



Michele Skelton: *Wave Form*, woodblock print, winner
2013 Artspace Mackay Libris Awards

HANDMADE BOOKS

Artists' books are artworks that use the form or the concept of the book. Free from the constraints of traditional publishing, they are about nothing so much as themselves.

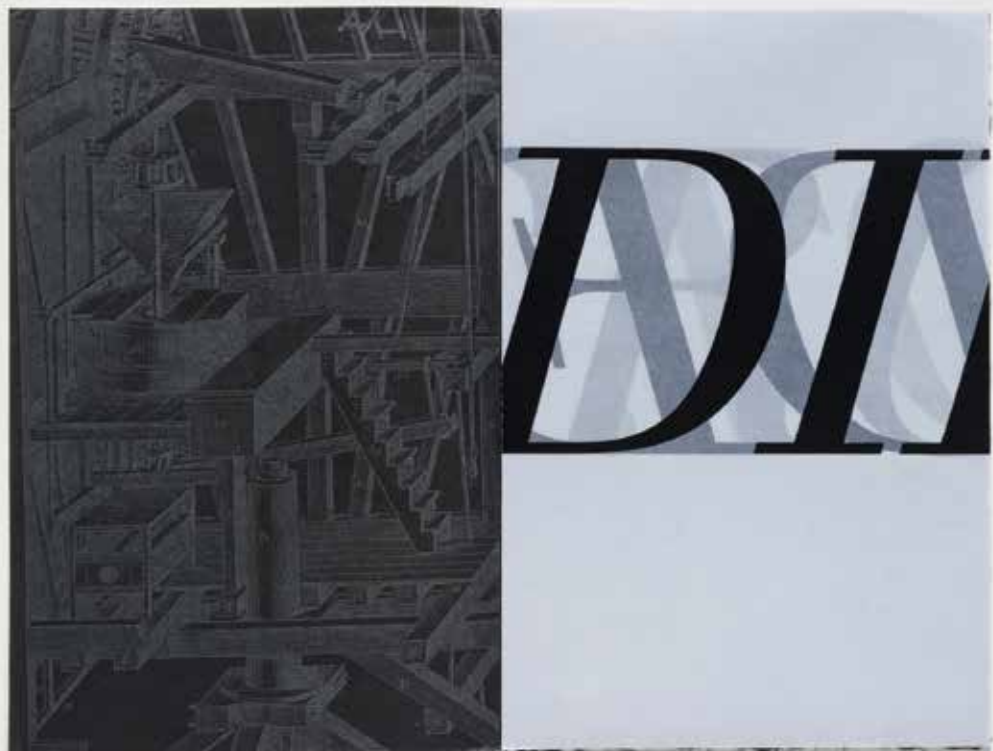
Artists' books are artworks that use the form or the concept of the book. Free from the constraints of traditional publishing, they are about nothing so much as themselves. They can be handcrafted or commercially printed; unique; or in limited or unlimited editions. Forms range from the traditional codex to sculptural works, or they may have audio, video, installation, online and performance components.
(State Library of Queensland)

The spectrum of book art means that definition can be challenging. Angela Lorenz offers a few pointers to some of the possibilities of what might be defined as an artist's book: artists' books are usually intended to be portable; they are mixed media and combine many processes; they are usually intended to be touched and interacted with, often in a predetermined sequence. All of their physical attributes are not visible at once, so a single work may have

a number of different display possibilities although they are generally not intended for simple display.

Which leads one to the question, why then does anyone collect artists' books?

Artists' books have become increasingly attractive as the subject of collections by galleries and libraries over the past few decades. This is an artform which would appear to fit in well with galleries, with their collections of art, and with libraries, as keepers of our printed literature. One would imagine that those artists' books which are least like books in either appearance or content, that is artworks, would be attractive to the galleries (such as Mackay Artspace's *The Wave* shown here) and those with an emphasis on the traditional book format will find their way to the library collections (some examples in Manly Library's collected works on display). At the moment in Australia it is unique



'The central visual metaphor is transparency, in inks, papers and watermarks, a reference to Diderot's call for more transparency in society..'

