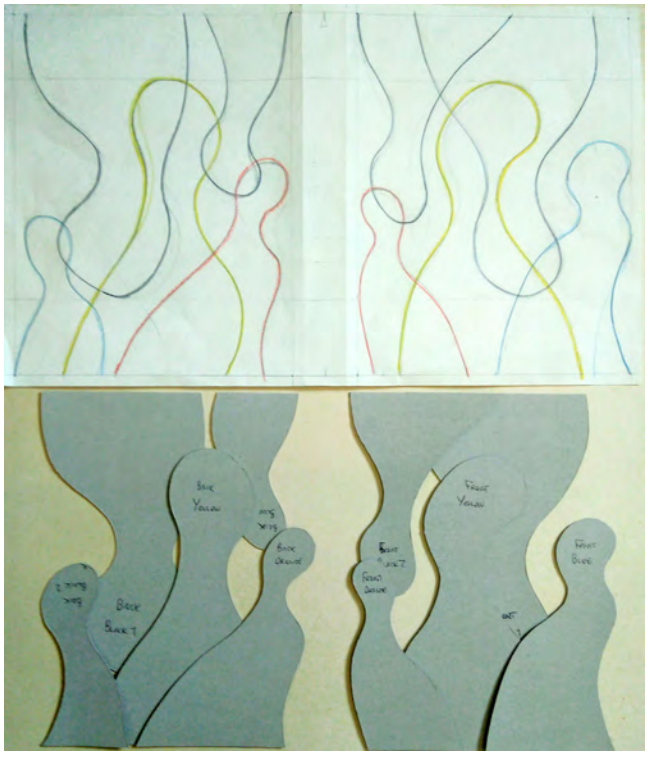


Figure 5-2. Multiple templates.

the template is held in place with several small pieces of masking tape, formed into a roll so that they stick in both directions.

Progressively cut out templates represent (so far) the most difficult variation. Again, templates are to an extent often progressively cut out, but then more in the sense of one stripe after the next (which can in itself still be relatively complicated). Here though, I mean templates which need to be cut out in quite specific orders, so that the required lines can be

Figure 5-3. Order of templates.

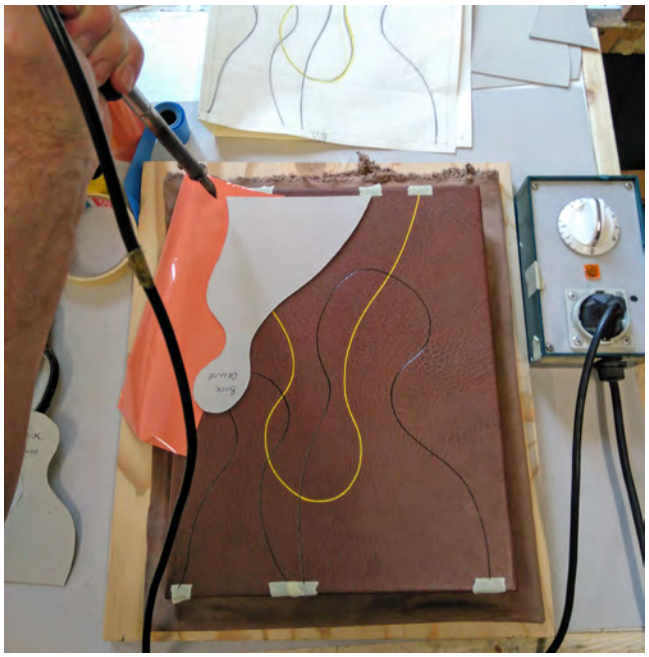


Figure 5-4. Overlapping tooling.

tooled. This can prove very fiddly, as some lines may be very short, curvy, and with two specific ends (figs. 5-5 and 5-6). A lot of care and an unwavering concentration are essential! The result can be quite striking—even when all lines are just in one color (fig. 5-7).

Figure 5-5. First cut in template.

The template often starts as a single, complete line drawing on 1 mm board. By the time you are finished, it looks more like a jigsaw puzzle (fig. 5-8). On this point, it should be remembered that it cannot really be used again, which means, whilst tooling, never to remove the template until you are sure that the line is correct—second chances will be difficult.

Figure 5-6. Template further cut out.

It is important to recognize that this foil-tooled drawing, while capable of striking results, is a

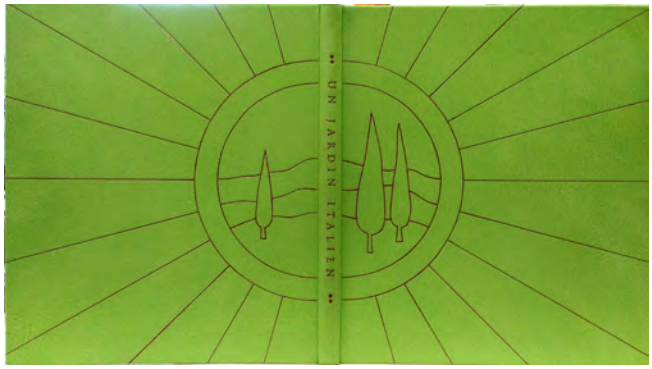


Figure 5-7. Complex "drawn" design.

technique that can (probably) be only taken so far. The trick lies in not over-doing it. I had this very much in mind as I considered the design for Buffon (fig. 5-9), a book full of illustrations of animals in movement. I decide to mirror this on the cover, not

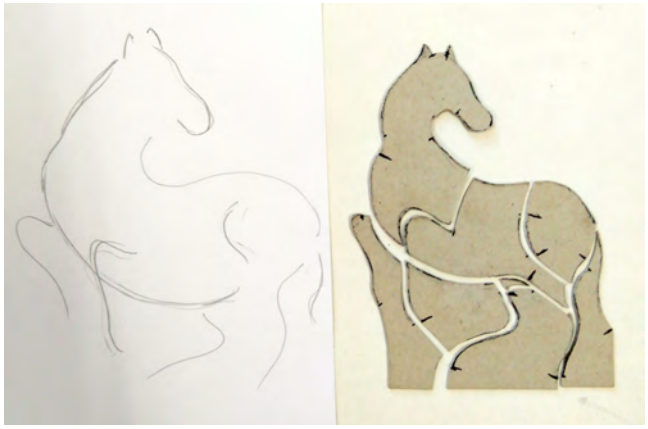


Figure 5-8. Progressively cut out template and drawing.

(too) abstract, but simple and clear. My first thoughts, and subsequent inspiration, were cave paintings. Our forebears knew how to use line to suggest much more than they actually drew. The essence of an animal and its movements, strikingly depicted with just a few simple lines.

Figure 5-9. Figurative tooling on the Buffon book.

TOOLING LINES ON THE SPINE AND OTHER ASSORTED TIPS

This simple little technique does not really fit in any of the other steps, so it comes at the end on its own.

aWhen tooling lines on a spine, you have not only to be careful that it is in the right position and straight and cleanly tooled, but that it is correctly at right angles to the run of the spine. All these potential difficulties and problems can be solved be using a card or thin board template fixed in place on the spine with masking tape. You slip the foil underneath and use the edge of the cardboard as a guide for the tooling (fig. 6-1). After lifting the template up to view the results, it is still possible to place it back down again if retooling is necessary (fig. 6-2). Good results are almost guaranteed—which takes away any stress and doubts in the first place.

Figure 6-1. Simple card template for line tooling.

Figure 6-2. Tooled line on spine.

VARIOUS TIPS AND TRICKS CONCERNING THE TOOLS AND TOOLING

AS CAN BE SEEN in some of the pictures, the stem of my soldering iron is relatively long. I am used to working with this length; nonetheless, I would prefer one with a shorter stem so that my hand is nearer to the actual surface being tooled. For those thinking of buying a soldering iron to try out the methods and techniques described in this article, one with a shorter stem would also be my recommendation.

When using the soldering iron in conjunction with filet heads to tool lines, there are a few extra points relevant as to exactly how you hold it. As only one end of the filet is generally used, you must hold the soldering iron at an angle. This functions best if, when tooling a line towards yourself, the soldering iron is angled away from you, and when tooling away from yourself, the iron is angled towards you. I would recommend only tooling in these directions, and not across the front of your body as you cannot then really see if you are holding the iron perpendicular to the line being tooled. The iron is angled towards or away from you, but not to the side, as this can cause the tooled line to appear tatty at one edge (because of variation in pressure from one side of the line to the other).

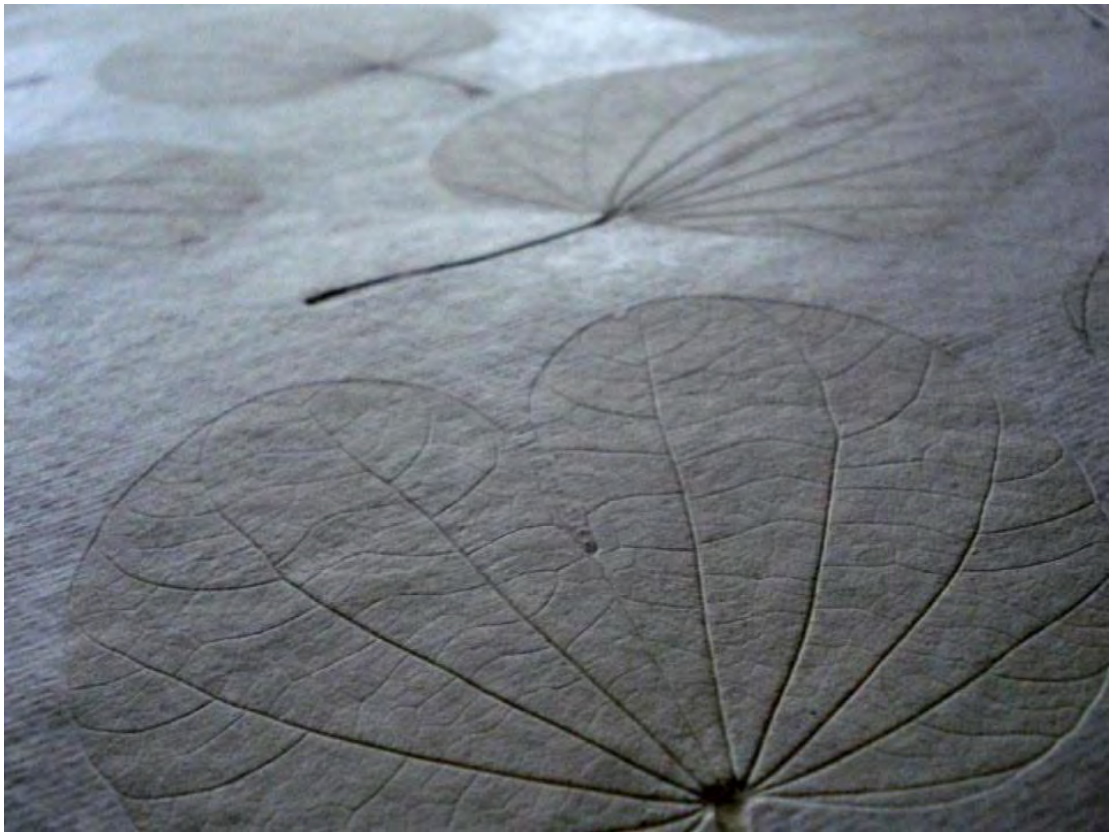
Before actually tooling a line with foil, you can pre-tool it to provide a clean imprint into which the foil will then go. This is something of a moot point, as my experience has shown me that sometimes this can help to produce a cleaner line, but sometimes not. It depends on the foil and materials being used and how well and steady you can tool and with how much (controlled) pressure. It is important though, if you do decide to pre-tool a line, particularly with light colored leathers, to be careful that the tool is, at most, only lukewarm. If it is too hot it will darken the leather, possibly to an extent that this creates a dark rim at the edges of the tooled foil.

To clean up tatty edges caused by excess foil being released, you can simply dab these areas with masking tape to help remove any unwanted foil. If done with care, the areas actually tooled (with heat and pressure), will be unaffected.

FINAL THOUGHTS

TO FINISH, I WOULD LIKE TO STRESS that the methods, processes, and techniques shown here, although offering an alternative, should also be viewed as an extension to the more traditional and accepted practices. Indeed, it is not necessary to take on board everything that is described in this article, as many aspects are compatible with accepted practices and can be combined with them. Just try things out, enjoy experimenting (with an open mind), and see what parts are suitable and can be fitted into, or help to develop, your way of tooling.

Some of you may be wondering how the solid gold circle in figure 4-6 was made. Well, it is simply a metal disk about 10 mm thick stuck onto the cliche tray of my block printing press. This is part of a whole new way of how to creatively use a blocking press and warrants an article in itself—which will be written sometime soon.



Paper with embossed *kachnar* leaves produced at Auroville Papers, south India.

MAKING A PLACE FOR PAPER

PRESENTED AT THE GBW STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE 2021

Radha Pandey

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN BY TALKING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT: man-made, natural, physical, and psychological environments. Their subtle yet dominant presence affects the work that I make, and that in turn affects how I perceive the world around me ¶ I am originally from Delhi. Growing up, I used to shop for paper in the old part of the city called Old Delhi. If you didn't make the trek across town, you'd be left with the three standard varieties of terribly ugly and inferior quality papers available at all the local stationers in New Delhi. Out of these, two varieties were merely decorative and were used for "cutting and pasting activities" by children. That would leave me with one type which was and is still called chart paper—rough on one side, smooth on the other, and available only in three pastel shades (blue, pink, and yellow). These sheets were awful to draw or erase on. ¶ My fascination with paper began at age five, when my mother brought back washi from Japan—I was awestruck. And I spent the rest of my childhood trying to emulate this Japanese paper or kozo using blended newspapers! I was sorely disappointed but still in love with the weak, grey circles of paper I was churning out every weekend.

—RADHA PANDEY

Radha Pandey is a papermaker and letterpress printer. She earned her MFA in Book Arts from the University of Iowa Center for the Book where she was a recipient of the Iowa Arts Fellowship. She specialized in Indo-Islamic Papermaking techniques and teaches book arts classes in India, Europe and the US. Her book Anatomia Botanica won the MICA Book Award in 2014 and received an Honorable Mention at the 15th Carl Hertzog Award for Excellence in Book Design. In 2018, her book Deep Time won the Joshua Heller Memorial Award.

Her artists' books are held in over eighty public collections internationally, including the Library of Congress and Yale University. Currently, Radha is working on an artist book inspired by Mughal floral portraiture from the seventeenth century, for which all the paper will be hand made in the traditional Indo-Islamic style.

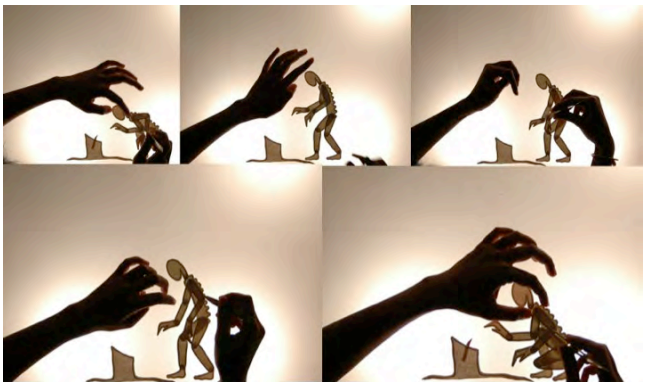
I FINALLY DID GET A CHANCE TO LEARN Japanese papermaking about eight years later at Haystack School of Craft, Maine. (My name was quite literally picked out of a hat after which I was granted a fellowship to travel to Haystack and take a workshop of my choosing from those being offered that summer). In a three-week course taught by now friend and mentor, Catherine Nash, I learned everything I could about Japanese papermaking and papermaking in general, this being my first official introduction to the craft. It was pure luck that I ended up at Haystack that summer, meeting a whole host of people doing what they love for a living—making books and paper.

While in college, I became interested in paper as a material in itself, not just as a substrate to print on. Being a graphic design student at the time was the antithesis of that. So, during my last year of college, interning at Auroville Papers in south India was a no-brainer. Their papermaking facility makes beautiful paper objects—beads, cast paper sculptures, books, jewelry. They treat their papers as completed works of art to be framed and hung on the wall. Auroville provided me the tranquility and the space I didn't realize I needed to create, to think creatively about how I wanted to use paper for my own work.

Surrounded by trees and paper-lovers, it was the perfect environment.

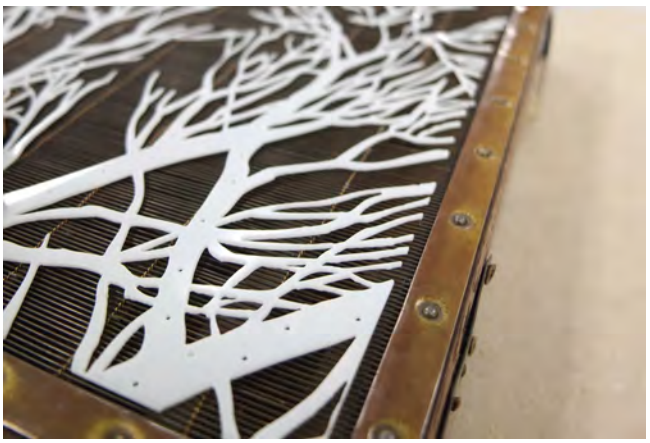
The landscape inspired me to create an animation based on a Japanese folk tale called *Green Willow*. For it, I made all the props using shaped wire embedded in between two sheets of paper. The five-minute minute stop-motion animation titled *Roopaantar* was then strung together using Adobe AfterEffects.

A still from *Roopaantar*.



In-progress shots from *Roopaantar*.

Working with paper so differently made me sure of my path, and I decided to apply for a masters at the University of Iowa Center for the Book. The move to the US, not to mention the Midwest, was a drastic shift from the busy streets of Delhi—not only in the natural environment but the built physical environment and the psychological environment. Suddenly there was all this space, and hardly any people. This made for a lot of work that looked inwards at my perception of the environments around me and how they differed from



the ones back home.

One of the animations I created while at UICB was made using watermarks in paper.[1] Using laser cut Delrin on the mould's surface, I created my images on paper. Traditionally, watermarks were made using shaped wire forms sewn onto the mould surface that displaced the fiber as the sheet was formed. These thinner areas transmit more light once the sheet is dry, creating a watermark. Using Delrin made this process easier, less time consuming, and allowed me to make my animation frames on a computer first,

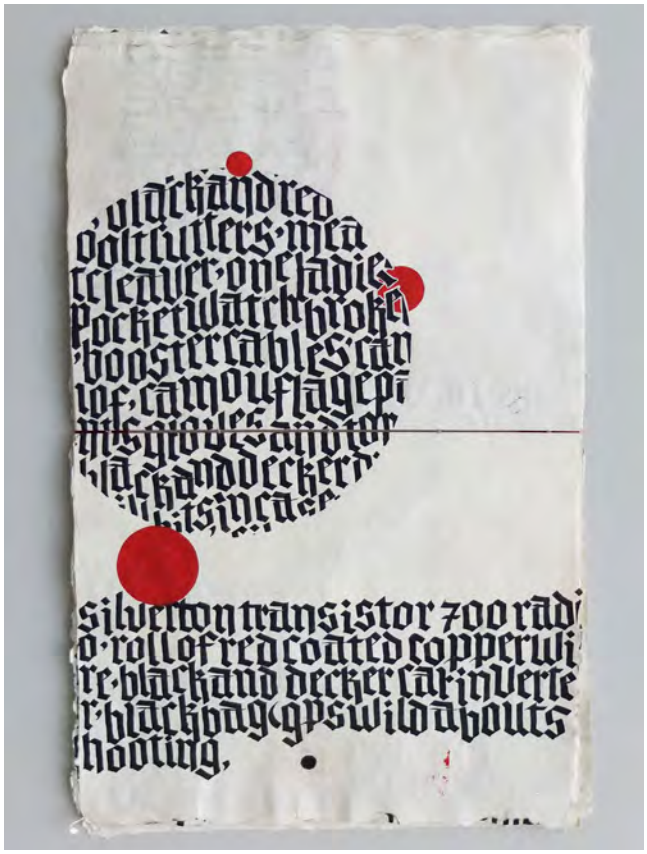
ensuring that the results were exactly as planned. The resulting stop-motion animation lasted a grand total of four seconds. To make fifty near-perfect sheets of paper with fifty slightly different watermarks, a lot of materials research and testing had to be carried out, which took about six months.

BOOK AND PAPER HISTORY PLAY A VITAL ROLE in my work. The journey of papermaking from China to Spain and how the craft changed is of great interest me. Paper made during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries in India is what much of my research focuses on. This gorgeous paper was used for Islamic and Indic manuscripts, the finished sheets burnished to a high shine. This finishing technique closes the fibers on the surface and compresses the sheet so that the calligrapher's ink sits on top of the sheet rather than sinking into it.

To explore this aspect in today's context, I worked on a collaborative project with calligrapher Cheryl Jacobsen. For it, I made all the paper as it may have been made centuries ago but using modern equipment. The hemp was fermented and then cooked in a lime solution before sheetforming. Jacobsen found a text which she explored through the book in her beautiful hand.

Found/Recovered* featured on the cover of *Letter Arts Review.

FOR SOME OF MY BOOKS, I try and make the paper whenever possible and relevant. I had a job as a production papermaker at the Morgan Conservatory in Cleveland which primed me for production in a way my graduate schooling had not. Working with the raw materials day in and day out helped me understand the finished product in a different way. While there, I would do pulp studies in my free time to learn the fiber and the beater better. I focused one of my pulp studies on abaca—a fiber from the banana plant. The longer this fiber is beaten in the Hollander beater, the longer it takes to form a single sheet and the more translucent the resultant sheet becomes.



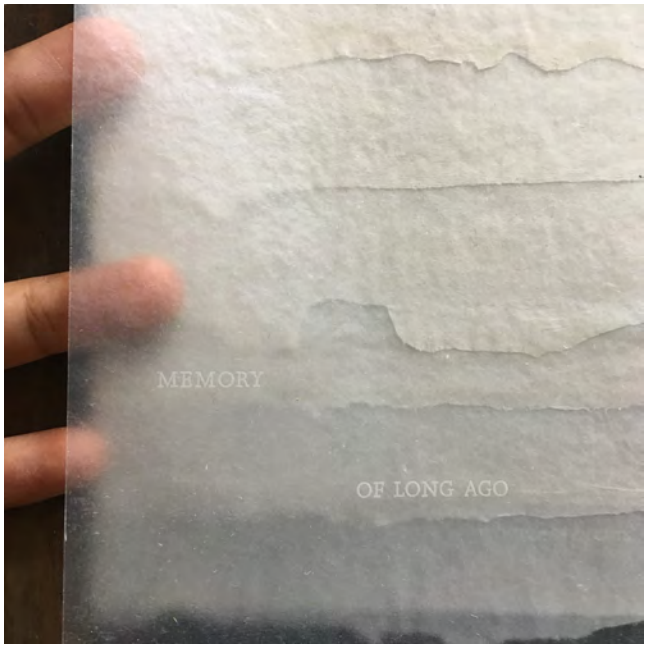
A spread from *Found/Recovered* made in collaboration with Cheryl Jacobsen.

Thin sheets of abaca stacked together to create a gradation of white.

From these studies came *The Memory of Long Ago.* The book explores our perception of the color white. Below is a text paraphrased from my colophon:

> Breast milk, semen and snow were perhaps our first encounters with white. But what if snow had fallen orange or black? How would our early perceptions of life, creation, and reverence of nature affect our current notions of virginity, race, purity, beauty? White would no longer seem clean, hospital and gallery walls may no longer be painted white.
>
> *Memory of Long Ago* has been made using highly beaten abaca fibers that were letterpress printed using Joanna types. Papers were waxed and bound to resemble an ice core. Layers of frozen water, or firn, hold our planet's memories from long ago.

Printed white on white, the text for this project was used with permission from a book by Kenya Hara titled *White*. As one goes through the book, the text slowly reveals itself, one line then the next. The previous lines slowly disappearing as the pages are turned. The wax treatment leaves the paper near transparent making it possible to read multiple lines at a time, allowing for a different reading of the same text.



Title page for *Memory of Long Ago.*

The staggered pages and layered text offer different readings each time.

USING THE SAME PAPERS, I worked on a book titled *Absence*. It was made based on a call and response theme to a show being hosted by the UICB. I was assigned a book of historical significance, Gerard's Herball, published in 1597, along with Lothar Meggendorfer's *Party of Six.* In the end I chose to work with the herbal. Its original owner had pressed plants related to the text within the book's pages. The conservation department at the University of Iowa had filed the pressed plants away separately, making sure to note which page numbers were attributed to these various plants.

The gutters of the pages had lightly stained, embossed impressions of some of these specimens. One had to strain to see them in the dim light of the library.

The plants were encapsulated in between two layers of plastic. The sheets were stacked one on top of another, making it possible to see through nearly the entire stack. I saw this as a different reading of the book itself. So in the end, my response to the call was to these pressed plants and how they were preserved, rather than the text.

Absence cannot be seen without the presence of light. The images of six plants from the herbal were


APPENDIX.

The stained gutter of Gerard's *Herball* at the John Martin Rare Book Room, University of Iowa.

created using cut-outs in a sheet of highly beaten translucent abaca that was folded in three. The cut-out was placed in the central panel, the other two panels used to enclose and protect it. Just as one had to strain to see the impressions of the pressed plants in the herbal in the library, one needs to hold this book up against the light in order to reveal what lies within its pages.

***Absence* as seen in transmitted light.**

The carefully encased plants layered atop one another.

Leonhart Fuchs, *De Historia Stirpium Commentarii Insignes*, 1543.

Dara Shikoh Album, 1630–33, British Library Add.Or.3129, f.64r.

THE PROJECT I HAVE BEEN WORKING ON before and during the pandemic is a book about floral portraiture in the Mughal miniature tradition and how it was impacted by colonial interests in the commercialization of plants. (The Mughal period in India can be compared to the Renaissance).

This book addresses the two very different ways of seeing and treating nature that emerged with colonial rule. On the one hand, the existing Indian culture of painting was used as a tool to appreciate natural beauty. Backgrounds and margins were highly decorated, and the plants in these portraits were not necessarily an accurate representation of their real-life counterparts. This aesthetic and book culture that glorified nature and beauty became secondary to the European aesthetic that focused on botany and science—a beautifully executed but targeted system for identifying and classifying plants purely for their commercial gain.

The nature of the Mughal manuscript and illumination patronized for the sheer love of plants was demolished by this European scientific botanical aesthetic created for the colonialization of plants.

Needless to say, synthesizing this idea into an artist book has taken the better part of three years. Still in progress, the papers I plan to use for the book will be traditionally-made raw hemp papers, the kind that were originally used by miniature painters in the Mughal courts. Manuscripts in Mughal India would have taken up to fifteen years to complete with more than four artists working on a single image. To honor that collaborative model of the past, the illustrations of the book will be printed using multiple wood-engraved blocks in collaboration with a miniature painter. He will then add finishing touches or embellishments to the printed image as he sees fit.

The endpages are designed based on stone latticework found in architecture of that period and will be cut by craftspeople working in the sanjhi (paper cutting) tradition in India.

The layouts, image, and text placement and the paper used for this book will all reflect and take

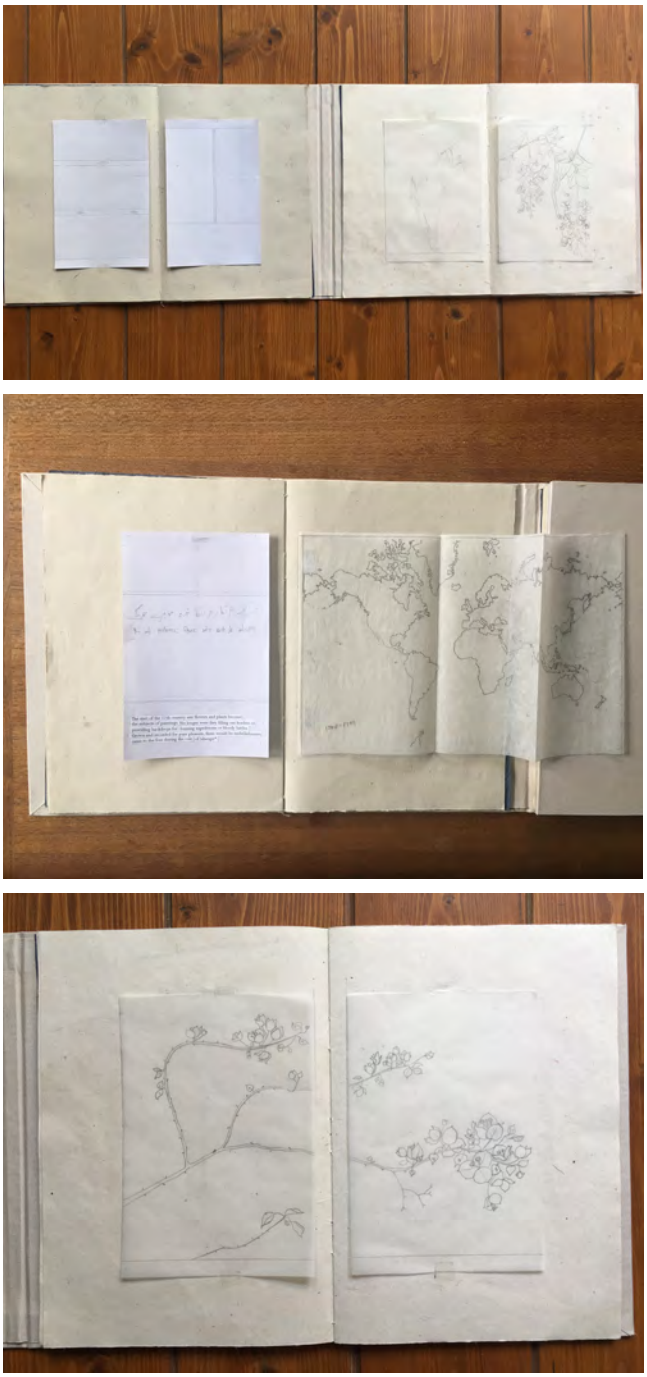
The three wood engraved blocks that were used to create the first proof print for the book.

A proof print of the kachnar one of the flowers to feature in the book.

inspiration from the Islamic manuscript tradition. These will be accompanied by couplets written by a poet in Urdu with translations in Hindi and explanations in English.

The illustrated section of the book will open left to right as in an Islamic manuscript. This section will be juxtaposed with a supporting text in English, that section of the book opening right to left; a conversation between the two aesthetics.

vWorking collaboratively, this book highlights themes that will carry through to future work: to look critically at book history and examine whose stories we tell and how we tell them.



A binding mock-up.

NOTE

1.Pandey, Radha, "Watermarks in Motion," *Guild of Book Workers Journal 46* (2018): 17-21. https://guildofbookworkers.org/sites/guildofbookworkers.org/files/journal/gbwjournal_46_2018.pdf

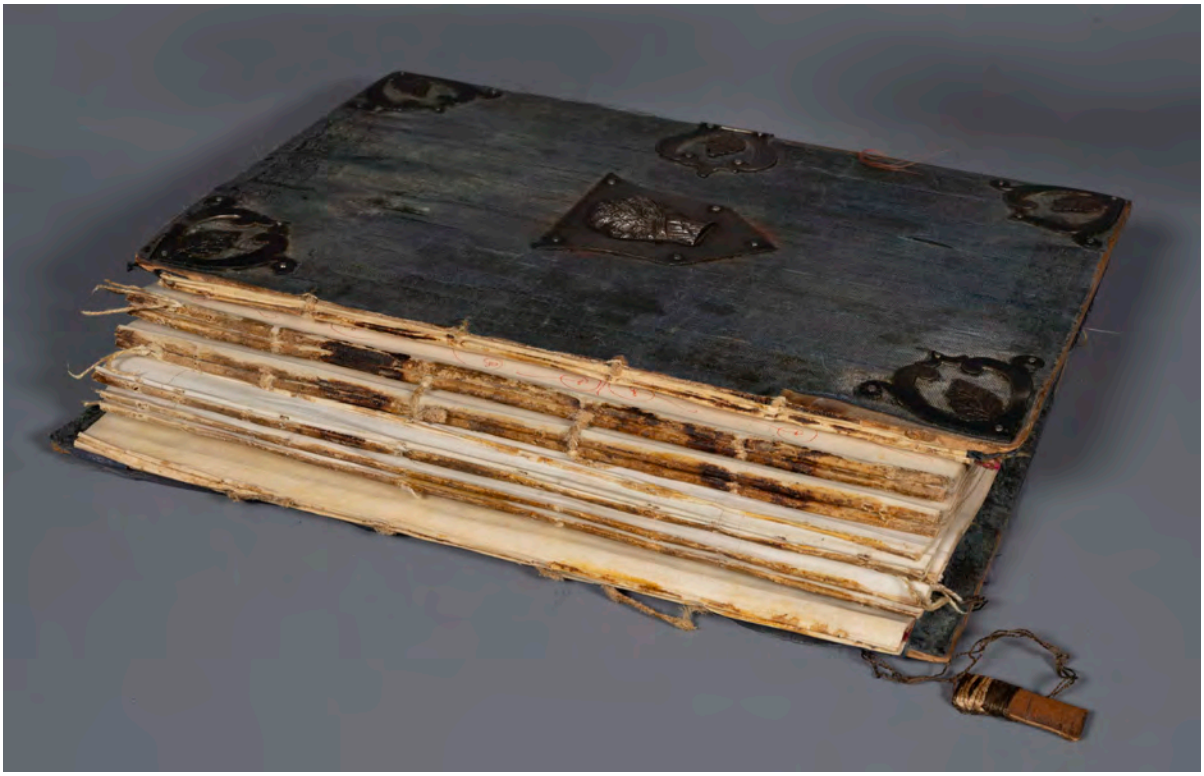


Figure 1. Three-quarter view of broken text block.

