

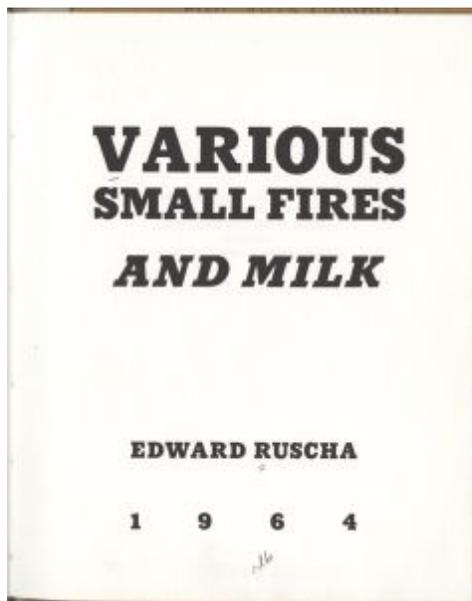
## Artists' Books

by **Tony White, Head, Fine Arts Library**

On Friday May, 16, 2008, Tony White, Head of the Fine Arts Library gave a 45 minute presentation on the history of artist's books followed by a 45 minute show-and-tell presentation of artists' books from the Fine Arts Library. The presentation followed an outline originally drafted by BJ Irvine, former Director of the Fine Arts Library. The following article is based on that presentation and has been heavily edited to fit the format of this publication.

White is an independent curator and has been making artists' books for over fifteen years. He is on the editorial board for the *Journal of Artists' Books*, and is also on the planning committee for a symposium on Contemporary Artists' Books to be held at the Museum of Modern Art and the New York Public Library, October 23-26, 2008 (<http://www.arlisny.org/cabc/>).

Artists' Books



In her tribute to the late pop art dealer Paul Bianchini, Anne Moeglin-Delcroix used this Bianchini quote as an epigraph: "An artist's book is a work solely created by the artist's decisions. It is produced by the best methods to achieve quality in unlimited quantities. It should be available at a moderate price wherever books are sold" (Moeglin-Delcroix, p.26). Bianchini offers an ideal of work solely created by the artist, but not all artists are intimately involved with the means or methods of the production of their work. Artists' books were an important part of the flood of experimentation in the visual arts during the 1960s. However it is easier to define what artists' books are not than what they are: they are not livres de peintres or livres d'artiste. But what are these?

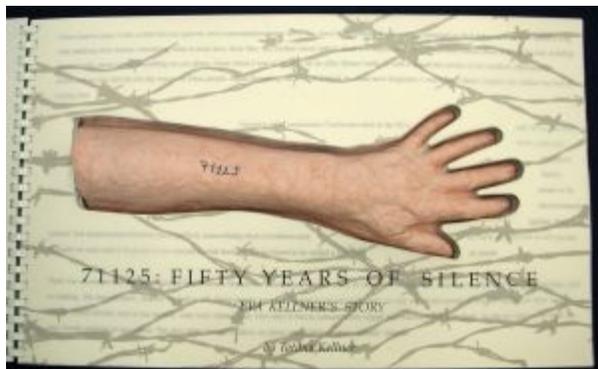
The nineteenth century was a great age for books illustrated by artists. At this time some of the first books illustrated with lithographs were created. For example, Goethe's *Faust*, illustrated by Delacroix's lithographs in 1828. The 1900s saw revival of lithography especially in the works by

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Odilon Redon and Henri Fantin-Latour. The livres de peintres thrived with artists like Honore Daumier, Gustave Courbet, and Edouard Manet, among others, and later Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Henri Matisse. Livres d'artiste or livre de luxe thrived with the works of Picasso, Andre Derain, Wassily Kandinsky, and Fernand Leger. These books were conscious collaborations of writers and artists to produce fine illustrated books. Similar books continue to be published through the present day. The artist's interest in book illustration is not new but these livres d'artiste still fall within the art world establishment, the world of wealthy collectors and exclusive exhibitions held in the most prestigious galleries and museums of the world.

The 1960s generally were marked by a reaction against the systems of the art world and the need of artists for non-object oriented ideas. Antecedents of the artist's book can be found in the broadsides, theatre programs, small press magazines, and cheaply printed books of the Surrealists, Constructivists, and Suprematists, and in the publications of the Futurist and Dada movements. These early 20th century movements experimented with a variety of sizes and styles of typefaces, unusual layouts, and merging of literary or political ideas with visual ideas or content. Innovative merging of visual and verbal elements on the page and the typographically manipulated text seen in the works of concrete poets is another example of this phenomenon.

The environment of the 60s was critical and essential for the development of Artists' Books. This was a time of anti-establishment, experimental ideas and actions, with the artist seeking to get art off the gallery/museum wall and into the hands of the viewer/reader/user.. Art work at this time included happenings (performance art), mail art, pop art, conceptual art, and minimalist movements. Earlier movements such as Futurism and Dada led to concrete poetry of the 50s, and conceptual and pop art of the 60s and 70s. One well known Happening was Bruce Nauman's Burning of Ed Ruscha's book, Various Small Fires.

