

BOOK ARTS NEWSLETTER No. 57 May 2010

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Artists' Books Exhibitions at the School of Creative Arts, Department of Art and Design University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

Stacey Wilding

Tom Trusky Exhibition Cases

Special Collections Room, Bower Ashton Library

19th April - 30th May 2010



Weathered Intrusion, existing book and (rusted) steel rods.

I am working through the medium of Book Arts; altering existing book forms to create sculpted works, alongside producing installations which contain existing, manipulated books. I use the book form as a 'container/vessel' for my ideas, which are a response to mental health issues. I am interested in the use of discarded books, using the everyday commodity item, to create new form, context and audience. I enjoy working with a range of existing books and inspired by their original formal qualities - the binding, paper and text. I have developed a methodology of adding, subtracting or adapting in an appropriate response to personal ideas, whilst also highlighting the nature of the existing book form. The Book becomes an object, occupying space, rather than a collection of pages, text and imagery that's intended to be held and read. I am interested in taking or removing aspects of an existing book, in order to create several pieces of work that are separate from the existing book structure.

Currently I am producing sculptural pieces, which explore ways in which I can express emotion and experiences of depression through the form of sculpted books. I have

been using multiple books within single pieces of work, to metaphorically combined ideas and represent multi concepts or issues. I enjoy incorporating a variety of media within my book works, including- collage, stitch, textiles, metal work and found objects. The varied use of media enables me to create diverse, unique pieces of work.



Into my shell (series). Existing books.

The process of creating work is very important, especially the interaction, and treatments between hand and book. My approach towards my practice is intrinsic - works stem from an initial idea, yet the process of making is often spontaneous and automatic. This allows me to explore and experiment widely with my chosen materials, in an expressive, vigorous manner. The act of creating the work is somewhat meditative, and could be seen as my means of therapy as it has aided my ongoing recovery. I use film and photography to document my work, my sculptural and installation work. Photography enables multiple viewpoints, along with creating space for judgement and evaluation.

My Installations and some of the sculpted works contain elements of movement, and the audience is encouraged to interact with the work, allowing the forms and visual concept the opportunity of continual change. My intention for my book works is to be seen as insights into my personal experience of mental illness, informing, re-telling my story and hopefully creating an enjoyable viewing experience. I produce work with is often aesthetically attractive, yet closer inspection can reveal sinister form or representation, relates to personal thoughts, emotions and experiences. Although the concept of my work is very personal, I try to create work which is open to reflection and gives the viewer the opportunity to create their own perspective.

In 'Lost Children, the Moors and Evil Monsters: the Photographic Story of the Moors Murders', *Helen Pleasance* discussed how an entirely pedestrian photograph assumes iconic status if it is that of a notorious killer. Our reading of Myra Hindley's police snapshot is tainted with the poison of the intervening years, representing 'a haunting archive of loss'. This is a loss not only at a bluntly personal level for the families of the murdered but also a loss of an idea of a *community*. Fellow speaker *Dr. Pete Atkinson* (University of Central Lancashire) tied Pleasance's themes to a 'developmental mythology of Manchester in the 1980s', as when The Smiths appropriated the photo for their 'Suffer Little Children' (1984). For the city, Atkinson feels, Hindley's image acted as 'a reminder of its working-class roots and the uncultured brutalism of its past'. Regarding the event, Pleasance herself enjoyed 'the combination of contributions from visual practitioners and those who analyse the visual from various different disciplines', which she felt provided 'stimulating ideas about how to think about the visual and the ways in which we read (or don't read) narrative in it'.

MMU Special Collections Archivist – and delegate – *Jeremy Parrett* noted 'how the variety of both subjects spoken of, and the ways in which they were spoken about, seemed to mirror the form of the exhibition'.

Essentially, Carson and Miller achieved in their conference schedule just as unlikely, uneasy and entertaining a mix as they had in the glass cases outside the venue.