PRESERVING THE PASSAGE OF TIME

THROUGH ANACHRONISTIC BINDINGS

Jen Hunt Johnson and Maren Rozumalski

TODAY'S CONSERVATORS HAVE ADOPTED A "LESS IS MORE" approach to their work in response to invasive treatments of the past, which prioritized aesthetics over retention of original material. In book conservation, this shift has occurred slowly given that significance of the text is the driving force that determines value, less so the binding itself. Rebinding has been a common practice for the purpose of repair, to facilitate use, or to suit the needs of a collector. In this process, however, important information can be lost. Physical attributes of an initial binding can help date a text, owner's marks and bookplates can determine provenance, and even the untrimmed margins of a page can suggest origins based on the place and period of paper manufacture. Appreciation for these important artifactual cues has increased as researchers look to uncover new information from primary source materials. Preservation of original material is paramount, and this approach has become the modern benchmark for ethical conservation treatment. ¶ But what if a damaged book is no longer contained in its initial binding? What if the initial evidence is lost but replaced with a binding from a much later time? Is this anachronistic binding important to retain, and how do conservators make decisions about representing the object going forward and ultimately decide what is in need of repair? These were some of the questions raised in regard to a fifteenth-century manuscript at the University of Notre Dame Hesburgh Libraries.

—JEN HUNT JOHNSON AND MAREN ROZUMALSKI

Jen Hunt Johnson is a Special Collections Conservator for the University of Notre Dame Hesburgh Libraries. She earned her MA, CAS in Art Conservation from Buffalo State College, and also holds an MFA in Interdisciplinary Book and Paper Arts from Columbia College Chicago. She is a past Program Chair for the Book and Paper Group, and is a Professional Associate of AIC.

Maren Rozumalski is the Gladys Brooks Conservation Fellow for the University of Notre Dame Hesburgh Libraries. She earned her MA in Conservation from West Dean College 2019. She also holds a Graduate Diploma in Books and Library Materials from West Dean College.

INTRODUCTION, EXAMINATION, AND CONDITION

I FIRST EXPERIENCED MANUSCRIPT cod. Lat. c. 7, in pieces.[1] The binding was completely detached, and the text block was loosely held together with deteriorated adhesive and broken threads. In its current state, the manuscript was being used much like a cut-a-way book model, to illustrate elements of the binding structure that would have been inaccessible when it was in better condition. Composed in Latin, the manuscript is a copy of two works by Augustine of Hippo, a theologian and philosopher of the fourth century. It includes *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On the Teachings of Christianity*), and *Retractationes*, a piece that Augustine wrote late in his life to clarify and explain some of his earlier works. In its broken state, the manuscript was clearly not safe for use and planning treatment for its repair became imperative.

Figure 2. Front board with metal furnishings and central armorial.

A thorough examination was initiated to document the current condition of the manuscript. The textblock was made of parchment leaves, which overall were found to be in good condition with no tears or losses and minimal discoloration of the parchment. The text was composed in black ink with rubrics in red. Gilt initials with red and blue backgrounds marked the beginning of each section, and botanical elements added further interest to the margins.

Figure 3. Rear board with clasp.

The leaves were sewn onto four single-raised cords identified only by remnants of cord found beneath the velvet covering and laced into the boards with a few remaining fibers still attached to the spine. These cord remnants did correspond to the sewing holes that were most recently used and appeared to be raised rather than recessed.[2] Sewing throughout the text was broken, with sections of the parchment leaves held together by remaining loose threads and residual adhesive. Only the threads nested inside the folios remained, leaving little information to describe the pattern of thread across the supports. The spine piece was completely missing from the binding but appeared to have split cleanly at the edge of the boards. There was no evidence of lifting or remnants of secondary material, suggesting the binding was fully covered in velvet. Loss of the spine piece unfortunately removed important evidence of how this binding was constructed.

Manuscript and gilt initial.

Embroidered silk panels were adhered to single-folio parchment endpapers, creating made endsheets at the front and back. One lone endband, almost fully unraveled, was still connected to the text with brown and natural-colored threads wound

Unraveling endband with leather core.

around a leather core. Remnants of the colored thread were noted in the center of some sections confirming the two-color design (fig. 6).[3]

The manuscript was bound in ⅛" thick wooden boards, with slightly beveled inner edges. The boards were covered in a dark blue velvet, with blind stamped decoration along the bevels. Metal furniture adorned all four corners of the front and rear boards, with a detailed, raised armorial piece centered on the front board featuring a wheat motif. The corner pieces were flat, delicately cut designs, with no apparent tool marks to indicate how they were made. A metal clasp was attached to the rear board, with a catch onto the front.[4]

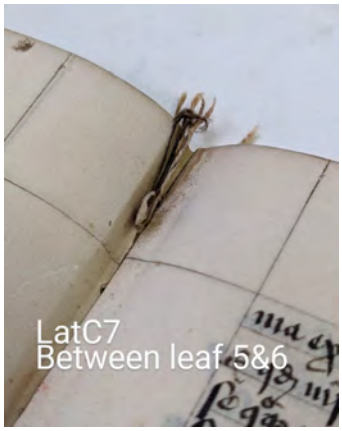


Figure 6. Remnants of endband threads.

Cod. Lat. c. 7 was in a very poor state when it arrived in the lab (figs. 1, 2, and 3). The wooden boards were fully detached, and the spine piece was missing. The velvet covering was heavily worn and had lost most of its nap. These images also show the broken sewing of the text block and the endband hanging by a thread. Based on the style of binding and the manuscript's provenance, the binding was believed to be English and dated to the seventeenth century. This would date the binding two centuries later than the manuscript itself.

One element of the binding raised both curiosity and questions about this date: the addition of brightly colored, floral-patterned silk endsheets. The pattern was composed of threads in bright pink and gold and did not seem consistent with the rest of the piece. It felt like a modern design, and its flamboyant, organic style seemed in conflict with the heavy, dark tones of the dark blue velvet covering. This curious contrast caught my attention when I first saw the piece and provoked discussion among my colleagues as we considered that the seventeenth century may not be an accurate date for the binding.

Further evidence suggested that the manuscript was bound more than once, as at least two sets of


Figure 7. Floral patterned silk endsheets.

sewing stations were discovered. Figure 8 illustrates the stations identified for each of the nine sections of the text. The diagram documents the pierced holes as they were found in each section along with the extant sewing threads shown in red. The sewing follows an abbreviated pattern. Here the green dots show the location of sewing stations that were unused at the time of examination, which are indicative of an earlier binding.

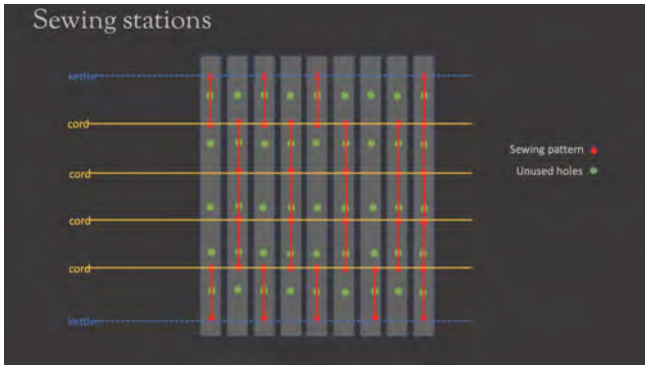


Figure 8. Current and previously used sewing stations.

CONSIDERATION FOR TREATMENT

AFTER COMPLETING THE CONDITION REVIEW, I weighed my observations against the treatment needs of the manuscript that would allow it to return to a safe condition for future use. Developing treatment plans for the Hesburgh Libraries always includes consideration of priorities. How will the material be used? Has it been requested for a single researcher? Is it for an exhibit? Will it receive repeated use for a class? Or is the identified need preventive? In collaboration with collections curators these questions are answered and treatment priorities determined in order

to best balance the immediate needs of researchers with the long-term preservation of collections. The following factors were discussed as part of prioritizing treatment for this piece and developing a treatment proposal:

Lat. c. 7 is heavily used for teaching in a recurring class on western codicology. Given this pattern of continued use, the primary concern was that the binding would need to support repeated handling, and in its fragmentary state, it was clearly unfit to do so. Students in the class study the history of the Western book and its physical transformations. They explore binding features that give clues to determining date or provenance and more fully elucidate the context of a manuscript as both a text and historical artifact. Working with unsecured pieces makes the text difficult to handle without risking damage to the manuscript leaves. Unbound leaves can become inadvertently rearranged disturbing the collation, or the tenuously held endband could be entirely lost. Continued use of this manuscript for teaching and direct study necessitated treatment to prolong access to the artifact.

Class use also requires that the book provide a particular type of evidence upon which students can draw useful conclusions; yet the binding in this case does not date to the period of production of the text. This has the potential to both add and detract from the student's experience. In the medieval era it was not uncommon to bind manuscript material well after its initial creation. Encountering a binding that is chronologically out of step is a useful encounter for students to have, as it offers an opportunity to identify conflicting physical traits of a book, which often point to interference or intervention. This study helps students to build in their knowledge and expectations of the features that identify a particular style and time period.

On the other hand, the later binding can prove to be a distraction. The physical attributes don't support an understanding of the object within the context of the period in which it was produced. Work done to rebind a manuscript may destroy evidence of an initial binding. In this case, prior sewing holes indicate that the manuscript has been bound more than once, so evidence of the original state has already been disturbed. Because of that, the current binding does not contribute to understanding the work at the time of its production but instead acts as another historical marker in the life of this artifact. Since it is used for teaching, awareness of this history is an even greater factor for consideration.

Lastly, evidence of the manuscript's most recent state is still present: the blue velvet binding, the decorative metal furnishings, the silk endleaves, and the fragmented endband. These elements are documentation of the manuscript's history. Attempting to repair this binding would be possible but invasive. The materials are no longer sound and are likely to deteriorate further through the course of treatment. As we currently have unrestricted access to these elements because of the damage (the detached endsheets, for example), the ability to analyze these pieces for further study would be restricted if we put them back together into a functional bound unit.

Based on these considerations, I proposed a treatment that I felt would best meet the goals of continued use of the object as a teaching and research artifact, while improving the structure and functionality of the binding to ensure long-term future access and preservation of this material.

My first priority was to rebind the manuscript to create a more stable structure. It was important that the structure be robust to protect the manuscript, but also that it would function well and be well suited to a parchment textblock. I was familiar with Gothic wooden boards bindings and felt this style had the advantage of being protective while offering a smooth supported movement of the text in which the leverage of the boards is shared across the whole book block. The wooden boards and laced-in cords provide ample structure and support. The cords lace from the outside of the boards to the inside, and this leverage pulls the spine into a slight round, which is desirable to resist the collapse of the text into a concave shape, a common occurrence with parchment bindings.

Gothic bindings span a period between the fourteenth and late sixteenth centuries.[5] This style of binding would be more in keeping with the period in which the manuscript was produced and was therefore a more appropriate choice than repairing the anachronistic binding in which it was most recently bound. I wanted to maintain a clean design, eliminating the flourish of decoration of its velvet-covered predecessor. Alum-tawed skin was an appropriate

choice for this style and could be completed simply, without tooling or other additional decoration. Maintaining a simplified style avoids any implication that the rebinding is meant to replicate or is in any way comparable to the initial binding. Lacking any evidence of the original binding, it is preferable to avoid superfluous elements and instead focus on the intention of creating a modern functional structure.

I would need to use an approach that would be conservationally sound, meaning to choose materials and a structure that will lend themselves to the long-term preservation of this book. Numerous examples of adaptation of wooden boards bindings have been developed to meet this criteria, so I knew this could be successfully accomplished.[6]

The fact that I had some experience in making this binding was also a consideration in pursuing the treatment. I already had experience with the action of the binding from having made a few models and from a prior rebinding experience. I had confidence that I could take on this project successfully and efficiently. This may seem like an obvious consideration. Conservators are expected to complete routine techniques with ease, but also be able to devise treatments for projects that don't fit a standard mold and rely on what we know fundamentally about structure and materials to engineer and solve unfamiliar problems. But with limited time and competing priorities in the library, complex projects have to be chosen wisely. In this case, I could undertake treatment with a limited number of unknowns, fitting the project within a list of other treatment priorities.

Creating a new binding for a text, particularly one in which we have no evidence of its initial binding, poses a challenge. What type of binding is appropriate? What are the effects of imparting a new iteration of binding onto such an early text? These questions prompted me to return to the concept of book interventions, an idea I first encountered during a seminar with Gary Frost in which he identifies conservation/restoration as one of five types of intervention.

The book intervention concept proposes that physical books record the actions of their use. Intervention is what people do to books and the book is the recording medium of all its interventions. Book intervention happens to individual copies aside from progressive deteriorations.[7]

Conservators are tasked with the preservation of the artifact and document to the best of our ability the life of that artifact. But there are implications when the physical nature of a work is "distracting" from appreciating the work as it's intended. The argument may be easier to apply to something like a painting, where the form of the work communicates the artist's original intent. In this case, any alteration to color, texture, or composition has a profound effect on a viewer's interaction with the work. But can the same be said for books? With books and other textual material, we have to contend with the dilemma of content (text) versus the container (binding). These two parts work as a whole, and while content can function independent of a binding or similar structure (we can copy text, digitize it, etcetera), the physical attributes of the whole artifact give richness to the text and offer an additional layer of understanding the work.

Conservators have many responsibilities in research libraries as we design treatments, first and foremost, structural stability for use. And we have limited resources to do our work, the most important being time. That said, it is also important to be cognizant of our impact, however innocuous, as we engage in treatment and consider implications of our work in the future as we make choices in leaving our own marks behind.

TREATMENT PROCESS

WHILE THE GOTHIC WOODEN BOARDS binding may be appropriate historically, some aspects of this style are problematic for long term preservation. Wood releases acidic components as it deteriorates, which can migrate into the manuscript causing further degradation. While wood was most common, pasteboards were also used during this period.[8] These boards are a lighter alternative to wooden boards, easily worked and shaped with sandpaper, and they eliminate potential concerns about the acidic components of wood. I chose to make mine from laminated blotter. Figure 9 shows the laminated layers of the boards.[9] After drying, I beveled the inner spine edge of the boards to fit the shoulder of the text and slightly beveled the interior board edges in keeping

Figure 9. Laminated blotter pasteboards.

with the style of this binding.

I allowed the boards to dry under weight for a few weeks. In the meantime, I turned to work on repairing the text block. I sewed the parchment sections with linen thread through a concertina of kozo tissue to create a barrier between the parchment and subsequent adhesive and linings. The manuscript was sewn onto four double cord supports with packed sewing for the first and last three sections and unpacked for the center sections. This provides extra support where needed but allows for more flexible movement of the spine. Single-folio parchment endsheets were added during sewing.[10] A hinge of alum-tawed goatskin was hooked around each of the endsheets and sewn through for added strength.[11]

Covering for the book was done with the same alum-tawed goatskin, which was edge-pared. I used a baggy back technique for covering in which the leather is adhered to the boards but not pasted to the spine.[12] This eliminates added moisture that could migrate into the parchment text during the covering process and also facilitates retreatment if needed, while still maintaining the appearance of a tight back binding. Even without adhesion to the spine, tying up around the cords creates the desired shape that would be expected from the leather molded across the spine. Figures. 10 and 11 detail the front and back of the completed binding and the opening.

Figure 10. After treatment three-quarter view, front board and spine.

Figure 11. After treatment three-quarter view, rear board and fore edge.

This treatment was very invasive, disconnecting the existing binding in favor of something more structurally sound. While little is yet known about the velvet binding and its relationship to the text, retaining its elements along with the rebound text is critical to allow for continued research. The velvet covered boards, silk endleaves, and remaining endband have all been retained. Maren Rozumalski, Gladys Brooks Conservation Fellow for the Hesburgh Libraries, designed and constructed an enclosure for these pieces, which she describes below:

CUSTOM ENCLOSURE

THE ENCLOSURE FOR LAT. C. 7 was designed with its life as a teaching aid in mind. Manuscripts have a living history, and the "retirement" of the velvet boards binding is an important moment in that history going forward. It would be too easy to overlook the previous binding if the retained elements were housed separately from the newly rebound manuscript. By creating a box that houses everything, nothing gets left behind on the shelf when the manuscript is requested.

I knew I was going to make a dual layer cloth clamshell box, so the only decision I needed to make was whether to house the bound manuscript in the lower compartment or the upper tray.[13] Having the smaller item below makes construction easier; however, I chose to place the manuscript in the upper tray. Since the rebound manuscript is the most important component of Lat. c. 7, I thought it was important that it be the first thing people see when

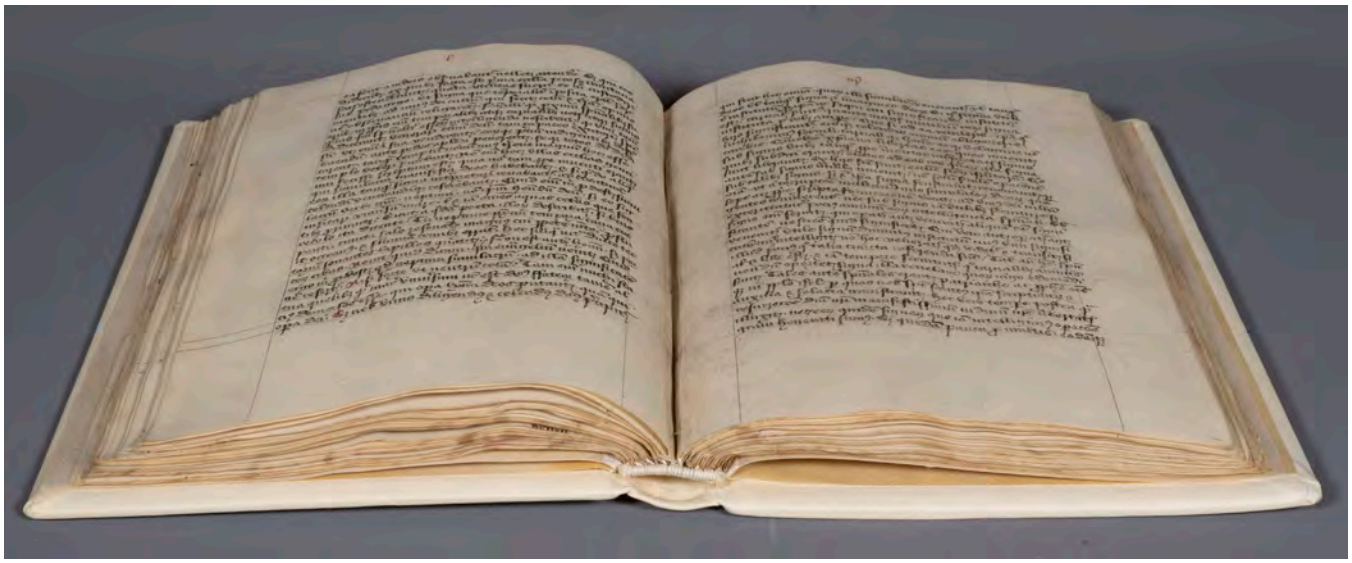


Figure 12. After treatment view of opening.

they open the box. Laying it in the tray is also better for the longevity of the binding, because it is easily lifted out rather than needing to slide in and out of the compartment.

Decision made, I moved on to the design and construction phase. I consider designing and constructing as aspects of the same phase because I always find myself modifying my plans as I go. I have made several dual layer boxes for collection items but no two were constructed in quite the same way. I either have an idea of a better way to do something or a part does not quite fit the way I thought it would, so I need to be able to adapt my plans as I go. Like everything we do in conservation, flexibility is key to success.

Construction started with making a phase box to house the remaining elements of the velvet binding. This came first because, as the larger of the items going into the box, it determined the overall dimensions of the cloth clamshell. I chose a phase box because they are fast, easy to make, and hold all of the binding elements together compactly. The elements were stacked in the same order they would have been if still part of the binding: the back board on the bottom, the two silk endsheets sandwiched in the middle, with the front board resting on top. (The endband fragment was encapsulated in a small polyester packet and fit perfectly when tucked between the beveled portions of the boards.) The clasp was laid flat as shown in figure 14 to keep the overall depth of the clamshell box from being too unwieldy. Volara foam was used on the base of the phase box to hold the board stack in place and add stability to the side of the box where the clasp sticks out.[14] The board stack was not flat on top due to the beveled boards and raised armorial piece, so Volara with cutouts to accommodate the centerpiece was also added to the innermost flaps. This adds stability to the closed structure of the phase box and makes tying it closed easier. Cotton twill tape ties also function as handles to aid in removing the phase box from the lower compartment.

Figure 13. Interior view of custom manuscript enclosure.

The clamshell's carrier tray, which has a lower compartment for the velvet binding and an upper tray for the manuscript, was started like a standard double-walled cloth clamshell. The only difference was that the inner wall was only the height of the phase box, which makes it possible to add a horizontal piece of board that becomes the base piece for the upper tray. It is crucial to have at least one board thickness on the

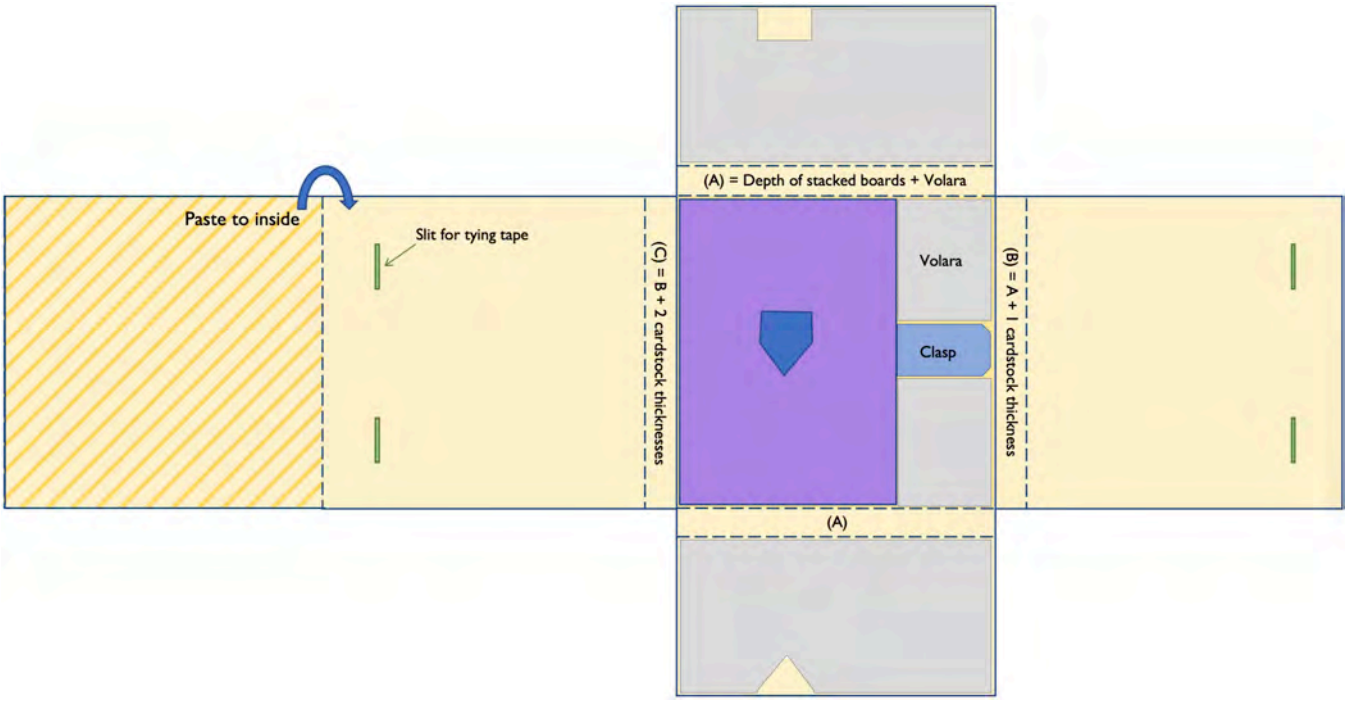


Figure 14. Diagram of the phase box housing the velvet binding elements.

inside so the upper tray base has a "lip" on which to sit.[15] This is the time to line the base and walls of the lower compartment with paper, leaving it unadhered at the open end so the cloth can be turned in neatly later. Next, the base piece of the upper tray was wrapped in the same lining paper and glued onto the lip.

The upper tray side walls are double walls since the new tawed binding has the same dimensions as the wooden boards, but the back wall needed to be extremely thick because it has to fill the space required in the lower compartment to accommodate the clasp. This end of the box was kept from getting too heavy by making up most of the wall's thickness with strips of corrugated board. Only the innermost and topmost layers were made of binder's board (fig. 15). This made for a lightweight yet sturdy wall with clean corners for covering cloth to go over. The box was finished by covering it and casing it in just like any standard cloth clamshell.[16]

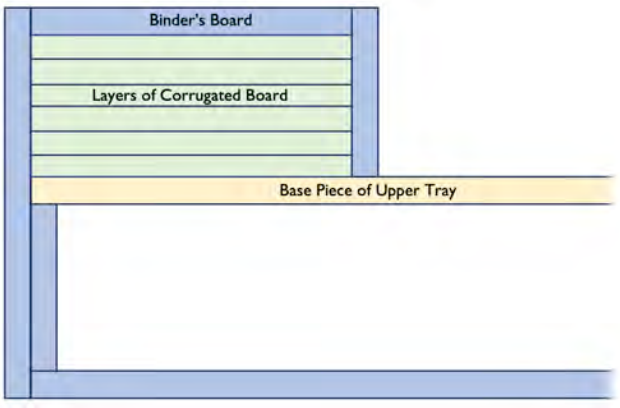


Figure 15. Cutaway of corrugated board layers in the back wall.

ANALYSIS AND FUTURE WORK

WHILE THE WORK FOR THIS MANUSCRIPT is complete, unanswered questions remain concerning the velvet binding. I am interested in finding ways to use simple non-destructive techniques to find evidence to help better understand the materials I encounter and have been developing techniques in our conservation lab to achieve this goal. We recently upgraded our digital imaging tools to conduct UV and IR photography, as well as digital image capture for microscopy. We continue to build our skills and experience to conduct analysis with confidence, and this project turned out to be a good fit to explore our growing analytical capabilities.

Early in this project the curator had requested images of notations in the text using UVA-induced visible fluorescence.[17] As part of this process, I chose to image the silk endsheets as well. Under UVA, some

Figure 16. Silk endsheet under normal illumination.

of the threads were discovered to fluoresce a bright orange. Rose madder, an organic pigment, has been used since ancient times and is known to fluoresce in this way.[18] It could have been the dye that was used here, but if so it would not support the hypothesis that this silk is of a later production. However, there are modern synthetic dyes also known to fluoresce in this way. Further analysis to narrow the possible types of dyes used in this fabric could more clearly indicate when this binding was produced or at least when these silk endsheets were added.

Figure 17. Silk endsheet under ultraviolet illumination.

The weave pattern of the silk may also give clues to its period of production. The photomicrograph in figure 18 illustrates the fine and consistent weave of the silk. Figure 19 shows a selvedge edge of the velvet that was found beneath a lifting paste down on the front board. This edge has a pink and blue striped pattern, which is commonly seen on modern machine-made fabrics.

Characteristics like these may be informative as evidence of a much later period of production than the seventeenth century. The metal furniture featured on the boards may also offer some clues to date this binding. The metal work is very fine and smooth with no obvious tool marks. The centerpiece features a common heraldic design.[19] Further study of these elements will develop a clearer picture of where this manuscript has traveled and how it has evolved over time.

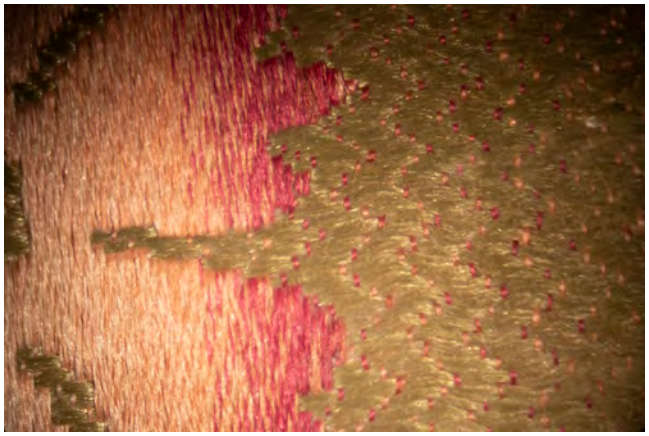


Figure 18. Silk threads at 10x magnification.

CONCLUSION

My role as a conservator is to stabilize and repair materials to support their long-term preservation. But books are not static objects. They are meant to be used. That accumulated use over years, decades, or centuries adds context to the material itself and richness to its value as an artifact. The book passes through many hands, and its use shifts over time. What once may have been prized by a lone collector is now an academic workhorse with many hands interested in turning its pages. Conservators have to take into account the physical information the book presents to us so that we can recognize and interpret the places it has been. We serve as translators as we record this information, attempt to make sense of the clues, and share it. Through treatment, we ultimately leave yet another mark in the cumulative story of the book.

This project offered an opportunity for investigation and reflection on how my treatment decisions impact the future experience of the material I work on. Lat. c. 7 is now packaged in a completely different

Figure 19. Selvedge edge of velvet at 10x magnification.

way. It moves and functions differently. It is a bound book again and no longer a collection of loose pages. Future users will engage with this book in a completely different way, most importantly, a safer and more functional one. By maintaining all of the elements of the binding in one container, users are invited to experience the lives the manuscript has led and incorporate that information into their own research. There are many more stories left to be uncovered in this book, but I feel like it's shared a few.

NOTES

1. David T. Gura, "Cod. Lat. c. 7," in *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts of the University of Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 257–59.

2. Figure 1 illustrates the broken sewing and remnants of cord on the spine. Sewing stations here are pierced and not sawn-in. The sewing likely was a simple all-along stitch around the cords, though more evidence is needed to confirm this.

3. Documenting elements such as threads, or other tiny details within a large text can be cumbersome during initial examination, particularly when accurate notations of the element's location are needed with enough description to be meaningful. While formal documentation can describe these types of features in detail, a quick cell phone image can be useful to keep track of features when they are first encountered. The problem with this is that informal images can easily become disorganized and disassociated from their original context before a full description can be completed. Annotation tools now offered on many new cell phone cameras can help make quick observations more accurate and efficient to maintain. Text, or drawings can be overlaid directly onto an image to highlight details, or include a quick reference such as a page number or location, making it easy to return later for more thorough examination and documentation. Figure 6 shows an example of an annotated image made with a Google Pixel 4a, which helped to capture this detail efficiently.

4. The clasp on cod. Lat. c. 7 does not follow the standard placement of clasps on English bindings as the catch in this case is on the upper cover. "In bindings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (and probably a good deal earlier) the position of the clasps is a fairly reliable guide to the country of origin; in England and France they were normally fitted to the upper cover with the catch on the lower…" For more, see Bernard C. Middleton, in *A History of English Craft Bookbinding Technique*, 4th ed., (Newcastle, DE and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 1996), 127–29.

5. Szirmai's study of Gothic bindings includes 410 bindings, dating from 1300 -1600. For more, see J. A. Szirmai, "Gothic Bindings," in *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding*, (Routledge, 1999), 173–284.

6. Roger Williams completed an excellent blog post of a similar treatment for the Northwestern University Library. For more see, Roger Williams, "Stabilizing History: How and Why We Rebound a 15th-Century Manuscript," *Northwestern Libraries Blog* (blog), 2018, https://sites.northwestern.edu/northwesternlibrary/2018/11/16/stabilizing-history-how-and-why-we-rebound-a-15th-century-manuscript/.

7. "Book Interventions Books Remade by Use," in *Suave Mechanicals: Essays on the History of Bookbinding*, vol. 4 (Ann Arbor, MO: The Legacy Press, 2017), 157-80.

8. Szirmai, "Gothic Bindings."

9. I have about eight sheets of blotter here laminated using Zen shofu wheat starch paste.

10. Parchment endsheets were constructed with Pergamena binding goat (thin @ 0.5 oz) kid skins, https://www.pergamena.net.

11. Hinge, and outer covering of the binding constructed with Pergamena alum tawed goat, https://www.pergamena.net.

12. Kassie Janssen, "A Monster of a Treatment," *The Preservation Lab Blog* (blog), October 28, 2019, https://blog.thepreservationlab.org/tag/baggy-back-binding.

13. The Library of Congress has instructions for a similar box in *Boxes for the Protection of Books: Their Design and Construction.* My process is different, but the results are comparable. For more see Margaret R.

Brown, *Boxes for the Protection of Books: Their Design and Construction*. (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Directorate, Collections Services, Library of Congress, 1994).

14. Volara is a chemically inert, closed-cell polyethylene foam used to line drawers, display cases, and boxes providing protection for fragile objects. For more see, http://www.universityproducts.com/volara-polyethylene-foam.html.

15. I recommend making the inner wall thicker if the book going into the tray is particularly heavy. Just be sure to add it to calculations you are making, especially if you are following written instructions for a standard double walled box.

16. Covering was completed using Iris book cloth #853 Midnight. Step-by-step instructions for this step will soon be available on the AIC Book and Paper Group Wiki.

17. UVA-induced visible fluorescence is a non-destructive technique that involves applying near ultraviolet rays (320-400 nm) to an object, the energy of which excites specific compounds in the object's make-up that can emit back visible light, called fluorescence. The technique can help distinguish between different materials and help to enhance attributes which may be difficult to see under normal light conditions.

18. "Madder," in *Conservation and Art Materials Encyclopedia Online (CAMEO)* (Museum of Fine Art Boston), accessed February 23, 2022, http://cameo.mfa.org/wiki/Madder.

19. Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, "Chapter XVIII Trees, Leaves, Fruits, and Flowers," in *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* (Project Gutenberg, 2012), 278, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41617/41617-h/41617-h.htm#page278.

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1997 *Vietnam Journal* 6.375" x 6.5", 54 pages, Vietnam.

REVISITING TRAVEL JOURNALS
WHILE SHELTERING IN PLACE

Dorothy Krause

AFTER BEING INTRODUCED TO COMPUTERS IN THE LATE 1960S, I combined traditional and digital media, incorporating photographs of people and places from around the world while attempting to understand the issues that unite and divide us. In 1997, in an effort to escape from the computer, I purchased a blank book to document a planned trip—a "travel journal"—which introduced me to the scale, the hand work, and the sequential narrative possibilities of the book arts. Since then, I have averaged two travel journals a year and completed over 150 books, many related to my travel experiences. During this time of sheltering in place, I decided to revisit my travel journals and consider how they have influenced my work. Some are compilations of individual pages marking the journey's progress, but more important to me are those that are thematically coherent, telling a relevant visual story. ¶ My first journal had a brown paper cover that wrapped around and closed with a strip of bamboo. It was chosen for a three-week trip to Vietnam to explore the legacies of that tragic conflict. Although I had intended to write about my experiences, the book also expanded to accommodate the ephemera I had gathered. ¶ Back in my studio, I scanned the pages and used the computer to distort my writing and add my photographs. I printed the resulting images on film and transferred the large-format prints to handmade papers from the region. Since writing was difficult and image-making easy, my future journals became primarily visual.