Ken Botnick's *Diderot Project* (above and opposite) won an American prize, the Minnesota Center for Book Arts Prize (the MCBA Prize) last year. This is an extraordinary project, the result of a 5-year investigation into the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* of Diderot and d'Alembert, a 150-page visual and textual narrative (meditation) on a number of the encyclopaedia's subjects: the nature of craft, the hand, work, tools, machines, dreams, the senses and the imagination.

There are 6 different papers in the book, three watermarked sheets designed by Botnick and made at Dieu Donne paper in New York. Over 220 press runs and 8 lbs of inks were used.

Botnick describes this as a book not of the encyclopaedia but because of the encyclopaedia. It began as a visual exploration of the original plate volumes seen through the lens of a camera and grew by considering it as a system of correlations and leaps of the imagination, Diderot's intention.

Botnick describes three components of the book: conceptual organization, visual metaphor and formal execution. The first is divided into three structures, the hand, the object and the senses. A narrative is woven of images overlaid with texts from Diderot's original encyclopaedia entries and those of 40 other writers. Botnick includes his own voice with that of Diderot.

The central visual metaphor is transparency, in inks, papers and watermarks, a reference to Diderot's call for more transparency in society and a visual representation of memories accumulated in layers and fragments. Some sequences are composed of printing on 4 or 5 surfaces of paper. Pattern is a strong visual component, referencing cognition and memory. The negative or white space is an allusion to a synaptic space, the connective tissue where leaps of imagination occur.

The formal execution: images form the core of the book but the design is a marriage of word and image. The type is shaped but is rarely perceived as such, instead defining the negative space. Each section has its own typographic signature, the first on the hand with softly curving edges reflecting the nature of material shaped in the hand; the second, on the object, sharp angular shapes carved by a tool; and the third, on the senses, presents subtle challenges to the reading experience.

original artworks which predominate in all collections. In countries with larger populations, in Europe and America, limited edition artists' books and the craft of printmaking and bookbinding are more prevalent.

Acquisitions and awards for artists' books

There are presently three noteworthy awards for artists' books in Australia. The oldest, Fremantle Art Centre's Print Award, is a highly regarded award which began in 1976 and recently celebrated its fortieth birthday with an exhibition, *Multiple Choices*, which brought together every winner in the award's history. It has a national judging panel and \$22,000 in prize money (first prize for work acquired \$16,000, second \$6,000) and is open to works from established, emerging and cross-disciplinary artists.

The City of Fremantle Art Collection includes Australian prints and artists' books which reflect the diversity, complexity and scale of print making in Australia, as well as the Print Award's winning works by artists such as Ray Arnold, Rebecca Beardmore, Pat Brassington, Damiano Bertoli, Marion Manifold, Mike Parr and Alick Tipoti.

Artspace Mackay's Libris Awards are an initiative of Mackay Regional Council biennially awarding \$22,000 in prizes. This year's award will be the fifth since 2006. The major prize is \$10,000 in category 1, open to all artists living and working in Australia, category 2 is for artists living in the Mackay region with a prize of \$2,500 and category 3 is for artists under 26 years or students of any age with a prize of \$2,000. Director Anna Thurgood reports that the sponsor, Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal, has generously agreed to give Artspace Mackay \$10,000 a year for four years, with the understanding that in non-Libris Award years, the money is to be used as a fund from which artists' books only are purchased. 'I believe this is a fairly unique arrangement, and I couldn't be more grateful to DBCT. This



actually matches our annual acquisition budget,' says Thurgood. Artspace Mackay is committed to artists' books and the Libris Award is an opportunity to further develop its nationally significant collection. The gallery's artists' books collection is the largest in regional Australia, third only to the National Gallery of Australia and the State Library of Queensland.

