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Page on Page – an overview of Contemporary British and Irish Artists' Books

There are many artists working with the book format in the UK and Ireland. *Page on Page* will discuss some of the concepts and formats of contemporary, British and Irish artist's book production, and some sources for further information on artists' books in the UK and Ireland.

Contemporary artists' publishing covers a range of production methods from digital print, photographic and traditionally produced artists' books, to zines, handmade and unique books, all of which I hope you will consider as both beautiful and useful!

Handmade and unique artists' books, including the Regenerator project:

Steve McPherson is a photographer, installation and book artist. He takes up to three years to complete his visual books, using a variety of hand-worked media, and often spending up to three months on a single page of hand stitching, photographs, found objects, lettering and drawings. These two images are from *bye bye bird*, a book in progress, and *Occasional Stranger Diary*, completed in 2001. He is also working at present on a unique book for our Regenerator project, which took discarded library books to be made into artists' books (www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/regen1.htm). McPherson is reworking Elias Canetti's *Auto Da Fe*, which will be kindly donated to our library collection by him, on completion (www.stevemcpherson.co.uk).

The Regenerator project involved 76 artists from the UK, Ireland, Australia, Germany, USA, Denmark, Norway and South Africa. Our library had a selection of books from hardback to paperback, novels, exhibition catalogues and manuals, mostly damaged, with missing covers or pages. Each artist selected a book from the discarded stock, and made an artwork with it, which was then returned for archiving and photographing before an exhibition and book swap (www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/regen1.htm). These are some of the pieces made from the books:

The Scottish artist Jane Hyslop worked with a catalogue: *Selected Scottish Drawings*, published by the National Gallery of Scotland.

Drawing is a crucial element in her own practice so this book was chosen to relate to drawings, made in pen and ink of wild plants, which she explains: "interest me and symbolise nature's power and ability to reclaim and eventually obliterate what human activity creates. This seemed an appropriate theme to pursue as I reclaimed the pages and changed the images below as I drew... Here I am working mainly across text which describes drawings, and it is fascinating how one reads parts of the text as one draws. This influences the line and creates different relationships in another interesting way."

Hyslop also used the pages from her altered book to create a facsimile version "where the idea of regeneration is explored through the interplay of fresh drawings of plants collected in derelict sites over reproductions of master drawings." This was digitally printed onto book papers in an edition of 100.

Siobhan Martin selected: *Dai Country*, Short stories by Alun Richards. The page sequence was kept, as integral to this book of short stories. She explains: "Each story seemed to relate to the next and there seemed to be threads that linked the stories together. I wanted to somehow still keep the message of the book but to alter it somehow. I decided to précis each story in three words or less and then stuck the pages of the individual stories together". The finished piece has become a sculptural work, which reflects shadows and light through the cut texts.

Deirdre McGrath worked with a ruined paperback of *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri, to create *Wreath for a Spirit-Child*. She turned the book into a creative piece as a memorial story of the spirit child, who exists between two worlds of joy and grief. The box echoes

the drawers full of items her own mother had saved from her childhood years: “a prayer book and various fragile papery flowers, which had lain wrapped up for over 30 years. I chose to dismember the book and recreate it as a *wreath for a Spirit-child* – fragile, fantastical blooms, the wreath a symbol of both grief and celebration, of eternity and continuation after death. As well as using the original book’s pages, chosen passages of text were scanned and reprinted on different papers. The wreath is placed in a tissue lined box as if tucked away like a half-forgotten memory.”

Kristine Steele turned an old catalogue - *Dutch and Flemish 16th and 17th Century Paintings from the Shipley Collection*, into *Pomona’s Crown*. Inspired by “two brightly coloured apples in the painting *The Temptation of Adam and Eve* on the cover of the book. Instead of the biblical Eve, I wanted Eve to become the image of Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit trees, with her own paper crown garland of apples.”

This reworked book focuses on Steele’s interest in the origin of the customs which shape our present traditions. The pages were separated, then cut page-by-page into the apple shape and folded to expand into a three-dimensional piece.

Some examples of hand printed, letterpress and handmade books:

Christine Tacq’s *Sleepwalking Through Trees* takes texts from Blake, Patten, Herbert, Jonson, Drouet and Atwood, printed as a series of narratives by the artist. This is a collection of eight small format books produced using relief print, letterpress and digital print on fine papers.

Vindication; Escape from the endless sleepover also by Christine Tacq uses texts from samplers (from the Dew collection) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Again, this was a combination of letterpress and relief print with chine colléd strips of laser-printed text on Arches paper with moving parts.

