

Text as Inspiration: Artists' Books and Literature

National Gallery of Art

July 30, 2011 – January 29, 2012



ALGERNON SWINBURNE

On the Cliffs

with a visual interpretation cut by Tuska



Tuska

Text as Inspiration: Artists' Books and Literature

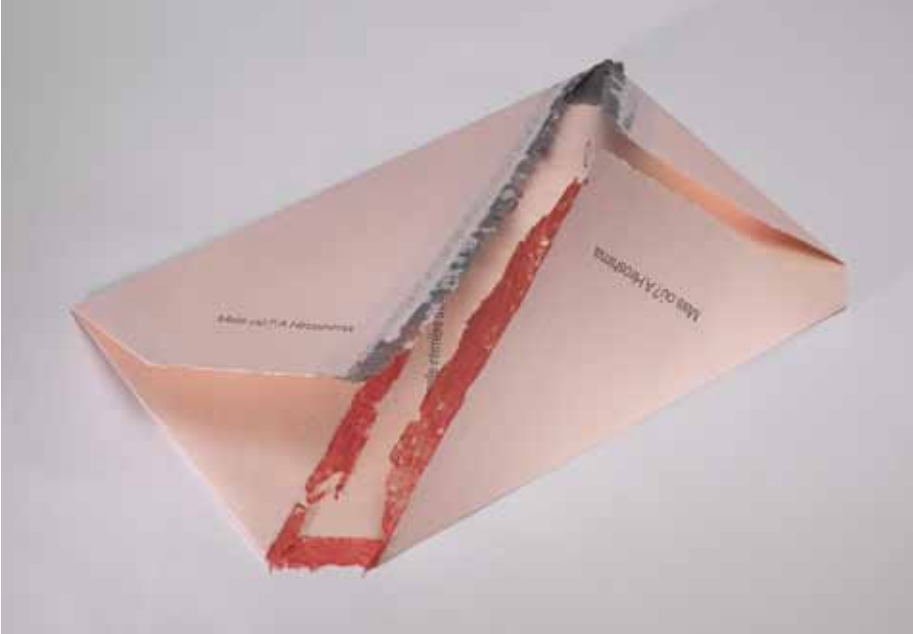
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Throughout the ages artists have enhanced and embellished the texts of manuscripts and books with narrative and decorative illustrations. The printing press made mass-produced books possible and illustrations often took the form of woodcuts and engravings. The illustrated book reached its apogee in early twentieth-century France, where the *livre d'artiste* took on a life of its own and continued in popularity with printed illustrations by such celebrated artists as Matisse and Picasso. The modern genre of artists' books evolved from the *livre d'artiste* to become a total art concept in book form. The artist therefore has the opportunity to manipulate the book into a work of art that conveys an idea in a visual and tactile format.

Poetry and prose inspired the fourteen artists' books exhibited here. Some are written by the artist-bookmaker, but most are by a familiar or favorite author who motivated the artist to explore the subject of the text and express it as a creative artwork. The book artist goes beyond merely illustrating a story. Molding and manipulating the text, the book artist makes it part of a unique imagery through the use of disparate elements. Carefully choosing varied types of paper (usually handmade), printing, and binding, the artist combines them with drawings, prints, paper sculpture, fabric, and other materials to construct a thematic whole. Some artists retain the characteristics of a book while others recreate the individual elements and transform them into a synthesis of text and image.

Artists' books are made in small or limited editions. Some deluxe editions and the occasional unique copy are made by using a variety of techniques and materials. Inventive page design and elegant, deckled, colored, handmade paper are a visual delight in artist Ann Sperry's interpretation of Marguerite Duras' *Hiroshima mon amour* (5). Witty interpretations of textual matter abound. Sandra McPherson shapes papier-mâché into a sculpture of Adam's rib and covers it with the mystery of a black veil for a book of poetry titled *Eve* (13). In *The Dream of the Dirty Woman* (8) Claire



Van Vliet tells the tale through relief plates placed on a single sheet of folded paper. *Presenting—The Seven Ages of Man* (7), a colorful book by Maryline Poole Adams, sets an entertaining text by Shakespeare within a replica of Shakespeare’s Globe Theater. Donna Thomas’ tiny *Picasso Book* (10), a unique copy, is replete with miniature images whose color and form refer to Picasso’s masterpieces. “*There are monsters in my hair*” (1), a children’s story written by Rebecca Arons, has etchings that slowly integrate colored, patterned endpapers into the illustrations. *Anansi Company* (2), a legend of the spider-god, details his travel and transformation from Africa to the Caribbean; wire and card puppets literally endow the characters of the tale with new dimension. Poignant, humorous, and clever, these books exemplify the creative and inventive abilities of their makers.

The National Gallery of Art Library is fortunate to have an exceptionally generous and knowledgeable benefactor in Patricia G. England, who has donated several hundred books that now form the basis of the library’s splendid collection of artists’ books. Unless specified otherwise, works are gift of Patricia G. England.



