

# **Artists' Books: Conveying meaning in a non-traditional format**

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# **Artists' Books: Conveying meaning in a non-traditional format**

by

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## **Declaration:**

I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or any other person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

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Shirley Louise Atkinson Greer

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Date

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## **Artists' Books: Conveying meaning in a non-traditional format**

**Shirley Greer 2009**

### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis argues that artists' books provide the reader/viewer with knowledge and meaning even when the normal expectations of what a book might offer are not met. An examination of the qualities of artists' books that differentiate them from traditional books reveals a broad spectrum of concepts being explored by artists working in this medium.

In the creation of their books artists consider both the formal components (structure and materials) as well as the conceptual aspects (ideas, meaning, interpretation and sensory responses). The results of these combined investigations provide the reader/viewer with a new interpretation of text, imagery and materials. Together these components present meanings that transcend a literal reading of text.

Combining an examination of historical and contemporary precedents with my practice-based research has resulted in the production of a series of artists' books responding to four hand-written letters dating from the 1930s. My books reflect a critical exploration of issues surrounding the notions of time, sequence, scale, haptics and the body. They also challenge assumptions about communication, and add to the already-substantial contribution made by women artists in the field of book arts. These books also offer the reader/viewer an opportunity to construct new meaning from the work, unlike that offered by traditional books.

This study presents an analysis of the literature related to the on-going debate concerning a definition for artists' books. This is followed by a discussion of historical precedents for artists' involvement with books. A review of contemporary practices in this field and an investigation of the myriad complex issues addressed by artists in the realization of their work laid the ground work for my own practice-based research.

The results of my investigations into this area of study contribute to the existing knowledge suggesting that artists' books convey new meaning in a non-traditional format.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

This practice-based study seeks to advance theoretical and creative investigations into the field of artists' books. It will explore how artists' books convey meaning to the reader/viewer in ways not experienced with traditional books, and will contribute to concepts of accessibility to textual meaning without using conventional language. This study will also contribute to the existing knowledge surrounding the significance of artists' books as a medium for artistic exploration.

My goal is to produce a written account of my theoretical and practical research into the history and practice of artists' books. I will present a reflective journal mapping my progress throughout the research period. Finally, I will produce a series of artists' books for public exhibition which will demonstrate the results of my research.

In this introductory chapter I will discuss how I arrived at my research question, how I propose to answer it and what contribution my work might make.

But I will start with a look at the ongoing debate surrounding the definition of artists' books. Virtually all of the literature on this subject includes a discussion of a definition, and it might be helpful to establish a sense of just what has resulted from this on-going debate. My own desire to define and describe notions of inaccessibility to language in my work echoes this desire to find a definition for artists' books.

### **a) Definition of artists' books**

Stefan Klima (1998, p.12) gives credit to Diane Perry Vanderlip for the term *Artists Books*. It was first used in 1973 when she chose *Artists Books* for the title of an exhibition of book arts at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia.

However, in a paper presented at the international conference "Museums in Libraries – Libraries in Museums" in Moscow in 1999, Janis Ekdahl wrote:

There is no agreement among critics, curators and writers as to the definition of an "artists book." Much ink has been spilled in the struggle to find properly inclusive terminology for this convergence of art, language, and the printing technologies (Ekdahl 1999, p.243).

A survey of the literature on book arts supports Ekdahl's statement. This is demonstrated by the variety of opinions about how artist's books should be defined, with sometimes only subtle nuances separating one person's definition from another. Johanna Drucker may have provided a clue to the reason for this ongoing debate when she suggested that,

"Because the field of artists' books suffers from being under-theorized, under-historicized, under-studied and under-discussed, it isn't taken very seriously" (Drucker 2005, p.3).

What is taken seriously is the on-going, sometimes passionate debate. The following partial list of opinions illustrates the importance placed on finding a definition (for example these discussions can often be found in introductions to books and papers, in the same way that I have included it in my own introduction), and indicates the fine distinctions between the varying views.

In his introduction to *artists books: a critical survey of the literature* Stephan Klima devotes an entire chapter to the discussion of a definition for artists' books, and comments that the failure to find one "...in many ways,

serves as a metaphor for the still insecure position of artists books in the world.” (Klima 1998, p.21).

Meanwhile, Johanna Drucker, writing in *The Century of Artists' Books* (Drucker 2004, pp.10-11), argues that “...ultimately an artist’s book has to have some conviction, some soul, some reason **to be** and **to be a book** in order to succeed.” She also defines artist’s books (Drucker 1994, p.15) thus: “The artist’s book, properly defined, is an independently produced artistic vision in book form that *makes use of the book as a form* not just *incidentally*, but *significantly*.” She later reiterates this position in an article published in *The Bonefolder - an e-journal for the book binder and book artist*, (Drucker 2005, p.4) where she states “My criteria for judgment about what constitutes an interesting artist’s book are simple: is this an original work of art that makes creative use of the book format?” Drucker sets high standards both for herself as a critic and for the artist as creator, and calls for a means to critically filter (ibid p.3) the art from the craft as happens in other fine arts media and in literature. In the same *Bonefolder* article she cites her reasons for the need for a clear definition, stating (ibid p.3) “...the risk is that the dross will overwhelm the better work and that the junk (sorry, but true) that is being produced under the rubric of AB’s will just drag the level of production and conception to an impossible low.” The problem with this statement is that we now need a clear definition of exactly what constitutes “dross” and “junk”, as I suspect there is no consensus here either.

The concern for a definition for artists’ books is echoed by others, including Dick Higgins in his preface to *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* (Lyons1985, p.11), and by Lucy R. Lippard in the same volume

(ibid, p. 49) who argues that they are "... not books about art or on artists, but books as art". Simon Ford, writing in *British Artists' Books* (Turner 1993, pp.4-11) provides a list of twenty-five definitions from different sources which he compiled as part of his own research.

Renee Riese Hubert and Judd D. Hubert in *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books* also acknowledge the lack of a firm definition for artists' books, citing "...a bewildering array of factors" (Hubert 1999, p.7) that make up artists' books as a contributing factor. They quote Ulises Carrion's definition (ibid): "Bookworks are books that are conceived as an expressive unity, that is to say, where the message is the sum of all materials and formal elements" as useful, but later concede (ibid, p.11) that the book "requires, at the very least, further elaboration concerning possible meanings and functions."

Among those calling for a clarification is Philip Smith (Smith 1996), who gives his own definition of what he calls "bookness". He argues controversially that "It is questionable whether something becomes a book by being called such," and further that "the notion that an artist may call anything he likes a "work of art" or a "book", because he says so, is the extreme of sloppy thinking ..." This view also illustrates the need for a common understanding of what constitutes an artists' book, but I would argue that other artistic media are not subjected to this kind of critique.

Johanna Drucker in her criticism of some artists' books, refers (Drucker 1994, p.37) to material clichés (including the use of transparent materials) and content clichés (among which she includes personal diaries and journals as well as books bound shut), dismissing them as "...exhausted ideas continually repeated by new-comers to the field." I would argue that in the right context

each of these elements would be valid additions to any artists' book, but as with any media the reasons behind the choices need to be clear and supported. Hedi Kyle (Mica flag book), Inge Bruggeman (*Impact: Shades of Gray* 2006), Sam Winston (*Folded Dictionary* 2004) are respected book artists who have used some of these techniques in their work, and I have followed their example in my own works for this project (see *Compendium*, *Dear Folks* and *Sealed Tender*, Appendix "A").

In her recent publication *No longer innocent: book art in America 1960-1980* Betty Bright also addresses the definition issue, and she comments "A preoccupation with definition is perhaps understandable given the diversity in artists' books ..." (Bright 2005, p.1).

Charles Alexander in his introduction to *talking the boundless book – art, language, and the book arts*, sums it all up this way:

Like notions of self, author, and reader, book is not a word which lends itself to easy definition. The book arts, perhaps, are specifically arguments against definition and limitation, as artists and writers strive to break the bindings of what has traditionally been considered a book (Alexander 1995, p.9).

I will conclude with Dick Higgins' definition, as it most closely reflects my own artistic approach to making books,:

... a book done for its own sake and not for the information it contains. That is: it doesn't contain a lot of works, like a book of poems. It *is* a work. Its design and format reflect its content [...] The experience of reading it, viewing it, framing it – that is what the artist stresses in making it (Lyons 1985, p.11).

Perhaps because they are unencumbered by the constraints of a strict definition, artists and institutions alike approach book arts from a variety of perspectives. The number of respected institutions offering studies in book arts

is increasing, with course structures ranging from the craft of bookbinding to critical theoretical investigations.

The University of the Arts in Philadelphia offers an MFA in Book Arts/Printmaking which "...offers advanced study in studio arts, focusing on the book as a vehicle of artistic expression ..." (Viguers, n.d.). Camberwell College of the Arts in London also offers an MA Visual Arts (Book Arts) program, and is the first college in the UK to provide a postgraduate program of study in book arts. The University of Alabama has offered an MFA in the Book Arts Program since 1985, and both the University of Iowa and Arizona State University have had book arts programs for some twenty-five years. As well, the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice, Italy, the Emily Carr Institute in British Columbia, Canada and Columbia College in Chicago all offer programs in book arts. The Center for Book Arts in New York, the Minnesota Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis, the San Francisco Center for the Book and the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild in Toronto, Canada are institutions offering creative opportunities for a growing number of artists to learn the craft of book binding along with letterpress and printing instruction.

Karen Kunc offers the opinion that "...there is also an obvious trendiness to artist's books now ..." with ... "Museums and galleries ... fueling this trend as well ..." (Kunc 1999, p.18). This acknowledgement offers artists further incentive to explore the book arts as a medium.

Since artists' engagement with the book as a means of expression has spanned more than a century, perhaps it is time to consider Wittgenstein's notion that the meaning of a word is its use in the language, and accept that



there are and will continue to be variations, but that the term “artists’ book” is now widely understood as a concept.

### **b) Research topic**

The title of my research project is ***Artists’ Books: Conveying meaning in a non-traditional format***, and my study aims to investigate how artists’ books provide the viewer with an opportunity to construct meaning and understanding in ways not experienced with traditional books.

For this investigation I have studied relevant literature on the subject of artists’ books along with the related theory of conceptual art and the use of text in art. My objective was to also conduct an extensive investigation of artists’ books produced by other contemporary practitioners from around the world. My own explorations into this field, along with an on-going reflection throughout the research period, was directed toward a body of work that would answer my research question.

Through looking at the works of other artists, I have been inspired to broaden the visual and structural aspects of my own work. As well I have investigated how the components of a book form and the components of language become expressive in a way that expands upon our preconception of books as communicative devices.

Realizing the goals of learning letterpress printing, polymer plate production, book binding and digital output has informed my art practice throughout this project.

### **c) Context of research and reason for choice of topic**

In 2007 I attended an exhibition of my work at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice, Italy. I also taught a monoprint workshop to the students at the Scuola, made use of their printshop to make new work of my own and lived in the Scuola's apartment during my time in Venice.

I do not speak Italian, and my inability to converse, to access text or to have meaningful conversations limited the fullness of my experiences during my stay. I soon stopped listening for familiar words, and found myself looking for visual and auditory clues to glean some knowledge of what was going on around me. My focus shifted from seeking a literal understanding of language to listening to the pitch and rhythm of a voice and observing gestures and body language. Architecture, colour, light, sounds and silences became the bookends supporting this new knowledge as these clues provided threads that I was able to connect in order to gain a new kind of understanding of my environment.

In the months following this visit my head was full of Italy. When the opportunity arose for me to pursue a Masters degree, I drew on my experiences in Venice and sought to explore, through the medium of artists' books, how we can derive meaning when our expectations are compromised in some way.

While working on my BFA (1999-2003), I had participated in bookbinding workshops offered by visiting artists, and was intrigued by the possibilities for exploration in book arts. I am a printmaker, and felt this an ideal sister medium to pursue for my Master's research. Artists' books share many printmaking aesthetics including the issues of editioning, multiples and display (both media are often presented to the viewer behind glass). This study of artists' books offered an opportunity for expanded theoretical and practical investigation in my

work. By bringing the complexity of text and language under scrutiny I am also adding a new dimension to the existing book arts practice within Newfoundland, a culture with a strong literary tradition.

#### **d) Research question**

My task now was to create artists' books that would answer my research question:

***Can artists' books provide the reader/viewer with information or knowledge even when the normal expectations of what a book might offer are not met?***

#### **e) The search for an answer**

Muriel Prince (2008, p.3) writes that "Artists' books are concept-driven. Book artists use ... whatever means are necessary to give form to their idea..." Clive Philpott (Lyons 1985, p. 99) argues that "For many conceptual artists the book was the most appropriate means to record and disseminate their ideas ... or to embody their artworks", and Kathan Brown has this to say about the viewer's engagement with a work of art:

Conceptual art generally requires something or someone outside itself for its completion. Your own experience completes any artwork (that's why you love some works and not others), and conceptual artists especially rely on your engagement. Conceptual art is visually oriented, but if you don't think about the idea behind the work, you won't get the full impact (Brown 2006, p.38).

In my work, I have focused on providing an expanded notion of what a book might be. I have also concentrated on how I might combine various elements into an object that would challenge our perceptions of books. It is my

intent that the viewer engage with the artefact and the text in a new way, one unlike that experienced with traditional books. My artists' books give the reader/viewer access to information through materials and structure. They also provide an opportunity to create new meaning from the content when access to text is compromised. I have been influenced by artists Dieter Roth and Ann Hamilton, both of whom confound the reader's attempt to access text, and my work will be discussed in the context of theirs. The works of contemporary artists Xu Bing, Sam Winston and Emily Artinian, who have also sought to provide a new experience for viewers of their work, will be discussed as well.

While carrying out my practice-based research in letterpress printing, polymer plate production and bookbinding, I was faced with the challenge of finding suitable text for my project. It was during this time that I discovered a series of four letters written in the 1930s to both my paternal grandmother and to my grandparents jointly by a widowed friend/relative. These letters resonated with me on a number of levels beyond the family connection. They communicate information, now of a historical nature, that provides a fascinating glimpse into a bygone era. This aspect is reflected in the script, the watermarked paper, and in the ink from a fountain pen. Interpreting, deconstructing and reconstructing these letters would provide a focus for my work. Throughout this dissertation I will refer to these letters collectively as "the Dotchon letters".

Rev. W. H. Dotchon, the author of the letters, was born and educated in Yorkshire, England in the late 1800s and moved to Newfoundland as a young man. He was a Methodist Minister, a published writer (*Chronicles of the Christ*, 1932) and a poet. In September of 2008 I spent a week alone at Landfall Trust,

an artist's retreat in Brigus, Newfoundland, to reflect on what I had discovered and to focus on the direction my work would take. Co-incidentally Brigus also happens to be the community where Rev. Dotchon spent the last twenty years of his life. Although he died in 1952, there are people in the community who still remember him. Their physical description is of a tall, thin, rather severe-looking man who always wore black.

An unexpected revelation of an outwardly-reserved man, these letters are humorous, playful and full of details about everyday life in Brigus the early 1930s. Two of the letters are filled with words of longing for a companion and are an eloquent expression of widower's lonely existence. This personal aspect of the correspondence would influence my approach to both structure and content in the book works I would develop.

Rev. Dotchon's writing style is reminiscent of a bygone era, elegant and decorative, a strong contrast to postmodern technological production of text. The language is ornate and expressive, unlike today's electronic communication, which has its own jargon, short forms and internet "lingo". A search through old family photo albums revealed well-preserved photographs of Rev. Dotchon and of his first wife, providing another layer of knowledge to inform my work and the possibility for imagery to accompany text.

These letters belong to my family's personal archives, and as the custodian I felt I had permission to take ownership of the letters and to explore their potential artistically. Both the writer and the original recipients of this correspondence have been dead for over half a century, yet I felt that perhaps the letters were not intended for public reading. This aspect also made them

ideal for my research, and my approach would be to devise ways to share the correspondence without divulging the entire contents. I would do this through manipulation and selection of text and through creative binding and presentation techniques.

By responding to the letters in a series of book works I am offering the viewers a new experience, one that goes beyond the original text. Each book in the series is a distinct piece, and each responds to a different facet of the letters. The individual works were not created in isolation, and each is linked to the other in form and content. There are conceptual, visual and structural connections that combine to make a coherent body of work. My focus has been to integrate materials, structure, scale and text to provide the reader/viewer with a new reading experience that would challenge the ways we traditionally interpret language.

#### **f) Research method**

My research included a review of theoretical issues surrounding artists' books as well as the related issues of conceptual art and the use of text in art. I reviewed published literature on the history of artists' involvement with books and of contemporary issues surrounding book arts. I also examined contemporary artists' books physically, on-line and in publications.

During the ongoing theoretical investigation I studied the crafts of bookbinding, letterpress, and polymer plate production along with various digital applications. Throughout the research process I produced a variety of artists' books in maquette form, investigating various structures in which to house the

textual content of my work. The result of this investigation has been a series of completed works ready for exhibition.

My research for this project included viewing thousands of artists' books. I accessed publications (books, journals, e-journals and articles) on the subjects of artists' books, letterpress printing, bookbinding, text and language. I viewed book arts collections on-line from academic sources, museums and miscellaneous book arts websites. I visited the Banff Centre for the Arts in Banff, Alberta and looked at a number of artists' books from their collection. As well, I viewed book arts exhibitions in New York at the Centre for Book Arts, the MoMA and the New York Public Library, and attended a letterpress conference and book arts fair in St. John's, Newfoundland. The evidence of imagination, creativity, exploration and craftsmanship in the field of book arts is astounding.

Artists' books offer an enormous range of possibilities for artists, and there seems to be no limit to the materials they will use, to the manipulation of text they will attempt or subject matter they will address.

The originality in the works is demonstrated by what an individual artist brings to the book, as is evident in the works of Chinese artist Xu Bing. Responding to government interference with language during the Cultural Revolution in China, Bing created a new, fictitious language in *Book from the sky* (Bing 1987) [Plate 22]. During this historic period the Chinese government simplified some of the characters and did away with others, only to make revisions, reinstatements and more discards at a later date. This action created confusion about the written language, and was felt by many to strike at the very foundation of Chinese culture. Viewers of Bing's work who understand Chinese script expect to be able to read the text he has printed, but their experience now

is with the installation of the work, the magnitude of the task Bing has undertaken, and an increased awareness of the politics of language. Bing's work is monumental in both scale and volume, reflecting the depth of his feelings about the issues he is addressing.

British artist Sam Winston's work is also text based, and he too offers viewers of his work an experience other than what might be expected from a book. In his work titled *Folded dictionary* (Winston 2004) [Plate 23] he folded the pages of all twenty volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary into one continuous sculptural object, "Question(ing) our understanding of words, both as carriers of messages and as information itself." ([www.samwinson.com/](http://www.samwinson.com/)). Winston explores these issues through his sculptures, drawings and bookworks, deconstructing and reconstructing language. His work is both familiar and yet outside the realm of the anticipated.

Winston's staff profile at Camberwell College of Arts (University of the Arts 2009) reads: "By turning words into images to disassociate their literal meanings and instead expose their artistic potential as purely visual tools, Winston's work challenges traditional ways of how we use language." His *Folded Dictionary* also challenges the traditional ways that we use and view books, and it is the notions of challenging preconceptions that I bring to my own work, both in terms of the structure of the book and the content.

Emily Artinian explores the space between the traditional physical book and virtual artists' books, working in both forms to expand linguistic and cultural issues through combining scale, journalistic commentary, photography and the haptic qualities of artists' books (Artinian 2006, p.1).



The works of these three artists, along with their own and others' thoughts and comments surrounding their work, would influence my own thinking as I worked through my ideas to the completion of my own artists' books.

My practical training in bookbinding techniques, letterpress printing and polymer plate production would come into play as I decided which parts of the Dotchon letters to use and how to use them. The appropriate structures to create, how to re-produce the text/imagery and which imagery to incorporate were all given careful consideration throughout the process. My examination of the literature on this subject would influence all aspects of my work as I linked previous theory and practice to my own ideas while seeking to demonstrate that indeed artists' books can convey meaning in a non-traditional format.

Through answering my research question, my work will contribute to the ongoing discussion of issues in the field of book arts, and will provide new information and experiences for the viewer as they look for other aspects of the work beyond a literal reading of text.

Further, I anticipate that my practical research may result in opportunities to teach workshops to other artists in my community where there are few book artists and few learning opportunities in this field. Dissemination of the practical knowledge I have learned throughout this process (letterpress printing, bookbinding techniques and polymer plate production) has the potential to be of benefit to other artists in my community, providing them with new tools to enrich their own art practices.

In this introductory chapter I have looked at the on-going debate over a definition for artists' books, introduced my research topic and the reasons for choosing it, stated my research question, outlined my research methods and posited the contribution my work will make.