Appreciation was equally subjective; delegate *Judy Kendall* (Salford University) noted her excitement at finding 'artists working in a similar 'visual text' field', Chair *Professor Steve Dixon* (MMU) that 'artefacts embody their own narratives and meanings which 'speak' in a variety of voices' and *Jane Pendlebury* (MMU Special Collections) noted 'the object as catalyst' of enjoyable discussion and creativity.

In her closing Keynote Speech – 'Relating the Story of Things' - *Dr. Patricia Allmer* (Research Fellow at MMU) talked eloquently about the threads running through the exhibition and, by association, the day. She cited the role of the haptic ('from text to texture') in our experience of things, and the 'imagination, passion and chance. . . sensual impulses' that had driven Carson and Miller throughout their original act of collation. *Jayne Burgess* (MMU Special Collections) thought it 'a most fitting end to the day and especially to the exhibition'.

Carson and Miller remain satisfied with the event in terms of it closing a lengthy chapter of their ongoing collaboration, stating 'the most important thing to us is to have hosted an event that instigates or extends discussion and debate around the notion of narrative and the visual (matters central to our own art practice)'.

Mike Nicholson

www.ensixteeneditions.blogspot.com

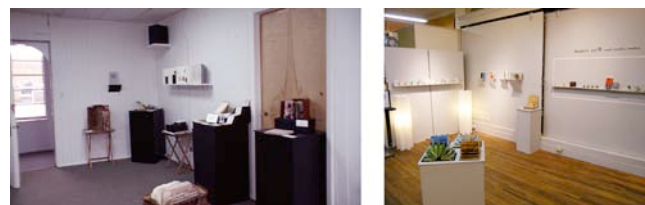
A READER'S ART: A Book Artist's Vision Becomes A 10-Year Tradition

Review by **Zach Pearl, Minneapolis, USA**



I Always Had Wings, Camille M. Boggs

Something special happened in the book arts 10 years ago in Lansing, Michigan. In an experimental exhibition space known as the Art Apartment (quite literally a downtown apartment gone avant-garde gallery) opened *A Reader's Art*, the first show comprised solely of book artists to ever debut in Michigan. It was an unexpected concept that met with delightful reception, capturing the minds of local residents and seizing the headlines of local press. Although the Art Apartment was run by a cooperative of three women/visionaries: Leslie Donaldson, Nancy McRay and Susan Hensel. It was the latter who recognised that the citizens of Michigan needed to experience the Book as something more than the conventional paperback romance or the illustrated nursery rhyme; they needed to experience the Book as a narrative object. Showcasing more than 50 artists' books from around the Midwest, the first instance of *A Reader's Art* also offered a rare privilege to the viewer: the opportunity to touch the work! As visitors entered the space they were greeted by a large bowl of white cotton gloves, and a warm invitation to explore the individual pages of each work. It was a highly progressive notion for its place and its time; no plexi vitrines, no guards standing watch, no force-fields of tradition or prestige that separated the art from its audience.



Left to right: *A Reader's Art 1*, at the Art Apartment, E. Lansing, MI & *A Reader's Art 9*, at Susan Hensel Gallery, Minneapolis, MN

Fast forward a decade, and head West about six hundred miles. The Art Apartment (unfortunately) no longer exists, but *A Reader's Art* lives on inside the walls of the Susan Hensel Gallery. Now, in its tenth year, the scope of the exhibition has gone from regional to international, but the

concept has remained the same. As the years have gone by, themes have been applied and focuses on particular media have come into play, such as the ‘sculptural’, ‘the handmade’, the ‘miniature’. However, at the heart of it all is still a passionate and down-to-earth gallerist who wants to educate and inspire the members of her community.



LOST, Susan Hensel

For many years, a prolific book artist herself, Hensel (whose works can be found in the Library at the Museum of Modern Art NY, Michigan State University and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts among others) has sited that the real impetus of *A Reader's Art* came from the desire to educate the general public about the potential of the Book as a time-based and interactive method of storytelling. “It’s always been important to me that people are allowed the chance to touch artworks, and interact with them,” says Hensel. “With artists’ books, in particular, touching the work can lead to a sense of personal interaction with the artist, and a deeper sense of meaning, versus standing across the room from a painting with your hands politely behind your back.” In the first two years of *A Reader's Art*, while it was housed at the Art Apartment, the reaction was exactly this: a fascinating, somewhat perplexing and occasionally transcendental experience that left its visitors feeling differently about their relationship to Art, as a whole. The local media responded with equal enthusiasm, as articles about the show appeared in the Detroit Free Press, the Kalamazoo Gazette, and the State News.

