Современные художественные издания: развивающееся культурное и мировое явление в библиотеках, музеях и архивах

Contemporary Artists’ Books: A Growing Cultural and Global Phenomenon in Libraries, Museums and Archives

Сучасні художні видання: культурне та світове явище в бібліотеках, музеях та архівах

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Художественные издания играли заметную роль во всем мире в течение 20-го столетия. Однако они не были замечены мировым культурным радаром, до тех пор, пока в последние десятилетия не были опубликованы значительные исследования, которые показали важность этой современной и передовой формы искусства.

Данный доклад обращает внимание на возросший интерес к современным художественным изданиям, начиная с нескольких работ предшественников, выполненные в конце 19 — начале 20 века и содержащих те экспериментальные элементы, которые нашли свое отражение в современном книгопечатании. Все большее число художников и печатников обращаются к этому экспериментальному виду художественного творчества, и мы рассмотрим несколько примеров из различных стран. Это явление продолжает привлекать внимание исследователей искусства и историков культуры, которые обращаются к современным художественным изданиям, находящимся в библиотеках, музеях и архивах, которые отражают участие ведущих типографий и печатников в создании таких творческих работ.

Хотя определение «художественного издания» предназначено отсутствует, данная работа, на примере таких художественных изданий выявляет разность между livre d’artiste (книгой художника) и современными изданиями и определяет жизненность этого вида искусства.

Arts’ books played a vital role worldwide throughout the 20th century. But they hovered under the art world’s radar until recent decades when significant studies were published that reflect on the importance of this modern and contemporary art form.

This paper focuses on the growing phenomenon of contemporary artists’ books, beginning with a few examples of precursors from the late 19th and early 20th century, revealing experimental elements that are reflected in contemporary bookworks. Growing numbers of artists and printers are turning to this experimental art form, and we will look at several examples from varied geographical areas. This phenomenon continues to attract the attention of art researchers and cultural historians, who turn to contemporary artists’ books found in libraries and museum collections, often supplemented by archives reflecting the activities of important presses and printers of these creative works. Although artists’ books purposefully avoid definition, the thrust of this paper, with its sampling of these bookworks, will reveal the difference between the livre d’artiste and the contemporary artists’ book and the vitality of this art form.

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Художні видання мали велике світове значення у 20 столітті. Але їх не помічали, доки нещодавно (останніми десятиліттями) не були опубліковані грунтовні дослідження, які продемонстрували важливість цього сучасного форми мистецтва.

Дана доповідь привертає увагу до зростання зацікавленості сучасними художніми виданнями, починаючи з декількох робіт попередників, які були виконані наприкінці 19-го на початку 20 століття, і містять у собі ті експериментальні елементи, що зважили своє відображення у сучасному книгодрукуванні. Зростає кількість художників та видавців, які звертаються до цього виду експериментальної творчості, і ми розглянемо кілька прикладів з різних країн. Це явище продовжує привернуті увагу дослідників мистецтва та істориків культури, які звертаються до сучасних художніх видань, що знаходяться в бібліотеках, музеях та архівах, і відображають участь провідних видавців та друкарів у створенні таких творчих робіт.

Хоча визначення «художнього видання» не існує, ця доповідь, на прикладі таких художніх видань, демонструє відмінність livre d’artiste (книги художника) від сучасних художніх видань, і визначає життєздатність цього виду мистецтва.
Although contemporary artists’ books intentionally elude precise definition, the description of their attributes and experimental qualities help identify them and also give us a sense of how the livre de peinture and livre d’artiste differ from the artists’ book. Artists’ bookworks hovered on the edge of the art world’s radar until the last few decades when significant published studies discussed the importance of this phenomenon. The numbers of book artists and printers who create contemporary bookworks have grown exponentially in recent years. And the increasingly lively interest in contemporary artists’ books is reflected in the steady increase of collections and related archives held in libraries and museums.

In this short talk, we begin with a few works from the late 19th and early 20th century, showing traits that resurface in the contemporary artists’ book. But our focus is on recent bookworks and the growing interest of contemporary artists in experimentation with the book.

