

Artists' Books: Still Collecting... further thoughts, update 2008

John Janssen - a self-interview

I last wrote about my collecting artists' books in Dec. 1995 on the occasion of a talk I gave at an ARLIS conference in Glasgow. ('Still Collecting ... further thoughts: a supplementary self-interview', privately circulated, unpublished).

These notes today are meant as an update and comparison some twelve years later, occasioned by an invitation to contribute to a research project by UWE on the future and opportunities of / for artists' books in the digital age, with a particular emphasis on their marketing and distribution. Because of this context my notes will be mainly about my current practice of acquiring and buying books rather than the importance artists' books play in my life, and the pleasures I still derive from collecting and living with such a collection.

How have things changed for you as a collector since you wrote about it in 1995?

Some things haven't changed much at all. One of the main problems, perhaps the greatest single problem, for both makers and collectors of artists' books has always been their distribution. For bookmakers: how do I find my audience, buyers and collectors? For the collector: where can I see and buy these books?

What would solve this problem for you? What about bookshops?

The ideal situation for somebody like me would be if there were at least a small number of bookshops specialising in this genre. I realise this is not going to happen, and we need to look for alternatives in the age of digital media. But before that, let me say a few words about (real) bookshops: they once did exist, and perhaps without bookshops I might never have started collecting books at all.

I am old enough to remember Nigel Greenwood, Coracle Press, the Arnolfini bookshop, and Basilisk Press, but by 1995 they all had already become merely fond memories. However, it is unlikely, that any of them ever had been much of a financial success. (1) In 1995 we still had workfortheeyetodo, the wonderful bookspace / bookshop, where I spent many a happy afternoon, but they closed soon thereafter, when Simon Cutts and Erica Van Horn moved their operations, Coracle Press, to Ireland. (2)

Bookartbookshop, near Old Street, was set up by Tanya Peixoto six years ago, is now the only shopspace / bookshop in the UK dealing exclusively in artists' books. Its problem from the beginning has been lack of space and lack of resources. It is simply not big enough to achieve critical mass, when it becomes a destination for collectors. Instead it has always had to rely on passing trade like convenience shops: selling artists' books to impulse buyers - it doesn't make sense. But it is a chicken and egg situation: the shop can't afford to move to larger premises, but unless it does it cannot stock the range that would appeal to serious collectors. (3)

In Europe, we still have wonderful, wonderful boekie woekie in Amsterdam, the artist-run shop that last year celebrated its 20th anniversary. Long may they continue. (4) Koenig's 'mother' bookshop in Cologne also is still a destination for collectors like me, though with the expansion of Koenig's empire of bookshops and their increasing emphasis on their own publications (which, however, often include well produced artists' books), the range of artists' books stocked is perhaps no longer as wide, interesting and representative of the international scene as it was in the earlier days.

We may not get back to having specialised shops for artists' books, but my reason for recalling their pleasures in this context is to suggest the sort of expectations and satisfactions collectors like me would like to see emulated and 'equivalenced' by future digital, virtual, or online facilities and opportunities. A large part of the appeal of real bookshops is the choice and range they offer, the ability to compare and select.

If the demise of bookshops for artists' books is the result of their not being viable commercially, shouldn't the Arts Council subsidise such a shop to support artist bookmakers at large?

Well, back in the early 80's for a while we did have an Arts Council-run shop in London, located in Long Acre, which was essentially a bookshop specialising in art books, with a very small section of artists' books behind glass doors. (5) It was only a matter of time before it was decided that the Arts Council had more important things to do than run a shop, and they eventually passed the shop to Dillons, who initially kept it as an art bookshop, but soon the artists' books in their glass case became totally inaccessible behind mountains of bestsellers piled up on in front of them. Eventually the bookshop closed altogether, as Covent Garden became another destination for fashion and boutiques.

