Artists’ Books DC:
Developing Access, Promoting Research and Fostering Community from outside the Library

Michelle Strizever
ARLIS/NA 2014
Artists’ Books

Artists’ books from the Library of Congress collection

Author: Strizewi, Michele H
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Summary:
Artists' books combine art and/or text with an attention to the materiality and structure of the book. The genre is not defined by common appearance or content; instead, artists' books are identifiable because of their self-referentiality, whether implicit or explicit. The self-referentiality of these works affects the way that they are read and how the text and images are perceived. My dissertation explores the ways that self-referential content, materiality, and form impact the experience of reading artists' books with text, including Toni Phillips's A Humument, Johann Drucker's From A to Z, and Emily McVarish's Wax. My project incorporates close readings of artists' books, reading both the text and the book as a whole. I group artists' books into five categories: visual and legible texts, illegible texts, material subjects, combinational structures, and non-codex bindings. In artists' books, text often has visual attributes that redirect the reader's attention away from the linguistic text to the visual text. Some texts border on illegibility. Yet illegibility, the condition in which materiality overwhelms content, also signifies. Works that take self-referential materiality as their subject, such as altered books, challenge the conventions and ontology of the book. Binding and physical form impact the way texts are read. Non-codex bindings can be combinational, leaving the reader to order, the text. They can also be sculptural, pushing the boundary between the book and the work of art. Artists' books emphasize the difference between the conventional codex and their own interventions. Their self-referentiality is split between their own real but unusual material forms and the idea of the conventional codex, constantly alluding to and exploring this difference. Artists' books exaggerate features of the codex, reflecting the materiality, technology and reading practices of the conventional book through their imaginative lens.
DC Artists’ Book Collections*

*I knew when I started doing research

Library of Congress

National Museum of Women in the Arts
ARTISTS’ BOOK EXHIBIT OPENING AT THE AA/PG LIBRARY

BY DOUG LITTLER

For the past two summers, three art libraries, the Hirshhorn Library (HMSG), the African Art Library (NMAA), and the American Art Library (NMA), have hosted graduate library student interns through the Smithsonian Libraries Professional Development Internship to work on three libraries’ artists’ book collections. Each library has a history of collecting artists’ books, with varied goals. Books in the HMSG Library have been collected in order to support the museum’s collection. While artists’ books in NMAA serve as examples of African art, those purchased in the past for the AA/PG library have been purchased for primarily aesthetic reasons. Under the coordination of Anna Boeke (HMSG) with partnership with Janet Stanley (NMAA) and Doug Littl (AA/PG), the internships were developed to define the issues regarding artists’ in-library collections and to determine ways to provide greater accessibility to the collections in the online catalog with the ultimate goal of providing more exposure to one of Smithsonian Libraries’ many hidden collections.

This year’s interns, Michelle Blitzever and Amanda Meeks, worked collaboratively to make the hidden artists’ book collection more accessible and more visible to the public through addressing cataloging issues and highlighting items found within the collection. Part of their project was researching items in the collection and writing about them (such as this blog entry by Michelle on a book in AA/PG’s collection).

Amanda and Michelle also put together a small exhibit of six books from the AA/PG collection that they researched and found particularly interesting. The library hosted an opening for the exhibit on July 18 featuring both these books as well as twelve others from the AA/PG collection that visitors could examine. We had a great turn out. Over fifty people attended the opening, including Smithsonian staff and interns, local librarians and university instructors, students, book artists, and book enthusiasts. Doug Littl gave a brief overview of the three collections and the ongoing...
DC Artists’ Book Collections*

*Included in my library school independent study interviews

Corcoran Library

Folger Shakespeare Library

National Gallery of Art Library

George Mason University Library

National Museum of African Art Library

Hirshhorn Museum Library

Library of Congress

National Museum of Women in the Arts

Smithsonian American Art/Portrait Gallery Library

University of Maryland Library
Library School Independent Study
Interview Questions for Librarians and Curators

Acquisition
Does your institution have a collection development policy for artists’ books?
What factors come into play in your acquisition decisions?
Do you have any kind of documentation strategy in place with other repositories?
How do you purchase books – through artists’ visits, dealers, online distributors, specialized bookstores like Printed Matter?

Cataloging
How does your institution catalog artists’ books?
Is there any online representation of these works?
Do you acquire artists’ archives alongside artists’ books?

Access and Preservation
Are researchers allowed to touch the books?
Do unconventional or delicate materials, which might require preservation, or artists’ books that have an element of self-destruction or change upon reading, influence your acquisition decision?

Exhibition and Outreach
Do you have any outreach or educational programs related to artists’ books?
Do you ever exhibit your artists’ books? How do you deal with the challenges of exhibiting dynamic works that may need to be activated by the viewer?