The newest artists' books award was inaugurated by Manly Library in 2011 with a grant from the Library Council of New South Wales—the first public library in New South Wales to establish an artists' book collection and this now numbers around 60 works. To ensure the sustainability of the collection, an entry fee into the award establishes the prize money for subsequent acquisitions. Last year's biennial award was judged by Helen Cole, Senior Librarian and Coordinator of the Australian Library of Art, State Library of Queensland, and Steven Miller, Head of the Art Gallery of NSW Research Library and Archive. Nine works were acquired. Manly's Collection began with acquisitions selected by the 2011 judges, Akky Van Ogtrop, art historian and President of the Print Council of Australia, and Therese Kenyon, former Director of Manly Art Gallery & Museum. The 2013 Award was selected and judged by Noreen Grahame, Director of the Centre for the Artist Book, and Monica Oppen, printmaker and bookbinder.

Manly Library says that their artists' book collection reflects in a challenging and thought-provoking way the long tradition of enquiry, curiosity and innovation that books signify when placed in the hands of artists. Artists' books, they say, are naturals for libraries, stressing the creative potential of the book medium and restating the longstanding relationship between the book and the library. Libraries are no longer places to be quiet, they point out, and in Manly the aim is to make their library outstandingly different. By making art the focus, they have become sought after to present and exhibit art throughout the year. Their walls have revolving art from current HSC students selected from Manly's regional gallery and the library is often selected to participate in national art exhibitions. Art workshops for children and youth are also part of the library's programming.

The **State Library of Queensland Artists' Books Collection**, one of the component collections of the Australian Library of Art, is the largest publicly available collection of artists' books in Australia and recognised as one of the best in the country. It consists of around 1,500 works by Australian and overseas artists. Although it does not offer an Award, Queensland's State Library has been granting fellowships for research and for artists to make a book based on the Library's collection.



BERNARD APPASSAMY is a writer, artist, graphic designer and teacher. In 2009, he says, *in the year leading up to my fiftieth birthday, I found myself asking the usual big questions. What is humanity? What does it mean to be human?* He started a paper sculpture on the medical professions and the idea of sacredness in a secular society (below).

In *Compendium of Knowledge* Appassamy assembled approx. 2,000 recycled microfiche, alluding to the librarians' and archivists' methodical dedication and infinite construction of systems of data. Each microfiche was drilled, folded and threaded onto fishing line and arranged in the shape of the infinity sign. He has now started a new project using all the birthday and Christmas cards he has collected over the past few years.

Above, *The Book of Asylum*, by Bernard Appassamy 2013
Manly Library Artists' Books Collection 2015, 4x10.5x90cm
Villawood Immigration Detention Centre provides visitors with lockers and a paper slip with locker access instructions. In this work hundreds of these slips issued to the Refugee Art Project volunteers and other volunteer visitors are bound like a palm-leaf sutra—a testament to their committed and sustained goodwill towards asylum seekers.

Below: *Sacred Hands*, 40x180x45cm
Shortlisted for the Director's Cut, Blake Prize 2009
Collection of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's museum
'Sterile medical gloves come within a paper insert, each labelled with the glove size and item number, referring to the medical staff and patient. My stitching, from approx. 3,000 recycled papers, combines stories of birth, life and death, in their infinity. The sterile setting is secular, but the space is sacred.'



Guidelines for entry to the main artists' book awards tend to be very free. This of course reflects the broad and all encompassing definitions of artists' books. Nevertheless, it may be an area which the organisers will find needs better definition in the future if the quality and integrity of their collections is to be maintained.

One of the important American awards, the Minnesota Center for Book Arts Prize was established in 2009 and attracts high quality innovative design from around the world to its biennial awards. This award has laid down its definition of book art and states its conditions for entry as follows: 'Book art, broadly defined, includes work that embodies narrative, instruction, reference, mapping, guides, documentation, and more. It is work that engages the viewer and propels the experience forward through narrative, sequencing, spatial elements, visual or verbal language, temporal, mechanical, aural, typographic, symbolic or material means.'

Their invitation for entries states: 'Forms, processes, traditions and approaches are open. Work may include unique book objects, altered books, graphic novels, 'zines, concrete poetry, conceptual, visual and literary works. Processes may include any printing or printmaking methods such as photo-mechanical, hand-worked, analog/digital, relief printmaking, letterpress, intaglio, and screen-printing, as well as hand-lettering. Works may

what we call artists' books today is primarily a late 20th century phenomenon with its roots in such avant garde movements as Dada, Constructivism, Futurism and Fluxus—and, before that, in the handwritten, illustrated, painted, printed and bound books of the English poet and artist William Blake

be in edition or unique. The finished work can depart from a bound book format to engage metaphors of the book in sculpture or installation. Work can be created collaboratively, but ultimately must result from an artist or artists' vision and active participation.

