

## Artists' Books Seminar 1, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2008

*How are artists using and investigating new media for publishing?*

*Where are we going with this?*

*Where will the books end up?*

Introduction to the seminar: Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden

This is the first seminar of our AHRC-funded project - *In an arena including digital and traditional artists' publishing formats – what will be the canon for the artist's book in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?*

The American critic and book artist Johanna Drucker, wrote in 2005 of the need for a canon for artists' books, to provide a descriptive vocabulary and critical terminology, in order to stimulate academic discussion and artistic practice within the field.

This research project intends to take the proposal further in the light of emerging media, by extending Drucker's argument into an open and responsive debate for an international audience of artists, academics, presses, publishers, curators, dealers and collectors involved in the field. It is necessary for the historical understanding and future growth of the field to uphold both traditional values of the 'artisan' produced book and to include new formats of 'interdisciplinary' artists' publishing.

This is a time of flux in the history of the artist's book. Advances in digital media continue to enter the field, which has led to critical arguments over the understanding and appreciation of what constitutes an artist's book in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Artists have always utilised new processes as they enter the mainstream, from letterpress printing and screenprint, to desktop publishing, and more recently, the newer technologies of CD ROMS, online file sharing and podcasting.

Our aim is to extend and sustain critical debate of what constitutes an artist's book in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - to publish a manifesto for a canon which would include both 'old' and 'new' formats of artists' books publishing - in order to propose an inclusive structure for the academic study, artistic practice and historical appreciation of the artist's book.

We intend to offer a series of examples of concepts and formats of artists' publishing - to encourage artists and academics to take the opportunity of discussing how and where they would fit in the canon through a range of online and paper feedback. The debate will be extended through continual monitoring of the responses and the publishing of regular updates and arising issues online, and through hosting two seminars, of which this is the first, and a conference exploring new and existing forms of artists' publishing.

Today's seminar focuses on the future of artists' books and artists' publishing. We will be looking at some of the recent advances in digital media and seeing how this is already being utilised by artists and mainstream publishers. We will also be raising the questions of where the assimilation of this technology will go and what effect it will have on the production of artists' books.

Publishing via mobile phones is already starting to become prominent. Half of last year's ten, best-selling novels in Japan were originally mobile phone novels (keitai shousetsu - literally, "mobile novels"). These novels are aimed particularly at teenagers and people in their twenties and are written in short sections, containing little plot and have cliffhanger endings to keep you coming back for more installments. With 100 million handsets in circulation, the mobile phone is Japan's most ubiquitous accessory and they have been publishing novels this way since 2003.

Maria Fusco will be talking about using Bluetooth messaging for her book works today, and American artist Angie Waller developed her Clip-fm project in 2000. Clip-fm's are simple clip art animations for the mobile phone that, as she says, 'come in handy when you have some news to tell someone, but aren't brave enough to tell her to her face. Clip-fm's goal is to foster more honest and direct communication between "wired" people through the convenience of cellular devices' (see: [www.clip-fm.com](http://www.clip-fm.com)). We are interested to see how mobile phone technology will continue to be used by artists.

In the handouts, we have copies of two views on artists' publishing from the latest issue of The Blue Notebook. The artist Jana Harper looks at DIY Internet publishing on demand (POD) options such as Lulu, Blurb, and Apple's iPhoto with reference to "democratic" book making.

Continuing the Internet explorations, Emily Artinian contacted c.100 people working in the book medium for a study in participation (and the lack of) for the Wikipedia definition of artists' books. There is also a copy of Francis Elliott's Wikipedia entry on the book Yves: Peintures by Yves Klein, of which he will be talking more about shortly. You will also find in your handouts a sheet of useful web links that relate to our topics today.

There will be five talks today and after each one there will be a ten-minute discussion/question and answer session that we really want you to participate in. The more opinions that are expressed the better. We will be recording the whole day and putting the audio files onto our website for people to listen to.

We would also urge you to please participate further in our project by completing a survey questionnaire and joining our online forum that will be launching shortly. The questionnaires are either available online at [www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/asurvey08.htm](http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/asurvey08.htm) or we do have some hard copies that you can take away today. There are six different questionnaires aimed at book artists, students, academics/instructors, collectors/curators, dealers and presses/publishers.

As part of the survey we would appreciate it if you could respond to the Artists' Publishing Tree diagram. This diagram was quickly drawn up by Tom in an attempt to classify the different areas of artists' publishing. With your copy please feel free to change as much or as little as possible. If you would prefer, re-draw it completely with how you think the many areas of artists' publishing should be classified and what else should be included. The returned responses to this diagram will then form part of an exhibition to accompany the Impact conference to be held at UWE in September 2009 called 'New Wave: from traditional to emerging artists' publications'. Please sign your diagram if you would like to be identified.

We will also be launching an online forum in the very near future. This forum will be an opportunity to discuss artists' publishing issues with a worldwide audience. The threads for each discussion will be started by Sarah or Tom and will be relevant to our AHRC project, the results of which may be quoted in our final publication, if people give permission for this.

There will be two distinct areas to the forum, 'The Artists' Publishing Forum' that will be split into the following four discussion sections: General, Creative Production Issues, Historical and Contemporary Context, and Marketing and Collecting Future Formats. There will also be an 'Experimental Publishing Gallery'. This will be an area where people can upload their digital artists' books for display and dissemination. The artwork files can either be image files, text, phone movie clips, podcasts or sound files, video-podcasts or movie clips, Flash or Shockwave animations, html works and links or E-books.

We look forward to hearing your views today.