

Simon Ryder, Private Collector, UK

ABTREE

The books I collect are various but sit primarily within the artists' books categories, and are mainly Letterpress, Woodcut, Etching, Altered Books and Sculptural books.

However, the "artists' books" categories appear to embrace production processes and formats, so are not mutually exclusive. Also I don't see a distinction between the Artisan categories and the 'commercially produced' artists' books, both of which I would say I collect.

I am not convinced about several of the Digital categories, as I wouldn't include them under a consideration of books (e.g. vodcasts, movie clips; Bluetooth as simply being a means to access the other categories). This led me to reflect further on the overall heading of artists' publishing – doesn't this also embrace music and other art forms? Maybe the overall heading should be more focused on Books. Ephemera and Artisan are subsets of the production of physical items.

Technology and Tradition

Over time, the types of books I have collect have changed from commercially produced illustrated books through fine press to sculptural, altered etc. I collect books that have been printed using mainly traditional methods, as this can be about the quality of production. Successful books combine an integration of idea, form and content

Yes, the computer has obviously impacted on the production of artists' books. Firstly, use of software packages like Photoshop; secondly, inkjet printing etc makes limited editions easier and cheaper to produce; thirdly, digital transmission. All these enable a wider range of artists to consider the production of books, but also diminish the importance and perceived value of traditional skills. Wider issues of technological convergence and the use of creative content across different platforms also impact on both the production and definitions of artists' books. Then wider Internet issues of promotion & distribution etc.

Marketing and Distribution

I buy the majority of the artists' books I collect at Artists' Books Fairs, but I have used the Internet to buy from Gallery websites and artist's own websites. I do collect some free books produced using purely digital media, partly to explore more widely than might otherwise be the case.

Bookshops give opportunities to sample, to discover something you didn't know existed, to experience a physical entity. For digital media, shops should aim to provide means (facilities) for the first 2 of these e.g. headphones, screens.

No, I don't think digital media will be widely collected. Digital media raise such enormous questions about what it is to collect, what is being collected (e.g. access or an experience rather than a physical entity?), 'ownership' etc. I don't have the answers!!

The Future of the Book

Yes, I do have concerns about the future of the book, for example the loss of traditional artisan skills. I would not want to suggest anything to limit to the definition of an artist's book - which acted as a constraint on artists' creativity...but do we simply accept in every case that X is a book because the artist says it is?

I suspect there will be always be fuzzy boundaries between 'books' and other artistic creations. However, I do see a difference between 'pushing the boundaries' of (any) definition of books and an 'anything goes' approach if the implication is we can label anything a book! That distinction may not be at all achievable except in theory in my head!

Defining an artist's book is too big a job for me! I suppose I start from a very simple perspective that we can create and communicate artistic content in a variety of ways, including visual, oral, other sensory, physical and digital means. If an artist's book is to mean something distinctive, including in some way being not just the 'creative content', then I suppose an essential part of a definition for me includes some form of physical entity. Should this include portability to distinguish from e.g. painting?

The parallel for other art forms may be music – the song is one thing, the CD/LP/digital download are all forms, not content. But for me an artist's book integrates idea, form & content in a different way to virtually all music.

This may simply label me a traditionalist – so be it!

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>