

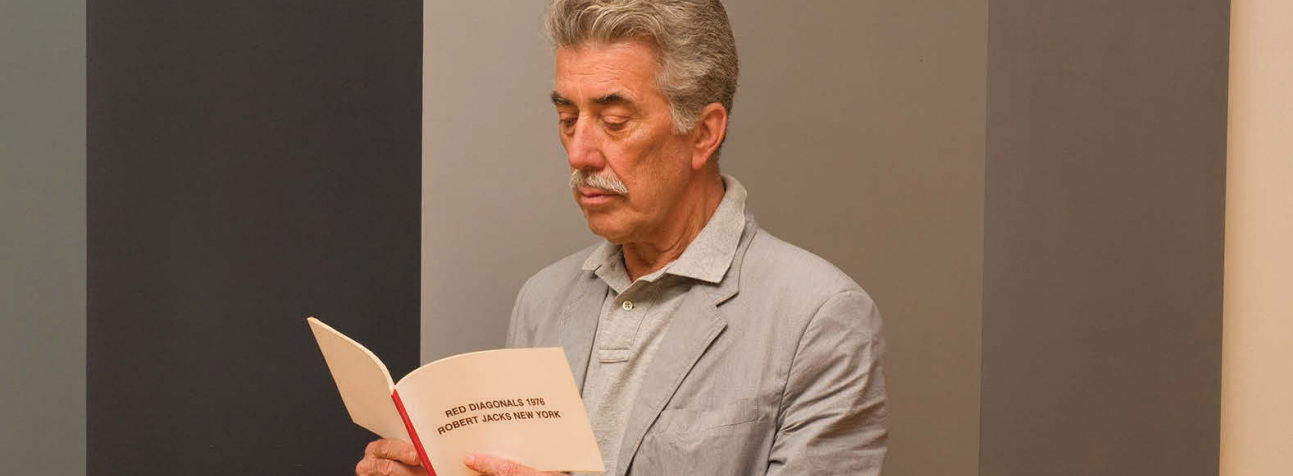
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

This special issue of the *La Trobe Journal* focuses on a field of book production that has grown enormously in recent decades, despite the onset of the digital revolution threatening many areas of print publishing.

While there is no agreed definition of what an artist book is, it is generally defined as a book made by an artist and intended as a work of art. Within this broad definition, artists have embraced a variety of practices, from traditional print techniques – woodcut, etching and lithography – through to offset, photocopy or digital production. An artist book, whether unique or multiple, may assume the form of a codex, an altered book, a sculpture, or something else entirely. This diversity of form – which often poses the question ‘what is a book?’ – has made the field an exciting one for artists and researchers alike.

Author and book artist Johanna Drucker categorises artists’ books as ‘the quintessential 20th century art form’.¹ Its immediate precursors were the private press books produced in the late-19th century by the Kelmscott Press, the Eragny Press, the Doves Press and others; the *livre d’artiste* productions engineered by entrepreneurial publishers such as Ambroise Vollard, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and Albert Skira; and the typographic and experimental publications associated with avant-garde movements such as Dada, Futurism, Surrealism and Constructivism.

The rise of Conceptualism in the 1960s saw artists increasingly turning to books as a medium in which to investigate their art practice. Ed Ruscha, Dieter Roth, Marcel Broodthaers, Ian Hamilton Finlay and others began creating inexpensive ‘multiples’ as a means of democratising their art outside the confines of gallery walls; in doing so, they paved the way for the modern artist book to be recognised as a distinct genre within contemporary art and publishing.



While throughout the 20th century a number of private presses, modelled on the work of William Morris and others, operated in Australia, it is nevertheless the case that, prior to the late 1960s, few Australian artists were involved with making books. There were some notable exceptions, including: Violet Teague and Geraldine Rede's *Night Fall in the Ti-tree* (1905), Christian Waller's *The Great Breath* (1932), Noel Counihan's *War or Peace* (c. 1950) and Robert Rooney's *Skipping Rhymes* (1956). It was, however, the decidedly internationalist stance of a new generation of artists in the 1960s and 1970s – Robert Jacks, Tim Johnson, Micky Allan, Alex Selenitsch, Ian Burn and others – that gave rise to the first great wave of artist book production in this country, documented in Gary Catalano's important early survey *The Bandaged Image: A Study of Australian Artists' Books* (1983).

The State Library of Victoria began to actively collect artists' books in the late 1980s. That is not to say there were no artists' books in the collection before that time, it merely acknowledges that those that had entered the collection – such as Imants Tillers's *Three Facts* (1981) – had done so randomly and were neither considered nor identified as such. The Library's growing awareness of this field of book production, however, saw it develop a policy aimed at collecting representative examples of Australian artists', with an emphasis on books created by Victorian artists.

