

# 2

## **A brief history of the artists book**

Finding a context

## A brief history of artists books

### Finding a context

So what we have is a form which is not, per se new, but whose “time has come.” — *Dick Higgins, founder, Something Else Press*

The point I’m trying to make is that all of us who love books are operating on an historical continuum. The structure that we call a book has changed drastically from what it was in the past, and it will change drastically in the future. [Others] have pointed out that our word “book” pre-dates the codex, our word “library” predates the introduction of papyrus, ... “volume” is derived from “roll,” as in a scroll. Rather than being locked in time, I’ve found it productive to be aware of historical models and to embrace them in my development as a book artist. It’s not an either/or situation. There’s room on my library shelves for all kinds of books. — *Edward H. Hutchins, Proprietor of Editions*



A 17th-century vellum scroll of the book of *Esther*

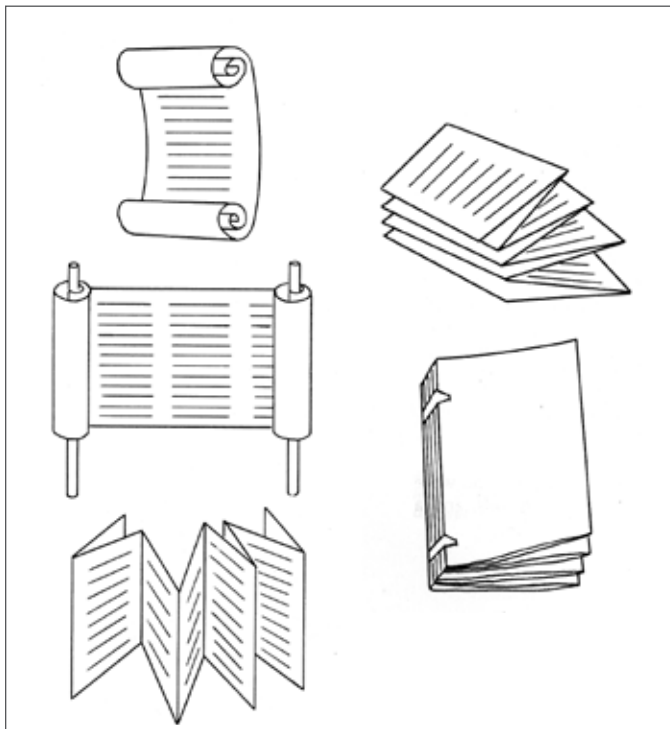
**W**here does one begin when looking at the history of artists books? With the medieval Irish scribes painstakingly illuminating the *Book of Kells*? With William Blake or Sonia Deluanay and their innovative ideas of merging text and image? With Ed Ruscha’s, groundbreaking work, *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations*, in 1962? Or even with the 1973 Moore College of Art (Philadelphia) exhibit which was the first to categorize the medium as artists books?

In this chapter, I am seeking to set the stage for the ones that follow on current book artists and book arts issues. To do this I will look briefly at various historical works and artists that have shown a vision for the book as a work of art. These visions still inspire artists to explore new directions and continually redefine the artists book.

For many reasons one could say that artists books is one of the most ancient of art forms. In the introduction to *Creative Bookbinding*, Pauline Johnson writes in reference to the Middle Ages: “At one time well-



Irish codex, *Aureus*, 8th century



In a vertical scroll the writing was continuous, but as horizontal scrolls were developed they began writing in columns. Later these sheets were folded back and forth and kept flat with a board on the top and bottom. Illustration by Pauline Johnson.

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constructed and beautifully embellished books were regarded as a major art form.”<sup>1</sup> The book as an art form did not begin with the coining of a term and we owe much to the explorations of early book artists.

## From the beginning

Many people who write about the history of artists books begin with William Blake, suggesting that his innovative printing techniques and merging of type and image, both in proximity and concept, were the first examples of artists books. I propose that there are many influences prior to Blake that have shaped and continue to shape the artists books being produced today.

Any historical figure, (possibly not even considered an artist in his lifetime), who has pushed the notion of a book to a new or higher level, influences and encourages book artists to continue their investigations – to experiment and to innovate. Each of these small steps in the alteration of the book structure, content or design brings us to where we are today.

In the 1990s there was considerable emphasis placed on book artists to challenge the codex form and to develop and perfect new structures. Is not the redefinition of the vertical scroll, to first read horizontally in a series of columns, and then to take the scroll and fold it back and forth, thus establishing a page, one of the most fundamentally innovative structures? This innovation with added covers for protection and hinges for stability – a codex – has been the primary bearer of knowledge for the last 2000 years. Christian scholars of the 7th century A.D. are said to have secured the longevity of the codex format because the codex made it possible to have several books open at once for comparative study. With scrolls this would have been impossible.<sup>2</sup>

With the codex format firmly in place, book binding developed into an art form. Like paintings of this era, the church, the wealthy and the royalty were the main patrons of the book arts. Bindings became more and more elaborate, incorporating precious metals and jewels into the wooden covers, to signify the wealth of the patron.

This highly ornate clasped cover was crafted around 1180 for the *Gospels of Henry the Lion* for the duke of Saxony and Bavaria.



*Book of Kells, Gospel of Luke, genealogy of Christ page, 8th-century.*

Artists from various countries competed to produce the most beautiful results.<sup>3</sup> These elaborate and expensive bindings were justified because of the importance placed on the book. Many of these innovations are being reexamined and mimicked in today's climate of renewed interest in all areas of the book arts.

