THE SPACE YOU LEAVE BEHIND IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE SPACE YOU FILL
SOME OBSERVATIONS ON NORTH AMERICAN ART PUBLISHING

Sandra Ludig Brooke
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“The space you leave behind is as important as the space you fill.”—Susie Cooper

Susie Cooper, Kestrel Coffee Pot (1932). Earthenware. Image courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum
Through seven decades of astonishing economic, social, and cultural change, the English ceramics designer Susie Cooper (1902-1995) managed to maintain consistently high aesthetic and manufacturing standards. Her stamina as a producer of fine goods for discriminating audiences, and her Zen-like maxim about ceramics patterns—“The space you leave behind is as important as the space you fill”—have resonance in the context of today’s session, which is about the art and business of art publishing in a period of destabilizing change.

In the next fifteen minutes, I will only be able to touch upon a handful of North American projects, but I hope they will serve to represent some larger themes. As art librarians, even as we embrace the new—new content and new modes of authoring and book production—we recognize that legacy content and formats are still utterly relevant. Digital publishers are experimenting and venturing into new terrain. Art e-books aren’t “painting over” their printed forebears. As a consequence, the territory that art librarians must cover is not simply evolving. It’s expanding, and we must pay as much attention to the spaces we are leaving behind in our collections, as to those we seek to fill.
Just what is it that makes North American art publishing so different, so appealing?
A quick disclaimer about the limited scope of this talk: “Art publishing” is a wide territory and there are interesting things happening across the spectrum. For example, there’s the Brooklyn-based, e-magazine *Triple Canopy*, a not-for-profit that is experimenting with collaborative publishing. And the device-only, artists’ e-books published by Badlands Unlimited—a press founded by the artist Paul Chan. But today I will only be talking about monographic works from academic presses, museums, commercial galleries, and scholarly foundations—the bread and butter of art history publishing.

“North American” is also a “soft” category at a time when transnational authorship and global book production are increasingly the norm. Take for example this recent “U.S.” publication—a book by the Canadian artist Moyra Davey. It was published by the Dancing Foxes Press in New York, but also bears the imprints of museums in Vienna and Philadelphia. The book was designed in Spain, and printed and bound in Belgium. My point is only that I’m not pretending to claim that the projects I will discuss are somehow “distinctively North American.” Rather, they are representative of what’s been happening in the U.S. and Canada this past year—which undoubtedly echoes similar developments in art publishing worldwide.
New books by first-time authors
I'll begin with an update on the Art History Publication Initiative—a Mellon-funded collaboration among four university presses that is nearing the end of a five-year grant cycle. The Duke, Penn, Penn State, and University of Washington Presses have so far published eleven of a projected forty art history monographs by first-time authors. Six are dual print and e-books, and the other five print only. The project was designed to address the economic hurdles to publishing a first, image-laden monograph. The grant allows the presses to provide young authors with expert help on obtaining image permissions for print and electronic publication. These first-generation e-books are available on multiple platforms—commercial and academic, for devices and on the desktop.
The AHPI presses have learned a lot about the production and economics of art e-books. One publisher said they were surprised at how well the AHPI e-books versions have done, accounting for 15-25% of sales compared with 4% e-sales for other university press books. She speculated that e-publishing and print-on-demand might one day prove to be a cost-effective alternative for academic art books, especially because there is no cost penalty for having all color illustrations. The presses are applying to extend their grant, and we should look for several more of their dual-format monographs by first-time authors over the next few years.
Scholarly e-books for new audiences

Online Art Books

Harold Town by Gertie Murray
Joyce Wieland by Johanne Sloan
Paul Kane by Arlene Gehmacher
Emily Carr by Lisa Beilisera
Yves Gaucher
Pitseolak Ashoona
Jack Chambers
Kathleen Munn
North of the border, the Art Canada Institute is also looking to publish dual-format art books—but with a focus on the audience rather than authors. The ACI is a recently-established, not-for-profit that aims “to promote an inclusive, multi-vocal Canadian art history to as broad an audience as possible,” providing readers—from university students to “those who never step inside a gallery”—with peer-reviewed scholarship on Canadian art.
Canadian Online Art Book Project e-book

JOYCE WIELAND
Life & Work by Johanne Sloan

START READING or DOWNLOAD EBOOK
In just sixteen months, through their Canadian Online Art Book Project, the ACI has released twelve, open-access e-books that can be read online or exported as PDFs. They plan to produce six to eight new e-books each year, and will eventually publish all or some in print as part of an ACI Art Monograph Series. It is heartening to see so many private, corporate, and foundation partners supporting open-access art scholarship, and we can but wish the ACI continued success.
Re-imagining the backlist
In January, Yale University Press announced receipt of a major grant from the Mellon Foundation to develop an Electronic Portal for Art and Architecture Content. With its publishing partner, the Art Institute of Chicago, Yale will digitize a selection of some forty, award-winning titles from their combined backlists. Yale promises that the electronic editions will be more than simple PDFs, but it is not yet clear what enhancements will be offered. They do, however, promise to upgrade illustrations with new, color photography.