1 Rebecca Arons, *“There are monsters in my hair”* (Pelham, MA: Beo Press, 1989)

Rebecca Arons’ delightful tale is intended for both children and adults. Anna Hepler created and printed the etchings for the book at the Janus Press. Published in an edition of twenty copies, the volume was bound in blue cloth boards with patterned endpapers and spine. The Gallery copy is number 20 and is signed by the artist. A thank-you note from Claire Van Vliet to Pat England is laid in.

2 Ronald King, *Anansi Company* (London: Circle Press, 1992)

The legendary spider-god Anansi’s adventures are told in texts printed on double leaves. Ronald King and Roy Fisher created thirteen removable handmade wire and card rod-puppets representing the characters of each adventure. The book was issued in a large portfolio, contained in a black box. Each of the 120 copies of this edition is signed by the poet and the artist. The Gallery copy is number 45.





3 Katharine Meynell, *Eat Book* (London and West Burke, VT: Gefn Press, 1990)

Poems based on nursery rhymes and two recipes make up this volume. The book is illustrated with six duotones of Katharine Meynell's photographs of food and with eight relief prints of kitchen utensils by Susan Johanknecht. One hundred fifty copies were designed by Johanknecht, printed at Expression Printers on Rives BFK paper, and bound at the Gefn Press. Johanknecht's reliefs were printed at the Janus Press, where the books were sewn by Linda Wray. The book is in a linen napkin wrapper with knotted tie cord. The Gallery copy, inscribed "for Pat England," is signed by the artist and the author. It is accompanied by a prospectus and additional pages of the text and illustrations.

4 Diane Wakoski, *Making a Sacher Torte* (Mount Horeb, WI: Perishable Press, 1981)

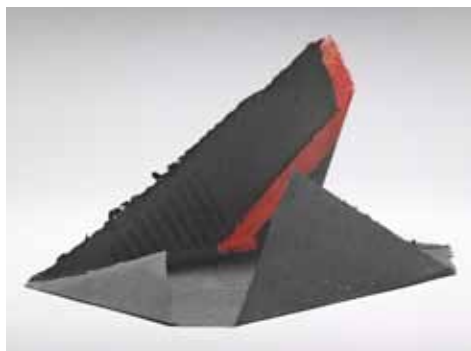
Conceived as a sequel to the 1974 *Wandering Tattler*, this volume includes nine poems about the glories of the table. Twelve illustrations by Diane Wakoski and Ellen Lanyon complete the book. The first page serves as front pastedown. The edition consists of 225 copies, printed on various colors of paper. It is quarter-bound in leather with violet and black paper over boards, blind-stamped on the spine, and housed in a drop-back box. The Gallery copy is number 30.



5 Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima mon amour* (New York: Edition Kaldewey, 1986)

This volume was printed in the Tower of Poestenkill, New York, on handmade paper created by Ann Sperry and Gunnar A. Kaldewey. Fifty copies of the regular edition were issued in loose sections, in a wraparound paper sheet

contained in a case. Ten additional copies were bound by Jean de Gonet. The Gallery copy is unnumbered and is signed by the artist Ann Sperry.



6 Algernon Charles Swinburne, *On the Cliffs* (Lexington, KY: King Library Press, 1980)

On the Cliffs is one of four long poems in Algernon Charles Swinburne's *Songs of the Springtides*, which was published in London by Chatto and Windus in 1880. A continuous strip is folded accordion-style with printing on both sides. This edition is limited to seventy-five numbered copies. The volume is housed in a standing case of pasteboard displaying a paper sculpture by John Regis Tuska. The Gallery copy is number 28. It is signed by the artist and accompanied by a prospectus.





9 Susan Allix, *The Beach: A Short Story* (London: Allix, 1989)

Twelve full-page illustrations include a combination of printing techniques, such as etching, linocut, and woodcut, and drawing media, such as pen and ink, gouache, and crayon. This book was issued in a limited edition of eighteen copies. Five copies were printed on Saunders Waterford paper and thirteen copies, on Lana Royal Crown. The book is housed in a striped cotton beach bag in turquoise and white, with shells, cord, and card title in a front pocket. Five deluxe copies (numbered 1–5) were made. The Gallery copy is number 3 and is signed by the artist.

10 Donna Thomas, *Picasso Book* (Santa Cruz, CA: Donna Thomas, 1999), David K. E. Bruce Fund

“To draw you must close your eyes and sing” — Picasso’s inspirational statement makes up the entire text of the book. Twelve handmade and painted sheets contain Picasso-like paintings, and the whole is bound in leather with leather appliqué patterned after the costume of a Picasso



saltimbanque. The paper was made by Peter Thomas; the paintings and binding, by Donna Thomas. The book is contained in a box covered in handmade paper and painted in a geometric decorative pattern with a large P. This is a unique copy (only one was made).