As the outside of the book became more expressive, so did the inside. First initial letters were enlarged, then embellished. These large initial letters soon became an opportunity for creating miniature paintings and lavish decoration using color and gold leaf. These embellishments soon spread to the borders of the page. Wealthy noblemen frequently commissioned a "Book of Hours" containing prayers to be said a certain times of the day. These "Books of Hours" were well known for their rich illumination and illustration.<sup>4</sup> In the 7th and 8th centuries the monasteries in Ireland were unequalled for their beautiful works, among them the *Book of Kells*, a codex of the four Gospels, is still referred to as "the most beautiful book in history."<sup>5</sup>

In the book design of Ireland and Persia, there was careful attention paid to the relationships between the text, the margins, and the proportions of the book. Medieval books established traditions in their page design with the inner margins the smallest, the top larger and the bottom the largest so there would be room for the thumbs when holding the book. The Greeks went so far as to have a formula, varying in size, but always based on the proportion of 5 x 8. The basis for these proportions were that they did not want the book size to be a perfect rectangle (a square plus half a square) because that was not an interesting shape, so the proportions of 5 x 8 was chosen. These proportions were again examined by William Morris, whose influence in the art and craft of the book moved book design into a new area in the mid-late 1800s.

One cannot look at the history of the art of the book without mentioning Johannes Gutenberg. While his name is synonymous with the invention<sup>6</sup> of moveable type and the printing press, he also contri-

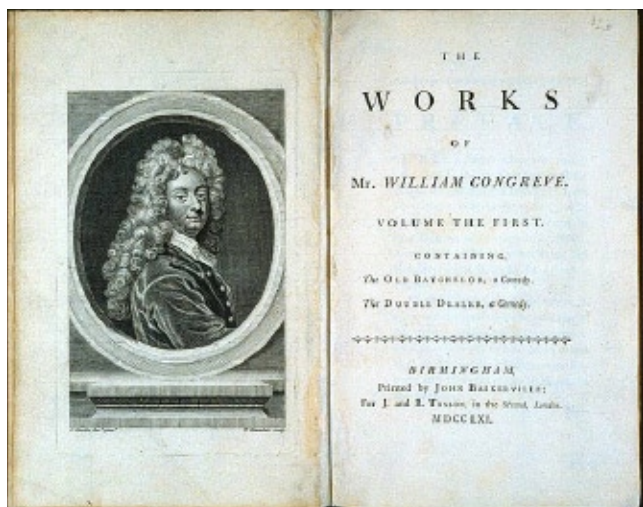
Book of Hours

Book of Kells



Above: *Gutenberg Bible*, hand-painted illuminations, printed on vellum, 15th-century

Below: *The Works*, by William Congreve, printed by John Baskerville, 1761



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buted much to the furtherment of beautiful books and excellence in the art of printing. The *Gutenberg* or *42 Line Bible* took six years to complete and is still considered unsurpassed in its printing quality.<sup>7</sup> His goal however was not to further develop the format or other aspects of the book, but to create work that mimicked those done by the hand of the scribes.

Because of the proliferation of printing in Europe, the need arose for a larger selection of typefaces. Type designers such as Aldus Manutius (1450-1515) not only developed new typefaces, but also began to experiment with the layout and design of the page, using the shape of the printing on the page to add visual interest.

Another typographer and printer, John Baskerville (1706-75) had wide spread influence that shaped the book design of this era. In addition to the typefaces he developed, Baskerville also invented a system where he hot pressed the printed page with heated copper cylinders, creating a crisp, smooth, glossy surface and “books of dazzling contrast, simplicity and refinement.”<sup>8</sup> Baskerville’s tasteful design and consideration of the book as a whole is in contrast to the very ornate and flamboyant styles of the period and demonstrate his guiding principle that nothing should interfere with the clarity of the message. In the 21st century it is Baskerville’s typography that he is best known for. The typeface bearing his name is now considered “the transitional” typeface that created a bridge for type design to move from the “Old Style” (Caslon, Goudy, etc.) to the “Modern” (Bodoni, Didot, etc.). The transition is marked by the subtle increase in the contrast between in the thick and thin strokes as shown below.

## Goudy Baskerville Bodoni

### Poetry in motion

While printing and type design was becoming more industrialized in Britain, there is one artist who stood apart from the established traditions. This is William Blake (1757-1827), who as I mentioned

Gutenberg Bible

Aldus Manutius

John Baskerville



Above: William Blake,  
*Europe: A Prophecy*,  
1794

Left: William Blake,  
*Songs of Experience*,  
1794



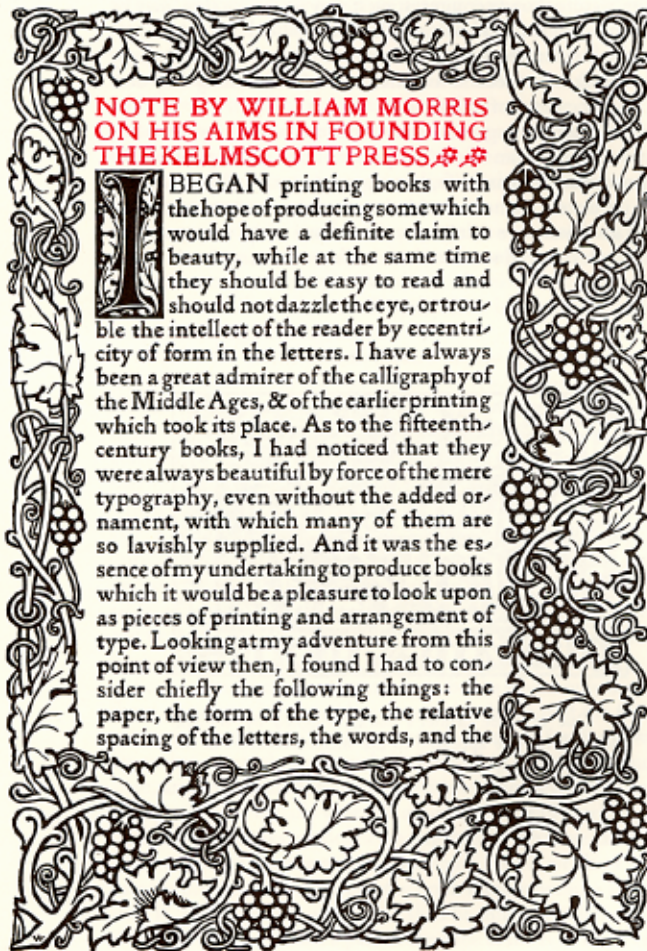
earlier is often described as the first artists book maker. His work was unique during this time for these reasons: it created a painterly union with image and text,<sup>9</sup> and he was self-published with full control over the entire process. The union of image and text and the idea of self-publishing are both key elements that are still important to many in the artists book field.