## Chapter 2

### Historical background of artists' books

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the history of artists' involvement with books and will chart the evolution of the book as an art form. I will examine chronologically key developments in the history of book arts, and will also discuss specific artists whose work has been influential in the growth of the book arts movement.

Historical precedents play an important role in my own art practice. An examination of the evolution of book arts and the theoretical discussions related to artists and their work has informed my artistic decisions throughout this project.

#### **a) Artists as illustrators:**

Perhaps the earliest involvement of artists in the production of books in Western culture was with the illustration of the Hiberno-Saxon illuminated manuscripts made in the British Isles between 500 – 900 CE. These include the Book of Kells and the Lindesfarne Gospels, followed later in the twelfth century by books of hours.

Although this study is limited to book arts in the Western world, similar examples of book illustrations, calligraphy and decoration also appeared in other cultures. Examples are the great books of the Islamic world (see Lowry, 1988), and Ehon, or "picture books" which have been popular in Japan since the eighth century (Keyes 2006).

India also has a rich history of illuminated manuscripts (Losty,1982). Scribes there worked on palm leaves, reflecting the cultural respect for animals and the subsequent rejection of vellum as a material for writing and illustration before paper became the material of choice.

Bettley (2001, p. 14) writes that the illuminations in medieval books were designed to “light up the page”, to help convey meaning and to provide a visual interpretation of the accompanying text. The illuminations offered visual clues that could be equally understood by the literate and non-literate and were an aid to memorization. Bettley (ibid) adds that illuminations “...create(d) a special work that was appropriate to a sacred subject...”

Before decorating a text the artist would interpret a biblical passage and design the layout of the page. The text was written by skilled calligraphers and the artist would then draw the imagery lightly, redraw it in ink, apply and burnish the gold leaf (the illumination), and finally paint the image (de Hamel 2001, p.72).

De Hamel (1992, p.4) also writes that “More manuscripts survive from the Middle Ages than any other artefacts”. Many wonderful examples of these illuminated texts are available today for viewing in libraries, cathedrals and museums around the world, and are tributes to the artists and scribes commissioned to carry out the tasks of writing and illustrating them.

Medieval books varied in scale from the gigantic to the miniature. Some tiny devotional books that fit in the palm of a hand, were “... worn at the waist or around the neck like a talisman” (de Hamel 2001, p.35). Anne C. Bromer and Julia I. Edison (Bromer 2007, p.18) point out that “the manuscripts of the Middle Ages were objects of beauty as well as utility in people’s lives. Miniature

manuscripts of devotion were easily portable for daily worship .... (and) were usually the only volume a family owned.” A seventeenth-century painting by Bartholomeus van der Helst portrays a Dutch woman holding a miniature book (Manguel 1996, p.145), suggesting that miniatures were still popular at that time. Today they are treasured collectors’ items.

It was common for medieval monks (and others) to carry their books in the form of ‘girdle books’ (Szirmai 1999, pp. 236-9) which saw the binding of the book extended and tied in a large knot for tucking into a belt or ‘girdle’. The book would hang upside-down so that it would be right facing when swung up for reading.

Artistic engagement in the production of illuminated and illustrated manuscripts did not end with the invention of moveable type and other modern printing devices. Illumination and calligraphy continue to be of interest to artists even today as evidenced by the publication of *Leabhar Mor na hEireann / The Great Book of Ireland* in 1989-91, (McDonnell 1997, p.168) and more recently by the publication in Ireland in 2002 of *An Leabhar Mor – The Great Book of Gaelic* designed to celebrate “... the reconnection of Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland after nearly five centuries of religious and political division ...” (MacLean 2002, p.7). Even more recent is the publication of the *St. John’s Bible* (Sink 2007) in Wales in 2007, a very contemporary example of an illuminated manuscript designed to be a source of reflection for both the viewers and the creators.

## **b) Development of artists' books**

The English poet and artist William Blake (1757-1827) is widely credited with having created the first of what have come to be known as 'artists' books' in the 1780s. His *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion* was written, illustrated, printed and published by Blake (Bright 2005 p.33) setting a precedent for artists' book production in the future. Another noted British book artist was William Morris, working a century later, but with an eye to the cultural and societal elements of emphasizing the craft of bookbinding. In an article published in the *Journal of Communication* Johanna Drucker sums up the differences between Blake and Morris this way: "...these artists defined two poles in the conception of artists' books: the *Production of a Vision* and a *Vision of Production* – the personal manifestation and the recognition of the social and cultural value of material, form, and mode of fabrication" (Drucker 1994, p.13).

It would take until the beginning of the twentieth century, however, before artists were actively engaged in book arts following Blake's example. Livres d'Artiste, or illustrated books, became popular in France in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, partly in response to a demand for art by the middle classes. These works were initiated by publishers who commissioned artists to illustrate poetic texts, working directly onto printers' plates, producing book works in response to the social and economic climate of the time. Bury (2007, p.28) writes that "The deluxe publications of Vollard and Kahnweiler aimed at an exclusive audience of collectors and bibliophiles" and further refers to the high quality of papers and typographic ornaments used in their production (ibid).

### **c) Rationale for artists' books**

In contrast to these deluxe editions the Italian and Russian Futurists produced their own books, pamphlets and manifestos in response to political events from 1910 –1934 when (artists') "... books played a fundamental role in the aesthetic thinking of the day" (Rowell 2002, p.10). Responding to events in Europe, the Futurists contributed to the artistic trend of abstracting reality in an effort to show their disdain for academic conventions. Rowell further contends (ibid p. 28) that the book was an ideal medium for Futurists' experiments, and that they were purposely promoted as being contrary to *livres d'artiste*. The Futurist books were small, cheaply constructed and aimed at the lower classes (Rowell 2002, p.29). Bury (2007, p.28) reports that the Futurists' works were published using newspaper, wallpaper and other supports in the production of their work to allow for a wide distribution. The influence of artists working in this period is still felt today as book artists explore their medium with abandon.

Particularly influential among the Futurists was the Italian artist Filippo Marinetti, who published the Futurist Manifesto in 1909. Movement, speed, noise and frenetic energy were evident in Marinetti's work. He also experimented with expressive typographical design in the printing of his poetry (Rowell 2002, p.11).

The Russian Avant Garde poets and artists were greatly influenced by what was happening in western Europe during this time and borrowed ideas from the German Expressionists, the Fauves, Cubists and the Italian Futurists. Included in this group were Aleksei Kruchenykh, Natalia Goncharova, Kazimir Malevich and Vasili Kamenskii (Rowell 2002 pp.28,30,68). The distortion and emotional expression exhibited by the German Expressionists, the breaking up

of space and presentation of multiple viewpoints by the Cubists, and the representation of movement and speed depicted by the Futurists all resonated with the artists of the Russian avant-garde movement. Rowell also points out (ibid, p.11) that "...innovation in literature existed side by side with advances in visual arts" during the evolution of artist's books in Russia. These innovations included experiments in typographic design and were influenced by French poet Stéphane Mallarmé and the art critic Guillaume Apollinaire. Their manipulation of the placement of text and their control of space on the page, their use of type variations and scale, were all expressive and unconventional.

The Surrealists were also involved with book illustration, and Joan Miro broke with past traditions by incorporating "...small printed portions of text ... surrounded or surmounted by vividly colored figures..." (Hubert 1988, p.11), in his lithographic interpretation of Tristan Tzara's poetry in 1951.

The movement towards using the form and structure of the book as an artistic expression expanded after World War II. Writing on the techniques of binding books, Bernard C. Middleton (1996, p. xiv) in his introduction to *A history of English craft bookbinding technique* observes that in the post-World War II era book arts saw a move away from societal and economic influences to more personal agendas. He cites as a cause of this "...the nature of the (creative) workforce has changed, and the humble artisan has been superseded by the well-educated, strong-minded designer bookbinder who has for the first time integrated experimental structures with expressive design."

With the emergence of Pop Art in the 1950s and '60s artists were again engaged in political and social activism resulting in experimentation with all the



forms of the book, including structure and content (Lyons 1985, p.7). Ed Ruscha and Dieter Roth are notable examples.

#### **d) Twentieth century debates**

Clive Philpott argues that “The principal credit for showing that the book could be a primary vehicle for art goes to Ed Ruscha” (Lyons 1985, p.97) and indeed much of the literature on the subject supports this claim, citing Ruscha’s *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (Ruscha 1967) [Plate 24] as the pivotal work that would impact on future book arts. Philpott states further (ibid) “...the idea that an artist might use the book form to make artworks was ... validated” by Ruscha’s work. Mimicking travelogues, the book presents a series of ordinary black and white images of twenty-six gasoline stations between Ruscha’s home in Los Angeles and his parents’ home in Oklahoma. Betty Bright (2005, p.120) notes that Ruscha “... kept his books in print and affordable” in an attempt “...to refuse any fine art appeal” (ibid, p.212).

Also working in the 1950s and ‘60s was German artist Dieter Roth who produced works which challenged perceptions of the traditional form of books by deconstructing existing books, collaging elements over existing text and re-using found text. Bright (ibid, p.108) comments that Roth “...is arguably the most inventive and influential book artist in the twentieth century,” (Roth was instrumental in promoting both multiple and sculptural bookworks) and she cites his *246 Little Clouds* of 1968 as a pivotal work. She contrasts his early “streamlined Swiss style” (ibid) with his Fluxus “serendipity” (ibid) developed in the early 1950s, which allowed him great freedom in his approach to his work.

Hubert (1999, p.55) argues “Roth has gone far beyond ... satirical insight. He deliberately compounds our frustration as readers to increase our awareness of the problems of communication.” His manipulation of text presents the reader with indecipherable content, and opened the door for other artists to experiment with text. An example of Roth’s Fluxus experimentation is *Literature Sausage*, made from pulped paper mixed with spices and stuffed in a sausage skin. This is technically a book, but is completely unreadable. Other Fluxus artists who contributed to book arts explorations include Yoko Ono and George Maciunas.

Writing about Dieter Roth’s contribution to book arts, Johanna Drucker concludes:

There would be no way to translate a Dieter Roth book into another medium – the idea of the works is inseparable from their form as books and they realize themselves as works through their exploration of the conceptual and structural features of a book.... Roth made it clear that these were really meant to be books, not sculptures or multiple art pieces. This last aspect of his work is significant, since it allows structural work to integrate with the edition process in the hybrid form of the artist’s book (Drucker 2004, p.75).

The 1960s and ‘70s also saw a move towards Conceptual Art, where the idea was given precedence over the formal qualities of the work. This was reflected in all artistic genres including the book arts, and had a direct influence on the way book artists internationally would approach the medium. Lawrence Weiner, Bruce Nauman and Sol Lewitt in America, along with Jaroslaw Kozlowski in Poland all included book arts in their practices. Meanwhile in Britain Tom Phillips was altering a Victorian novel by W. H. Mallock titled “A Human Document” to create his first edition of *A Humument*, now in its fourth edition. (Phillips 2005).

Bookbinding classes, along with letterpress and polymer plate instructions grew in popularity and provided artists with extra tools to hone their craft. Predictably universities began to recognize books arts as a valid form of investigation and MFA programs specializing in this genre began to emerge in both the United States and the United Kingdom.

In this chapter I have presented a brief historical overview of artists' involvement with books, including a look at the artist as illustrator, the development of artists' books as we now understand them, the rationale for artists' books and 20<sup>th</sup> Century debates surrounding this medium.

## Chapter 3

### Literature review

In this chapter I will examine the literature addressing key issues in the field of book arts. This includes some thoughts on artists' books, a discussion of text and language, sequencing, time, and scale. I will also examine notions about the connection between the body, touch and the book. As well I will discuss issues of display and access, and the role of women in this multi-disciplinary art form.

#### a) Some thoughts on artists' books

Susi R. Bloch in her catalogue essay accompanying the 1973 exhibition *The Book Stripped Bare: A Survey of Books by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Artists and Writers*, (Bright 2005, p.180) "... pointed to Stephane Mallarme as, crucially, recognizing the *meaning of format*: a recognition which moved against the 'artificial unity that used to be based on the square measurements of the book.'" Ulises Carrion (Klima 1998, p.61) argues, "In the new art, every book requires a different reading." Klima (ibid) goes on to explain that "Carrion was writing about a new kind of activity, insisting that for a complete and accurate reading of the new kind of book it was vital to understand the book as '.. a structure, identifying its elements and understanding their function'.

In the final chapter of *Talking the Boundless Book: Art, Language, & the Book Arts* (Alexander 1995, p.144), Karen Wirth asserts, "The fluid movement of ideas from the maker through the object and its message to the reader, requires open-minded engagement on both ends." This statement echoes

Kathan Brown's comments about the role of the viewer (see Chapter 1, pg 9, above), which is crucial to the understanding of, and informed engagement with, artists' books.

In Matt Ferranto's essay on Bruno Munari's "Unreadable Books" (Ferranto 2008, pp. 34-5), he points out that Munari's books contained no words as the artist chose to "...investigate the communicative potential of book covers, spines, and pages." Through using different papers and manipulating the pages by sewing, cutting and ripping, Munari sought to construct a narrative based on the "... relationship between material and meaning." (ibid)

Writing on self-reflexivity in book form, Johanna Drucker supports this idea, saying:

Artists who focus on the elements of book structure are frequently making ... self-conscious gestures from within the conventions of bookmaking. They show a margin, gutter, page, or frame to be both the **thing that it is** and also, show an awareness of the features that form the identity of that element (Drucker 2004, p.162).

And further,

The meaning of the book as a boundary, a point of delimitation and demarcation on the one hand, and the meaning of the book as a space, infinitely imaginable and expandable on the other hand, are ... two aspects of the paradoxical nature of the book – any book – as a **Real Fiction** (ibid, p.195).

These ideas serve to both define artists' books, and to provide a theoretical look at the thought processes of the makers which result in artists' books communicating meaning to the reader/viewer.

## **b) Text and language**

Johanna Drucker, in *Figuring the Word*, (Drucker 1998, p.57) argues that "...there is no activity which characterizes human culture more distinctly than that of language", and further (ibid, p.59) that "All writing has the capacity to be

both looked at and read, to be present as material and to function as the sign of an absent meaning.” She continues (ibid, p.67) “... while on the one hand writing gains a certain power through its ability to provide legitimacy it also exercises a power of fascination in the cryptically illegible condition of the glyph.” What she is suggesting here is that even when illegible, language and text can offer a new reading, a new interpretation and a new experience.

Simon Morley (2003, p.205) echoed this opinion when he wrote that “...artists now emphasize the *textuality* of writing itself, that is, of writing as a visible form functioning within a specific space ...”, and that “this foregrounding of textuality resists the inclination to read words for their linguistic meaning, and instead makes us prone to experience them both as spatial figures and as forms with their own intrinsic history – the history carried in typography.”

An example of this approach is seen in Dieter Roth’s enlargement of text in one of the editions of his book titled *The Daily Mirror* (Roth 1961) [Plate 25]. This action resulted in the text dissolving into an unreadable series of dots, making use of the newspaper’s halftone dot pattern aesthetic to make the text illegible.

Like Roth, artist Janet Zweig, in collaboration with Holly Anderson (Smith 2005, p.264), gradually enlarged text throughout their work titled *Scheherazade* until the text dissolved and became completely unrecognizable, at which point a new text appeared in the spaces created within the now-dissolving original text. This new text was then enlarged in the same way revealing yet another narrative within the spaces of that enlarged text. This book is Zweig and Anderson’s retelling of the ancient Persian tale of survival through storytelling.

Both Roth and Zweig/Anderson have used text as a visible form that provides a new reading and interpretation.

A recent touring exhibition of multi-lingual artists' books titled *Found in Translation* opened at the San Francisco Center for the Book in 2006. In his introductory comments, curator Marshall Weber writes "Found in Translation celebrates the ability of literary and visual languages (and their various modes of integration into the book form) to convey meaning, sometimes precisely and sometimes ambiguously" (Weber 2007, p.3).

### **c. Sequencing and time**

Jae Rossman (Rossman 2008, p.35) discusses paratextual analysis in the context of artists' books, drawing on Gerard Genette's theory of structuralism. She quotes Genette's definition of 'paratext' as "the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public." Rossman goes on to assert that "The physical format of artists' books has always been a key component of their interpretation." She also suggests that by making the familiar vocabulary of the book unfamiliar, book artists are seeking to "...slow the reader's habitual consumption of the communicative content in order to emphasize their message", and further that "artists' books often use a delayed sense of time...to provide a more interactive experience for the reader."

Viktor Shklovskij explained his theory of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization, this way:

Art exists in order to recover a sensation of life, to feel things, in order to make the stone stony. The goal of art is to give the sensation of things as seen, not known; the device of art is to make things "unfamiliar," to increase the difficulty and length of their perception, since the perceptual process in art is valuable

in itself and must be prolonged; art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object, the object in art being itself unimportant (Crawford 1984, p.210).

In a similar vein, Keith Smith, while discussing the spacing within words and from page to page, reminds us that the "...turning of the page creates an unavoidable pause for the reader" (Smith 1995, p.31). This element allows the book artist to format text (both the font and the placement on the page) and to direct the pacing of the reading. In this way the reading of the text for literal meaning can be replaced by the experience of sequence, time and text as image, reinforcing the ideas presented by Mallarmé and Apollinaire from the late nineteenth century.

Deborah Wye (1996, p.82) comments: "Language ... resembles the multipart project in that it is time-based, and requires sequential decoding by the viewer", and further (ibid, p.83), commenting on language's natural association with books, she writes that "Here text and images, or images alone, create a communicative sequence."

#### **d. Scale**

Book artists frequently exhibit an awareness of scale, from the gigantic to the miniature, and the gigantic within the miniature (as demonstrated in Dieter Roth's *Daily Mirror* discussed above), in the construction of their work. Wye (2006 p.114), in discussing Roth's work, observes that "such miniaturization implies texts filled with secrets, and Roth's "stories" are, in fact, impenetrable".

Artist Emily Artinian (2005) [Plate 26], in the composition of her large-format bi-lingual English and Armenian artists' book titled *From Ararat to Angeltown* (420mm x 597mm), chose to present the photographs of people at



almost life size so that "...the reader experiences a strong physical sense of their presence." Artinian utilizes the oversized format to draw attention to the content, which includes writings by contemporary Armenian writers. In this way she controls the reader/viewer response to the book; handling the large book is awkward, and even difficult for some. Through this process she is raising the issue of the publication difficulties experienced by Armenian writers.

The use of scale is also demonstrated in works such as Zweig and Anderson's 1988 story of Scheherazade mentioned above (p. 28), but in this case scale is dealt with within the physical size of the 17cm x 23cm book and within the text itself.

In two of her own books (*Through Light and the Alphabet* [1986] and *The Word Made Flesh* [1988]), Johanna Drucker (2004, p.251) writes that she "...was intent on using contrasts in scale as a way of introducing hierarchies of meaning and forms of movement into the printed text." She further describes her actions: "The letters of the title phrase are spelled out one to a page in sequence so that the book's unifying element is provided by huge, darkly inked, wood letters."

Chinese artist Xu Bing created his monumental work *Book from the Sky* in the 1980s. The installation features hundreds of books placed on the floor, huge printed scrolls hanging from the ceiling, and many printed panels hanging from the gallery walls (Erickson 2001, p.37). This installation fills large exhibition halls and for Bing it is not the individual pieces of unintelligible printing that are important, but rather the magnitude of the installation itself which leaves the viewer feeling overwhelmed by the unreadable work. In their work, both Bing and Artinian use scale to reinforce their ideas about the politics of language.

Still other artists, including New York artist Scott McCarney (McCarney 2005), produce works in a miniature format (*Think Seoul* 2005, 7.62cm x 7.62cm, Plate 27). Bromer and Edison (2007, p.52) argue that “Miniature books are a perfect vehicle for artistic bindings. Intimate objects, they invite attention to every detail...” Miniature books also hold a fascination for the viewer, and they present the book artist with opportunities to use scale to emphasize both their skills and their ideas in a novel form.

Buzz Spector (1995, p.61), in an essay on the altered books of Ann Hamilton, reminds us that “The gigantic and the miniscule coexist..” in her work. Her (untitled) limited edition altered book (Hamilton1992, Plate 28), created to benefit The New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, was on display at the MoMA when I visited in April of 2008, and I was reminded of Gaston Bachelard’s comment about the “... solitary patience” (Bachelard1994, p.159) evident in miniatures from the Middle Ages. Hamilton and her assistants glued rows of minute pebbles matching the size of the fonts over the entire visible text (eight pages attached edge to edge), creating what Spector (1995, p.63) refers to as “... a miniscule terrain” resulting in “... a granular residue that still corresponded to the structure of now vanished thought.” Although the size of the book itself had not been altered, Hamilton successfully created an awareness of scale within the space of the page through the introduction of miniature pebbles.