—DOROTHY KRAUSE

Dorothy Simpson Krause was introduced to computers while working on her doctorate at Penn State in the late 1960s and has since combined traditional and digital media. She embeds archetypal symbols and fragments of image and text into her work, combining the humblest of materials with the latest in technology, to evoke the past and herald the future. Her artmaking is an integrated mode of inquiry that links concept and media in an ongoing dialogue, as a visible means of exploring meaning.

After receiving a Smithsonian Technology in the Arts Award for organizing "Digital Atelier: A printmaking studio for the 21st century," at the American Art Museum in 1997, Krause shifted her focus to artist books. Her work is in more than 50 public collections, including Harvard's Houghton Library, Yale's Beinecke Library, and the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston). She has been a Visiting Artist at the American Academy in Rome and at Harvard's Countway Library; the Helen Salzberg Artist in Residence at the Jaffe Center for Book Arts at Florida Atlantic University; and the Von Hess Visiting Artist at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Krause is Professor Emeritus at Massachusetts College of Art, the author of Book + Art: Handcrafting Artists' Books (North Light, 2009), and co-author of Digital Art Studio: Techniques for combining inkjet printing with traditional art materials (Watson-Guptill, 2004). Her work can be seen at www.DotKrause.com, and she can be contacted at DotKrause@DotKrause.com.

2001 *Cuba/history rewritten* 6.375" x 6.5", 53 pages, Cuba.

ALTHOUGH I HAD NO EXPERTISE RELEVANT to the places I traveled, I often discovered an issue or a story to explore. In Cuba, in February 2001, foraging for collage materials, I found a history book written in 1925. I collaged its pages with materials related to Batista, Castro, Russia, and the CIA, as I considered how time and political persuasion affect, counteract, and obliterate viewpoints. Returning home, I replaced the spine on my overstuffed, triangle-shaped book to allow it to recover some semblance of normality and again used the scanned pages in my large-format work.

To avoid the problem caused by adding too much material to a bound book, I found another wrapped journal, this one with a leather cover, and I headed to the Middle East in September of 2001 to consider why one would kill another in the name of God. I was in Israel on 9/11, and I began filling the journal with images ripped from the headlines. The wrapped structure held my many collages, dutifully serving its expandable purpose, and the pages were again used in the production of large-format images.

2001 *Promised Land* 6.65" x 5", 32 pages, Middle East.

Instead of being source material for my large-format work, the journals became my impetus for traveling, and I began taking workshops, learning how to keep them from falling apart. Although I carried a pencil case and a clear acetate envelope with a small selection of materials, I relied on ephemera and artifacts found in bazaars and flea markets along the way. As such, the line between journal, book, and book-like structure became more fluid.

2002 *folio* 20" x 7" open, 5" x 7" closed, Lancaster, PA.

IN LANCASTER, PA, I found a handmade antique leather folio/wallet that a farmer or traveler might have used at the turn of the century, and I added images and old letters related to the area. In another find, an embossed metal box, I referenced Amish quilts with a concertina of pierced Arches on black cover, collaged paper quilt blocks, and text from early German documents.

Although my goal was to complete each piece while traveling and away from the computer, some required additional research and assistance. In Ireland in the fall of 2002, I encountered the story of 133 unmarked graves discovered on property held by the Sisters of Charity. Returning home, I found that an estimated 30,000 woman worked in virtual slavery in the Magdalene laundries. I began this book shortly after in a class at the Center for Book Arts with Shana Leino. Referencing a bible or hymnal, this full leather Coptic binding over papyrus would have been beyond my limited abilities without considerable instruction.

2002 Pieced Together 6.25" x 4.75" each, tin box 6.25" x 4.75" x 2.25", 10 pages, Lancaster, PA.

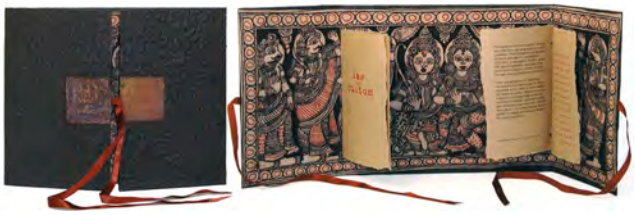
2003 *Magdalene Laundries* 6" x 4.25" x 1.25", 72 pages, Ireland.

2004 *India* 7.25" x 4.75", 124 pages, India.

2004 *Guardians* 5" x 6.25" x 2.25", 10 pages, India.

2004 *Weaver* 7" x 5.75", 2 pages, India.

2004 *many truths* 4.75" x 10.5" x 5.25" tall, 2 pages, India.



2004 *law and custom* 8.75" x 11" closed, 8.75" x 22" open, 8 pages, India.

IN THE WINTER OF 2004, I spent three weeks in India and made five books—*India*, *Guardians*, *Weaver*, *many truths*, and *law and custom*—using found objects and simple structures. I added the text for *many truths* and *law and custom* after returning home.

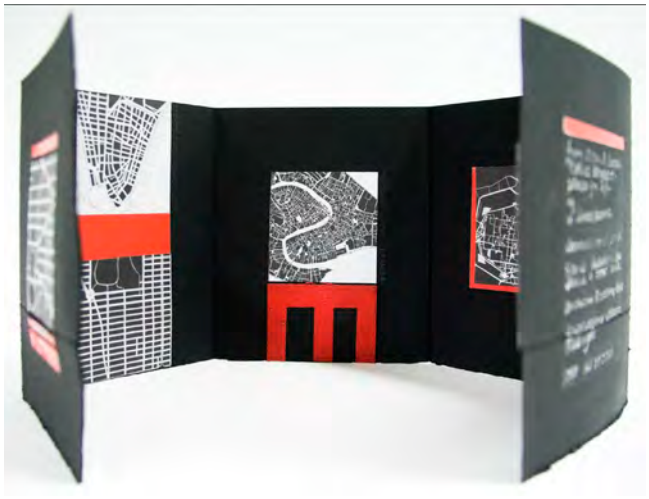
2005 *Terme* 6.5" x 4", 12 pieces unbound, Rome, Italy.

AS A VISITING ARTIST at the American Academy in Rome, in December 2005, I also made a number of journals. *Trastevere*, *One Square Mile*, and *Palladio* are concertinas, and *Chapel* and *Labeling Women* have case bindings. One of the books, *Terme*, began with a small book on the ancient baths (terme) of Rome and a copper printing plate found in a street vendor's bookstall. Reproduction coins of the heads of some of the emperors who had built baths were collaged with early etchings, diagrams, and copper leaf. The unbound pieces were wrapped in the paper showing the printed copper plate.

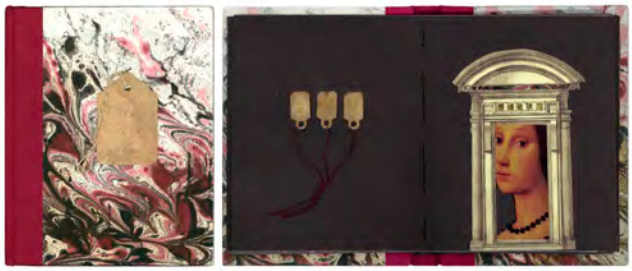
2005 *Trastevere* 6.5" x 4.75" closed, 6.5 x 38" open, 16 pages, Rome, Italy.

The wrapped binding, which could expand as needed, continued to be a favorite, and I began to make a leather cover with a longer wrap than I anticipated needing. I carried a selection of papers to add signatures as content demanded, and often incorporated guards or spacers to provide room for thick additions. At the end of the trip, the back cover was cut to size. It worked well for *Fasnacht*, created in

2005 *Chapel* 6" x 5.75", 60 pages, Rome, Italy.



2005 *One Square Mile* 4.5" x 4" closed, 4.5" x 20" open, 12 pages, Rome, Italy.



2005 *Labeling Women* 6" x 5" book, 40 pages, Rome, Italy.

2005 *Palladio* 2.75" x 2.75" x 1.5" closed, 1.75" x 26" open, 15 pages, Rome, Italy.

Switzerland, *West*, made in New Mexico, and *Land of the Incas*, made in Peru.

2005 *Fasnacht* 7.5" x 6", 24 pages, Switzerland.

2005 *West* 7.5" x 6.75", 24 pages, Santa Fe, NM.

2008 *Land of the Inca* 8" x 5.25", 48 pages, Peru.

AS I CONTINUED TO TRAVEL, I took more workshops and began to shift my focus toward making books. I wanted everything about the book to support its content: size, papers, binding, cover, materials, and box, slipcase, or bag, if it had one. Some of my travel journals had similar characteristics,

2008 *Sicily* 8" x 7", 56 pages, Sicily.

and a leather-bound concave spine book, made in a workshop with Wendy Hale Davis, went with me to Sicily.

A BOOK I MADE using Karen Hanmer's long-stitch binding version went to Egypt with me in 2010 and became *Valley of the Kings*. I also took a second book, that had been made using Cherryl Moote's embellished two-sewn-as-one binding, which had pages aged with tea, coffee, and walnut ink, and a cover from paper embossed with hieroglyphic-like symbols. It was completed in Cairo with collaged vintage photographs and titled *Early Explorations*.

2010 Valley of the Kings 7.5" x 5.25" x 1.25, 84 pages, Egypt.

2010 Early Explorations 6" x 5.5", 24 pages, Egypt.

IN 2011, I WENT TO BERMUDA, with a Daniel Kelm wire-edge binding and metal covers. I discovered a dark side to the island and focused on collages related to their history of slavery.

FROM 2012 TO 2017, I was an artist in residence, teaching on Oceania Cruise Lines. With no idea how long this opportunity might last, I again used the wrapped leather cover and added signatures as needed. I traveled to Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Norway, Finland, Russia, Estonia,

2011 *Slave Trade* 8.5" x 5.5", 34 pages, Bermuda.

Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, American Samoa, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Tonga, Malta, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Jordan, Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Croatia, Montenegro, Greece, Italy, Monaco, Spain, Portugal, France, United Kingdom, Canada, St. Martin, British Virgin Islands, St. Barts, Martinique, Barbados, St. Lucia, Aruba, Curacao, Granada, St. Vincent, and Antigua. Because of the number of ports covered in such a short time and my workshop schedule onboard, I couldn't focus on the uniqueness of any one area, so I kept a continuous visual narrative over the many voyages. However, in American Samoa I visited Robert Louis Stevenson's grave and bought vintage tapa cloth, and this year I completed my homage to him, *Requiem*.

2012 – 2017 *Oceania* 6.5" x 5.5" x .75", Oceania Cruise Lines.

IN 2017, FOR A RETREAT OUTSIDE ROME, I brought several monoprints and Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic War, printed in 1888 and illustrated with an old map and costume plates. I toned the disparate pages with acrylics and watercolor and, using Tim Ely's drum-leaf binding, took advantage of the double page spreads. The handwritten text, a quote from Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar, seemed appropriate since in many ways the U.S. government seemed to be "afloat," the title of the book.

2017 Afloat 7.75" x 5.75" x .75", 22 pages, Rome.

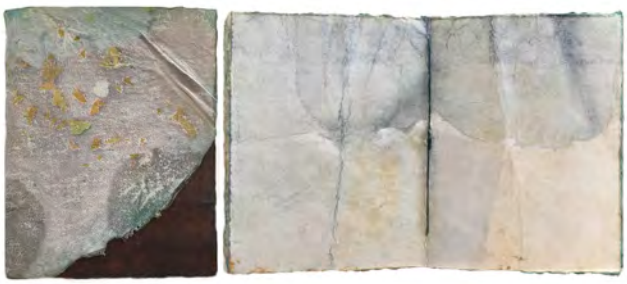
THE FOLLOWING YEAR IN GERMANY, I bought a book with images of sculptures by sixteenth century sculptor Tilman Riemenschneider and later saw an exhibition at the Nuremberg Documentation Center discussing the Concordat, an agreement between the Vatican and the Nazi government. Using bright orange-red painted, mono-printed pages I had brought from home, I collaged the contrasting images. The cover was made from the sleeve of a vintage leather jacket, found in a local shop. The cross shape created by the stitching amplified the effect.

2018 *Concordat* 5.5" x 3.75" x .75", 26 pages, Germany.

2018 Apache 5.5" x 3.75" x 1.75" closed and 5.5" x 28" open with 10 inserts printed back and front, Phoenix, AZ.

LATER THAT YEAR, I carried a well-worn leather pouch and small eco-printed tags on a trip to Phoenix and in the Heard Museum found an exhibition documenting our appalling treatment of Native Americans. I collaged vintage photos onto the tags, which were placed into a Hedi Kyle pocket accordion, designed to fit into the pouch. The colophon describes how prospectors and settlers, supported by the might of the United States government, gained their land, natural resources, and wealth while the culture, religion, and ceremonies of the Apaches fell into decline.

ECO PRINTING, AS TAUGHT BY Merike van Zanten, reappeared on the cover of a small journal of leather over board that I took to Alaska in 2019. Onto the wrinkled pages, which had been previously dipped into rust and indigo, I drew and painted Alaska's mountains and glaciers with graphite, water color, white gouache, and chalk. And when I returned to my studio, I printed and transferred text related to the impact of melting glaciers.



2019 Glaciers Melt 5" x 4", 24 pages, Alaska.

SINCE THE PANDEMIC BEGAN, in collaboration with Daniel Kelm, I've been tracking the worldwide journey of COVID-19 on a globe-like icosahedron, tentatively called *Spread*. I've also completed two other books related to travel restrictions and the effect of the virus: *Lockdown* and *Brain Fog*. I also worked on a book about the proliferation of gun violence, *Constitutional Carry*, a series referencing children separated from their parents at the Mexican border, *Whitewash*, and *Requiem*, mentioned earlier.

As I sheltered in place, I thought of myself as an "artist in residence" and participated in more than a dozen Zoom workshops and numerous presentations. The computer, which I was so happy to leave behind in my early involvement with the book arts, is now a means of virtual travel, my lifeline to the world. I'm increasingly grateful to the individuals and organizations who have shared their expertise so generously during this time, as well as all the instructors of workshops I took through the years. In addition to those mentioned, Velma Bolyard, Julie Chen, Melissa Jay Craig, Maureen Cummins, Tim Ely, Dan Essig, Don Glaister, Leslie Marsh, Suzanne Moore, Susan Joy Share, Laura Wait and Stephanie Wolff were especially influential.

AS I PLAN MY NEXT TRIP TO MEXICO, I look forward to each of us being able to venture into the world, in person and virtually, continuing the tradition of exploration and sharing.

My computer work station.

HOME LAB

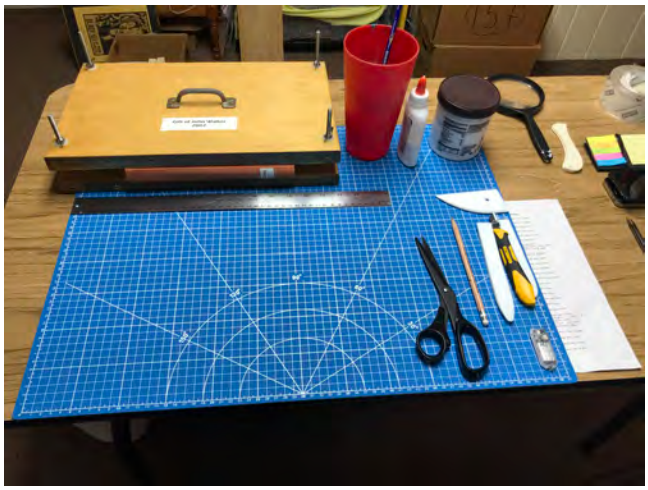
Craig Fansler

IT'S MARCH 2020, AND I'M HOME. When can I safely go back to work again? This question reverberated in my brain and I'm sure the brains of all of my colleagues at Z. Smith Reynolds Library (ZSR). I am the preservation librarian at the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University. We have a solid library with holdings of 1.2 million books and sixty-two full time faculty and staff. For a small university of 5,200 undergraduates, we offer a lot to our students in terms of research, instruction, study, and employment. ZSR Library actively offers instruction ranging from information literacy to the history of the book. We employ more students than any unit on campus and many times establish lasting friendships with our graduates. As one of a handful of preservation librarians in North Carolina, I feel fortunate to have my position in such a great library filled with bright and giving staff members. ¶ Slowly, as I realized COVID was going to be a long-term event, I began to wonder how and if I could do my work, which is primarily hand work. ZSR Library ceased face-to-face operations at the same time as the university, on March 16, 2020. I had taught back-to-back book repair workshops in two libraries in North Carolina the week prior. As business and governmental office closings began to cascade across our state, Wake Forest announced it was ending face-to-face teaching. We were in the middle of spring break, students were away, and we weren't going to teach? I don't think Wake Forest was any different than other institutions.

—CRAIG FANSLER

Craig Fansler is Preservation Librarian in the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University, a position that he's held since 1994. Craig repairs books, encapsulates photographs and documents, and constructs archival boxes and enclosures for the ZSR Library at Wake Forest University. He also designs print materials for the ZSR Library and contributes to library exhibits. He teaches book repair workshops regularly across North Carolina. In 2013, Craig and the ZSR Library accepted a donation of a letterpress print shop from a local individual, and he has been using the press to print bookmarks and poetry broadsides.

As business and governmental office closings began to cascade across our state, Wake Forest announced it was ending face-to-face teaching. We were in the middle of spring break, students were away, and we weren't going to teach? I don't think Wake Forest was any different than other institutions. We had to find solutions. I think it's safe to say that few of us had experience with Zoom before the pandemic. As this idea developed, I asked my supervisor, Director of Special Collections and Archives Tanya Zanish-Belcher, if I could bring some of my tools and supplies to my home. The answer was yes, and I began a slow process of bringing to my home each week a few supplies (archival board, PVA adhesive, Velcro, and basic tools) and items for me to repair or re-house. A colleague who was still working in the building regularly helped me do this. Every other week, I sent him a list of things I wanted with photos of each item, and he assembled books for repair and the supplies I requested. He then put them on the loading dock for me to pick up at a prearranged time. I left my completed work for the circulating collection and special collections and archives from the previous two weeks for him to return to the circulation sorting area and the preservation lab. This arrangement prevented personal contact during a time of heightened fears of COVID contamination. Every two weeks, I received and worked on both circulating and special collections materials. The special collections materials were not super rare or fragile items. I was able to bring a few valuable tools to my home in the lab I set up. These tools were a scoring machine, corner rounder, a CoLibri machine, small book presses, and a Kutrimmer. I already had an assortment of bone folders, brushes, a mini spatula, ruler, etc.



This is my primary work area, where I repair books and make archival boxes.

Using several folding tables, I set up a computer, a work surface for simple book repair, a cutting table for large items, a table for the scoring machine and Kutrimmer, and a table for the CoLibri machine.

The scoring machine, which is used for making nice, neat folds on archival boxes, is not heavy, and I was easily able to get it home. To make a box, you first measure the height, width, and thickness of the book. These measurements are transferred to a piece of archival board, which is then cut and scored to wrap around the book vertically. Then, the height/width/thickness of the book is measured along with the vertical piece of archival board. These measurements are transferred to a piece of board as well and become the horizontal piece of the box. The two pieces are glued together to make a cross shape of archival board, which completely wraps around and encloses the book. Velcro dots serve as closures.

Scoring machine and archival boxes.

Nearby is the corner rounder for making archival boxes open and close easily and making them last longer. The Kutrimmer is a very safe device and is used for cutting archival board.

The CoLibri machine makes a custom-fitted archival dust jacket and is used often for special collections and archives materials. The dust jacket is made of polyethylene, which is inert and will not adversely affect the book in terms of acidity. I like

Kutrimmer and Corner Rounder.

to refer to the CoLibri machine as a Seal-a-Meal for books because it uses a heated metal bar to cut and seal a pouch, much as a Seal-a-Meal does with food. This creates a polyethylene jacket that is a custom-sized cover.

CoLibri machine.

It is great to be able to do the majority of things I would normally do in my home library, at home.

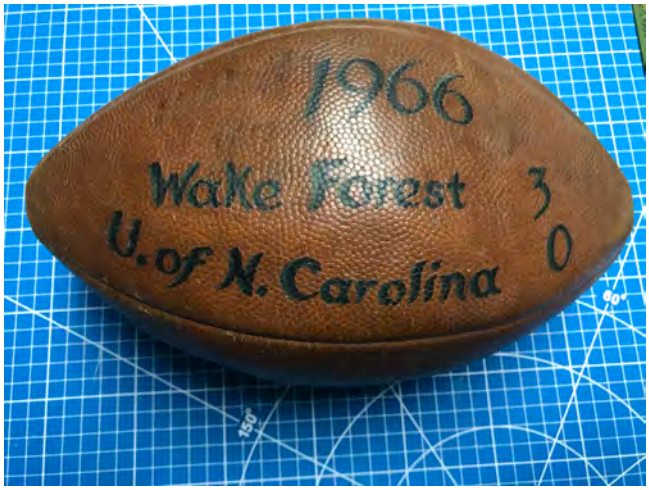
Normally, before COVID, I did a variety of things in addition to archival boxes, book repair, and CoLibri covers. I make four-flap folders for thin and fragile items, which I then glue into premade pamphlet binders. I also create polyester encapsulations of large documents or fragile materials. I use a sewing machine to create these if I can and avoid using double-sided tape. I also assist with our exhibits and do a fair amount of large format printing for these. I also create custom boxes from corrugated archival board for unusual or large items. Occasional clamshell boxes round out my normal work flow. My work at home was not as efficient or as fluid. I didn't have my board shear so cutting the archival board into large pieces was done with a knife or scissors. I missed my board shear a lot! I never realized how much I used it.

Slowly, as I was able to assemble supplies and tools at home, I breathed a sigh of relief and started repairing and boxing books.

WORK FROM HOME

Almost always, the object itself requires me to customize the enclosure I make for it. The size, shape, fragility, or potential use all come into play. These are a few of the items I made in my home lab during COVID 2020 lockdown.

The size and shape definitely were considered for this football.

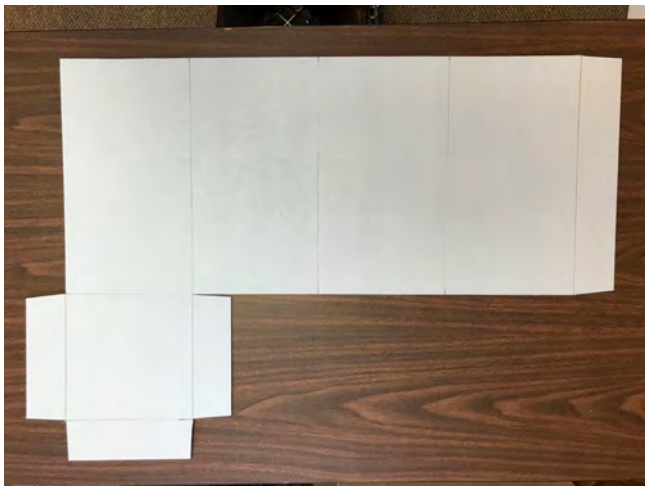


Football awaiting a box.

I made a draft version of a box to hold the football, which I used to make it fit properly. This is a flattened, measured, and trimmed version of what I used to score and fold the box into shape.

Once it was folded and glued together, I also made a lid.

I received a group of extremely fragile and rare newspapers, The Asheville Baptist. These were printed in 1889 and are very fragile. When I say fragile, I mean simply handling these shards of brown newsprint from the 1890's would almost inevitably damage them. Many of the individual sheets had already torn on the folds. I needed to make it possible for these

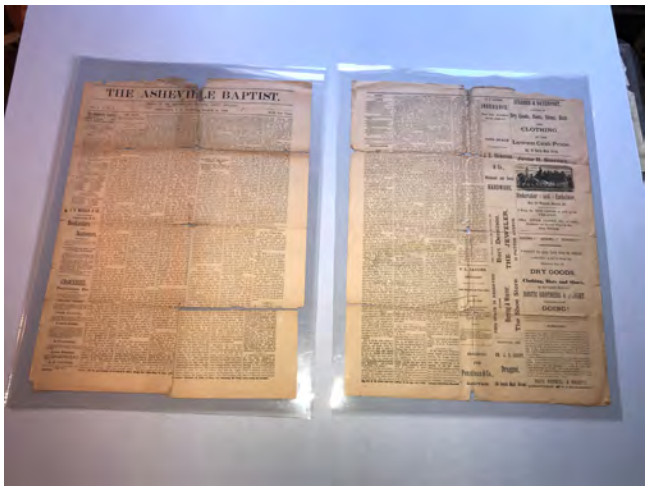


Unfolded box for the football.

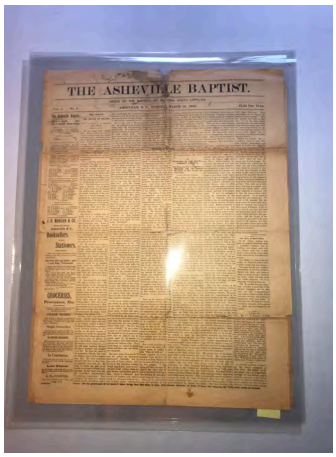
Completed box for the football with lid.

Closed box for football.

to be digitized. I did not feel I should do anything to try to reattach or strengthen these delicate sheets of newsprint. I couldn't do that to them. I didn't think we could afford a deacidification project on these newspapers, which were slated for digitization, not handling by patrons. I decided to place each page inside a Mylar sandwich, without any tape or anything else to keep the sheets together. The polyester has a little static charge, and this alone would hold the newsprint sheets inside. I measured out the polyester sheets and scored and folded them. Each sheet of newspaper was placed individually inside the folded sheet. In addition, for each edition of the paper, I made an "L" envelope to hold the sandwich together. I am hoping this method will succeed in making digitization possible and preserve these newspapers as well.



Two spreads of one edition of The Asheville Baptist newspaper.



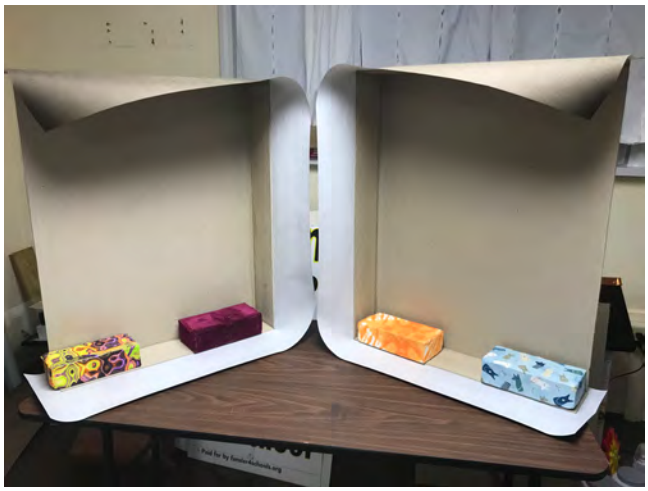
An edition of The Asheville Baptist inside polyester enclosure.

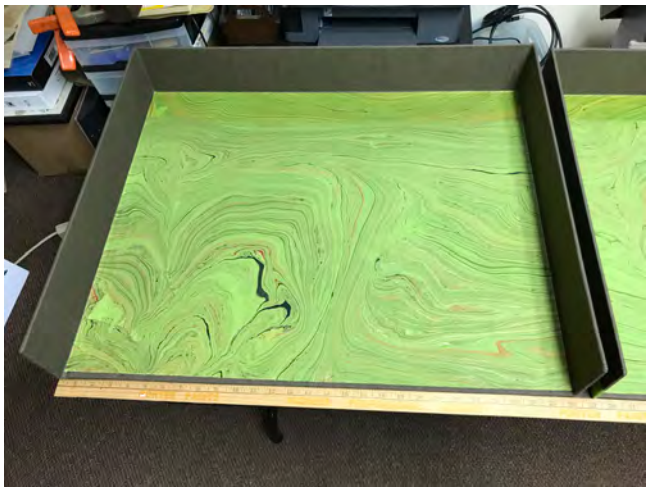
I made a large clamshell box for a scrapbook of presidential signatures. I worked blind on this box because I just had the basic measurements. A clamshell box has two trays which hold the book inside and fit together smoothly. The trays are then glued inside a case. I've made many of these boxes, but none this large (2' x 2.5' x 4"). I ordered a very thick binders board (approximately ¼" thickness) and cut the pieces for the trays and the case on my table saw (once again, I missed my board shear). I used the table saw because I had nothing else to do this cutting. I taped the pieces together to make sure they would fit

properly.

[Fansler_12_GBW]

I covered the trays with book cloth and dried the adhesive under a weight.





[Fansler_13_GBW]

The book cloth must then be trimmed and glued down to the trays. This is a slow process which only allows a small amount of the excess book cloth to remain and be glued on the trays--this reduces bulk and makes the trays fit well.

[Fansler_14_GBW]

Each tray has marbled paper added to the inside and is ready to be glued into the case.

[Fansler_15_GBW]

Next, I made a case which is covered with book cloth, and then I glued the trays inside it.

Finally, I recently made an enclosure which was a labor of love. Many former students of Dr. Ed Wilson were invited to write him letters of memory and appreciation. I was asked to make an enclosure for these letters. Edwin Grave Wilson graduated from then Wake Forest College in 1943, attended graduate school at Harvard, and began teaching at Wake Forest after serving in World War II. By this time, Wake Forest had moved from Wake Forest, NC (near Raleigh, NC) to Winston-Salem, NC. Dr. Wilson served as provost, but continued teaching English. I personally attended his reading of Catcher in the Rye and watched him fill up with emotion as he read about Holden Caulfield. I can't overstate how Dr. Wilson is loved by former students.

[Fansler_16_GBW]

Inside the enclosure was a pocket to hold all the letters.

[Fansler_17_GBW]

The letters were connected to the recent interview Tanya Zanish-Belcher did with Dr. Wilson

Cover of Songs for Dr. Wilson 2021.

for the publication of his recent book, Songs of Wake Forest. The recording of Tanya's interview is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rpz-sUiVNsk&t=2783s.

REFLECTIONS

Conservators in private practice have been working "from home" forever. Since I've always been tied to my lab at a university library, it was a bigger leap. Although I have returned to work in my library, there was a time I was too anxious for that because of potential COVID contamination. Doing my work from home was a life-saver for my situation. I am very grateful a working from home option could be arranged in my case. Over that summer of 2020, everyone tried to catch their breath and calmly prepare for the fall semester. A group of core library staff returned to the library and resumed face-to-face operations in August 2020. I remained at home working, as did the majority of the library faculty and staff. By the time I returned to work in ZSR Library, it was May 2021, and everyone in special collections and archives was already back.

Going back to work was surreal. It was so great to be back in my space. It's where I live and is so familiar. Some of my kind colleagues even watered my plants for me. That goes above and beyond! I had projects that had been moved into my lab for me to work on when I returned. I relished these and couldn't wait to hit the ground running. It was unusual returning after a pandemic, before most of the other library staff. The university is offering a hybrid work situation if approved, and about one-third of the ZSR faculty and staff have taken the option to work three days in ZSR and two days from home. In August 2021 when students returned to campus, it was great to see students, faculty, and staff back on campus and in ZSR

Opened folder of Songs for Dr. Wilson 2021.

Library. As fall semester begins, 97 percent of students, faculty, and staff are vaccinated, and everyone is masked when indoors. We are here working safely.

Mad scientist at work.

BINDING ISOLATION

Todd Davis

It's not an original idea, but it's true. The city is a living thing. It has a rhythm that changes with time of day and day of the week. Weekday early morning garbage trucks give way to the backup beeps of early restaurant delivery trucks which give way to jackhammers merging with impatient commuter horns. Shop owners raise their clackity-clack security grates from their front windows while the subway ding-dings that doors are closing. In a very real sense, the city is alive. ¶ Beginning in February (2020) or so, I started becoming aware of the problems in China and elsewhere. At first the reports sounded like another SARS (which it was) or MERS (which it was) that would play itself out somewhere far away (which it didn't). Then came the super-spreader event at the Boston Marriot Long Wharf on the waterfront. ¶ The city began to shut down. ¶ I live in Boston South End, and my bindery is in Lowell near the New Hampshire border. I rely on public transit and my commute is about ninety minutes. It's a long time, but I'm not driving, and I'm at the end of the line in both directions, so I can't oversleep my stop should I happen to fall asleep which … has been known to happen. ¶ As the news from overseas, particularly Italy, got bleaker, the subway and train had fewer and fewer riders. Each day there was less traffic and there were fewer people on the street. The parking lot at the bindery less and less full. By early March, it was not uncommon to be the only person in a subway car and, possibly, on the entire train. North station at times was completely empty. Like, zombie apocalypse empty. Even Dunkin' Donuts closed! I don't think I would have been surprised to see Vincent Price or Will Smith wandering around.

—TODD DAVIS

Todd Davis started professional life as a drafter, evolved into a programmer, eventually founded and ran a software consulting company. Todd holds a BA summa cum laude in History from UMass Boston and a diploma in bookbinding from North Bennet Street School. He now runs Middlesex Bindery in Lowell, Massachusetts.

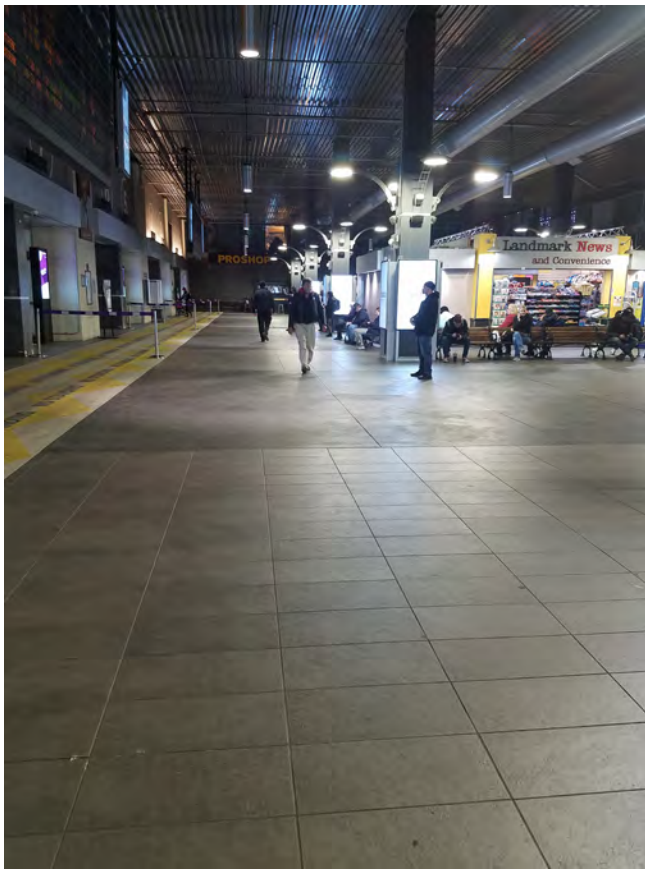
https://MiddlesexBindery.com
https://Facebook.com/

MiddlesexBindery
https://Instagram.com/llysenw
https://vero.co/llysenw
https://twitter.com/midxbindery

Promo from my studio building complex.

