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Creative practice

For my own artists' books: Inkjet, Laser printed, Print-on-demand, Letterpress, Screenprint, Etching, Lithography, Altered books, Sculptural books.

Students use: Inkjet, Laser printed, Screen based/ Internet, Linocut, Letterpress, Etching, Woodcut, Lithography, Altered books, Sculptural books, Photocopy, Hand-drawn/Letraset.
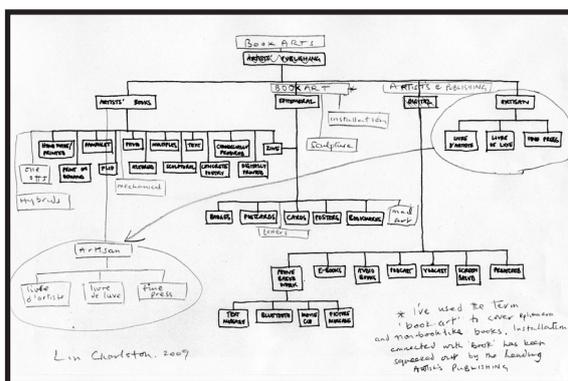
ABTREE

I want to make room for 'book art' i.e. book related installation, sculpture, performance…
These seem to have dropped off the edge in order to accommodate digital developments under the new title 'Artist's Publications'.

I wouldn't rule out anything on the diagram for my own work but so far the following apply for my students' work.
Under ARTISTS' BOOKS: all of the headings except print-on demand and commercially produced.
Under EPHEMERAL: postcards (for mailart) and bookmarks.
Under DIGITAL: screen based and projected.
Under ARTISAN: fine press.

Technology and Tradition

I am constantly expanding my skills (both traditional and new tech) so that I have a larger range of production methods to make use of. I teach mature students who are already established printmakers or artists. They work with their own software and are reluctant to switch or spend too much on new software. I teach traditional techniques so that they

can be used towards the meaning of the book. I also encourage experimental use of traditional methods.

I like to combine traditional and contemporary methods. For example, preparing text on the computer and printing it letterpress or scanning intaglio prints to process and print digitally. Traditional purists would say that the quality suffers. Fulfilling the concept of the book is an issue for me rather than the conventional correctness of the method.
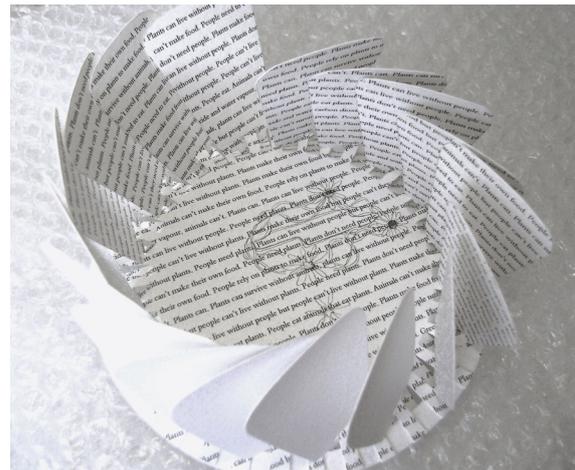
Plants Can, Lin Charlston, 2009
Plants can make their own food. Plants can live without people. As you turn the pages of this artist's book you may be reminded of unfurling petals or leaves. The book when wide open looks like a flower - or a sun. Is there a connection? Yes, plants have been using energy from the sun to make food from CO_2 and H_2O for millions of years. The structure of the book is based on a vegetable steamer, which completes the cycle – plants make the food, we eat the plants. This is an open edition, printed digitally with some floral doodles added by hand, on Fabriano Pittura paper.

For teaching though, technology is useful: the Internet is a fantastic resource for research, historical perspective, seeing artists' work, criticism, methods, supplies, events and exhibitions. Email is useful to exchange ideas and work on collaborative books. Students use Photoshop® or similar software to process digital photographs and scanned images. I use Photoshop® to process digital photographs and scanned images, Word® or Quark® to lay out the final book and to process text. Students use Word® or DTP software to lay out the final book and to process text. Inkjet printing is invaluable for producing editions.

As to how my working process will adapt as technology develops: hysteresis applies. In other words, I adapt with a time lag.

I have enjoyed making books using a combination of production methods, some part of which I perform myself, e.g. commercial offset-litho printing can be

made up and stitched by hand, on demand. Another example, when I print using a vintage platen press I may use commercially made plates which I have previously designed in Quark®. Less successful (and frustrating) is inkjet printing on the occasions when the quality or colour is unreliable.

My production methods would be different if I could spend thousands on better, newer, more expensive equipment and a bigger space for working and storing paper, books and tools. Students are reluctant to make more than one copy of books that require a large amount of time, effort, or money. Therefore even small editions involve compromises over paper, archival quality, structural complexity and technique.

New technologies provide a resource for doing background research for my books and also looking at other artists' work and methods. I have considered collaborative projects using webcams, Skype, email and blogs. Mature students are using new technology to extend and support traditional skills. They can do things that were previously impossible. This is exciting and changes their whole outlook to the creative process. It is interesting that the opposite applies for younger students who have grown up with new technology and who may turn to traditional skills later to expand their creative repertoire.

Marketing and Distribution

I sell my artists' books through Artist's Book Fairs, Exhibitions, specialist shops, websites, ABYB. I have used the Internet to sell my work via Amazon link-ins. Students have also sold their works at exhibitions, Artists' Book Fairs and local shops, and used their own websites and gallery websites.

A student who made an edition of concertinas from a single etched plate remarked that the work would be easier to show and would sell more easily and at a much higher price when flattened out and framed.

Teaching History and Theory

I teach Book Arts at Westhope Craft College in Shropshire (internal certification is offered) and Summer Workshops at the Sidney Nolan Trust, Presteigne and elsewhere. Each module at Westhope is the equivalent of 4 days 'Structure', 'Image', 'Text', 'The Whole Book'

Students have purchased or read parts of:
The Century of Artist's Books, Johanna Drucker
Creating Artist's Books, Sarah Bodman

Text in the Book Format, Keith Smith
Non-adhesive Bindings, 1-4 Keith Smith
UWE's *Book Arts Newsletter*

They are encouraged to research and discuss: ancient books and scripts; illuminated manuscripts; traditional and modern book production; Blake; Morris; livres d'artistes; avant-garde movements, artists and writers; the emergence of the artist's book 60s onwards and artist's books of practising artists.

When looking at artists' books in exhibitions or online, they are enthusiastic about highly sculptural work such as Su Blackwell, Susan Porteous, Brian Dettmer. However, their own books are usually hand-held and influenced by a wide range of artists and styles.

The Future of the Book

Do you think there is any limit to the definition of an artist's book?

Yes, but luckily artists usually ignore limits.

I would define an artist's book as an artwork which:
is in the form of a book
and/or
refers to 'the book'
and/or
includes elements of 'book' (sequence, narrative, text, pages ...)

The horizon of the book is expanding.
As long as there is a market for traditionally produced books, the skills will survive to a certain extent.

It is possible that as new technologies become commonplace, both artists and their audience will turn to dying skills with renewed interest. There is already a rising interest in artisan skills such as letterpress.