In each biennial competition, integrity—a unity of form, materials and content that reflects an artist's vision—will be a determining criteria in the winning works. The primary impetus for the creation of the work must come from the vision of the artist or artistic collaborators. Related works on paper (broadsides, prints, photographic portfolios), journals or diaries, scrapbooks and blank books will not be considered for the award, nor will video or film unless it is integral to an installation that embodies the qualities described above.'

Diderot, Ken Botnick's winning entry to the 2015 Minnesota Center for Book Arts Prize is shown here. Another prize-winning work, Robin Price's *Love in the Time of War*, letterpress/handpainted silk, 38 pages, in an edition of 70, is a collaboration between Price and renowned Iraqi poet Yusef Komunyakaa who began writing these poems when the US invaded Iraq in 2003. These two examples are an indication of the skill and commitment required to produce remarkable artists' books.

Beautiful and functional books

Australia's contemporary design bookbinders have been exhibiting regularly over many decades at the Australian Bookbinders Exhibitions. Their manifesto is set out in the catalogue for their 2012 exhibition by Wayne Stock and Imogen Yang:

A good bookbinder is 'one who is able to make objects with integrity and resilience in form, function and construction. Objects which will last, and lend themselves to use over time.

'A good design binder is able to bring individuality, imagination, experimentation and control to this fundamental skill set to produce objects which are expressive and unique. Objects which perform both a pragmatic and an aesthetic function, where the design of the book's physical structure adds to, or collaborates with the content in a way that expands or enhances our appreciation of the whole.

'Design binding brings with it this inherent burden of proof—its judgement as art can't readily be separated from the soundness of its workmanship. Its fitness to perform a task cannot be subordinated to its ability to communicate as an artwork. Making a weak construction,

just because it looks nice, or moves in an interesting way, is not good binding. The two elements—the craft and the art—must go hand-in-hand.'

Art v Craft

It is probably not surprising that the age-old debate about art and craft continues. In 1984, Ivor Robinson wrote in 'Contemporary Designer Bookbindings: Europe and Australia':

'The bookwork, in which the maker selects and determines the nature and the form of the content, and where that content influences the nature and form of the entire work, offers of necessity a total and integrated 'whole book' experience of great significance to the future of book based visual activities.'

In the same volume, Edgar Mansfield writes: 'The creative act does not reflect the age, it is the age. The rest is repetitive craftsmanship.'

'Bookbinding is one of the most difficult of the crafts, and it may be also the greatest art form among the so-called Crafts.'

This thirty year-old publication features a remarkable array of contemporary designer bookbindings, beautiful, imaginative and elegant. The times were very optimistic for a resurgence in interest in such books.

These views may seem fairly traditional, but the importance of skilled craftsmanship does need to be reinforced periodically to ensure that it is not lost. Of course it also needs to be taught. Their words were also a cry for wider recognition of the beautifully designed and bound book as ART. Mansfield, remember this is 1984, says that 'even the cover torn from a book and stuck onto a board would qualify (as art), while the original book would not.'

Included in the publication's illustrated design bindings is one described as an example of the book as a 'found object' by artists working in other media. *Stigmata* by Helen Wadlington (binder) and Petr Herel (artist) is made of handmade paper from indigenous fibres and uses rusted nails specially coated. The maker states: 'Traditionally the binder is not directly involved with the author or artist in the book creation whereas in this instance the realisation required close co-operation between the artist and binder to achieve a work in which book and binding are an integrated form.'

The rigid demarcation they refer to is no longer adhered to and clearly the two groups are moving closer together, and it is probably the book crafts which have

been making the greater concessions. Time perhaps for the artists to apply more craftsmanship to their artists' books and for the award givers to encourage this. Then, just as artists need to be aware of the style or ethos of a particular art award or competition and who its judges will be in order to decide whether their work is likely to succeed, so book artists would become aware of particular guidelines for entry to book art awards and acquisitions appropriate to their work.