[visual 1] Stéphan Mallarmé (French, 1842-1898). *Un coup de dès jamais n’abolira le hasard...* 1898

Facsimile no. 20 from *Shaped Poetry: a suite of 30 typographic prints* by Glenn Todd with printer’s notes by Andrew Hoyem. San Francisco: Arion Press, 1981. (*A Throw of dice will never abolish risk.*)

Although a small printing of *Un coup de dès* appeared shortly after Mallarmé’s death, it was only in 1914 that *La Nouvelle Rêvue Française* and Gallimard put out the first published edition. The French Symbolist poet was planning this evolutionary work during the last year of his life. He was searching for a way to show the essence of feeling and ideas, using words on a page as symbols [almost akin to music]. Mallarmé’s inventive design used letters, words and phrases strewn across the pages to form shapes that reflect the meaning of the text. *Un coup de dès* echoes through the century. Scholars have researched and dissected it, and to this day, artists continue to create variations as homages to Mallarmé’s work.

The next examples are from the Douglas Cooper collection held at the Getty Research Institute, both collaborations created by Fernand Léger (French, 1881-1995) and Blaise Cendrars (Swiss /French, 1887-1961). These were Léger’s cubist years. He lived near Montparnasse, and there he met Frédéric-Louis Sauser, who called himself Freddy Sauser until he took the pseudonym Blaise Cendrars (a play on words for braised ashes). Art critic, journalist, film director and writer, Cendrars wrote in a staccato beat. Just three years before completing this book, he had lost his right arm fighting at the front.


The jacket drawing shows glimpses of a battle scene, the title words and Cendrars’ name. Cendrars’ impressionistic words describe the battlefront & confront us in blood red type juxtaposed with Léger’s drawings that interweave jagged colorful letters, words and shapes. Artist and writer collaborate, interweaving words and images with text to project their meaning.


The Léger-Cendrars collaboration continued with this witty satire, *La fin du monde (The end of the world, filmed by the Angel of Notre Dame: a novel)* begun in September 1919, just two months after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. This book sold for only 20 francs when first published and was one of the more accessible and popular books in France at the time. Cendrars’ text, takes the form of a witty subversive film script. It is set in thick black type interspersed with Léger’s arresting prints, his ink drawings shot through with color and words. Here again, as he did in *J’ai tué*, Léger overlayed his ink drawings with strong primary watercolors using the pochoir method. The first chapter begins with this double spread. The words «English spoken» and «cashier» surface through the lines and colors. On the last day of the year, the Angel of Notre Dame is filming the end of the world; the first scene shows god the father, a shirt-sleeved American sitting in his office and lighting up a thick cigar. Léger’s stark drawing extends to the ends of the page.

These are a few snapshots from numerous predecessors of the contemporary artists’ book: Russian Futurists, Dadaists, Italian Futurists and many other early 20th century visual art movements have intimations reflected in the contemporary artists’ book. But these earlier artists worked within typographic and largely literary norms, using manifestoes, leaflets, magazines and books in a print-oriented form. In the late fifties and sixties, book artists reflected the social and artistic revolutions that spawned the phenomenon of artists’ books. It was then that the proliferation of contemporary artists’ books caught on in the United States, Europe and other parts of the world. The Getty Research Institute is one of many libraries and museums collecting significant groups of bookworks, created by artists who surfaced in mid-century and experimented through the next several decades. Our intent is to focus on collecting artists’ books
created on the west coast and also worldwide when tied to the scope of our existing collections. Our Special Collections holdings include archives for artists’ bookmakers and printers, such as Coracle Press, Perishable Press, Turkey Press, Walter Hamady, Ian Hamilton Finley and others, which help us track the collaborative efforts involved in creating contemporary artists’ books.