Thereafter the Arts Council's support for books and bookarts was channelled totally and exclusively to Book Works, and so it has remained for the past 20 (?) years. (6) Why? This has puzzled me for a very long time. I have always liked Jane Rollo, and have no doubt she is both knowledgeable and good at commissioning new books. However, I am not sure that this subsidy has benefited anybody but Book Works. I myself have acquired very few of their many publications. Few of them are artists' books by most people's standards or definitions. They are mostly quite competently produced commercial publications, not much different or better than those of other publishers. I don't see how the case for artists' books has been advanced by Book Works. But I've never heard anybody questioning the sense of continuing this support to the exclusion of everything else in the bookarts: another case of the Emperor's New Clothes? Moreover, I think most people are agreed that the problems faced by artist bookmakers are mostly those of distribution and marketing rather than of making books in the first place. I can only imagine this subsidy for Book Works provides a sort of alibi for the Arts Council against potential charges alleging a lack of support for books and bookarts.

If many other art forms and formats require public support for their flowering at the highest level, it could be argued that support for bookarts should similarly be given where it is needed most: for the running of a proper showplace, bookspace and bookshop for artists' books. Such a bookspace would need to be run by a suitable organisation at arm's length from the Arts Council.

Such a bookshop would have to be located in an accessible location, but need not be in a fashionable or central location, as it would act as a destination of choice rather than convenience. Above all it would need to have enough space to stock a wider and international range of artists' publications. (To appeal to visitors from near and far it would need to be located in London, however.)

To be honest I am not holding my breath for any of this to happen sometime soon, but the questions ought to be raised and debated by the bookarts community at large.

Which bookfairs do you attend, and how important are these to you?

I have attended the London-based bookfairs from their beginnings whenever I could.

The main one for me, and the one I always look forward to most, is the Small Publishers Fair. I have to explain, that I have known almost all the artists and publishers showing at this fair for almost as long as I have been collecting books, and many of them have become personal friends. I usually spend the whole two days at this fair! (Usually boekie woekie is there also, and sometimes Granary Books, N.Y., and other 'real' publishers from overseas, and this for me lifts the fair.) I collect most of these artists 'in depth', and will buy almost everything at the fair they have produced in the past year, or since I last met them. If there was no such fair I would acquire these books direct from these artists / publishers at other times, so it would be a little misleading to judge the importance of the fair to me from the number of purchases.

I also look carefully at other stalls and artists new to me, and I do buy the odd one that catches my eye - as long as it is not too expensive, say up to £15, above that it will require more careful consideration. Only occasionally will I add a new artist or publisher to my portfolio of 'regulars' - the most recent example perhaps was Floating World.

I am aware that this fair has a reputation for being near to a closed shop; there is certainly an emphasis on poetry and words, and above all 'publishing' as opposed to making handcrafted books in tiny editions. A recent reviewer has spoken of an 'ethical dimension' he finds in the type of books shown at this fair, and I would subscribe to this.

I also normally attend Marcus Campbell's LAB fair, but in recent years I have derived less enjoyment from this, as it has increasingly become dominated by the stands of colleges all waving their flags for their courses in competition with each other. Much of the work is of the itchy-bitsy novelty type, a sort of pre-Xmas bazaar. A vast crowd of students is milling around; this fair is certainly popular, but what about the books on show? By contrast Marcus Campbell also attracts a smaller number of artists making much more expensive Private Press books. I am very sceptical about these, too, these days, and don't pretend to more than polite interest for most of these, perhaps with the honourable exception of Circle Press.

Again my purchases at LAB will be mostly from artists I already know and like. Where I buy a little book from somebody 'new' it will find its place in a drawer of my filing cabinets labelled YBA. When I recently perused a couple of just these drawers I found that the appeal of most of these books had faded for me already, and that hardly any of the artists had become more prominent as book artists in the meantime: a sort of novelty book / novelty artist phenomenon seems to operate for these purchases of mine. (7)

I have also attended the BABE Bristol fair last year, which was interesting, but could have done with more space for exhibitors and visitors alike, and have visited the Leeds fair on its last two occasions in its splendid new space at the university there. I have some personal connections to Leeds from previous visits and from showing some of my books with Coracle at the Henry Moore there, but I was pleasantly surprised by its ambience and by meeting a few artists I had not met previously in London. I found myself buying more books than I had expected, even allowing for the batch of books from Ian Tyson I had previously negotiated to purchase on both occasions when visiting Leeds.