General
What challenges and rewards do you see in building a collection of artists’ books?
Are your institutional policies about artists’ books similar to, or quite different than, institutional policies about other books or archival materials?
How would you say your institution differs from similar repositories in its policies about these materials?
What are the most exciting or interesting artists’ books in the collection?
Library School Independent Study

Michelle Stiezer
LBSC 709:2601
5/6/12


Introduction

Defining the Artists’ Book

Artists’ books are works that incorporate text, images, unconventional typography and/or innovative structures within the book form. Since the 1960s, this interdisciplinary, international field of art has exploded. The genre plays with the boundaries of what constitutes a book. Stephen Bury describes the artist’s book as “a book or book-like object in which an artist has had a major input beyond illustration or authorship: where the final appearance of the book owes much to an artist’s interference/participation: where the book is the manifestation of the artist’s creativity: where the book is a work of art in itself.” Artists’ books include, but are not limited to, works with handmade paper, fine bindings, printmaking, typography, poetry, painting, sculpture, and dynamic pop-up elements. The extremely wide variety of works that constitute the field range from unique, sculptural objects, which reference book forms but seem more like museum or gallery art than books, to multiples, which are produced in a large or unlimited edition size through technology like offset printing. Artists’ books have played a role in the

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Applying for a Grant

College Book Art Association Mission

The College Book Art Association supports and promotes academic book arts education by fostering the development of its practice, teaching, scholarship and criticism.

CBAA Grants and Awards

PROJECT ASSISTANCE AWARDS

The CBAA Board invites members to submit proposals for project assistance grants. These grants are intended to provide financial assistance to members for existing research and creative projects. Proposals will be accepted through June 1, 2014, and grants awarded in amounts up to $500 from the CBAA Board Fund and other CBAA funds. Grants, while not large, are intended to help support existing projects with modest extra funding that allows progress to continue or projects to be completed. Funds are awarded until the budgeted allocation is exhausted.
Artists’ Books DC

Audience
- students
- advanced researchers
- librarians
- artists
Artists’ Books DC

Collection information
- about the collection
- finding artists’ books
- how to get there
- what to expect
- other resources
Artists' Books DC

Collection information
• about the collection
• finding artists’ books
• how to get there
• what to expect
• other resources

By Metro, take the Red Line to the NoMa-Gallaudet University station. Turn right on 2nd Street NE, then right on Florida Avenue. Located at 800 Florida Ave NE, the library will be on the left in about half a mile.

What to Expect
The location for Gallaudet University Library artists’ books, particularly the collection of works by Joseph Gogley, is the online public access catalog in “GLA: UNIV DEAF Copy 4 Books (Non-Circulating).” Found on the basement level, these books do not circulate and may not be removed from the building. To access them, request the items from the desk. For questions, email library.help@gallaudet.edu. When researching the collection, it may be useful to know that the library uses the term “Deaf” to refer to a Deaf person in the Deaf community, and the term “deaf” to refer to a deaf person who does not associate with the larger Deaf community.

Other Resources
Gallaudet Library
Gallaudet Library Locations
Gallaudet Library: Deaf Collections and Archives
DC Artists’ Book Collections*

*Initial Collections on Artists’ Books DC

American University Library
Catholic University of America Library
Corcoran Library

District of Columbia Public Library
Dumbarton Oaks Research Library
Folger Shakespeare Library
Gallaudet University Library
George Mason University Library
Georgetown University Library
George Washington University Library
Hirshhorn Museum Library

Howard University Library
Library of Congress
Marymount University Library
National Gallery of Art Library
National Museum of African Art Library
National Museum of the American Indian Library
National Museum of Women in the Arts
Phillips Collection Library
Pyramid Atlantic
Smithsonian American Art/Portrait Gallery Library

University of Maryland Library
University of the District of Columbia Library
Feedback and Edits

What to Expect

The Folger's reading room is not open to the public. To become a reader, you must be a scholar or qualified researcher and go through an application process, explained here. If you aren't able to do research at the Folger, you can also look for scans of artists' books in LUNA, the Folger's Digital Image Collection, or contact a reference librarian about the collection by emailing reference@folger.edu.

Gall Plaster Reading Room at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Photo by Julie Ainsworth

Other Resources

Artists' books posts from the Folger's Collation blog

Folger Shakespeare Library
DC Artists’ Book Collections

American University Library
Catholic University of America Library
Corcoran Library
Cullman Library
Dibner Library
District of Columbia Public Library
Dumbarton Oaks Research Library
Folger Shakespeare Library
Gallaudet University Library
George Mason University Library
Georgetown University Library
George Washington University Library
Hirshhorn Museum Library

Howard University Library
Library of Congress
Marymount University Library
National Gallery of Art Library
National Museum of African Art Library
National Museum of the American Indian Library
National Museum of Women in the Arts
Phillips Collection Library
Pyramid Atlantic
Smithsonian American Art/Portrait Gallery Library
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
University of Maryland Library
University of the District of Columbia Library
Outreach and Publicity

ARLIS/NA Book Art SIG...sharing information, ideas, issues, and resources related to the book and paper arts