AS EACH DAY PASSED, THINGS GOT QUIETER until finally, on March 23, the order for non-essential workers to stay home was issued by His Excellency, the Governor of the Commonwealth, and home is where I stayed for months. The first weekend, I got a call from a friend who, with homemade masks in place, took us on a trip to the bindery to pick up enough stuff to do a bit of work at home. At the time, I had my largest order ever, rebinding corporate annual meeting minutes from 1938 through 2000, plus making rounded spine boxes for years 2001 through present. I had completed and delivered all of the annual minutes to the customer, but was still working on the boxes at the time of the lock down. I brought home all the tools and supplies I needed to do the spine pieces, but as always happens, you forget the one tool that makes the job possible or at least a little easier.

After the shutdown order came from the Governor, another order was issued by Martin Walsh, stopping all construction. At that point, the city got spooky quiet. I share a pedestrian alley behind my building with three restaurants. When the restaurants closed, they stopped the exhaust fans, pot clanking, restocking, door slamming, and general hubbub. It got very, very quiet. And it was quiet even with outdoor parking spot dining that started up after restaurants started reopening a bit. I only experience that sort of quiet when I'm visiting rural hinterlands. It really was other-worldly when climbing into bed, not having a background roar of restaurant exhaust fans. The city really did look like The Specials' "Ghost Town" video.



North Station at the height of morning rush hour 3/11/2020.

During the trip to Lowell that first weekend, I also brought home all my knives and my sharpening kit so when this was all over, all my knives would be back to the condition they should be. It's hard to find time to do routine maintenance like that. I was also able to re-grease the Kitchenaid mixer, dutifully write my "You're Fired!" postcards, and get mirror shines on all my shoes. I was also able to do a trans-continental

Orange Line subway, evening rush hour 3/15/2020.

Annual meeting minutes 1938-2000 in the standing press.

interview with Stepan Chizhov of iBookbinding.com about the situation here, which was great fun as was Zoom cocktail time with Fionnuala on Wednesday evenings, and Zoom lunchtime with my Lowell studio neighbors on Thursdays at 1:00.

Lockdown work, knives to sharpen, rounded spines to round.

My lockdown was probably very similar to everyone else who couldn't work from home: long stretches of mind numbing boredom punctuated by InstaCart deliveries. We all had to figure out our own personal twenty-second handwashing song, mine being a sort andante con moto version of the ABC song. Somewhat unique, depending on where you live, was the Memorial Day riot in response to the George Floyd murder which took out the wine store next door and the mall around the corner. My building was spared, thankfully. All other protests were peaceful, if noisy. Otherwise, it was lots of TV, spending mornings with Perry Mason (9 am, channel 5.2) and afternoons with Marshal Dillon, catching up on podcasts ("Mission to Zyxx" FTW!), and taking advantage of all the free streaming offered by the cultural institutions that were and are so hard hit by all of this (thank you Met).

Lockdown work, re-greasing the KitchenAid.

I sent an email to everyone that had bindery work in queue explaining that, for some inexplicably bizarre and totally unjustifiable reason, I am not considered an essential worker, so their work would be delayed by however long this lasts. Everyone was very understanding, and even the large job I mentioned

Post riot cleanup at the wine shop next door 5/31/2020.

above offered to send another installment payment which was so, so welcome since income, obviously, was cut to zero.

Someone who lived near the bindery was renting a bench from me for the last couple of years. She was nice enough come in every couple of weeks in spite of the lock down to print a color photo so the printer ink wouldn't gum up, but she decided to leave in June. I did get the government unemployment checks and the small business loan, but I filed too early, so when they changed the rules to base the amount on gross rather than net income, I lost out on a lot of money that I really could have used, but what did come was a godsend.

The nearly two years between then and now all seems a big blur. It's freaky when you recall an event from the ostensibly recent past and think, "Oh, that was about a year ago" when it was actually about a year before lockdown which makes it close to three years ago now. There is a massive chunk of time missing.

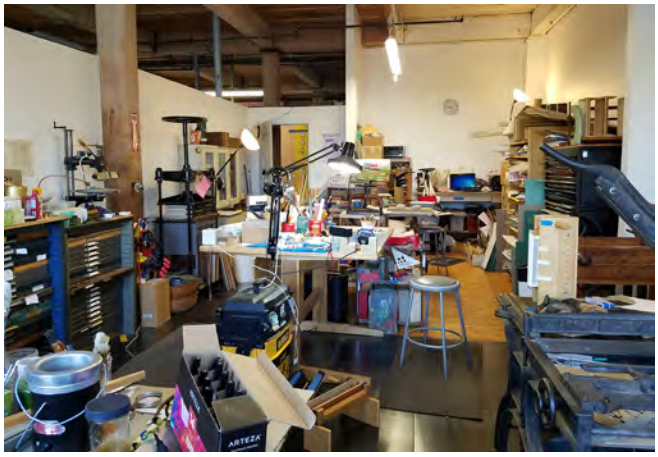
To the best of my memory backed up by the EXIF data from phone camera roll, I reopened the bindery in August or September 2020, but it's hard to be certain since everything really is a blur. I was able to finish the twenty-five or so boxes and get them shipped off to the customer. I hadn't realized how many hours I was working before lockdown. Getting up at 6 for the train, then not getting home again until 7 really wears you out in a way you don't really realize until you're forced to stop. It took me a month before I felt rested up enough to be ready to go back to work. I swore then that I did not want to be that tired again, so the bindery is now on a four-day work week. It's still 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., but closed Wednesdays.

What has happened since reopening has been fascinating. Business has exploded. I have never been so busy.

There are several reasons for this that I can see. Most are related to the great reassessment, that introspective look people took during lockdown to decide what is really important to them. Job or family? Things or experience?

On the one hand there are many articles about how younger generations don't want to inherit tchotchkes. Money: yes; stuff: no. Nobody wants Gramma's china. On the other hand there is still a special place for books. Bibles and cookbooks keep the lights on and it's more true now than ever. Bibles with and without family trees are arriving in great numbers. Personal ones with and without notes. Ones that could be

Lockdown work, rounding wooden spines.



Middlesex Bindery, where the magic happens.

replaced at the bookstore for $19.95 are being repaired instead. Hurrah! But beyond that, also arriving are a fair number of children's books, often with a story attached. "These were my kids', and I want my grandkids to have them, but they're in tatters." And some are prized keepsakes.

Second is gift giving. Christmas gifts, from what I can see, are less likely to be from Black Friday steel cage death matches at Walmart and more likely to be something with more thought and are ever more commonly hand crafted. There will always be a need for socks and underwear, but with supply chain issues, reduced store hours and capacity, or crossing a metaphorical Karen at the checkout line, far more people are looking for something more special and tailored. Books are a part of that both in the Bible and cookbook repair realm, but also custom new work. One customer took a trip to France and Switzerland for their honeymoon several years ago and "always meant" to have the photos bound into an album. Another customer somehow got a script for her boyfriend's favorite movie and had it bound as a birthday gift. There have been several who had their thesis bound after sitting in a box for forty years. And, perhaps most unusual, one customer, before being deployed to the Middle East (the geographic one, not the night club) for one year, brought twenty softback graphic novels to be recovered hardbound in leather. I hope to have them finished by the time he returns in 2023.

Third, related to the others, is much like the whole home improvement rush. Some combination of being tired of looking at things that are broken, a general refresh, or perhaps wanting a nicer background for Zoom meetings. Who can say? Whatever it is, it's welcome, even if I now see crestfallen faces when I tell them it might be a three- to four-month turnaround.

Lastly, it's a side effect of so many binderies closing or merging into ever larger companies that cherry pick only the largest of jobs. I'm now getting calls from institutions because their longstanding binder was bought out, retired, or otherwise closed. Binding newspapers for city or school archives, personal magazine collections, all kinds of things. Even calls about editions of three thousand of a privately printed book. (I had to turn that down).

AT THE END OF THE DAY, I can't say that my lockdown was really any different from anyone else's. But following that lockdown, I've been swept along with the great resurgence of trade and craft. The amount of work right now is a bit overwhelming, but all in all, it's a good problem to have.

Finished page, alive and well.

THE PANDEMIC, PANGOLINS AND A BOOK ARTIST'S LIFE

Gabby Cooksey

THE PANDEMIC BROUGHT SO MUCH CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY. In February 2020, I had teaching gigs, talks, and travel plans for the next eight months. It was looking to be a big year for me professionally. I had just returned from NYC after visiting the opening for American Academy of Bookbinding's Open/Set exhibition, and work opportunities were lining up. I worked two different letterpress printing jobs, worked as a landscaper and studio assistant, and was running Bound by Cooksey. I was also invited to join the *Science Stories* exhibition, where the University of Puget Sound and Slater Natural History Museum set in motion collaborations between scientists and artists to produce an artist book. We gathered in January to not only meet the scientists but also to see the collection of taxidermied animals and insects. I laid eyes on the venerable pangolin, knowing nothing about it, and I knew I wanted to collaborate with this creature. Their scales and patterns were fascinating and I wanted to know more. ¶ Just a few months later, due to the impact of COVID-19 and the preventative measures across the U.S., I had lost a lot of work, including travel, teaching, and commissions. I was freaked out. One of the letterpress studios closed. My mentors were moving. "So now what?" I asked. I had been striving to work for myself full time, but I had quickly become nervous.

—GABBY COOKSEY

Gabby Cooksey is a bookbinder and book artist living in Tacoma, WA. She studied at American Academy of Bookbinding and North Bennet Street School. Her books are in the collections of University of Puget Sound, Boston Athenaeum, Library of Congress, and many more institutions.

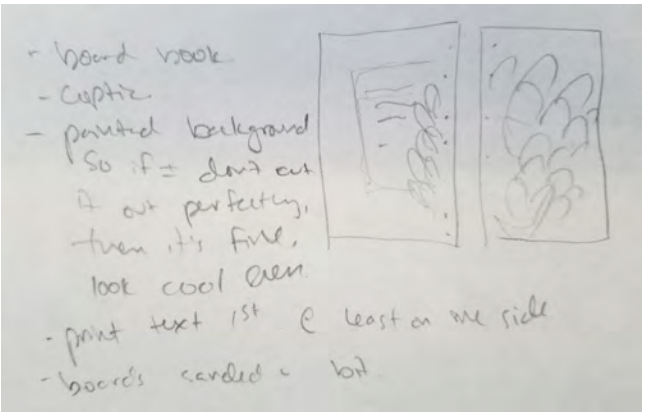
***The article is about being a book artist through the pandemic, focusing on the making of the artist book,* Pangolin Pandemic.**

boundbycooksey@gmail.com

THERE WERE FITS AND STARTS TO FILL UP the time. I could make videos! Everyone was making videos, so I started making process videos to show how I create my books. I could also sell smaller work online to diversify, which I did and will be forever grateful to the handful who bought something and gave me hope when I did not feel any. Then I jumped into Zoom only to learn that my studio's internet was not that great. I honestly didn't feel an urge to fix this. I checked in on everyone to see how they were doing. I was holed up in my studio, scaring myself by looking at job postings online because I did not want to do those jobs. Did anyone even want to buy fancy books? Along the way, I figured out to just stick with my original plan: finish my artist book, Blight, and start creating the pangolin book.

During the start of the pandemic, pangolins, which are native to Asia and Africa, were thought to have started the spread of COVID-19 because they carry the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Pangolins are one of the most endangered mammals, so getting this COVID-19 label at the beginning of 2020 brought more awareness to their plight. I didn't know any of this until I started researching pangolins and COVID-19 kept appearing. This changed the tone of my book, even if I wasn't sure where I was going with it to begin with. There felt like more of an urgency to make a book about these gentle creatures because most people don't know about them, but also to share awareness around COVID-19 and poaching.

Nearly a year flew by, and during this time I dreamed up the entire book. I knew exactly what I needed to do it, but I was too busy being too busy to start until November, and it was due mid-December. This was not that big of a deal until I got a job packing



Initial concept drawing of page layout.

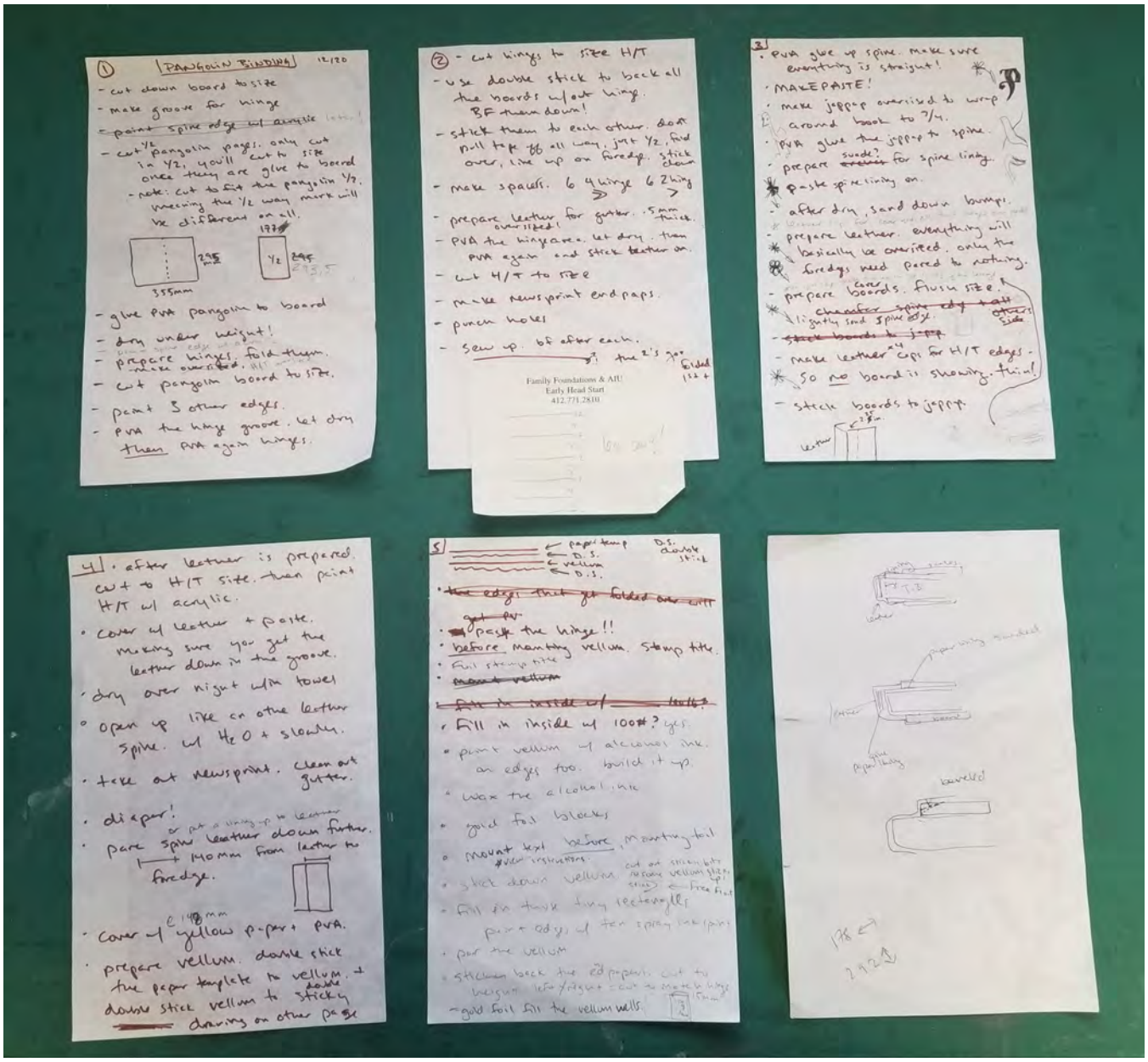
Finished page, defensive curl.

holiday orders from a former employer. This was great news because it guaranteed money, but I knew this was taking time away from my deadline.

In the middle of all that chaos and time, I left myself notes. The very first note I made, way back in January, served as my guide (Fig.1). Having made six other artist books by this time, I had come to the conclusion that my first sketch was more or less the way to go. While iteration helps generate details that hone my vision, I always end up going with one of my initial designs. This was no different with the pangolin book. I knew I wanted to emphasize the patchwork of scales using all kinds of paper, cloth, and wallpaper. I also knew that I wanted the pangolin to cover part of the letterpress printed text. I didn't end up doing a Coptic binding (or an unsupported link-stitch binding), but I went with a montage sur onglets (which translates to "tab mounting") binding. This is a binding where each page is hinged, and all those hinges are sewn together. It creates a beautiful opening for the board pages I used.

Since there was a deadline, I planned on finishing two of the edition of six, such that when I turned the one in, I would have an extra on hand to look at. That was a great plan, but I had to ditch the second one after a bit because I could not take time away from the first book. This turned into a very ambitious book considering the time allotted. My instructions to recreate the binding kept getting bigger!

The writing always comes last for me. I love asking other creatives who make artist books how they go about starting a book. For instance, I start with the image, then the binding, then the text. My colleague



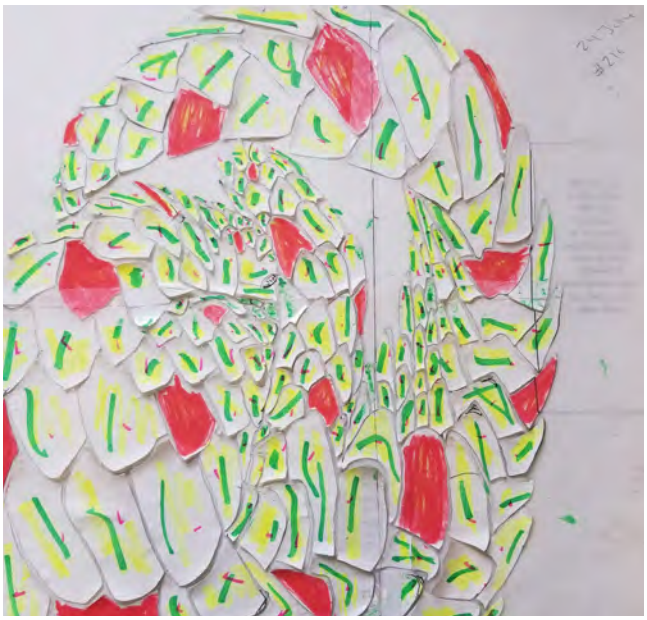
Instructions on how to recreate the binding.

and close friend thinks of the text first, and then images and the binding. I love the variety and how people get from the beginning to the end.

Since my pangolin book had to do with the current pandemic, I wanted the writing to reflect that. I love exploring the texts of the public domain, so I started reading the work of poet and scholar Francesco Petrarch, who lived during the Black Death. A passage he wrote, which feels eerily contemporary, says:

We have mourned the year 1348 of this age. But now we realize it was only the beginning of mourning and this strange force of evil, unheard of through the ages, has not ceased since then, ready to strike on all sides, to the right and left like a most skilled fighter. So after sweeping across the whole world several times, now that no part is left unharmed, it has struck some regions twice, thrice and four times, and ruined some with annual sickness. [1]

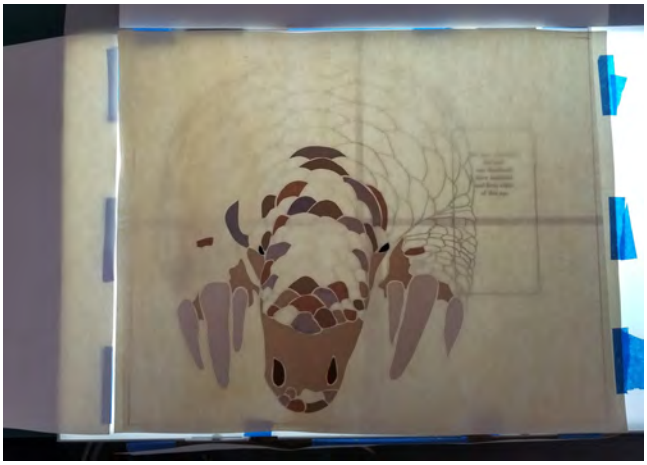
During the making of this book, I felt the most burnt out that I had ever been. I stopped being there for everything else but the holiday packing job and the pangolin book. My mental health was getting scary. My partner called me out on how I wasn't really around anymore, but I couldn't stop! I had



Puzzle-piece template.

never missed a deadline before. I was urged to email the Science Stories exhibition board to ask for an extension. This turned out to not be a big deal, and they gave me a whole extra month to finish. Whew, because I wasn't even done with the scales!

The reason the scales took so long was because each one was cut out by hand. I created a puzzle-piece



Lightbox to put scales on.

template using double-stick tape on each scale to show the whole pattern (Fig. 4). I used a light table with my pangolin template below it so I could glue the scales down accurately. I letterpress printed the text at Springtide Press, and I puzzle-pieced it together with the scales. The book tries to mimic the scale of a real pangolin. It was important to communicate this

Finished page, with scales.

and feel the potential loss of these creatures. There are five images throughout the book, starting with it alive and well, curled up in a defensive posture, dead and drying, hung up, and finally de-scaled.

MAKING AN ARTIST BOOK IS A PROCESS. It was a different process during the pandemic, but each of my artist books has been informative. For *Blight*, my artist book on climate change, I tried to cram everything I had learned into one book. For the *Chronicles of a Coleopterist's Strikingly Curious Swarm*, a bestiary on beetles, I was in the process of a major breakup and a big move, but this turned out to be one of my favorites because it was so fun and quirky. For my first artist book, Monsters and Beasts, select stories from Greek mythology, I had no idea what I was doing, but I knew I liked animals and myths. That was all I needed for that book to begin. I need an idea that I'm interested in, perhaps what my audience is into, and the drive to keep it going, because they take a long time to make.

***Chronicles of a Coleopterist's Strikingly Curious Swarm*, 2018.**

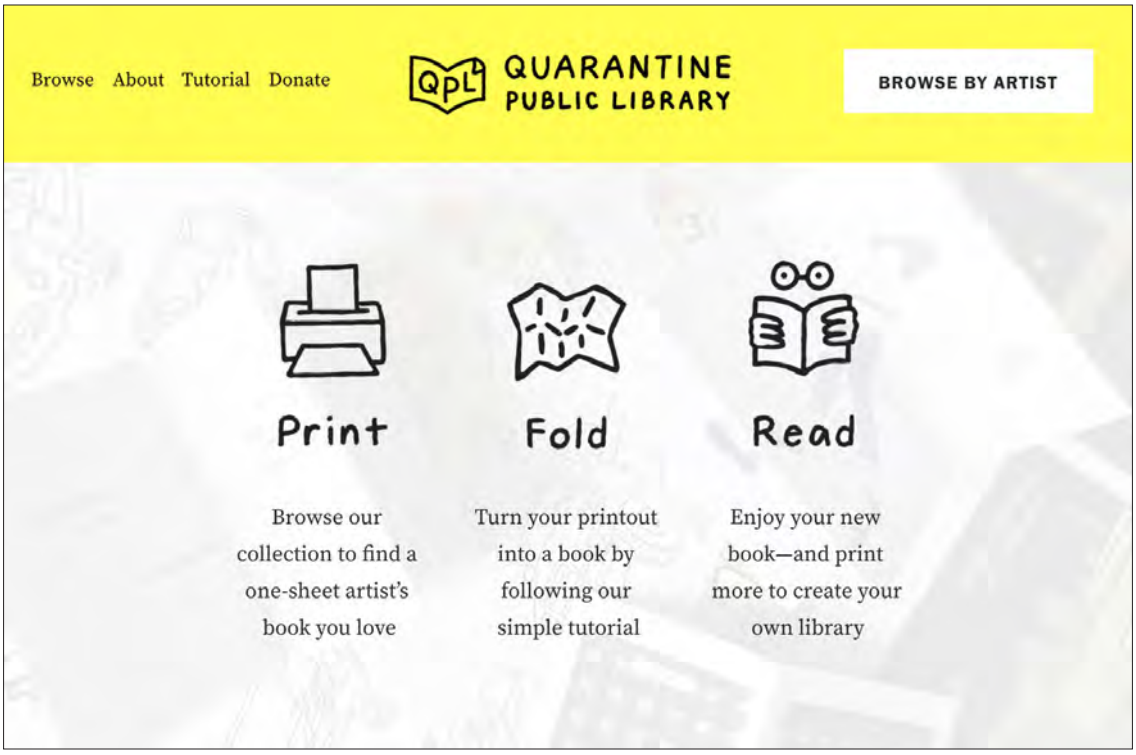
***Blight*, 2020.**

At least mine do. There are several moments during the process that require navigating self-doubt. "What the heck am I doing? I don't even like this anymore!" I just have to keep going. There was a reason I started. I saw the finished book, but it is hard to mentally picture the making of the book to bridge the gap between conception and completion.

I have been complimented that none of my works looks the same as the last. At first I was taken aback because surely I saw it all as me, but then I thought a little longer on that; I believe it's because I try something new for each book. Can this be more refined? Can I incorporate that cool thing from that video? Maybe tattoo some leather? Can I use only flush rivets to attach all this brass?

The next artist book I'm cooking up has inserts because I want a hidden element to the artwork. Who knows what you'll get from me, but growing and not being afraid to try something out is my favorite part. If it fails, that stinks, but I keep going! "You'll figure it out," I tell myself. Artist books are meant to delight, to teach, to feel and interact with. I hope my

***Monsters and Beasts*, 2014.**



The Quarantine Public Library homepage.

MAKING THE QUARANTINE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Tracy Honn And Katie Garth

Origins

QUARANTINE PUBLIC LIBRARY (QPL) is an online repository of books made by artists established by Tracy Honn and Katie Garth in July 2020. The works are free for anyone to download, print, and assemble—to keep or give away. With more than two hundred books published in our collection, we have excitedly shared a simple on-demand artists' book format with visitors from around the world at a time when in-person art experiences have been hard to come by. The project has provided scaffolding for creative output and professional exchange, sustaining our hearts and minds in a moment often marked by casual disregard for humanity. We cannot imagine having experienced this pandemic without the sustenance it has provided. ¶ Our friendship began in 2011 at the University of Wisconsin–Madison when Katie worked at the Silver Buckle Press, of which Tracy was the director. Tracy had long envisioned an exhibition of one-sheet, print-on-demand eight-page books. The simplicity of the format could both inspire work by very different kinds of artists and encourage engagement with book arts. When children visited the press, Tracy sometimes used a one-sheet book demonstration to grab their attention; to fresh eyes, the end result is inscrutable, but its construction provokes a sense of both the magical and the inevitable. To learn this form is to want to teach it to someone else.

—TRACY HONN AND KATIE GARTH

Katie Garth is a print-based artist in Philadelphia. Her interdisciplinary work explores tedium as a coping mechanism for uncertainty, and often reflects her interests in language and independent publication. Garth received her MFA in Printmaking from the Tyler School of Art and a BFA from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she was Tracy Honn's printing assistant at the Silver Buckle Press. Garth has exhibited internationally, and her work has appeared in the Washington Post and PRINT. She has been a resident at Anderson Ranch Arts Center and an apprentice at the Fabric Workshop and Museum, and currently serves on the Mid America Print Council board. She joined Sarah Lawrence College as Visiting Assistant Professor in Printmaking this fall.

Tracy Honn is a printing history educator, curator, and letterpress printer living in Madison, Wisconsin. She is senior artist emerit from University of Wisconsin-Madison where she directed the Silver Buckle Press, a working museum of letterpress printing. Honn oversaw the transfer of the SBP collection to Hamilton Wood Type & Printing Museum in 2016. In 2020 Honn co-curated "Speaking of Book Arts; Oral Histories from UW-Madison" at the Chazen Museum of Art. The exhibition featured artists' books from the Kohler Art Library with audio excerpts from interviews conducted by UW Archives Oral History Program with book arts alum and instructors from UW. Honn is president of the board of directors for Hamilton Wood Type & Printing Museum in Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

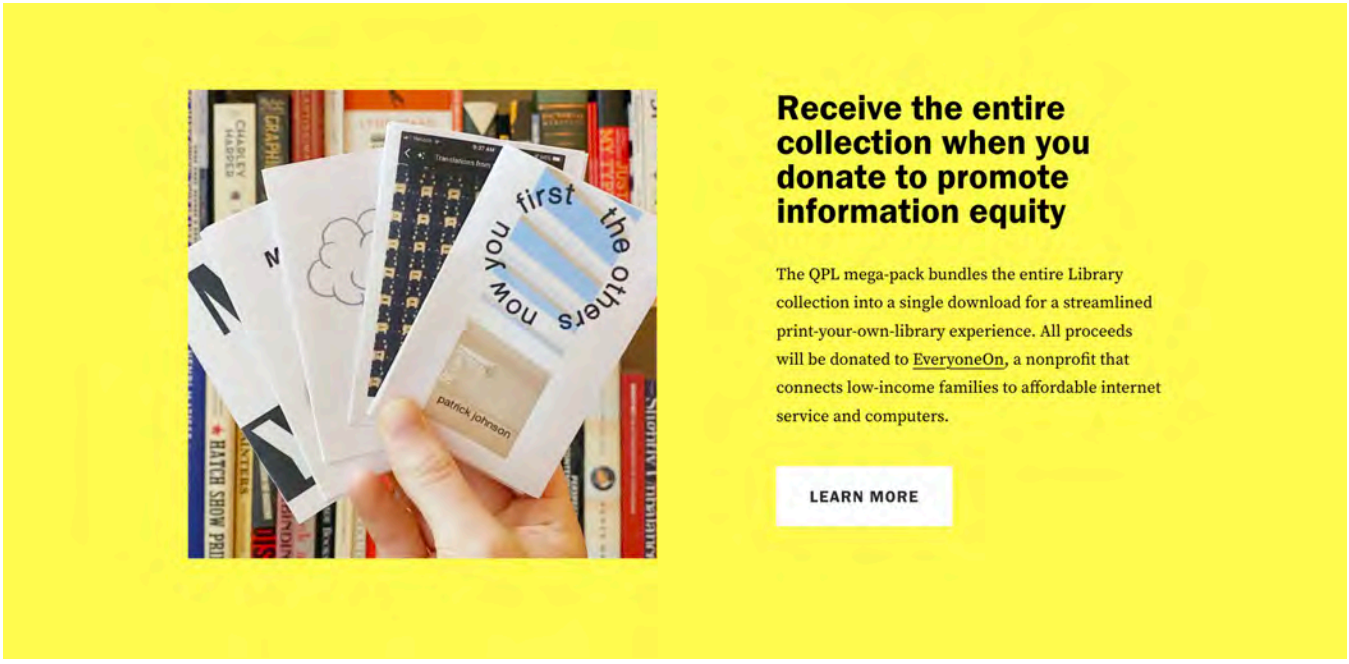
Demonstration-ready books display the pagination sequence of the one-sheet, eight-page format.

Girl Scouts visiting the Silver Buckle Press circa 2015.

OUR FRIENDSHIP BEGAN IN 2011 at the University of Wisconsin–Madison when Katie worked at the Silver Buckle Press, of which Tracy was the director. Tracy had long envisioned an exhibition of one-sheet, print-on-demand eight-page books. The simplicity of the format could both inspire work by very different kinds of artists and encourage engagement with book arts. When children visited the press, Tracy sometimes used a one-sheet book demonstration to grab their attention; to fresh eyes, the end result is inscrutable, but its construction provokes a sense of both the magical and the inevitable. To learn this form is to want to teach it to someone else.

The United States' initial COVID-19 lockdowns commenced during Katie's final semester of graduate school at the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. Tracy had just celebrated the opening of Speaking of Book Arts, an exhibit she co-curated with Lyn Korenic at the Chazen Museum of Art in Madison, Wisconsin. We were each nestled in our own hubs of knowledge and artistic expression, surrounded by beloved libraries, print- and bookmaking facilities, and the others who frequented them, until suddenly we weren't. As galleries, bookstores, universities, and museums shuttered, looking at art with other people—let alone handling it—seemed like a distant fantasy. Thesis shows, art fairs, and professional conferences moved online, and at some point we realized that, with the assistance of standard, letter-sized desktop printers, Tracy's dream exhibit could too. It felt particularly potent to provide a physical book object to others sheltering in place, separated from both public institutions and their personal communities. We decided to begin work upon Katie's graduation.

In March, we wondered if delaying the project until May 2020 would mean the launch of an irrelevant project in a post-COVID world. In reality, we watched with alarm as an impotent government squandered opportunities to intervene in the service of public health, then with horror as law enforcement brazenly exercised its legacy of brutality against Black Americans like George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. These circumstances changed what it meant to ask for attention in online spaces, which were suddenly flooded with anti-racism resources and protest strategies in addition to health advisories. We decided the site should direct donations to a relevant cause and realized information equity was an obvious choice. We researched organizations and found EveryoneOn, which works to eliminate the digital divide by delivering free and affordable technology and training to underserved communities. We also developed a Pocket Protest Guide containing



QPL incentivized donations to EveryoneOn by compiling the complete collection into a single download for users.

information about constitutional rights at organized demonstrations.

On July 15, 2020, we launched quarantinepublic-clibrary.com. A generous group of artists had quickly created thoughtful, energizing work in response to our invitation, and they excitedly shared the library with their own networks. QPL appeared on news websites in the US, India, and Australia and had more than two thousand unique visitors from forty-four countries on the site's first day. Friends, family, and strangers shared footage of themselves printing and making books. Our dream had become real, and we decided to continue publishing for the foreseeable future.

A variety of books from the site's launch.