Leeds always produces a proper catalogue of artists showing at the fair, which I find very useful for reference and following up on books or artists that may have stayed in my mind. This year I particularly liked the stand of artistsbooksonline, whereby artists can show their books at the fair at moderate costs without actually having to attend the fair. I was quite impressed for example to see the Dutch artist Frans Baake's splendid books at their stall and couldn't resist them; even better he was also represented on UWE's stand. It is always good to see books from an established and mature artist from overseas alongside those from young home-grown artists for comparison.

There is also the cumulative effect of seeing a particular artist's books at different fairs. I had noticed Imi Maufe's books at the UWE stand on several occasions and different fairs before I started buying them, and I am only just beginning to consider myself a collector of her charming little books having acquired about eight of them to date.

I do not attend fairs for Fine Print and Private Presses. I still find handmade paper and letterpress printing highly beguiling, but I feel this is harking back to medieval times, while we have moved on to the 21st century. I dislike the preciousness of books produced in this manner, even where the contents is contemporary, say new poetry.

With new bookfairs springing up all over the country would you say fairs now make up for the disappearance / absence of bookshops for artists' books?

Only to a very limited degree. There is a good deal of overlap between all the fairs, with many artists and publishers showing at more than one fair, and collectors seeing much

the same range of books at whatever fair they attend. What you don't see at fairs are the books by the 'big' names in bookarts, That is books made by artists who work in many different media, and who often publish new books in conjunction with new shows at both public and private galleries and museums. These institutions then are the publishers of these books. Such books are often much better designed, printed and bound than those produced by artists with more slender means using more limited resources, but you never see these books at fairs. To me this makes a huge difference. To pretend bookfairs offer the best in artists' books is just ridiculous, sticking your head in the sand.

Baldessari, Barry, Beuys, Boltanski, Broodthaers, Brouwn, Byars, Carrion, Clemente, Darboven, de vries, Downsbrough, Feldmann, Filliou, Finlay, Fulton, Gerz, Gette, Gudmundsson, Huebler, Kaprow, Lewitt, Long, Messenger, Morellet, Nannucci, Nauman, Roth, Ruscha, Spoerri, Tot, Tremlett, Tuttle, Villers, Waanders, Weiner, Willats, Williams

The above names are just some of the past and current artists, whose books I am interested in and which I have collected in the past and mostly still do when I can. How many books from artists like these would I have come across at UK bookfairs?

No private collector could hope to collect everything he / she might be interested in, and one often has to be prepared to leave out books or artists which, for one reason or another, it is just not feasible / sensible to collect. Some people are happy enough to collect a narrow range of books, perhaps by just a few artists or publishers, perhaps just from those artists you do find at fairs. For me this just would not be an option.

Significantly, most of the artists in the above list are not based in the UK. But surely artists' books is a genre where language and country of origin matters less than in almost any other field. For me it seems indefensible to restrict one's artists' book collection to UK-based artists.

How then can you continue to collect books by artists not showing at fairs?

With difficulties! Some of the books published by major museums and galleries on the occasion of one-man shows of established artists achieve some distribution in art bookshops: Koenig's Serpentine bookshop and Tate Modern's shop are places where you would find books by artists like Fulton, Long, Lewitt, de vries, Weiner and the like. These publications therefore require constant vigilance and are easy to miss.