A 20th Century Phenomenon

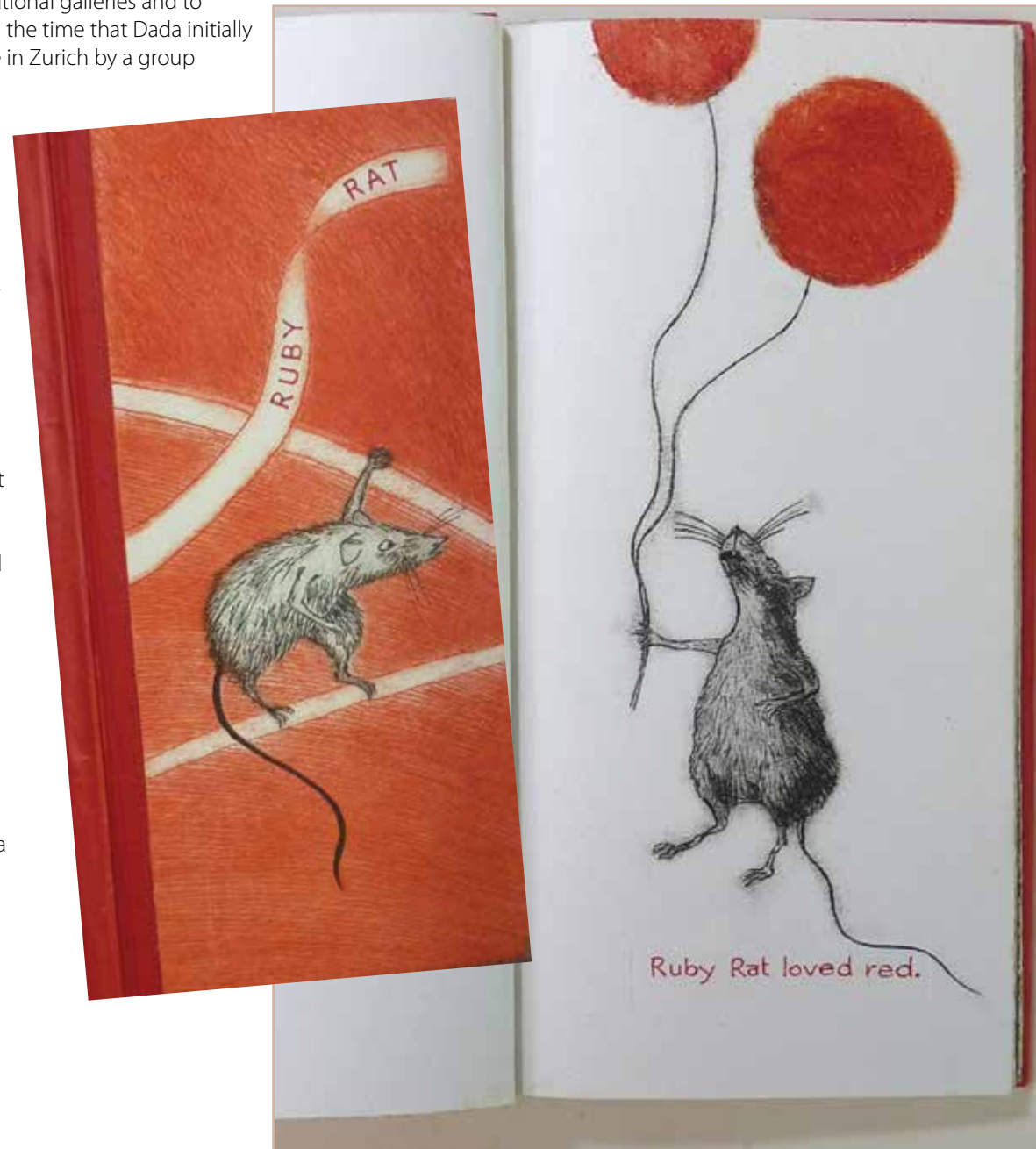
Artists have been involved in printing and making books since early medieval times but what we call the artist's book today is primarily a late 20th century phenomenon with its roots in such avant garde movements as Dada, Constructivism, Futurism and Fluxus—and before that, in the handwritten, illustrated, painted, printed and bound books of the English poet and artist William Blake.