OUR APPROACH

WE WEREN'T IN SEARCH OF AN IDEA for a collaboration—though we knew that was something we wanted to do together someday. Instead, the idea for Quarantine Public Library simply emerged from phone conversations between two friends, as we were each staying-at-home in the spring of 2020 and trying to cope with the emergence of COVID-19. As we talked QPL into being, its potential for good was a source of encouragement that gave us purpose. The impulse to make something to give to others (during an awful time and around a stunning experience) felt powerful, comforting, and right.

Public libraries, and more generally, formal education and teaching, were institutional service models that represented the kind of democratic principles we wanted QPL to embody. The project's name, which Katie suggested early on, was critical to our success: it perfectly captured the spirit of our idea and gave us the conceptual hook we needed to make a possibly confounding idea "getable." Like a public library, the site would be open to anyone who visited, and it would offer a variety of books for free circulation. The bonus of our artists' book library concept was that visitors could keep any book (or as many books as they liked) by printing and assembling at home. In a world temporarily without public

Detail: *On the Count of Three* by Ben Blount.

commons, we used the familiar idea of libraries to offer a virtually shared space of refuge.

QPL was intentionally designed with a balance of open and closed systems. There were clear boundaries like the format that we controlled, but within those parameters there was autonomy for free expression. We asked artists to follow strict submission guidelines, but beyond those rules we trusted the authority of artists to make the books they wanted to share.

The website was designed for ease of access and understanding; we cultivated an attitude of respect and kindness towards contributors and users. Design decisions were driven by utility, and as much as possible, we streamlined our own processes. We worked quickly to build the site as contributors were simultaneously creating its content—the books. Adding books in later rounds was made easier because we had anticipated that QPL might grow.

While public libraries represent our service model, QPL is most accurately described as a publishing project. As publishers we solicited content and formatted it to our standards. We controlled presentation, distribution, and primary promotion of the work. Getting QPL established and running was in large part an editorial process. The work required us to be exacting and precise—things that we value.

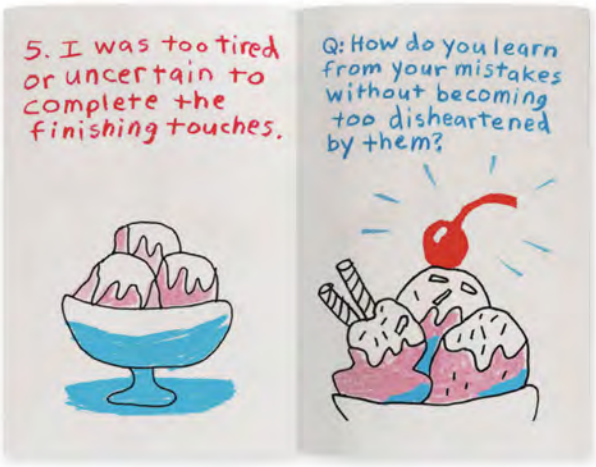
Thinking of our work as publishing allowed us to improvise our own structure for generation. Other ventures, like the Library of Artistic Print on Demand, have centralized projects from disparate artists, and several printable zine websites exist that accept and display all user submissions. The College Book Art Association has a traveling zine exhibition and archive called Rising Together, and the discipline continues to practice its long-established tradition of curated exchanges. Over the last decade, art-for-a-cause auctions and gallery shows have also proliferated. None of these models entirely mirror our approach: we shrugged off parameters we didn't want and embraced the guardrails that felt right.

THE BOOK

Our familiarity with artists' books, book arts exhibitions, and our own separate practices and curatorial work informed QPL. A presentation of book arts per se was not the goal as much as artists' books were the means. We used familiar tools to put something meaningful in people's hands at a bewildering time.

The idea of offering free artists' books for home printing was made possible because of the eight-page book structure we used. Book artists recognize the form's value as a basic teaching tool: it's easy to make and has surprising power to inscribe pleasure. The structure's economy of means—carrying content on only one side of a single sheet of paper—allowed us to present artists' books on a website with elegance and efficiency.

Unlike the folio, perhaps the simplest codex form, this one-sheet structure yields a multi-page book that supports nuanced expression of many essential book



Pages 6-7 of *A Few Ways I Fell Short of Various Goals* by Carolyn Swiszcz. The book's blurb: "The author reflects on missteps that kept her from fully realizing personal and professional ambitions."

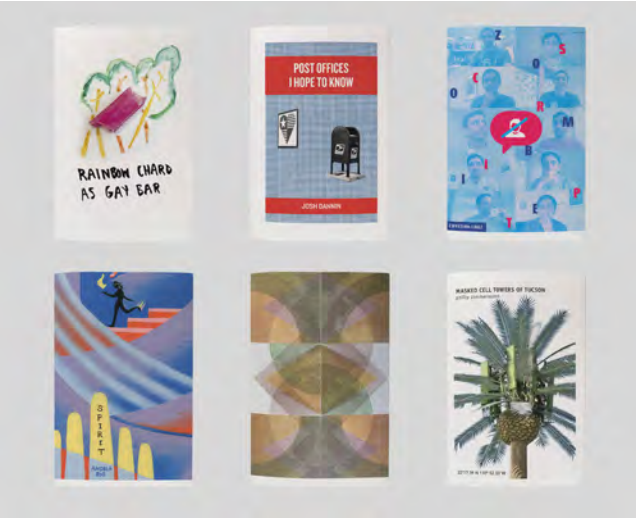
arts concerns. Eight pages allows sufficient room for elaboration of content, and exploration of sequencing. The protean nature of the form is amply illustrated by the variety of books housed in the Library.

This book format is widely used in the world. It is most familiar to zinesters and to many makers who do not think of their work in the context of book arts at all. This ubiquity speaks to the strength of the form rather than to a failure of classification, and is an excellent reminder that people make books for all kinds of reasons.

BUILDING THE COLLECTION

The site launched with books from forty-three separate artists, most of whom we knew personally. This intimacy created a sense of community that many artists were lacking; it was also useful to have a rapport with artists from whom we solicited unpaid work (of course, our labor was also gratis). Each of us created separate rosters of thirty artists to invite, and agreed to publish the work of anyone who said yes. Our lists contained a range of artists who we believed would showcase the exceptional adaptability of this book format, and we checked on one another's indexes only to avoid inviting the same artist twice. This very autonomous aspect of our collaboration was enabled by mutual trust, an understanding of each other's working styles, and extensive discussions about the range of characteristics we hoped to represent.

We replicated this balance in the invitations to our first artists. Our initial correspondence read, "We expect the books to be loose, but you can be as tight as you want. Books can be visual and/or textual: silly, sad, or funny. We are looking for work that is juicy and arresting—that's why we are inviting you." We provided just two weeks, hoping to encourage playfulness and eliminate the second-guessing and anxiety often invoked by premeditation. (This deadline was later adjusted in response to the urgent protests for racial justice that proliferated shortly after these invitations. Later contributors also had more time as we began to more regularly extend invitations to artists we didn't know—and because, as the world reopened without meaningful institutional support, we all became overburdened with work and waylaid by fatigue and disillusionment.)



Clockwise from top left: *Rainbow Chard as Gay Bar* by Oliver Baez Bendorf; *Post Offices I Hope to Know* by Josh Dannin; *Zoombie Script* by Crystian Cruz; *Masked Cell Towers of Tucson* by Philip Zimmerman; *Stronger Together* by Jenny Wilkson; and *Spirit* by Angela Rio.

We asked artists—some emerging, some established, and a few amateur—employing a variety of media, sensibilities, and visual styles; with attention to representation across gender and sexuality, race, age, ability, and status. We included work that may not have suited our own tastes and preferences. We reached out to book artists, printmakers, graphic designers, illustrators, poets, photographers, writers, and some who did not self-identify as artists at all.

Artists were eager to recommend peers, and we were grateful to establish connections with many gracious and energetic participants who helped to enrich our collection. An invitation to Tia Blassingame resulted in a collaboration with her own initiative, the Book/Print Artist/Scholar of Color Collective. We also cold-emailed prominent artists we admired and were thrilled when they agreed to participate. Some artists wrote to ask for our consideration. For our December 2021 international release, we used referrals from colleagues to invite artists, but we also hunted down contributors who were complete strangers, often sending an invitation to an email address discovered on an obscure and perhaps outdated website, dubious it would reach them at all, and amazed when they wrote back to join in. Being in touch with this chorus of participants has radically changed our perceptions of creative community, and we see this reflected in the collection itself.

We considered how an invitation-only collection that relied largely on our own networks could reproduce aspects of gatekeeping that may be in conflict with our ideals. The time and care we devoted to publishing each book was integral to the project's success, and replicating that work across unlimited submissions was not realistic for two individuals. We also saw the accessibility and attractiveness of our collection as a byproduct of this significant forethought, and felt its contents should reflect our own standards and concerns; it had never been our ambition to have as many books as possible in the collection. We hope that future initiatives from other book artists will pursue outcomes our collection may not embody.

COLLABORATION

Quarantine Public Library is collaborative at heart. It begins with our working partnership, extends to our contributors, and includes our audience. We think of visitors to the site who download, print, and make a book as being in collaboration with us; they complete the cycle of bookmaking. All are valued participants.

We live in different parts of the country, but it has been COVID-19 that both inspired and necessitated a collaboration-at-a-distance. The first opportunity we had to talk about QPL in person was in October 2021 at the Las Vegas Book Festival, more than fifteen months after its launch. Our work depended on phone and email, and we have used Google apps—Drive, Forms, and Gmail—to organize files, house submissions, and manage correspondence.

Collaboration is a much discussed practice within book arts. A common method has one person directing the separately made parts (writing, printing, binding, etc.) while retaining authority as producer. For QPL, we used a blended identity model of collaboration: we shared development of the concept and co-own the final product.

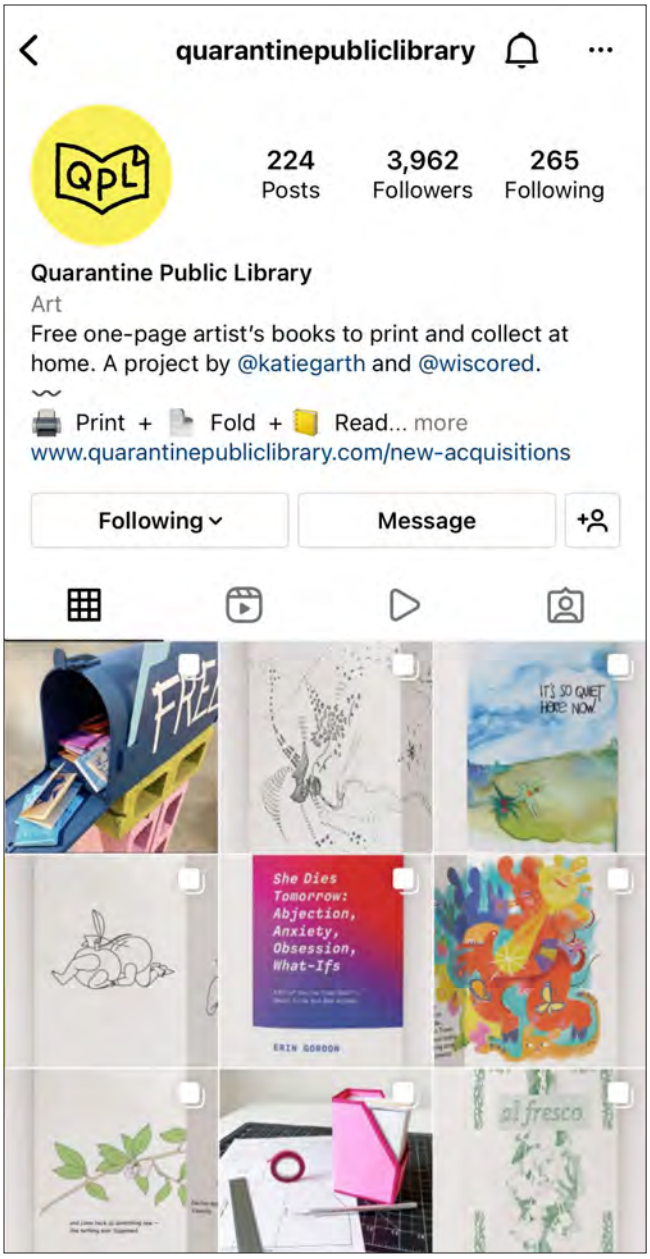
With that said, there has been much division of labor in the production of this project! To make the work lighter we separately managed similar tasks like issuing invitations, answering mail, writing, and proofreading. Katie's fluency with digital tools and social media meant she interacted more directly with the site; Tracy's experience managing institutional projects provided insight for fine-tuning communications and reflecting on our work. In the end, we each feel we are in the other's debt, which makes for a gracefully balanced collaboration.

MIND THE GAP

Web design and social media strategy were key aspects of our early discussions. How could we quickly convey the potential of this niche form to a general audience in a way that encouraged and engaged? A successful project would reach viewers beyond our own networks, teach them something new, convince at least some to make a physical object, and then give a certain intimate attention to this offbeat media; even more ideally, it would then incite them to share it with others. Marketing experts with large budgets and significant expertise may spend months crafting a digital campaign just to entice a small fraction of its target audience to open an email; getting a stranger to make a book is a much bigger ask, especially for two people working against a quick deadline. To us, an elegant solution would obscure this intricate dance of user engagement and showcase artists' contributions both individually and as a collection.

Katie's background as a web designer was a useful starting point given our discipline's reticence towards fleeting and unstable technologies. (The stereotypical book arts philosophy is a far cry from Silicon Valley's "move fast and break things" credo, for good reason). While Tracy could imagine the digital delivery of books, Katie's skills made it happen.

She suggested we create our project with Squarespace, a popular template-based web builder, which in her view sets the industry standard for usable, sophisticated design. This choice meant our site had specific advantages baked in from the beginning: it was responsive, functioning well for both desktop and mobile viewers, among other devices and viewport sizes; it was engineered for search engine optimization; it allowed us to manage our own content rather than relying on a web developer; and due to the platform's popularity, its navigation patterns would be familiar to many of our users. From Katie's point of view, our site itself is relatively unremarkable, but we both feel it succeeds in bringing work from this analog, materially-minded community of creators into a space that is primed for how people use the internet right now.



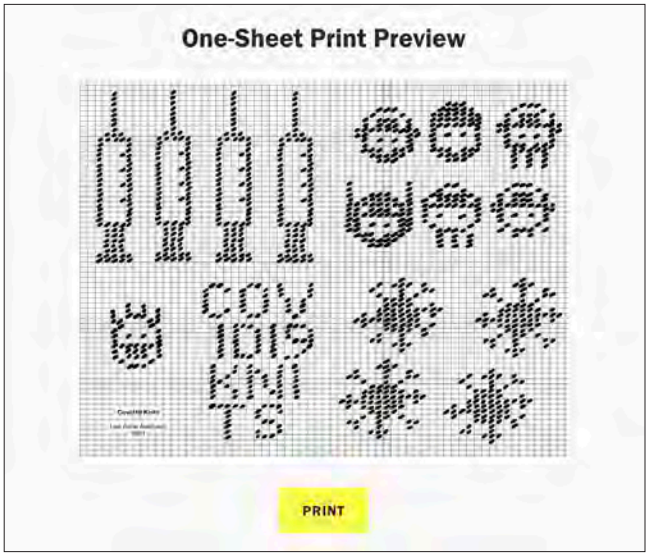
QPL's Instagram profile.

Instagram was also an important part of the project's circulation. Engaging with this platform is not without its downsides, given its dubious corporate ethics and ad-based revenue model, but the app employs experts who endlessly fine-tune the interface for maximum interaction, with a focus on content that is visual first and foremost. Instagram allowed us to go to where the people already were, and show them what we had to share.

Because digital accessibility is highly time-specific and context-dependent, it requires constant reiteration and translation. Archiving the site is a priority for us. While we do not know exactly what it will look like in twenty years or how usable it will be, we can take some specific future-proofing measures. The project has outgrown Squarespace, and we are working with a developer on a rebuild that allows the entire site to exist as a file index—stored safely and able to be used even without the internet. This process will not result in any noticeable visual changes but frees us from a subscription service with its own uncertain future.

That archiving, of course, only accounts for QPL's digital vestiges. This raises a larger question about the success of its conceit: did users actually print and fold books? It appears that a select group of especially passionate users completed our imagined sequence, but these numbers felt significant to us. Realistically, most Library visitors have only ever seen the books on screen; the site and Instagram posts may have successfully translated the haptic qualities of the book in such a way that it supplanted a user's impulse to print any out. Ironically, QPL books likely circulated so broadly in a digital space because presenting them as printed objects lent them a sense of cultural legitimacy.

Another variable for our audience was the desktop printer, described aptly by QPL artist and Printeresting co-founder Amze Emmons as "magic technology made into ubiquitous and invisible trash by weird ink



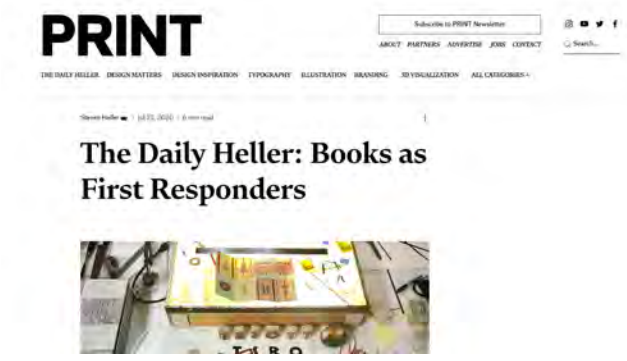
COVID-19 Knits by Lisa Anne Auerbach. On the site, every book's individual page included a print view, as shown above, and a right-reading view of the book. Artists were asked to keep in mind that users might only be able to print in black and white.

pricing schemes." Neither of us printed every book as the project developed; we felt both beholden to the idea of a printer as a necessary appliance and avoidant of it in practice. It is true that a user who printed our books had the benefit of a physical experience at a time when physical touch was perhaps what we missed most. For the many users who have no printer or whose firmware is out of date, who don't want to buy ink, or just don't want to make the effort, we are pleased that the digital translation provided them with an adequate sense of the experience.

Ultimately, the project circulated most rapidly and extensively on social media and would likely not have reached a significant general audience in any previous era of the internet. While virality is not a new digital concept, it seems apt that a project borne of social distancing could spread from friend to friend as if contagious.

RECEPTION

WHEN WE LAUNCHED ON JULY 15, 2020, COVID-19 cases and infection rates were higher than ever before: our project was sadly more relevant than we had hoped it might be. The first day gave us a special window into what felt like a sacred phenomenon. It was possible to see that visitors from different countries were printing and folding the same book on or around the same time, creating alone, but in tandem. This separate simultaneity reflected the potential that a digitally-native project intended for material realization might achieve—a way of puncturing the digital realm to create a shared, haptic art experience in a time of isolation.


PRINT

The Daily Heller: Books as First Responders

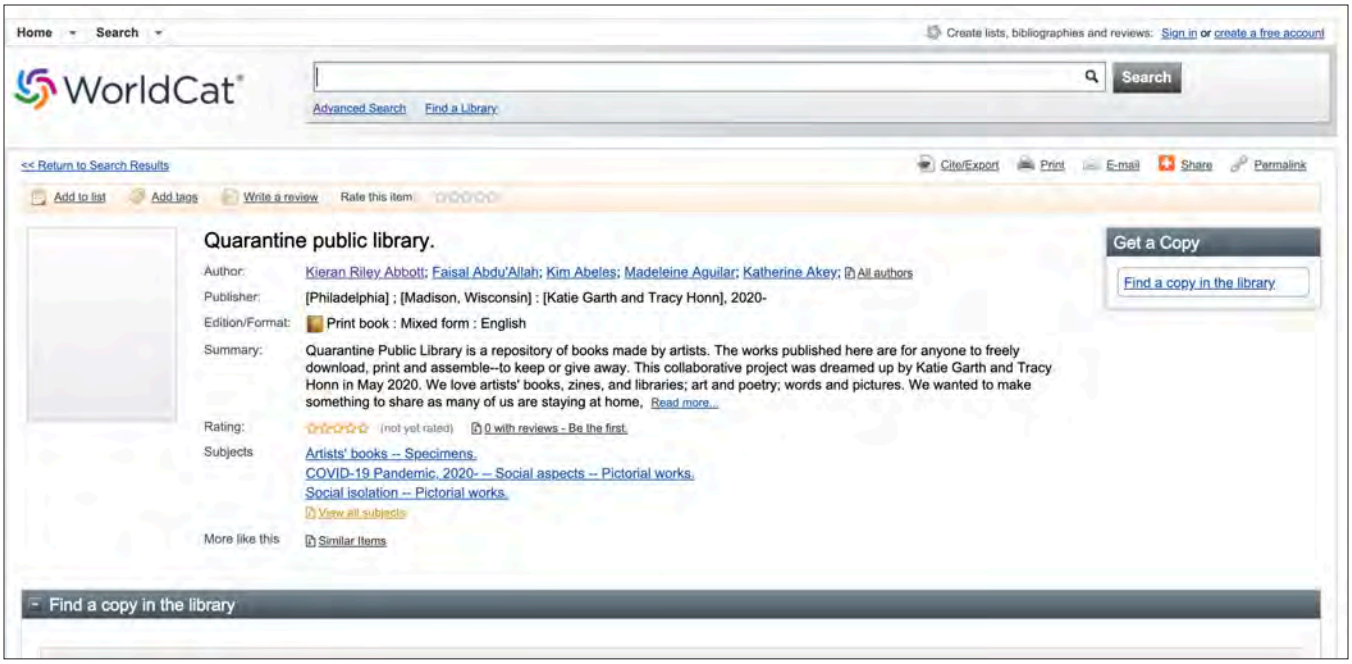
A screenshot from The Daily Heller's article about the project, featuring a process photo of Walter Tisdale's *To Thine Own Self Be True.*

QPL books on display at the 2021 Power of the Press Fest in Detroit. Photo by Gabby Baginski. Courtesy of Lynne Avadenka and Melinda Anderson.

Since then, QPL has garnered 130,000+ page views, attracted visitors from more than one hundred countries, and raised over $2,000. This reach was generated largely by the audience each contributing artist brought to the site and accelerated by several exciting mentions in the media, perhaps most notably a feature on The Daily Heller.

This digital circulation was a pleasant surprise, but we were even more taken aback when QPL began to manifest in the physical world. The project is represented on WorldCat, as a handful of libraries have included the Library in their digital collections—but at least one has amassed a printed set, too. Several Library contributors eventually facilitated public book displays. James Sturm supported librarians at the Center for Cartoon Studies who created an exhibit;

A visitor makes books at the Las Vegas Book Festival's QPL workshop event.



A screenshot of the site's WorldCat entry.

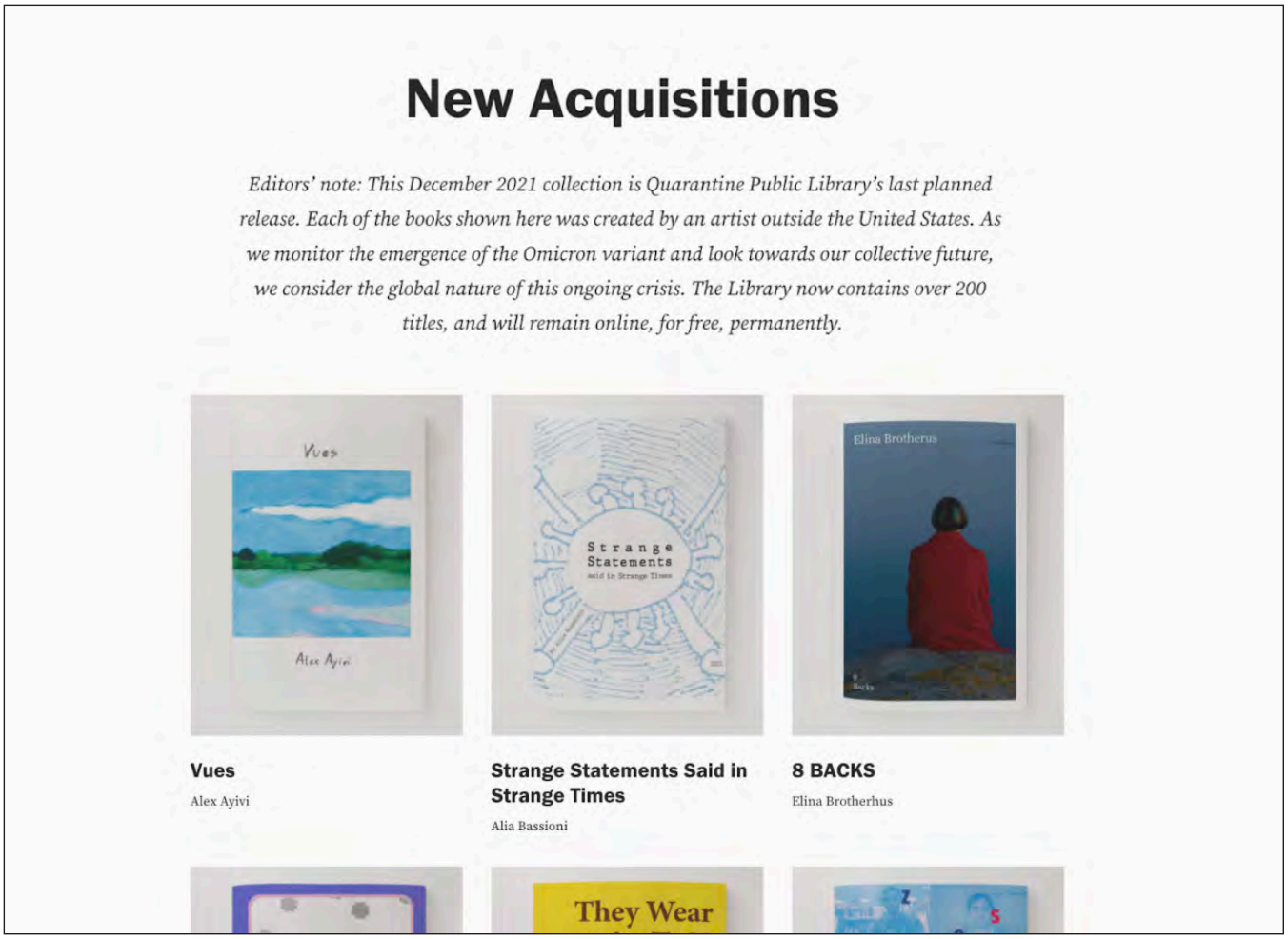
Lynne Avadenka folded what was then every book in the collection to feature at the Power of the Press Fest in Detroit. We were stunned by these displays, and by the beautiful images we received from these events: visitors holding books carefully in their hands, happy to be experiencing something new and intimate. In October of 2021, we led an in-person workshop at the Las Vegas Book Festival. These interactions completed a cycle we could not have anticipated.

These new connections meant we received messages from visitors all over the world—like someone who wrote to let us know he had printed out his favorite books to give away at his local bike park! Many visitors were excited to tell us they had been using the Library as a resource for remote instruction. Knowing these books would reach so many students was satisfying, and it was a salve to hear that QPL may have eased even the smallest of burdens for overworked educators. These pen pals joined the contributing artists with whom we had been happily corresponding, many of whom had also been perfect strangers. We compared bird sightings from Wisconsin to Israel, traded lockdown stories, and heard about loved ones who had been ill. As we continued to publish books in bimonthly installments, our inboxes were replete with gifts: newly submitted books, curious artists, and thoughtful visitors.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

QPL began as a way to connect with others around a shared experience. We used a form we loved—artists' books—to reach people where they were—anywhere but mostly at home. The conceit of a library reflected our personal values and framed our intentions to freely offer something for all. The success of the project was dependent on how the work was created, shared, and received: generosity from myriad contributors built the collection; we strove to thoughtfully publish and circulate its works; and strangers across the world enjoyed these novel little books as the gifts we envisioned them to be. From artists' passionate participation to the extent of the project's digital circulation, we feel we achieved our goals.

We also identified areas for growth. We worked to understand our positions as class-secure educated white women and considered what "giving" to "everybody" means. Had we accounted for the unintended consequences that came with our idea, or did we fail to anticipate its risks? Did the project's curation function as gatekeeping—simply representing our personal tastes and promoting our own communities—or did we stretch to reach beyond what we knew or thought familiar? The answer is, "a little bit of all of these." We learned as we went. We



A screenshot of the site's December 2021 release.

changed our minds, asked for feedback, and pivoted as we felt appropriate. We questioned and encouraged one another. And this work continues.

Our clearest insight is that giving yourself permission to do something you imagine will be good is the only authority you need. We are both well aware of the baggage that comes with the medium of book arts and all its unspoken expectations. Trying to make something that resembles something else you love can be limiting—our love of materials, tradition, craftspersonship, and pride in these things—can keep us from exploring new things with different potentials. It was the extenuating circumstances of the pandemic that allowed us to see the possibilities and legitimacy of the medium in new ways that were, by necessity, less confined. There is a conspicuous absence of material investigation in this space, yet it is not less successful as book arts for that being true. Having brushed up against this latitude, we are hungry for others to continue exploring it too.

The question of when and how we might end the project was one we returned to again and again. The project was of its time, and its generation depended on ever-changing conditions in the outside world, as well as the circumstances of our own lives. There was no right time. We decided last summer, before the Omicron variant emerged—when life on the other side of the pandemic appeared to be within reach—that our last planned release of books would be in December of 2021. To acknowledge the danger and uncertainty of the ongoing global pandemic, we distinguished the final round by inviting only international artists (those outside our home base in the United States), reflecting the reality that our fates are bound up in one another's.

We are still attached to QPL, and to its possibilities. We are allowing ourselves time to consider what the project might look like in the future, should we choose

to revisit it. Of course, no matter when COVID-19 becomes endemic, our everyday life will look quite different than it did in March 2020. Quarantine Public Library has been a way for us to understand that this altered future is one worth sharing.

Tracy Honn and Katie Garth together to write this paper in Chicago in January 2022.

Miniature books bound by the author during the Coronavirus pandemic.

THREE REFLECTIONS ON LOCKDOWN INDEPENDENT LEARNING

Lena Krämer

WHEN COVID-19 FIRST BEGAN AFFECTING EUROPE, I was halfway through my MA in Conservation Studies with a specialism of Books and Library Materials at West Dean College. I do not need to tell you how quickly and radically the world changed—you already know. With the uncertainties around continuing my studies online, I opted to interrupt my course for a year in the hope and expectation that the situation would be "back to normal" before April 2021. Within a few short and frantic weeks, my diary went from overflowing with planned internships, coursework, research and thesis writing, conferences, and social activities to being filled mostly with strikethroughs, question marks, and a lot of empty space. I was determined to make the most of one-year worth of deleted plans and to continue learning and developing in any way I could. This is neither a success story, nor will I bore you with complaints about the anxieties, uncertainties, frustrations, and general awkwardness of 2020. The following is a reflection on three of the things I did, intentionally or accidentally, that aided my development as a book conservator and bookbinder. None of these ideas are revolutionary or new, but they helped me through the first lockdowns and greatly benefited my subsequent studies. I hope they will be of use to you when developing strategies for independent learning, whether you are a student between courses or academic years, a recent graduate with time to fill before starting a job, or an amateur binder with limited access to classes.

—LENA KRÄMER

Lena Krämer is a book conservator and bookbinder working for Green's Books, a small independent studio in the UK. She completed her training at West Dean College in 2021 with distinction. Her MA thesis explored the potential suitability of fish parchment for use in conservation.

Summary: The author reflects on her experiences of independent learning during the Coronavirus pandemic by focusing on the three aspects: discipline and time management, combining different types of learning, and making miniature books. The general principles of each aspect are explained, and it is explored how each successfully contributed to the author's professional development as a book conservator and bookbinder.

lena.k@myself.com

DISCIPLINE AND TIME MANAGEMENT

KNOWING MYSELF, I WAS AWARE OF THE RISK of letting the year whizz past without achieving anything at all. To avoid this, I decided to be disciplined and persistent and set a daily schedule for myself. I was privileged with my own little space, so that I did not have to work around the other people in the household but could be undisturbed whenever I wanted or needed to be. The most important thing about my schedule was that it was personal. I knew from experience what times of the day I was best able to concentrate and so organized my days around these hours of productivity. For me, this mostly meant getting up just after sunrise to use the first hours of the morning for effective brain work. The schedule also included breaks for food, walks, and focusing my eyes on something in the distance, and I took weekends off to recharge.

The second most important thing about the schedule was that I had not tried to set it in stone. I could adapt and adjust my schedule without feeling guilty. This allowed me to postpone studying to go for morning swims with the family in summer, and fit in some evening research when I got a full-time job. The flexibility of my schedule was key to being realistic and kind to myself. There was no point in missing out on good moments or forcing myself to reach an arbitrary deadline—COVID had made life hard enough as it was. I realized that not all progress is immediately noticeable and learnt to value my own efforts and persistence more than obvious achievements. As my favorite saying goes, constant dropping wears out the stone, and even a couple of hours of focused study or practice every day add up to significant progress over the span of a year.

COMBINING DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING

Within my loose but strictly followed schedule, my days soon divided themselves into two distinct sessions: the highly focused time I spent researching and trying to define a topic for my MA thesis, and the more random, relaxed, and creative sessions where I got my mind excited and my hands dirty.
Initially, I felt that the two were slightly at odds with one another. Finding a thesis topic was a chore and I felt the pressure of having to identify a good topic, as a lot (my entire career, I thought) depended on it. The freer sessions, in contrast, were an opportunity to read up on topics which had caught my attention but which I had never had the time to follow up, and provided room for me to experiment with different materials and techniques. The focused research sessions took up two of my most productive hours each day, whereas the more creative sessions continued throughout the mornings and afternoons, depending on my mood and plans. I allowed myself to get distracted listening to any lectures I could access and exploring topics which sometimes seemed unrelated to bookbinding altogether. Resources like the recordings of the Guild of Book Workers Standards of Excellence Seminars and the ICON Book and Paper Group webinars were treasure troves of information and inspired many hours of model making and experimentation.

