



## COLLECTING ARTISTS' BOOKS

Akky van Ogtrop has been inspired by the challenging and idiosyncratic works of the Dadaists—and much more

**Author and book artist Johanna Drucker** categorises artists' books as 'the quintessential 20th century art form'. 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.

*Top: Der Sturm, cover and inside pages, Berlin 1912, E. L. Kirchner, (1889-1931), Original woodcuts*  
*Right: zines display, Brenda May Gallery, Sydney*



I caught the collecting bug from my father. He collected first editions sheet music and scores, manuscripts, letters by composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, Handel etc. and books about music. He used to take me to antiquarian shops and auctions and taught me to bid with restraint.

Zines display at Going Gaga with Dada exhibition curated by Akky van Ogtrop at Brenda May Gallery

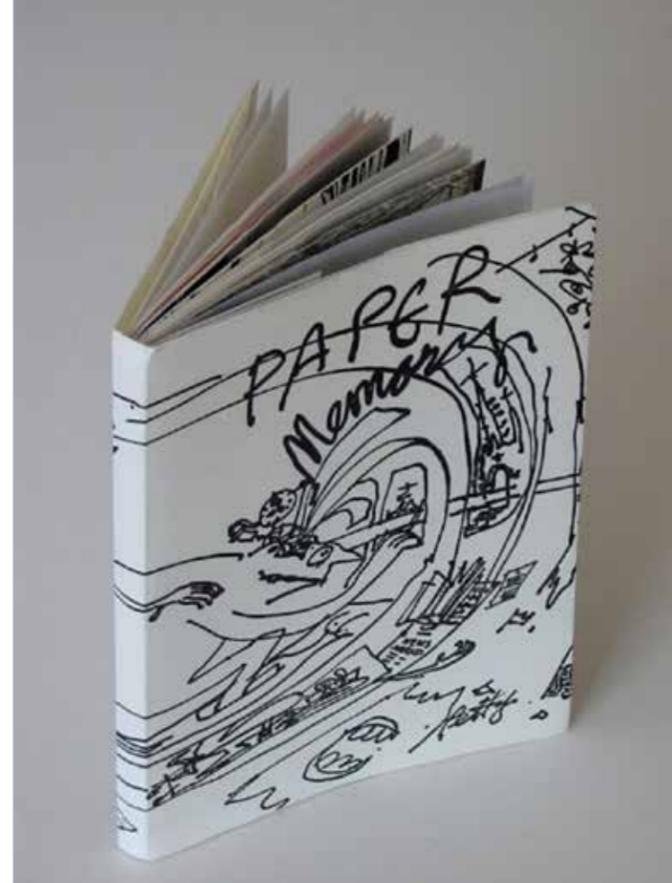


The rise of Conceptualism in the 1960s saw artists increasingly turning to books as a medium in which to investigate their art practice. Ed Ruscha, Dieter Roth, Marcel Broodthaers, Ian Hamilton Finlay and others began creating inexpensive 'multiples' as a means of democratising their art outside the confines of gallery walls and in doing so, they paved the way for the modern artist book to be recognised as a distinct genre within contemporary art and publishing. 1970 was particularly lively in the visual arts in Europe, with Joseph Beuys and Fluxus still very influential.

I caught the collecting bug from my father. He collected first editions sheet music and scores, manuscripts, letters by composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, Handel etc. and books about music. He used to take me to antiquarian shops and auctions and taught me to bid with restraint. While cataloguing the remains of his collection, I was so lucky to find a copy of the magazine *Der Sturm*, an edition

of 1912. This famous magazine was first published in 1910 and had become the central forum of discussion for ideas and tendencies within modern art. It ceased publication in 1932. The cover of this 1912 edition is an original woodcut by the German Expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1889-1931). I still have this edition in my collection.

However my real inspiration was Dada. The challenging and idiosyncratic works of the Dadaists in the early 20th century were topics for my MA study at the University of Sydney. The thesis, entitled *Holland Dada*, established a strong Dutch connection between renowned collagist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) and Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931). This connection was evident in the folded poster *Kleine Dada Soirée* (1922) which I acquired from New York dealer Jack Banning for the exhibition, *Holland Dada*, launched at Stadia Graphics Gallery in Sydney which then toured to Orange Regional Gallery in 1989.



Above: George Maciunas/George Brecht, *No Smoking* (1976), Off Set Print, 42.3 x 42.5 cm FLUXUS Edition

Left: *Paper Memory*, 2005, commissioned and published by Akky van Ogtrop to commemorate the Sydney Art on Paper Fair 10th anniversary

Below: *Kleine Dada Soirée*, 1922, Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931) with Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), colour lithograph 30 x 30cm



*Kleine Dada Soirée* is a reminder of the manifestos of the past and ongoing connections with the ephemeral zines, stickers and stencil art created today. It became the foundation for my collection of art on paper, artists' books, zines and other ephemera. Although the artist is 'of their time', they are still utilising the forms of collage, found objects and strange juxtapositions that reflect a topsy turvy world. I have to admit that, although there is a preference towards that topsy turvy element, I do not have a clear structured policy in mind. I collect what I like and can afford, but each object possesses some type of personal value. They often take me back to a place where I met the artist, or a bookshop where I had an extraordinary experience.

Visiting Boekie Woekie, the artist-run bookstore for books by artists in Amsterdam is for me like being in a lolly shop. Taking part in and visiting art fairs, like the Small Publishers Fair in London or the artists' book and multiple fair in Brisbane, organised by Noreen Grahame, is another perfect place to sell, buy, exchange and especially to have fun.

Many artists' books are self-published or are produced by small presses or collectives including Caren Florence (Ampersand Duck), Dianne Longley (Agave Print Studio), Stephen Spurrier (Ugg Boot Press), Ron McBurnie (Monsoon Publishing), Bill Moseley (Hill End Press), Monica Oppen (Ant Press), Petr Herel, Bruno Leti, Peter Lyssiotis, Alex Selenitsch, Jan Davis and many more wonderful Australian book artists.

Collecting zines has become another passion and the zine fairs at the NGV in Melbourne, MCA, Sydney, and more recently at Art Space, Sydney, have since become my next lolly shops. And talking about lollies: 'Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some are to be chewed and digested' (Francis Bacon). These words illustrate what I believe my collection of artists' books and zines is: bringing together a collection of works by wonderful book artists and fine press printers; feeling at ease to touch, read, taste and digest these books. Swallowing books might be the next step, an eat-art experience. I am working on it.

**Akky van Ogtrop is President of the Print Council of Australia**

Top:  
zines display at *Going Gaga with Dada* exhibition curated by Akky van Ogtrop at Brenda May Gallery  
Right:  
FLUXUS Artists' books, Collection Akky van Ogtrop

### References

Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, New York, Granach Books, 1995, p.1  
Latrobe Journal No. 95 March 2015, *Creating and collecting artists' books in Australia*, Editor's introduction, p.4  
*Bacon's Essays*, Francis Bacon and Richard Whately, 1857