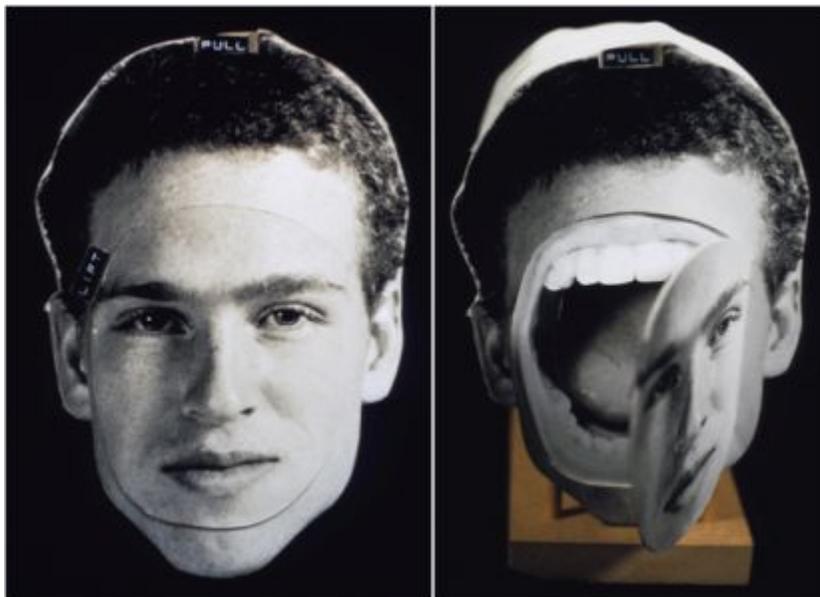
An artist's book may be conceived as a unique art work or book object; or it might be a book that happens to be designed by an artist, often hand printed, and distributed by the artist; or perhaps it is mass produced using office or commercial printing and binding technology...to create the fabled "democratic multiple". BJ Irvine often noted that the artist is the creator (the artist), author, illustrator, editor, publisher, and may even be the distributor,, allowing the artist complete control of both form and content of a book.



Some examples include scrapbooks (documenting past actions); albums with loose-leaf pages, boxed rather than bound; and pages often stapled or appearing as a series of postcards or playing cards. To create text and illustrations and/or images, artists often used letterpress, xerography (copier art), serigraphy (silk screening), photo-offset lithography, rubber stamps, cut-outs, pop-up elements, a series of post cards or playing cards, hand lettered or drawn elements, sewn elements, etc. Initially in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, books consciously avoided the creation of unique or precious objects, the objective being the cheap, mass-production of work. Examples include books by Ed Ruscha, Lawrence Weiner, Sol le Witt, and Dieter Roth. These works were reminiscent of cheaply printed publications of Futurist and Dada artists.

Artists' books provided an easy way for artists who might otherwise never be exhibited to show their work/artists' books. This was especially true for women artists in the 1960s and 1970s. Artists' books became an anti-deluxe book, and merely photo-mechanical reproductions of original books, photocopies of original books and other inexpensively reproduced and marketed "multiples."

Currently artists' books are actively produced and collected in many parts of the world. In 1999 BJ Irvine, former Director of the Fine Arts Library, established an Artists' Books Endowment to ensure the continued collecting of artists' books. In 2006 she made the first purchases using funds from this endowment.



Since September 2007 I have provided library instruction sessions on artists' books to students from Indiana University's School of Fine Arts, the University of Kentucky, and the IUPUI-Herron School of Art. I have also traveled to New York City and Clarksville, Tennessee, to lecture about artists' books and to discuss the collection here at the Fine Arts Library at Indiana University, Bloomington. Student, staff and faculty interest in the artists' book collection remains strong and continues to grow.

Images, from the top:

- *Various small fires and milk*, Edward Ruscha, Anderson, Ritchie, & Simon, 1964.
- *Maciunas flux-deck*, George Maciunas, ReFlux Editions, 1988.
- *71125, fifty years of silence: Eva Kellner's story*, Tana Kellner, Women's Studio Workshop, 1992.
- *Seth*, Tony White, 1994 (cover).
- *Seth*, Tony White, 1994 (exterior, opened, detail).

Works cited:

- Irvine, Betty Jo. *Artist's Books*. AB LECTURE. Mar. 1993, Rev. Nov. 1998.
- Drucker, Johanna. *The Century of Artist's Books*, 2nd ed. New York City: Granary Books, 2004.
- Moeglin-Delcroix, Anne. *Guardare, raccontare, pensare, conservare : quattro percorsi del libro d'artista dagli anni '60 ad oggi*. Casa del Mantegna : Corraini, 2004.
- Ruscha, Edward. *Various small fires and milk*. Los Angeles: Anderson, Ritchie, & Simon, 1964.