The content of Blake's work is based on his strong belief in the spiritual world<sup>10</sup> and the belief that his writing and illustration could serve to transform and educate others in their spiritual life. In his first work of illuminated printing *No Natural Religion*, (1788), Blake expresses his beliefs that "each individual has their own vision of the world, sense of values, and structure of belief. Any assertion of a unified view of the world, the cosmos, or spiritual life misrepresented the originality and variety of human experience."<sup>11</sup> This idea of independence and imagination is joined with themes of innocence – a condition of enlightenment, and experience – in the subsequent work of *The Songs of Innocence*." Images, a fluid, graceful line, and in later works "forms and forces of terrifying energy" accompany his rhythmic handwriting to create a "visionary theater" within the confines of book.<sup>12</sup>

For ten years Blake attempted to find a publisher that would allow him to create his own images and engrave his own plates (two processes, previously not done by the same person). Because publishers were not willing to take his work under these terms and because of Blake's poverty, he was forced to create an economical way to print and to self-publish.

The process he developed for creating his art came to him in a dream in which his deceased and beloved brother describes the process.<sup>13</sup> "His method was a form of relief etching in which both words and images were formed in some sort of fluid resist on a single copper plate. The lines were probably brushed on the the plate with a small camel's hair brush, one of Blake's favorite tools, so that the platemaking process was essentially painterly, calligraphic, and much more direct than engraving. ... The resulting plate would be etched in extremely shallow relief,





Top: William Morris, Trademark for Kelmscott Press, 1892

Above: William Morris, Page from Morris's "Aims in

## The book revived

By the late 1800s the quality of commercial printing drastically declined largely due to the influences of the industrial revolution. In the words of Douglas McMurtrie, "British printing standards were at their worst, and ugliness ran riot in the field of typography."<sup>18</sup> William Morris (1834-1896), an already well established artist in the Arts and Crafts fields of tapestries and furniture, turned his attention to this ugliness. With the leadership of Morris and a close friend of his, Emery Walker (1851-1933), a book design renaissance began. The movement called for "individual expression by both designer and worker, truth to the nature of materials and methods," and a reunion with art and craft.<sup>19</sup> Although Morris was already 50 when he became involved with book and type design, he is best known for these efforts.

In 1890 Morris and Emery established the Kelmscott Press so their efforts in type and book design and printing could take place under one roof. Their design treatise was based on the design of 15th century medieval manuscripts and reads quite similarly to some of the definitions of artists books in the previous chapter. "The ornament, whatever it is, picture or pattern work, should be part of the whole scheme of the book."<sup>20</sup> He considered book design to be similar to architecture, where careful planning of every aspect – paper, ink, typeface, spacing, margins, illustration and ornament all result in design unity.

The Kelmscott signature work, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, was referred to as a "pocket cathedral,"<sup>21</sup> not unlike Abeyta's definition in Chapter One, which defines the artists book as a self contained gallery. An active socialist, Morris was unsettled by the fact that these books needed to be sold for £20 and were too expensive for *Everyman*.<sup>22</sup> There is little documentation of Morris' socialist ideas influencing artists in the 1960s and 1970s, but the idea that art should be available to the masses is shared by both.

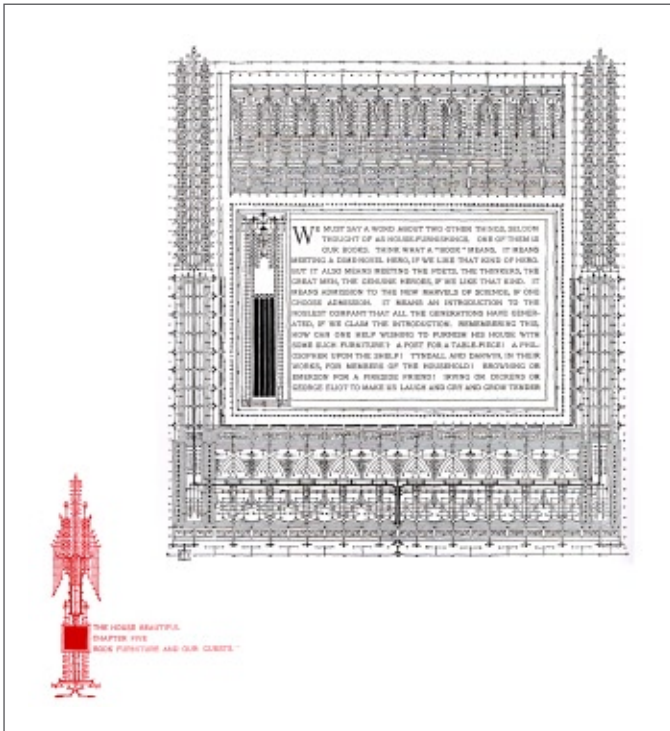
During his life Morris modeled a passion for fine craftsmanship and after his death, Walker carried on the legacy of fine printing that

William  
Morris



Above: William Morris, designer, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Walter Crane, illustrator, 1894

Below: Frank Lloyd Wright, designer, *The House Beautiful*, , 1896-1898



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continues to this day. While Morris contributed greatly to the art of book design and printing, some of his rules of proportion, margins, decoration and type density were so rigid they may have actually inhibited the artistic development in book arts. Still, his work in the Arts and Crafts Movement and transformation of book and typography design had a major influence, even if it has since stirred design reactions in the opposite direction.

