

CASE STUDY I: Interview with Antic-Ham, Artist, South Korea, October 2009

Were you aware that you were making artists books when you started to make them?

In summer 2004, after taking a design course I made a small book with my drawings, collages and writings. This was the first book I made by myself, and at that time I didn't know anything about artists' books.

What does the term 'artists books' mean to you? How would you describe an artist's book? What do you think of the term artists' publishing compared to artists' books?

Through my books I share parts of myself with others. I show myself through the books I make, like painters do with their paintings, musicians do with music and dancers with their performance.

Artists' books should reveal the artist's own good sense and confidence in expressing their feelings in the appropriate physical format of the book. Artists' books have two aspects, which are the content, and the book as a material object. Artists must think about both the content and materiality of the book at the same time. Materials for books, the way it is bound, a cover, how the pages will be turned, the construction and sequence and of course the content. The artist must ultimately control all these things, which go towards making a book.



11 small antiques by Antic (Antique) Ham. Accordion book with 11 drawings of antiques purchased by the artist, 2009

We feel that the content and context of any artist's book is paramount, we are not so interested in categorising books into separate formats, but do you feel there are things that can or cannot be artists' books, or should or should not be?

I fully agree that content and contexts are important. Also the pleasure derived from the book itself is very precious to me. I feel enthusiastic, moved and

impressed by artists' books, not only by the content of the book, but when the form transmits the contents at once. Formats are important only in conjunction with the content, it has no meaning without the content. And I think any format is possible if artists have confidence and concepts about the books they make. Books made with stones, books bound by light, books covered by time or books that can be opened only by imagination. I think anything is possible. Is it too extreme? But why not?

We noticed at the book arts fair in COEX, Seoul that there were many books called artists books that were actually blank books, which we felt were more examples of fine binding. Do you think there a difference in the perception of an artist's book in Korea?

Actually many people are still making blank books and fine binding books and call themselves book artists. It is just because they don't know the definition of artists' books (many people don't even know the words). This is also because under the term 'book art' in Korea, people include artists' books, paper crafts, fine binding, book workshops for children, portfolios etc. There are no clear distinctions between any kinds of book works, but anyway all bookworks are slightly or totally different. It needs to be better defined in Korea. Many artists in Korea are making artists' books though, and as the numbers are increasing annually, the situation will improve.

Are many artists publishing their books through publish-on-demand sites in Korea?

Many artists, designers and illustrators are fascinated by making books. Some are making books mostly with fine binding. Recently young designers and artists are making zines and books through 'self publishing'. It is quite a new trend and very interesting.

How do Korean artist's book societies operate?

There are quite a few associations for book art in Korea. They are always very busy doing many things like discussing reunions or cooperation with other associations, organising staff, providing a service of certification for teaching book art and also arranging regular book exhibitions, events and fairs. I can see there is some competition between them, but I know there are many people who are active and passionate so I hope artist's book organisations here will be better in the future.

Are there many artists who use digital or new technology? You have mentioned that it is cheaper/easier to produce large editions of books, particularly in Seoul, does that apply to all types of production or just digital?

In Seoul it is very easy to access digital processing and all associated printing techniques and materials, which are relatively cheap. You can easily find many materials to make books and can apply different possibilities to produce affordable books.

If you were researching artists' books, is there much reference material available, and is the subject taught at art schools?

I know some people who are teaching book art at schools and there are different kinds of courses. But I'm not sure how well artists' books are represented in these courses. As I said still all kinds of book works are mixed in Korea. And I'm not aware of any official collections or libraries for artists' books, but I know some artists and professors who have private collections they use for teaching.



Flowers by Antic Ham 12 screenprints with added colouring from drawings of flowers. Printed on vintage tracing paper and hand painted wallpaper. 2009

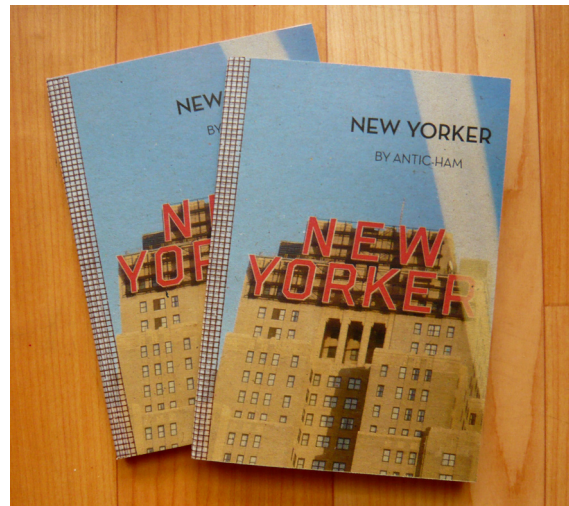
We have noticed that mobile phone novels are very popular in Asia - particularly Japan, now, and e-books continue to join the market are you aware of any artists making books using mobile phone or e-book technology in Korea?