Like Zweig and Anderson, Hamilton has dealt with the issue of scale within a traditional-sized book. As a viewer of this work my response was not to the fact that the text was no longer visible, but rather to the beauty of the tiny sparkling stones arranged in perfect rows, and to an awareness of the

painstaking labour involved in creating the work. Hamilton successfully provided new knowledge and meaning through subverting the original text in her altered book.

Writing on the miniature in *the poetics of space* (1994, p.150), Gaston Bachelard argues that "... values become condensed and enriched in miniature", and further, that "Platonic dialects of large and small do not suffice for us to become cognizant of the dynamic virtues of miniature thinking. One must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small" (ibid). Ann Hamilton's altered book is an excellent example of this kind of thinking.

Susan Stewart (2005, p.165) suggests that "Small works are fragile and reflect the fragility of the human, just as they are themselves instances of human making." She also observes (ibid, p.162) that "miniature books have often been worn as amulets or charms ... (and) they retain the power of the concentrated labor that has formed them", and further (ibid. p.160) "...the small compels our attention and so is endowed with the worth of *time*, the *worthwhile* which has no necessary relation to spatial magnitude."

#### **e. The body, touch and the book**

In an article titled *Book arts and the desire for theory*, Matthew Brown (2007, p.8) writes "...the verbal and tactile elements of bookishness are specific properties that the artist manages in relation to the temporal, spatial, and image-based modes of artistic communication available to the creator. This is a qualitative difference ... of book art ...", and further (ibid) "The tactile and the

verbal coordinate with the visual, the sculptural, and the temporal to make the book expressive as a medium.”

In his introductory chapter to *The Bookmaker's Desire*, Buzz Spector expands on this notion of tactility and talks about the eroticism of books:

The topography of an open book is explicit in its erotic associations: sumptuous twin paper curves that meet in a recessed seam. Page turning is a series of gentle, sweeping gestures, like the brush of fingers on a naked back. Indeed, the behavior of readers has more in common with the play of intimacy than with the public decorum of art viewing or music listening. Most of us read lying down or seated and most of us read at least partially unclothed. We dress up to go out and look at art; undressed, in bed, we read... When we read ... we often become the lectern that receives the book: chest, arms, lap, or thighs. This proximity is the territory of embrace, or possession; not to be entered without permission (Spector 1995, p.16).

Spector (ibid, p.10) also declares that “...only the beloved’s body comes closer to that of the reader than the book, held in the hands, resting on the chest, or nested in the lap.”

Stéphane Mallarmé also referred to the erotics of reading when he referred to “The unopened virginal book” (Rothenberg 1996, p.19) and to “...the introduction of a weapon, or page cutter, to establish the taking of possession” (ibid).

Adding her voice to this discussion, Susan Stewart (2007, p.37) writes: “The metaphors of the book are metaphors of containment, of exteriority and interiority, of surface and depth, of covering and exposure, of taking apart and putting together. To be ‘between covers’ – the titillation of intellectual or sexual reproduction.”

Our physical intimacy with books is an acknowledged quality of these structures, and may help to explain the increasing popularity of books at the

beginning of the twenty-first century despite predictions of their demise with the availability of texts online. The haptic qualities of books are given careful consideration by book artists as they choose their materials and design their structures. The irony in all of this is the general inaccessibility to artists' books in galleries, where they are often placed behind glass and out of reach of the viewer.

Despite the problems with access to and handling of artists' books, Gary Frost, in an article titled *Reading by Hand: The haptic evaluation of artists' books* (Frost 2005, p. 3), writes "The haptic concern ... follows from the peculiar essence of the book as hand held art. ... And the codex echoes its own legacy as a folded letter inviting unfolding and re-folding." He also argues (ibid) that "...haptic features are consequential for considering the often unconventional and experimental format of artists' books."

Karhryn J. Reeves further argues, in a paper on printmaking presented at IMPACT, the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Printmaking Conference, that

Parchment as a material evokes both its own skin and our skin. Paper, the successor to parchment, references the body through its association with parchment as well as through its strength and fragility... Recognition that our bodies are a part of the medium and that materials are subject to tactile manipulation reveals additional layers of invisibility and intimacy (Reeves 2001, p. 5).

Writing about her artists' book titled *real fiction* (a book about the writings of Portuguese author Jose Saramago), Emily Artinian in an article titled "Virtureal" written for the online poetry journal *How2* in 2006 explains:

It was .. fundamental to my own understanding of Saramago that I experienced his texts physically, and that I designed and bound *real fiction* by hand. I wrote the text and developed the layout and structure simultaneously; the bodily activity involved in the act of making informed and shaped the idea in the text (Artinian 2006, pg.2).

Yet another connection between text and the body is the human voice. In *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel (1996, p.45) writes “Written words, from the days of the first Sumerian tablets, were meant to be pronounced out loud, since the signs carried implicit, as if it were their soul, a particular sound”, and further, “Faced with a written text, the reader had a duty to lend voice to the silent letters ... and to allow them to become ... spoken words – spirit” (ibid).

Technical bookbinding terms frequently reference the body and eroticism as well, and we speak of putting the book to bed and laying down text. We use terms such as head, spine, bleed, sheets, shoulders, whip stitching, gutters and spreads. Combined with the tactile qualities of materials, book artists constantly reference the body in the realization of their work.

#### **f. Women and the book arts**

In an essay titled “*Women and Books: Contemporary book artists share their thoughts*”, Muriel Prince comments on the appeal of book arts for women:

One, perhaps pertinent fact, is that in the 1970s when the artist's book emerged, many feminist artists were turning away from painting and other art practices, feeling their gender to be undermined and devalued by the domination and influence of male practitioners and critics. As the artist's books had not, historically, been coded as male, women could embrace it as an art practice, on equal terms with men (Prince 2008, p.9).

Prince (ibid, p.10) further reminds us of the role of women in society as the keepers of family records and ephemera, a rich source of inspiration for artists' books. This situation applies directly to my investigation of, and response to, the Dotchon letters for this study.

Stephen Bury (1995, p.22) writes “The question of what constitutes a feminine aesthetic has been answered in terms of a preoccupation with the detail or with pattern or decoration”, but adds “... in terms of the actual output of

artists' books made by women these do not seem preponderant qualities." He suggests instead (ibid) "The privacy or intimacy of the relationship between the reader and the book artist..." is what attracts women artists to this medium.

Joan Lyons (1985, p.8) observes that "Women artists in large numbers began to make books responding, in part, to the adaptability of the medium to narrative and diaristic concerns." Mary Kelly's *Postpartum Document* of 1973-79 with its inclusion of her diary notes in her reflexive documentation of herself as an artist and mother gives credence to Lyons' statement.

The recent publication of *The Book As Art – Artists' Books from the National Museum of Women in the Arts* (Wasserman, 2007) confirms the continued interest in book arts for women artists. In her opening essay in this volume, Johanna Drucker comments, "Women create authority in the world by structuring a relation between enclosure and exposure. The women who make books out of the materials of their lives and imaginations establish a balance that gives voice to their own issues in their own terms." (Wasserman 2007, p.14). These comments are echoed by many of the women book artists quoted in this same volume, and in the above-noted *Bonefolder* article by Muriel Prince.

Visual artist Emily Artinian (2006, p.1) explains how she was drawn to the book arts: "After a good deal of searching in various corners of the visual arts, architecture, and theatre, I found the artist's book, and with it the place to get my ideas about literature stuck into the material world."

These comments and reflections resonate with my own thoughts and art practice, and have also influenced my approach to this project.

### **g. Display**

I will conclude this discussion with some comments on the display of artists' books and in particular how they are presented in museums and art galleries. Full access to artists' books is frequently denied in these institutions, presenting the reader/viewer with an incomplete viewing experience. Protected by glass, the reader/viewer's response is not one of holding, feeling the heft of the book, experiencing the tactility of the paper, inhaling a book's unique scent, or even being able to examine individual pages. The new experience is a visual one which, combined with prior knowledge, challenges the viewer to fill in the gaps. Kathryn Reeves (Reeves 2000 p.35) writes "The glass, through which the viewer looks, reflects the viewer and is transformed into a looking glass ...". It is my experience that this reflective/mirroring aspect further complicates the viewer's experience with the work, adding another visual layer disconnected from the work itself.

Weighing in on the subject of viewer access to book arts, Buzz Spector (1995, p.26) argues that given the opportunity, viewers of artists' books will touch them as "... a way of getting to know the work." He goes on to say (ibid, p.27) that "Locked in a cabinet, a book is absolutely mute, although its visage is still present."

Further, Rowell and Wye have this to say about the viewing of artists' books:

For the initiated viewer, (the) book offers among the most intimate of art experiences. Holding such a book in one's hand, perusing its pages, scrutinizing its images and text, the viewer relates to this distinctive art form in an altogether personal way. Unlike a painting, which makes an initial immediate impact, a book reveals itself only in a time-related sequence (Rowell 2002, p. 10).



Despite the desire to touch, to lift and hold and to turn pages, galleries tend to place artist's books behind glass, removing this opportunity from the viewer. Issues of conservation and security factor into these decisions, but it is difficult for a reader/viewer to fully experience a book that is inaccessible. The issues of tactility, intimacy, viewing proximity and access to inner pages would seem to exclude gallery visitors, except those who receive permission to privately view museum collections, and even then the reader is obliged to wear museum gloves which present yet another barrier to an important element of artists' books.

In considering how his work might be viewed, Johnny Carrera (2005, p.8), writes, "Book Art does not display as well as Exhibition Books which suggests that I may need to present my books differently, or develop innovative methods of display...", and further that "One effort I have made ... is always leaving a book unbound for wall displays to accompany the bound copy that becomes a "Book Object" in a glass case." A wall display could also include glass, and although this method may make the contents visible, it still eliminates the tactile experience.

Betty Bright (2005, p.7), commenting on display, argues "...a book is much more than pictures and text, much more than any one page. Reading a book involves the tactile, even emotional experience of paging through it." While not all artists' books are made inaccessible to a viewing audience, as in the case with some installations, book arts fairs and selected galleries, the issue of accessibility is a very real one for artists as they factor display considerations into their structures. Haptic qualities are important aspects of my own artists' books. I am not immune to the art world notions of the 'preciousness' of art

even as I lament the possibility that viewers of my works may not fully experience their haptic qualities. This is an issue that will affect my own exhibition, and is a problem that Betty Bright also acknowledges:

The history of book arts complicates an art world context ... because it highlights art world issues set into play with the transformation of the book from information vehicle into artifact. ... The artist's book also forces a rethinking of art world conventions of display, in the difficulties of showing books and of writing about looking through them, not just in looking at them (Bright 2005, p.261).

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature related to key issues surrounding artists' books. Specifically I have highlighted the discussions concerned with text and language, sequence and time, scale, the body, touch and the book; women artists and the book arts, and the issues surrounding display and access.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Method and reflexivity**

This chapter presents an overview of my research as it relates to my art practice for this project. It also presents a record of meetings and discussions with Marlene MacCallum, my studio supervisor, and others relative to my practice. Included are selections from my extensive reflexive journal which was written throughout the research process. These entries have been consolidated and presented thematically, although the projects, workshops, meetings and discussions were happening simultaneously and continued until the end. The journal charts my journey through early experimental book works, recording my processes and thoughts, and presents a context for some of the finished pieces.

#### **a) Experimental book projects:**

Simultaneously with the writing of my initial proposal to include with my application for the Masters Program at the Waterford Institute of Technology, I began to experiment with book making and to explore elements of typography and language. At the outset of my research I had not identified a particular text source for my work. (Projects preceded by an asterisk will be included in the exhibition of my work completed for this study.)

I started at the beginning with a two-part project which reflected my experiences with inaccessibility to language as outlined in the introduction to this dissertation:

### Book Project:

\* Exclusion (- s h i r l e y) and Isolation (+ s h i r l e y)

This project has two separate structures, each with wrap-around paper covers, sewn in a three-hole binding stitch. Each book measures approximately 5cm x 1.27cm x 19cm. Both the text and the cover imagery were silkscreened onto Arches 88 paper.

To illustrate the notion of exclusion, I manually removed from the text of my initial proposal all of the letters that appear in the word “shirley”. In the book titled “Isolation” I removed all of the letters other than those that spelled “s h i r l e y”. I then manually closed the spaces left by the missing letters in both. This manual gesture was an important aspect for me, as it provided a meditative, sequential time element to the process, and it also involved me (versus the computer) in the construction of the text.

This was also an important first exercise for my project, as I needed to put myself right in there and try to express visually how I felt and why it was important for me to make work about it.

On reflection, it seems that excluding myself from one text, and finding myself standing alone and isolated from the text in the other expresses the two themes of exclusion and isolation. From that perspective I feel the books are a useful start.

### Book Project:

\* The Book of A

As part of my search for a meaningful text, I experimented with ways of producing and printing text, which led to this structure, with silkscreen-printed

text on Lanaquarelle paper printed at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in February of 2008.

The book measures 18cm x 13cm x 1.27cm and consists of five signatures of four pages each, with covers made from mat board covered with decorative paper. This is a sewn structure with the folios attached to the covers with linen tapes.

The text is comprised of approximately thirty different fonts for both upper- and lowercase “a”, and is an exploration of the history of typography.

This book is also an exploration of text as image. I was aiming to illustrate a book that provided no information at all, but on viewing there is implied information about all the different fonts, even though these differences are not identified.

With regards to the structure itself, the tapes need tightening; I need to glue thin paper over the spine to hold it all together; the papers lining the inside covers need to be a little wider, or extended over onto the first page of the book. Otherwise it was structurally a satisfying experience and a second attempt at this structure should not present any difficulties.

(A copy of this book was subsequently accepted into the juried 5<sup>th</sup> *International Artist's Book Triennial Vilnius 2009*. In addition to the Lithuanian exhibition, the work will be shown in Leipzig, Germany and Silkeborg, Denmark in 2009.)

Book Project:

Notes From Home

*Notes From Home* is another experimental book structure. At this point I am experimenting with different binding techniques and am still unsure about the text that I will use for my final work. This is an altered book. I distressed the cover through wetting and rubbing. A photocopy of my digital photograph of a house was cut and glued to the lower portion of the front cover.

A hole was drilled through the front cover and book pages on the lower right-hand corner of the book. A wooden dowel was inserted into the hole and glued in place. Some of the pages were glued together, and the whole edge of the text block (three sides) was coated with PVA glue. An antique white ceramic door knob was affixed to the protruding dowel with a screw.

This book relates to my previous work about house and home, belonging and shelter and all of those issues that influence all of my work. This is also part and parcel of the exclusion/isolation theme, with access (to the book/house/information) being denied.

(*Notes From Home* was selected to be part of a juried exhibition titled *Shelter – unique visions of a universal subject through artist’s books* organized by Lasell College in Massachusetts. This exhibition travelled to various venues in the United States in 2008/09.)

Project :

Everything in the World

Using plastic bread bag ties, an instantly-recognizable domestic object, as stand-ins for letters of the alphabet, I ‘spelled’ the words: *Everything in the world exists in order to end up in a book. S. Mallarme.* I used large ties for the

upper-case letters, and small ties for lower case letters, to provide a clue to the intention of text.

Using different ink colours for each letter, I screen printed the text on three separate single sheets of paper measuring 38cm x 15.25cm for inclusion in a book.

This project did not function well on any level – technically, visually or conceptually. Making these experimental books is helpful as at each step new ideas and thoughts are presented, and I can feel things shifting.

### Book Project :

#### Tea Bag Book

Using a small tea-bag as the book structure, I cut up text that I had printed, separating all of the letters into single units, and placed enough in the bag to steep a good cup of ‘tea’. I stapled it closed and attached a piece of string with paper for the tag. The idea would be to infuse the ‘teas’ with a view to gaining enlightenment about the text, but this has probably been done before in one form or another as a book structure, so I will not pursue it further.

### Book Project :

#### Untitled (with cut up text)

For this experimental book I scored and folded a piece of Mi Teintes paper for a 12.7cm x 15.25 cover size, but almost 38cm long, with several folds: front cover, spine, back cover, smaller spine, and foldover. Inside the front cover I glued a blank accordion-fold book. Under the back cover fold-over I taped down a clear plastic bag filled with cut out individual letters, in both upper and lower case. I then glued a paper frame over this to secure the bag but keep

the contents visible. The letters are not readily accessible, but the suggestion is that they contain the text from the now blank book.

This book has the feel of the “magnetic poetry” kits one can buy, and the viewer may not be able to move beyond this to spend time considering other interpretations.

Other construction possibilities include cutting holes in the pages of the book, as if the text had been removed and then placed in the bag. This would provide a direct link between the pages and the text: information provided/access denied.

#### Book Project:

##### \* Geography Lesson

For this project I had text and an accompanying voice print of a short clip from a CBC Radio interview reproduced on film and subsequently exposed in a screen for printing. I also exposed various other images, including maps. The text and imagery have been printed and the pages assembled into an accordion fold book.

In a meeting with Marlene we looked at this accordion structure which included a square cover for the rectangular pages, leaving the top one-third or so exposed. I had seen this done before and liked the effect of leaving parts exposed and open still for other possibilities. Marlene said it reminded her of the way fold-out maps look/feel, and wondered about using Hedi Kyle’s folding technique as demonstrated in her Blizzard books. We also discussed the folding, scoring, stapling and collage elements, and in the end I think we both agreed that these interferences did nothing to enhance the book.



Ultimately I feel that the voiceprint pieces do not belong with the other (unrelated) text/imagery. I think the work generally looks unresolved. I have let myself go with this and just worked with what was in the screens without worrying too much about what the end result would be – paying attention to colour and composition, placement on the page, etc. Perhaps I am getting rid of things in my head to make room for what will come later.

Book Project:

\* The Glory of the Page [Included in exhibition as an example of binding technique.]

I have been experimenting with different types of structures, including a binding technique (re)discovered by Hedi Kyle (University of the Arts, Philadelphia) called Secret Belgian Bookbinding. My source was from the internet, not from Hedi, so this may not be exactly as she would teach it. Basically the two covers and the spine are “laced” (sometimes using eyelets), and the text block sewn in afterwards. It is a visually interesting construction, and is part of my ongoing research into binding techniques. This structure could also serve as a temporary case for a book, as the text block is assembled and sewn separately from the cover. My sample was constructed from the pages of a book titled “The Glory of the Page” that had been damaged by water, and the title appears on the cover of my book.

Book Project:

Untitled (with hole-punched text)

For this project I hole-punched individual letters from a text and arranged the punched-out pieces on a page adjacent to the original text. What works with this is the interruption of the flow of text, the surprise of finding the removed bits on the adjacent page and the visual back-and forth created by this unusual arrangement of text as the viewer tries to make sense of it all. But I think this would work better if: a) I had been selective about what I removed (all capitals, for example); and/or b) if I had arranged the cut-out bits in the same location as the holes in the text page, but had then placed the wrong letter in that spot to provide an additional challenge to deciphering the text. I will add this to the list of possibilities for further investigation.

#### Project:

Untitled (with screen printed 'falling' text)

I printed an image from Venice showing clotheslines strung between buildings, then overprinted text that seems to be falling from the sky and collecting in an incomprehensible pile at the bottom. What worked: I feel the image is a strong one, and is tied to the inspiration for this project. The notion of text disintegrating and collecting in a heap like debris, or perhaps something that needs rescuing is something I will think about more. What did not work: the text as presented. Perhaps a mixture of font styles and sizes would be more successful. Also the "pile of text" at the bottom of the image is too orderly and does not suggest strongly enough that those letters have fallen there from the text above. Using letterpress might be a solution, or perhaps using a different computer program that could generate and manipulate text into a dense pile. I will add this piece this to the "possibilities" pile and revisit it later.

## Book Project:

### K n o w i n g

For this project I screenprinted the word “k n o w i n g” in white and blue ink on translucent velum, in two font sizes. My goal was to have the viewer think about that word, and how we know what we know. Within this one word, are several other words: no, now, know, in, win, wing, owing, which I also printed, using several sizes of fonts.

What worked: a) the translucency of the paper – the text on the underneath pages shows through when the pages are stacked, but is not easily accessed; the blue ink (for the smaller font) emphasizes that portion of the text, and also places it within the context of the larger word, printed in white ink. b) The placement of the text in the larger font. The commercial printer split the word in this size even though that did not seem to be necessary. In the end this forced me to think about how I would print it – all together or as it was but in different places on the page so the viewer might question why the word was split.

How many pages would I print, and how would I bind or display them is still unresolved. The use of translucent materials referencing access to language is something I will continue to work on.

## Book Project :

### Short story

In preparation for printing on the etching press I glued pre-made foam letters onto mat board, and coated everything with acrylic gel medium to harden and protect it. The letters are all upper case, and in a font designed to be

playful. Inking the letters individually, I printed them onto Rives BFK using the small relief proofing press.