Harrington&Squires is a small private press, founded in 2002 by the designer/typographers Chrissie Charlton and Vicky Fullick. They specialise in small format, hand printed, limited editions (www.harringtonandsquires.co.uk).

Aide Memoire was printed using letterpress and inkjet print, as a series of memory aid lists covering subjects from Girl groups in the 60s, to characters in *The Archers*.

The Golden Key is a reworked tale from the Brothers Grimm, letterpress printed and foil blocked, with the paper worked into using a variety of tools, in order to illustrate a story through text and texture.

Otto’s artists’ books deal with “mythologies in contemporary culture, such as consumerism, the work-ethic and self-destruction” (www.ottobooks.co.uk). His books are always self-produced; screen-printed, ink-jet printed, or photocopied. He has been working as a book artist/author since he graduated from his MA in Illustration and Screenprint from Kingston University in 1996.

Journey to the Centre, a collaboration between Otto and Katherina Manolessou, is a variation on Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, screenprinted by hand in an edition of 100.

Return of the Crayfish, is Otto’s most recent book, depicting a giant crayfish ghost attacking the City of London in the style of 70s disaster movies. This book has been beautifully screenprinted by hand in three colours plus gold, in an edition of 100.

Tracey Bush works with found materials, recycling by hand, meticulously cutting old papers, maps and packaging to form books and sculptural works. Her books explore the natural environment, from the surroundings of the River Thames, to British native flowers, butterflies and moths. Her most recent artist’s book *Nine Wild Plants* is a selected

compilation of responses from the public to the question “Which nine wild plants could you confidently identify?” (www.cga.org.uk/traceybush)

Andi McGarry has been producing handmade artists’ books in Ireland for many years. Texts and images are hand rendered in Indian ink, then immersed into trays of marbling inks, so each book within any of his editions becomes unique (www.geocities.com/sunmoonstarspress).

Lucy May Schofield publishes her own books in both limited and large editions and multiple works (www.lucymayschofield.co.uk) Her books are based on the themes of love, secrets and romance. *Yearning* is a series of letters and images charting the passionate beginning of a relationship, *Loveless* is a series of text and image observations on the later decline and end of that same relationship.

Colin Sackett is an established artist/typographer whose work encompasses raw source materials as diverse as book indexes, maps, watercress labels and birdsong, yet all are concerned with the analysis and reading of the landscape. Sackett has published his own artists’ books since the 1980s and collaborated with Ian Hamilton Finlay, Andy Goldsworthy, Paul Etienne Lincoln and Richard Long amongst others. His website (www.colinsackett.co.uk) contains a wealth of information on his published works, with related writings and bibliography.

Digital Print and Artists’ books:

Since the mid 80s, more and more artists have been working with desktop publishing programmes to publish their own limited edition books. Further developments in technology have brought about the availability of quality archival inks and coated papers specifically produced for bookmaking.

Wide-format print has been absorbed into fine art printmaking more recently, and artists have found this a significant aid for making larger-scale books. Here are some examples of books produced using digital and wide-format print techniques.

Helen Douglas’ *Swan Songs with damselflies*, was published by Weproductions in an edition of 30 in 2006. Douglas has worked with the book format since the early 70s, publishing in collaboration with Telfer Stokes under the Weproductions imprint from 1974-2004, where she lives on the Scottish Borders. Her books are explorations of nature, landscape and place (www.weproductions.com).

Swan Songs is a contemplative exploration of a loch and its inhabitants, with 86 pages unfolding to over two metres in length. Douglas prints her books on her own offset litho press, and more recently on a wide-format printer. Her experiments with digital print have resulted in larger format books such as *Swan Songs with damselflies*, produced in her own studio.

Susan Johanknecht’s *Subsequent drainage on folding rocks* (2004) considers the implications both above and below the surface of landscapes where nuclear waste has been dumped, altering the earth from underneath. The book is viewed alongside a CD ROM, which demonstrates the difficulties of containment and possible leakage through a series of diagrams. As the artist states: “Nuclear waste is reprocessed... then buried where it will be toxic for thousands of years, perhaps beyond future memory, where it could conceivably be dug up in the future as fossils from the past...The images are to be read as visual strata; draining, toxic, under-landscapes.”

Homeless People by Tom Sowden is one of his handmade, digital print editions, produced in tribute to Ed Ruscha’s documentary style of artists’ books such as *Twentysix Gasolene Stations*. Sowden’s work is also based on the ‘non-place’, the unidentifiable transient site we find ourselves in when visiting the supermarket, airport, bus or train station. *Homeless*

People references Ruscha's typographic cover design and format, but shows Sowden's own photographic series of abandoned supermarket trolleys, far removed from their natural habitat into the countryside, river or hedge.