Often the distinction between what is a catalogue and what is an artist's book is blurred. Even artists themselves differ in the way they view their catalogues / books. Long for example previously stated, on the occasion of the publication 'Kuenstlerbuecher' by Krefeld Museum, that he regarded all his catalogues as artists' books, because he would have been closely involved in their format, design and contents, while admitting that his participation would rarely have been 'hands-on'. Lewitt by contrast once did compile a 'definitive' list of his artist's books, as distinct from other publications by, with, or about him, but closer inspection soon revealed that there were almost certainly errors and omissions in his own list. (8) To me this distinction has never been a problem. I am quite happy to describe myself as book collector rather than an artists' books collector. I have always kept a record of all my acquisitions (by way of keeping my addiction in check and thus stave off ruin!) but I have never classified my purchases into artists' books, monographs, general art, or whatever. In practice, if I like an artist's book, I am also likely to like, and be interested in, the catalogues of the same artist, so why worry? (9)

You seem very conservative in the ways you go about collecting artists' books. Don't you use the Internet at all for buying books?

I am coming to this. In fact, after buying direct from the artist / publisher or from a fair - which as I explained amounts to much the same in my case - buying via the Internet has become probably the second most important source for acquisitions for me, accounting for perhaps a third and possibly up to half of my total spending on artists' books these days.

However, most of this buying is done via abebooks rather than artists' websites or other sites devoted to artists' books currently in print. I was talking earlier about the need to emulate the experience of shops offering the widest range from throughout the world. These days for this I need to acquire first the catalogues of all major curated / juried book-shows. It is not about chasing famous / big names, but simply finding out what other experts have judged to be the most notable publications in the world of artists' books.

I have a large number of such reference books and spend a lot of money on these, but I find this quite indispensable in seeking out the most interesting books. Of course, it also matters who curated the shows. I know whose taste I broadly share, whose less so. (I append a list of my favourite reference books, which should form part of every collection of artists' books; I never understand how any college or library with a serious interest in this subject can do without them). (15)

This type of research creates lists of 'Wants'. Thereafter it becomes a matter of tracing suitable copies at affordable prices. Many of these books, however, will be out-of-print by the time I have identified them, and few of them will ever have been on any bookshop's or distributor's list of titles that can be ordered. Where could I go then to find a copy other than on the Internet?

I also carry out regular 'trawls' of the net by name for perhaps 40 of my favourite artists. I much enjoy this type of search and research, a sort of hunting for the prize prey. I search by name of artist, by publisher, by dates, by keywords, and by combinations of all these, rarely by title itself. I sort the long lists resulting in all sorts of ways, like a gold digger with a shovel panning for gold nuggets. Often I find other titles that I had not known about, and this then leads to further research in reference books and the net.

Of course, experience helps, and I by now I have established a few broad guidelines for buying artists' books from what are almost always antiquarian or second-hand book dealers throughout the world. (14)

It is amazing what you can find via the Internet. Back in 1995, before I started using the net, I used to trawl innumerable catalogues and bookshops for my wants, ever hopeful, but rarely with success. It would often take me years to find a particular book.

But where do these dealers in the abebooks system get their stock from? Rarely if ever from the artists directly. Sometimes from publishers as remainders. Sometimes they are books received by artists as gifts from other artists. (10) But mainly, I believe, by buying up the estates of deceased artists. (11) It confirms what I have long known to be the case with almost all my artist friends: Artists and bookmakers send their books to other artists and bookmakers as tokens of their esteem and friendship, or pride!, and they in turn receive copies of books in return.

I would not be surprised if this type of exchange and sending out of free books as gifts accounts for anything up to half of all artists' books made! (12)

How important are artists' and bookmakers' own websites to you then? Do you ever buy your books that way?

I use these websites mainly to find out more about an artist I may have met recently for the first time at a fair. I am particularly interested in bibliographies, lists of books they have ever made, with all details of publication, and, ideally, a picture of the cover and / or a key page. Availability and price should also be part of that information.

The quality of such websites varies, of course, a great deal, but my needs really are easily accommodated by something fairly simple in terms of webpage design. What is annoying is when links are not working, the site locks up and you may have to re-boot. Too many sites suffer from such basic faults. An all-singing-and-dancing website on the other hand has not much added appeal to me either. I cannot be persuaded to buy a book through its

high-tech presentation, if it doesn't appeal to me in the first place. I can tell almost instantaneously if a book has any appeal to me at all.