On four separate sheets are all twenty-six letters of our alphabet – all the letters we would need to write any story at all. The font design gives a clue to the playfulness of this piece.

The playfulness of the font, of the colours, and of the idea all support each other visually. The placement of the text on the page and the blank spaces between suggesting that text might have been removed are all elements that work well. I think this work also illustrates the complexity of language, how recognizing certain aspects (in this case the letters) does not address the larger issues of literacy and understanding.

I will need to think about the font some more, whether a more formal style would be appropriate and whether one letter per page or a different arrangement of the letters would be more effective.

Marlene's response to the foam-letter alphabet printing was to the shapes created within each individual letter, and she wondered if I might explore those digitally. I scanned one of the images and experimented with it in PhotoShop, enlarging and flipping the image, but there is nothing exciting happening yet. I may try other fonts and see what happens when I look at those flipped and enlarged images.

Experimentation with these foam letter scans is ongoing, and there are definite possibilities here to explore other ways of looking at the components that make up language, as well as possibilities for digital experimentation with text.

Book Project:

\* I'm Afraid [This project was resolved into a completed work for inclusion in my exhibition.]

My approach for this project has been to make a small accordion book using selected text scanned from Rev. Dotchon's correspondence. The title is text from the original letter, and this is the first book project directly related to Dotchon's correspondence.

The photocopied fragments of text in this book are glued onto printmaking paper. If I continue with this piece I will consider reproducing the text on something more delicate and perhaps in a more direct way – direct printing, stitching or hole punching. I also kept the photocopied page of the letter from which this text was removed/cut out, and there might be something to work with there as well, working with the gaps and holes in the paper, and seeing what is left over. Deconstruction of language - how we find meaning when we are not given the entire text, etc., just as I am left to wonder what might have prompted Dotchon's writings and what the response may have been, as I have only one side of the conversation.

(In the final version of this book the text is punched with a needle through frosted mylar. Visible in the right light, and tactile when the finger moves over it, I have selected phrases from one of the Dotchon letters to suggest a narrative. The pages are different sizes, and stacked one on top of the other.)

Book Project:

(Untitled)

This book structure is based on Eileen Wallace's refined version of the simplified binding technique as show in *The Penland Book of Handmade Books* (LaFerla and Gunter 2008). It includes the making of headbands and a wrapped spine that is separate from the cover boards. This is a sewn-on-tapes structure and features gluing and lining the spine to make the text block strong and to keep it from shifting.

My book is 10cm x 10cm and contains just four signatures of medium-weight paper, and it is really too small for headbands, but the exercise was worthwhile. I have figured out how the kettle stitch works too – that is the stitch at the top and bottom of the signatures that holds everything together. This is the first time that I have made a separate covered spine in this way; when the front and back boards are glued on there is a nice separate covered spine showing. There are lots of options here for spine colour, for using different papers, for folding the pages, and for the overall shape of the book. This is the same kind of spine used on the book *Text/Hypertext* by Critical Art Ensemble that I looked at in Banff. The book is sturdy, the cover opens out and lies flat, and it all has a neat, finished look.

Book Project:

\* CSB Hidden [Included in exhibition as an example of binding technique.]

This is another small book, using a cross-structure hidden binding technique that Rhonda Miller introduced me to when I visited her studio in Halifax in May. It went together quite nicely and uses an interesting technique –

the cover is constructed from two separate pieces that interlock and overlap, with the overlapping bits being glued down. There are a number of other cross-structure bindings as well, and they can all be found on Carmencho Arrequi's homepage (<http://www.outofbinding.com/>) for cross-structure bindings. The stitching shows through on the spine, which adds an interesting visual element.

#### Book Project:

\*Talisman [This project was resolved into a series of book works for inclusion in my exhibition.]

The structure for this project is a miniature book, about 2cm high, with the text block made up of a portion of one of the Dotchon letters. I added a loop at the top, and a narrow ribbon so that it might be worn as a locket or talisman, kept close to the body in an intimate and private gesture.

#### Book Project:

\* Compendium [This project was resolved into a series of three book works, for inclusion in my exhibition.]

In preparation for this book I typed the entire contents of the three-page letter from Rev. Dotchon addressed to "Mistress Elsa". I arranged all the words alphabetically in columns of fifteen words each. I will reproduce the text through screenprinting. I plan to make a 'compendium' of the words, although I have not yet decided on the format for the book. I will need to work out the size/shape/design of the book before I print. The list of words will provide the viewer with the complete text of the letter, but not in its original sequence, providing infinite possibilities for re-constructing the letter.

I subsequently made maquettes for four variations of *Compendium*, each leading to a more refined version (as opposed to four discrete and separate books). At the moment the text is still arranged so that fifteen words will appear on a page. I will screenprint the text onto thin/flimsy/translucent/transparent papers experimenting to see which works best. Printing on translucent paper will allow successive layers to show through to some extent.

At a meeting with Marlene in her studio we experimented with the text for this book in Adobe Illustrator. We weren't able to turn the text into an image and eliminate the pixellation, but it is what it is. It is not letterpress, but computer-generated type – a modern invention for printing an old text. As well, the font is small so any pixellation should not be visible to the naked eye.

I had a series of films made at Transcontinental, then exposed the first portions of text into a screen for proofing on different papers in preparation for final printing.

Ultimately I decided to print this text on Japanese Sekishu paper. It is quite translucent and delicate looking, although very strong. Also sensuous – silky smooth on one side and ever so lightly furred on the other. It will be good bound in leather. I think there will be a visible build-up of layers of text as the pages are stacked on top of each other.

The final version of the text for “Compendium” consists of three good copies, each with approximately one hundred pages. There were some not-so-good printings which I will use for experimenting with the leather binding. The sheets are long, narrow and flimsy, and I need to figure out how to punch the binding holes consistently through the lot of them.



To facilitate accurate hole-punching I made a 'trough' to hold the sheets, and carefully placed them in one by one. Marlene had suggested having a couple of strips at the bottom of the pile so I could wrap these up around the bundle and secure them. This worked well, and there was no problem punching the holes. I bound the sheets for one version of this book with a leather cover sewn with raffia in a Japanese account book style. This would work well suspended, but I am not sure if I will have that display option at QEII Library. In any event, while I was working on this solution I had a couple of other ideas for binding these sheets: a) sew a string to the center of the leather cover on the opposite end from the raffia binding, then starting at the bound end, I will roll the whole thing and secure it with the string tucked in under itself; and b) using Coptic binding, stitch through the center of the text block using tacketts (removable stitching as was traditional for this type of binding). One would have to flip from one side to the other to read any given page, and keeping track would be cumbersome. I am also considering using Lucite for the covers for a third copy of this book, bound at the top Japanese style over paper and boards. I will need to research how to attach the lucite.

#### Book Project:

\* Sewn Shut [This project was resolved into a final bookwork (*Sealed Tender*), for inclusion in my exhibition.]

Thinking about the notions of inaccessibility to text, I folded and creased photocopies of the Dotchon letters and attached two paper covers front and back. I then bound them in the Japanese stab-binding style, but with a double row of stitches securing almost half the width of the book (which measures

13.7cm x 5.4cm), limiting access to the contents. The pages are arranged some with the top of the text at the head of the book, other pages with the top at the bottom of the book, and all with the folds facing out, further restricting access to the text.

I then pierced a hole at the fore-edge, through the covers and text block, half way down the length of the cover and about 1.27cm in from the edge. I ran a length of binding thread through the hole and tied it in a bow on the front of the book. This will require a further action on the part of the viewer to try to read the text. Then I remembered a gift from several years ago of a seal and sealing wax, so I melted the wax over the bow and stamped it with an “S” to seal it. The curve of the “S” visually echoes the curves of the bow-tied thread. The seal also suggests that the letters are now mine (initial “S” for Shirley), and that I am the one who is attempting to restrict access to the contents.

I think these letters also are metaphors for memory – not just the fact that they were written 75 years ago, or that the people involved are no longer here, but also a memory of a time when people wrote letters as a way of communication – before phones, e-mail and text messaging. We have lost that aspect, and these letters raise the issue of nostalgia and selective memory.

This book is satisfying on a number of levels: visually by its size, the pattern of stitches (drawing with thread) etc. I also enjoy the way it sits in the hand and the suggestion that the contents are important and should not be accessible to everyone, or perhaps that they have been read and are being put away for safe keeping. It seems as if the seal validates all the other actions, that although one could peek in at either end of the book, that perhaps one

shouldn't. I think this is the closest I have come to being able to articulate what I want to say about the overall project in general, and these letters in particular.

At a meeting with Marlene she had a look at the series of works I have done since our last meeting. I think we both felt good about where this is going. The one piece she questioned was the small book with the wax seal – she saw a conflict of ideas between the Japanese binding and the red wax seal – a European convention. She also suggested that I consider extending the sewing farther into the cover of the book, with successively denser (closer together) lines of sewing, and to use the bow/red sealing wax for a separate construction – or perhaps use a different colour of wax, one with less cultural referencing. I think the red seal is reminiscent of the red 'chop' often found on oriental prints, which creates a visual link with the Japanese-style binding.

#### Book Project:

\* Untitled – folder with sleeve and feather closure [This project resulted in a completed book work, titled *Rev. H. D.*, for inclusion in my exhibition.]

This book is based on Rev. Dotchon's reported physical appearance - a tall, thin man who always dressed in black. As a Methodist Minister in the 1930s he was likely outwardly reserved. His writings portray a different story – playfulness, humour, romance and so on. The book is long and narrow, and the final version will be covered with black bookbinding cloth on boards, will have fold-in flaps top and bottom, and two fold-over covers. Holding the whole thing together is a white band which wraps around the book (referencing a clerical collar), and is secured by a feather, sharpened to reference a quill pen. There is

a small raised black fabric loop on the cover, and a matching hole in the white band. The feather slips into the loop securing everything.

The inside of the book will be something sensuous/luscious (perhaps dyed tyvek) and a contrast to the austere cover. I have not entirely worked out the contents yet – they will likely be a series of loose papers/prints/images/snippets of appropriate text from the letters.

I am experimenting with printing lace patterns on various papers, including double mat mylar and Japanese papers. I think the white ink on the mylar is the most successful. I plan to fold a piece of this 'lace' to go in the folio book, and may print text on the reverse side, also in white.

This period of experimentation and exploration has resulted in the completion of seventeen distinct book works. The details of these final pieces are outlined in Appendix "A". Images of both the final and experimental books can be seen in Plates 1 – 21. These books represent the results of my research, both practical and theoretical, and illustrate that indeed artists' books can provide the reader/viewer with information or knowledge beyond that offered by traditional books.

**b) Reflections on finished pieces:**

Dieter Roth's work is germane to my own intent and has informed many of my decisions as I searched for ways to direct the viewer/reader to an experience beyond the conventional reading of text. My work continues Roth's investigations into the use of text as a communicative device even as it inhibits a literal reading.

*Dear Mistress Elsa* presents fragments of text repeated, enlarged, and sometimes reversed. This text is presented in the writer's original script, typewritten and arranged in a spiral, and also typewritten in a continuous flow with no spacing. I scanned and screenprinted the text in opaque and translucent inks and juxtaposed it with, or printed over it, related imagery. Short phrases no longer in common usage were blind letterpress printed, some showing traces of ink from previous use of the lead type, echoing a memory of language. In this way I am utilizing the text as image, having a meaning other than a literal translation of the word.

My flag book (a variation of artist Hedi Kyle's invented construction), titled *Gossip*, rustles, whispers and scratches as the book is handled. The pages are made up of printed fragments of text from the Dotchon letters, each folded to form a loop which rubs against adjacent loops. The whole presents inaccessible text, visual activity and an auditory experience which goes beyond that offered by traditional books.

Although in many instances the books in the *Found in Translation* exhibition (referred to on page 29), are dealing with literal translation projects, by re-configuring, re-interpreting and re-presenting the text of the Dotchon letters, I too am offering my own translation of the original text. It is this process that also links my own work to the original catalyst for this project – the need to 'translate' isolated words, gestures, sights and sounds while visiting Venice in 2007.

The notion put forth by Viktor Shklovskij (page 29), that artists' books can present the reader/viewer with a new experience beyond the familiar, is one that I kept in mind when sifting through the myriad of choices available to me in the

construction of my book works. In formulating an idea, every aspect was considered as I constructed my work to operate on a number of levels at each step in the process. The decision of whether and how to deny or obscure access to any portion of the text evolved as the work unfolded. Whether through manipulation of the original text, the choice of materials and their haptic qualities, through the use of colour, by the acts of stitching or folding, or considering the scale and the sequencing in the works, I sought to engage the viewer in an experience beyond the familiar or anticipated.

The notion of time-based sequential decoding referred to by Deborah Wye (page 30, above) was also a consideration for many of my book works, supported by the use of fragments of text with or without accompanying imagery. My books require a slowing down in the viewing process, a searching for meaning in a format where the anticipated becomes unfamiliar.

In formulating my artist's book *Compendium*, I printed the entire contents of a three-page letter. All of the words from the letter are in the book, but they are arranged in alphabetical order, fifteen to a page, on translucent Japanese paper. In one edition the pages were folded in half and stitched to the book's cover through the layered text. Printed in ten point Book Antigua, the words have become a block of dense text as each successive layer is hinted at behind the previous one. Access to an entire page of text is interrupted by the binding stitches. It is also physically awkward to access the text as each of the sheets of soft, flimsy paper refuses to maintain its shape and form as the pages are turned in sequence.

All of the characteristics associated with books are in place (cover, pages, binding, text), but the reader's experience is now focussed on the

manipulation of the pages and of with having to go back and forth from one side of the book to the other to completely read any given page, raising the issues of sequencing and time in the reading of the text. The experience is no longer one of reading the letter, but rather an experience with materiality, sequencing, and text as image. The reader is given infinite possibilities to construct her own narrative from the text provided.

A further illustration of the notion of time-based, sequential decoding is found in my book titled *Dear Folks II – Decoder*. This book contains an electronically-produced voiceprint of a reading of one of the Dotchon letters. Printed in a continuous line, the graph represents a reading time of 1 minute 4 seconds. Here the length of communicative sequence is determined by one particular reader's pacing. Re-interpreting will present other time/sequence possibilities for the viewer. Another version of this voiceprint book (*Dear Folks*) features five separate segments of the graph, each screen printed on clear acetate in a different colour, overprinted with the original text. Multiple copies were stacked one on top of the other and bound with post and screw onto clear lexan. A third version (*Dear Folks III – Volumen*) has individual 'pages' of the voiceprint, printed on clear acetate, rolled and tied with thread. Stacked in a pyramid, one becomes aware of space, volume and containment of time.

Susan Stewart's discussion of small, fragile works (Stewart 2005, p.165) directed my thinking to the construction of miniature books containing the Dotchon letters. I copied the letters onto Japanese Kozo paper, then cut and folded the pages to 2cm x 1.27cm. The acts of folding and cutting have resulted in some of the text being upside down, and in the text disappearing into the folds of the book and being truncated at the edges. I consciously housed the

text in its original scale inside a miniature case, emphasizing the importance of the content over the structure even as I restricted access.

I have made a varied edition of these books (titled *Talisman*). Two are intended to be worn close to the body: one on a thin cord for wearing around the neck and possibly tucked inside the clothing out of view; the second on a circular wire 'ring' that fits around the neck, suspending the miniature book at the throat. The positioning of these books would present them as pieces of jewellery, displayed for view and inviting curiosity. However, the proximity to the body and the face would likely prohibit a viewer from actually touching the books. This gesture suggests intimacy and privacy while at the same time conveys the status of value, despite the diminutive size of the book.

A third miniature was placed inside a small 7.6cm x 5cm drawstring bag (which appears large when contrasted with the 2cm x 1.27cm x .3 cm book, again creating an awareness of scale) for safe keeping. In a fourth version I created a *Pocket Library*, which sees multiple volumes housed in an antique wooden pencil case. The rounded ends of the "shelves" provide a finger-hold for removing the books from the case.

By presenting these miniature books in this way, I am both drawing attention to the book by its display and at the same designating the status of intimacy and inaccessibility to the object. The viewer is denied access to the contents (compromised in any event by folding and cutting), but is presented with a new experience - one of scale, of colour present in the materials, and of display.

Ann Hamilton's drawing attention to the miniature through materials (miniscule stones glued over text, mentioned on page 32, above) also



influenced my experimentation with miniature books, even though I chose to present this aspect in the scale of the structures themselves.

My paper choices throughout were influenced by Kathryn Reeves' discussion drawing associations between paper and skin (Reeves 2001, p.5), and these choices were considered and intentional in the construction of my artists' books.

For *Compendium* I screenprinted text on a delicate Japanese paper called Sekishu. Smooth on one side, and lightly furred on the other, each of the several hundred sheets that I ran my hand over (to confirm that the smooth side was top facing for printing), evoked memories of my babies' skin, smooth on the front, lightly furred on the back, echoing Buzz Spector's comments (page 34) above. Two versions of this book were bound in leather, also smooth on one side and furred on the other, the whole offering the reader another layer of investigation and response.

Emily Artinian's response to the bodily activity involved in the making of her book titled *real fiction* was similar to my own, as I felt I needed to be connected to the Dotchon correspondence at every level in order to respond to the contents and to make informed choices about the bookworks I would construct. Physically tracing the original writer's text, choosing materials for both their visual and tactile qualities, printing, folding and creasing, stitching and wrapping were all conscious and intimate gestures.

While I was at Landfall Trust in Brigus I would begin each day sitting at the window overlooking the harbour and reading aloud the letters, written by Rev. Dotchon in that very place seventy-five years ago. I could imagine the recipients of the letters also reading them aloud, sharing and discussing the

contents in an era when letters were the prime source of communication in rural Newfoundland.

This action of reading the letters aloud was in response to Alberto Manguel's writings about the history reading, mentioned on pages 35-36 of this dissertation, and it was this experience, too, that prompted me to produce a sound piece for this project (*Four Letters, Three Voices and the Sea*). Three different voices reading the four letters, each speaking simultaneously, blend together with the sound of the sea and obscure details in this audio version of a book. I have also converted one of the readings into a digital voice print (*Dear Folks*, mentioned above) over which I have printed the matching text, contrasting postmodern technologies with the authenticity of the original hand written letters.

My thesis exhibition includes more than one copy of some of my artists' books, offering front, back and interior views to compensate in part for their inaccessibility.

**c) Practice-based research:**

The following selections from my reflexive journal outline my practice-based research for this project:

In April of 2008 I spent two weeks in New York where I participated in a five-day *Letterpress I: Hand Typesetting* workshop at the Center for Book Arts with instructor Barbara Henry, followed by a two-day *Lo-tech/Hi-quality Photopolymer Platemaking* workshop with Inge Bruggeman, a book artist from Oregon.

Learning the processes and techniques taught at both workshops was technically informative and opens up new ways of thinking about my own work in terms of image-making possibilities. It was interesting working with both the very old and the relatively new approaches to printing/image making that these two processes offer.

Susan Mills, a bookbinder/conservator, was teaching a bookbinding class at the Center while I was there. I had brought along some of the work that I have done to date, and she had a look at what I was doing. She made some helpful comments about structure and so on. She said she knew what I wanted to say with the work, which was helpful - knowing that I am able to communicate that.

While in New York, I viewed exhibitions at the MoMA, the Metropolitan and the Guggenheim, the Armory Show, the Art & Design Show, and a show of Milton's early hand-printed bookworks at The New York Public Library. There was a book-arts show (*Book/Shelf*) at the MoMA featuring works by Richard Long (River Avon Book, 1979), Ann Hamilton (*Untitled*, 1992), Lenore Tawney (Seed Circle, 1967), and others. In her work, Ann Hamilton had placed small pebbles over the text in a book of poetry.

I have been viewing the videotapes from the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild home study course in hand bookbinding on an ongoing basis. These provide very detailed and thorough visual, verbal and written instructions.

I am constantly looking at book works by other artists on the internet as well, including The Yale Collection, Center for Book Arts Collection, Victoria and Albert Collection, and on and on. Also works from various symposiums, work shown in book arts journals, and whatever I can find. It was all a bit

overwhelming at first, but now I am editing quite a bit and identifying themes and approaches that it will be helpful for me to look at more closely. At this point I have identified some areas that I tend to revisit, including transparency/translucency of materials. Text is still a bit of an issue as I try to figure out how to use it. Text as imagery, as shape, and as object may be possibilities.

I periodically check bookbinder Rhonda Miller's on-line blog, (Miller, n.d.) and I noticed that she mentioned having done a coptic binding course with Susan Mills. Rhonda lives in Halifax, and I e-mailed her asking if she might be interested in doing a workshop on this technique in early May. She has agreed to do this and we have set a time.