On reflection, I realize that the methods of my focused morning sessions and my more relaxed experimentation did not actually clash, but complemented each other beautifully. Even though I often listened to wholly unrelated podcasts while carrying out practical tasks, the free afternoon sessions were not brainless exercises. In fact, they challenged and engaged my brain as much as the focused and systematic morning sessions did, but in a more relaxed way. By allowing myself to experiment and get distracted, I discovered new areas of interest which I could follow up in later research. No matter what caught my attention, I was able to justify having some fun with it: trying origami would get me used to the mechanics of paper, drawing would help my precision, watercolor my color-matching skills, and weaving tape on a makeshift tape loom and making inks from oak galls would give me an idea of historical practices. My experimental discoveries allowed me to bring different ideas together, which in turn made my focused research time more exciting and enjoyable. Inspired by Peter D. Verheyen and the 2020 Bind-O-Rama (https://www.philobiblon.com/bindorama20/), I experimented with making parchment from fish skin, which ultimately became the focus of my MA thesis. [1] The thesis was ultimately awarded a distinction, which illustrates how well the two types of learning complemented and informed each other throughout the process. Though intense and full of learning, my

The author's makeshift workspace during the 2020 lockdown.

days did not exhaust or drain me, as I was able to rest from one type of learning while continuing to be fully immersed in the other.

MINIATURE MODELS

DURING MY EXPERIMENTAL SESSIONS, I spent a lot of time investigating historic binding structures and was eager to make models of them. Due to the limited space and access to materials during lockdown, I decided to work on a small scale. Having accumulated a small library of miniature books, I realized that this was of great advantage. The obvious benefits are economy and space: working in miniature meant that I could use scraps and small offcuts and was able to work on a surface the size of a coffee table without creating too much clutter or chaos. The advantage of size also extends to the finished piece: small books can be stored in small spaces, and even a substantial number of miniature books can fit inside a shoe box. This makes a miniature library portable, so examples of one's work can easily be taken to job interviews or courses. Miniature bookbinding is also a great learning opportunity. Making a good miniature requires a certain level of precision, as small inaccuracies appear greater in proportion. Most materials have to be hand-cut and assembly can be fiddly, which exercises hand skills and trains the eye to spot small errors. When scaling down a book, the relative thickness of the materials has to be considered, as the small size exaggerates the mechanical interaction of different elements of the book. The size I picked for my books (approximately 3x2 inches) is large enough to illustrate how particular book structure influences the movement of the finished book, and it allows for the inclusion of a certain level of detail when it comes to finish and decoration. The final benefit of miniature books is that, when they are bound accurately, immense satisfaction can be gained from handling a library of tiny books.

NOTES

1. The Book Arts Web. "2020 Bind-O-Rama: Fish Skin Binding – Piscatorial Bindings of a Different Kind". Accessed March 23, 2022. http://www.philobiblon.com/bindorama20/

Jeff Altepeter

Sarah Bryant

Laura Beyer

Erin Fletcher

Mitchel Gundrum

REFLECTIONS
A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS
DOCUMENTING THE VOICES OF BOOK ART AND CRAFT PRACTITIONERS, STUDENTS, AND EDUCATORS

IN MARCH OF 2020, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC began to spread in the United States resulting in shut down protocols, social distancing, and self-isolation. Many workplaces and schools implemented virtual alternatives. This changed how people all over worked and studied and had a huge impact on our lives. In addition to navigating the global and community health risks imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, national and international communities have brought social justice to the forefront of cultural discourse challenging long standing oppressive power dynamics, marginalization, and inequity while striving to make meaningful societal change. In recent years, many artists, crafts people, and educators engaged in facets of book work and the handmade book have used their creative practices and artistic voices to contribute to social justice initiatives. ¶ *The Guild of Book Workers Journal* editorial board proposed a series of interviews to give insights into how different bookbinders, artists, instructors, and students were affected by the events of the past few years. The following interviews seek to document the ways that working methods and priorities shifted and how we as a community of book workers are coming together in meaningful ways to overcome the challenges we collectively face. ¶ We mark this moment in time within our associated book disciplines.

Andrew Huot

Aimee Lee

JEFF ALTEPETER

Interviewed by Martyna Gryko
January 14, 2022

JEFF ALTEPETER IS THE HEAD of the bookbinding department at North Bennet Street School and a 1999 graduate of the program. He is also a 2003 graduate of the American Academy of Bookbinding. A past chair of the New England Chapter of GBW, Jeff has also mentored several NBSS graduates as they serve in GBW volunteer positions. Jeff has taught workshops at PBI, Penland, and at many other venues in addition to his full-time teaching at NBSS. He provides custom bookbinding and box making for many private and institutional clients, specializing in historic binding styles.

Martyna Gryko: Can you introduce yourself?

Jeff Altepeter: I'm Jeff Altepeter, and I am the Bookbinding Department Head at North Bennet Street School in Boston.

Martyna Gryko: Can you please describe your professional practice before COVID?

Jeff Altepeter: I'm gonna talk about this from the perspective of teaching. Our program is a two-year-long program that is full-time, Monday through Friday, eight to three each day. We do have a summer break in the middle that is three months. Prior to COVID, we have operated as a primarily hands-on program and the focus is on benchwork. Being in-person and working hands-on and working one-on-one with people, as well as with a group, are all kind of key components to the way we do things here. Typically, I and my colleague Martha Kearsley will do demonstrations and lecture presentations on various topics then work directly with the students on common projects based on those step-by-step demonstrations and presentations. There's a lot of very direct aspects to the work, especially pre-COVID.

Martyna Gryko: Can you remember back to the spring of 2020, how did you first respond to the COVID shutdown?

Jeff Altepeter: When we originally shut down in March of 2020, like a lot of people, we thought it was just a short blip. Actually we were able to time it according to some of the programs' spring breaks here at North Bennet Street School. We basically planned to take spring break and maybe a slightly extended spring break off, and during that time we were exploring some ideas of how to do things remotely on a very temporary basis–which we did. And we had a number of meetings during that time period during which we also quickly realized that it was going to be a longer-term situation than we initially thought. We rather quickly all tried to adopt some new distance-learning strategies in a place where we had all been long saying we would never, ever do anything virtual or distance learning. We would never, ever; none of us wanted to ever do anything like that. We suddenly had to try to convert from meeting in-person to working from home. Our initial efforts were a bit scatter shot. Some things worked well, some things didn't. One of the best things was that we quickly, as faculty here at the school, was adopt a very regular lineup of meetings and check-in times where we were sharing with each other what was working, what wasn't working, sharing ideas–and that was really helpful. It meant that we could figure out some new systems really quickly.

Martyna Gryko: Can you describe what you implemented?

Jeff Altepeter: Yes. So initially, what we ended up doing in Bookbinding–particularly once we realized that we were going to have to stay closed down for the rest of the school year in Spring of 2020–we converted to something that we called a "book club." It was actually a book and video club. We assigned readings and videos. We were fortunate to take advantage of the Guild of Book Workers Standards videos that were made available for free during that time. We used those as well as a few other recorded things that we had and a lot of reading material and then treated it like a book club. So students on their own time would go through the readings or videos, sometimes with some assigned questions or things to think about while they read and watched. Then we would meet and have discussion groups via Zoom and kind of do whatever we could to dig into an aspect of the work that is often shortchanged in our program. Because we're so hands-on and so focused on the hands-on side of things, we often don't spend as much time as

a group doing that kind of background, contextual study, and historical information. They are all things that we do a little bit of, but generally pre-COVID students were expected to do a lot of that work on their own and dig into it. They could ask questions in class, of course, and we had class discussions, but it got kind of short shortchanged in some ways, and so we converted to those things in our book club period in a way that actually ended up being a bonus for what we would have normally done. And that time ended up acting a bit as a bonus time for the students anyway because we then were able to offer–once we were able to open the building up again in September of 2020–to bring students back in to make up for that lost bench time. So students were still able to do the actual projects that they were expected to do, and it went pretty smoothly because of course we had done all of the context plus I had done a lot of some demonstrations, and we watched videos of other demonstrations of some of those things so it meant that we could move through those projects kind of quickly.

There were some other topics that we also dug into a little bit more deeply than we had pre-COVID. Especially in terms of pricing, estimating, things like that. We collaborated with some other programs to do some things on pricing and running a business kind of exercises. Anyway, then we were able to assign some projects virtually that gave students a chance to spend time doing estimates, writing treatment proposals, and spend a little bit more time on that as a group than we had previously. So there were some definite silver linings.

Martyna Gryko: How did your response to COVID change over time? Did you continue to try different ways to continue your professional practice?

Jeff Altepeter: Well, I would say that we certainly learned a lot from that first chunk of time. Those couple of months that I called the book club, we learned a lot from that. We at North Bennet Street School spent some time in the summer of 2020 preparing some things, either to be able to reopen or to try to operate as much remotely as we might be able to. We didn't know of course at that point what we would be able to do. So we invested in a lot of camera equipment and then eventually big screens that we were able to put in all of the programs here. Actually, in the fall of 2020, at one point there was a day that I think we had 20 big-screen, flat-screen TVs and 60-inch flat screen TVs delivered in one day. It's the weirdest thing to see at a school that teaches mostly historic trades–all these flat-screen monitors showing up and lots of camera equipment and other sound equipment and things. But we shifted to an idea of being able to do more demonstrations. Some of the programs back in that initial COVID period where their students had the ability to do some work from home, some of the programs were able to put together kits and materials that they could send home. That initially wasn't very practical in the Bookbinding program, even though in theory it would be, but most of the students at that time did not have any kind of useful space at home to do the work, and they didn't have tools and equipment at home. So to some extent we did allow and set up times for students to be able to come in and pick up tools and materials and things so there was a little bit of that. One of the things that we did moving towards the fall was to prepare kits and materials that could be sent home.

Once we did in fact learn that we were able to open, even then, we created these kits that people could pick up right at the beginning of the school year. Assuming that it was likely or certainly possible that we might have to go remote for some period of time. So we set up all the students with certain materials, tools, and supplies to be able to work on some projects that we had pre-envisioned in advance that we might be able to do remotely. Especially things like paper mending and–well I can't think right now what some of the other projects were–but we had a series of projects that we felt that students would be fairly able to do at a kitchen table kind of scene while doing some of the sort of book club kind of things if we needed to do that. We were fortunate to not have to do that at all as we did not have to go remote. And in fact, the Bookbinding program has not had to be remote since that early part in 2020, but we've continued to maintain a sort of a back pocket set of things that we could convert to if we needed to spend time remote. Virtual projects that we could work on, topics that we could dig into a little deeper–like again, the history or some things like that–we could do if we needed to work that way. So that's one of the ways that we sort of

changed our initial approach. The other thing is that a lot of those things that we brought in, like all that camera equipment for example, with the hope that if we had to we could at least videotape some of our demonstrations. This way, for some of us who didn't have space at home during that time when we were really more in lockdown and couldn't do anything, we envisioned being able to at the very least have faculty be here in the building and able to do some demonstrations and film them. This way students would be able to at least watch and if not turn around and do the hands-on work right away, it might have to get spread out a little bit to later. So we've kept all that stuff in case we need it.

Probably the biggest thing that we've kept, and it has been fantastic, is the camera stuff which we continue to use live in the classroom, and so we're able to give close-up views of things. We have also tried to record some of those live demonstrations and use them as possible materials for somebody to review if they were out sick or something like that, and some of the programs here have done a lot of that. I know the furniture program has hundreds of videos. I have done a fraction of that in Bookbinding because I'm a little bit too perfectionist about what the outcome is. The furniture instructors say that some of theirs are great, some are really bad, but they have hundreds of videos, with some much more useful than others. But yeah, I need to do better at just recording some things. Even if it's poor quality, it can be better than nothing, and it can be a starting point. It can give us ideas of how to maybe film it better and things like that. So, yeah, those are things that we've changed and kept from what we've been doing.

Martyna Gryko: The flat screens and being able to see things in real time up close has actually been really very helpful.

Jeff Altepeter: And it's just better. That's something that we have thought about for years but we've never been really motivated to spend the money on the equipment to do it. And this again it's one of those silver lining kind of things. The school got some grant money to invest in some of the technology, and it pushed us into some areas that really have been helpful.

Martyna Gryko: In retrospect what worked and what didn't? Are there some practices that you want to continue even as communities open up?

Jeff Altepeter: I would add to that, that one of the things I've discovered is that using that camera stuff live simultaneously with the in-person kind of thing has worked well, but live-streaming demos and presentations that way I haven't thought was very successful, for me. So one thing I have found is that some things I have continued to do virtually. I've done some guest teaching for some other classes and in those I have used more of a combination of some live discussion and some pre-recorded video right within that live Zoom session, and some things like that have worked better than just trying to do a live stream demo because it's difficult to do that without a film crew kind of running that. When you're trying to demonstrate or teach something and film it at the same time and make sure people can see that, I find that can get a little difficult. That's one thing that I've learned about what works and doesn't work. The other thing that worked and didn't work was back during our book club days realizing that the idea of doing that and having these discussion sessions was a bit of a bumpy ride. Especially at first because that's not how we have normally worked in our classes. I mean, of course, we have discussion sessions, but we don't do those really sitting down and just having a discussion-type of setting. That's very common in a typical college classroom but is not what this group does, right? That's not what we really do in here, and so students really struggled with the idea of sitting and having a class discussion that would be more normal for a college setting–would just be par for the course–and so I found that was something I needed to really rethink how to present and how to engage with students. I'm continuing to think about how we work in our class on a regular basis, whether we're in person or not.

Martyna Gryko: There have been many other dramatic developments over the past two years including disruptive politics and active social justice movements. How did these developments affect your work and how have they affected you personally?

Jeff Altepeter: So that's something I could really go on quite a bit about. Obviously, there have been things that have had a big impact on all of us. One of the things that I'll focus on is some of the social unrest that happened. Particularly the murder of George Floyd brought a lot of us here at the school to really take a hard look at how–many of us who are not impacted daily by that kind of thing, and speaking for myself as a white man–have not historically been impacted daily by that kind of thing. It was a moment that I really realized how much I kind of allow to pass by me. How little I paid attention to something that was affecting some communities in such a deep way. A lot of people here at North Bennet were in that same situation, so faculty and staff here at the school established a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion group during summer of 2020, and we started making plans for how to be more active and proactive in our own community on DEI topics. Learning about things, learning about ways that we could try to work within our own community and our own small space to try to make things better, and that has had a huge impact on our work here, I think, because that is and has been an ongoing initiative at the school. We hired a consultant and established a very regular series of meetings. We meet monthly to work on some initiatives. We're still working on new goals even right now but we established some new ideas here. We really solidly established a commitment to working with the board and the administration here at the school, so that is an ongoing kind of thing that I have been very active in. I'm on the Faculty and Staff Committee and have worked from the very beginning. I interviewed the consultants that we hired, and so I've been really involved in that the whole time and it's really important to me in thinking about how we can address some clear inequities in our field. I think that as a school that trains people to work for employment in some very specific fields, we have an opportunity to develop potential employees in those fields and also make an impact on those fields. A lot of the faculty here, we've recognized the limits within our fields. Bookbinding, for example, is a very white field, and we have recognized that we can't solve all of that immediately, but we've been looking at ways that we can work to improve that. How can we target our potential employers and potential employees in the field and make people feel welcome? Because there's nothing wrong with white people doing bookbinding, it's just that when we look at the demographics in any field, and we see that it doesn't reflect the demographics of our community on the whole, we're missing something. We're missing out on the likely amazing input that could happen from communities that are not represented well and trying to figure out how to bring more people into our own interest areas or how to make our interest areas more appealing. We've spent a lot of time on that and I'm happy that we've been doing that, and I'm happy that it's become a really key organizing principle on almost everything that we do here at the school now. It's been really nice to see that lens is applied to just about everything that we organized since then. From public programming, to hiring, to outreach, and recruiting for students. I mean just across the board. I can't think of a thing where the DEI committee here has not had a little bit of a voice on as we've been proceeding.

Martyna Gryko: Do you have any thoughts about the future trajectory of your practice in your field in general?

Jeff Altepeter: I think that there have been some silver lining kinds of things in terms of our practices for how we present things. For even how I meet with prospective students. I have had a better ability to do that because we converted to virtual meetings. Sometimes in the past I had very short or limited conversations with potential incoming students and that has improved a great deal. There's a lot of things in terms of communication that I think our new acceptance of virtual communication and sharing information virtually has allowed us to reach a wider audience, so I feel really good about that. And I think that's something that will continue to offer dividends to the school and to the program moving forward. I think as I already said the DEI work–I'm really loving seeing what's happening with that and seeing that that is impacting decision making and planning here at the school so completely. Right now we're working mostly within our own community and sort of focusing inward, but we also have plans for how we can expand that into the field on the whole, and so I'm looking forward to that kind of thing. I think that that's something that I see the Guild of Book Workers doing

as well, and that it's going to be great to see hopefully very positive outcomes moving forward in our field from that.

Martyna Gryko: Do you have any comments about how your private practice has been going at this time?

Jeff Altepeter: So, interestingly, private-practice wise, especially initially, it was very difficult because I didn't have access to a studio because although I used to live in my studio space, unfortunately when COVID hit I did not, and I had not for a few years. So I actually did not have access to be able to do work for a long time. For the first six months or so, I had no access to anything and all my work was on hold. That had a pretty major negative impact on my finances as well as just being able to continue with that kind of work. It took a while to rebuild that especially because last year, the 2020/2021 school year, trying to get used to the new ways of working took a lot of time. Because we had three cohorts in the initial part of that: we had the people that were supposed to graduate in May of 2020 back to work, as well as a small group of new students, and a small group of continuing students. All that overlapping stuff meant that I was really occupied with things here at the school–all for the good, I enjoyed it, it went well, everything was good, but it really meant that COVID was, at least for the first year, a big drain in my private-practice. I accomplished very little during that time in private work. In this second year of things I have been able to ramp back up a little bit and do some private work. I was able to do some stuff over the summer and even into this school year here, so things have been slowly kind of regrouping. I also have kind of, I would say prioritized things differently since then and kind of approach that work maybe a little bit differently. I don't know if I can explain that more than just to say that it certainly had a big impact and has changed the way that I work probably on a permanent basis at least as long as I'm teaching here at North Bennet.

Martyna Gryko: Thank you.

Jeff Altepeter: Thank you.

LAURA BEYER

Interviewed by Martyna Gryko
December 8, 2021

LAURA BEYER IS AN ARTIST SPECIALIZING in print, paper and book design. She graduated with her BFA from Albion College in Albion, Michigan and her MFA from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. She works as an arts educator at various institutions in the Detroit area including Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center & College for Creative Studies. Her business, Hearty Greetings, focuses on the production of letterpress goods and handmade books. Laura's artwork has been collected by colleges & universities, private collections as well as the Detroit Institute of Art.

Martyna Gryko: Can you please introduce yourself, provide a brief bio and describe your professional practice?

Laura Beyer: Sure. I'm Laura Beyer, a book artist and printmaker. I received my college degree from Albion College where I earned my BFA in studio art and focused primarily on book arts and printmaking. That's where I first learned letterpress. I worked as a studio intern for Women's Studio Workshop after I graduated from college, which is a facility that specializes in the publication of artists' books. I then received my master's degree at the University of the Arts in book arts and printmaking. I finished up my schooling in 2011 and moved back to the Detroit area. Currently, I work as an art instructor at the Birmingham Bloomfield Arts Center and College for Creative Studies where I teach book arts and printmaking. I also own my own studio business called Hearty Greetings that specializes in letterpress printed stationery, invitations, and ephemera.

Martyna Gryko: Can you remember back to spring of 2020? How did you first respond to the COVID shutdown?

Laura Beyer: At that time, I was teaching at the Birmingham Bloomfield Arts Center, which is a continuing education arts center. My classes were canceled and so I was unable to teach in-person. Spring 2020, I was offered a position to teach book arts at the College for Creative Studies. I learned that the class was going to be a hybrid class which meant I would be teaching on Zoom by working on the computer with students and also in-person in the classroom with COVID protocols in place such as wearing a face mask and social distancing in the classroom. I didn't have experience teaching online but accepted the position to give it a try. That semester went well, and I felt the students were very engaged on the computer. We split the class into two groups– half the class could come in in the morning and half the class could come in in the afternoon because we could only have a certain number of students in the classroom at one time for social distancing. During our in-person class time, I would have a Zoom call open since some students did not want to come into the classroom because of their comfort level around the pandemic. I would record part of our class sessions on Zoom, particularly during demos that were technically complicated, so that the students could refer back to the content later.

As an artist, I'm working with my hands all the time. As a result, I've been slow to learn and put off learning some new technologies. These teaching experiences have pushed me into the deep end to learn new things. I'm grateful to have had these experiences and gained different ways to teach.

Martyna Gryko: Yeah, pushing people out of their comfort zone.

Laura Beyer: Definitely out of your comfort zone. Sort of a long answer to your first question but I think it kind of encompasses everything.

Martyna Gryko: How did your response change over time? Did you continue to try different ways to continue your professional practice?

Laura Beyer: I've taught other studio classes online, via Zoom, over the last year and a half and continue to grow and innovate my methods of teaching. I've used an external camera in the Zoom classroom space to show my bookbinding workstation and shared pre-recorded demos with the students. This way you have the feeling of having a hands-on experience even when you're not physically in the same room as everyone else.

I've bought some new tools. I have a ring light that connects to my computer so I can have better lighting if we're just talking like we are here now on Zoom. I got a cell phone attachment to hook onto my tripod as well. It's been fun trying out different things that can help me advance my teaching in the future.

Martyna Gryko: How did you change as an artist, bookbinder, and teacher as a result of your COVID experience?

Laura Beyer: I'm not sure. I think that it's been such a challenging time for everybody. I try to be compassionate in the classroom, emotionally available, and be a good listener. People are craving the community of a classroom experience in a different way than they would have when they didn't have any restrictions on their social life or seeing their family. I think people are a little bit more present and willing to connect. Being a facilitator of these interactions is a key part of teaching so everyone feels comfortable and can share if they want to, or if they're having a bad day. Just tapping into people during this challenging time is important but also rewarding to have that role in people's lives.

Martyna Gryko: Yeah, I found that mental health played a really big part, too, because everybody's worried about their physical health but also being isolated took a big effect on people. I feel like last year there was a big difference or a shift. We all felt so separated in the classroom because at North Bennett nobody could sit together and eat lunch because of the other social distancing. They were all separated in different pods so there was no intermingling between the different majors. It was like we were all here in the classroom together but still very much isolated. We didn't even really talk very much. There's a huge difference now. This year, people are hanging out and more open about what's going on in their lives and if they're not feeling good mental health wise or physically. People actually care more about self-care now because it's something we really ignored in the past. I feel like if you had a cold you still went in, you still tried to push past it and now it's like, "Hey, I should care about myself, take care of myself, take a day to rest." To make people more compassionate for others around them. Like, "Maybe I should take the day off to not get anybody else sick." I feel like before the pandemic that was something that was not normalized in our culture. It was just very normal to go be sick and do things.

Laura Beyer: Making books can be very therapeutic for people. Since you're creating this functional object by hand–however you embellish it, whatever materials you've chosen–it's very personal to you. You can then use the book for writing and reflecting. Just the action of making books is satisfying since there are so many design components to consider. Also, books don't take up too much space. Books just fit tidily back on your shelf afterwards which is nice.

Martyna Gryko: Yeah, sometimes I'll make a book and I'm like, "Oh, it's too precious to use! Yeah… I don't actually want to use it as a sketchbook."

Laura Beyer: Yeah, then after you make the third one, then you're like, "Okay, maybe."

Martyna Gryko: Exactly!

There have been many other dramatic developments over the past two years including disruptive politics and active social justice movements. How have these developments affected your work and have they affected you personally?

Laura Beyer: As an educator, being aware of the movements in our history, and the different sides of current topics, I can go into a conversation as a participant and a facilitator. These days things are so polarized politically nobody wants to talk. But if you can bring the exchange down to a conversational level, people gain better understanding of one another and everyone wins.

Martyna Gryko: I feel like printmaking lends itself to being a good platform for activism as well especially with the work artists such as Tyanna Buie are doing. It is very much a social commentary.

Laura Beyer: Absolutely. Printmaking allows for posters and ephemera to be generated en masse so you can get your ideas out there and be heard. I've seen some really great work during this time tackling all kinds of issues.

Martyna Gryko: Do you have any thoughts about the future trajectory of your practice or your field in general?

Laura Beyer: I think the book arts as a field is something that will continue to gain popularity as a foil to our digital lives. I also teach letterpress printing at Signal Return and find that a lot of people who take classes may be graphic designers or just curious to learn the old-style printing process. It is how mind-blowing that within a generation we could be working with handset type, linotype, to offset, to digital, to where we are now in terms of media and communication. It's pretty crazy. During class, the students learn the history, which I think is pretty grounding. Letterpress is methodical, it's technically challenging, and creative. There are a lot of entry points for people, so I see the field continuing to grow in popularity.

Martyna Gryko: When I took your workshop, I was honestly surprised that many of the participants were also in so many other workshops. The pandemic seemed like a time to learn a million things, explore, and just get out there.

Laura Beyer: I know. I wish I had more time to do everything! But I think that there's like two sides of the coin, especially when we're talking about mental health. The first part is making sure you slow down, making sure you take care of yourself. But then the opposite side of the coin is, well, can I use this as the opportunity for growth? Are my habits changing? What can I learn from this, hopefully, once in a lifetime experience?

Martyna Gryko: Yeah, unfortunately I feel like the pandemic is going to become a thing we adapt to. It's like the new normal, right?

Laura Beyer: Yeah, it'll be interesting to see because I think at this point there's not a clear ending point.

Martyna Gryko: Yeah, it will be interesting to see how it all evolves and where we go from here. Hopefully, there won't be any other shutdowns because that was a lot to handle. With the pandemic, I think I've become a lot more flexible. I am trying to adapt to it. I'm more open. I'm more vulnerable with people. More honest with myself.

Laura Beyer: That's good, the ability to just slowdown is key. I think people were doing too much. It was too crazy. I think people are spending more time with their families. For me, learning how to cook for myself and family better and form some better habits has been rewarding. I know that there are lots of families out there that changed their habits and gained different and better connections as a result.

SARAH BRYANT

Interviewed by Victoria Birth
December 15, 2021

SARAH BRYANT HAS PRODUCED ARTIST BOOKS and prints under the name Big Jump Press since 2005. These books use analytical imagery and reference material to address topics ranging from archives and self-representation to population mapping and urban planning. She frequently collaborates with artists and individuals working in other fields. Her work can be found in dozens of libraries and private collections in the United States and abroad, including The Library of Congress, The New York Public Library, and The Yale Arts Library. She is currently an assistant professor at The University of Alabama, where she teaches letterpress and other courses for the MFA Book Arts Program. To see more about her work, view her portfolio at bigjumppress.com.

Victoria Birth: Can you please describe your professional practice before COVID?

Sarah Bryant: Sure, I would love to. I feel like my professional practice is split into two. One is teaching and then one is being an artist and making books and prints. Obviously both of those things got totally upended. Before COVID, I was teaching in-person courses primarily in letterpress at the University of Alabama, which involved heavy demonstrations, lots of in-person time, lots of time in the studios, helping troubleshoot, lots of students in the studios together troubleshooting each other's projects when I wasn't around. I sometimes teach in the bookbinding area. too, but in general I'm sort of the letterpress person. So that was what was going on on my teaching side. Leading up to COVID I was teaching two upper-level print courses: Print 2 and Print 4 which have different names now, but that's kind of still how I think about them.

My students in spring semester 2020 were making their first books in Print 2 and in Print 4 people were putting out their big project before their thesis project. Everybody had gotten through the design stage, and we were ready to print. Some people had just started printing their work by March of 2020. So that's my teaching side.

On the artist side in 2020, you know, I'm a letterpress person, so I use presses to make my work, and in 2020 I was using the school presses. I do have a press, but I hadn't yet moved it down from New York State at that point. I generally produce a big artists' book every couple of years, and then I've got some other collaborative work that I'm doing kind of sprinkled in all of that. So, I'm pretty busy trying to kind of get out my projects and get books out into the world, and it requires unsurprisingly a lot of time in the studio. So those were the two places that I was prior to the shutdown.

Victoria Birth: Thinking back to spring of 2020, how did you first respond to the COVID shutdown?... without going into the trauma…

Sarah Bryant: Yeah, could I just describe my trauma to you, and my weird buying of grains and beans…

So, the University shut down. It was just before spring break and the University was like, "Okay, JK. We're gonna have a two week spring break, and we're gonna come back only online" which obviously really caused problems for all the students of mine who were about to print their books. Like, the whole trajectory of our courses was geared toward this moment where they would then print the projects. So, we'd already done all the readings. We'd already done all the demonstrations. All this stuff had happened, and the whole rest of the time was meant to be production: workdays, workshopping, critique. So suddenly, I didn't have a curriculum at all, and I didn't have any studios or equipment, and obviously we were all dealing with trauma. So the students and I were all just kind of like, "I don't know what to do."

The upper-level class were students that I knew quite well. They'd already worked with me for a while. After we went online I gave them "book-a-week" content-generation assignments, and we started an online chat so that we could check in about the projects we were working on at home. Sometimes they were collage, and sometimes I would just give them some kind of a prompt. We came up with a mantra that was:

"Moving is making and making is good. I make what I want to and not what I should."

We made stuff together and kept in touch over this video-social media stuff. Mostly, I was just trying to give everyone some structure, but I wasn't going to grade them. I mean, I gave them feedback, and we were trying to work things out. So, that was the first group. That was the Print 4 group. The Print 2 group was just starting to print their first book, and we'd been talking about typography and stuff… I even struggle to remember what I did… I'd have to look at my syllabus which I adapted. I think in the end I showed them some techniques like pochoir and "how to edition an image using paint brushes, stamp pads, and stencils" and "here are some videos that we can go watch." I can barely remember.

So, that semester was kind of a wash, but it sort of had to be because nobody was able to…I mean, it was just a hard semester for everybody. I think it was harder for my colleague Kyle Holland who was teaching papermaking. He was having to come up with a lot of crazy assignments for them. Like mixing pulp at home and, you know, what kind of projects they could do.

Victoria Birth: So did they legitimately shut down the University? You could not go into the library studio spaces?

Sarah Bryant: You couldn't go. You couldn't access the library. That went on for months. My professional work, my practice, ground to a halt because I had no press access. Almost six months. Through the summer I couldn't access it. Then, finally, I was given access to the studios. But all I could do was film demonstrations because I was gearing up for the fall semester which was sort of officially face-to-face but everybody was dealing with it differently so it didn't look that way everywhere. What we ended up doing was limiting access to the studios to one person at a time. We started using a doctor's office booking platform so that we could control not just who was on what press but how many people could book in at a time. Then I filmed all the demonstrations. I made these incredibly detailed, elaborate letterpress demonstrations. How to set type by hand. How to operate the press. How to change the packing. How to check the roller height. I mean, everything you can imagine. How to set type on a curve. How to carve a linoleum block. How to make a linoleum block. So, so much of my life was filming. I didn't have time to do my own work, and then, once the semester started, I felt like it was hard to get into the studio because the students had such limited access and I didn't want to bump them.

But I was also home alone and my son Milo was home. So, another thing that was happening was that we lost our child care. Ben [Sarah's husband] and I were shuffling Milo back and forth, and we were all home, all the time. I was Zoom teaching in the basement, and Ben was Zoom piano teaching in the garage, and Milo was occasionally Zooming in some really pitiful way with his preschool class–but mostly just running around looking for us to play with him, which was how it went for ages. So that is kind of the first and second semester, spring and fall of 2020. The other thing that was complicated about the fall semester was that we had to make room for students who wanted to participate remotely. So, in that semester, I was teaching artists' books, which was fully remote, and we did all remote artists' book stuff. Although occasionally, once, I guess, I had an artists' book library day where everybody could come to my backyard, and I put all these artists' books out on our big picnic table, and then people came to look at them. So, we did that. And then the print class though, I had half the class… It wasn't a huge class, but half the class was learning letterpress for the first time through Zoom and video demonstration, and then solo time, and then the other half was not in town and participating remotely. Instead of having my standard intro letterpress class where they're kind of getting a little bit of image making and handset type and press operation and a bit of polymer, I just basically made it all about type. So the students with studio access were learning how to set type, lead type, wooden type, and digital type converted to polymer plates. So that's the letterpress people. And then with the remote people it was like, "Let's look at grid systems, let's look at these texts, let's work with this software and I want you to design these types of things". I mean it was really hard. So, that was the fall.

Victoria Birth: How big was class sizes at that point or the entire program?

Sarah Bryant: We generally have three to six incoming students depending on a given year. We had three incoming students that year which is not out of the norm for us. And we had also just started

a 15-credit certificate program. So, I think we had a certificate student or two at that time. So, yeah, my intro letterpress had five students, and then the artists' book class had probably six maybe. So not huge but not tiny for book arts anyway.

I do want to say one thing about this time though. In November and December of 2020 I moved my press to my house, and I bought all of this type from a place up in Florence, Alabama, that was just getting rid of a really old letterpress setup that they hadn't used for 50 years. By the end of December, I had a working letterpress shop, and I had type, and I had my press in my garage. I had my house set up so that I could actually be an artist at home. But also in the spring, I started bringing students to my garage. We would open up the garage door and everybody wore masks, and I put tailgating chairs on their list of supplies and then it was like the safest possible way. They still had to watch the demonstrations but then a lot of the demonstrations were suddenly possible in person as well. We did pressure printing in my garage. And we did all the stuff. We did linoleum again. We were able to spend some real time together, but there were still no vaccinations so it was best to do it outside. And then by the end of that spring semester, we started meeting a little bit and once people started getting vaccinated we started meeting more, inside occasionally. Not much, but sometimes. There, I told you everything.

Victoria Birth: Yeah, that's awesome. Glad you had that press!

Sarah Bryant: I know, it made a huge difference. Like, it's crazy. It really did make a huge difference to have it come.

Victoria Birth: I mean, I think for anyone, owning a press makes a huge difference in their life.

Sarah Bryant: Yes!

Victoria Birth: You kind of answered a little bit of this too but, how did your response change over time and did you continue to try different ways to continue your professional practice?

Sarah Bryant: I had a book project underway that was really weirdly affected by the pandemic. I had been planning on doing this project about fabric samples. In late 2019, I'd gone up to the Yale Birren Color Collection in the arts library there. I'd gone through all these boxes of fabric samples, paint chips, color systems, and artists' books too just to think about color and think about how to make this book. I had settled on this idea–which then got completely gazumped by the pandemic–of making a sample book about my own space, my home space. So like, using old clothes and using the colors of my walls. At the time, before the pandemic, I was never in my home space. So it was unusual. And then suddenly I was there all the time and then the whole project, which I had wanted to be about landfill culture and planned obsolescence, started to be a project about being at home during COVID. In a way, part of it worked because I could do some of it without a press–like fabric collage. So, I started doing work on it when I didn't have access to the studios. There's a lot of thread winding. You can pick it up and put it down. Which was also ideal for having a five-year-old at home. But then a lot of it just ended up in a drawer and it was only this summer (2021) where I finally felt like I had the headspace to go back to my original thinking and not make it a COVID book. I mean, it will always be a COVID book. It'll have that part to it. I think that when I look back on it, it will be clear that it was where my mind was. But it's also kind of still what I wanted it to be. So, it's kind of weird. But I mean, it was lucky I was able to shift it so that I was working on collages. I feel like a lot of people are doing collage right now. Like, we've all just been like, "What can I do?"