When the Art Apartment closed in December of 2002, *A Reader's Art* found a home at the Lansing Art Gallery. Enjoying much the same level of success in its new location, the university asked if it could retain the concept and title of the exhibition when Hensel decided to move to Minnesota in 2004. Fully aware that she had struck conceptual-gold, Hensel politely refused to leave *A Reader's Art* behind and brought the show with her to the Twin Cities area. Since its arrival in her Minneapolis gallery space in 2005, Hensel has modified the concept to include aesthetic and contextual themes. For instance, in 2005, as George Bush announced he would be running for a consecutive presidential term, Hensel decided to add a political angle to the selected works. “Not everything in the show that year was political,” she recalls, “But a majority of it was.

It was important for me that the works resonated with a large number of people in a way that was current.”

The physical space of the Susan Hensel Gallery reflects these values. A modest, but cosy space, with hardwood floors and high tin ceilings, the gallery invites a relaxed and almost conversational viewing experience. These days, during *A Reader's Art*, there are multiple stations positioned throughout the exhibit that are fully-stocked with white gloves, and the show has gained a local reputation for its hands-on policy. The show has also become noted for its regular inclusion of emerging book artists, some of whom have even been shown ‘in-depth’ with multiple works or complete series present. “One joy of this show has been starting to work with more emerging artists, and showcasing them,” says Hensel “I enjoy taking a risk with this show, and allowing them to show in some depth. It’s important to help build the trajectories of their careers.” Hensel also points out that there is a parallel effect of giving exposure to new and upcoming artists: exposing art to fresh audiences (in many instances, the friends, relatives and colleagues of the emerging artists). This phenomenon can also be seen clearly at *A Reader's Art*, as the visual-journals of students at Hudson High School in Wisconsin are often displayed alongside the work of seasoned book arts veterans. Hensel began a partnership with Hudson High School in 2006 through the chance encounter of teaching one of its faculty. Laura Gajdostik, an English teacher, signed up for a workshop with Hensel on creating narrative through collage. Gajdostik was so inspired by the workshop that she introduced visual-journaling as a part of her curriculum for her upper-level students, and the project has remained a prominent feature of the exhibition in most years since. “The families and friends of the high school students have probably been the most exciting visitors that we get during this show,” Hensel adds. “Some of them have never been to a gallery before, let alone one about the Book Arts.”



A Reader's Art 9, gallery visitors investigate last year’s miniature-themed exhibition

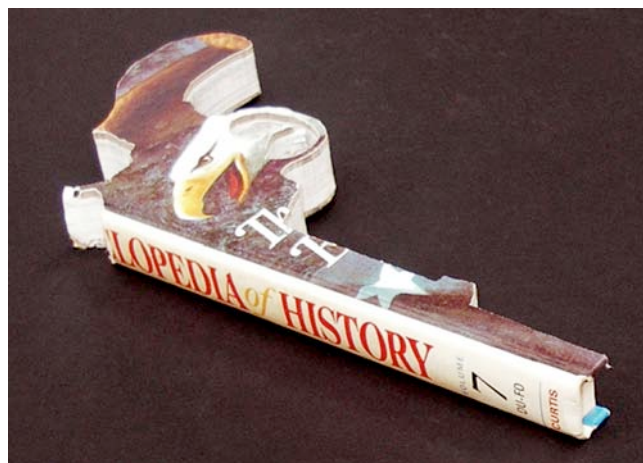
In anticipation of its tenth year, Hensel knew that she had to do something different; something more than just a variation on media or scale. She also knew that she had an obligation to continue increasing the exhibition’s scope. In April 2009, Hensel got her solution when longtime

friend and fellow artist Jon Coffelt came to the gallery with a unique and inspiring exhibition entitled Communion. Comprised of dozens of intricate, hand-sewn miniature pieces of clothing that memorialized their original wearers, Communion was greeted with awe-filled faces and eager hearts by all its viewers. Over the period of the install and the show's opening, Coffelt stayed with Hensel. They bantered about fantasy-exhibitions and ideals of gallery administration; leading up to Hensel's decision to commemorate the birth of her book arts brainchild by inviting Coffelt to guest-curate.