Social Media

Twitter

- @ArtBksDC
- Live tweeting research

Listservs

- ARLIS-L
- Local library listservs
- Book art listservs

Blogs

- ARLIS Book Art SIG
  http://www.arlisnabookartsig.blogspot.com

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ARLIS/NA Book Art SIG: A Guide to Researching Collections

I just launched Artists’ Books DC, a guide to collections of artists’ books in the Washington DC area. This project is funded by a grant from the College Book Art Association. My experiences doing research have taught me that book art collections are often hidden, and that searching catalogs for artists’ books can be frustrating. Artists’ Books DC is a reference tool for researchers, artists, students, and librarians that solves these problems. The website lists repositories in the area that have collections of artists’ books, provides information about the collection development and access policies of each library, and incorporates maps and some photos from the repositories. In addition to linking to institutions’ catalogs, the website provides a detailed explanation about how to use each catalog to generate a list of artists’ books. Artists’ Books DC has information about how to visit the collections and perform research, including transportation details, the location of collections within the library or museum, whether research cards and appointments are required, and contact information for further questions.

I came to the DC area just as I was starting my dissertation, writing about artists’ books, criticism, and theory for a doctoral program in English. The books I chose to write about were those that I could access in a facsimile version (either online or in print) and those that I could easily visit. Aware that the Library of Congress and the National Museum of Women in the Arts had substantial collections, I focused my research at those repositories. Smaller collections of artists’ books in DC, such as those at the Hirshhorn Library and Corcoran Library, remained unknown to me. Knowledge of these collections had the potential to affect my research and methodology. Without outreach and online resources, collections like these are hidden.

In library school, I did an independent study that explored local artists’ books collections. I interviewed librarians and curators at DC-area repositories. The questions focused on collection development policies, providing digital and physical access, preservation, budgeting, and exhibition procedures. I wanted to turn the information I gathered into a comprehensive research tool available to everyone interested in artists’ books, librarianship, special collections, and/or Washington DC.

Drawing from my research experience and interviews, I developed the reference tool as a website. Students and researchers can find new resources and figure out how to access them. Librarians can check out the holdings, policies, cataloging practices, and libguides of peer institutions. Artists can visit collections to get a hands-on look at inspirational works and to see if their work fits the focus of each collection for potential acquisition. I’m very excited to promote artists’ book collections in DC and to facilitate...
Outreach and Publicity

Live Tweeting Research/Tweet-up about Book Art Collection
Outreach and Publicity

Live Tweeting Research/Tweet-up about Book Art Collection

Artists' Books at the Dibner Library
(Smithsonian Libraries, Washington, D.C.)

A Twitter chat about a selection of artists' books inspired by some of the most famous books in the history of science and technology from the collection of the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology in Washington, D.C.

by Diane Shaw @Museocat

On February 18, 2014, Hirshhorn librarian Anna Brooke (@Brookea2), special collections cataloger Diane Shaw (@Museocat), and artist/librarian Michelle Strizever (@ArtBlisDC), also a former intern at the Smithsonian Libraries, got together for an informal discussion of the artists' books in the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology, one of the special collections of the Smithsonian Libraries in Washington, D.C. These artists' books in the Dibner Library were acquired in connection with the exhibition Science and the Artist's Book, which was sponsored by the Smithsonian Libraries and the Washington Project for the Arts in 1995-1996.
Outreach and Publicity

Other Outreach

- Directly contacting each library
- Contacting local book art professors
- DCPL talk for general audience: “Artists’ Books: What Are They and Where Are They in DC?”

Artists’ Books: What Are They and Where Are They in DC?

Artists’ books are works of art in book form that may have unusual bindings, vibrant typography, colorful images, fine printing techniques, digital interventions, and/or sculptural elements. They play with the conventions of the book and expectations of reading. Join Michelle Strizewi, creator of the artistbooksdc.com, as she discusses artists’ books in DC, her website, and research techniques for finding these fun, surprising, and exhilarating books.

Thursday | April 10 | 6:30 pm | Room 219

Check out more events at dclibrary.org/mlk
Outreach and Publicity

Response from libraries and organizations

- Added to libguides
  - George Mason University
  - SAIC Joan Flasch Collection
  - Duke University
  - Carnegie Mellon University

- Featured on library Facebook, Twitter accounts

- Added to College Book Art Association website and newsletter
Assessment of Effectiveness

Current Assessment Methods and Effects

- Feedback from librarians
- Response on social media
- Google Analytics
- Requests to expand the project to other regions
- Artists’ books cataloging tweaks at Smithsonian Libraries and Holocaust Memorial Museum

Questions

- How to assess effectiveness in serving different audiences, such as students?
- How to see effects on library usage from outside the library?
Future Plans

- Expand to other cities? Regions? States? Countries?
- Oversee volunteers in other regions?
- Apply for grants? Nonprofit status?
- Continue book art collection research tweet-ups?
- Open research tweet-ups to the public?
- Bring in students and artists?
- Remain outside the library?