Have I ever bought a book from an artist's website? I can't recall, probably not directly. But I tend to prefer to establish some rapport first with an artist bookmaker about whom I know nothing and whose books I have not bought before. But sure, visiting such a site might be part of that process of working towards a situation where I eventually buy a book. Even then it might be by phone call, by letter or by email -rather than by direct ordering from a website.

Would I ever buy an artist's book just from visiting a website alone, which perhaps I was directed to through a link? No, most unlikely.

Are there any other things artists could do themselves to improve the distribution of their books and make it easier to achieve sales?

One simple thing every young bookmaker should do is to at least keep a record of who they have sold which book to - by name and address / email address. Few people will refuse to provide such information. The idea is to turn a first-time buyer into a repeat buyer and ultimately a collector of your books.

Finding a new customer is always the hardest thing. This is so in all fields, for anybody providing goods or services of any sort. Nobody likes cold-calling: it is not easy to do, and people don't like to be approached by somebody who wants to sell them something they don't want or need. But somebody who has at least once before bought your work will be much more amenable to a direct approach next time round.

It sometimes feels as if book artists think the potential market for their books is limited to fairs and institutional libraries. I think this is fundamentally wrong. What is needed long term are more private collectors, but they need to be nurtured and developed. And not just by selling, but by developing their critical faculties and appreciation of art in this form. One has first to 'learn to read' artists' books. (13) Indeed many people - potential collectors - enjoy getting to know artists, talking to them. Most people are fascinated by those who are creative. It shouldn't be hard.

I am constantly emailed by organisations whose goods or services I have bought before: hotels, ferries, galleries, car dealers, financial institutions, wine dealers: the more I have liked their goods and services in the past the more receptive they find me. They in turn already know what I like and don't like. They make me offers I can't refuse. It is about building loyalty, which then can become a benefit to both sides. All this is called database marketing. There is no reason to think it could not be made to work in the field of artists' books, too.

Notes:

1. Nigel Greenwood's bookshop had benefited from sharing premises with the gallery, which had been among the leading contemporary art galleries in London in the 70's and 80's. When the gallery suddenly went belly-up in 1992, the bookshop went with it, and much of its stock was auctioned off in bulk to end up in Marcus Campbell's second-hand bookshop.

Coracle Press had closed their Camberwell gallery in 1985 after Simon Cutts had joined Victoria Miro Gallery. Uniquely among London galleries and bookshops Coracle Press had for a number of years been in receipt of a revenue grant from London Arts. Even so the operation was desperately short of money almost throughout its life, and in retrospect it appears a miracle Coracle survived at all for those ten glorious years in that location.

The Arnolfini's bookshop in Bristol in the seventies was run by a manager, who was enthusiastic about artists' books and stocked a wide range of mainly offset printed books by American artists. The Arnolfini at the time was also forming their own collection of

artists' books, which would grow into one of the finest of its kind outside London. Then in 1981 the Arnolfini had a reorganisation; the bookshop was moved from its ground floor location to an upper floor without daylight and with a new manager. Artists' books now were out, their own collection boxed up and put into storage. The end - or almost.

The boxes were rediscovered by chance somewhere in Bristol some 25 years later, and somebody took an interest. In due course an application by the Arnolfini to fund an archivist to deal with it all was successful and a young man, Julian Warren, got the job. The books saw their first new public outing on the occasion of the BABE bookfair at the Arnolfini in 2007. A selection of them was put on show and was available for handling by all comers in one of the upstairs galleries. I couldn't believe it: here was the cream of some of the greatest artists' books produced in the 60's and 70's: Ruscha's titles, Nauman's LAAIR, etc, etc, all in near fine condition, and many worth many hundreds of Pounds - the Nauman alone probably £1500. There was no supervision whatsoever. How many books would still be there at the end of the fair? I alerted the Arnolfini staff. Julian W. was bleeped; he appeared to be rather surprised by what I told him. He clearly was a newcomer to artists' books learning as he went along. (What had happened to the index card file on the collection, which I remember somebody once showing me?) But to their credit they immediately arranged for an attendant to provide some security. I offered Julian my help to make sense of the collection, discuss problems, think about how to put on a programme of talks & seminars to celebrate the survival of this important collection and resource. He never took me up on my offer, as he must have felt I was encroaching on his role. I, too, forgot about it, and was only prompted again by the current project at UWE. Perhaps I should contact Julian W. to find out how far he has got, what is happening at the Arnolfini, and what the future holds for this collection.