[visual 4] Edward Ruscha (American, 1937-) Every building on the Sunset Strip. Los Angeles: E. Ruscha, 1966. Ruscha’s artwork surfaced in the sixties on the west coast. This early work quickly became famous. As the long accordion-folded book opens, we see Ruscha’s photographs of the entire length of Sunset Boulevard. His photos seem to reflect the flat fronts of a film studio lot. His early artists’ books, conceptual and self-published, have his own unique style — deadpan, laid back. In the 60s and 70s, Ruscha used a variety of images, often his own photographs, produced in flat, repetitive sequences. Purposefully inexpensive, his books were completely removed from the rare and elegantly produced livre d’artiste. They were made to avoid the pricey art gallery market and they circulated widely. I must say I agree with those who give Ed Ruscha the principal credit for revealing that the book can be a primary artistic vehicle. He introduced the idea that contemporary artists might use the book form to make art.

[visual 5] Me/The [I'm using Ruscha’s pronunciation] was published in December 2002. Ruscha’s sculptural cloth-covered hardbound book has blank pages, gold fore-edges with airbrushed text ME and THE, words that are only visible when the pages are fanned in opposite directions. Ruscha has talked about his interest in the brick shape he chose for this book. Full of implied meaning, his conceptual experiments with the book format continue but this latest one is no longer self-published and is markedly different from his early artists’ books.


Book artists were often drawn to a playful approach, adapting and changing aspects of children’s books for the adult audience. Always experimenting with the book format, artists made works often carrying satiric or political messages. Keith Smith is known for his many innovative artists’ books, and also his teaching and published studies. Smith numbers his books in consecutive order. And he transforms the book into an art presence of mutating shapes and sounds, making the reader a participant in the transformation. This Book 91 is now a classic. Without text, except for the embossed title page, Keith Smith’s book has its leaves strung together with linen cords pushed through holes punched in each page. The reader moves through the book, turning its leaves, creating varying sounds and changing effects of light and shadow. Each page reveals a new artwork that changes slightly each time it is viewed. The last few pages have no cords and the punched holes grow fainter until they finally disappear. Smith gives us a literal reality: by holding the book, turning the pages, viewing the linear & shadow reflections on each page, hearing the sound effects of string drawn through paper, we experience the reality of Smith’s sculptural book.


Buzz Spector alters the book’s structure in a completely different way. He often refers to critical theorists and texts, and draws us in, with his subtle, witty deconstruction of the book. The brilliant red square placed in a white-enameded wooden frame turns out to be a book... with blank pages... but half way thru the book, we discover a page with a brilliant gold square in the center. Spector’s handwritten colophon tells us that... «Malevich would put a drop of yellow in the white of his Suprematist paintings. He wanted them to carry the memory of the gold in Russian icons.» «Spector’s salute to Malevich gives us an artwork that is a book altered and deconstructed to become an artwork.


Charles Hobson also playfully experiments with the book format, but he often alters it completely, creating other shapes and forms. Because he sees the artists’ book as a natural meeting place for image and word, he works with the sculptural book. Hobson has described the book as a container for the idea, like a suitcase that makes the idea portable. In his exhibition catalogue on Why I Love Books and also on his website, Hobson uses poetic words to describe the physical book. What would we have, he asks, if the book were to speak as profoundly, as singularly to us, as the message it were meant to convey? What if the book bore no message
beyond itself? What if the container shone with intelligence? What if the vessel were the wine?

In this Artist’s proof signed by the artist (one of four prototypes made in the summer of 1995), Hobson has recreated the metronome artwork described by Man Ray. He has added the small accordion book -- a pastel monotype with handwritten text on hand painted paper of eight leaves -- and attached it to the side of a metronome. Hobson also added a small book of four pages attached to the bottom. All three pieces fit in a black cardboard box in the triangular shape of the metronome. On the beating arm of the metronome, as in Man Ray’s creation, is the pastel monotype of lips based on those of Lee Miller, who was the beautiful muse of Man Ray.

Hobson sees a commonality between John Harrison and Man Ray. Harrison, a clock maker, won the Longitudinal Prize for using a clock to build an entirely new mechanism, a reliable marine chronometer. Man Ray saw the camera as a perfect machine to reproduce reality and he used it to create surreal images. Both Man Ray and Harrison used light as inspiration to «gave a kiss to time.» Hobson created his conceptual artwork using an altered book format.