Besides making their legacy content—as they say—“more meaningful for today,” Yale wants to create new revenue streams for the press. What they see as really setting the Portal apart, is that clients will be able to “build their own books”—to create customized remixes from multiple titles. The press envisions expanding the Portal to serve multiple publishers—an electronic analog to Yale’s extensive stable of museum distribution partnerships. It will be interesting to see if Yale can become an aggregator for scholarly art and architecture e-books—and successfully market those books in chunks, and not just as complete tomes. Look for the beta of Yale’s Electronic Art Portal in 2017.
Extensible catalogues raisonnés

Please select from the following categories in order to view the related web links.

**Online Catalogues Raisonnés**

Louise Bourgeois: The Complete Prints & Books
www.moma.org/bourgeoisprints

The Paintings of Paul Cézanne
cezannecatalogue.com

Chuck Close: Paintings, 1967-Present
artifexpress.com

The Daumier Register
www.daumier-register.org/

Edwin Dickinson
edwindickinson.org

Jim Dine: Sculpture, 1983-Present
artifexpress.com
If there is a form of electronic publication that the arts community has embraced, it is the online catalogue raisonné. By hewing to established standards for authentication and documentation, and adding time stamps for revisions, publishers are persuading the arts community that online catalogues raisonnés can be an authoritative source—as well as being more up-to-date, flexible, and accessible. Here are two recent North American releases.
The Paintings of Paul Cézanne

An online catalogue raisonné under the direction of Walter Pechtenfeld, Jayne Warman and David Nash

Catalogue

Browse the catalogue

The works in this catalogue are organized in five consecutive groups or themes: landscape, portrait, figure composition, still life, and bather. The works are numbered chronologically within each theme.

Sorting the catalogue by date will integrate all the works chronologically; the numbers will not be consecutive.

Each work has its own page, or entry, which includes the work’s principle statistics and an image that can be enlarged. The entry also includes a work’s provenance, its exhibition history, and its published references — all linked to other sections of the catalogue.

Many entries include commentaries and supplementary materials, such as sketches and studies by Cézanne, historical photographs, site photos, vintage postcards, or works by other artists.

Works with the letters “IA” after the catalogue number are paintings that have been traditionally attributed to Paul Cézanne, but have not been physically examined by the authors. Therefore a determination of its authenticity cannot be made until the work has been inspected, at which time the “IA” designation can be removed. Several paintings that require further study are also included in this category.

Paintings that have been omitted from Cézanne’s oeuvre have been examined by the authors and are, in their opinion, works by another hand. These works are acknowledged if they were exhibited or published, but do not have their own entry page.
The Paintings of Paul Cezanne is a collaborative project launched last November with funding from the Mitchell-Innes & Nash Gallery and the International Music and Art Foundation. The principal authors are Walter Feilchenfelt and Jayne Warman who posthumously published John Rewald’s catalogue of Cezanne’s paintings. The third author is the eponymous David Nash. This enhanced, open-access catalogue, offers major advantages over the 1996 Rewald volumes, not the least of which is full color photography. Embellishments include a concordance with the legacy Rewald and Venturi catalog numbers, a virtual reconstruction of Vollard’s dealer stock books, and a growing bank of supplemental images including vintage postcard views of the sites painted by Cezanne.
Artifex Press’s latest release

Tim Hawkinson

Video Archive

Selected Videos of Mechanized or Motorized Works

Überorgan (2000.03) installed at Ace Gallery, New York in 2002

HAWKINSON Überorgan at Ace Gallery NY, 2002

Bike Spin (2004.11)