The Arts and Crafts Movement had considerable influence in America, most notable in the work of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. William Morris inspired Wright and friend William Herman Winslow, an amateur photographer and printer, to collaborate on a book project in the style of Kelmscott Press, entitled *The House Beautiful*. The text, written by William C. Gannett, a Unitarian minister and friend of Wright's uncle, is about the various elements that work together to create "the house beautiful." This text addresses Wright's ideas for the aesthetic, practical, social and spiritual concerns of creating a home. In the original edition there was a booklet attached to the front endsheet of twelve photogravures (a photographically etched printing plate) of weeks and wildflowers – arranged and photographed by Wright – printed on mitsumata, a handmade Japanese paper. The design elements in this booklet seem a direct link to his interest in Japanese design, and also his recent attraction to the relatively new medium of photography.<sup>23</sup>

Wright frames Gannett's text with intricately drawn stylized abstractions of nature which are similar to those we see in the following years in his stain glass and furniture designs. The generous margins are a break from the book design of the period and rather suggest an artistic decision on Wright's part. As in books designed by William Morris, the pages are designed as a spread rather than the individual page. A quote from Wright in the foreword speaks for the many artists that are exploring the format of the book during this time. "And the book is becoming to you and to me what the cathedral was in the Middle Ages. It embalms for us in type, the qualifications our time."<sup>24</sup>

Frank  
Lloyd  
Wright



Above: Henri Matisse, *Jazz*, 1947

Below: Filippo Marinetti, *Mountains + Valleys + Streets x Joffre*, 1915



## The 20th century

During the first half of the 20th century many other artists from various mediums were drawn to the book format. Their purpose was not to explore the structural, typographic or conceptual possibilities of the book, but rather the book became another venue for the presentation of their work, usually painting, drawing or sculpture. These books are now referred to in several different ways: livres de peintre, livres d'artiste or illustrated books. Unfortunately the most common usage is livres d'artiste, which has caused a great deal of confusion as it translates to artists books. They are a very different genre than artists books. I agree with Johanna Drucker, author of *The Century of Artists' Books*, that they fall short of the criteria of artists books because these books were usually conceived by editors or entrepreneurs and existed for the reason of publishing deluxe editions of popular artists (Picasso, Matisse, Miro, etc) to expand the market for painting, drawing and sculpture. Many are also very standard in their format, with mechanical alteration of text on the left and image on the right. While many "livres d'artiste are interesting on their own terms, they are productions rather than creations, products rather than visions, examples of a form, not interrogations of its conceptual or formal or metaphysical potential."<sup>25</sup> There are of course exceptions, but these statements represent the majority of the livres d'artiste.

Book arts, like most mediums, had many influences that came under the heading of modern art, during these early years of 1910-1950: Cubism, Dada, Futurists, Bauhaus, Surrealism, Postmodernism, Fluxus, Conceptualism and Performance Art. Each movement had some component of the artists book attached to it.<sup>26</sup>

Filippo Marinetti (1876-1944) is one of the Italian Futurists that had an impact on the future of book arts. Like the Futurist painters, his poetry and book work expressed modern life. His typography shows the influence of Mallarmé in expressiveness, but he took this idea further and abandons traditional grammar, syntax, punctuation and format,

Sonia Deluanay-Terk,  
*La Prose du Transsibérien  
et de la petite Jehanne de  
France*, 1913



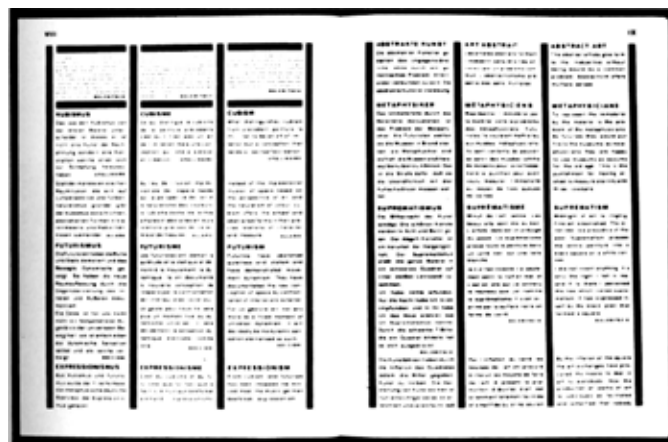
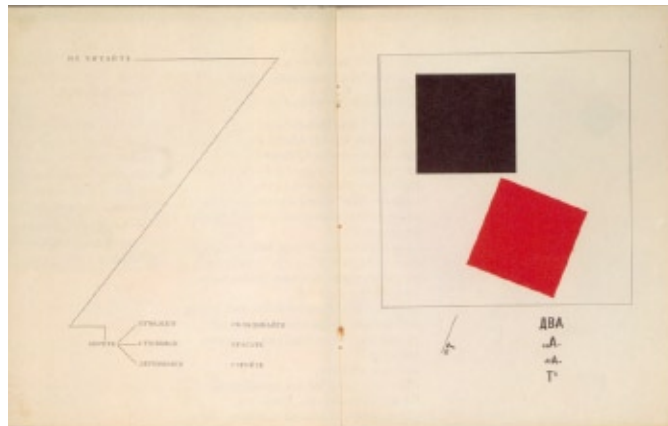
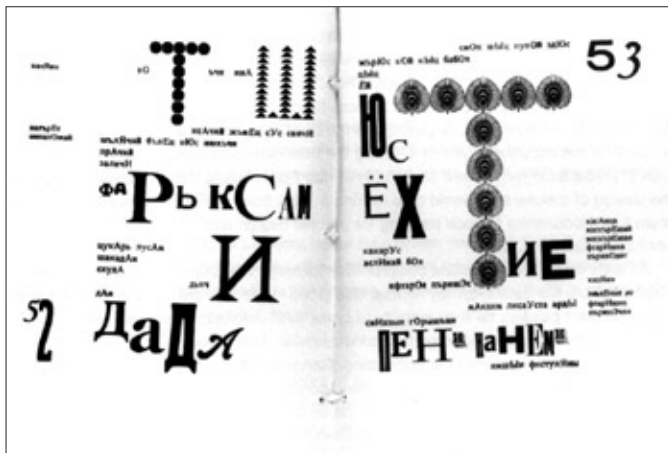
creating a vivid, “pictorial typographic page.” Some of Marinetti’s work was also in reaction to the work that came out of the Arts and Crafts era. He preferred fluidity, movement, variety, and freedom to use many typefaces and colors of ink to create the dynamic effect of “words in liberty” rather than be bound to huge initials and mythological vegetation.<sup>27</sup>