Price, Robin. 

Slurring is a printer’s term, which means to blur or make a double impression of the type caused by a slipping of the paper in the printing process. Printer/publisher Robin Price created artists’ books on the west coast before moving to the American east coast. She conceived this «visual and tactile cornucopia» in collaboration with Emily K. Larned. And she invited ten artists to contribute original work in blind collaboration. The middle four signatures of the book vary, thus making each copy unique. With exposed sewing on cords attached to sanded Plexiglas covers, the work is housed in a simple dark lidded box inside a tray made from weathered 2 by 4 corners.

Price and Larned began with leftover press sheets from Price’s earlier books which included fragments of obscure, technical printing directives (written by Price herself). The two artists altered the pages and paper itself and then, letterpress printed new texts, mostly excerpts from other previously published books on half of the prepared sheets. The remaining sheets were sent to the ten invited artists, who added their own original contributions. The pages are overprinted and altered using techniques including block prints, photo transfers, collage, cutouts and drawings. Primary texts were chosen to celebrate chance, collaboration and humor in the creative process, and the unknown and unknowable in life. The words of John Cage are quoted on the title page, describing Art as a process set in motion by a group of people.

Further on in the book, in «Dada and Chance» Hans Richter recounts the familiar story about Arp. Dissatisfied with his drawing, Arp tore it up, let the pieces fall to the floor, and later found them in a pattern that pleased him. Chance had created what all Arp’s efforts had failed to achieve. Richter writes: «However unsafe and unknown the territory into which we now... tumbled, we were all sure where our paths lay... And the paths led in all directions.» These quotes reveal something of the message in this inspiring work... and also the spirit behind the entire genre of artists’ books.

Heebner, Mary. 
Scratching the surface: a visit to Lascaux and Rouffignac. Santa Barbara: simplemente maria press, 1998. 9/10

The use of handmade paper plays an effective role in this work as well. Painter and book artist, Mary Heebner created every part of Scratching the surface to share the tactile visual experiences she felt when walking through the caves of Lascaux and Rouffignac. She wrote the words and painted six original paintings for each of the ten books. The whole creation is housed in a Plexi acrylic case with the title etched on the surface. On each of the outer folios, she has lightly drawn the cave’s plan view map: we see one at the upper right in this slide. The folios are held in a hand-painted Torinoko paper enclosure, that she made with ochre pigment «scratched» on with a rag, a rough brush and her bare hands. She used ochre and carbon black pigments in her paintings and text, adding mica and graphite to simulate what the Lascaux and Rouffignac artists might have used for their cave wall paintings. Her paintings are tipped onto folios of abaca and cotton paper that she made by hand. The paper is translucent and ruffled, designed to make a susurrant sound with each turning page. Her impressionistic artwork and evocative text meld with the effect of rustling paper in its soft folio format, transporting us to Lascaux and Rouffignac.

Horwitz, Channa. 
8 Los Angeles: C. Horwitz, 1978. 9/30

We move now from an impressionistic soft-edge bookwork to sequences charted on graph paper. Channa Horwitz [Channa is how she pronounces her name] creates surprisingly arresting artworks in book format on graph paper. She has been an active artist in southern California since the sixties, and she created this work with printer Ed Hamilton at June Wayne’s Tamarind Studio in Los Angeles. Using a
pulse in a sequence of 8 counts plotted on graph paper in linear progression, she creates eight shapes, as variations on the theme, focusing on the notation of motion in time and space. This meticulous folio suite of lithographs in accordion book format surprises us with its beauty of composition and, although more precisely drawn and calculated on graph paper charts, reminds us of Sol Lewitt’s work.