11 D. H. Lawrence, *Tortoises: Six Poems by D. H. Lawrence* (Williamsburg, MA: Cheloniidae Press, 1983)

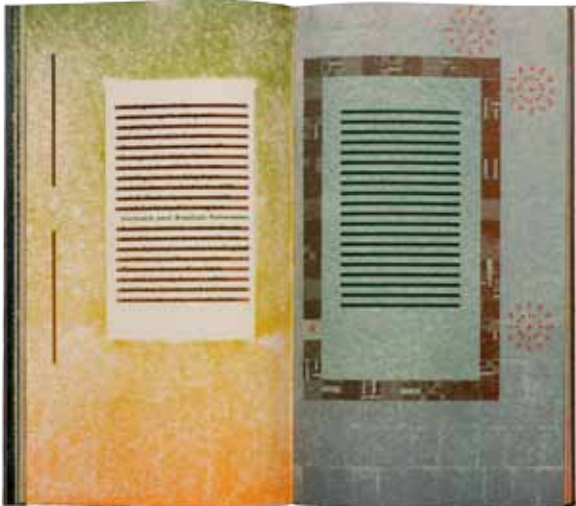
D. H. Lawrence's poems, with an introduction by Jefferson Hunter and wood engravings by Alan James Robinson, were printed at the Hampshire Typothetae by H. Patrick McGrath. Three

hundred copies were issued. The books were hand-bound at the bindery of Gray Parrot in vellum and paper over boards and housed in a quarter vellum drop-back box. The Gallery copy is number 18 and is signed by the artist.



12 Ken Campbell, *Father's Garden* (Oxford: Ken Campbell, 1989)

The text is in verse, printed with multicolor and metallic inks on chinese-folded Zerkall Gehämmert paper. The typography is Bembo italic. Some of the tints were produced by hand-wiping. Printed in an edition limited to fifty copies, the volume is bound in patterned metallic paperboards, backed in teal leather, and issued in a slipcase. The Gallery copy is number 14 and is signed by the artist.



13 Sandra McPherson, *Eve*
(London and West Burke, VT:
Gefn Press, 1987)

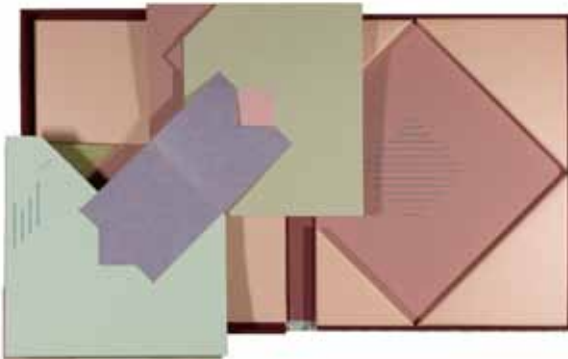
The book consists of a paper construction representing Adam's rib. The base of this sculptural construction is attached to an accordion-folded strip on which the text of the book is printed. It fits precisely into a linen box, which contains transparent black fabric intended to cover the rib in a black haze. Fifty copies of this book were made. The Gallery copy is number 1. It was made for Pat England and is signed by the artist.



14 Margaret Kaufman, *Aunt Sallie's Lament* (West Burke, VT: Janus Press, 1988)

This is an autobiographical poem of a spinster quilter. The book was designed by Claire Van Vliet, based on a binding structure developed by Hedi Kyle and made with Linda Wray. The first and last leaves are in the shape of a diamond with one corner cut off. Inner leaves are cut in various shapes, with the text of the poem on verso pages. The overlapping pieces resemble a pieced quilt square when viewed together.

The words of the poem are seen in various combinations. The leaves are joined with strips of colored paper inserted in slots, so that the whole can be extended accordion-style to reveal all the stanzas of the poem. The volume is issued in a case made by Judi Conant of Guildhall, Vermont, and covered with blue patterned cloth. One hundred fifty copies were printed in red, blue, and black on colored papers, including Twinrocker Aura and Lilac Wind. The Gallery copy is signed by the poet and by Claire Van Vliet.



Label texts have been excerpted, with some emendations, from *The Patricia G. England Collection of Fine Press and Artists' Books* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2000). To consult other artists' books in the library's collection, call 202.842.6510 and schedule an appointment with the reference librarian.

Suggested readings

Drucker, Joanna. *The Century of Artists' Books*. New York, 1995.
Fine, Ruth. *The Janus Press — Fifty Years*. Burlington, VT, 2006.
Hubert, Renee. *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books*. New York, 1999.
Jury, David. *Book Art Object*. Berkeley, CA, 2008.
Wasserman, Krystyna. *The Book as Art*. New York, 2006.

Checklist of the exhibition *Text as Inspiration: Artists' Books and Literature*, July 30, 2011 – January 29, 2012.

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The Gallery website features highlights from the exhibition and links to exhibition-related activities at www.nga.gov/exhibitions/artistsbooksinfo.htm.