Another very influential French work from this period was *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (1913). This work, created by Sonia Deluanay-Terk (1885-1979) and published by Baise Cendrars (1887-1961), was advanced for its time because of its interest in finding a relationship between structure and content. The piece which refers to the newly constructed Trans-Siberian railroad, was not designed in a codex fashion. Rather, it was constructed in a way that visually relates to the railroad and also to the Eiffel Tower that is mentioned in the poem and appears in the colorful painting. It is made up of four long sheets glued together and then folded (once vertically and 21 times horizontally) and fits into a hand painted wrapper. When unfolded it reaches a height of six feet. Three hundred of these were to be produced, which if joined together would have reached the exact height of the Eiffel Tower.<sup>28</sup> On the left side of the work bright, dramatic watercolor decorations are painted using a stencil which provides unity to the edition. In contrast, on the right side, the color is painted more lightly, outlining and supporting the passages of poetry that are also printed in colorful inks.<sup>29</sup>

This work is important, not only because of the unique way it combines text and image, but also in that its folded construction and size is very unusual for this early cubist period in which paintings for the most part had shrunk to a more domestic scale. Since the time of the scroll, few if any, “private reading experiences”<sup>30</sup> had been created in such proportions and creating a “book” in this format was a remarkable concept and a structural achievement.

Three Dada artists that also influenced the future of book arts are Ilia

Sonia  
Deluanay-  
Terk



Top: Ilya Zdanevish, *Le Dantyu as a Beacon*, 1923

Middle: El Lissitzky, *Pro dva kvadrata*, 1922

Bottom: El Lissitzky, Title page for *The Isms of Art*, 1924

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Zdanevish, Lazar El Lissitzky and Marcel Duchamp. Zdanevish (1894-1975) wrote his text in an invented language called Zaum, in an attempt to transcend the limits of conventional languages so that meaning, emotion and sensation could be expressed through phonetic means.<sup>31</sup> His best know work, *Ledentu*, in which he created large scale letters out of typographic ornaments and used contrasting type styles to push letterpress communication to its extremes.

Lissitzky (1890-1941) known for his bright red and black arrangements began to use geometric devices to develop images that related to the text. As a book artist, or graphic designer, he did not decorate the book, but rather “constructed the book by visually programming the total project.”<sup>32</sup> *The Isms of Art*, an influential work of the 1920s, was edited by Lissitzky and Dadaist Hans Arp in Germany. In this work Lissitzky created a three-column horizontal grid structure to organize the information, which was at that time a new concept. His use bold rules, sans serif type, numbers as compositional elements and generous amounts of white space positioned this work as an early expression of the modern aesthetic.<sup>33</sup> His design aesthetic was assimilated into the Bauhaus doctrines by Jan Tschichold and quickly spread through out the German design and printing world which was still using medieval typography and symmetrical layouts.

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), another French artist whose work blurs the lines between many movements, took the idea of unconventional structures much further. The foam-rubber breast on the exhibition publication for *Le Surréalisme en 1947, exposition internationale du surréalisme* was one of the first examples of a non-traditional cover. This idea of a non-traditional structure soon transferred to magazines and other popular books.<sup>34</sup>

Duchamp’s *Green Box* (1934) is filled with torn scraps with jotted notes that have been precisely reproduced and placed in a green suede box. These notes are from his creative process when developing a large sculpture of the same name that he created between 1913 and 1923.

Ilya  
Zdanevish

El Lissitzky

Marcel  
Duchamp

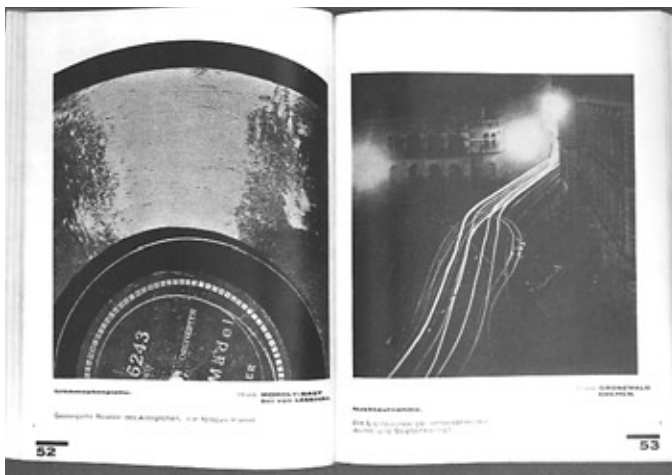
El Lissitzky

Marcel  
Duchamp



Above: Marcel Duchamp, *The Green Box*, 1934

Below: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film*, 1925



Since Duchamp's Dada beginnings, he was always willing to push the borders of accepted forms of art. The *Green Box* is both a model for so-called book object and a valuable prototype for the artists book as it became an accepted art form in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>35</sup>