Book artist Susan Mills will be teaching a credit course in bookbinding at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, Nova Scotia in May. She has invited me to audit two of the sessions. We will be making five small, different, hardcover structures and a slip case. May 7 and 8 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Rhonda Miller also suggested that I get in touch with Joe Landry, who runs the Dawson (printing) Press at NSCAD, and sent me his e-mail address. I contacted Joe and I will meet with him on Friday morning, May 9<sup>th</sup> for a tour of the Press.

Halifax report: Rhonda Miller demonstrated how the historical Coptic binding worked. This structure is modeled on the Nag Hammadi codices which were discovered in Egypt in 1945, buried in a jar and dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The binding is done with a stitch called "tacket binding" – used

these days for its decorative look, but it also allows for quick and easy removal of the text block so that the cover can be re-used.

Rhonda also demonstrated a couple of cross-structure binding techniques, and gave me sample templates to take home so I could try these on my own.

We spent some time looking at the many books that she has made (all blank – she is strictly a binder at this stage), as well as a number of books from other book makers that she has in her collection. She was generous with her time, with sharing her knowledge and providing helpful tips.

Susan Mills' workshop sessions were intense, informative, and lots of fun. She had brought with her the boards, papers, book cloth and so on all cut to size for the class projects, which did in fact enable us to make five structures and a slip case in the two marathon sessions! I took as many notes as I could, as we were working on several structures simultaneously and it all went very quickly.

All five books are hard-cover, flat-back books: two have sewn text blocks, including one with French folds. The other three had glued pages (including accordion and butterfly binding). Having hands-on experience doing this work was a wonderful opportunity, as we were able to ask questions as they arose.

Susan and I met a half hour early on the second day to chat about my project, mostly in general terms, but she is very knowledgeable and informed, and the conversation was good.

Joe Landry gave me a comprehensive tour of Dawson Press on Friday. It really helped that I had done the letterpress workshop in New York, and was able to have a conversation about the process. The shop includes a working

model of a common press, along with the standard letterpress units. They also possess an extensive collection of lead and wood type.

It was a productive week. Everyone was very generous with their time and resources, and once again I am feeling part of a larger community of artists, and the instruction sessions were both informative and useful.

I have also been viewing more of the videos from the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild Home Study course. The instructor gives very detailed directions, and there is a lot of discussion about how and why, etc. It is all very informative and is adding to my knowledge of book structures enormously.

I spent four mornings working with Marlene in her book studio at her house. There still remained eight copies from her *Townsite Houses* edition to be bound. This was a wonderful learning opportunity for me. I was cutting and sanding both the silhouettes for embossing and the boards for the covers, tearing paper for lining the covers and pasting the silhouettes. As Marlene was performing her own tasks of paring leather, gluing in endsheets, affixing covers and so on, she provided me with a running commentary of what she was doing and why she was doing in a particular way.

Marlene also provided me with an outline for my job under her grant, researching the use of polymer plates with a view to offering workshops using that technology at Grenfell.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell College does not have a letterpress, nor a specially-designed exposure unit for polymer plates. My research will include experimenting with various exposure times using a constructed light box, and with using a variety of lithograph, etching and block printing inks and rollers. As

well I will be printing the plates on the litho and intaglio presses, working out pressure, solving problems of slippage, smudging and embossment.

At this point I feel the research aspect of my work is going well. I am much more knowledgeable about the evolution of book arts, who has contributed to the practice, and in what ways. My previous artistic forays into this field were limited, and almost never involved looking at text specifically.

My practical knowledge has also been expanded. The letterpress instruction and the thinking around the use of text as an artistic expression, the polymer plate production and its use for both text and imagery, the bookbinding workshops, the tutorial videos and the work with Marlene have all left me much better prepared to make informed decisions about the practical side of my work.

I am still reading. However, at this stage I am running into a lot of repetition, so feel that I am ready to start writing now. New threads can be woven in as the reading continues.

The work itself is still very much unresolved. I have always avoided using text in my art practice. The dilemma of what text to use, not wanting to appropriate but questioning whether I have anything to say that will not appear pretentious or self-conscious, previously resulted in my simply avoiding it altogether. My exploration into the use of text in book arts, text as image, and the myriad of approaches that artists take when using text has been exciting and a bit overwhelming. I am examining the works of Xu Bing and of UK artists Fiona Banner ([www.fionabanner.com/works/](http://www.fionabanner.com/works/) [Accessed 08 May 2009]) and Sam Winston ([www.samwinston.com/](http://www.samwinston.com/) [Accessed 08 May 2009]), who all use text in unconventional ways in their art practice.

There has been a response to my request to view books in the collection at the Banff Center for the Arts in Banff, Alberta, and I have sent them a list of twelve books to view when I visit on June 19th. I chose books specifically for their construction and use of text.

**d) Meetings and peer discussions:**

The selected journal entries in this section relate to discussions with my supervisors and my peers. I also discuss my response to works viewed from the Banff Center for the Arts collection, my own submissions to book arts exhibitions, and my response to my experience at an artist's retreat.

Marlene (MacCallum, my studio supervisor) and I have regular meetings every two weeks related specifically to the book works. These meetings are supplemented with e-mail correspondence if issues arise between meetings. The discussions form an important part of the process for me partly because of Marlene's experience in book arts, but also because her approach is always to present possibilities that are open ended. Jackie Barrett, a print instructor at SWGC, has also joined our discussions on a couple of occasions. We all bring work and give each other feedback.

In June the Grenfell Gallery hosted an exhibition associated with An Leabhar Mor/The Great Book of Gaelic. The exhibition featured selections from poems visually interpreted by artists and calligraphers. It is a large exhibition with many wonderful works. It is very good for me to see this blend of text and imagery right now.



Neil MacL. was working in the Gallery for this exhibition. He brought in the bookworks he had done in the fourth year of his BFA program, and some others, and talked to me about the content, imagery, text and the technical side of creating the images. It was a good session, and helped to fill the gap of not having peers to talk to me about their work.

In late June I visited the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta. The library had pulled from their archives the twelve books I had requested. I was not permitted to take photographs, but I did take extensive notes. There was a good variety in terms of construction, use of text, approach to the bookwork as a whole, size and content.

Of particular interest were:

1. Susan Mills accordion book, "l x w x h" – a small accordion-fold structure. Mills photocopied text, added her own, covered up bits, etc. so that in the end the only part that was legible was her own writing (there was also a language barrier element with the main text which was photocopied text from an ancient Tibetan ledger). I also liked the smallness (intimacy) of her book, and the introduction of colour in the title, in her signature stamp and the embroidery thread. I found this book very satisfying to look at, open, read and handle. It has the feel of a personal note one might find among someone's possessions, carefully folded and kept. (Dotchon's letters again – carefully folded and passed through the generations.) Susan's use of embroidery thread, a very domestic material (as opposed to bookbinding thread) also brought the book into the realm of the personal and presented a feminist aesthetic. It is definitely not a 'traditional' book at all.

2. "Texthypertext" by Critical Art Ensemble. A well-constructed book – the shaped covers and folded pages worked individually and as a group. I also enjoyed the way the text was both visible and hidden (by the folded flaps), the use of two different fonts and ink colours, the stitching on the spine, the overall size of the book and the shaped bits. Wonderful attention to details in placement of text, folding of pages, etc.
3. Nora Lee McGillivray's "Climb". The black paper cover, hinges carefully constructed from the same material and the stainless steel rod which slipped between the hinges to hold it all together were perfectly constructed with incredible attention to detail. There is something old-fashioned about the closure, assigning importance to that aspect of the construction. I am not sure that the contents measured up; they are visually a bit busy. But I could definitely imagine discovering something like one of Dotchon's letters inside the cover – an important 'document' preserved.
4. Davi Det Hompson's "1 (a, b) 18" – a visually interesting book, with text going everywhere – in old typewriter font, photocopied and sometimes enlarged. Folded flaps sticking out all over the place. Excellent use of text. Unwieldy structure.

While I was at Banff I also met with Jordan Bennett, a graduate from the BFA program at SWGC who is working at Banff for the summer, and he gave me a tour of the amazing facilities and introduced me to some of the visiting artists there.

At our first meeting following my Banff trip, Marlene and I looked at an image of a cottage taken in the Scottish Highlands at dusk by my friend Tim. It is quite dark and blue, and there is a bright yellow/orange light in one window. Using a yellow/orange text I typed the beginning words of a letter written by Rev. W. H. Dotchon in 1931 to his friend. I found the original of this letter, and three others (dated 1930, 1932 and 1933), that have been in my family's possession for a number of years. The idea to use these letters grew out of an aside from Marlene at our last meeting when I was expressing my difficulties with using text and she wondered if I had considered a collaboration. When I saw Tim's photograph I thought of the letters and made a connection between the two.

As always, Marlene's insight proved fruitful, and she suggested deconstructing the text of the letter, using fragments that will bring their own associations/responses and working with different kinds of image-making approaches. I could consider using parts of words and phrases - a portion removed from the whole that may be a key to understanding. This presents an opportunity to generate both text and image digitally, and would offer another learning curve for me, as my knowledge of image/text manipulation in that medium is limited. There are also possibilities here for polymer plate processes.

Marlene also looked at the book structures I have made to date, and the photographic images of Dotchon's text etc., and we talked about where this might be going. She made the observation that spines, folds and edges seem to hold particular interest for me. I knew that. But I didn't know it. This too opens up exciting possibilities.

In the meantime, St. Michael's Printshop has received my playing card design, the birdhouse for the Writers' Festival fundraiser is finished, and I have submitted a book work to Bank Street Arts, Sheffield, England (Sheffield Artist's Book Prize), which has been received by them, and will be included in their exhibition – details of dates, etc. are to follow. As well my altered book *Notes From Home* has been accepted by the Wedeman Gallery in Massachusetts for the *Shelter* exhibition, which will travel to various galleries across the United States during the next twelve months.

July 2008. I have been experimenting with printing polymer plates in the shop at Grenfell on the intaglio press, with limited success. The rollers on those presses cannot be lifted, and even with minimal pressure tend to crush the polymer. I will try again using metal guides to control the pressure.

There are some lively discussions about the definition of artists' books online. It is interesting that this debate is still active. Some of the arguments relate to books that stretch the definition of "book". It is exciting that artists are pushing the boundaries and challenging perceptions though.

August 2008. Marlene and Dave have generously offered me the use of their letterpress, which is a wonderful thing and opens up many possibilities for me for printing text and imagery with polymer plates, as well as using the metal type in their collection. We will get together to work on that soon. In a meeting with Marlene we also talked about the polymer plate research as well as research into a printmaking bibliography as part of my research assistant job.

Research into polymer plate production is continuing in our shop at Grenfell. I am experimenting with exposure times, etc. that will work with our light system and so on. So far things are going well, and shouldn't present any

major problems. I have printed on the small letterpress proofing press, and on the intaglio press. The next step is to try printing on the litho press.

I submitted a book work (*BIG HOUSE/ little house*) to “Bookopolis 2007“, a book exhibition in Asheville, NC, USA, and received word that it arrived safely.

September 2008. I am working in Marlene and Dave’s letterpress shop this week, printing a recipe for a Wayzgoose fundraiser. My contribution is one of Dr. Chase’s recipes for salve that includes sugar of lead and opium! I am choosing fonts, setting type, trimming paper, and so on. Contemplative work.

There is an artist’s retreat in Brigus, on the east coast of the island, called Landfall Trust, and I have booked a week there for mid-September. It will be good to isolate myself for a week. There will be no phone, computer or other distractions, and I will bring very little with me besides my sketchbook. I feel that I have the tools I need to make work now (letterpress, polymer plate and bookbinding knowledge plus my previous printmaking experience). Also I now have a text to respond to, so some time away to reflect on how this will all come together could be helpful.

Late September, and home from Brigus where the weather was good and there was a big moon on the ocean every night. The cottage is off the grid (solar-powered lights, propane stove, and fireplace) and quite a distance from the nearest house, so the silence was amazing. Since there was no electricity nothing hummed, cut in or out, beeped or flashed. No phones or computers. I slept with the windows open, hearing only the sounds of the sea, combined with the rustling of leaves when the wind was up.

There were no distractions at Landfall. I was usually up at 6:00, reading and/or writing by 7:00. I took long hikes over the barren hills in the afternoons.

I began each day sitting in front of the big window overlooking the bay and reading aloud the four letters from Rev. Dotchon. He spent his last years in this little town, and I tried to imagine him dipping his pen in the inkwell, perhaps gazing out the window at this same bay while composing his thoughts. But mostly I wanted to have the content of the letters, his use of language, the way his script looks, the feel of the flimsy paper, the watermarks on the paper and so on become very familiar so that to some extent my responses to them will be automatic and true as opposed to having to search for meaning.

Rev. Dotchon was reportedly a tall thin man who always dressed in black and the children were a little afraid of him; however his writing reveals a very different character – one filled with wit, humour, playfulness and poetry. I hope to reference this in one of my books – a formal (severe even?) cover with visually luscious contents and some choice phrases from his writings.

The letters also give a picture of life in the 1930's – he talks of inviting friends in for tea and to listen to a concert on the radio. I learned from one of the residents of Brigus that there was a formality observed in that era that we no longer see – hats and gloves were worn, someone would be designated to pour the tea and to pass the sweets, unmarried women were referred to as “Miss ....” and so on, an aspect that may not appear in my work, but might in some way affect the way I approach it. I feel I cannot ignore the source, and that I need in some way to pay homage to that and respect it.

I was also reading Keith Smith's “Structure of the Visual Book” while at Landfall. He talks about the book as a physical object, the relationship between the structure and content, display and composition and so on. He discusses the book as a whole and how all of the elements relate to one another. He talks

about movement, sequence, text as image, and picture relationships. Also how a book evolves. Nothing is inconsequential.

Also I re-read some of Johanna Drucker's writings, as well as Stefan Klima, Betty Bright and the Huberts. I have made lists of the book structures I plan to make, and of the things I need to consider (paper, ink, font [type and size], images, covers, binding, etc.) for each structure.

This was a useful and productive week. I feel calmer about it all now, confident that I can make work that will satisfy me, and hopefully have something to say to others as well.

October 2008. I have come this far and still sometimes feel a lack of confidence about my work. What initially seems like a good idea is haunted by insecurity. It is this working in isolation, I think. In any event, at the latest meeting with Marlene we talked about the work and how it has progressed. She questioned me on some points. I was able to answer her, she responded and offered suggestions/thoughts/ideas, and at the end I felt very positive about the possibilities. She always knows the right questions to ask, is able to grasp what it is I am doing and is able to help me sort through it all and get me back on track.

A new show opened at SWGC this week, including work by Michael Pittman. He gave a talk in the gallery for the students about life post-BFA. We had a chat afterwards about the Masters program at WIT, our work and so on and it was wonderful. (Working in isolation again – filling the gap.)

October 18, 2008. St. John's trip. A good workshop with Crispin Elstead of Barbarian Press (Vancouver) at the Wayzgoose in St. John's this morning. He brought many examples of the work he and Jan have done over the years –

varieties of binding, text, layout, etc. He talked about layout, type design, ink, placement of text and imagery, binding considerations, margins and reasons for, tipping in of images and so on. He emphasized that every consideration is given with the reader in mind ... space for thumbs when holding the book, leading (the space between the lines) and line length and splitting of words are all arranged to be restful to the eye. Choice of fonts also, and binding techniques so the reader is not fighting with the physical structure (it should open easily, the pages shouldn't fall out, etc.)

Crispin and Jan set high standards for their work, and it was an interesting talk for me to hear as I will be breaking most of their rules. Sometimes rules are broken unintentionally or unknowingly, but I will be conscious of their golden rules as I devise means to defy them.

At 1:00 I met with Peter and Anne Jordan who had come out from WIT. The timing for this visit was ideal. It is all coming together now. Peter confirmed approximate deadline dates for me, we talked about what I have done to date and what I need to do now. Anne went over the most recent draft of the writeup with me and offered good advice and direction.

I had brought along a portfolio of my maquettes and preliminary work, and showed these to Peter and Anne. It was wonderful having a new audience, whose specialty is not book arts, look at the pieces. Even though nothing is fully resolved and it is all still a work in progress, I felt that they were genuinely interested and curious, that they understood where I was going with the work, and could see the potential even beyond the MFA. This was an enormous boost - I was prepared for just about any response, and this was very positive and encouraging. It is important for the writeup to make sense and to show evidence



of research and so on, but as an artist it is most important for me that the work itself function as it should, and I think now that it will.

Late October, 2008. Bank Street Arts in Sheffield, England have used an image of my book in their advertising, which is also in the latest issue (# 45 – October/November 2008) of UEW Bristol's Book Arts Newsletter. Although I am not credited, it is nice to see it just the same. On October 17 I mailed a copy of "The Book of A" to a book arts exhibition in Lithuania, and hope it will have arrived before the deadline on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

I have a meeting with the school board this week about some short teaching possibilities - a full day in December and several days at the end of June.

October 30. I sat in on Matthew Hollett's Digital Editing class at Grenfell today because he was talking about applications in Adobe Illustrator, and I may need to use this program to produce an image for a polymer plate. There are lots of possibilities there for manipulation of text.

November 10. Another group discussion with Marlene and Jackie Barrett this week – we each showed current work and gave each other feedback. A good, productive session again.

Peter has suggested I concentrate on the writing now to move that along. This is working well, as it is difficult to write when I am making, and equally difficult to make when I am writing. Both of these activities are far enough along now that I think I can leave one to concentrate on the other without worrying about it all too much! I am still researching, but now just as things come to my attention that I feel I should check out.

I am enlarging portions of the Dotchon correspondence and of the photos, and isolating fragments. These may be used for layering text and image, using translucent paper allowing for subsequent layers to show through. Perhaps some imagery can be processed through the polymer plates when we get that process sorted out.

I also photographed the copy of the text printed on acetate. I hung the acetate in the window and the images show shadows of the text, text backwards, and text with the background showing through.

My plan is to make a series of books in response to the four letters written by W. H. Dotchon in the early 1930s. I will be thinking about how the finished works might be displayed as well. The only place I know for sure that I will be exhibiting is in the QEII library at Memorial University in St. John's, and I am not familiar with the space they have allocated for me. The pieces will be in library display cases at and will likely be inaccessible. I do not know how the display will affect the reception of the work.

I may also record myself reading the Dotchon letters (as if they were written to me and I was reading them for the first time). Perhaps I could cut up the tape and attach it to the book pages, or try again to get voice prints of the whole text and print these images with snippets of text here and there. New ways of interpreting, or of gaining knowledge/meaning. I will begin now on the final versions of artists' books for my exhibition.

In this chapter I have presented selections from my extensive reflexive journal which was written throughout the research and exploration period. These entries document my working and thought processes which preceded the

production of the final body of work. They also document my practical research, meetings with my studio supervisor and meetings and discussions held throughout the research period with my academic supervisor and with peers.

Images of my final book works can be found in Appendix “A” at the end of this document.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

In this final chapter I will reflect on what has been presented in this dissertation. I will address the research question and discuss the contribution my work makes to the field of book arts. I will also present recommendations for further research.

My research question asks whether artists' books provide the reader/viewer with information or knowledge even when the normal expectations of what a book might offer are not met. My review of the literature addressing various aspects of artists' books, along with literature related to conceptual art, text and language, reading, space and scale support this notion. An examination of books produced by other artists followed by my own completion of a body of book works suggests that the book is an expressive vehicle for the construction of new meaning. Artists' books frequently conform to the components of traditional books, but the reader/viewer's expectations of communication are challenged, requiring a new construction of meaning.

This dissertation begins with a look at the on-going debate surrounding a clear definition for artists' books. I would suggest that the lack of a clear definition has left the field open for artists and institutions to freely explore structures and concepts within the book arts medium, as indeed they have done.

Part of the debate surrounding a definition for artists' books grows out of a concern for the quality of work being produced. It is a tribute to those who recognize the artistic potential of artists' books that MFA programs have been developed, giving credence to the practice as well as study opportunities for book arts practitioners.

My research has examined the history of artists' involvement with books, as well as the literature addressing the unique qualities of contemporary artists' books. This investigation has provided a theoretical background which has informed my work throughout this project.

Artists' involvement with books in the Western world can be traced to medieval times when scribes painstakingly interpreted biblical texts to produce illuminated manuscripts. Examples of these works are still available for viewing in museums and libraries around the world, even as the tradition of calligraphy, illustration and illumination is still being carried out.

In the early twentieth century some artists worked for publishers, mostly as illustrators for deluxe editions of poetry and prose which were destined for a select audience. However, this era also saw the Russian avant-garde artists and the Italian Futurists and others embracing the book as a means of expression, frequently in response to political and social issues.

Artists' books gained in popularity with artists in and around the 1960s, when American artist Ed Ruscha produced his pivotal work titled *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* as a commercial, mass-produced object (Bright 2005, p. 118), and German artist Deiter Roth made his *Daily Mirror* to illustrate the complexities of communication. Their breaking with traditional art practices and materials opened the door for other artists to freely explore the book as an

artistic medium. The popularity of book arts has steadily increased in recent decades as artists around the world experiment with this medium.