In the intervening 25 years, the Library's artist book collection has grown to more than 1000 items, ranging from deluxe books produced in editions of only five or ten copies, through to inexpensive and ephemeral books printed via photocopier, offset, or digital technologies. A survey of artists represented in the collection reveals works by: Tate Adams, Lyn Ashby, Angela Cavalieri, Phil Day, Tommaso Durante, Dianne Fogwell, David Frazer, Gracia Haby, Petr Herel, Louise Jennison, Nicholas Jones, Deborah Klein, Bruno Leti, Dianne

Longley, Peter Lyssiotis, George Matoulas, Ron McBurnie, Milan Milojevic, Leonie Oakes, Francis & Leonie Osowski, John Ryrrie, Stephen Spurrier, Theo Strasser, Richard Tipping, Judy Watson and Gali Weiss.

In recent years, the Library has moved to acquire representative examples of international works that provide an historical context for the collection, including books by Dieter Roth, Ed Ruscha, Joseph Beuys, Sol LeWitt, David Hockney and Tom Phillips. The Library also collects the work of contemporary Australian letterpress printers, such as Alan Loney, Carolyn Fraser and Caren Florance, whose work has strong links with contemporary artists' book production.

When the earliest acquisitions were made, there was no certainty as to how artists' books would be used by patrons, however, it is now the case that they are amongst the most heavily consulted items from the Library's Rare Books collection, where they are housed. They are frequently consulted by practising artists, and regular presentations are delivered to fine art and printmaking students. Artists' books are featured in the Library's *Mirror of the World* exhibition, and were the subject of the exhibition *Fine Impressions: Printmaking and Artists' Books in Melbourne 1999–2010*. Sasha Grishin taught a five-day course on artists' books as part of the Australian and New Zealand Rare Books Summer School held at the Library in 2012, and artists' books have been a feature of annual presentations by the Library at the Clunes Booktown Festival in Victoria.

The Library has acquired a number of significant archives that support the artist book collection. The archive of Wayzgoose Press, the country's pre-eminent private press, was acquired in 2010 and, more recently, the archive of Jim Walker's Croft Press was added to the Library's collection. The personal papers of Robert Jacks were acquired in 2012; the Print Council of Australia's archive in the same year; and artist and printmaker Dianne Fogwell's personal archive of artists' books was acquired by gift and purchase in 2013. The Library has, at the same time, built significant collections of Tate Adams's Lyre Bird Press, Jenny Zimmer's Zimmer Editions, and David Dellafiora's Field Study Productions.

An exciting development has been the Library's contribution to the production of new artists' books through its Creative Fellowship program. Since its inauguration in 2003, a number of Fellowships have been awarded to artists to make new books that draw inspiration from the Library's collections. Recipients have included: Peter Lyssiotis, John Ryrrie, Bruno Leti, Tom Nicholson, Antoni Jach, Nicholas Jones, Angela Cavalieri, Petr Herel and William Kelly. Where feasible, the Library has subsequently displayed

the results of this creative endeavour. A more recent development has been a partnership with the Baldessin Press to provide for a residency for a Creative Fellow at the press's studio in St Andrews, Victoria, which was first built by George and Tess Baldessin in 1971.

In developing the collection, the Library has forged strong links with the artist book community. At the same time, the Library has been the beneficiary of a number of significant gifts from artists and collectors. While these are too numerous to mention, it is timely to acknowledge the generosity of these donors.

We would also like to thank the authors who have contributed to this special issue of the *La Trobe Journal*. Helen Cole's essay surveys the development of artist book collections in Australia. Andrew Schuller provides a first survey of Croft Press, which – though strictly a private press – issued work by prominent artists such as Eric Thake, Donald Friend and Rick Amor. Sasha Grishin looks at the various factors that coalesced to make Canberra a centre for the book arts in the 1980s. Steven Tonkin provides an account of the early development of artists' books in Australia in the 1970s, and Peter Anderson reviews the critical oeuvre of Robert Jacks, one of the key artists of that period. Caren Florance surveys the revival of letterpress printing and its relationship to contemporary artists' books, and Marian Macken, an architectural educator and artist book maker, looks at the relationship between her two chosen disciplines. Finally, Doug Spowart looks at the rise of the photobook in a digital world wherein everyone can be their own publisher.

In editing this special issue of the *La Trobe Journal* on artists' books, our chief aim has been to introduce the Library's significant collection of artists' books to new readers. At the same time, we hope that these essays will open up questions and point others toward new areas of research in the field. While there has been a growing literature on the subject, it is nevertheless the case that artists' books in Australia remain an under-researched area of study. Given the growing proliferation of artists' books, in defiance of the digital trend, it appears certain they are here to stay. Whatever the future of the book, we feel assured that artists, in emphasising tactility and materiality, will be fundamental to its continued evolution.

This special issue of the *La Trobe Journal* is dedicated to the memory of Robert Jacks (1943–2014).

Des Cowley, Robert Heather and Anna Welch

GUEST EDITORS