Hungarian constructivist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), teacher of photography and graphic design at the Bauhaus, had considerable influence on the early artists book makers because of his use of the photographic book. Moholy-Nagy demonstrates one of the first “modern attitudes” toward photography.<sup>36</sup> In his work the normal viewpoint is replaced with a “worm’s eye, bird’s eye, extreme close-up or angle viewpoint.”<sup>37</sup> In 1922 Moholy-Nagy began to experiment with photograms, which allowed an artist to capture patterns on a light sensitive paper without a camera. He used this medium to express abstract pattern that he believed could be more creative and functional than imitative photography. His book *Painting, Photography, Film* (1925) “laid the ground rules for making a photographic sequence function beyond the level of mere collection”<sup>38</sup> This work also uses structure and format as part of the content, rather than merely as instruments of eye catching organization. His concentration on the sequence or series of photographs and the declaration that the “knowledge of photography is as important as that of the alphabet”<sup>39</sup> make his work a predecessor to the photographic artists books of Ed Ruscha or Sol LeWitt in the 1970s.

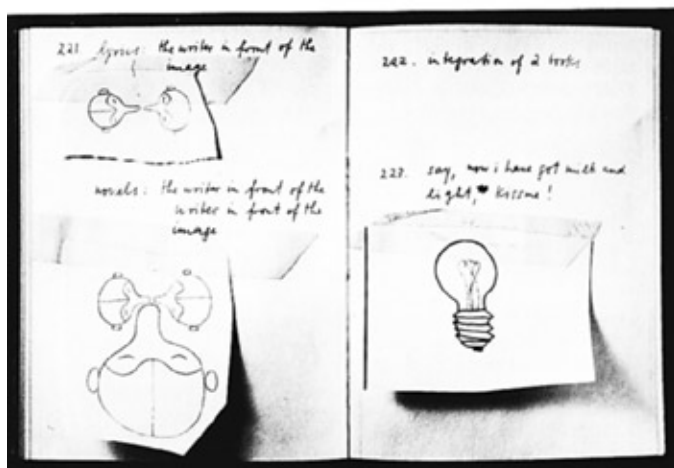
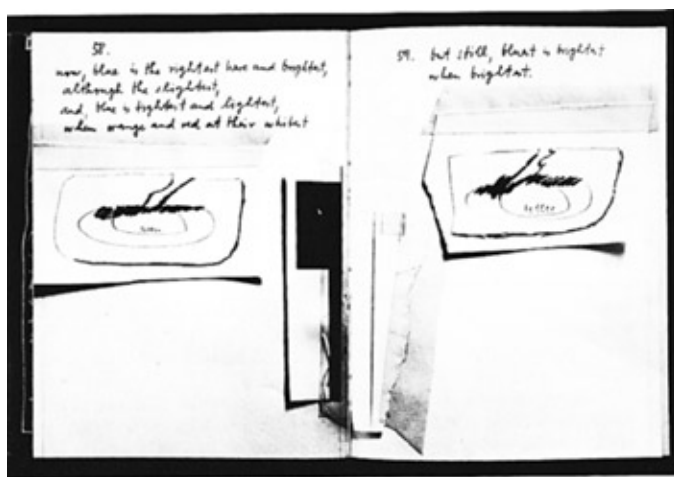
While all of the above artists and movements influence artists working in the book medium, there are two artists from the 1960s and 1970s that stand out as pioneers to the current activity in artists books. These are Dieter Roth (Diter Rot) (1930-98) and Ed Ruscha (1937 - ).

Their works stand as a model to the artists book as a form because they produced book works in a sustained series of projects. Until this time 20th century artists working in the book medium had only dabbled and not created a sustained, long-term body of artists books. Their work grew out of the non-traditional, conceptual art forms being developed

Laszlo  
Moholy-  
Nagy

Dieter Roth

Ed Ruscha



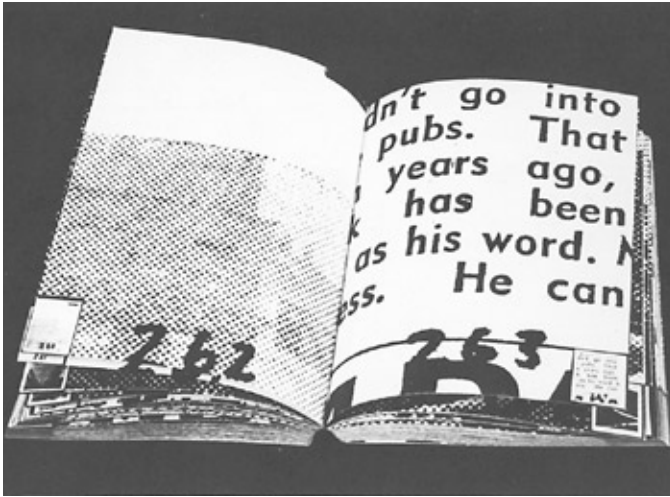
Dieter Roth, *Collected Works, Volume 17: 246 Little Clouds*, 1976

in the late 1950s and early 60s and set a foundation for the medium of artists books and particularly for the artists book as a democratic multiple or inexpensive edition.<sup>40</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s with the climate of social and political activism, the democratic multiple was appealing to artists shut out of the traditional gallery and museum scene. “The book could be art in and of itself.”<sup>41</sup> Artists books became a way to reach a wider audience and the decades of the the 1960s and 1970s were fertile times for this new art form to take hold. The fine art hierarchy had been shaken by the public and artistic interest in photography. As the lines between conceptual art, film, theater, dance, literature and music were blurring, experimenting in the book arts was a natural transition for many artists. As Clive Phillpot states in “Some contemporary Artists and their Books,” the 1970s was a “time more artists were compelled to discuss their intentions than ever before. ... There were a great many artists who wished to communicate without intermediaries...”<sup>42</sup> and the book format made this an option more than ever before.