Victoria Birth: Yeah, like what's physically around me at this very moment that I can take advantage of?

Sarah Bryant: Yeah, like what are the tools that I have? The other thing about my work and my professional practice is that I didn't really have time for it. That book sat in a flat file for a year because I had no child care, and every minute of my time was preparing to teach these classes that were really hard to teach. So, I think we did well. I feel like the Alabama MFA cohort that came in with COVID is really strong, and I feel like there's a sense of community there. So, I feel like we did okay, but it was very challenging.

Victoria Birth: In retrospect what worked and what didn't? Are there some practices that you want to continue even after communities open up?

Sarah Bryant: It's so hard to say what worked and what didn't because for so much of it we were hanging on by our fingernails, trying to make it work. Well, I mean, I think that we got into a rhythm, and I do think that our response was good. People felt safe, and we were able to do the teaching we needed to do. It wasn't ideal, but it was what it had to be. One thing I think that is incredibly useful for the students, and for me, is to have those demonstration videos so that there is a place where they can go for review. I mean, chances are, like, I've got tying up type on video, right? So, sometimes you need to see that five times…and I will show it to them in person five times. I'm happy to do it. But sometimes I'm not there, and now they can just go to the video and watch it. And having the big demo, the full two-hour letterpress demonstration on video is very good because I can always tell them they can return to that. It's broken into chapters, so they can access portions of it easily. And also, if I have students who need to miss a day, and I can't repeat a demonstration, all that information is there. So I'm very grateful. That's really a positive. I don't think I ever would have put together all these videos if it weren't for the pandemic. I wish that there weren't so many references to the pandemic in the videos so that I could use them forever.

Victoria Birth: I mean, there's just some historical elements to them, right?

Sarah Bryant: Yeah! I'll probably be using them when I'm 60, if I'm still alive. And people will be like, "She looks so young!"

Victoria Birth: How did you change as an artist, bookbinder, teacher, or even as a student as a result of your COVID experience?

Sarah Bryant: I don't think I can tell yet, you know? I think this semester has been so great because we've been back face-to-face. But I also miss my kid because I'm not seeing Milo as much. My studio space at home is so great, it's kind of harder to leave it now. But I also think that COVID anxiety plays a factor in that too. I hope that I am still a strong teacher. I feel like the last year and a half or two years have just been this crazy blur. There have been really really positive moments. There have been great days with the students and great demos and great results and great student work. But there's also just been days where I've been like, "I am terrible!" "I am the worst!" And I'm also returning to the curriculum now, and I'm like which way do I want to do it? Not that I want to do it online, but maybe I should change the order of the way I'm teaching things. We're still kind of reshuffling. Anna Embree also went on sabbatical this semester, so she's not here and Kyle Holland and I are teaching different things. So I still don't feel like I've gotten into a rhythm after everything. So, I'm not sure. And I feel like that as an artist, too. The project I just finished, I think it made me just work more spontaneously and intuitively because most of my projects are so much about planning and execution, tight registration, and researched projects. With this one, in the end I just had to finish it. I wanted to be done with it, and so I sort of let certain things go, and I think that the book kind of benefits from that a little bit. Although it remains to be seen. It's brand new, and I haven't really taken it out for a ride yet, with people. So, I don't know. It's a very different kind of book, so we'll just see.

Victoria Birth: We'll see if people throw tomatoes at you on the street because of it and then we'll really know.

Sarah Bryant: That's always the fear: that people are going to throw tomatoes at me. I'm going to go to Codex, and people are going to throw tomatoes, or potatoes because those would hurt a lot more.

Victoria Birth: There have been many other dramatic developments over the last two years including disruptive politics and active social justice movements. How do these developments affect your work and how have they affected you personally?

Sarah Bryant: How do you even describe the last year?...

Victoria Birth: You made a book, which it's actually really funny. I had told Nate, my husband, about this idea for a book and then the next thing I knew, you had already made it. It was the book Read This Out Loud. I saw it and was like, "Sarah's amazing. I was never gonna actually make it."

Sarah Bryant: So, I think that I started going way further back, like four or five years ago which feels

like 20 years ago. When Trump was inaugurated and the women's march happened, I decided I wanted to make a book as a way to participate in a women's march. I actually ended up going to a march in Birmingham, but at first I was like, 'I'm gonna spend this day designing a book'. And so I did this project where I printed two inaugural addresses: President Obama's 2008 Inaugural address and Trump's 2016 inaugural address. Anna Embree came and joined me on that project. So Anna and I worked collaboratively. I printed the back-to-back inaugurations, we bound them back to back as a dos-à-dos, and then we sold it to raise money for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Then we did a second edition in 2018, and we sold it to raise money for the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the ACLU. So, I think part of what I've been trying to do is use the press and my design skills to try to help this broken world in some way. Now, I don't know how effective that is. I mean, I know how much money we raised. So, I did that for that, and then the Kavanagh garbage. I tried to print something for the Yellow Hammer Fund. This one didn't raise very much money, but I was just trying to raise some funds for the Yellow Hammer Fund for abortion in Alabama. And then I was also printing postcards that people could send to their representatives. So, I would print those cards and give them out and send them to people as long as they promise to send them to their representatives. Then with the horrible George Floyd murder, the summer where America started paying more attention to all of the murders of black people. So, I made that book Read This Out Loud, and I have mixed feelings about it. I hope it was helpful but I'm also a white woman. Like, am I being helpful? I raised money, so I hope that's helpful. I guess my worst fear is that it's just like an empty project that might make people feel better about themselves. You know what I mean? So I'm not sure. I feel really proud of The Address that I did with Anna, and I feel good about identifying ways that I can do at least something with the press that is related to activism or is activism. Read This Out Loud I hope is helpful, but I don't know. I don't know. It's not like I wouldn't do it again. I would do it. But I guess I struggle with whether or not it's effective and how helpful it is to have a white lady making this book.

Victoria Birth: From your standpoint as an artist, do you feel that it helped you process? I mean, was that the whole point when it started?

Sarah Bryant: Yeah, well when it started this was in rhythm with these other things, where if something made me furious, I would try and print something to raise money that could help alleviate that situation in some small way. And so at that time that was my reaction, but only one reaction. Because the thing is you can't just make a stupid book project, and then that's it. So I was also trying to do all of the other things I'm trying to do: looking very carefully at my curriculum and thinking about where there are glaring gaps in whose work we're talking about and innovations from the people we're talking about. So, I started including different kinds of readings in my courses. I mean, the intro courses are so craft based and craft focused that there's not a total curricular shift that was happening, but the supplemental materials I was trying to build up around it were different. I had already moved on from being 'Gutenberg, Gutenberg' a while ago, but now I was trying to kind of drive that home with more discussions focused on the blind spot that can show up in texts about printing (or about anything). You know, just trying to talk about why that is. So that was happening in my teaching. I'm trying to make changes. It's been a complicated couple of years for a million different reasons.

Victoria Birth: Thank you for sharing all of that. Final question, do you have any thoughts about the future trajectory of your practice and your field in general?

Sarah Bryant: In my practice, I have a lot of projects that were delayed that I'm now trying to do. So I feel pretty energized; I have just a lot of projects. I'm working on a collaboration (Half Premonitions of the Moon) with a composer named Holland Hopson right now, which I'm kind of excited about. That's what I'm printing today. He's laser cutting this instrument that attaches to a string. You whirl over your head. I'm printing and binding a modular score for the instrument and we're making a kit. I received a collaborative fellowship at the University of Alabama, so I'm doing a lot of collaborative work on campus and off campus with other people. So that's sort of energizing, and it's also helping me to feel a part of a community again after being at home. So, that's

cool. I've got another project that I'm doing with my old steady collaborative group, Shift Lab. We've been working together for like eight or nine years now. So, we've got a new book (Multiple Discovery) that was also changed by the pandemic, actually, I think in an interesting way, that we're finishing up now to take it to CODEX in April. So, I feel energized. I feel good. I feel like I've got a lot of projects that I want to do, and they're not all about a pandemic, and that's nice. As far as the field, I don't know. I mean, I hope that we continue to grow. I'm talking to prospective students right now which I love doing, and I wonder what kind of great mixture of book arts people we're going to have here in the fall. So I'm just feeling hopeful, I guess.

Victoria Birth: Wonderful. That's a great sentence to end with, "I'm feeling hopeful I guess."

Sarah Bryant: I don't want to say it too loud in case something falls out of the sky and strikes me dead.

Update, Sarah Bryant: I went to codex, and no one threw tomatoes OR potatoes at me.

LINKS TO THINGS I TALKED ABOUT IN THE INTERVIEW:

Read this Out Loud: https://bigjumppress.blog/read-this-out-loud/

Fairmont Color Card: https://bigjumppress.com/section/507261-Fairmont-Color-Card.html=

Half-Premonitions of the Moon (with Holland Hopson) : https://bigjumppress.com/section/510673-Half-Premonitions-of-the-Moon.html

Multiple Discovery (Shift-lab) : https://bigjumppress.com/section/511922-Multiple-Discovery.html

ERIN FLETCHER

Interviewed by Victoria Birth
December 16, 2021

ERIN FLETCHER IS THE OWNER OF Herringbone Bindery, where she crafts one-of-a-kind fine bindings and small editions for various clients and institutions. Her work is regularly exhibited throughout the US and abroad. Her work has been collected by The Grolier Club, the Boston Athenaeum, UCLA and the University of Virginia as well as several private collectors. She studied bookbinding at the North Bennet Street School in Boston where she graduated in 2012 where she now works as an instructor in the Continuing Education department. She also regularly teaches book arts workshops at other institutions around the country. She has been a member of the Guild of Book Workers since 2011 and recently stepped down as Chair for the New England Chapter.

Victoria Birth: Can you please describe your professional practice before COVID?

Erin Fletcher: Prior to COVID, my business was split into two categories: studio work and teaching. I was sharing studio space with my friend and colleague Colin Urbina and we had a space in South Boston. For me, the studio work was either creating work based on commission or creating work for exhibits, and then teaching was primarily for the North Bennet Street School. As a workshop instructor, I was doing classes for the general public in the Continuing Education department and while also teaching a middle school book arts program. There's a partnership between North Bennet and two nearby middle schools. The students would come to North Bennet where Colin and I would co-teach. We did a semester-long course with them. And then occasionally I would travel to teach as well, which I severely miss but it's understandable. I would say, since COVID, I moved my studio into my home and it hasn't really impacted my studio work too much, and I feel really fortunate that my work, I think, has actually flourished a lot over the past two years. I think being in my own space, which is something I've wanted for a really long time, just kind of boosted my productivity. It's nice to have a two-foot commute basically. I think I've just really changed the way I operate my business now. That probably has a little bit to do with the environment of COVID and just being in my own space. But teaching since COVID is a totally different story. All of my classes in 2020 were canceled and it was really devastating. But I eventually made the leap into online teaching and I'm glad that I did for a myriad of reasons. I think it really boosted my spirits during some of those difficult months of COVID. It was great to connect with people whom I had met at in-person workshops, but also just meeting a bunch of new people had a really positive influence on me. It was just so wonderful to still engage with people and to share things that I was passionate about and to continue teaching. Not a ton changed about my practice, the teaching had the biggest impact.

Victoria Birth: When you think back to spring 2020, how did you first respond to COVID shutdown? Outside of just running through the streets screaming...

Erin Fletcher: This was a really interesting question to think about, putting myself back in that state of mind. I feel like I've grown so much as a person in the past two years–faster than any other time period of my life.

Victoria Birth: That's because it was actually 10 years, and we all just say that it was two.

Erin Fletcher: Exactly. I like throwing out crazy numbers, "Do you remember 26 years ago when…" So in spring of 2020, I had just come back from a trip in California. We were at Disneyland which seemed like the worst place to be at the start of a pandemic. But none of us knew better. I was actually in the middle of teaching a class at North Bennett Street when Massachusetts announced their lockdown so we had to cut the class short. I think I was just blindly optimistic that things would resolve quickly and go back to life as normal. It was just really hard to comprehend what it is like to live through a global pandemic because no one had done it. So I just didn't know what to expect. I think, even still, because this pandemic is ever evolving, that I'm continuously reassessing my business, my relationships, my day-to-day. It's all kind of fresh every day but that's also kind of exhausting sometimes, too. When the lockdown in Massachusetts was announced, I think I reacted like a lot of people. I was bringing a bunch of stuff home to work on, which

can be hard for a craftsperson. You need your studio, your tools and equipment. But the timing was kind of perfect for me in that with the projects I was working on I was at the point where I was doing a lot of embroidery work. It's a very easy thing to transport to other spaces. I think I had about three or four weeks of embroidery work ahead of me. So I just converted my dining room table to my office space that I shared with my husband. But I think we all soon began to realize it wasn't ending anytime soon. Normally I take public transportation to get to my studio, but I just didn't feel safe riding transportation anymore. So that's why we decided to make the big move and bring my studio to our house.

Victoria Birth: Are you in a room in your house?

Erin Fletcher: Yeah. We have a second bedroom which was just a guest room. So we just moved everything out and then converted it to the studio.

Victoria Birth: How did your response change over time and did you continue to try different ways to continue your professional practice?

Erin Fletcher: I think, as I mentioned, the biggest impact was on my teaching, and I had lost so many teaching gigs in 2020. I had stuff scheduled into September, and those were all just gone, so I had to really figure out how I was gonna get that income back. I was really hesitant to teach online at first, and I did talk to some colleagues early on in 2020 about just what it would look like to teach online. There's so many little nuances to technique, and I didn't know how that would transfer through online teaching. However, the biggest issue is that I wouldn't be able to see what people were doing. And how would I be able to help someone if they encountered an issue if they can't necessarily describe what's wrong, or they don't understand what's wrong? So I just decided to take the leap into online teaching anyway. As I mentioned before, mentally, it was really good for me just to continue to be engaged with other people other than my husband, who was the only person I saw for a long period of time. It was really beneficial financially as well but students that I had in class were really grateful because they were finally able to learn bookbinding. It opened up opportunities to people who are not close to schools or organizations that offered this in-person teaching prior to COVID.

Victoria Birth: What sort of equipment did you have to obtain just to make online teaching possible?

Erin Fletcher: I really benefit from having a partner who studied film–and he's an animator–and so he's just kind of in this world. And I have a really close friend who's a videographer and knows a lot of stuff about lighting. So, I kind of tasked my husband to figure out everything that I would need. I also benefited from being at North Bennet Street School in September of 2020 and seeing what kind of technology they were using because they did set up screens with videos so people could be at a distance but still see what was going on during demonstrations. They were using GoPros which I didn't really like, so we decided to use iPhones. We're just the kind of people who like to keep their iPhones [so we had extras laying around to use for this].

Victoria Birth: Yeah, you just pulled the four out of your drawer that you just happen to have.

Erin Fletcher: Yeah, my father-in-law always has to get the next iPhone so he passes his current one to whoever wants it. So I got to inherit some newer iPhones which has been nice. I think the biggest issue was lighting and just figuring out how to rig up the iPhones so you can get the best view. I have two professional photography lights on either side of my bench, and they reflect off of the ceiling.

Victoria Birth: To prevent shadows?

Erin Fletcher: Yeah, it's not directly down on me. It's sort of diffused light. Then I also have a rig for overhead views. This rig holds the iPhone, and then I can swivel it around as I need to. This just ended up being the best for me. It's a minimal amount of equipment. I didn't have to alter my space severely in order to teach, and everything can just stay hooked up, which is really nice.

Victoria Birth: I feel like when I took your workshop, there were multiple cameras set up in places. You had one at the press, one at the overhead, and one on your face.

Erin Fletcher: Yeah, I also have this other one that is like a gooseneck that I can move around different places in the studio so I can get other views.

Victoria Birth: And you just have each of those signed in as Zoom users essentially?

Erin Fletcher: Yeah, they're essentially just another person. There was a lot of testing. I'm just so thankful for the people in my life that are into tech because everything sort of worked pretty well from the beginning. I didn't invest in a lot of stuff that I didn't end up needing, which is good.

Victoria Birth: We just talked a little bit about this but in retrospect, what worked and what didn't? Are there some practices that you want to continue, even as communities open up?

Erin Fletcher: I would say that my mindset has changed, that if something didn't work it's okay. It's not a huge failure. Because everybody's in sort of a different place in their life right now. So it just means that right now this isn't working, so I just need to alter it a little bit so it serves myself or people better. With the online teaching, people have been asking me and I've had to think about whether or not I want to continue offering it as communities open back up and schools start to bring people back into the building. But I think because it reaches just a different audience that I want to continue to offer online teaching. It also allows me to just think about how I can change it to serve people who are not at home as often, or what do I need to do differently to still engage with that audience. I've had some in-person classes scheduled, but they've been canceled because I think people are still not ready to go back. And I think travel is still a barrier for people, even locally. I have a lot of local students, and I'm like, "Oh! You guys! North Bennet is opening back up!" And they're like, "Ehh…no thanks." I think it's going to take a while for some people to really feel comfortable. North Bennett is opening back up to the public next year so I'll be teaching my first in person workshop in February [2022]. I'm excited about it. I feel like I'm super rusty when it comes to talking to people in person, but we'll see how it goes. I think the next thing to look forward to potentially is hybrid classes, where a portion of the class is online, and then there are times where you go into a space to work. Because one of the biggest obstacles with bookbinding is there's only so much you can do in your home without access to big equipment. We can't even do any kind of book that has a rounded spine because not a lot of people have job backers or backing boards in their homes. In retrospect, things worked pretty good and, if they didn't, then I just moved forward from it. I'm looking forward to seeing how this continues to flourish in the future, and maybe online teaching totally goes away, and I have to deal with it then.

Victoria Birth: How did you change as an artist/bookbinder/teacher/student, as a result of your COVID experience?

Erin Fletcher: I just became more focused in my practice. Prior to COVID, my commute every day was an hour in both directions. I really love living in a big city but navigating through a big city was just more taxing than I realized, both mentally, but also in planning day-to-day to get to my studio. You're never in control. Sometimes the train can just not work and then you're like, "Great. I've lost a portion of my day." Being in my home studio, I'm more focused and I'm more efficient as a businesswoman, and I just like feeling more empowered by my work. I think I was starting to get into this rut being in my prior studio. That's just me. I think people really can thrive by having a separate studio space, but I'm clearly not that person, and I sort of realized that over the past two years. I think I mentioned before, I'd always wanted to move my studio into my home, but that was a really costly thing to do. But I think COVID just forced me to make this major decision and to make it quickly. It was sort of a positive thing for me that has come out of this whole experience. In terms of my practice from a personal standpoint, there are some really low points, especially last year, feeling depressed and so unmotivated to do things. I really relied on the people in my life who were giving me positive reinforcement and slowly starting to use my practice and reconnect with techniques that I hadn't done in a while to kind of act like therapy to get me out of those funks. I think that put me into this mindset of really being able to define how I want to be moving forward: what kind of artist and what kind of binder I want to be moving forward? In some ways, COVID kind of allowed me to reset, to just make the leaps that I had been putting off again and again and again. When life gives you lemons, I guess!

Victoria Birth: There have been many other dramatic developments in the last two years, including disruptive politics and after social justice happenings. How did these developments affect your work? And how have they affected you personally, if you feel like answering that.

Erin Fletcher: The lack of motivation and the depression that I spoke to wasn't solely because of the pandemic. There's just all these other incredibly dramatic, overwhelming things happening. Personally, I've experienced some divisions in my family over politics and how people have reacted to the pandemic. Those tense relationships have been really difficult to handle. I first started off feeling shocked that I have people like this in my life and then have had to just figure out how to navigate them. I've just kind of jumped back to my practice: how I can let my hand skills and my love of bookbinding kind of reconnect with my family in a different way. That's just been the biggest obstacle that I've experienced. It's a little difficult for me to talk about other societal issues because, as a cis white woman, I have far fewer hardships than other people in historically oppressed groups. My experience, my day-to-day the past two years, has been on a very different level from that of some other people. For me, it's just been about educating myself, staying up to date with what's happening in the news, and just trying to figure out what I can do within my community: how do I define my community, and what can I do to affect people in my life? I think that was one of the reasons why I decided to join the DEI committee that the Guild of Book Workers formed because the Guild has been a really positive influence on my career, especially early on. I felt and I continue to feel very supported by the community–but I know not everybody does and that's really disheartening. If you don't have the support of your community, then you might not thrive. Bookbinding is such a small field that we really need to boost everybody up. So that [DEI] is just like one small piece of the pie that I feel like I might have some impact on. But I think it's just continuously educating myself, continuously trying to be a better ally, and maybe realizing that I'm not always doing a good job. It's a really tough question to answer because I never want to say the wrong thing, but I also have to be okay with potentially saying the wrong thing and making it better than next time.

Victoria Birth: Do you have any thoughts about the future trajectory of your practice and your field in general?

Erin Fletcher: For my practice, I'm excited about this next year. I have some ideas about changing up what I'm offering through online learning and just creating more of a brand around Herringbone Bindery. I'm also excited to use my hand skills to make work that is not a book. I've just been so consumed in bookbinding and have been wanting to branch out. I did that a little bit earlier this year and it was really thrilling. There's something about being a design binder for me where, I mean I love it, but the idea always starts from the book so my design is always coming from somebody else's idea or art. I was just really wanting to make something that was solely my own. That's a goal of mine next year, to just make some pieces outside of bookbinding. I don't know where that's going to go, if anybody's going to see it, but I'm looking forward to it, at least for myself. Being a private practice bookbinder is kind of wild in the sense that I never know year to year if it's going to be financially sustaining. There's kind of this uncertainty of if I'm going to get any more jobs. Bookbinding is kind of a luxury item in a way. And because of that uncertainty, I try not to get comfortable in any specific position and just really try to reinvent myself as much as I can and make myself…what's the opposite of obsolete? Necessary. That's what I don't want to be: obsolete. But in terms of where the field is going, I can't say for sure, but I do think that people are still interested in book arts. I think there's still a lot of interest in learning techniques and doing things by hand. I was actually doing an interview with a grad student, and she had observed that a lot of schools around the country were adding book arts. They weren't grad programs, but they were just classes, like you could just take a book arts class. I think that more people are becoming aware of it, at least as a way of developing hand skills or a way of being creative. The more people that are exposed to it, the more people who might try to pursue it as a career. I am optimistic that people will still want to learn the traditional techniques, but then they'll just bring their own experiences and push book arts into the next generation. I think it's so fascinating that bookbinding itself is such a really old art form, but there's still room for innovation. People are still modifying or creating

MITCHEL GUNDRUM

Interviewed by Martyna Gryko
December 6, 2021

MITCHEL GUNDRUM IS A 2021 GRADUATE from North Bennet Street School's Bookbinding program and is currently working both as a full-time conservator technician at the National Archives in Washington DC and as a private practice bookbinder and restorer. His focus at NARA is on pre-digitization stabilization treatments for Civil War-era paper documents including surface-cleaning, humidification and flattening, tissue-mending, encapsulation, and mold remediation. His independent bookwork and research centers around historical book structures, early American bindings, and German decorated papers.

Martyna Gryko: Do you want to introduce yourself?

Mitchel Gundrum: Sure, my name is Mitch Gundrum. I'm a recent North Bennet Street School Bookbinding program graduate as of spring of 2021, currently working as a conservation technician at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Martyna Gryko: Thank you, okay so can you describe spring of 2020 and talk a little bit about the pandemic response?

Mitchel Gundrum: Sure, yeah, wow that was a lot of fun. Spring of 2020, March of 2020, we were getting ready to apply to internships for the summer which is traditional. Usually in between the two years at North Bennet Street School, you do a short summer internship to get some real world experience. So we were getting ready to apply to a bunch of those. We actually had somebody coming the day before we took our first little break—they were scheduled to come up and do short interviews with us—but things started getting a little shaky. The school sort of decided we were going to have an ad hoc spring break and do some deep cleaning sometime. That was the middle of March. Deep cleaning, try to keep everybody separate for a week and hopefully nothing gets worse with COVID. At the end of that week they said, "actually, we're going to keep you out until the middle of April," and then when the middle of April came, they were like, "actually we're not going to take anybody back until next year." So that last day we grabbed a bunch of tools and materials and kind of prepared for the worst, and then we didn't end up going back until the year after. So throughout the rest of the spring and into the summer, we tried to do more reading- and research-based work to try to do something. Jeff Altepeter would send us an article, and we would read about it and would talk about it the next week. And kind of just tried to stay in touch. But you know, as much as there were pros and cons to it, it's obviously not what we signed up for, right? I wanted a hands-on learning experience–that's kind of the real point of North Bennet Street School. There's so much hands-on work, but there's also a lot of history and tradition that goes into what we do, centuries of it. So being able to dig into the more academic side of things–to not just do a Cambridge panel because Jeff told us to do a Cambridge panel and it was traditional–but to understand where that tradition came from and why they used the tools that they used and sort of the larger context. So it was good, and we did a short presentation at the end of the summer and it was okay.

Martyna Gryko: How did the COVID response change over time?

Mitchel Gundrum: Initially, I think nobody knew how bad it was going to be, and so it was treading lightly, being as prepared as possible but kind of not wanting to think about how bad it could be. Eventually, the school just kept us home until summer. The following fall came around, and they did a ton of work to put plexiglass screens up between benches, to put protocols in place for where people were sitting and the occupancy. There are lots of new technologies to make sure that people who weren't going to come in, who either got sick or who weren't comfortable being at the school, could still get the teaching. As a student worker at North Bennet Street School, they even went so far as to divide up the building into different sections so that people who are doing the trash at the end of the day and going into different programs wouldn't have as much overlap as there normally is. So they really dug into it to make sure that we could all be there in the fall which was great. It's hard to anticipate as a new student in 2019 that it was going to be so

crazy. I don't know whether I would have waited or whether it ended up being for the best? I'm glad that I'm here now working, so clearly things didn't turn out all that bad but just interesting.

Martyna Gryko: I also think that the response at North Bennet Street School was good. They did a lot and I appreciate that they kept everybody in separate pods between the programs so there wouldn't be too much overlap.

Mitchel Gundrum: Yeah, and even though there were maybe a handful of scares or positive cases, they did let us know where the positive case was. Everybody in that pod got sent home, so that they didn't have to send the whole school home–which was, I think, a really efficient way of going about it.

Martyna Gryko: Yeah, that was really successful, and everybody was notified via email. We all knew what was going on, and people were able to get tested and proceed from there.

Mitchel Gundrum: Yeah.

Martyna Gryko: How has COVID affected the opportunities that were available to students such as internships and apprenticeships?

Mitchel Gundrum: Well, like I mentioned, everything basically got put on hold. I think there's a handful of internships that most students at North Bennet Street School expect to apply for. There's Haverford, there's the Boston Athenaeum, there's HACE (Historic Architecture, Conservation, and Engineering Center) in Lowell, MA, and a bunch of other major institutions. They were like, "We can't risk it." So a lot of that got closed down. HACE ended up deciding that they were going to proceed, and they did what the school did where they split everybody up and kind of staggered schedules so that the lab was never full. I did get to do six of 10 weeks there before somebody ended up getting sick, and they closed everything down again. But I did get a little bit of experience working in a lab prior to coming back for school and applying for a full-time position, so that was good. The Boston Athenaeum–I think that schedule is usually February or something that people start or enroll and then start in the summer–all that got pushed back. So Lisa Muccigrosso just finished the end of November 2022, and she's off to her new thing now, and Jane Knoll is still there through November.

I mean I don't have a ton of insight into how things were because this is all I've ever seen, but I know things got a little shaky there. Sort of unrelated, I applied for Rare Book School and got a scholarship to go, but they ended up putting all of those classes online for last year (2020) and working and actually going there and seeing their collection is a big part of what Rare Book School is about. So, gratefully, they have allowed the option to redeem your scholarship after two years, so I hope that this coming summer they'll be back to in-person classes, so I can do that. But, yeah, COVID was pretty widespread. I mean it was literally quarantine. They literally just shut everybody out for a while and tried to let it run its course.

Martyna Gryko: When did your internship start at HACE?

Mitchel Gundrum: Early June. It was supposed to go from early June to mid August, but I ended up only getting through mid-July. It was supposed to be your classic 10-week summer internship.

Martyna Gryko: What was their response like? Was everybody masked?

Mitchel Gundrum: Everybody was masked. There were about six of us, Lisa Muccigrosso was actually there, too, but I never saw her because they only put half the staff in throughout the week. So, I had Tuesdays and Thursdays, and she was Monday, Wednesday, Friday–and then we switched, so I never saw her. Across the lab, there was a 50-person capacity, so there was a ton of space in between us, and they really tried to make sure they were doing it as cautiously as they could while still being open.

Martyna Gryko: How do you feel that the COVID response affected your ability to learn?

Mitchel Gundrum: Specifically, at North Bennet Street School? I'm an extrovert and so not being able to see people's faces and communicate that way and have a more interpersonal learning situation… it didn't happen, so I don't know what would have happened if we had. But it was a little weird coming in the second year and not really getting to know you guys—the first-year students—as well because we were all

isolated. Certainly not as well–not the same situation–as it was with the second years when we were first years. We had the lunches on Wednesdays, and everybody was together in the main floor area there and got to talk. So that was part of it, but ultimately I feel like they did a really good job of accommodating as needed to get back to a normal curriculum. Other than the fact that we missed a few months and needed to come back and pack a bunch into the third semester for us that fall of the second year.

I feel we learned everything that we set out to do that was originally on the plan. If anything, I think having a bunch of things going on at once [was beneficial]… you get some momentum, and it was fun to do the 18th-century calf right next to the millimeter and to see the differences and the similarities as opposed to drawing it out longer. I think the second years ahead of us, they did the Gothic structure almost all of their second fall, spent several months, and we packed it into the last month of the school year. Which is probably closer to the way it would have been done traditionally because you don't have a million years to do it. So again, I feel that I don't necessarily have the context of having had a year to do it one way and then having another year to compare, but I definitely feel like I learned a ton. I don't feel anything was really lacking, we made the best of it and, yeah, I was on Jeff to give us access to mineral marbling which hopefully will still happen.

Martyna Gryko: You also did like a bunch of paper making over that summer too, right?

Mitchel Gundrum: I did, that's true, yeah. I didn't even think of that. I feel like the research was really good. That was a different way of learning and thinking because you're not necessarily having to think about the historical context when you watch Jeff demonstrate how to do something and then you sort of do it, and your hands tell you how to do things and get in a rhythm. You don't have to think about all of the social, political, and material context that surrounds those things but doing the individual research project and having those readings and getting more into that, that's something I don't think we would have done at all if we hadn't had that break so that was good.

Yeah, I did some paper making. Jane Knoll and I did some marbling, that last day she grabbed a tank and all the combs and a bunch of paper that she cut down to size and it ended up being great because we had something to do for that first month where we were in limbo and not sure when or whether we were going to come back at all. By a few weeks in, we were like, "Okay we're going to come up with a different schedule here." I did some commissions and some little stuff there, too. Kind of a taste of what it was like to be an independent craftsperson sort of mixed in there, so it wasn't a loss. It wasn't like, you know, a blank period, it was just different.

Martyna Gryko: How did you change as a bookbinder/student/artist as a result of the COVID experience? Were you doing a lot of bookbinding before you came to North Bennet?

Mitchel Gundrum: I was taking classes at the Center for the Book in San Francisco, and that was what got me onto it, and that's what got me out here. So it was pretty consistent, rather. I don't know how I changed because it was not like I was established and then tried this new thing, it was all very organic. This is the way that I learned, and it included COVID, that's all. There are always constraints, if you were a student in the 80s when conservation was barely a thing then you know it, your learning didn't change, it's just that's the context. So yeah, COVID was just the context.

Martyna Gryko: That's all how I feel too where I don't have anything to compare it to because I started my first year in that situation that's all I got to know so I don't know the experience of it being like pre-COVID to compare it to now post-COVID. I also feel like in the next few years people might also still be dealing with COVID, and, who knows? Maybe we'll be wearing masks every day for the next five years.

Mitchel Gundrum: Yeah, in which case life will go on, and that's just the way it goes.

Martyna Gryko: Yeah, I do however think that this was a unique experience because that spring 2020 and summer 2020 and then also this past summer of 2021, I feel like our opportunities were really impacted because the internships that would be available were not available at all this past summer. There were one or two that came through and we didn't find out about them until the last week of school. There was

a Dartmouth internship that myself and a few other students applied to, literally a week before school got out. Lucy Barsness did it and she got to do a whole 10-week internship, and that was awesome. Arianna Rutledge worked at Thornwillow Press. Those were literally only two opportunities out there that even came up that summer.

Mitchel Gundrum: Usually, there are four or five [interships], and then just your normal job applications, but they're cutting back on all of that stuff. Yeah, I don't know, I have to assume that new employers of new professionals are taking that into account.

Martyna Gryko: Hopefully, future students will not have the same experience.

Mitchel Gundrum: Yeah, yeah, hopefully things even out a little.

Martyna Gryko: This is going to be the last question, do you have any thoughts about the future trajectory of your practice and or your field in general?

Mitchel Gundrum: It's kind of the same deal: this is a new reality that I didn't account for, that none of us really accounted for, that we just got to navigate like anything else. Even when things were "normal," it's not like you could see the future. You still kind of had to navigate things and figure it out as you go, and that continues to be the case.

I am in this term position at the U.S. National Archives which is three years–ostensibly it was slated for three years to complete the project with x number of employees. One of those years was pretty much a wash because of COVID, and so it will probably get extended at the end of that three years or they will pick back up in another five years. So I don't know, but I have a position for the next two and a half years which is great, and from there I'm trying to come up with any other professional skill-building things I can in the meantime. I'm taking some courses and teaching some courses at Pyramid Atlantic Art Center in Hyattsville, MD. Which is like The Center for the Book. They have a letterpress studio and a bindery, and they actually have a paper making studio, too, which is super cool. And they have a gallery space up top, it's in a warehouse, and it's really cool. I volunteered there when I was in D.C. in 2019, and then I came back for this job and came back to do some volunteering, they were like, "if you have any ideas for courses you'd like to teach we'd love to have you." So I'm doing a paste paper workshop sometime in January, and then I have some other ones that we're still working the details out on. Other workshops they're offering, Rare Books School hopefully in summer, entertaining a master's degree because I like being in school. We'll see where that goes. I have some different ideas, you know, library versus conservation versus something else entirely.