My own investigation shows that the material, structural and conceptual considerations in this multi-disciplinary medium provide an intimate art form for many women practitioners. My own work of re-interpreting the Dotchon Letters will expand the discussion related to women artists who find themselves the custodians of family memorabilia and archives, and who have been inspired to use this material as a catalyst for artistic expression.

Like Dieter Roth, artists continue to use text in their work to raise issues related to language and communication. Xu Bing, Emily Artinian, Sam Winston and Ann Hamilton are four such artists, and their approaches have influenced my own work. Through exploring the artistic potential found in The Dotchon Letters I am raising an awareness of the complexities of language and communication, even when the text I am using is written in my native tongue.

My research has indicated that serious artists approach this medium with an acute awareness of theoretical issues and conceptual concerns. Artists also use a wide variety of materials and experimental structures in the realization of their work. The results of these explorations both delight and challenge the reader/viewer as they contemplate ways to interpret, or 'read' these new books.

As well as manipulating text, artists consider the function of scale, the haptic qualities of materials and an awareness of the relationship between the book and the body. Through using books in a non-traditional format, artists provide opportunities for the reader/viewer of their work to gain knowledge and meaning in unexpected ways. This new knowledge is of materials, structure and

content. As Kathan Brown suggests (p. 10 above) this art requires engagement on the part of the viewer to “get the full impact”.

My examination of other artists’ work, combined with a study of theoretical and practical concerns, has enabled me to produce a body of work that raises issues about the complexities of communication and how we access information. Through observation of the elements of structure, sequencing and time, patterning, colour, materials, text and image, my work presents a new reading experience. Ultimately the meaning may be a surprise as the reader/viewer constructs a new way of reading through an examination of the components of the book.

My practical training in letterpress and polymer plate production has also informed my response to the use of text in my art. The aesthetics associated with these methods, as well as those of digital technologies, have influenced my text-related choices even when evidence of these techniques is not present. My increased knowledge of bookbinding has supported my structure-related and presentation decisions.

This investigation of theory and practice related to artists’ books has provided me with an increased awareness of the artistic possibilities in this medium. It has also provided me with new knowledge and skills to share with my community of artists in Newfoundland, a community with a strong literary background but where few are engaged in books arts practice.

While my study has focused on the aspects of artists’ books that provide an experience for the reader/viewer unlike that offered by traditional books, it has been limited to the qualities of these books as they relate to tactility, intimacy, scale and display. It considers the roles of text and narrative, text as

image, time and sequence, privacy and exclusion, and the contribution of women artists. The work addresses issues of the complexities of communication.

My study did not include an in-depth exploration of the many binding and construction possibilities open to book artists, the sculptural potential for artists' books nor the role of altered books. I have not addressed the history of typography and its relationship to the production of artists' books. This study also does not address the commercial issues related to artists' books. It has not explored the significant issues surrounding books with no text, such as those produced by artist Bruno Munari mentioned in this paper. I would suggest that there are many opportunities for further investigations in these and other thematic-specific aspects of the book arts. Artists' books offer a rich and complex arena for study; Susan Stewart offers this opinion:

The metaphors of the book are metaphors of containment, of exteriority and interiority, of surface and depth, of covering and exposure, of taking apart and putting together (Stewart 2007, p.37).

And further,

Once the book is considered on the plane of its significance, it threatens infinity (ibid).



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## **Appendix “A”**

### **Plates**

Plates 1 - 16 Book works completed by Shirley Greer for this study.

Plates 17 - 21 Book works constructed by Shirley Greer as part of the research.

Plates 22 - 28 Images of book works by various other artists cited in this dissertation.



Plate 1a. Shirley Greer, *Compendium I*, 2009. 46cm. x 8cm. x 1 cm. Lucite, Japanese sekishu paper, frosted mylar, decorative paper, glue, bookbinding thread, screenprinted text. Japanese binding. One-off book.





Plate 1b. Shirley Greer, *Compendium I*, 2009. (Detail).

(Overleaf A4) Plate 1c. Shirley Greer, *Compendium I*, 2009. (Standing, open view).



Handwritten text at the top of the structure, including the word "COMPENDIUM" and other illegible characters.

COMPENDIUM  
of words  
used  
in a letter  
dated  
October 2nd  
1831  
from  
W.H.D.  
to  
Miss  
E.H.

COMPENDIUM



Plate 2a. Shirley Greer, *Compendium II*, 2009. 59 ½ cm. x 9cm. x 1.27 cm (open).  
Leather, bookbinding thread, button, Japanese sekishu paper, screenprinted text.  
Tacket binding One-off book.



Plate 2b. Shirley Greer, *Compendium II*, 2009. (Interior detail).





Plate 3a. Shirley Greer, *Compendium III*, 2009. 50cm x 8.3cm x 1.27cm (open). Japanese sekishu paper, leather, raffia, bookbinding thread, screenprinted text. One-off book.

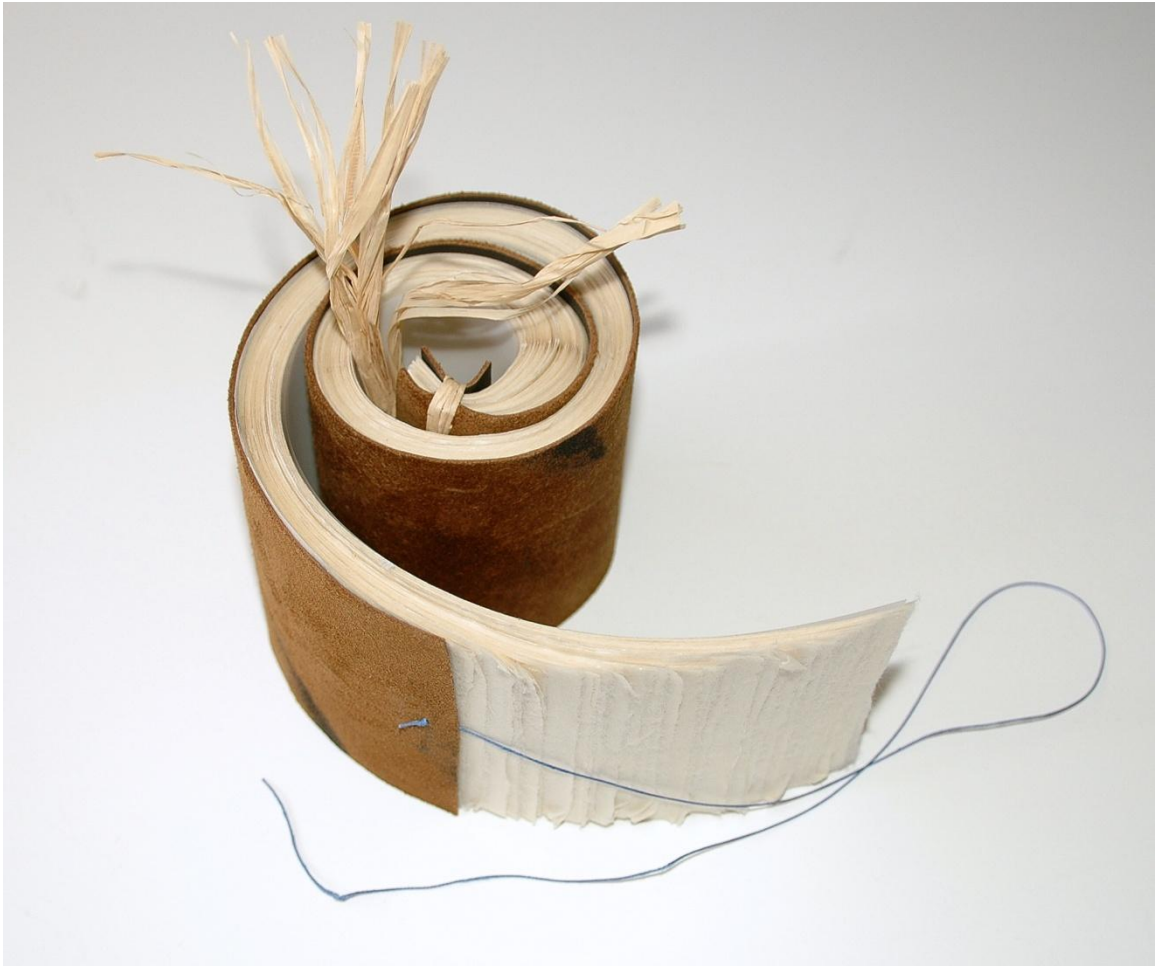


Plate 3b. Shirley Greer, *Compendium III*, 2009. (Partially open).

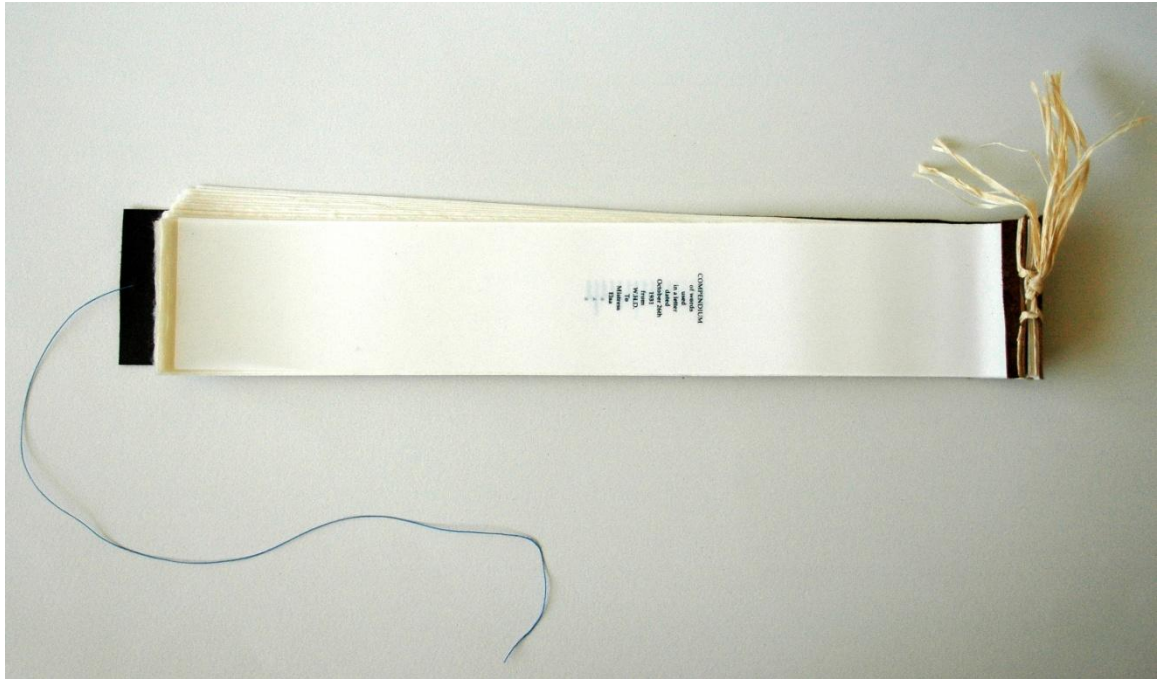


Plate 3c. Shirley Greer, *Compendium III*, 2009. (Open view).

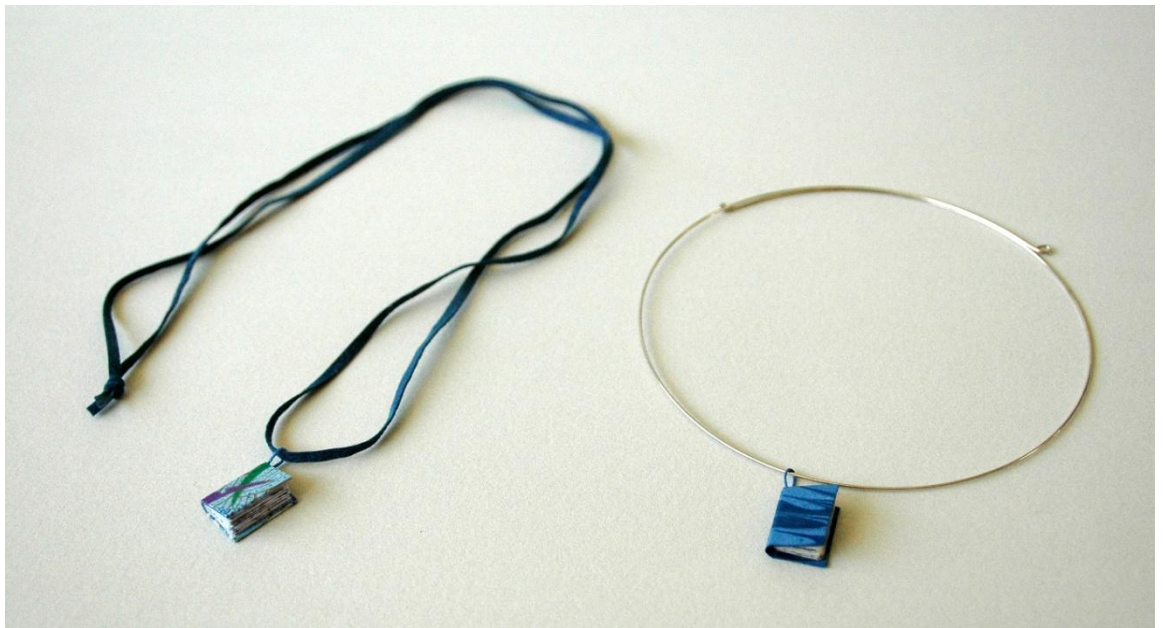


Plate 4. Shirley Greer, *Talisman I*, 2009. 1.8cm x 1.27cm x .3cm. Decorative paper, inkjet-printed text on Japanese paper, thread, glue; leather cord. *Talisman II*. 1.8cm x 1.27cm x .3cm. Decorative paper, inkjet-printed text on Kozo, thread, glue; metal ring. Open edition.



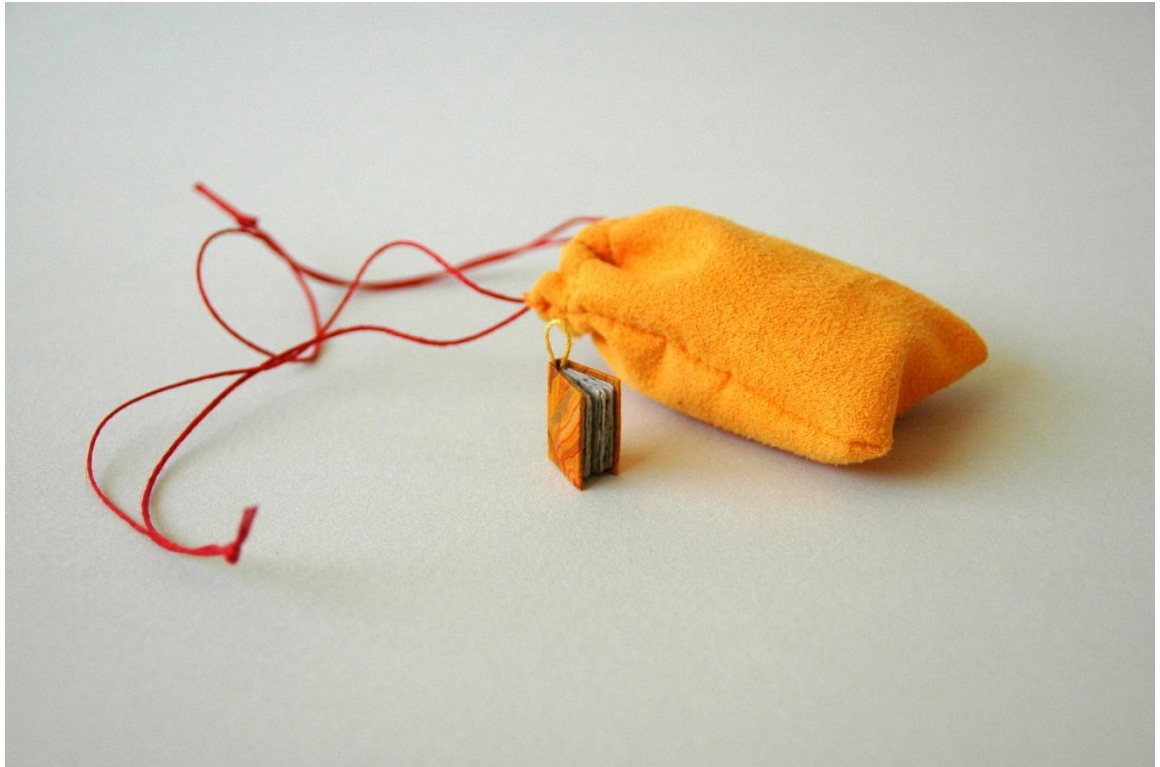


Plate 5. Shirley Greer, *Talisman III*, 2009. Book 1.8cm x 1.27cm x .3cm. Decorative paper, thread, glue, text printed on Kozo. Pouch 7.6 cm x 5cm. Imitation suede, bookbinding thread. Open edition.



Plate 6a. Shirley Greer, *Pocket Library*, 2009. Case 5cm x 23cm x 2.5cm. Books 1.8cm x 1.27cm x .3cm. Wooden pencil case, paper, glue, string. One-off object.



Plate 6b. Shirley Greer, *Pocket Library*, 2009. (Detail).

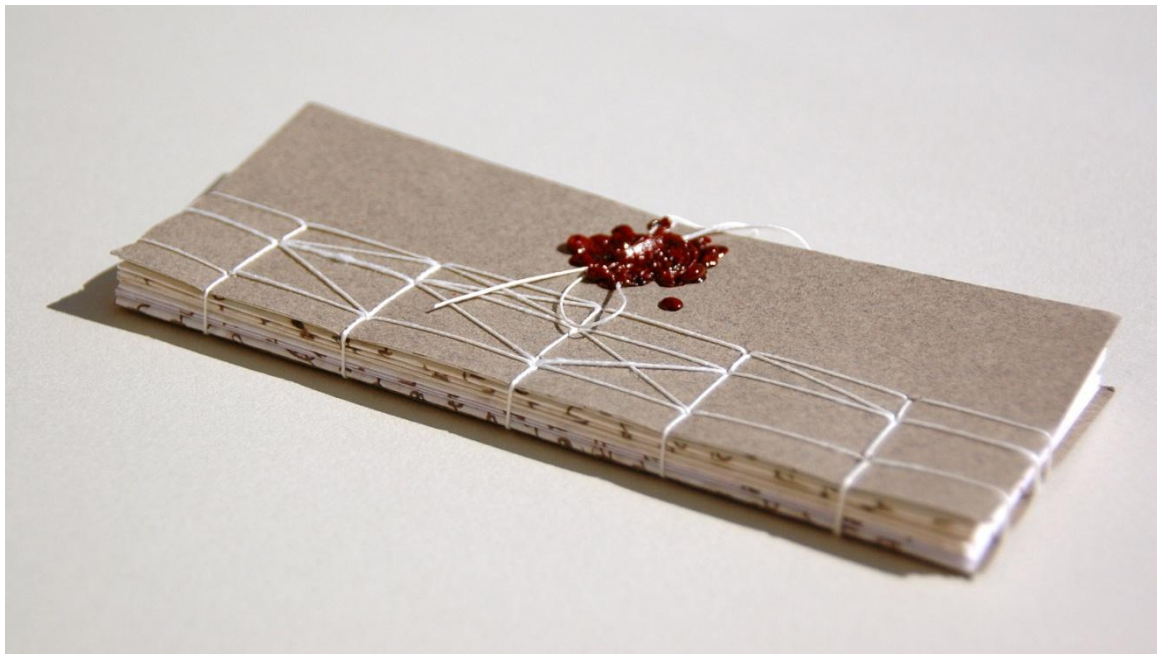


Plate 7. Shirley Greer, *Sealed Tender*, 2009. 5.4cm x 14cm x .6 cm. Paper, string, sealing wax, inkjet-printed text on linen paper. 5.4cm x 14cm x 1cm. Edition of 5 copies.

(Overleaf A11) Plate 8a. Shirley Greer, *Rev. H. D.*, 2009. 23cm. x 10.5cm x 1cm. Book cloth, book board, tyvek, glue, feather and mixed media. Folio construction. Varied edition of 5 copies.







Plate 8b. Shirley Greer, *Rev. H. D.*, 2009. (Interior view).



Plate 9a. Shirley Greer, *Dear Mistress Elsa*, 2009. 14.5cm x 19cm x 1.1cm. Frosted mylar, tyvek, Somerset Satin paper, string, button, ink, screenprinting, letterpress printing. Edition of 5 copies.



