



The choice of works stocked at Rota's is partly to do with the history of the organisation – which has traditionally sold fine press work, though not exclusively so [the company has returned to selling predominantly fine press work since 2009]. It is certainly the case that a number of our private clients have formed collections of fine press books and would see artists' books as outside the scope of their collections. Many of our institutional clients have a broader concept of collections exploring 'the history of the book' and are keen to develop their collections with contemporary work which interrogates the book form. As well as the issue of production standards, issues of permanence/archival quality and storage of artists' books are also pertinent in this context.

Computer graphics and digital printing have moved artists' books production forward immeasurably. These sophisticated technologies replace non-archival forms of reproduction such as Xerox as an effective means of large-scale cost-efficient production. They also make the presentation of information and image much easier and more time-efficient than letterpress production was, so that artists are no longer so disciplined or restricted by their materials.

*If you have stocked books that have used a variety of production methods, which do you feel have been successful/unsuccessful and why?*

The greatest sales successes have been artists' books which have a broad understanding of traditional book production methods – even when deviating widely from these methods, or deliberately subverting them. So these could be printed letterpress, offset or inkjet ... The factor which sells a book tends to be quality of production and depth of concept rather than the materials used. I am more impressed by, and more likely to promote, books in which the artist has taken trouble with the work – if there is a binding it is executed to professional standards, and only falls to pieces if that is the intention. In broader terms, successful works are those which show an informed awareness of the historical context of book production, books which engage with their form, rather than just fetishise the book object – so that, for example, if the artist uses a *de luxe* binding with gilt and morocco, this contributes to voicing the subject matter of the book, rather than just subscribing to the artist's idea of what a hand-bound book should be. Individual productions don't have to be ambitious to be successful, but it is important that the artist has succeeded in a professional manner in what they have set out to do.

Inkjet and laser-printed works have a higher turnover because costs can remain low.

I've found that private collectors have a greater interest in illustration. I stock the work of several artists who use line-drawings and screen-printed images to develop a narrative and I find that these appeal more to individuals.

New technologies are making it much easier to find out about artists' publications. I think also the rise of the internet etc. is making the general public more interested in the possibilities of the book as a collectible object, with its redolent and romantic associations sharpened by its perceived demise.

*Do you stock, or would you consider stocking books that are to be viewed or listened to exclusively on digital equipment?*

Yes. I think the information revolution is one in which artists and designers are playing a part, and this makes experimental digital productions particularly interesting. One claim to justify fine press books has been that the independent printers and designers can influence mainstream publishing and design for the better through their exemplary typographic and design sensitivities. Similarly, I think book artists will influence contemporary discussions on ideas of text, narrative, media, and they should be given a seat at any summit exploring such ideas!

## **Marketing and Distribution**

The majority of books are sold through the shop's London premises, or by travelling to international book fairs and visiting specific institutions. Our main target audience is private collectors and institutional collections – particularly those dedicated to the history of the book or book arts.

## **The Future of the Book**

I think the future bookshop will be virtual. I know publishers – particularly charities – who are very concerned about the issue of how to cover editorial and production costs in the case of digital media. As booksellers have overheads too, if books go digital I think they will find it very hard to finance their businesses. Certainly digital technology has made it easier to market books to a wide audience, but I don't yet find it as productive as seeing clients in person.

I don't think there is a limit to the definition of an artist's book. However I do notice a distinct division among the books that I handle, between books reflecting on the nature of the book form, and books as a vessel for the artist's work. I prefer to keep an

open mind what an artist's book can be – more or less any sculptural object or printed multiple which an artist defines as an artist's book. I think the artist plays an important role in deciding the definition.

Perhaps I'm a little concerned about the diminishing use of traditional print skills, although there are still good opportunities available for those who want to learn them. But I am intrigued and excited by the ways in which our reading and research processes are changing as a result of new technologies, and how contemporary experiments with texts and books reflect this.

You can follow Nancy Campbell's Greenland residency at: <http://nancycampbelle.blogspot.com>

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>