Martyna Gryko: Yeah, the whole world is your oyster.

Mitchel Gundrum: Yeah, I feel like you get a job so that you can have some money to support your other curiosities, and I'm back here with a little bit of money to explore other things.

Martyna Gryko: And you're doing bookbinding commissions in your apartment.

Mitchel Gundrum: Yes, I'm trying to do some research on paste papers. Herrnhuters in the U.S. in the late 1700's early 1800s… fascinated with scale boards now, that's my new fixation.

Martyna Gryko: Very cool, anyway that's all I've got. Thank you very much, Mitchel Gundrum.

Mitchel Gundrum: You're welcome, Martyna.

ANDREW HUOT

Interviewed by Victoria Birth
December 16, 2021

ANDREW HUOT IS A BOOK ARTIST, bookbinder, and conservator in Atlanta, Georgia, where he operates Big River Bindery, a studio for bookmaking and letterpress printing, book repair, and design. He conserves and repairs books and historic documents for individuals and institutions. He holds a Masters of Fine Arts in Book Arts from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Andrew's teaching includes: bookbinding and preservation for the University of Illinois School of Information, workshops in his studio and across the country at places such as the John C Campbell Folk School, BookArtsLA, the International Preservation Studies Center, and the Guild of Book Workers among others. His artwork focuses on everyday life, abstracting the patterns, lines, and shapes to create playful work that resonates with readers. He exhibits his work widely and it is held in over 50 university library collections.

Victoria Birth: Can you please describe your professional practice before COVID?

Andrew Huot: I have a shop here in Atlanta, where I do conservation and repair for individuals and some institutions. We do soup to nuts, so we do repair, we do new bindings, we do boxes, we kind of do whatever comes in the door.

I also kept pretty busy with workshop teaching, so I would either teach workshops here in the shop, or I would travel and do it for other organizations, including Guild chapters, and so I would do that two to three times a year, maybe a little more.

I also am an adjunct instructor for the School of Information Science at the University of Illinois. So I have, usually, one class a term that I teach for them, in the evenings. I've been doing it for a while, I started out when I was in Illinois. I started teaching a bookbinding class for them, as a short course in the summers and then I actually, for the first time ever, was probably ahead of the curve, where I started teaching online. So I've taught online bookbinding for about 10 years now. I developed a system that seemed to work pretty good, and then as I've moved locations I've been able to hold on to that online teaching for them.

Victoria Birth: Can you remember back to spring 2020 and how you first responded to the COVID shutdown?

Andrew Huot: My first response was panic. I had just finished teaching a workshop in Idaho when everything shut down. I was in the final stretch of the workshop, and I got a call from my wife saying, "Hey, the school shut down, my work shut down, and we're all going to hide at home". Soon after, I tried to make my way back, and I was on a bus from Idaho to Salt Lake City. And then the bus driver made the announcement that there'd been an earthquake in Salt Lake City. They closed the airport, and there were all these issues, so I spent the next 12 hours sitting in an airport in Salt Lake City as the world seemed to be crumbling around me.

Victoria Birth: Oh, my goodness.

Andrew Huot: It was hard, you know, and I didn't have masks, because we didn't have masks then.

Victoria Birth: You should have called me!

Andrew Huot: Well, they kept saying, "Oh, it's just gonna be a couple of hours," and then they were like, "You know, really, we are not going to get you a hotel room," so I'm like, "Well, at this point, I might as well wait." So I got home and then immediately closed the shop, because we didn't know what was going on. So, I stopped taking any clients, and I updated everything saying we're closed for a little while to try and figure this out. Luckily, I was in the shop by myself, and although it was unclear whether I could officially work, I was the only one that was going to tell on me. So I continued to come in and my wife was working at home, thankfully, because my son was at home.

Victoria Birth: Right, daycares and schools were gone.

Andrew Huot: Right, and they were trying to figure that out, and so I was having shorter days and was still trying to get some stuff done and catch up. Luckily, I had a pretty good backlog of work waiting for me, so it was okay that there was kind of a pause in work coming in, so I could try to keep moving projects forward.

Victoria Birth: How did your response change over time? Did you continue to try different ways to continue your professional practice? It sounds like you were already continuing it.

Andrew Huot: I tried to stay closed as long as I could, just so that we could get those numbers down and be safe. But I kept getting calls, and everyone's like, "You know, as soon as you're open, can we come in?" I'd just get more and more of these calls, so eventually, I decided to go ahead and open up limited hours, limited times. I only met by appointment, and so that way I would only meet one person at a time. We were meeting at the front of the shop, instead of the back of the shop like we often did. So, that was different. I just tried to keep things kind of slow, as I could. The big change really came in my teaching because all those workshops that I had scheduled and planned suddenly disappeared. I've had experience teaching online before, and I saw a lot of people were exploring that, so I thought it was a good idea. I ended up getting together with a couple of folks and putting together a website and a source for online teaching. And so, building on the experience I've had at the University, we fleshed out and built out that whole infrastructure, and are still continuing to teach that way now.

Victoria Birth: And that's "Book Paper Thread"? "Paper Book Thread"?

Andrew Huot: "Book Paper Thread," yeah.

Victoria Birth: I know it's the three of those.

Andrew Huot: They're all in there somewhere. So, unlike most live Zoom sessions, we have a lot more recorded content, and we have classroom spaces that people can check into, leave comments, and ask questions. It's more asynchronous, or a little more distributed, but I think a lot of people have said how it's been great to be able to watch the recorded lessons time and time again. They don't feel like they get lost if they run behind on something. It's a slower process, but people seem to like it.

Victoria Birth: In retrospect, what worked and what didn't? Are there some practices that you want to continue, even as communities open back up?

Andrew Huot: I think doing work by appointment is nicer. I'm able to block off times a little bit easier. It's less likely that I'll be in the middle of a project and someone will come knock on the door and come on in. A lot of the work continues on, so I think that there hasn't been a huge change in the process of how I take work in, or the assessments I do, or the treatments. It's just the scheduling and working.

The big change is whether or not I'm going to continue to do online teaching. I love in-person teaching, and I've started to pick that back up again. I've done a workshop for the John C. Campbell Folk School, which is down here. They've been carefully opening up again, and I did a class with them recently. They have me scheduled for a few more times, so I'm gonna have to figure out how to juggle all the parts that I have, and how much in-person teaching I want to dive back into.

Victoria BIrth: You're so used to online, to begin with, that it's not this huge change. There are definitely differences in online versus in-person teaching. It really depends on what the subject matter is, and probably how advanced your students are.

How did you change as an artist, bookbinder, teacher, student, as a result of your COVID experience?

Andrew Huot: I'm trying to take care of myself a little bit better. I have a tendency to run myself ragged. And we are trying to catch up, after slowing down for so long. So, it's a bit of a racing game at the moment, but we are definitely trying to catch up and get things to a place where I can spend more time concentrating on relaxing, or on doing different work, which I don't often get a chance to do.

Victoria BIrth: Do you have an employee?

Andrew Huot: Yeah, I've had one for about four months now. And it's been great.

Victoria BIrth: That's wonderful. And there aren't a lot of opportunities like that.

There have been a lot of other developments over the last couple of years: disruptive politics, active social justice movements. How did these developments affect your work and you personally?

Andrew Huot: I have a young son, and I'm concerned about the direction of the opinions people have. I'm down here in the South, where the fight is as active as anywhere. I'm trying to keep an eye on that, and just

trying to make sure that we teach him the right things, or what we believe the right things are. I think that that's been the biggest thing personally. I always have to deal with the public, which has different opinions, and I'm much more firm about everyone wearing a mask, whether they want to or not, when they come into the shop. But, yeah, just trying to think of equity, and trying to think what I can do to bring our profession into a more well-rounded organization or situation is something that I think about.

Victoria BIrth: Remind me how old your son is.

Andrew Huot: He's 11.

Victoria BIrth: Do you have any thoughts about the future trajectory of your practice or our field in general?

Andrew Huot: Well I'm happy to say that with my employee we're now starting to catch up so the business is on much better footing. Hopefully, I'll come in less at night, in order to catch up. I think I'm lucky because there's not a whole lot of other people doing conservation down here for the public. So, being able to expand and do more, and help more people, is something that I'm really excited about. I'll be interested to see how the field changes, or what happens with the change of politics and more thinking about equity. I think that we've often been kind of inwardly focused, people find us and then we're happy to have them, but we don't necessarily do the outreach or finding out who's out there who might be someone that's good to join us and to be involved.

Victoria BIrth: Well, great. That was very succinct. Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me.

AIMEE LEE

Interviewed by Victoria Birth
February 23, 2022

AIMEE LEE IS AN ARTIST WHO MAKES PAPER, writes, and advocates for Korean papermaking practices as an Ohio Arts Council Heritage Fellow (BA, Oberlin College; MFA, Columbia College Chicago). Her Fulbright research led to the first hanji studio in North America, an award-winning book, Hanji Unfurled, and an active studio practice that includes jiseung, joomchi, paper textile, botanical paper, book art, and natural dyeing techniques. She travels the world to teach, exhibit, and serve as a resident artist while also building and enhancing studios for Korean and East Asian papermaking. Her favorite plant for papermaking is milkweed and her 2021 Fulbright Senior Scholar research focused on bamboo screens for hanji making in Korea. aimeelee.com.

Victoria Birth: Can you please describe your professional practice before COVID?

Aimee Lee: I was trying to remember. It's very hard. Essentially, I was the same as now, pretty much a freelancer, and I would get gigs and travel a lot, mostly for teaching but sometimes for shows, and often for various conferences in different fields. In between that, I would try to get studio work done at home. By 2020, I had been a couple of years into new homeownership, so that was also kind of taking over. It was a big adjustment, and I was also in the middle of construction for a new studio. So, a lot of things all over the place. I had been working like that for a while, so I was used to it. It wasn't what I wanted. I mean, I think I always wanted more stability, but then again stability isn't really…it's a lie.

Victoria Birth: Can you describe the freelance work that you do?

Aimee Lee: I try to explain to students, and I think the best visualization came from talking to Jeff Peachey when I was interviewing him for one of my many stalled-out, long-term projects. I'm working on this book about people who make tools and equipment for hand papermaking, and I talked to Jeff early on because of his views in general about tools. He essentially said, "You have many pieces in a pie, and you have to hope that the times where the big pieces shrink up, other pieces fill up that space." He showed me a big bag of strops, and he was like, "This is all just horse butt! And this is a big piece of my pie. All I have to do is cut them up and sell them."

So, for me a lot of obvious income is from teaching. There was a semester-long class where I would teach artists' books at the Cleveland Institute of Art here. I would only do one class a year because I didn't want to give up any more than one semester where I had to be available here on a weekly basis. Then there's usually a Winter Term class that happened in January, a month-long intensive for Oberlin College. That was a big project right before the pandemic in 2019. I was building out an entire paper studio for them, so that I could teach this class. It was an intensive papermaking into bookbinding class that was the equivalent of a semester's worth of contact time but crunched into a few weeks. Then I would do workshops at the Center for Book Arts in New York and then different book art centers. In the summers when craft schools have a lot of their workshops, I would do Penland or Haystack.

Then there are tack-on ones where maybe a weavers' guild doesn't have the money to bring you to their city, but hear that someone else is bringing you to town, and they ask you to give a talk or demo. Or other academic gigs, schools asking me to do a show or workshop or talk. And international stuff where I get invited to other countries to present at a conference or do workshops. It's everything, ranging from a workshop that happens in the span of a day to a week or two weeks. Everything slotted in when I wasn't on the road would include trying to make my own work. Which would be either making my own paper to make artwork, or working on artists' books and then sending them to Vamp & Tramp to place.

And then ongoing projects like this book that I'm ashamed to say is still not done. But I'm trying to do that while trying to get this studio off the ground–which is also an enormous thing that seems like a great idea at the time–and then you realize you're only one person.

At this point it feels like most of the pie is being taken up by extremely long-term things. Which makes me feel crazy because I can't get them off the to-do list. But I think it's also that point in my life and career when the things that I am working on have to be bigger; they aren't things that I can get done quickly because they're more significant.

Also, within that, because of the nature of freelance work, I spend enormous amounts of time during deadline seasons applying for things. I've gotten better about streamlining and not applying for [just] anything but being mindful about where to spend my energy. But it's still a lot of energy to prepare those kinds of things.

Victoria Birth: Can you remember back to the spring of 2020 and how did you first respond to the COVID shutdown?

Aimee Lee: I think, at the very beginning it was like, "Hahaha! Now people will see what I have to deal with since I work from home," thinking, "What's the problem? This is my life!" and then very quickly realizing, "Oh no, this is terrible."

Very quickly, all of the long-term creative ideas I had for studio projects went out the window. I completely stopped working on those and I found myself in creative paralysis. I remembered that the most important thing is the small daily things that you can commit to. So I started to draw this one rhododendron bush outside of my window. And I would do that every day and then date and time stamp it. That was inspired by Hannah Hinchman's A Trail Through Leaves. I had read that, and it really helped inspire me to do that. But it was also coupled with the deep fear of not wanting to go outside. Instead of going outside to draw nature, I thought, "I can see it from here, but I don't want to go outside." And it wasn't only that I was afraid to go outside because the virus is outside. I was afraid to go outside because I was being targeted as an Asian-looking person. I didn't feel safe on the outside, not like Asian people were being beaten outside my home, but I just didn't even want to deal with it. This feeling that I got from my next door neighbor, even in the comments that he made, made it feel, "Oh, you think that I'm a vector for this disease, and because I look Asian all I do is travel to Asia," because I'm sure my neighbors are very confused by me not being here a lot. So I didn't want to go outside. That eventually changed, and I was able to do things like walk because I could no longer work out at the gym. I used to swim, and since I couldn't do that, I would walk and the most I would take with me were a couple of plant identification books, trying to figure out what the trees are in this boring suburban neighborhood I live in.

Also, because I have such a compulsion to still work with my hands, instead of doing my artwork, I started sewing. Right before the pandemic started, the solid waste department of the county had an annual zero landfill event where they invite educators to come and peruse stuff that normally would be trashed by people who do interior design, like their samples.

Wallpaper samples, fabric samples, tile, glass, bricks, all kinds of stuff. So I had all this extra material, and first started sewing bags, and then I started sewing clothes, teaching myself. I think it was a kind of desperation, going into survival mode.

Immediately, all my gigs were canceled, so I was losing all my income and, fortunately, because unemployment was extended to self-employed people, I was able to lean on that.

But I was very frustrated by one place with the most immediate gig where I had bought a ticket that I was supposed to be reimbursed for. When I asked what to do, because obviously I couldn't go, they said, "Hold onto the credit and we'll reschedule later." I had to wait over two years to reschedule, and there was no offer to alleviate that. Their expectations were that I needed to take that hit. So, that was a lot of learning about, "Why did I agree to do this thing for an organization I thought was reputable but didn't even give me a contract, and then made it very difficult for me to apply for relief aid without a contract." I was lucky to get some grants, but I'm sure there were some I was rejected from because I lacked official proof that I was losing thousands of dollars of income.

I was looking at your questions, and feel like I'm being retraumatized thinking about all of this.

Victoria Birth: I mean, when I'm asking these too, I

don't know that I can answer these for myself, I don't remember.

Aimee Lee: Yeah, who wants to remember that.

Victoria Birth: Yeah, these two years have been like two decades.

How did your response change over time, did you continue to try different ways to continue your professional practice?

Aimee Lee: In the beginning, I was extremely averse, and I still am, to all the online and remote teaching and Zoom everything. Because the whole point of everything I do is to be engaged with materials directly, and to teach people directly. Physically, they have to be next to me, to the point where I will almost wrap myself around their bodies to hold their hands to help guide them. So I had zero interest in trying to turn that into a virtual experience, and I saw my friends and colleagues who were pivoting real hard, and I admire that. Some of them actually said, "This is something I want to do anyway, this is great." And some of the things they do translate a lot better than what I was doing. But, yes, at a certain point, I was being asked to do certain Zoom teaching, and I agreed to do it; but it confirmed that I didn't enjoy doing it. Even what I thought would be a pretty simple demo, because I wasn't willing to spend the money to get new cameras, or get the app for the phone to turn into a camera or whatever, even being at a very awkward angle for an hour in front of my laptop trying to demonstrate was something that affected my body really negatively. So I'll do talks, but I'm not that interested in doing demos or full-on teaching that way. I was lucky with my artists' book class that they gave us the option to teach face-to-face with distancing and masks because I wouldn't have taught it hybrid or remote like some of the other classes were doing.

Eventually, my drawings of the rhododendron bush turned into artists' books. And my books are always dealing with what's right in front of me at the time, so it made sense to reflect that. I was trying not to reflect too much. It wasn't like, "This is a COVID-19 book". But it was 100% influenced by what was going on.

I was also really fortunate that summer. I was supposed to have a residency that was canceled, but then they said, If you're willing to quarantine for two weeks and distance, we'll let you come. Instead of being a group residency, I was alone for most of the time. But it was perfect because it was a garden residency and they had all these acres and it was exactly what I needed. I was able to take all the pieces of work that I couldn't get together in my home and get a lot of work done. I was able to go out and harvest plants for papermaking and feel more like myself again as an artist and feel like, "Okay, I can still do this." It was really, really important to be able to have that time.

I also was very fortunate in that I was able to go on my Fulbright to Korea. I had already only asked for half a year instead of a full year because I knew I needed to be home. Luckily, the dates that I had asked for weren't affected by the shutdown like my cohort who were supposed to be there the whole year who couldn't go. None of us could leave until January 2021, when some people were supposed to leave in August 2020. It was so helpful to spend half a year in another place, in a country that was being very responsible and taking it really seriously, where we had 100% mask compliance and effective contact tracing. It was the polar opposite of what was going on at home, and then on top of that, I wasn't subject to the racism and could have a different perspective. Being here when things were happening is really different from being in Korea when, for example, all those people were murdered in Atlanta. That kind of helped me survive. I was more on the surface of it, rather than drowning in it. I think if I was here, it would have been really bad.

Victoria Birth: In retrospect, what worked and what didn't? You mentioned a bit of this with Zoom and whatnot, but are there some practices that you want to continue, even as communities open back up?

Aimee Lee: The small daily things really help because they anchor you in a way, and ground you even if it's for a few minutes. I can't say I'm continuing that, but I know that it's there. I know that I can always go back to that, and there was a time late last year or early this year where I remembered, "Oh! I could do this, and feel less crazy today if I drew that plant."

I think the other things are less about practice and more about perspective. What didn't help was being

hard on myself that I should be getting all these things done because I can't go anywhere else. The entire first year of the pandemic, everyone said, "Now you should be able to write your book, right?" It really helped to see other writers publish about how ridiculous that was because I already knew from past experience. I had a residency years ago in Northern Ireland, and the whole point was being in a post-conflict area and making work. I learned from that experience that I'm actually not an artist who would make amazing work during a war. If a gun was put to my head I wouldn't think, "Okay, I'm going to make work about this!" Instead, it would be, "I'm going to die."

Later, it made sense that I was absolutely not going to write my book during COVID, and it helped to see that other people were feeling the same way, or even to have visuals. I don't remember where, but someone had made a cartoon which was a person in a little boat on very stormy waters, all alone, thinking, "This is how I feel and you want me to write a book??" I'm trying to let go. I don't think that's totally gone, but I'm trying to understand that I'm essentially an animal reacting to unprecedented experiences, and it's not useful to be so hard on myself.

There are also very bad habits I got into that I haven't completely gotten out of. I already had pretty disordered eating and then it got worse. I would eat every two hours during lockdown.

Even before I went to Korea, I thought, "Oh my god, what am I going to do? That's not the culture: snacking." It's different now, but it's not Korean culture to be snacking all day. You have three square meals, and that should be sufficient. I was very scared I couldn't do that, but then I went and survived, and I realized, "It's possible!" Then I came back and gained all this weight. So I think it's the practice of being kinder to myself. I don't practice it that much, but I think it's important.

What's become useful is to take more time with my decisions. When you freelance and an opportunity comes in, you always think "yes" before "no." I've been trying to switch it to have it be "no" before "yes." Everything should be a "no" and then they have to make a really good argument, or I have to see enough merits that it turns into "yes." Because at this point, all of the things that ask me to go away takes me from the work here.

Victoria Birth: That's a really good perspective that I haven't heard, so thank you for that.

And you kind of just led into this question, which is how did you change as an artist or a teacher or any label you want to give yourself as a result of your COVID experience?

Aimee Lee: I don't know how much I've changed. I think it's more that I've always approached teaching and being an artist with the sense that improvisation is the heart of it. And improvisation actually means that you're incredibly prepared. It's given me a little more leeway to let things go that maybe I would have been more hard on. I say that, but then I think about what happened last semester, how I tried to do things certain ways, but then with attendance, I said you have to be here in class and students got upset. I thought, this is totally ridiculous. But it made me realize that the people who are younger are having much more dramatic changes in their brain chemistry that I can't even begin to understand. But now I just finished teaching at Oberlin, and it was incredibly wonderful and they were actually very good. It was the most quiet class I've had, and I tried to explain to them why I think it's important to have quiet time and why I don't play music during studio time. They were able to focus in a way that I think they aren't given the space to do so. In that way it's changed my desire to give more of that space in the teaching than I used to. I used to do technique after technique, demo after demo. But now I realize it's necessary to give more space to practice the demo more than once, to be given more space and time but have it be guided or supervised time– where I'm there even if they don't come to me. So that becomes a comfort. Mostly it's been a process of having to be okay with things taking longer.

Victoria Birth: As you're aware, there have been a lot of other dramatic developments over the last two years, including disrupted politics, active social justice movements, etc. How did these developments affect your work, and if you don't mind, how did they affect you personally?

Aimee Lee: I think I touched on that a little bit, but I feel like anyone who wasn't affected is in total denial. It

was all this fear and obviously anger. There were times where I channeled that into the books I was making and had the plants be stand-ins for people, saying that different kinds of plants can live on the same plot of land peacefully. What is so hard about this? I tried to explain why I was doing it this way, why I wasn't going outside, or why I was scared to go outside and then had a gallerist who wanted to carry my new work laugh at me and say, "Did anything happen to you?" As if it only counts if I was attacked.

But I also feel grateful for things that did come out like Cathy Park Hong's Minor Feelings. It was so helpful to have someone who had these experiences that were so eerily similar in terms of college, about the kinds of interactions that we had with other Asian American women and in the art department, and to feel like it's not me being crazy or paranoid. This is all reasonable, and all my instincts that I had been told were silly, were real and justified. If anything, it's been a lot of zooming out and seeing that it's not just about me or about individual actions and choices, but about systemic issues.

It's something that I've started to talk more about with my students. There's a reason that you are physically having a hard time being in a paper studio, standing on your feet, or lifting heavy things. It's because you grew up in a time where physical activity is not valued or supported and so your bodies are different from my generation. And I'm not an athlete or anything. I was not an active kid but it's completely shifted, and I talk to them about being responsible to not bring their phone in, but there are incredible forces that are causing them to become addicted and behave in certain ways, and how that affects their brain chemistry and memory and things like that. Yes, there's the individual responsibility to put the phone down. But if you do get sucked in, it's not necessarily about beating yourself up, but about understanding that it's all designed this way.

My partner was directly affected. His business was broken into, and he was robbed during protests–so it's affected that always-being-afraid feeling. He still has wood that he drills into his storefront. And he only happened to have whatever the right insurance was so that some things were covered, but not everything, whereas a lot of people didn't have coverage. Now he's always seeing things that I don't see. He'll say, "Did you notice that all of the stores on this side of the street are boarded up? That must mean something's happening or something is coming." So that has been very disconcerting, and that's not the kind of world I want to live in. Yet it's very close, especially now that I have this studio that is a total glass storefront on a major road. And I worried about this when we were designing it. Why is there so much glass? That has been something that I think about. What is it to be in this body in this area that doesn't have a lot of bodies that look like this? Or that people have new, negative ways of thinking about my body? Maybe not even new, just more public and condoned negative ways of looking at and treating this body. I sometimes wonder if that's why I've been dragging my feet opening the studio because then I have to deal with it. Whereas, if I'm still in the process of putting nails in the wall, then I can hide from it.

I think it reflects in the work to some extent, reflects in the way that I teach and in the projects that I agree to take on. One of my past students and mentees who's become a friend and colleague started a Korean American Artists Collective. When they asked me to participate in fundraisers for either for BLM or the Atlanta shootings, I agreed without hesitation. Whereas, other times when I'm asked to do things, especially give away my art for free, I'm less willing. Trying to be supportive of those groups and movements, while still knowing that I'm not built for the direct political action that I really admire certain people taking. I do what I can. The thing that I am best at doing is my work, and hopefully that somehow feeds into these ideas that these movements have.

I talked to my Oberlin students about this last month, and it sometimes feels like a cop out, you're just saying it, you're not actually going to do anything, you just do whatever you want. But I feel like what I have been trying to do this whole time is bring more attention to cultures that people don't really understand or even know about through a very tactile experience and through working with nature. I feel like those are the connections that we've lost in the kind of world that we're in today. I don't know if those kinds of broken threads can be regenerated, but I also don't think it's something to give up on. I'm always going to opt for

direct contact with people over virtual. That is why I'm completely strung out right now, because I'm supposed to not only open a studio, but start a garden outside the studio funded by a grant where I wanted to include children in the community. That raises lots of other issues about how to do this kind of thing while dealing with the red tape with architectural review boards and city planning, building codes, and so on.

It's something that has also affected my relationships with friends and colleagues where it's become very clear, very quickly, who I want to continue to associate with and where I think I'd like to pull back. Even thinking about people who have the wealth to be able to sign up for my classes. Who am I serving and is that a good thing for me? How much can I push back in those spaces? I don't think it's a secret that a lot of these spaces are older white women with money, and so, when is it possible to push back in those spaces and when is it better to protect myself? I've seen some people drop out of wanting to engage with me, because I send out monthly emails and tried always to be very careful about, only saying good, positive things. But when things went down I couldn't hide how I was feeling, how I'm doing, and I was very open about that. It was interesting to see who wanted to stay in that discussion and who didn't. Having the experience of being able to teach at Women's Studio Workshop when they made mindful changes like implementing a sliding scale to accommodate low-income students was powerful. It completely transformed my teaching experience because I had students whom I normally would never be able to teach because they couldn't afford it.

Even at Oberlin, this is the first year that we were not allowed to charge a fee, and that changes who gets to be in the room. I'm trying to figure out how to create more spaces like that and wanting this studio to be a space that is more firm about certain ethical things and being open about things like ingrained racism, sexism, or ableism. It's a lot more thinking, a lot more conversations, a lot more opening up ideas of more collaboration with people that I really respect and want to have these difficult talks with.

And then being very clear. There was at least one person where I had to say, "I'm sorry, we can't be friends anymore. I can't listen to you make excuses for why it was okay that George Floyd was treated this way."

The last thing is trying to be more aware of how all of this affects my body. In this field, it's dealt with a little bit in terms of repetitive stress, but I don't think it's addressed enough. I think it's often treated like your body has nothing to do with the work. I wasn't able to see my regular physical therapist during the height of it but coming back into it has reminded me that it's something that I want to always be able to make space for, that I'm always really, really upfront with my students about from day one: how this is going to affect your body, seeing how it actually does, and trying to intervene, to teach them and to model for them how to take breaks–which I'm very bad at.

Victoria Birth: Do you have any thoughts about the future trajectory of your practice or your field in general?

Aimee Lee: I feel more disconnected from the traditional communities that we're gathered around. Whether it be the Guild or hand papermaking organizations, I feel like I almost consciously took a step back and they've asked for me to step up to leadership positions and volunteer. I had done some of that and thought it was really important, and then I felt like I actually needed to step back. There are other projects that I tried to start that I realized I couldn't see through and had to extricate myself from. But in the process, I've learned that the field isn't going to die, it's still sorting itself out. It's going through natural changes as the original, older leaders keep aging out. And it's mirrored in society: this unwillingness for certain generations to let go or to even know how to uplift the people coming up. For me, it's been a really long process of stepping back to first figure out what I need to do to take care of myself and then be able to decide from there how I want to be part of those communities. If I want to, beyond paying a membership fee every year, how I would want to be part of them. Of course, I have friends and colleagues who run them and do wonderful things, and I don't know how they do that. How do you do that and also run a household by yourself and feed yourself and make your work? Maybe I don't have ideal workflows and systems in place or maybe I'm not built for it. Giving myself space to figure that out has

been important. I'm still in the middle of that. I think there's a lot going on, and I see so many more people–young people, people who are traditionally excluded from the fields–asserting themselves and trying to make space for themselves, but I don't know what then comes from there. Do they then just assimilate into the structures that already exist and then perpetuate them? The whole thing about, "Can you really change things from inside?" I don't know. And that's something that I have been thinking about a lot with my studio space. Do I want it to become a replica of all the other spaces where it's my private studio but then to make income I teach workshops or have people come for residencies? Is there any way to operate at all outside of that kind of the capitalist model? I don't know if it's possible, but I've seen, especially during the beginning of the pandemic, more conversations come up about how some people are trying to break out of that. Whether that's through cooperative work or bartering. I still don't have any answers, and I think maybe it might be impossible because I'm too old and I don't know any differently. So there's a desire to always make sure I maintain some kind of interaction with younger people coming up because that's where you learn.

Even a few weeks ago, I directly asked a couple of my students who are mixed race, "What is your preference? How do you want to be called?" Because my own nieces are mixed race and talking to friends who also have mixed race children, what's the language you use? Because I don't think the language we've been using is appropriate or sufficient and I think it's damaging to say that you're half something: Half black or half white or half this or half that. It's incredibly fracturing and also, people aren't fractions. I was very careful in how I was phrasing this question and then the answer was so simple, which was, "Within our community we call ourselves multi." That makes so much sense. And that's where it begins. Being able to be within these communities and have those spaces for themselves, that's been really helpful during the pandemic: learning that it's okay to find those spaces before you go out into the world to figure out how you want to think and talk about these things and interact with people and have responses.

`That's not a really good answer to what's happening in my field, like I said, I feel very disconnected from that in a sense, but I think that it'll be fine. It's going to be like everything else. It's finding its footing. I hope very soon we'll be able to gather in person. We'll hopefully go to Codex in the spring and it will be the first time in years that I'll get to see some of these people. For the papermaking groups, it's different. I think that bookbinding lends itself a little better to the virtual stuff than papermaking. It's just been brutal. I don't know how anyone does this virtually with any kind of satisfaction, without an enormous amount of prep insanity. I think once we get to a point where we can be together, things will stabilize a little more. And maybe people are very happy with the virtual stuff, I don't know. I'm not.

Victoria Birth: I can't imagine learning paper making virtually. I mean, it's hard enough on its own.

Aimee Lee: I know, it's hard enough in person. It's almost impossible. Some of the things I teach in person are impossible. I mean, if you have to cook and prepare materials, and the teacher is the one who's introducing you to that, it's not even safe. "Go take this caustic and cook this by yourself in a place that you don't do food preparation."

Victoria Birth: Well, thank you so much. I'm so grateful that you agreed to this because I resonated with so many things that you have said so thank you so much.

I think this will be really interesting for our members to see and I think it'll bring a lot of people together to see that people had similar experiences or understand you better because they didn't share the same experiences.

Aimee Lee: Right, I do think that it's one of those archival projects that I see other places taking on as well, and it becomes a record for the future. I was reading somewhere about what this is going to be like in however many years, and they said, "You know how we talk about 9/11 to young people and they don't give a shit? That's what it's going to be like!" For them, as they get older, "I lived through the pandemic!" and then other younger people will be like, "What's that? We're fine!"

Victoria Birth: One of my students said the other day that I'm going to get the wording wrong, but essentially that 9/11 wasn't a big deal for them. And I was shocked. "What do you mean it wasn't a big deal in your lifetime?!" and they said, "Well, I was one or two [years old]"

Aimee Lee: There's an artist's book I show in every single class where I show the book Absence by Jeannie Meejin Yoon. It's that white one that looks like a big white block and it has no words, it's just cut-outs, and you start and there's just a hole, another hole, another hole, and then it turns into two holes, and then it turns into squares and then the last page is a cut-out of the footprint of the World Trade Center. So it registers as nothing. It's not until you read "In Memory of September 11" that it hits you. That's exactly what she's trying to show: the absence of these buildings in this block of board. And I always have to explain it to the students, because they have no idea what it's doing. And they also have no connection to it anymore. In some ways it doesn't really matter to most Americans, because unless it's something that was part of your landscape and part of your growing up in your myth around New York City or the business district, it doesn't really mean anything to you, at least the absence of those buildings. But of course it talks about so much more.

Then I try to talk to them about Nicholas Basbanes' book On Paper and his last chapter on 9/11. The way that a man had scrawled out on a piece of paper and then threw it out the window and when they found the paper, he had a bloody thumbprint on it. They were able to identify it and give it to his widow, and she's given it on loan to the museum that memorializes these things. Talking to my students about the way that paper can record these things in a way that digital cannot.

Every year I go through those lists and think I should take this book off the list and find a better book or more relevant book. And this is the first year I thought I need to take it off the list. But I don't have the heart. Because it was so important to me even if it's not important to them.

But it was great because the one student that I really walked through it went away and took all of her scraps and just cut bigger and bigger and bigger holes and made herself a little book sculpture that tunneled into itself. So even if it's only about the form, it's something.

Victoria Birth: It reminds me of a book from a few years ago. I went to school at The University of Alabama in their Book Arts Program, and Steve Miller was still teaching there. He made a book right before I started there, and I still think about it regularly. It was just a book of linocut prints, no words until the very end.

But it's just a scene of grass and as you progress, you see this darkness coming down and when it comes back up, the color of the grass has changed. It's about the tornado that swept through Tuscaloosa and so many people lost everything, including Steve. It's just one of the most powerful things that I have ever seen. Because it was just so visual, he didn't need to say anything. Things happen, they change us, and they go away, and we are left as something else.

Thank you once again, Aimee. This has been lovely and maybe someday I'll actually get to meet you.

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