At about the time of World War I, avant garde artists in Europe began to produce pamphlets, books and posters as a means to bypass the traditional galleries and to promote themselves. This was the time that Dada initially started, at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich by a group of artists exiled in neutral Switzerland. The protagonists became more and more politically active, producing books, periodicals, manifestos and satirical lithographs about the German bourgeoisie (Kandinsky, Marc, Huelsenbeck and George Grosz). Artists' books from this time onwards are avidly collected.

In the seventies and eighties artists' books became recognized as a separate genre and began to be taught and studied throughout America and Europe. Collections were founded and exhibitions held, bookstores opened which specialized in artists' books. The Library of Congress included artists' books among its established subjects and maintains a permanent collection. In the 1980s and 90s, university programs in book art sprang up in colleges around America and an MA was established at London's Camberwell College of Art.

Tanya Crothers is an artist, architect and art teacher. (See issues 3 and 4 of OZ ARTS, The Lewers.) In 1969 she studied printmaking at Willoughby Workshop Arts Centre with Michael West and from 1970 on she exhibited in group shows with Sydney Printmakers, the Print Council of Australia and the Print Circle among others. Tanya says: *The postwar influx of European migrant artists had ignited a revival of interest in printmaking that had once flourished in 1930s Sydney.* Tanya Crothers began publishing her own books in 1996 and in 2001 was awarded Winner of Australian Best Self-Published Book with an illustrated account of the life and work of fellow printmaker Barbara Davidson.

*Below: Tanya Crothers: Ruby Rat, 26 x15 cm
This was created for my grandchildren and hand bound using one of many traditional Japanese methods. The images are hand printed collagraphs and the text is hand written.*



Left: Barbara Davidson, Book, *Room with a View*, etching, 28x30 cm
Below left: Kimberley's *Kitchen*, etching, 28x28cm from *Room with a View*

held object that integrates the cover, binding, end papers and content to create a book.

Below: *Two Vases* is a collaboration between Crothers and Davidson. This fold-in/fold-out book can be viewed as a 3D piece in various configurations or in a more conventional format by turning the pages and/or opening them out in sequence. The two artists drew separate images of two different vases and then combined them by over-printing. Every page is printed on both sides by both artists in a variety of colours and combinations using lithography and collagraphs, 38x28cm, cover and end papers lightweight Ingres paper on cardboard; internal pages 300 gsm Magnini paper for stiffness.

Barbara Davidson designs and prints all her images and hand binds the books usually using perfect binding. *In the last 20 years, books have become increasingly important in my art practice and since 1992 I have produced approximately 40 artists' books. Drawing on my immediate environment—home, garden, leisure activities and people, books allow me to create a narrative by presenting my prints in a continuous sequence of my own choosing without the intervention of glass. The idea of linking my prints to tell a story can be developed on many levels. Sydney Circular Quay illustrates a walk around the Sydney Harbour at Circular Quay in which an image of the Harbour Bridge is followed by another of the Overseas Terminal, then the Wharves and so on—until reaching the Opera House. In Time Flies references to the various stages of life are shown metaphorically by images of breakfast, lunch and dinner and all the cups of tea in between. Changes in tone, colour and movement are used to alter mood—as in a series depicting spectators experiencing the highs and lows of a sporting event. Above all, I enjoy the process of combining prints into a crafted, hand-*



Future awards and acquisitions

Any discussion of artists' books must make reference to Australia's small presses, such as the Wayzgoose Press, producer since their beginnings in 1985 of over 50 limited edition letterpress books and broadsides. These publications have been acquired by collectors and institutions in the UK, Europe, America and, of course, Australia—'typographic masterpieces unparalleled in Australian printing history', according to Des Cowley of the State Library of Victoria (OZ ARTS magazine, issue 5). While small presses continue to produce beautiful books in Australia this has become a very small and select gathering of dedicated artists.