Basilisk Press bookshop, near Rosslyn Hill, was run by Charlene Garry, and there has never been anybody more enthusiastic, optimistic and generous running such an enterprise than her. She really specialised in livres d'artiste and Private Presses, but displayed humbler artists' books in straw baskets and trays. Her catalogues provided insightful and enticing descriptions of every title listed, and were a model of their kind. It couldn't last: after about five years in 1984 Charlene G. closed her shop, but continued to issue catalogues for a while from her home. By that time she was already seriously ill and died of cancer soon after. Sometimes we only fully appreciate people like that, when they are no longer with us.

2. workfortheeyetodo had opened in Limehouse in 1990 and later relocated to Whitechapel. It is another enterprise that people remember with great affection, but it is necessary to point out that it was never a financial success either. It existed only because Cutts and Van Horn used the sales of their own books, Coracle Press, to pay for running the shop, rent and all overheads, i.e. they donated their own books for sale by the shop without drawing any salary themselves or charging for the books. workfortheeyetodo never received a public subsidy. Maggie Smith, who ran the shop, always reported how popular it was with all sorts of people who used it as a resource, but who never bought anything sometimes assuming it was publicly funded anyway!

3. The bookshop probably has a turnover of only between £30000 and £40000 per annum. If it wasn't for the fact that Tanya doesn't have to pay rent, it wouldn't make any sense whatsoever economically, even allowing for the goodwill of her friends and supporters who help her run the shop. Her terms of business with her suppliers, 50 % of sales retained by the shop and stock held by the shop on a sale or return basis without being paid for until sold, do not sound overgenerous, but what else is Tanya to do? The generosity of artists and small publishers in their business dealings is often difficult to understand by outsiders. 'Big' names among artists and publishers are less willing to accept such terms, however, and so it becomes almost impossible to stock the full range of books the shop would be expected to stock.

4. If it wasn't for steady sales of their own postcards and t-shirts with tulips and Amsterdam themes even they would not have survived all these years. Even so, one of

the three artists, who have run the shop since its inception, last year decided to return to Iceland to take up paid work for an unspecified period of time.

5. To my recollection there was nobody among the staff running the shop who had any interest or knowledge of artists' books, quite different from the Arnolfini situation. I did, however, once find an intriguing little stapled pamphlet full of strange graphic symbols, somewhere between Sol Lewitt and railway semaphore signals, with no author or title, but with a proper price sticker of just 10p. I have still got it. I later learnt from friends, who had perpetrated this little deceit on the shop, but I'm afraid I've long forgotten! I was reminded by that story only at the recent UWE seminar, when one of the speakers reported similar goings-on from the results of stock takes at the Tate Modern bookshop.

6. I recall a figure of £150000 p.a. being mentioned in the early years. I have no knowledge of what the actual figures ever were or what they have been in more recent times.

7. Because many of my artists' books are not big enough to stay upright and in its place on a bookshelf, I have to keep the smaller books in filing cabinets. And artists whom I collect in numbers may initially share a drawer with one or more other artists, before 'graduating' to a dedicated, named drawer. Only a few artists will ever make it to a second drawer, while Ian Hamilton Finlay and Coracle each have a whole filing cabinet to themselves. There have even been cases where I perhaps prematurely dedicated a drawer to an artist, who subsequently stopped making books, before they had fulfilled their early promise or filled their drawer! The names of Robert Maude and, especially, Daniel Jubb spring to mind, who in the early 90's had looked like becoming the next wunderkind, before giving up art altogether to join - so I believe - the more lucrative world of advertising. But even with hindsight the five books he made look a splendid achievement and I still like them.

