

DOING GOOD WITH BOOKS

Sarah Bodman

As a researcher at the Centre for Fine Print Research, at UWE Bristol, UK, part of my role is to write and publish reference material that assesses the current state of artists' books. This includes the free download *Book Arts Newsletter*, *The Blue Notebook* journal for artists' books and the biennial reference publication the *Artist's Book Yearbook*. Through the information that is gathered for these both nationally and internationally, I can monitor activity as the field grows, pass on news as it comes to light, observe as interest develops in certain areas, and assist new artists emerge onto the scene. It is a great position to be in and one that I can use to channel information out into the wider community of artists and interested parties. So, for readers of this catalogue, the following text will share some news on the community of the book, some artists, groups, places and projects that open the artist's book up to the wider public.

As the iconic, largest non-profit organisation dedicated to books by artists, Printed Matter (est. 1976), celebrates the move into its new, specially designed two-storey space on Chelsea's 11th Avenue in New York, there are many other great things happening with artists' books around the world, and closer to home. As the programme for *Opening Up the Book* shows, artists' books are integrating themselves into many aspects of creative life with a book appreciating public. A growing



Figure
1

interest in paper-based books and by association artworks, has allowed artists to do many good things with and for books, and the current energy is palpable.

We have new fairs in the UK, such as Counter (Figure 1), organised by

Plymouth-based artists Maddy Pethick, Paul Hearn (Pineapple Falls) and Vickie Fear, who rightly describe themselves as “keeners, fans, and DIY enthusiasts”, in their pursuit of sharing books with others. In Australia, the first Melbourne Art Book Fair took place this May at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), and was so successful that the following week it was announced as an annual event.

In Leeds, the *PAGES* artist’s book fair and associated annual events, coordinated by John McDowall and Chris Taylor celebrated its 18th iteration this year, inside a new, larger venue at the Tetley, with a programme of exhibitions and talks alongside the two-day fair. In May, *turn the page* artist’s book fair at the Forum, Norwich showcased the delights of sculptural and one-off books to an appreciative public, including a reworked version of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, created by American artist Brian Dettmer during a residency at Shandy Hall, Coxwold, home of the Laurence Sterne Trust.

With many regular fairs and events established in the UK and Ireland taking place from Dublin to Edinburgh, Gateshead, Leeds, London, Limerick, Liverpool, Manchester, Norwich, Bristol, Reading and Plymouth, including this 5th outing of the *Sheffield International Artist’s Book Prize* and its ever-growing programme, there are other opportunities to engage with artists’ books in between the calendar of fixed events. Good Press in Glasgow (Figure 2) moved into a new independent gallery / bookstore space earlier this year, and continues



to run an energetic programme of artists’ talks, exhibitions, and residencies. In London, *bookartbookshop* (Figures 3/4) has regular launches, readings and celebrations to accompany its permanent showcase stock of hundreds of

Figure 3

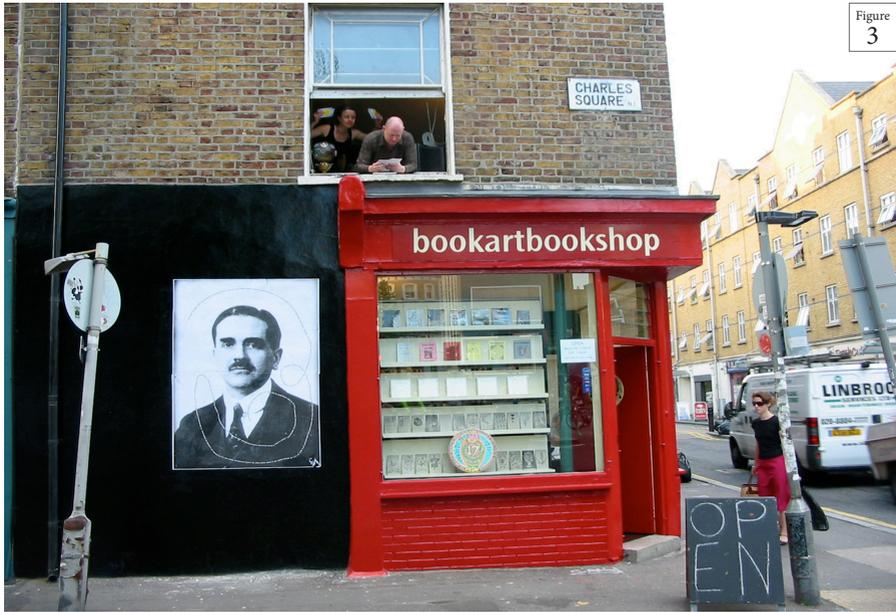
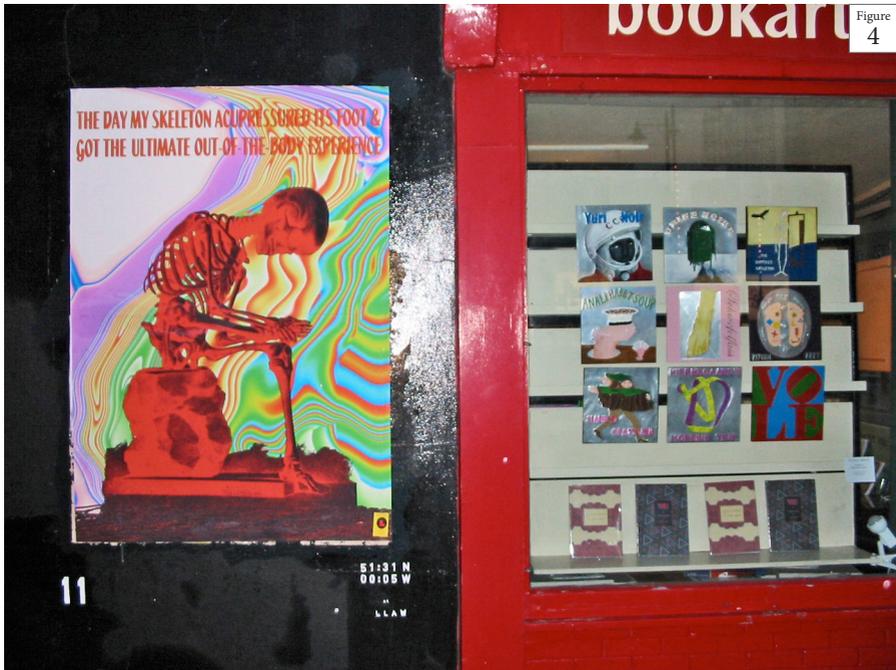


Figure 4



books by artist publishers.

As a nation we even have our own dedicated centre for book arts in London. The USA has a long history of such places, with the Center for Book Arts in New York established in 1974. The Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA), the largest organisation for artists' books in the USA, and champion of taking book arts out into the wider community celebrated its 30th anniversary this year (Figures 5/6/7). This included a year-long programme: *This Is Book Art*, offering free talks and



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

promotional workshops, and a Book Art Biennial in July celebrating books by national and international artists.

The London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA), took the success of MCBA as its model and in 2013 opened its doors in Britannia

Works as the first organisation of its kind in the UK; an artist-run, open-access resource and education centre dedicated to book arts and self-publishing (Figure 8). Alongside LCBA, artists can access facilities and expertise to make books in many printmaking studios around the country. Hot Bed Press in Salford (Figure 9), is North West's largest open access print workshop, with many members actively involved



Figure 9

with artists' books. It is also the first studio in the country to introduce a one-year certificate course 'The Complete Book Artist', training artists in a professional environment outside of academia. Other studios have followed, with Spike Print in Bristol offering a new certificate course 'Book Arts: Hand Printed Artists' Books'. These courses are invaluable in that they offer development for artists in



a professional studio environment, which means that the field will grow as more artists become involved. And with more artists' books being made, comes more engagement with the public audience. Putting the *Book Arts Newsletter* together every 4-6 weeks, gives me the luxury of seeing all of the good things that are happening each month, from new artists' publications to courses, talks and workshops. Artists' books can travel quite easily, and through exhibitions and fairs they regularly end up in the hands of the public around the world. Looking back to the start of 2015, the last four newsletters amassed around 70 pages featuring exhibitions of artists' books, whether large-scale solo shows, curated or collaborative group exhibitions at venues from Australia to Iceland, Brazil, Russia, Portugal, New Zealand, Ireland, Austria, France, Switzerland, Norway, Egypt, Poland, South Africa, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark, The Netherlands, UK and USA. This amount of activity demonstrates the current vitality of the artist's book and is just a sample of the breadth of audiences reach.

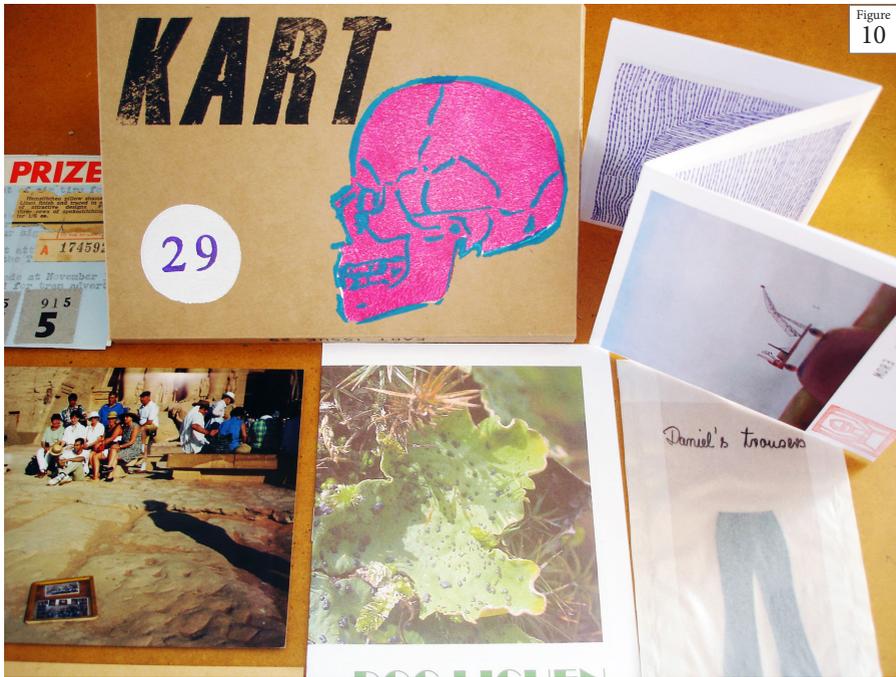


Figure 10

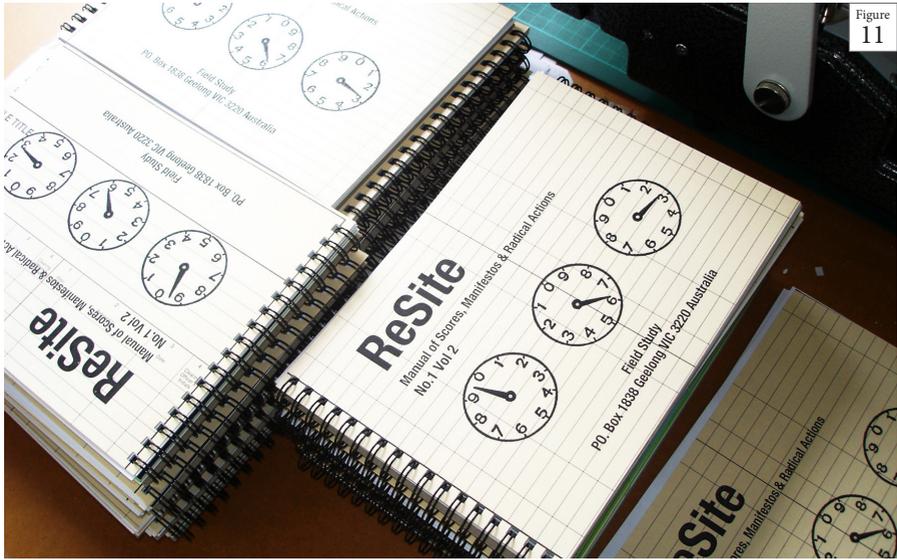


Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

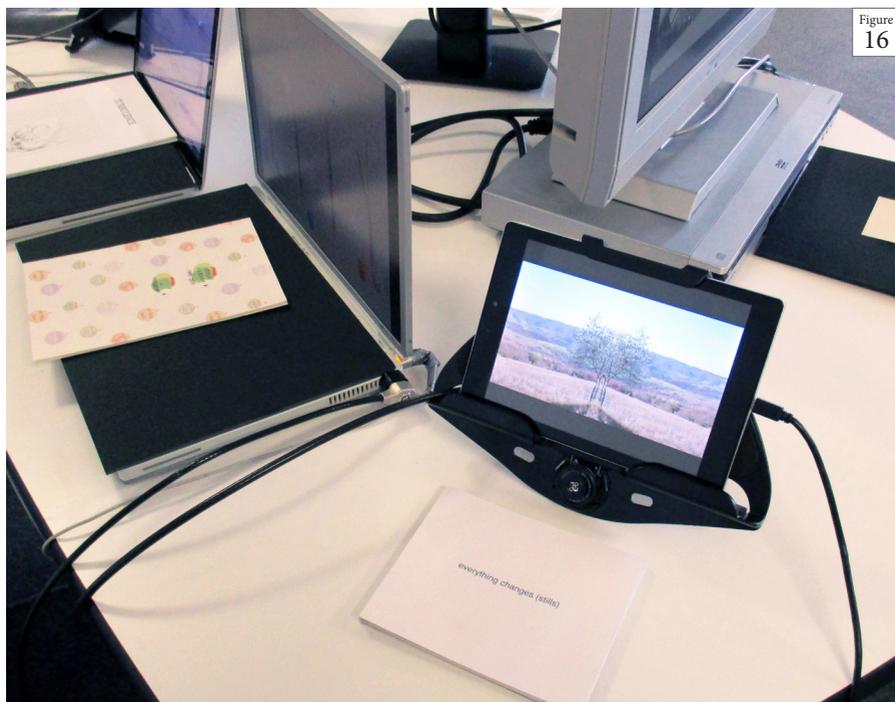
Around the world artists are joining forces on collaborative book projects and building their own organisations for artists' books. Field Study International, established in 1993 and headed up in Australia by David Dellaflora, concentrates on community publishing projects, with open calls to international artists to send in contributions for collaborative artists' books (Figures 10/11); Booklyn in the USA has established a popular

Figure 14



Figure 15





gallery, exhibition and workshop series uniting artists working in the book format (Figures 12/13); the artistsbooksonline.com collective based in the UK represents artist members from many countries through exhibitions and stands at book fairs, offering a community for makers of small editions who could not afford to exhibit their work alone. The UK artists' books group AMBruno (Figure 16) has brought together artists from diverse practices since 2008, to develop work and exhibit as a collective, successfully showing at Printed Matter's Art Book Fair and other national and international venues. Collective Investigations established by Egidija Čiricaitė, George Cullen and Chris Gibson is a long-term publishing project and arts investigation looking at the contemporary artist's book in the codex format (Figures 14/15). Their practice involves producing, publishing, performing and exhibiting books, and offers a platform for discussion of our relationship with the book as an artefact. In Australia, the recent Artists' Books Brisbane

Figure
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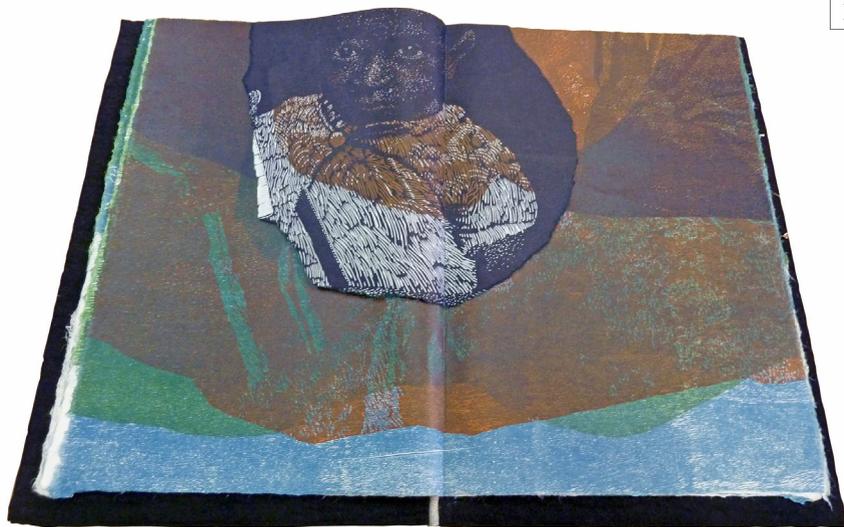


Figure
18



Event (ABBE) also contributed to this discussion through offering ideas towards a critical language for talking about artists' books today. The central themes for the event were shaped through the terms "post literacy", "the haptic" and "materiality", offering a response to the US academic and commentator Johanna Drucker's call for artists to contribute their own input into how their works are perceived and understood as a discipline. ABBE built upon recent research in this area by its founder, the artist Tim Mosely, whose practice explores the haptic touch in artists' books. His ongoing practice with books examines the particularly unique relationship between the viewer/reader and the artist's book, that of touch and using all of our senses to experience artworks fully.

Mosely's artist's book *Kanage Pholu Wanda* was first exhibited at his solo show *re/membering touch* at Queensland State Library in 2014 (Figures 17/18). It is a beautiful, large-scale book that demands interaction with viewers as it leads them through a tactile and visual narrative of the plight of Kanage Pholu Wanda of the Samberigi (Sa:mba:leke) people of Papua New Guinea with whom he lived as a child. The imagery is printed up to the edges of all pages in dense, multi-layered relief prints that transport its audience through their fingertips. The book is made for and of the rainforest, with each of the print blocks hand cut from (salvaged) Luan plywood, and printed onto pliable Kozo papers that yield to the touch. In order to participate in the book, viewers have no choice but to touch the art on the pages, to feel with their fingers which parts of the paper to turn, open and navigate through, immersing themselves into its physical presence. As an artwork it is one of the most beautiful and moving books I have ever had the privilege to experience. It is works like this that contribute hugely to our understanding of the power of the book as a valuable, physical artefact in the digital age. As an artist's book maker, Mosely is committed to extending dialogue, audience and experience of these artworks both within Australasia and further afield. Just as Bank Street Arts are doing with the artists' books exhibition and events in Sheffield; we are all eager to do good with books, from one corner of the world to another.

Making connections and further reading:

AMBruno: www.ambruno.co.uk

Artists' Books Brisbane Event (ABBE): artistsbooksbrisbaneevent.blogspot.com

between one hand and another, Collective Investigations:
betweenonehand.tumblr.com

Book Arts Newsletter: www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk

bookartbookshop: www.bookartbookshop.com

Booklyn: booklyn.org

Center for Book Arts, New York: centerforbookarts.org

Collective Investigations: collectiveinvestigations.tumblr.com

Counter: Plymouth art book fair: <http://counterplymouth.com>

Field Study International: daviddellafiora.blogspot.com.au

Good Press: www.goodpressgallery.co.uk

Hot Bed Press: www.hotbedpress.org

Kanage Pholu Wanda: silverwattlebookfoundry.blogspot.com

The Laurence Sterne Trust at Shandy Hall: www.laurencesternetrust.org.uk

London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA): londonbookarts.tumblr.com

Melbourne Art Book Fair:

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/whats-on/programs-events/art-book-fair/>

Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA): www.mnbookarts.org

PAGES Leeds International Contemporary Artists' Book Fair:
www.leedsartbookfair.com

Printed Matter, Inc. 231 Eleventh Avenue, New York: printedmatter.org

[re/membering touch exhibition catalogue:](http://re/memberingtouch.com)

http://issuu.com/qcagriffith/docs/tim_mosely

Spike Print Studio: www.spikeprintstudio.org

turn the page artist's book fair: turnthepage.org.uk

Photo Credits

- Figure 1 Counter 2014. Photograph: Dom Moore.
- Figure 2 Good Press gallery and bookstore, Glasgow. Photograph: Good Press
- Figure 3 The brilliant bookartbookshop in Pitfield Street, London. Photograph: Tanya Peixoto
- Figure 4 Poster and window exhibition by Malcolm Green, Red Sphinx Press at bookartbookshop, London. Photograph: Tanya Peixoto
- Figure 5 Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA) gallery entrance in the Open Book building, Minneapolis, USA. Photograph: MCBA
- Figure 6 MCBA brings the book arts to life for students of all ages, through world-class exhibitions; artists' talks and lectures; classes and workshops in the print, paper and bindery studios; and much more. Photograph: MCBA
- Figure 7 MCBA's studios are accessible to all ages and skill levels; the organisation serves upwards of 30,000 school children each year, through field trips and classroom residencies. Photograph: MCBA
- Figure 8 The bindery at London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA). Photograph: Ira Yonemura
- Figure 9 Hot Bed Press, studio members and classes. Photograph: Hot Bed Press
- Figure 10 *KART 29*. An assembling publication created to promote artistic and cultural diversity. Each *KART* is produced in an edition of 40, containing works by 15 artists. Published by Field Study. Photograph: David Dellafiara.
- Figure 11 *ReSite, a Manual of Scores, Manifestos and Radical Actions*, an assembling publication with an element of audience participation or interaction. Published by Field Study. Photograph: David Dellafiara.
- Figure 12 Booklyn Workshop Series: Japanese Stab-binding sketchbook workshop with artist Caroline Paquita at Booklyn, New York. Photograph: Aimee Lusty.
- Figure 13 Booklyn Workshop Series: Sign-painting workshop with Jon Bocksel at Booklyn, New York. Photograph: Aimee Lusty.
- Figure 14 'In the reflected sky', a three-part installation by Collective Investigations for Art Language Location (ALL), shown at the Casimir Lewy Library, University of Cambridge, October 2014. Photograph: Egidija Čiricaite
- Figure 15 'Between one hand and another', a video installation by Collective Investigations about the book as an object. The video was filmed with the readers of Tate South Lambeth Library, 2015. Photograph: Egidija Čiricaite
- Figure 16 'AMBruno: Book Acts'. A project by AMBruno, initiated by Sophie Loss, in which artist's book makers perform and embody the concept or essence of their book through the medium of film. The exhibition comprises a copy of the originating book accompanied by the corresponding video work by each artist, shown here in the Reading Room during Bristol Artist's Book Event at Arnolfini, Bristol, 2015. Photograph: Cally Trench
- Figure 17 *Kanage Pholu Wanda*, Tim Mosely, 2014. Photograph: Sarah Bodman
- Figure 18 *Kanage Pholu Wanda*, Tim Mosely, 2014. Photograph: Sarah Bodman



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