It is not suggested that all makers of artists' books should strive to replicate these exceptionally crafted and designed works but they surely must find inspiration in the the passion they embody, for literature and, for many other environmental, social justice and political causes. Our international reputation for book making will diminish if there is no incentive to continue their production and so appropriate book and print awards and acquisitions which invite submissions including from this highly specialised category of artists' books are important. Australian artists certainly have the skills and are able to compete with the best internationally.

Carolynne Skinner

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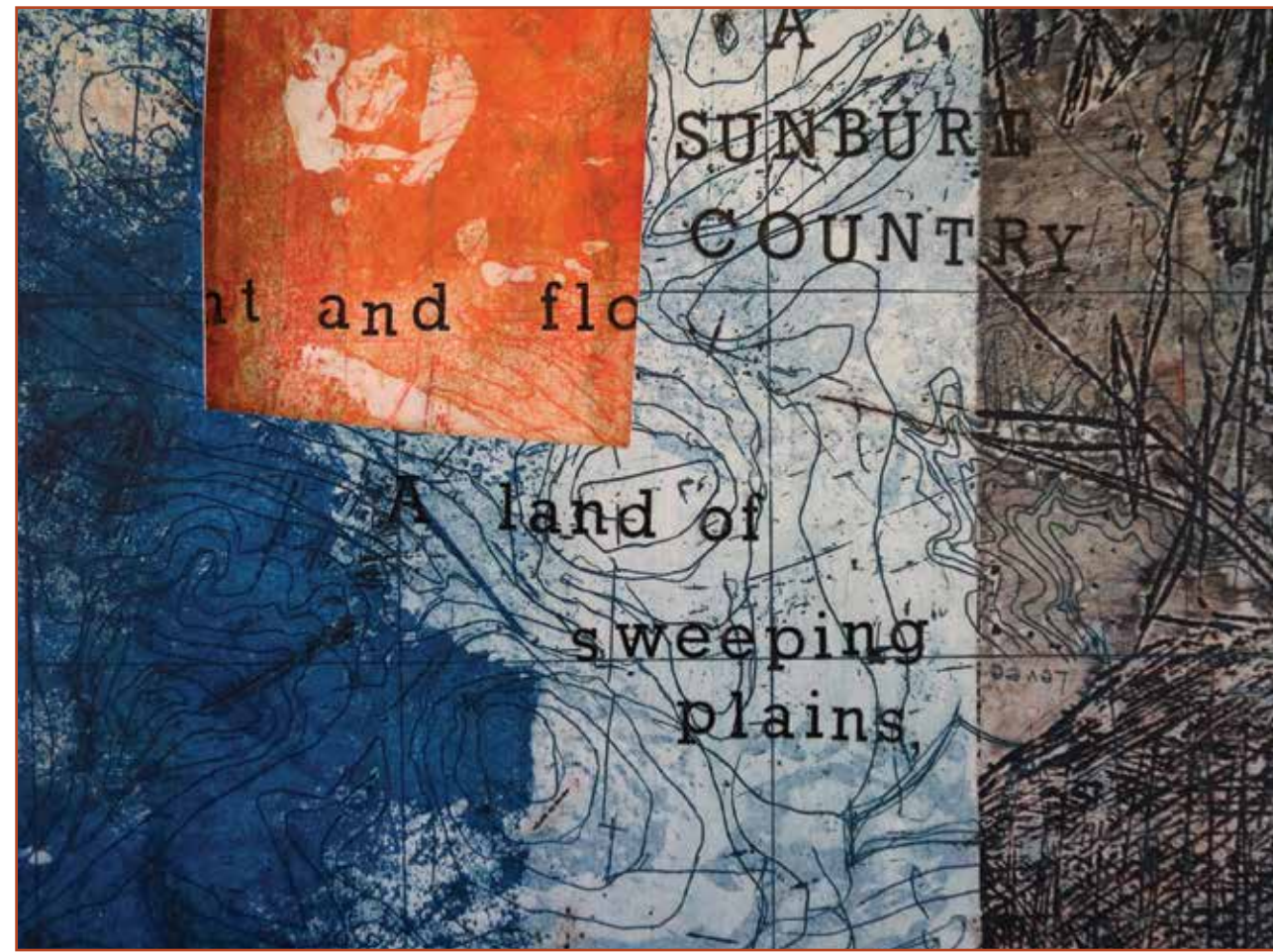
Above: Paul Thompson, *Attack of the Lepidoptera*, Manly Library Artists' Books Collection