Coffelt was happy to oblige, as he had organized many a book arts show when his career took a 'gallery-centric' turn in 1993. Along with his longtime partner Shawn Boley, and friend Janet Hughes, Coffelt opened a progressive gallery space called Agnes. Located in Birmingham, Alabama, Agnes focused foremost on contemporary photography, but it regularly featured exhibitions by book artists and film artists as well. Active until 2001, Agnes gained national recognition for its mission to raise awareness about critical issues such as AIDS, homelessness, racism, imprisonment, etc. through visual art. Agnes worked frequently with the Video Data Bank in Chicago to show short film/video artists, and presented a key exhibition just after its founding entitled, World Without Art in conjunction with Visual AIDS to commemorate World AIDS Day. The gallery's forward-thinking, however, did not always gain support from its Birmingham patrons, who occasionally picketed its openings. One such incident earned Agnes an article in a December 1994 issue of USA Today. Coffelt ultimately decided to close the gallery in order to concentrate on his studio-art practice, and relocated to New York City. However, he couldn't stay away from curating for very long. In 2009, Coffelt played an instrumental role in organising the first two exhibitions at Central Booking, a two-section gallery space in Brooklyn, NYC that allocates one gallery specifically for the book arts and an adjacent gallery to showcase work by book artists in other mediums.

With this year's *A Reader's Art*, Coffelt set out to make the selection of artists reach from the traditional to the conceptual, stating early on in the selection process, "You could say that I'm using this exhibition as a kind of survey of what's going on in the world of artist's books right now. I'm interested in artists utilising every possible form of the book, from fine type-set handmade books to altered books to limited edition to out-of-the-book vernacular." And, Coffelt accomplished just that. His call-for-art caught the eye of hundreds of artists ranging from internationally renowned to locally emerging; their work spanning an equal spectrum in form and content.

Among the 51 artists selected, highlights included works by: Sara Garden Armstrong, Beatrice Coron, Joan Lyons, Esther Smith, Florida-based and previous Susan Hensel Gallery exhibitor Claire Jeanine Satin, Douge Beube, Janet Hassinger and Miriam Schaer.



Encyclopaedia of History 7, Janet Hassinger

Janet Hassinger produces works that are immediate, metaphorical and political in their message. Perhaps, best known for her ongoing series of 'gun-books' (found codex texts on subjects such as civil rights and American history that have been carved into the shapes of hand guns), she is also a skilled watercolourist and curator. In addition to a small gallery that she operates in Houston, she and Jon Coffelt co-curated *The Book 'ever after'* for College of the Mainland Fine Arts Gallery in 2007.



One Heart, Miriam Schaer

The work of Miriam Schaer is a testament to the sculptural potential of the Book as well as the progressive notion of using multimedia to achieve a unique aesthetic and voice. Exploring issues of the Feminine in society, Schaer utilises bustiers, brassieres, gloves, aprons and more as sculptural enclosures for her books. They are often accompanied by tiny collections of symbolic objects such as shredded letters, coins, pills and antique keys that are nested inside. Of her larger series, Schaer's 'girdle books' are particularly powerful and visually engrossing for their textures. Many of them feature heart-shaped accordion books that must be pulled out of the sculpture's chest cavity in order to be read.

Also showing in *A Reader's Art* was Harriet Bart, a widely recognised and accomplished Minneapolis book artist who is mostly known for her large-scale sculpture and installation works. Bart's bookwork capitalises on the study of iconography and the beauty of simple forms.