8. Lewitt's own list of books was published in his book for Portikus, Frankfurt, 1990. Alternative versions have been compiled in the catalogues for major retrospectives of his work and elsewhere, e.g. by Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen, 1994. I once compared all these versions when selecting a Lewitt bookshow for Dundee, and I did subsequently send my own consolidated version of his artist's books to Sol Lewitt who, probably with amusement, acknowledged it, without, however, taking sides. No two people will ever agree what is an artist's book and what is not.

9. Sometimes I'm asked as to how many artists' books I have, and the answer has to be: it depends, what you mean by an artist's book. My records show that I have acquired some 9000 books / publications (excluding cards, folding cards and ephemeral items) since 1963. I started collecting what we now would regard as artists' books around 1974, and I would estimate that artists' books make up perhaps somewhere between 25% and 35% of the total depending on one's definitions and classifications.

Even if I had ever classified my books into artist's book: yes / no, I am not sure the classification could or would have remained consistent over time. And to quote Simon Cutts - who once proposed to have a year without artists' books: 'What is the difference between artist's books and books made by artists which are not artist's books, and books?'

10. I have bought a good many books of Ian Hamilton Finlay's over the years from Alan Halsey, which Finlay had signed 'with love from Ian' to various friends of his, who clearly preferred a little cash alternative by passing them on to a second-hand book dealer.

11. In the UK this is certainly the case for both Marcus Campbell and Alan Halsey, and the same was told to me by Andre Swertz in Utrecht last year, one of my main dealers in Holland. It appears there are still a good many artists who drink themselves to a premature end. Their surviving partners often have little interest in these books, and it becomes understandable that before long some will try to turn unwanted books into cash.

12. After the death of the artist / bookmaker / publisher / editor Brian Lane in 1999, when a group of his friends, including myself, examined his papers and archives for transfer to the Tate, we found that throughout his life as an artist also making books he had given away a large percentage of his books to friends and acquaintances, who he felt would appreciate them (and most of them did!). He would always claim that his distribution was a mix of give-aways and sales, which apparently 'had worked well' for him, but in reality these sales were often not very significant at all. (The Printed Performance. Brian Lane. Works 1966-99, ed. Martin Rogers & Simon Cutts, RGAP, Derby, 2001).

13. Indeed, a splendid enamel badge by Sol Lewitt and sold by Printed Matter reads 'Learn to read art'. It should be the motto for all artists' books and any organisation promoting them. Note the emphasis on 'reading' - not making!

14. Some Guidelines for Buying Artists' Books: 'Wants' via the Internet:

- Buy the cheapest copy available in an acceptable condition. In practice that usually means 'fine' or 'very good', but 'good' invariably means not very good at all!
- Do not assume the more expensive copies are always in the better condition.
- Study the description of any book's condition most carefully: most dealers are honest, but some are simply more lazy than others.
- Ask questions per email as to condition if you are not sure. Good dealers will reply very promptly; leave those that don't well alone: always assume the worst.
- Try to avoid acquiring ex-library copies. Learn to recognize dealers most of whose stocks is from this type of source - they tend to be less scrupulous as a rule.
- Book prices in the US are roughly half what they are in the UK and the rest of Europe, but charges for postage from the US have become exorbitant and often exceed the cost of the book. Therefore use US dealers only as a last resort.

The US has some top dealers specialising in rare artists' books and 'big' names. These dealers, however, are very expensive, and I try to avoid them where I can.

The invisible charges to dealers in the abebooks system these days are quite steep and amount in total to about 15% of the sales value, but dealers can charge what they like for postage and packing, and abebooks allows them to keep it all without further deductions. Dealers widely exploit this by overcharging the customer and thus compensating themselves for their abebooks deductions.