Mikhail Karasik began his Kharmsizdat publishing project as a personal initiative. Karasik has created a series worthy of any leading modern publisher, but Kharmsizdat is not a traditional publishing house. With these four Kharmsizdat works -- Russian Dada; Oberiu Box; Literary Constructivism; and the Leningrad Literary Underground -- Karasik has succeeded in linking some of the most memorable events in the artistic life of St. Petersburg in the 1990s. Karasik named his publishing project after the legendary Daniil Kharms, whose underground literature resurfaced in Leningrad’s cultural environment of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The appearance of Kharms’ works coincided with major exhibitions of the works of Pavel Filonov, Kazimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky. Closest to Karasik’s project is the publishing of Ilya Zdanovich, who was the link between the Russian avant-garde and Dada in Paris of the 1920s. Karasik aimed to resurrect the experience of Russian avant-garde artists while, at the same time, adding traits of the experimental contemporary artists’ book. Each folio-size matchbox/book includes artists of widely differing approaches, ages and temperaments, thus resulting in a sort of polyphony of text and image.

In his Russian Dada box, he recalls Duchamp’s assemblage-collage device of the 1960s, but here Karasik brings together several artists. Each artist has created his own Dadaist work, reproducing artistic techniques going back to the Russian Futurists of the 1910s, thus creating a form of the ready-made. He uses rough hand-made paper to resurrect the long-forgotten 1920s works of the Canine Box creative bureau of Nothingists. In his Oberiu Box, Karasik is referring to The Unification of Real Art or OBERIU (Ob’edinenie real’nogo iskusstva), a group formed in early 1928 by the writers Daniil Kharms, Alexander Vvedensky, Nikolai Zabolotsky, Igor Baktieterev and Konstantin Vaginov. These Oberiu writings continued post-Futurist absurdist traditions of the 1920s but most of the Oberiu literary heritage was lost or destroyed. After the deaths of Kharms in prison hospital in 1942 and Vvedensky on his way into exile in 1941, Jacob Druskin rescued their surviving manuscripts. Karasik has brought together a random choice of seven artists, each of whom chose to create a book reflecting an Oberiu member. The books rest in the same box and each box features a label of the Gomeldrev match factory.

Pettibon has always liked the format of books and has had a career-long love affair with text in his art. He began his career in the 60s making 1 zines that he sold through a store in New York or simply gave away. Pettibon’s latest brainchild, Faster, Jim, is an artists’ book on the theme of travel, «from land to sea to space to air and back down to earth.» Pettibon invited seven younger artists to collaborate with him and he turned to master printer Ed Hamilton with his proposal. The title came from his mental image of a high school couple in a car race with the girl egging the boy on. Hamilton is used to dealing with one or two artists at a time so he realized this would prove quite a challenge, but he found Pettibon’s idea exhilarating. The project took over two years, involving many discussions with each of the artists.

The aluminum cover for this suite of prints has an image of a hot rod, extending front to back, done by Victor Gastelum, whose work is ‘cool, hybrid Chicanoismo.’ The cover was silk-screened by Jeff Wasserman. And Kitty Marryat of Two Hands Press, located in Los Angeles, carefully designed and created the amazing binding. The book’s slipcase has an image by Gastelum and Pettibon. And Pettibon’s drawings are scattered throughout the book: hot air balloons, surfers, a UFO.

The verso of the title page has Todd Squires photograph, «Highway 1»... his homage to Ed Ruscha’s gasoline stations. And p 28 features Pettibon’s walking man with his handwritten text: «Move circumspectly and you will get ahead»
at Tamarind Studios with June Wayne. When Ed Ruscha co-founded the Hamilton Press Gallery with Ed Hamilton in 1990, his intention was to do collaborative projects such as this one. Ruscha was quoted in an article by Louise Roug in The Los Angeles Times «Calendar Section,» Friday, 31 October 2003: «Artists’ books are something that have almost been forgotten,» he said. «It’s one of the noblest art forms, but so many artists don’t think of it that way.»

The contemporary artists’ book is now appearing on the art world’s radar screen. The numbers of artists’ book printers are multiplying in many parts of the world; in Los Angeles, for example, the number of artists’ book printers has grown from a handful two decades ago to hundreds today. More and more artists are experimenting with the book format. Without doubt, this is a contemporary art phenomenon that curators, librarians, and archivists have realized they must continue to collect, study and document.