Mobile phone novels are not yet popular in Korea, I don't know any artist using these technologies but I think there must be some out there.

Has digital technology and the computer helped in the production of your artists' books?

Most of my books are made on my personal computer except one-off books and my screenprinted books. The biggest advantage is that I can edit images and work like collage for my books and make the layouts using programmes like Photoshop®.

As I print them myself on my printer I can control the whole process and can experiment with different materials and papers. I'm not so good at experimenting with new technologies and I'm not used to working with them, but always I try to learn and slowly I'm getting better.



New Yorker by Antic Ham. Photographs taken in the streets of Soho, Chelsea and Queens in New York. Drawings of visitors at The New York Art Book Fair at PS1 MoMA. 44 pages, 169 copies, Inkjet, 10.5 x 15 cm, 2009

Have you been using the Internet to sell your work? Is this a popular way to market artists' books in Korea?

I started recently to sell my books through the Internet by announcing new books by email to potential customers. So far I can't say that the result is great but I like to do this because it is also good publicity for my work and myself in a way. Also I'm trying to sell through eBay. It is not so popular to sell artists' books using the Internet in Korea, it hasn't caught on yet, but some young artists and designers are working with the Internet and are also selling zines and books.

How do you think bookshops/galleries/specialist shops can adapt to distributing artists' books in Korea?

I find that even good bookshops for art and design cannot adapt to distribute our books which are small editions, and relatively expensive compared to normal published books. It needs good understanding and relationship between book artists and bookshops or galleries to present artists' books. There is a routine system in the normal bookshop, which is difficult to apply to artists' books.

Do you have any concerns about the future of the book, for example the loss of traditional artisan skills? If so, how do you think this can be remedied?

I'm not so concerned about that. Books are still made today with human interventions in the process and this will go on. This is just natural evolution like everything else. Of course I'm worried that professional skills from the past are disappearing slowly in Korea. But I don't think there is something I can do particularly to stop that. The important thing is a social consensus and support for people trying to keep those skills with passion and faith

Do you think that the difference in the way artists' books are made (or viewed) in the East and in the West will eventually change? Have you noticed anything that is particular to either?

Changes are natural and will get faster as the distance between East and West is getting smaller. Sometimes I feel artists in the East give too much importance to the physical aspect of the book but this also is changing quickly. It is getting increasingly popular to collaborate with artists of many other nationalities. Something exotic has always fascinated people. I see many Western artists interested in the traditional skills and materials from the East. And Eastern students study art in the West. In this field there is no borderline any more and both influences will mix together. In the end artists' own specificity and character will prevail.

Anticham exhibits her work internationally.

Examples of her books can be seen at:

www.anticham.com

<http://blog.naver.com/anticham>

<http://anticham.blogspot.com>

<http://franticham.blogspot.com>

Some information about artists' books in Korea

Mediabus is an independent publisher based in Seoul, MAP Mediabus Artist Publications publishes books and zines for emerging & established artists.

<http://mediabus.org>

D.I.Y. Satellite an artist's book by Song hojun

(mediabus No. 18) can be downloaded from:

<http://mediabus.org/index.php?/publications/18-diy-satellite/>

<http://www.bookarts.pe.kr/intro.html>

Na-Rae Kim's Bookpress, book arts association

website for her own gallery of work and Seongnam International Book Arts Fair. Keith Smith's *Structure of the Visual Book* was translated into Korean by Na-Rae Kim in 2004.

Artists

The Sujak Book Art Studio: www.thesujak.com

Ji Heeseung: <http://bookstory.org>

Book Arts, Making Books

Myung Sook Lee, 2004, Communication Design, Seoul, Korea, ISBN 89 90551 15 3 13600

Hong In Young:

<http://artistbooks.ning.com/profile/Honginyoung>

You can see images of books by Korean artists from Stand 9 - Korean Book Art at the 5th Artists' Books + Multiples Fair organised by Noreen Grahame of grahame galleries + editions, Australia at:

<http://www.grahamegalleries.com/?cat=49>

This case study forms part of the Centre for Fine Print Research's AHRC funded project 2008 - 2010: *What will be the canon for the artist's book in the 21st Century (In an arena that now includes both digital and traditionally produced artists' books, what will constitute the concepts of artists' publishing in the future?)* <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm>