

INTRODUCTION

*There is something impossibly difficult in the written assessment of books others may not have seen, like reports from deep space or from the sensual life reporting back a summary of its own existence. Most valuable things are complex; good criticism is very difficult indeed.*¹

—JIM TRISSEL, 1996

The story of book art in America in the 1960s and 1970s is a story of persistent identity crises and of fierce allegiances as well as dissensions. Much to the chagrin of critics and the frustration of artists, the enduring debate over the years has turned on the most basic of questions: What is and what isn't an artist's book? In his essay "The Rise of the Book in the Wake of Rain," printer Jim Trissel laments that too often the critics of artists' books have resorted to an "effort to segregate kinds of books into categor[ies] and to proclaim something now called the 'artist book' the emergent and superior species." By this, Trissel refers to writers who claim for art one kind of artist's book to the exclusion of all others. To the uninitiated, such hair-splitting may appear confusing, even mean-spirited. Why the polemic?

A preoccupation with definition is perhaps understandable given the diversity in artists' books, which appear in dramatically different forms and with radically divergent content. Such books can appeal to entirely separate audiences. Let me offer a story from my own experience as curator of the nonprofit organization Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA). In 1992, the respected book collector and critic Abe Lerner arrived in Minneapolis to speak at the annual dinner hosted by the Ampersand Club, a local book art group. Before the dinner, Lerner visited MCBA and toured its exhibition, "Completing the Circle: Artists' Books on the Environment." The show would soon begin a national tour, accompanied by an illustrated catalogue and funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Lerner later departed from his opening remarks to Ampersand members to rail against the exhibition and MCBA for sponsoring it. One got the impression that he felt a need to identify an infestation that was threatening the health of the book world itself.

What had prompted Lerner's wrath? Certainly not fine press books such as Claire Van Vliet's *The Tower of Babel* (1975, fig. 1), a set of unbound folios of haunting lithographs accompanied by letterpress-printed texts by Franz Kafka about the imagery and myths of Babel. Or on a more intimate scale, not the elegant typographical design of Gray Zeitz's *Sabbaths 1987* (1991, fig. 2), in which seven poems by Wendell Berry either rage against prodigality or meditate upon a

1. JAB [*The Journal of Artists' Books*] 5 (Spring 1996): 26–27.

FIG. 1. Claire Van Vliet.
The Tower of Babel
 12½ x 10

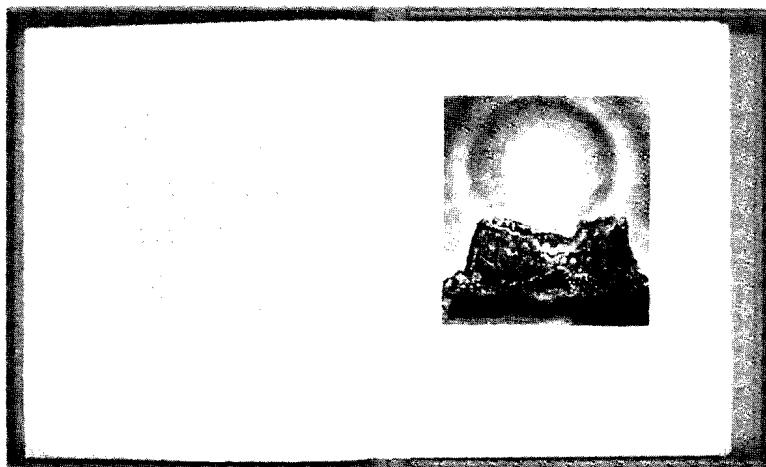
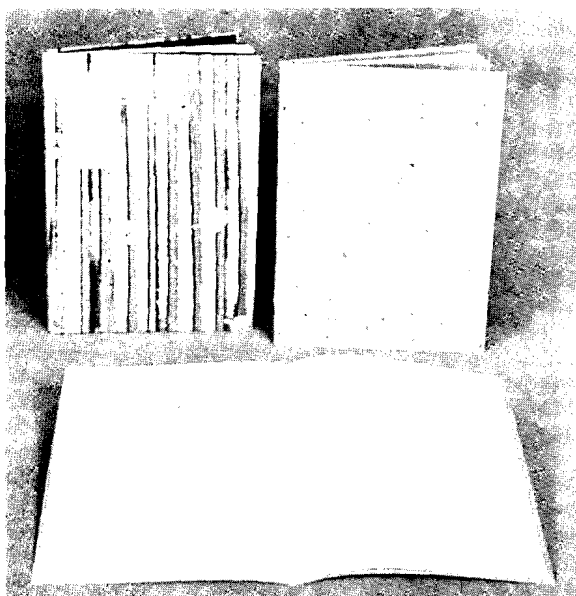


FIG. 2. Gray Zeitz.
Sabbaths 1987
 10 x 7



longed-for balance with a changing earth. No, Lerner reacted to the blight he believed had afflicted sculptural bookworks such as Richard Minsky's gaping *Geography of Hunger* (1988, fig. 3) and Doug Beube's *Tar Spill* (1987, fig. 4). These books are not pretty, and they do not follow the rules of typography or binding or, for that matter, reading itself. They capture attention by amusing or disturbing a reader, who often responds by nervously searching for a label to explain the work's transgressions. No wonder that Lerner took umbrage with the cohabitation of such works alongside the well-proportioned page designs of fine printing. Abe Lerner rightly recognized the challenge delivered to booklovers by the sculptural bookwork. Imagine, then, a critic's dilemma: How does one place a consciously repellent book

into a proper context? Principles of typographical and structural integrity that have guided booklovers in the past do not apply to these practical objects transformed into a purely expressive role. In fact, the clash between typographical and sculptural artists' books is only one conflict out of several that have thwarted an even-handed discussion of artists' books, from fine press books of poetry to fetid bookworks.

To compound the difficulties of placing such works into a proper curatorial context, I could find no history that identified precursors for the full spectrum of book art. When I asked book artists in the late 1980s about their influences, they vaguely acknowledged works from the 1960s and 1970s. Over time, my questions grew more persistent. Where did these different

books originate from? Are their histories related? What drew so many artists to the book form, and why did some artists alter it into such unrecognizable manifestations? Finally, I posed the question: Is it possible to encompass such diversity within one history?

I tamed diversity through definition. I traced the rise of three distinct categories of the artist's book: the fine press book, the deluxe book, and the bookwork. I also identified the appearance of hybrid artists' books, in which characteristics of one kind of book merge with another. This process results, for example, in a fine press–deluxe hybrid or a deluxe–bookwork hybrid. Second, I explored a number of issues concerning the production, distribution, and reception of the artist's book. Most of these issues stem from two conflicting perceptions of the artist's book: Is it a book, or is it art?

What exactly is an artist's book? Simply stated, an artist's book is a book made by an artist. To create it, an artist either executes each step of a book's production or works closely with others to give form to a vision. But mere artistic involvement does not make an artist's book. Every aspect of the book—from content to materials to format—must respond to the intent of the artist and cohere into a work that is set in motion with a reader's touch.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? The reality is much more complex, even labyrinthine. General terms such as "artist's book" or "book art" actually convey radically different meanings to various groups in the field. As will be detailed below, some critics adopted the term "artist's book" in the early 1970s to identify only the multiple bookwork. For these writers there was simply no other valid kind of artist's book, and in steadfastly arguing that point of view, they succeeded to a great extent in dismissing art world identities for fine press, deluxe, and sculptural bookworks. Although today more writers use "artist's book" as a general term, these earlier definitions, with the resulting confused perceptions, linger.

In contrast, the term "book art" has escaped such partisanship. It has faithfully continued to indicate a range of practices conducted within a community of nonprofit arts organizations that first appeared



FIG. 3. [CP11] Richard Minsky.
Geography of Hunger by
Josué de Castro.
9 x 7



FIG. 4. Doug Beube.
Tar Spill
12 x 20 x 8. Size varies

in the mid 1970s. Perhaps because of the clarity of the term, some multiple bookwork writers have avoided or belittled it in order to dissociate their books from the craft-based disciplines related to the production of fine printing. I use “artist’s book” and “book art” as umbrella terms, while recognizing that “book art” implies a broader meaning that encompasses related arts such as hand papermaking and bookbinding.

The proliferation of book art begins around 1960, when recurring differences in content, format, and material begin to distinguish the three categories of artists’ books.² The terms “fine press book” and “fine printing” remain generally unchallenged, and for sympathetic writers those terms continue to reflect an aesthetic based in a British heritage and associations of literary content and letterpress production. Fine press books celebrate the demands and rewards of craft: of pulling a mould and deckle from a vat of paper pulp, of sewing the signatures of a binding, or of printing on a hand press.

“Deluxe book” evokes associations with star artist and high-cost collectibility rather than with aesthetic innovation. In truth, “deluxe book” has never been used consistently as a term, perhaps because of its elitist associations. More common has been the use of *livre de peintre* or, less commonly, *livre d’artiste*. While those terms accurately reflect the French patrimony of the deluxe book, the terms are inaccurate when translated into the too-narrow “painter’s book” or the too-broad “artist’s book.” The French heritage of the deluxe book utilizes printmaking (usually) and induces the pleasures of sight, touch, and even smell from a close attention to vivid imagery, fine papers, and rich leather bindings. “Deluxe” describes the expensive materials and meticulous production of the traditional deluxe book and also indicates the issues that complicate and enrich that aesthetic—for example, in the homely look of Richard Tuttle’s *Story with Seven Characters* (1965, fig. 5), discussed in chapter 7, which he adopted in ironic contradiction to the deluxe canon. Both strategies inform the deluxe aesthetic.

The term “bookwork” first appeared in 1975 with *Artists’ Bookworks*, an exhibition curated by Martin Attwood for the British Council.³ The compound term indicates a reflexive stance: This is an artwork about books, one whose content may subvert conventional book design or deliver provocative artistic or social significance. Two influential writers, Ulises Carrión and Clive Phillpot, used the term regularly in the late 1970s to describe an artist’s book that relies on avant-garde strategies, content, and formats. Their regular usage, however, should not suggest unanimity over the use of that term or any other for the multiple bookwork. In fact, passionate debates over definition

2. Other terms that have vied for prominence concerning each type of artist’s book are discussed in the following chapters, at the point in time in which they appeared in the literature.

3. The date of 1975 is based upon the chronology reported by Clive Phillpot in “Twenty-six Gasoline Stations that Shook the World: The Rise and Fall of Cheap Booklets as Art.” *Art Libraries Journal* 18, no. 1 (1993): 4–5. There is no listing of “bookwork” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

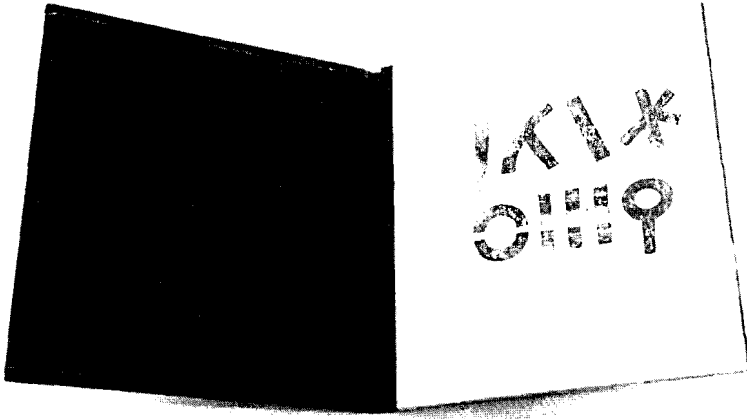


FIG. 5. Richard Tuttle.
Story with Seven Characters
 12 x 11

dominated the 1970s as artists and writers called the multiple bookwork by different names while arguing its case as an artwork.

The bookwork in that period developed into two subcategories: the multiple bookwork and the sculptural bookwork. “Multiple bookwork” was actually coined by Phillpot in 1982. He intended that the term indicate an artist’s use of a contemporary commercial printing technique (such as mimeograph, copier, or offset printing) in books of relatively large editions. Artists who made multiple bookworks often priced them low to indicate a populist intent. They hoped that the multiple bookwork’s large numbers and low prices would result in more books being sold directly to the public, thus bypassing the traditional gatekeepers of the museum or the gallery.

In addition to the term multiple bookwork, I add “sculptural bookwork.” A sculptural bookwork designates works such as those by Richard Minsky (*Geography of Hunger*) and Doug Beube (*Tar Spill*), discussed above. The two terms of multiple and sculptural bookwork indicate their shared avant-garde intent to defy the norms that govern the ordinary book. One kind of intent is directed toward producing unconventional content (in multiple), and the other intent expresses itself through sculptural means and is generally a one-of-a-kind work. In the 1970s sculptural bookworks were described by a number of terms (most often, “book object”). The sculptural bookwork, however, was not always a static object, but occasionally emerged as a performance piece or an installation. Its varied manifestations had in common the artist’s intent to embody ideas about the book as an object and as a concept in its form and materials. Its content often responded to the associations that have grown up around books over the centuries, such as the religious identity of the Bible. An artist might work with just such a concept to dramatize the content of a bookwork and so heighten the response of a reader. Such an encounter occurred

for me with *The Crisis of Democracy* (1980), another work by Richard Minsky. Minsky bound the book in leather and then wrapped it in barbed wire. The content of *Crisis* concerned the author's fears of the impending collapse of democracy. As I cautiously opened it for display, I experienced a number of conflicting ideas. Reading the book (a risky enterprise, but possible) would contribute to its eventual shredding, symbolically enacting the warning of the author and so implicating the reader in the political crisis that is the book's subject. The powerful effect of guilt-by-association created by *The Crisis of Democracy* engages the associations or aspects of the book in order to transcend gimmickry and succeed as art.

Several issues have arisen from the confusing dual nature of the artist's book as art and book. One issue concerns whether the artist's book has helped to enlarge our sense of what constitutes art and art-making. Book characteristics align it (even define it) with the ordinary book (as in trade publishing, small press publishing) or with technology (its printing method). Artists have recognized the advantages of invoking these associations. Most agree that books can be seen as carriers of knowledge, even guardians of culture. Because of that, an artist's book can operate like a "Trojan horse of art,"⁴ as printer Walter Hamady put it: It can insinuate itself into a reader's consciousness while it delivers content that may be unexpected or disturbing. In being associated with the trade book, however, the artist's book is then inextricably linked to the fate of trade publishing.

Additional debates concern the difference between a unique work of art and an artwork produced in multiple; the uneasy relationship of high art with popular culture; and the awkward intersections of fine art with craft and commercial printing technologies. Questions about distribution arise from the different expectations for books and art. For example, book distribution assumes publication in large edition sizes with a goal of reaching a broad audience. But the traditional view of fine art distribution suggests hushed conversations in galleries or bidding at auctions, where the goal is to sell artworks produced in limited numbers to a wealthy audience.

Artists in the 1960s and 1970s confronted such issues when they brought art and populism together, as independent publishers who sought a means for direct address to a wide audience. The timing of this populist fever was not coincidental to the dramatic growth in the production of artists' books—the two developments were interdependent. But the means of printing a book also determined what audience it reached. To a critic or potential collector, hand lithography

4. Walter Hamady, "Pre/Face, in Lieu Of," *Two Decades of Hamady and The Perishable Press Limited* (Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin: Perishable Press, 1984), n.p.

usually suggested a fine art, deluxe context, while copier printing communicated an avant-garde, bookwork context.

Finally, the book form has always posed special reception issues in its display. Unlike most art, an artist's book requires touch to unlock its evocative "otherness." The restrictions of exhibition in display cases force readers and critics to judge and articulate a book's success based on a single page opening. But a book is much more than pictures and text, much more than any one page. Reading a book involves the tactile, even emotional experience of paging through it. How, then, have the aesthetic complexities of the book form affected its acceptance as an art form? Put another way, what do the problems that the artist's book poses to the art world tell us about the limitations of that very world?

The conflicts over definitions of artists' books and the issues that these books raise for the art world are crucial to the story of the artist's book as a vital cultural artifact which underwent tremendous change in the period from 1960 to 1980. As I weighed key artists and artworks out of the many that emerged from that period of growth, I discovered early writers who raised questions about the disappearance of the ordinary book. These questions influenced the development of the artist's book as early as the 1960s, when the ordinary book's 500-year rule first faced diminishment from electronic and digital interlopers.

No history has been written before now that charts the development across the full spectrum of book art activity in the United States. A review of the key historical texts for each kind of artist's book reveals a breadth and depth of writings that vary widely with the type of book under discussion. (A selection of key texts is included in the bibliography.) Writings about the fine press book, for example, reflect longstanding efforts by American writers to understand the relationship of their own fine printing to that of their British predecessors. In addition, early historical writings on fine printing often appear in books under the subject of "books about books." These histories actually concern the common book and its printing technologies as they contributed to the spread of information and learning. But book history shifts into the history of book art in the many writings that celebrate the books of William Blake and the books of William Morris's Kelmscott Press in England.

Some early designers such as Stanley Morison of England exerted influence through their writings and, in the case of Joseph Blumenthal of the United States, also through curating. Joining them in America

from about 1950, the writings of printer Harry Duncan provided a voice and a model for the next generation of fine printers who were equally committed to achieving a similar literary farsightedness, mastery of craft, and attention to a book's artistic holism. In 1983 *The Private Press*, by Roderick Cave, surveyed a rich heritage of fine printing whose international selections included contemporary U.S. presses and their books. Journals such as *Fine Print* (1975–90) and later *Bookways* (1991–95) framed and fostered that dialogue, in which the related arts of papermaking, bookbinding, and calligraphy also gained a profile.⁵

Today, the lack of a substantive national journal for fine printing has to some degree muted that dialogue. The fine press book needs venues and criticism that do not eschew its typographical and literary past but rather come to grips with art-world influences and its own increasing visual, material, and structural enrichments. Although the recent history of fine printing and book art is relatively well documented through a scattering of catalogue essays, articles, and chapbooks, this history integrates the developments of hand papermakers and bookbinders into the larger story of fine printing and book art.

The deluxe book, unlike the fine press book, has benefited from the documentation and celebration of its books in a parade of glossy European surveys. In fact, success for the U.S. deluxe book was gauged early on by the degree of America's ingress into Europe's pantheon, as tracked in exhibitions here and abroad.⁶ But publications of mere documentation or tributes to imagery and printmaking expertise often ignore the crucial role of "book" in these works. This omission is evidence of a critical vacuum that has not been helped by the relative unavailability of the deluxe book. That unavailability derives from its small edition sizes, from its sequestration in private and institutional collections, and from its display behind glass. Museum visitors who understand that "don't touch" is a necessary restriction for the protection of a museum's treasures still find the admonition irreconcilable with the expectations of touch that they bring to a book.

Discussions of the deluxe book must address the related contexts of a book's production. An essential resource is the essay by Robert Rainwater for the catalogue *The American Livre de Peintre* (1993). Rainwater examined the form and content of the deluxe book, the collaborative efforts of deluxe publishers, the contributions of early U.S. exhibitions, and the influence exerted by ateliers and dealers. The following year, *A Century of Artists Books* appeared, a lavishly illustrated catalogue accompanying an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art [MoMA], authored by Riva Castleman,

5. In addition, book art organizations in California have published *Amper-sand* (from the Pacific Center for the Book Arts) and *AbracadaBrA* (from the Alliance for Contemporary Book Arts, ACBA, until 1999) for several years and in varying publication schedules. A shared U.S.-British journal, *Parenthesis*, appeared in 1998 from the newly christened Fine Press Book Association. All of these journals publish reviews of books and general interest articles on book art that primarily concern the fine press and deluxe book; *Amper-sand's* scope extends to the sculptural bookwork.

6. Catalogues that marked that progress included Monroe Wheeler, *Modern Painters and Sculptors as Illustrators* (New York: the Museum of Modern Art, 1936); Philip Hofer and Eleanor Garvey, *The Artist and the Book: 1860–1960 in Western Europe and the United States* (Boston: the Museum of Fine Arts; Cambridge: Harvard College Library, 1961); and Breon Mitchell, *Beyond Illustration: the Livre d'Artiste in the Twentieth Century: an Exhibition* (Bloomington: Lilly Library, Indiana University, 1976).

Chief Curator of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. The exhibition contained mostly deluxe books, interspersed with a few bookworks—such as those by Ed Ruscha and Dieter Roth—that had by then entered the canon of the art world.

Twenty years earlier Susi Bloch wrote an essay for the catalogue *The Book Stripped Bare: A Survey of Books by 20th Century Artists and Writers* (1973). In it, Bloch provided a critical model that not only assessed compelling imagery but engaged the book form itself. Her essay will figure into my discussion of the 1970s. Not long after Bloch's essay was reprinted in *Artists' Books*, an anthology edited by Joan Lyons (1985), the writings of Renée Riese Hubert appeared, which outlined an aesthetic program in essays and in her definitive *Surrealism and the Book* (1988). In 1999 Renée Hubert joined with Judd D. Hubert in an in-depth consideration of a variety of contemporary works in *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books*. This substantive writing is relatively recent; only Monroe Wheeler (*Modern Painters and Sculptors as Illustrators*, 1936) confronted issues of format and media pertinent to the deluxe book before Bloch's essay appeared in 1973.

The multiple bookwork generated the greatest number of debates during its rapid growth in the 1970s. Most arguments established an historical lineage that was reflective of (and thus validated by) the art world. But most of these writers displayed little knowledge of the bookwork's avant-garde history. Susi Bloch's essay in 1973 was one exception among the early catalogue essays that circulated in the book art community. Most writings postdate 1980, such as those by Renée Riese Hubert, as well as the catalogue essay by Jaroslav Anđel for Franklin Furnace's *The Avant-Garde Book: 1900–1945* (1989), and Anne Mœglin-Delcroix's *Esthétique du livre d'artiste, 1960/1980* (1997).

The critical discourse of the multiple bookwork crystallized before 1980 in catalogues and journals.⁷ From France, Stéphane Mallarmé wrote the earliest and perhaps most influential essay, "The Book: A Spiritual Instrument" (1895). In it, Mallarmé described type as marks that inhabited the white space of a page and contributed equally to the expressive meaning of a text. From Germany, Walter Benjamin wrote "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in which he observed the mass media's ability to dissolve the elitist "aura" that contrived to hold art separate from the masses. Benjamin's essay circulated among American artists in the late 1960s, when it was translated into English.

Beginning in the mid 1970s, a small circle of contemporary writers set the parameters of the discourse specific to the multiple bookwork. Ulises Carrión, Clive Phillpot, Lucy Lippard, and others depicted its

7. In particular, see the catalogues *Artists Books* (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art, 1973) and *Artwords and Bookworks: An International Exhibition of Recent Artists' Books and Ephemera* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1978), both of which figure into my discussion later in this history. See also two alternative journals whose special issues focused on the alternative multiple: *Art-Rite* (no. 14, Winter 1976–77), and *The Dumb Ox* (no. 4, 1977). As for ongoing journals, only *Umbrella* (Judith Hoffberg, ed.) has consistently tracked the field since 1978.

various artistic and social characteristics. In the period after 1980 the influence exerted by *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* (1985), edited by Joan Lyons, cannot be overstated. Recently joining Lyons's anthology in importance, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York City: Granary Books, 1995), by Johanna Drucker, acknowledges avant-garde precursors and then examines over three hundred multiple bookworks within book-specific contexts. Drucker identifies a "zone of activity, rather than a category into which to place works by evaluating whether they meet or fail to meet certain rigid criteria."⁸ For the most part, the fine press and deluxe book, as well as sculptural bookworks, fall outside of Drucker's zone of activity. Anne Mœglin-Delcroix analyzes more than five hundred artists' books from Europe and the United States that share conceptual content, in her copiously illustrated *Esthétique du livre d'artiste, 1960/1980*.

The sculptural bookwork, the fourth and last kind of artist's book, was not investigated by an American writer before 1980, except for a brief celebration or dismissal. An in-depth history of the U.S. sculptural bookwork remains to be written, beyond the few works noted in this study. Only in the mid 1980s did the sculptural bookwork attract sustained critical attention here, seen in the writings of Renée Riese Hubert and Buzz Spector. Hubert characterized the sculptural bookwork in oppositional terms as a "*livre détourné* [that] produces an almost systematic clash between the book as object and its intellectual, aesthetic and cultural dimensions. It plays art against functionalism" and "reading against looking."⁹ Such "deviant books" interrupt, redirect or even refuse a reader's movement from image to text or from page into sequence or back again, even as they "invite us to read them in their own deviant way."¹⁰ Hubert identified the combustible mix of fascination and repulsion that such works can inspire, since, when confronted with them, readers react personally, even viscerally.

For artist and critic Buzz Spector, Hubert's concept of the deviant book was intensified by the interplay between nostalgia and desire that is stimulated when a reader encounters a sculptural bookwork.¹¹ Spector writes with the authority that comes with making altered bookworks as well as installations of found books, such as *Library of Babel* (1988, fig. 6). These works assumed nearly iconic status among book artists. They excelled at triggering viewer emotions that collide with memories of reading as an intimate and protected activity: of a book opened in one's lap, or reading while reclining in bed, the book suggestive of a pivot point at the intersection of a reader's public and private lives. Such subliminal residues lurking within a reader resulted in profound associations attached to the common book that Spector and others readily engaged. For example, a book's

8. Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York City: Granary Books, 1995), 2.

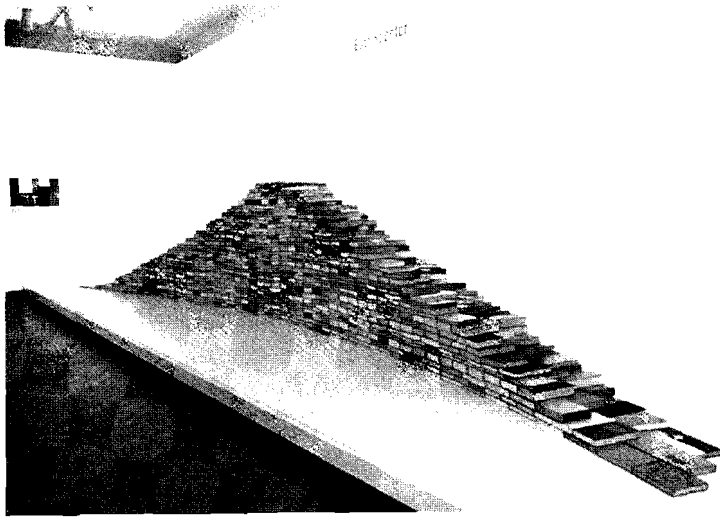


FIG. 6. Buzz Spector.
Library of Babel, 1988.
Installation of found and stacked
books. Approximately 4' x 30' x 5'
(HxWxD).

Photo courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago

openable codex format suggests oppositions of containment and release, interior and exterior, surface and depth, covering and exposure, invitation and rejection. Now imagine those associations subjected to the theatrics of Lucas Samaras, whose sculptural bookworks from the 1960s were often pierced by knives and glass shards. Such works can generate an onslaught of emotional suggestions and deflections.

Add to this tense drama the idea that such associations do not exist in stasis but in an object that moves in response to a reader's touch. Within the book, timeframes coexist: that of its original production; that of the completed book's presumed word-by-word reading; and that of each reader's unique experience with it. Such an experience begins with touch to set it into play, and develops along with whatever kind of paged access the reader undertakes. Once a reader becomes aware of the reading experience, this sense of a performance complicates and enriches every encounter with an artist's book. Hubert is particularly adept at alerting a reader to this process, to the choices that he or she makes in following a text or in contemplating an image, and how those choices create a complex response. Such concentrated reading is taxing, since a sensitive reader must open up to an unfolding physical, intellectual, and emotional simultaneity. Book artists understand this sentient quality of reading and hold in mind the expectation of each reader's individual response. In that sense the book artist needs a reader to open the book in order to activate it, and so complete it.

Signs of the critical maturation of the book art field are recent or just emerging. For example, Keith Smith has published textbooks since 1984 that examine issues of aesthetics and production in his own multiple and sculptural bookworks as well as in the bookworks

9. Hubert notes that the term was first used by Caroline Corre. Hubert, "Readable-Visible: Reflections on the Illustrated Book," *Visible Language* 19, no. 4 (Autumn 1985): 521.

10. *Ibid.*, 522.

11. In 1995 Spector's collected writings appeared in *The Book Maker's Desire* (Pasadena: Umbrella Editions, 1995).

of other artists. His writings were crowned by *200 Books* (Rochester, New York: Keith Smith BOOKS, 2000), an extensively annotated bibliography of Smith's artists' books up to that time. Other book art writers to whom I owe a debt for their insight into the book's cultural identities include Frances Butler, Susan Compton, Betsy Davids, Susan King, and Gerry Lange. *The Journal of Artists' Books* (known popularly as *JAB* 1994–2003), edited by Brad Freeman with the strong involvement of Johanna Drucker, published a number of interviews and essays that often featured the multiple bookwork. In addition, *Speaking of Book Art: Interviews with British and American Book Artists* (1999), by Cathy Courtney, held a series of lengthy interviews with leading artists on both sides of the Atlantic. There are not many interviews with multiple bookwork artists of the 1960s and 1970s beyond those with Ed Ruscha, Lawrence Weiner, and a few others. An exception is found in Thomas Dugan, *Photography Between Covers: Interviews with Photo-Bookmakers* (Rochester, New York: Light Impressions, 1979), which captured a sense of the time for artists, including Joan Lyons, Keith Smith, and Syl Labrot. To supplement this material, I have conducted several interviews with leading artists and others in the field.

Collected writings are also a sign of critical maturity, and Drucker's own *Figuring the Word: Essays on Books, Writing, and Visual Poetics* (1998) brings many of her journal and catalogue essays together in one volume.¹² Despite these publications, relatively few in-depth retrospectives and monographs on book artists have appeared; those that have belong to prominent artists, such as Ed Ruscha, Sol LeWitt, Dieter Roth, and Lawrence Weiner.

Another sign of a maturing art world is bibliographical documentation, a nightmarish prospect in such a wildly diverse and marginalized field. Scholars and collectors of fine press and deluxe books have long produced bibliographies, but for the multiple bookwork, the reading lists produced in the 1970s soon gave way under the flood of articles and small catalogues that appeared in the 1980s. To date, only Stefan Klima has attempted to assemble and interpret a bibliography for (primarily) the multiple bookwork, in *Artists Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature* (1998). Klima considers a mountain of literature in journal articles, reviews, and exhibition catalogues, but he does not examine the multiple bookwork within its larger book and art contexts or within a consistent chronological framework.

The variety of writings suggests a number of difficulties that the artist's book poses to an historian intent on establishing definitions, boundaries, and interpretations. The most important point to be made here is that the book art community itself is not comprised of a

12. In addition, see Jerome Rothenberg and David Guss, eds., *The Book, Spiritual Instrument* (New York City: Granary Books, 1996), a reissue of *New Wilderness Letter* #11 from 1982. See also *A Book of the Book, Some Works and Projections about the Book and Writing* (New York City: Granary Books, 2000), a compilation edited by Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay of over ninety writings from all time periods.

discrete set of makers and viewers, nor sites for art-making and exhibiting. In the book art world, artists and critics and sites of production and exhibition may shift in and out of the book and art worlds as interests and opportunities provide.

This bibliographical summary captures the complexities and limits of not only this particular history but of the book art field itself. Let me end with six points that tell what this history will include and what it must leave aside.

First, my priority lies in assembling a broad-based U.S. history in which book art's own institutional development, along with the related worlds of art, typography and graphic design, trade book publishing and independent publishing, are considered together with the discussions of specific books and artists. To that end, *Art Worlds* (1982), by Howard Becker, has proved invaluable. Becker proposes a sociology of art production, whose players range from institutions that anchor "culture industries" such as film or book publishing, to minor art worlds vying for recognition, to the rebels of emerging "maverick" art networks.

My second point is that this history reflects that book art can translate into fine press or deluxe books as well as the multiple and sculptural manifestations of the bookwork. As I alluded to above, I came to this research from within the book art world: I helped to start Minnesota Center for Book Arts in 1984, and stayed there for nine years, during which time I curated about fifty exhibitions and handled thousands of artists' books. After a career of exhibiting radically different kinds of artists' books, and learning about the varieties of book and art from those juxtapositions, I am able to let the differences as much as the likenesses inform and illuminate the story of the book's continuing appeal to artists.

Third, I have adopted a chronological approach to this history in order to address an amnesia that has long afflicted the field. As a curator I felt that I operated in a vacuum, since no history existed that examined the crucial time period in the United States when the artist's book came to life, from 1960 to 1980. My research, then, was meant to answer my longstanding questions about an art form that had matured to the point where it was "no longer innocent" and yet had no sense of its own history, its own heritage. This amnesia has produced an increasing number of artists' books in the last twenty years whose content or strategies were long ago exhausted by unacclaimed innovators.

Fourth, in keeping with my focus on the United States, European artists' books appear here only selectively. I have chosen a few books made in Europe before 1960 as key precursors, to illustrate specific

strategies or content that proved attractive to American book artists. In addition, I include selected contemporary European artists' books from the 1960s and 1970s which were for the most part made by artists who had unarguably established a U.S. presence by that time and which in the following years exerted significant influence over American book artists.

Fifth, this history is limited by its use of terminology. Any selective lineage cannot escape the confusions and even the unwitting deceptions perpetrated by terminology. After all, it is a fact of any history that to define is to separate, to assign an identity, and even (by extension) to control a reader's perception of a work, a kind of work, or even of an entire field. But for the purposes of telling this story, I have sorted work into three categories that are distinguishable in artistic intent, content, and format especially in their early manifestations. Note, however, that part of the story also lies within the increasing overlap between the fine press book, the deluxe book, and the bookwork, an overlap which only hints at the plurality that awaited the artist's book in the 1980s. Even so, the use of terminology (despite its deficiencies) is necessary to sort through the kinds of books that embody this history.

Sixth, writing a history about a marginalized art form poses special questions regarding emphasis. Book art has been permeable to influences from the book and art worlds that surround it, but to a great extent book art has also been held separate from the attentions and resources of both the art and book worlds. This disregard is being redressed to some degree as the more recent art movements concurrent with the rise of artists' books receive attention. But then, the contributions of the book to these movements are hard to ignore. For example, books played a crucial role in the Fluxus movement, where their sequential structure enlivened content that often concerned chance and performance. And Conceptual interests in an idea-based, "dematerialized" art outside of the museum and the gallery, as well as Conceptual involvement with time-based and sequential art-making, contributed to a flood of artists' books.

As a site and source of art-making, the book undoubtedly affected those art movements sympathetic to its properties and potential. My challenge has been to capture the importance of works and actions that took place within the book art world, while not overstating its influence on the surrounding trade book and art worlds. The paradox here is that for all of its modest influence as recognized by those on the outside, to those within the book art world, an artist's book holds the power to demand and deliver nothing less than a new way of seeing, through the simple act of picking up a book.

What is left is to tell the story, which will begin with a discussion of the precursors for each type of artist's book produced in Great Britain and Europe in the early twentieth century. That context will lead in later chapters to the period when U.S. artists' books came to life, between 1960 and 1980. To best describe the changing nature of the book as an artifact, only a few books and artists must represent the hundreds that appeared. Many books have been left out, and the pain of such necessary omissions has been heightened by the knowledge that this history can only do so much and must await other voices to respond, enlarge, and deepen the discussion.