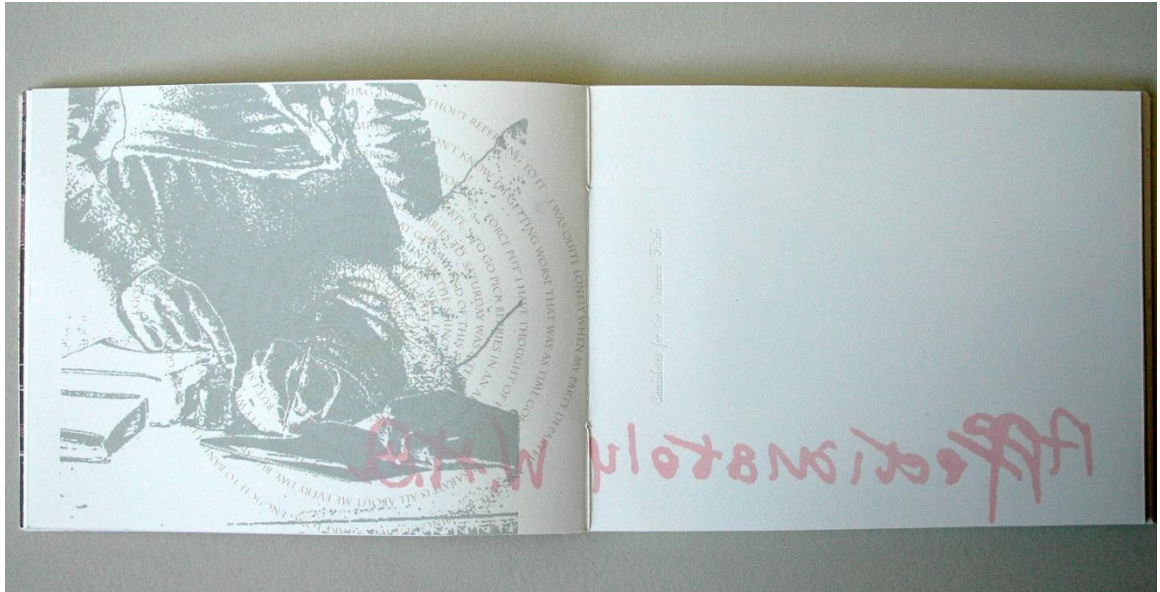


Plate 9b. Shirley Greer, *Dear Mistress Elsa*, 2009. (Detail - interior.)

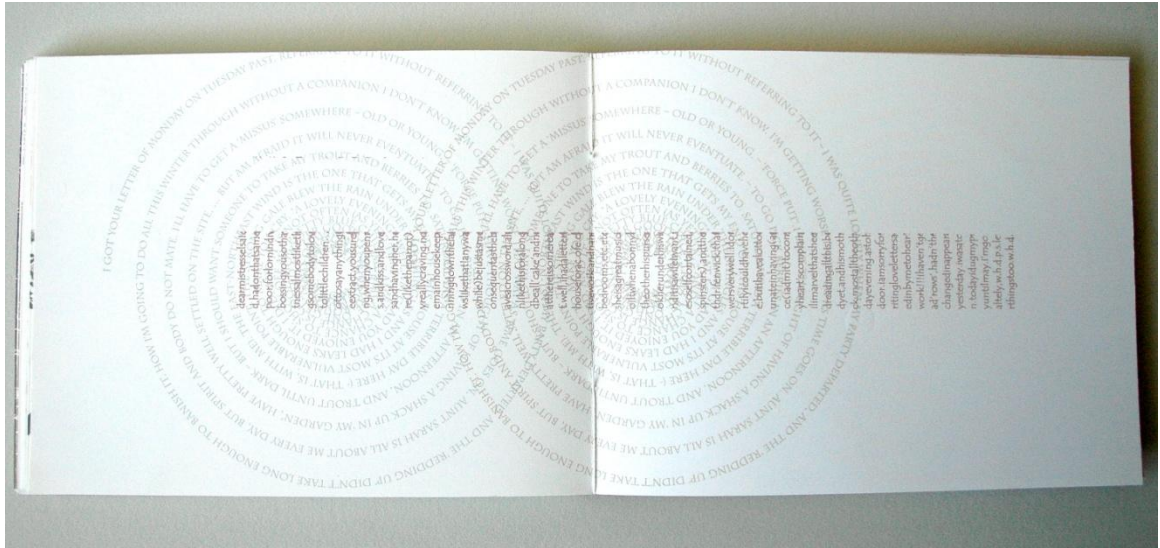


Plate 9c. Shirley Greer, *Dear Mistress Elsa*, 2009. (Detail, interior)

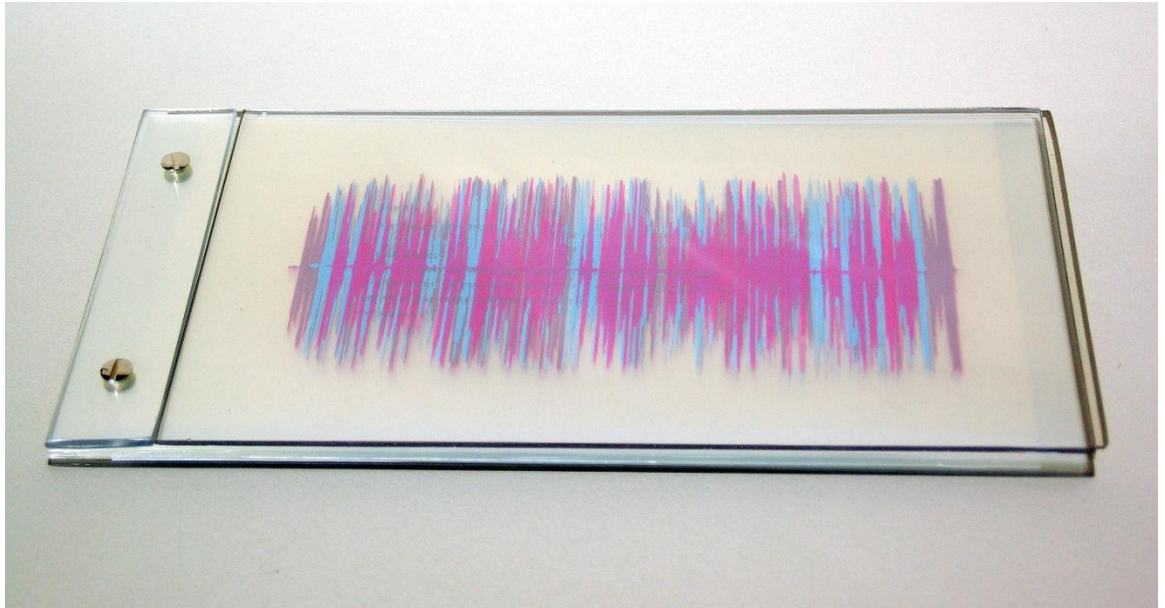


Plate 10a. Shirley Greer, *Dear Folks*, 2009. 15.24 cm. x 30cm. x 1.27cm. Acetate, lexan, metal post and screw binding, screenprinting ink. One-off object.

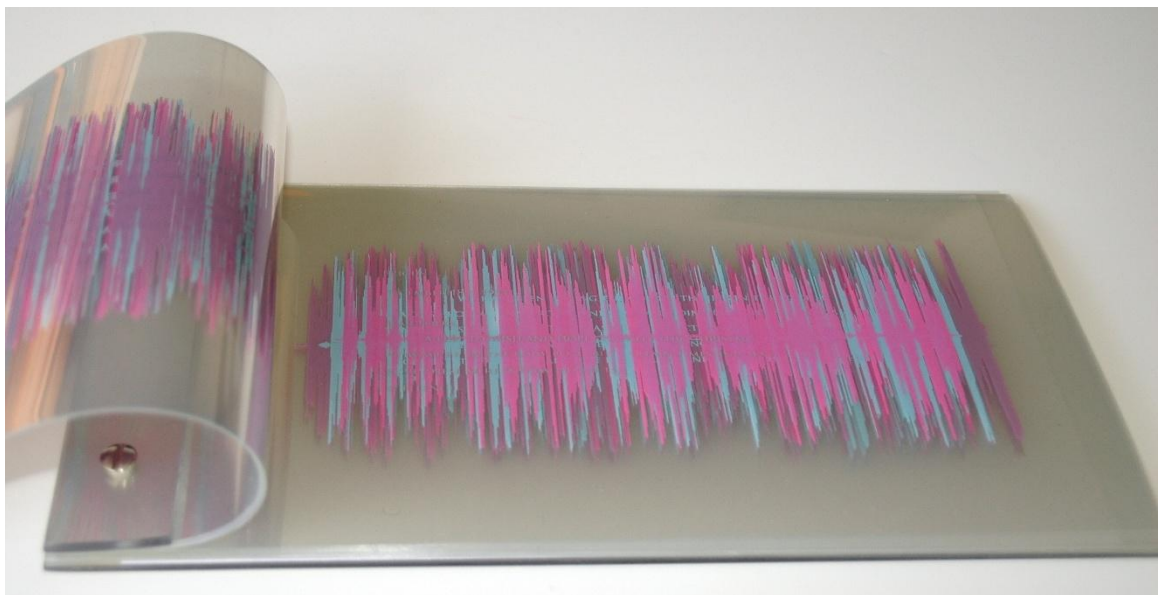


Plate 10b. Shirley Greer, *Dear Folks*, 2009. (Detail - interior)



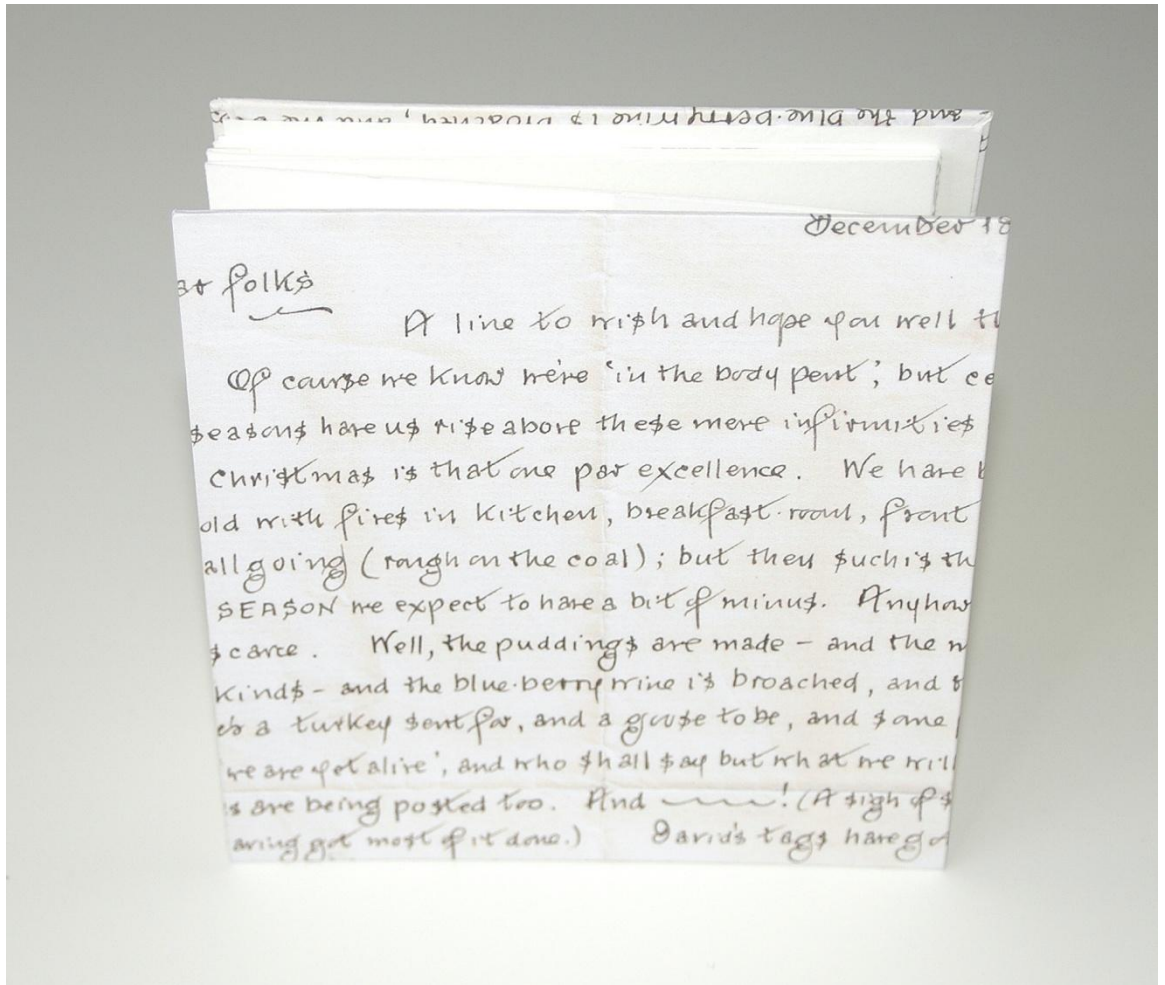


Plate 11a. Shirley Greer, *Dear Folks II – Decoder*, 2009. 12.7cm x 12.7cm x .95cm. Paper, book board, glue, screenprinting ink on Arches 88 paper. Edition of 5 copies.

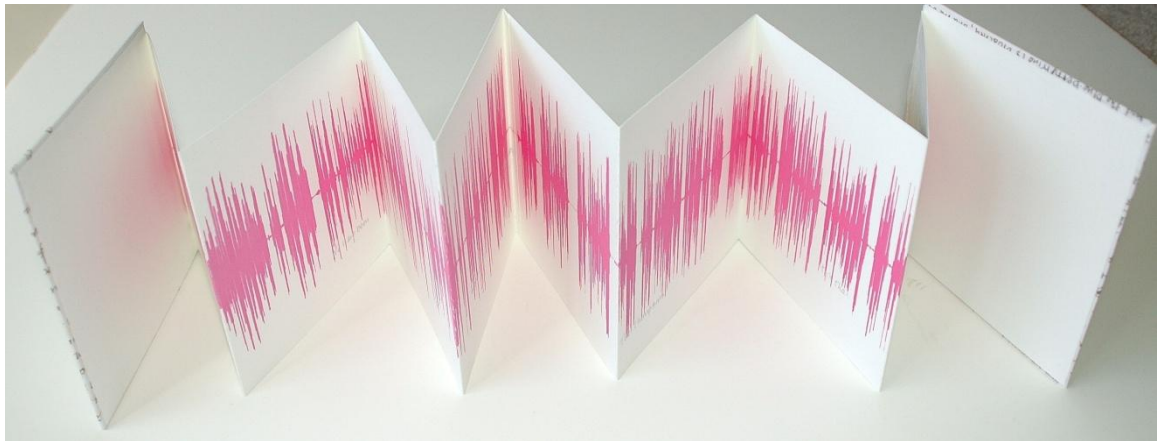


Plate 11b. Shirley Greer, *Dear Folks II – Decoder*, 2009. (Interior view.) 120.3cm open.

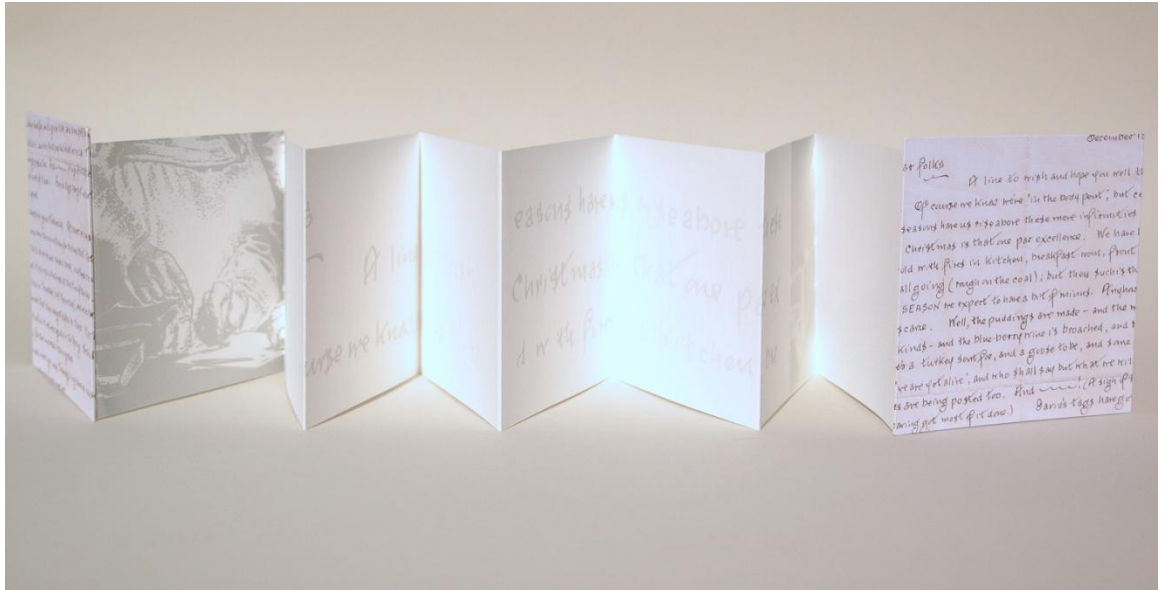


Plate 11c. Shirley Greer, *Dear Folks II - Decoder*, 2009. (Reverse interior view.)

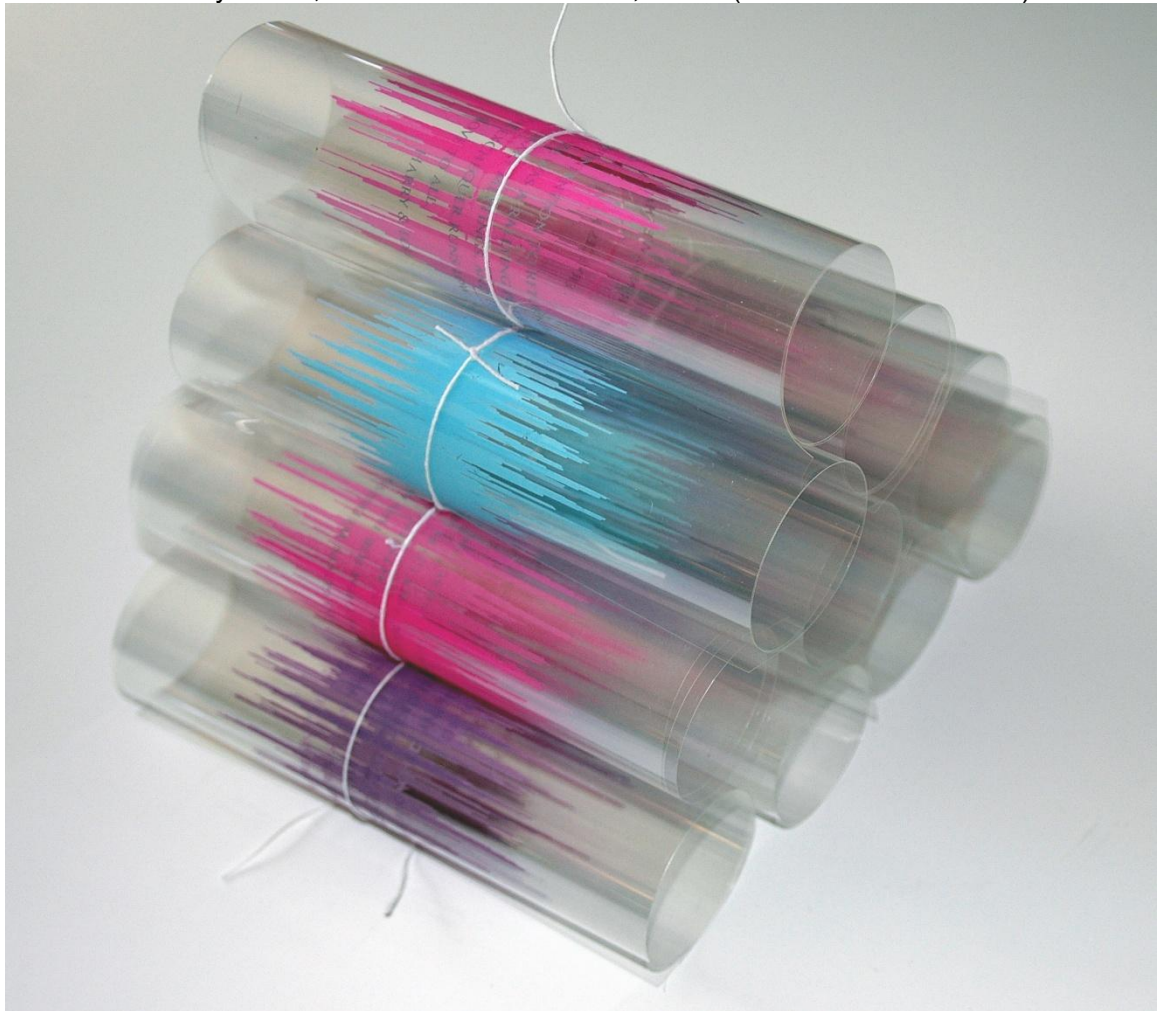


Plate 12. Shirley Greer, *Dear Folks III - Volume*, 2009. Individual pages 15.24cm x 3.8cm. Installation size variable. Silkscreen ink on clear mylar, bookbinding thread. Open edition.