Dieter Roth

Dieter Roth’s path to artists books came via experimental work in graphic design and concrete poetry. His earliest work was co-publishing nine editions of the journal *Spirale*.<sup>43</sup> His book projects began in 1954 as he began to investigate the physical form of the book. In his work the “conventions of the page become subject matter – a turning page becomes a physical, sculptural element, rather than an incidental activity.”<sup>44</sup> Roth is also interested in exploring process in his books. For example in *246 Little Clouds*, scraps of paper (little clouds) with sketches are taped onto the page below a particular phrase. This is then photographed with the illumination moving one degree at a time from left to right representing the rising sun with the taped pieces of paper casting shadows such as clouds might create.<sup>45</sup>

*The Daily Mirror* also represents a process in two respects: first by enlarging the page to unreadable levels and also having it represented in minuscule form in the bottom corner, and the second respect is that



Above: Dieter Roth, *Daily Mirror*, 1961

Below: Dieter Roth, *Daily Mirror*, 1970



this book had three incarnations. In 1961 he first created it as a two centimeter square book made by cutting squares out of piles of *The Daily Mirror* newspaper and gluing them at the spine, second, in 1965, he created a loose collection of these pages, blown up to twenty five centimeters and printed on newsprint, and third in 1970 he produced the *Collected Works* edition in standard octavo size (6 x 9.5"), each page showing the source image, roughly 2 x 3 centimeters in the bottom corner of the full-page blow-up of this same image.<sup>46</sup>

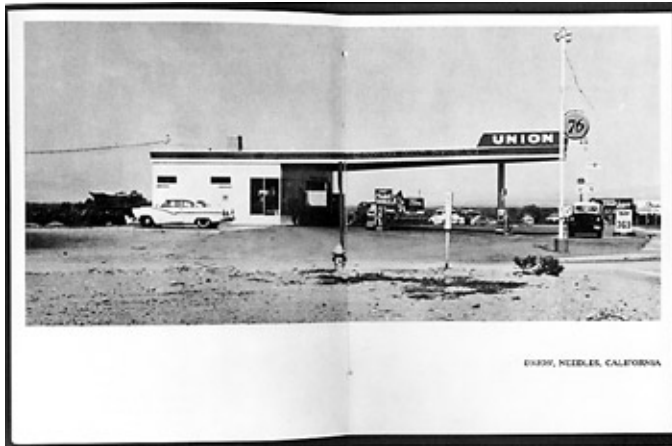
The interpretation of this book offered in *The Cutting Edge of Reading*, is that "the artist implies that he has magnified what the *Daily Mirror* had already grossly exaggerated. ... He compounds our frustration as readers in increasing our awareness of the problems of communication ... one would expect that magnifying small densely printed news would make it more legible, but to the contrary the smooth surfaces metamorphose into endless rows of dots.<sup>47</sup>

An important aspect of Roth's work is that he took the conventions of format and structure as the subject matter of his books. "There is no way to translate a Dieter Roth book in to another medium – the idea of the work is inseparable from [its] form as a book and they realize themselves as works through their exploration of the-conceptual and structural features of a book."<sup>48</sup> It is also important that he created editions of his books as this helps the format fit into one of the conventions of book publishing, therefore helping to root artists books in the book medium.

Creating in editions were also of primary importance to Ed Ruscha with ideas from one edition leading to the next. Multiplicity was one of the important features of his art as he championed the idea of the democratic multiple, meaning that his books were easily available, cheap and portable. With his work the customary aura of artwork was dispelled, his books were for use, intended to be handled and enjoyed.<sup>49</sup>

In his first book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1962), Ruscha exhibits 26 photographs of gasoline stations located along Route 40

Ed Ruscha



Above: Ed Ruscha, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1962

Below: Ed Ruscha, *Various Small Fires*, 1964



between Los Angeles (where he lived) and Oklahoma City (where he grew up). “These images are like 26 letters of a personal alphabet that are structured by the form of the book.”<sup>50</sup> He numbered the first printing of this book, but soon came to realize how by numbering the books he was making a statement that was the opposite of his intent of “making mass produced” objects. With these books he also destroyed the aura of preciousness by printing them two more times, ending up with 3,900 copies in circulation, making his work available to audiences beyond the gallery and museum goer.

In his next two books, *Various Small Fires* (1964) and *Nine Swimming Pools* (1968) Ruscha further displays his sense of humor. When the book is opened words are added to the titles so they become, *Various Small Fires and Milk* and *Nine Swimming Pools and Broken Glass*. Both books continue the format of a sequence of photographs, printed in an undistinguished way and are designed to have the look of an “incidental publication.”<sup>51</sup> Ruscha’s ideas of propagating art work in simple publications soon became very popular in the climate of the 1960s and early 1970s when art took on a more inclusive character.