- Set up an account with a bank in Europe, which allows you to transfer money to dealers' bank accounts directly in Euros without incurring bank charges.
- Having identified via abebooks a dealer who has a book you want in the right condition deal with that dealer directly outside the abebooks system by offering to pay up-front in Euros directly to his account.
- Negotiate for a discount against the Euro price and ask for mailing post-free. Sometimes I suggest the price I would buy at, at other times I ask the dealer what help he can offer me to acquire the book. Most dealers are quite agreeable to such deals. Walk away otherwise.
- Build up relationships with a few key dealers in Europe: Andre Swertz and Luiscius, both in Holland, often have the books I'm interested in, and now there is mutual trust.
- Stick to your limit as to what you would be prepared to pay for a particular book. Do not be tempted if the only copy available is too expensive: another will turn up another day at the right price.

15. Some reference books, surveys and catalogues listing Artists' Books:

The Artist and the Book in England, Morley College, London, 1971

Book as Artwork 1960-1972, Germano Celant, Nigel Greenwood, 1972

Artists' Bookworks a British Council exhibition, 1974

Artists' Books, selected by Martin Atwood, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976

Text Sound Image. Small Press Festival, Guy Schraenen, Antwerp, 1976

The Open & Closed Book. Contemporary Book Arts, V & A Museum, London, 1979 ed. R.C. Kenedy

Kuenstlerbuecher. Artists' Books, Lydia Megert, Bern, 1980 book works, eds. Jane Rolo & J. Walwin, South Hill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell, 1981

Printed Matter Catalog. Books by Artists, N.Y., 1981, 1983/84, 1986 (the best ever commercial catalogues, illuminating descriptions)

Books by Artists, Tim Guest & Germano Celant, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1981 (one of the classics, good text, well illustrated)

Kuenstlerbuecher, Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1981 (multi-national exhibition, essays and selections by experts for each country)

du livre, Rouen, 1982, (well-informed selection, well illustrated)

British Artists' Books 1970-1983, ed. I. Tyson & S. Turner, Atlantis, 1984 (a last hurrah for the livre d'artiste - and its farewell)

Artists' Books, ed. Joan Lyons, Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985

Livres D' Artistes, ed. A. Moeglin-Delcroix, Centre Pompidou, 1985 (one of the best shows ever, organised thematically and attractively illustrated)

Das Archiv Sohm, Thomas Kellein, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1986

Kunstenarsboeken. Book as Artwork, Guy Schraenen, Provincial Museum Hasselt, 1990

Work & Turn. Artists' Bookworks from the UK, ed. David Blamey, Open Editions, 1992

Books as Art, Boca Raton Museum of Art, 3rd edition, 1993

Kuenstler Buecher I, Krefelder Kunstmuseum, 1993 (every book ever made by eight of the biggest names)

Facing the Page. British Artists' Books 1983-1993, ed. I. Tyson & S. Turner, estamp, 1993

Buecher der Kuenstler, Hansjoerg Mayer, 1994

The Century of Artists' Books, Johanna Drucker, Granary Books, 1995

Esthetique du livre d'artiste, A, Moeglin-Delcroix, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, 1997

Livres d'artistes l'invention d'un genre, Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, BndF, Paris, 1998 (only 48pp, but a model pamphlet: accessible, authoritative, informative, attractive)

Artist / Author: Contemporary Artists' Books, C. Lauf & C. Phillpot, D.A.P., 1998

Speaking of book art, Cathy Courtney, Anderson-Lovelace, 1999

Sand in der Vaseline. Kuenstlerbuecher II. 1980-2002, Walther Koenig, 2002

Libros de Artista / Artist's Books, Hellion/Turner, Netherlands / Mexico, 2004

guardare raccontare pensare conservare, ed. A. Moeglin-Delcroix et al., Mantua, 2004,
'four directions of the artist's book from the Sixties to the present' (exceptionally well
illustrated catalogue of a comprehensive survey & exhibition)