Kafka's Doll is a new publication from EMH Arts/Eagle Gallery, a collaborative book by Paul Coldwell and Anthony Rudolf (www.emmahilleagle.com). The book is based on a story where Franz Kafka assumes the identity of a missing doll, writing letters to the child who misses it. The digital images by Coldwell are of simple objects such as a letter rack, layered over photographic images and maps of constellations. Like "dot-to-dot drawings", they remind us of the child's loss, and the imagination used by Kafka to keep her memory of the doll alive.

Coldwell's digital printmaking also formed part of our first Internet-based, publishing project for artists' books, in 2003; *The History Book That Never Was*. For this project, twenty-seven artists who work with books were invited to contribute an artwork as a visual description of a book that had never existed. The premise was for the artists to describe its essence and any historical impact it would have made if it had existed, to form a new free-download artist's book.

Each artist was asked to use only one sheet of A4 sized paper to depict their imaginary book. The events described had to be fictitious, although they could be based on real aspects of history that the artist cared to depict from an alternative perspective.

The pages were loaded onto our website as a free download gallery of artworks to print out and make into an artist's book. The artists' contributions ranged from descriptions of ancient mythical gardens and architecture, to the discovery of lost publications by famous historical characters, or political current affairs.

The onset of the Iraq crisis during the project in early 2003 influenced some of the contributing artists to imagine their own versions of current and past political situations:

Fixing Things; A Memoir of World Revolution by Marshall Weber, has a plot worthy of Jack Bauer from the television series 24. Colonel Bradford Devol leads the assassination team that has despatched both Yasser Arafat and Tony Blair before going 'native' and returning to the USA for a campaign of "fixing things" (the term used by special forces when covering up mistakes). In Weber's text, the year 2004 uncovers a worldwide, war crimes conspiracy and sees the unsolved disappearance of the Bush family.

These pages are designed to be viewed online with the option to select, print and collate pages for your own copy of *The History Book that Never Was*. Print instructions are given at the top of the online gallery (at www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/nevergal.htm).

Artists' zines:

Zines allow anyone to publish images and texts cheaply for distribution to a public audience, and are often produced as part of the art and music scene. There has been a real surge in artists' zine production over recent years, partly due to the fact that desktop printers are now cheap to buy and use. Digital technology has also developed to give much higher quality output from photocopiers, so more artists are making colour zines on better and more stable papers. Some examples of artists' newspapers and zines:

The artist Magnus Irvin has been publishing *The Daily Twit* (ISSN 1477-8084) for 26 years, which he calls "a nonsensical newspaper about nothing". Each issue is usually photocopied in an edition of 500, and launched with accompanying performances by Irvin (www.dailytwit.com).

John Bently has been publishing under the *Liver & Lights Scriptorium* and *Kind Red Spirit* imprints since the early 80s. Each book in the *Liver & Lights* series to date is different in

size, scale and shape from the last. Bently has published artists' books including *Concerning the Poetry of Lost Things, Harrow; A Book of Fife Heroes*, and *A Handful of Memories, Dundee*. These editions are often priced at a standard paperback price to reach a wide audience.

Bently has also been producing zines for many years, and has recently published *3 Songs and a Camper Van*; a collaboration between himself, Kathy Round and Alan Outram. The set, made in tribute to his old camper van, focuses on a journey in the van and contains two zines and a CD of Bently's band Afterrabbit, performing music orchestrated with 'found van sounds'. This was hand produced in an edition of 100 (www.liverandlights.co.uk).

Liver and Lights No. 35, Stale Biscuits is Bently's official Afterrabbit fanzine, 'created in the 70's style using a photocopier and a plastic bag'. The zine also contains a free demo CD of two unreleased Afterrabbit tracks and a badge.

Liver and Lights No. 37, Van Gig Zine by John Bently, Kathy Round and J. Lanteri-Laura, was published this April, as a book and film record of the 'Van Gig', where Afterrabbit invited artists to produce hand-made instruments to play with them for a live performance.

The Brighton-based artist Jackie Batey publishes her own books, and the zine series *future fantasteek*, under her own imprint of Damp Flat Books, established in 1999. Batey uses digital copy to produce her zines as affordable editions of artwork. Her website contains images, sample pages and working information on all of her publications and is well worth a visit (www.dampflat.com).

There is a huge range of artists' zines around; a good place to view an online selection is Café Royal (www.caferoyal.org) an Internet venture by the artist Craig Atkinson. Café Royal has a great selection of works by artists, including its own zine, of which *Issue Zero* has been recently launched.