In 1976 Printed Matter, a collective bookstore and publisher for the artists book as a mass produced multiple, opened in New York City. It is still in existence today. This same year another institution, Franklin Furnace was founded by Martha Wilson as an archive for a similar type of artist book. Their collection policy was based on creating an archive for the democratic artists books – books with big ideas and small budgets. It was Wilson’s belief that other types of artists books, that focused on materials and production, could not focus on a big idea in their content and as she states “ ... I’m sort of prejudiced against high-end stuff because while it is big on materials, it is often very short on ideas. ... I don’t care about technique – no, none of that stuff impresses me at all. I just care about the idea.”<sup>52</sup> She also believed that other museums were collecting “high-end” artists books and that the Franklin Furnace collection was filling a much needed void. In 1993 the 13,500

Printed  
Matter

Franklin  
Furnace

titles in the Franklin Furnace collection were sold to the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) for the price of \$1 million.<sup>53</sup> There they could be included in the museum's database and preservation could more easily be managed. MoMA agreed to maintain the terms of acceptance that were key to Franklin Furnace's whole concept – that they would accept any work that was defined as an artists book by the artist so that the collection could maintain its artist-driven basis.<sup>54</sup>

In the mid-to-late 1970s the aspect of the artists book as a democratic multiple began to fade, and in effect Ruscha stopped creating books and continued working in other mediums. Interestingly, in *Artists Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature* by Stefan Klima, Ruscha is quoted as saying that his interest was not in the book as a object, but rather in the “mass produced object.”<sup>55</sup> Since the 1970s the emphasis on the “available and cheap” is only minimally apparent in artists books.

In *Speaking of Book Art*, Cathy Courtney interviews 15 well-known British and American book artists. All were familiar with Ruscha's work, but only one felt directly influenced by his contribution to artists books. Perhaps his work per se does not influence current book artists, but one cannot ignore the effect that his work had on exposing artists books as a viable medium to the art world.

It is with Dieter Roth and Ed Ruscha that I leave the historical chapter on the artists book and move into the present day. Many of the artists I cover in the next section partially overlap with this 1960-1970 time period, but for the most part this would be near the beginnings of their careers. Much has changed since these early days, but it seems evident that by the mid-late 20th century artists books were becoming a self-sustaining, even self-defining medium.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Pauline Johnson, *Creative Bookbinding* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Phillip Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design, 3rd Edition* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998), p. 37.
- <sup>3</sup> Johnson, p. 11.
- <sup>4</sup> Johnson, p. 19.
- <sup>5</sup> Michael Olmert, *Smithsonian Book of Books* (Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Books, 1992), p. 91.
- <sup>6</sup> There is evidence that moveable type was used in China as early as the 6th-century A.D.
- <sup>7</sup> Johnson, p. 24.
- <sup>8</sup> Meggs, p. 115.
- <sup>9</sup> Joan Lyons, *Artists' Books: A critical anthology and sourcebook* (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), p. 154.
- <sup>10</sup> <http://www.union.edu/PUBLICLIBRARY/SC/blake/man.html>
- <sup>11</sup> Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary 1995), p. 23.
- <sup>12</sup> Drucker, p. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> Drucker, p. 23.
- <sup>14</sup> Lyons, p. 154.
- <sup>15</sup> Lyons, p. 133.
- <sup>16</sup> Lyons, p. 134.
- <sup>17</sup> Cornelia Lauf, and Clive Phillpot, *Artist/Author: Contemporary Artists' Books* (New York: The American Federation of the Arts, 1998), p. 109 .
- <sup>18</sup> Douglas C. McMurtrie, *The book: The story of printing and bookmaking*, (New York:Oxford University Press, 1943)p. 451.
- <sup>19</sup> Meggs, p. 165.
- <sup>20</sup> Meggs, p. 167.
- <sup>21</sup> Olmert, p. 230.
- <sup>22</sup> Olmert, p. 229.
- <sup>23</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright, *The House Beautiful*, Rohnert Park, California: Pomegranate Art Books, 1996), p. Foreword.
- <sup>24</sup> Wright, p. 24.
- <sup>25</sup> Drucker, p. 5.
- <sup>26</sup> Drucker, p. 8.
- <sup>27</sup> Drucker, p. 52.
- <sup>28</sup> Renée Riese Hubert and Judd D. Hubert, *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1999) p. 8.
- <sup>29</sup> Drucker, p. 50-51.
- <sup>30</sup> Drucker, p. 51.
- <sup>31</sup> Drucker, p. 54.
- <sup>32</sup> Meggs, p.265.
- <sup>33</sup> Meggs p. 267.
- <sup>34</sup> Riva Castleman, *A Century of Artists Books* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1995), p.71.
- <sup>35</sup> Castleman, p 42.
- <sup>36</sup> Lyons, p. 188.
- <sup>37</sup> Meggs, p. 281.
- <sup>38</sup> Drucker, p. 62.
- <sup>39</sup> Lyons, p. 188.
- <sup>40</sup> Drucker, 71.
- <sup>41</sup> Lyons, p. 7.
- <sup>42</sup> Lyons, p. 101.
- <sup>43</sup> Drucker, p. 73.
- <sup>44</sup> Drucker, p. 74.
- <sup>45</sup> Dieter Roth, *Art is Life/Life is Art* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1999), p. 28.
- <sup>46</sup> Drucker, p. 74-75.
- <sup>47</sup> Hubert, p. 55.

## Endnotes continued

<sup>48</sup> Drucker, p. 74.

<sup>49</sup> Lyons, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> Lauf, p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> Drucker, p.77.

<sup>52</sup> Lauf, p. 116-17.

<sup>53</sup> Brad Freeman, "Artist/Author: Contemporary Artists' Books, A Review of the Exhibition Catalog," *JAB*, Spring 1999. p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> Lauf, p. 120.

<sup>55</sup> Stefan Klima, *Artists Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature* (New York: Granary Books, 1998), p. 43.