Ledger Domain, Harriet Bart

Her bindings speak to her love for sculptural materials, with covers and cases of metal and wood that are characterised by a refined and almost puritanical design sense. However, once opened, Bart's book works reveal playful and striking juxtapositions of text and graphics that allude to the transformative nature of language.

Other noteworthy local artists included in this year's show were Jody Williams, Nora Lee McGillivray, Chip Schilling (who was recently named 2010 Minnesota Book Artist of the Year by the Minnesota Center for Book Arts), and Georgia Greely who hosted an evening of poetry at the gallery on April 16th with members of the Laurel Poetry Collective.

As the opening approached, and the boxes and the envelopes trickled in from their respective destinations, Hensel looked back over a decade of *A Reader's Art*. The dog-eared postcards, the laminated pages of newspaper clippings and even the occasional sleeve of slides. The effect is overwhelming, and at the same time satisfying. What began as a simple but determined gesture, a single artist's endeavor to push the book arts into the radar of her

immediate community, has become a tangible catalogue of what's going on in the contemporary world of book arts and a decade-long tradition.

A Reader's Art 10 ran from March 12th to April 23rd, 2010. A full list of the exhibitors can be found online at susanhenselgallery.com

Zach Pearl is a production artist, assistant gallery coordinator, and arts instructor residing in Minneapolis. He graduated in 2006 from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design with a BFA in Illustration, and has since pursued curating and critical arts writing as a culmination of his interests in education, environmental narrative, art theory and design. www.zachpearl.com

Artists' Books Research Project at the National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum
A report by Sophie Bradbury and Andrew Russell

Sophie Bradbury, a student from Sussex Coast College Hastings, recently had the opportunity to study artists' books in the National Art Library's collection.



Volcano of thoughts and emotions, Sophie Bradbury, Mixed Media, 40 x 60 x 20 cm

She says, "My objective during the placement was to examine books relevant to my studies in Contemporary Crafts Practice and to make a piece in response to my experiences while on placement. I kept a journal of my time, recording what I thought about the books I saw, and I also recorded my physical and emotional responses to the placement experience, particularly regarding my disability (I have Multiple Sclerosis)."

As a disabled student, Sophie found Andrew Russell, Librarian and Social Inclusion Officer, gave her invaluable support. He assembled relevant books in a private room that was easily accessible. She says, "I was able to conserve my energy and devote it to study."

"Back at college, I made two mixed media book objects and a pewter book-brooch. The whole experience has been beneficial to my confidence as a maker as I look forward to leaving college and working professionally."



Pewter Brooch, Sophie Bradbury, Pewter Shim and Nickel Silver Wire, 5 x 2 x 2 cm



Above: *Yellow Tree Book* (front), Sophie Bradbury, Ceramic, Paper and Gouache, 20 x 20 x 10 cm

Below: *Yellow Tree Book* (reverse), Sophie Bradbury, Ceramic, Paper and Gouache, 20 x 20 x 10 cm



The National Art Library, situated within the V&A Museum, has several thousand artists' books. Over 150 of these can be seen online at the following web address - http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/prints_books/features/artists_books/index.html

All students are welcome to come and study and details of access and facilities for visitors can be found on the National Art Library website at <http://www.vam.ac.uk/nal/about/index.html>

The library's opening hours are Tuesdays to Saturdays 10am - 5.30pm (6.30pm on Fridays) and full details of how to use the library are available on these web pages.

Sophie Bradbury is a student from Sussex Coast College, Hastings. sophiebradbury@btinternet.com

UWE Bristol Exhibitions

Bower Ashton Library opening hours, term time:

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Please call to check opening hours before travelling as times vary during inter-semester weeks and vacation periods (usually Mon - Fri 09.00 - 17.00)

Library main desk Tel: 0117 328 4750

If you have any book arts news, please email items for the Book Arts Newsletter to: Sarah.Bodman@uwe.ac.uk

Please supply images as good quality RGB jpegs (300 dpi)

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Sarah Bodman, Centre for Fine Print Research
UWE Bristol School of Creative Arts, Department of Art and Design, Kennel Lodge Road, Bristol BS3 2JT, UK
www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk / Sarah.Bodman@uwe.ac.uk