In 2004, the zine artist and illustrator Mike Nicholson began publishing his '*bio auto graphic*' series, finally appearing as himself in his own zines. These explore current affairs, global and domestic events "looking at identity and recreating/revising oneself whether consciously or unconsciously", and have been conceived as an ongoing series. The issues '*I, in the sky*' and '*lettering from america*' volumes 1 and 2' cover a recent trip to the American East Coast.

Other issues by Nicholson include a special *sitting ruminations* zine for the 'Sitting Room' exhibition curated by Tom Sowden and Lucy May Schofield; a touring exhibition of artists' books to browse in a sitting room environment (currently on show at Winchester School of Art Gallery). Nicholson's *sitting ruminations* combined observational drawings completed on the London transport system with thoughts on the curative properties of reading for the commuter (ladnicholson@yahoo.co.uk).

Independent publishers:

The Caserom Press is a publishing concern with an interest in art, languages and poetry. Recent books include *FlatPack* a book of component parts: journeys, sketches, photographs and notes, connections and associations. It can be read in a number of ways – as four separate books, as a series of larger narratives or as a random series of connections and statements (www.the-case.co.uk).

Ignition books is a recent venture in Ireland, by artist/writers Andrew Kelly and Ciara Healy, launched in 2005, to publish work by Irish artists and writers. To date Ignition has produced five books, with another new publication out soon (www.ignition.ie).

Ciara Healey's *Butterflies* encompasses seven years of artwork. It forms part of her work exploring themes of belonging through classification, with imagery echoing Victorian museum formats of archiving and display. The book was published by Ignition in an edition of 500.

Birds, is an upcoming publication from ignition (www.ignition.ie).

Mermaid turbulence (founded and run by artist Mari-aymone Djeribi since 1993) is an independent publisher of books, artists' books and multiples, based in the North-west of Ireland.

Time Bomb: all the questions my firstborn will ask and I don't have an answer for, is one of Djeribi's own artists' books, laser printed from her drawings and imagery in an edition of 111 (www.mermaidturbulence.com).

Also in Ireland, Coracle, directed by Erica Van Horn and Simon Cutts has published many editions since its inception in the early 70s. Working with artists and writers including: David Bellingham, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Stuart Mills, Tom and Laurie Clark, and Colin Sackett. Coracle publishes affordable, well-made books (www.coracle.ie).

The most long standing artists' publisher in the UK, has to be Circle Press, which was formed in 1967 by Ron King and a group of artist printmakers interested in publishing limited editions of fine books and prints. Circle Press has produced numerous artists' editions of texts, books and pamphlets to date, and King has worked with over 100 artists and writers, encouraging artists from both his own and a younger generation (www.circlepress.com).

One example, of a collaboration between Ronald King and Roy Fisher in 1992, is *Anansi Company*, produced as an edition of 120, screenprint and letterpress, with removable wire and card puppets by Circle Press Publications.

Ron King has also been the catalyst for a new group of artists that has recently emerged from Circle Press; Victoria Bean, Karen Bleitz and Sam Winston produced books under the Circle Press imprint in London for several years, and have now launched their own independent imprint ARC, named in honour of Circle Press (www.arceditions.com).

The Mechanical Word (Vol. 1 - 5) was designed and produced by Karen Bleitz at Circle Press in 2005. With texts by Richard Price, this limited edition series of book works was screenprinted with additional working mechanical parts...

"Discs, drivers, levers and gears are used in the books to create mechanical metaphors and to give readers a new, physical tool with which to break down and examine the underlying meaning of words.

These machines look at the dynamic relationships - people and power relationships - that grammatical rules quietly and sometimes noisily suggest."

Some artist's book projects at the Centre for Fine Print Research

Arcadia id Est is a touring exhibition of 119 artists' books concerned with nature and landscape, looking at how these subjects are interpreted in a narrative format. The show was curated as a hands-on book exhibition, which has been travelling around the world since March 2005. Visitors at each venue are encouraged to handle the books wherever possible.

We have built educational workshops, talks and panel discussions around the show, with a full image and information archive of each of the books on our website, so people can find out more about the work, how and why it was made, and contact the artists involved (www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/arcadia.htm).

A small sample of books in the show includes: Finlay Taylor's *Trail*, a favourite with viewers due to its unusual production process - the text areas have been physically eaten out by snails. This book is one part of Taylor's ongoing project investigating snails, sites and species within landscape and natural history. The book contains images of a garden from a snail's-eye view, with texts eaten through the paper to spell out words such as 'song thrush' - a snail predator- and 'shelled' (www.finlaytaylor.com).