Plate 13a. Shirley Greer, *I'm Afraid*, 2009. 10.25 cm. x 10.25 cm. x .9 cm. (Closed). Paper, frosted mylar, leather, thread, glue, bookboard, decorative paper, wire. Varied edition of 3 copies.

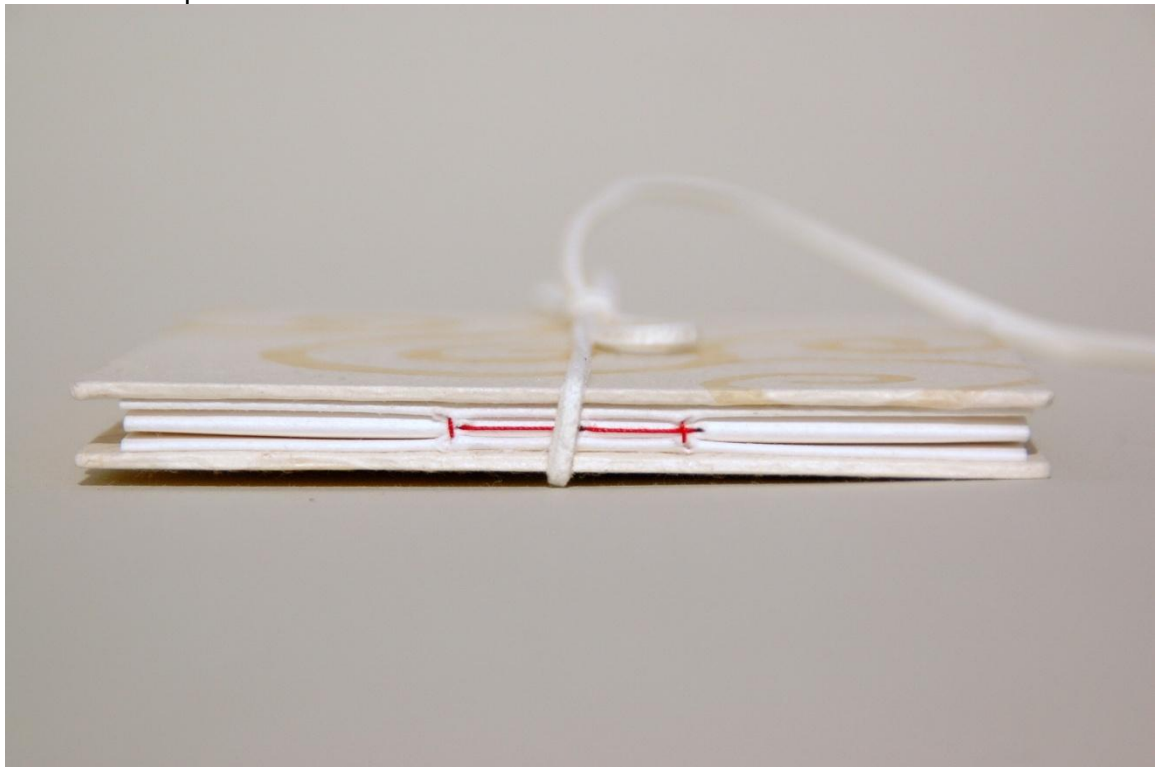


Plate 13b. Shirley Greer, *I'm Afraid*, 2009. (Detail - binding).



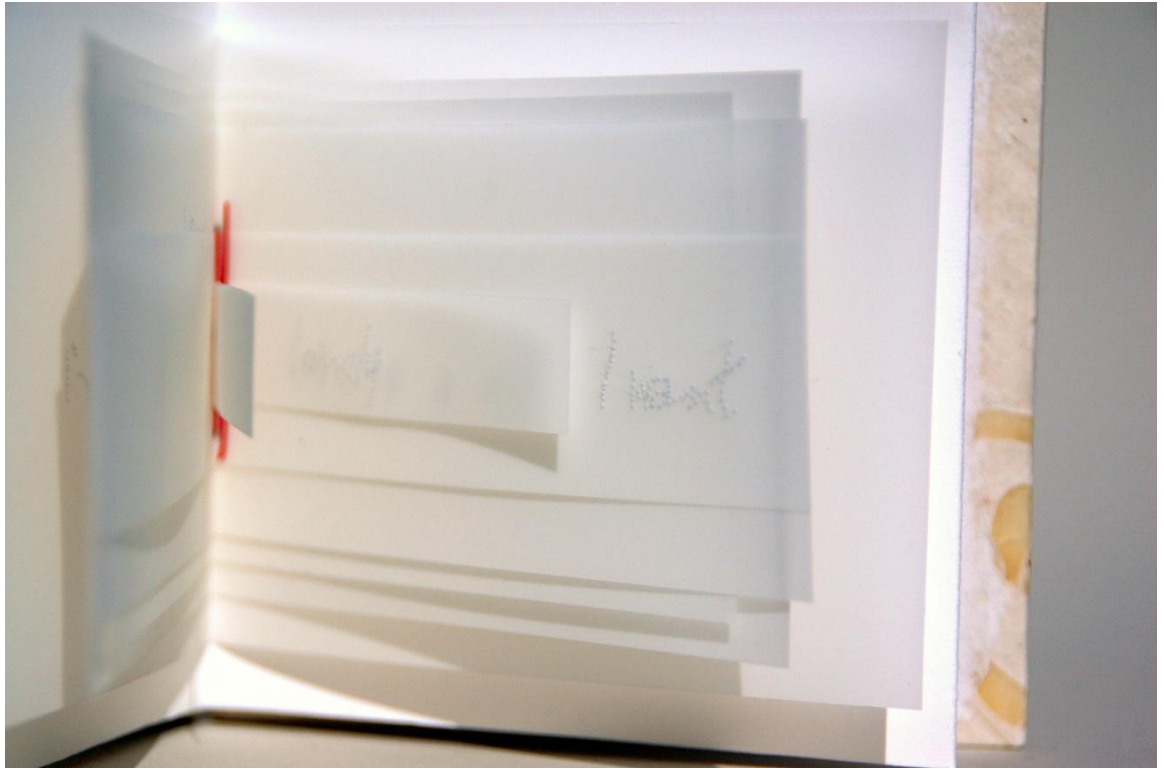


Plate 13c. Shirley Greer, *I'm Afraid*, 2009. (Detail - inside view).



Plate 14a. Shirley Greer, *Chronicles*, 2009. Cardboard box, photograph, silkscreen and digitally-printed scanned text, tape, plastic audio tape reel. Box 13.2 cm x 13.2 cm x 2 cm. Edition of 5 copies.





Plate 14b. Shirley Greer, *Chronicles*, 2009. (Outside view, box open).



Plate 14c. Shirley Greer, *Chronicles*, 2009. (Inside view showing text on reel).

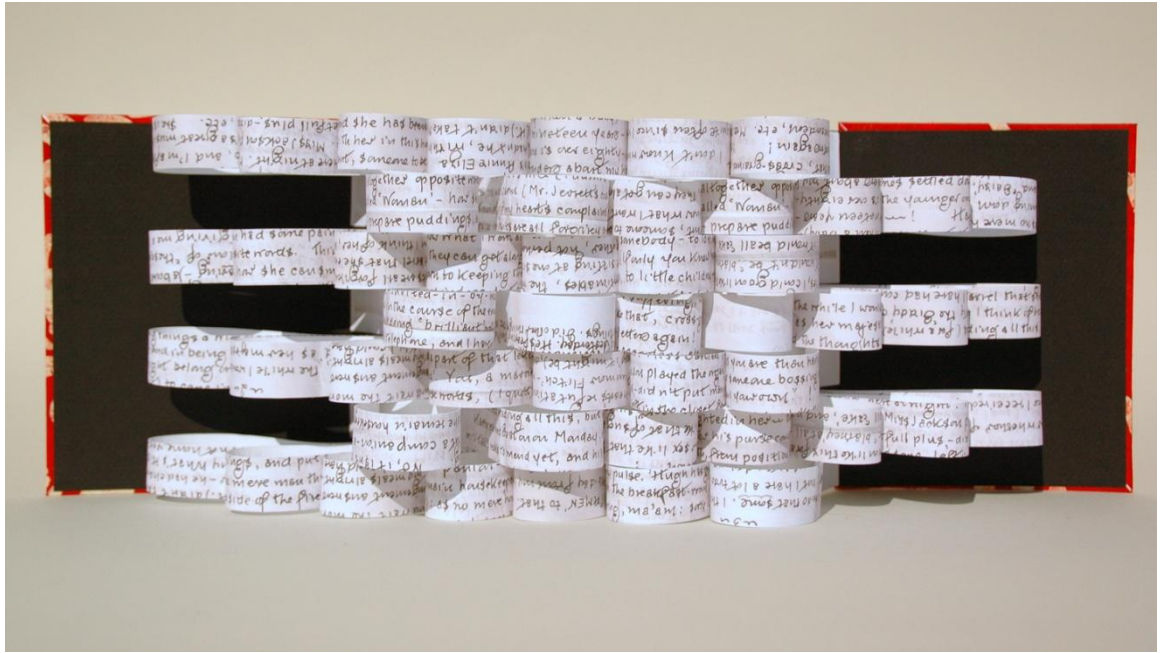


Plate 15a. Shirley Greer, *Gossip*, 2009. (Front view). 14cm x 44cm x 9cm (open). Bookbinding board, paper, glue, tape; digital inkjet printing. Edition of 10 copies.

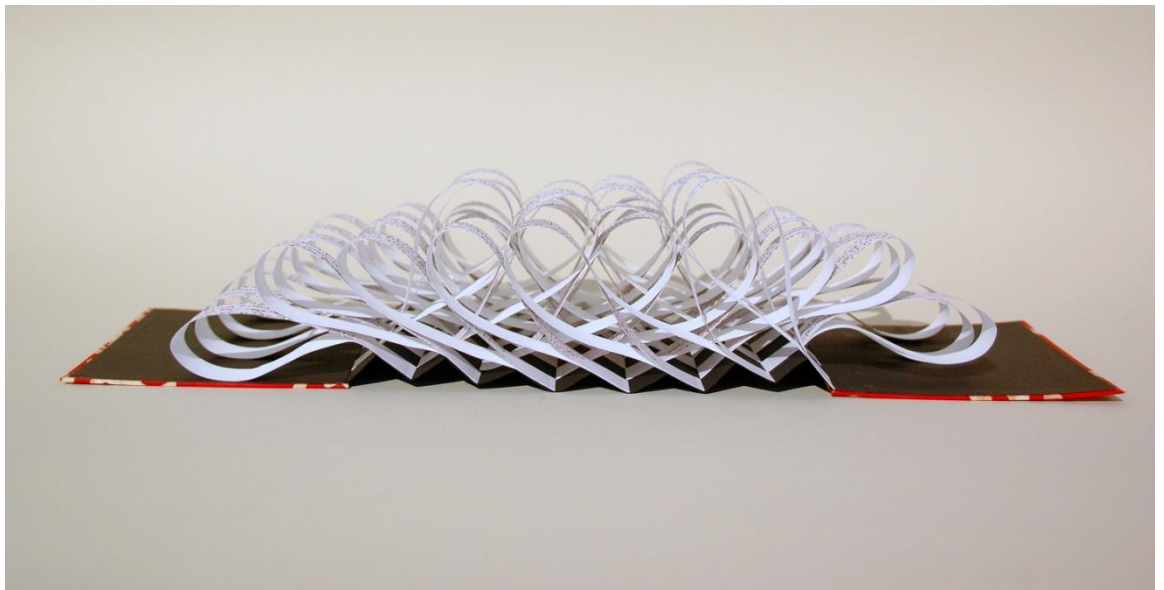


Plate 15b. Shirley Greer, *Gossip*, 2009. (Side view).



Plate 16. Shirley Greer, *Four Voices, Three Letters and the Sea*, 2009. Case 15.5 cm x 15cm. Audio book – CD Rom, paper, digitally-produced laser-printed label. Edition of 6 copies.

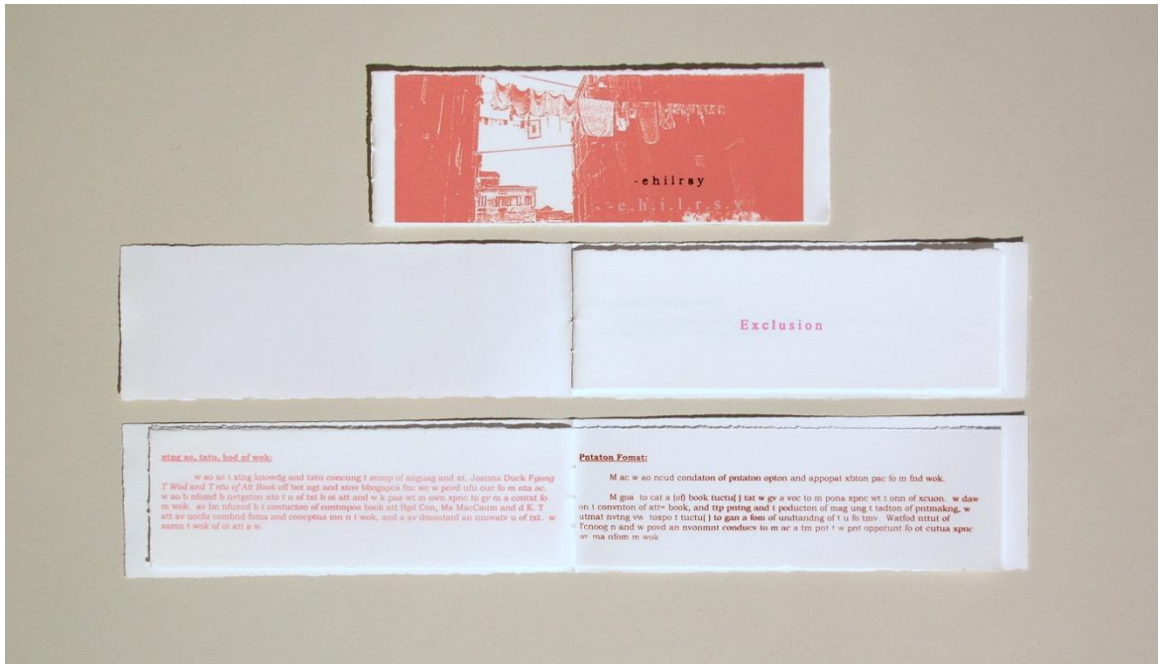


Plate 17a. Shirley Greer, *Exclusion*, 2007. 6.35cm x 19cm x .3cm. Paper, thread, screenprinting ink.



Plate 17b. Shirley Greer, *Isolation*, 2007. 6.35cm x 19cm x .3cm. Paper, thread, screenprinting ink.





Plate 18. Shirley Greer, *The book of A*, 2008. 17.8cm x 12.7cm x .93cm. Decorative paper, book board, linen tapes, bookbinding thread, screenprinted and embossed text on Somerset satin paper.



Plate 19. Shirley Greer, *Geography lesson*, 2008. 18.6cm x 13.3 cm x 1cm. Mat board, glue, screenprinted text and images on Somerset paper, mixed media.

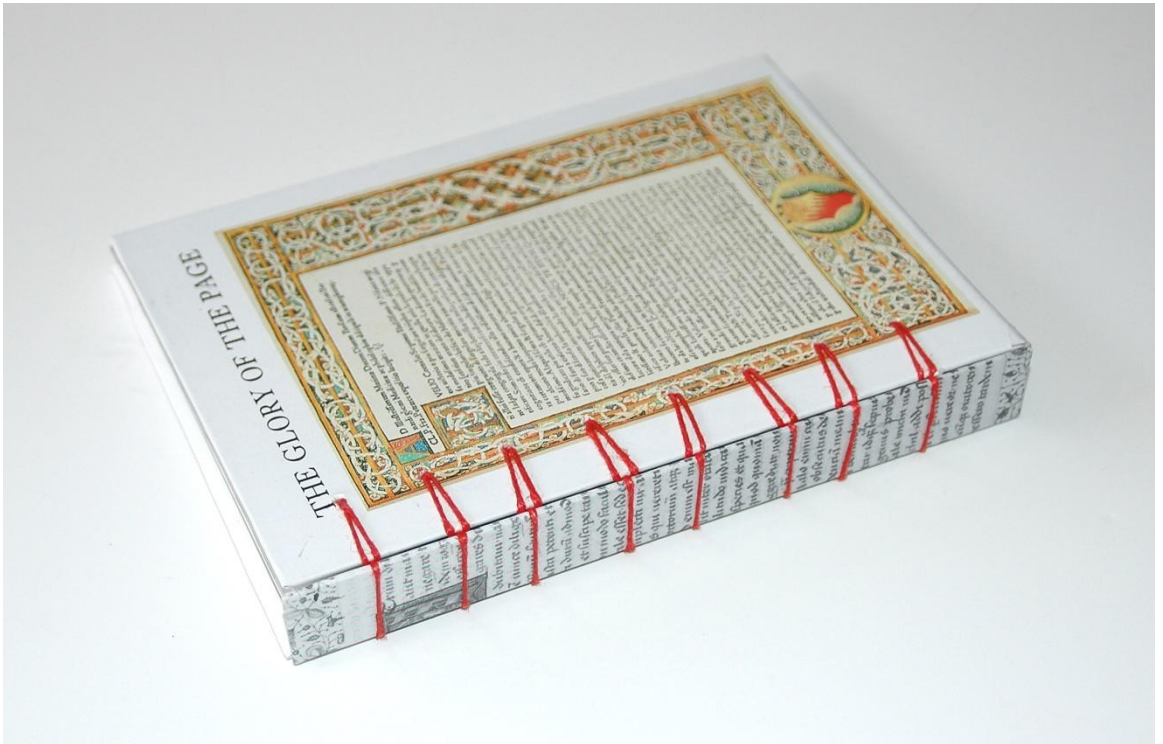


Plate 20. Shirley Greer, *The glory of the page*, 2008. (Secret Belgian bookbinding). 14.6cm x 10cm x 2cm. Mat board, bookbinding thread, pre-existing book pages.



Plate 21. Shirley Greer, *CSB hidden*, 2008. 14.3cm x 12.3cm x 1.7cm. (Cross-structure binding). Mi-Teintes paper, bookbinding thread, blank pages (Somerset paper).



Plate 22. Xu Bing, 1987. *Book from the sky*.

(Overleaf A26) Plate 23. Sam Winston, 2004. *Folded dictionary*.







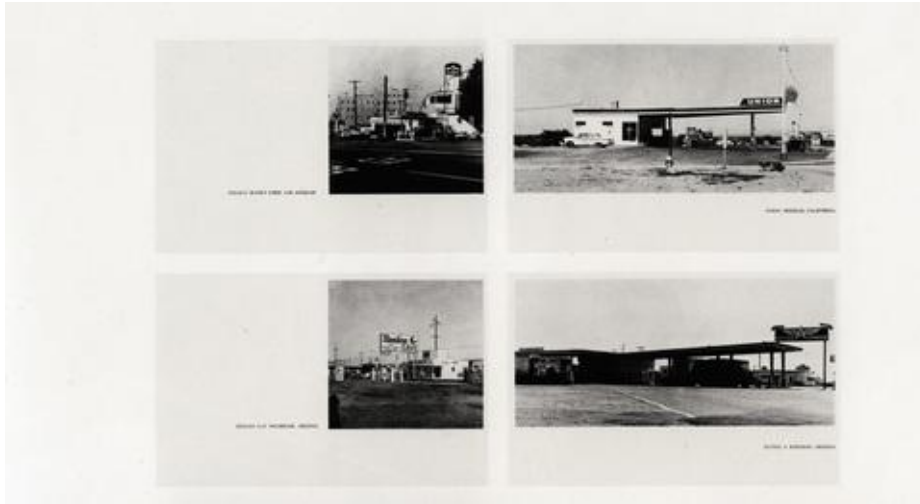


Plate 24. Ed Ruscha, 1967. *Twenty-six gasoline stations.*



Plate 25. Dieter Roth, 1961. *The daily mirror.*



Plate 26. Emily Artinian, 2005. *From Ararat to Angeltown.*



Plate 27. Scott McCarney, 2005. *Think Seoul.*



Plate 28. Ann Hamilton, 1992. (Untitled).