Above: Nicola Laidlow: *Cup of tea?*, monoprint. Artspace Mackay Foundation Young Artists' Book Award 2013



Left: Bronwyn Rees: *The Long Paddock*, 2012. Acquired by the National Library of Australia 2013: 'Inspired by Brendan Ryan's poem, *A Paddock in His Head*. I read this in *The Age* not long after settling in Melbourne, having lived overseas for a few years. His poem captured a lost restless feeling that I was experiencing at the time. I made the book in segments with many holes, collage and embossing, reflecting fragments of my life and the longing for the bush that had drawn me back to Australia. There is also a strange nostalgia for a country life that is in my mind, although I cannot seem to live without the rush of the city.'



BRONWYN REES

I made my first artist's book in 2008 in response to a call out from the *Libris Prize* in Mackay. I was shortlisted and attended the conference and so embarked on a steep learning curve about the wonderful world of artists' books. I had been making prints for many years but had never considered books. Since then I have made books in between making 2D prints for exhibitions. Quite often books are where parts of the exhibitions end up, so it cycles between the two.

Left: Bronwyn Rees: *Country*, 2014, 58cm x 38cm, multi-layered coloured etching, bound with alternating tabs formed by the pages. Acquired by Manly Library Artists' Books Collection 2015

The words from 'My Country' had been buzzing around my brain like a bee. Dorothea Mackellar was born in Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century. She was sent 'home' to England to improve her education and social opportunities and was horribly homesick. The poem 'My Country' was the result. We learnt it as a song at school and would scoff at its naivety, colonialism and corny sentimentality, but now I just want to cry for everything that's been lost and everything that needs mending. I called the book 'Country' to honour the people whose country this really is, however much I may love it.

I used the techniques of layered colour etchings, cutting out windows to reveal words and progressive parts of the images. The crows and currawongs are depicted as embodiments of spiritual elements; the barbeque on the verandah represents a more prosaic narrative. The giant eucalypt reminded me of an ageing body, trying to protect the land from harm. The lens of sadness and nostalgia act as a filter, creating a beautiful complexity of now.



Left: Bronwyn Rees with Elizabeth Banfield:

A Different Path, 2015: Last year I participated in an exhibition primarily of books in partnership with Elizabeth Banfield at Stephen McGlaughlin Gallery. Elizabeth and I collaborated on *A Different Path* for this exhibition. Elizabeth is very precise in her methodology and techniques and I asked her to choose an existing print of mine to alter. She divided four large (editioned) etchings into strips and overprinted them with linocut. I collaged the reverse of each one in a unique but similar way. Elizabeth sewed leaves on the other side, in the same format, with the stitching complementing the collage and bound the four books with beautiful golden brown covers, matching the colour of the ink.



Below: Peter Charuk was an ANAT Synapse Artist in Residence at CSIRO Marine Research in Hobart in 2005 and in 2007 was awarded a New Work Grant from the Australia Council to develop *glacies lux*. His research engages with a thematic of 'water' in the broadest sense. He works with video, artists' books, photography, sound and text.

Left: *'No Diving'* references my love of water and of surfing. Leonard Cohen's song *Suzanne* provided the book's structure although not the words. The spiritual in art, the questioning of one's existence in the universe these are underlying themes in my work.

'The words to *Suzanne* helped give the book direction and a focus for the disparate images I had collected. A fascination for pop-up books was the motivation for the book's format, so that it may be presented with a number of different scenarios.' Exhibited at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery Art Award 2001, Sydney 4th Artists' Books & Multiples Fair 2001, Brisbane 8th International Works on Paper Fair, 2001. Acquired by State Library of Queensland Collection of Artists' Books.