Stuart Mugridge's book, *NTL/VTC* is an observation of a glimpse of wildlife. Mugridge explains: "NTL is used to mark the tidal limit of rivers on Ordnance Survey maps. The tidal limit in this case is on: Vallum Tremayne Creek [VTC], which flows into the Helford River in Cornwall. The book is a record of time spent sitting at the water's edge observing the comings and goings of the estuary's birdlife."

One clean, white page in the middle of all the dirty brown pages represents a fleeting glance of an egret, which made him wonder how it managed to keep so clean in its muddy river environment. The book's cover is made from a waterproof poncho he bought in an army surplus shop, which he states "has a suitably damp and muddy smell" (www.smabs.co.uk).

Malbik Endar by Imi Maufe is a text-based record of her 121-day cycling trip to Iceland and back. *Malbik Endar* - Icelandic for 'tarmac ends'- uses one word or phrase from each day, per page, to illustrate her adventures in an ever-changing landscape (www.axisweb.org/artist/imimaufe).

Impact Press Publications:

We aim to promote the artist's book to a wide audience through our publications and projects at CFPR. We publish the free *Book Arts Newsletter* - ISSN 1754-9078 (Print) ISSN 1754-9086 (Online) - delivering news on the book arts to an international audience.

We also edit and print reference publications on the arts of the book, including *The Artist's Book Yearbook (2008-2009 issue published September 2007)*, ISBN 10: 0-9547025-6-5, ISBN 13: 978-0-9547025-6-4), which contains critical essays and free listings sections for artists and organisations; and *The Blue Notebook Journal for Artists' Books* - ISSN 1751-1712 (Print) ISSN 1751-1720 (Online).

We have also published a free download guide to help book artists market their work; *Artists' Books Creative Production and Marketing* is the result of a survey project, supported by the AHRC, which investigated some of the problems for artists selling, and librarians buying artists' books (free download, 50pp guidebook, ISBN 0954702514, 2005, at: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/survres.htm).

Over a one-year period, we surveyed artists at book fairs and exhibitions, and librarians, dealers, lecturers and curators through interviews, email, mail and Internet forms. We had a great response to the publication, so much so, that we are now working on a new updated edition.

For the new issue, we have interviewed more dealers, gallery owners, librarians and artists, and asked the original 24 case-study artists to update their profiles. The new updated 2nd version of *Artists' Books Creative Production and Marketing 2007*, will be published as a free download available from our website this August.

If you are interested in viewing and purchasing books in situ in the UK, then some good

places to start are: bookartbookshop, London (www.bookartbookshop.com), Permanent bookshop and gallery, Brighton (www.permanentbookshop.com) and Firecatcher books, Bolton (www.firecatcherbooks.co.uk). Many artists, publishers, bookshops and galleries also sell artists' books online; Book Works – the largest independent publisher of artists' books and projects in the UK, sells online (at: www.bookworks.org.uk).

An example of one of our projects to get the public involved with artists' books is: *Book Marks: Infiltrating the Library System*, an ongoing annual series of international distribution of bookmarks made by book artists. 150 artists and writers have contributed over 15,000 bookmarks, for free distribution at 47 venues to date in Italy, the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, Poland, Canada, Brazil, South Korea, Cyprus, Australia and the USA. *Bookmarks Five* will be launched this September in the UK, USA, Poland, Japan and Croatia.

The *Bookmarks* project series aims to encourage appreciation of work in the format of the artist's book. Participating book artists each hand-produce an edition of 100 signed and numbered bookmarks to give away.

Contributions are collated into sets; one full set being sent to each of the contributing artists and the rest divided and sent in distribution boxes to participating galleries, bookstores and libraries around the world, for people to help themselves to. Each venue also receives an archive set of bookmarks.

Each bookmark is stamped with the *Bookmarks* project website, which directs the taker of the bookmark to the gallery section of the website. Visitors to the site can view the bookmarks online and contact the artists via the links from our site. *Bookmarks IV* saw 58 artists contribute 6,100 bookmarks for distribution from last September to February 2007 (www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/bookmark.htm).

If your organisation would be interested in hosting one of the boxes in the future, then please contact Sarah Bodman.

Lastly, our bookarts website at the Centre for Fine Print Research has been built as a working tool for artists, researchers, students and librarians. The site has free download essays and newsletters, a full information and visual archive of all exhibitions and projects to date and links to other websites for further information. Please visit www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk for more information on artists' books.

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