Hawkinson Bike Spin
ARTIFEX Press says something revolutionary is underway with their Tim Hawkinson Catalogue Raisonné that launched just a few weeks ago. ARTIFEX is an independent publishing company in New York that was spun off by Pace Wildenstein in 2009. This is their third published catalog, and they have eight more in development. The Hawkinson catalog has thoughtful enhancements like video documentation for his installations and motorized works, but what really sets it apart is the relative youth of the artist. As president David Grosz observes, “Hawkinson is simply too young for a catalogue raisonné!” The idea is that this will be a living catalog, expanding over many years in concert with the artist’s career.
The never-ending story
For a limited time, ARTIFEX is offering their catalogs on a free subscription basis to registered users. The press realizes revenue from software licensing and presumably receives some kind of subsidy from Pace (this is not clear), but it remains to be seen if they will have sufficient funds to sustain their growing list of projects without subscription fees or other funding mechanisms. With digital catalogues raisonnés, the blessing of extensibility is also a curse for there is no “backlist.” Time rolls on, and exhibition histories, bibliographies, and provenance notes continue to expand. Indeed, long-term financial stability is a hurdle that every online catalogue raisonné will have to resolve—through endowments, grant support, sales, or perhaps advertising. When some of them fail financially—and some certainly will—the arts community will look to libraries to save these critical, scholarly resources. That is something art libraries must be thinking about now—collaboratively, and in partnership with these pioneering art publishers.
Museums in the vanguard
MoMA made a big splash in 2014 with its first, digital-only publication. *Picasso: The Making of Cubism, 1912-1914* is a lavish production with interactive, 3-D images, x-rays, and embedded videos. To reach the broadest possible audience, MoMA made two, parallel versions of the book—a enhanced PDF for desktop users, and an IOS-based app for tablet readers. In one sense, MoMA showed the way forward with this award-winning publication, but it can’t exactly be called a “model.” More than five years in development, *Picasso* was a tremendously complex and expensive undertaking that, according to its chief editor, even MoMA won’t be able to repeat on this scale. Nonetheless, the premise of this project—that digital enhancements must be deeply integrated with the essays, that they are not mere embellishments, but inform the authors’ observations and conclusions—this should be a touchstone for other art e-book developers.
New print publishing venture
However, it’s not just e-publishers or the big trade houses that are making a go with art books. For example, in 2014, after years of doing small-run and co-published exhibition catalogs, the David Zwirner Gallery in New York established David Zwirner Books, a press whose mission is to produce beautiful art books, with excellent scholarship, project-appropriate design, and high-quality printing and binding. Zwirner Books’ fine-printing aspirations are exemplified by a competition they mounted among five printers to see which could most effectively reproduce Ad Reinhart’s black paintings.
Forthcoming from David Zwirner Books
An example of the press’s drive to mix up gallery publishing conventions is their forthcoming monograph, *No Problem: Cologne/New York 1984-1989*—the counterpart to a 2014 Zwirner Gallery exhibition of the same name. The book was intentionally developed post-show so that the authors and designers could respond to that event, and it will be published nearly a year after the exhibition. In a bookselling landscape defined by the Amazon juggernaut, Zwirner’s marketing plan revolves around connecting directly with readers—through social media and a high-end website, but also in person—by exhibiting at international art fairs and by cultivating relationships with independent, brick-and-mortar booksellers.
Michael Werner Gallery bookwork $40

Another trend in North America and elsewhere is the burgeoning of imaginative book design for modestly priced art books. Here’s a 2014 book produced in association with an Aaron Curry open-air, sculpture installation. Dual text blocks, with blue-stained fore-edges, open like a diptych to a panoramic view of Lincoln Center Plaza. Illustrations and texts in both blocks can be leafed through simultaneously. Raw, un-backed bindings and reverse-fold, cover flaps, colored stitching, blind embossing, metallic insets and punched boards, single volumes with variously sized papers, and cards and other loosely inserted ephemera—you’ve seen all that recently, haven’t you? It’s why the other selectors can’t seem to walk by Marquand’s approval books without stopping to touch one or two. “Your books are so interesting!” Indeed, one publisher remarked that printed art books seem to be getting “bolder”—as though making the point that they can be just as interesting—if not more so—than electronic books.
Susie Cooper, Ginger Jar (1926). Earthenware. Image courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum
In the months that I have been thinking about this presentation, and talking with various players in the North American art publishing world, I have become more convinced than ever that what we are seeing is, not the gradual demise of print, but a blossoming on multiple fronts. So much of the collection development conversation in libraries today revolves around the twin gods of currency and instant access. But art publishing—like art making itself—is driven instead by the marriage of content and presentation—the quality of content, the quality of presentation, and the appropriateness of each for the other. And that is why both print and electronic formats are thriving.

Ultimately, it doesn’t matter that a printed book is less current, or that it takes a trip to the bookstore or library to get it, if that book’s physical self resonates with the art it documents—if it holds your attention and grabs your imagination. And if an extensible and reconfigurable book with moving images and sound files is what the content demands, then that is where the art book publisher will go. And that, of course, is why art libraries today find it ever more challenging to building the deep and wide research collections of tomorrow. But it is also what makes working with art books so rewarding!

Just remember: “The space you leave behind is as important as the space you fill.”
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