

Faculty Fellows Project Report 20 – 21

Professor Karen Jacobs, Department of English

May 20, 2021

I developed the new course “Artist Books: Theory and Practice” with the assistance of an ASSETT fellowship, and I planned to teach the course in spring 2020. Because this is a hands-on course, it had to be postponed during the Covid pandemic, so I’ll be teaching the course this fall 2021 instead. As a result, this Final Report is in progress, and I will submit a follow-up report at the end of the fall semester.

In the Department of English, the Creative Writing program has long been run independently from the department’s work in literary criticism and interpretation. This split reflects a culture-wide perception, operative at least since the 1960s, that creative work and interpretive work are distinct and unrelated vocations. But this assumption is belied by the fact that many creative writers are *also* critics and vice versa. Many creative writers and critics are also artists, musicians, dancers, and so on, and when these distinctive disciplines come together, they often yield the most innovative and challenging results.

“Artist Books: Theory and Practice” aims to bridge these divides by asking students to study the distinguished tradition of artist books (see attached syllabus for ENGL 4026-001, below).

Beginning in the twentieth century, artist books joined the ranks of developed art forms, appearing in every major movement in art and literature. More recently, digital technologies have expanded the ways practitioners, theorists, and critics can conceptualize, create within, and respond to this vital body of work. While some artist books are unique works of art, new technologies have made it possible to create longer editions and even mass produced printings. Norlin Library’s Special Collections holds an exciting archive of hundreds of these books.

“Artist Books” proposes to educate students in these various traditions and practices toward producing such books themselves. The larger objective of the course is to encourage students to think beyond existing binaries that separate creative from critical work or words from images, and to enable them to think about and produce books in entirely new ways. The first half of the course will introduce students to unique works of art created in a wide diversity of styles and materials, culminating, in the second half, in the creation of their own unique books.

The course should be of interest not only to literature and creative writing majors; it would also enable fruitful collaborations within and across the Department of English, ATLAS/TAM, CMCI, and Art and Art History and I am advertising the course in these departments and programs. English will soon have an interdisciplinary “English, Media + Technology” track for which this course would also be well suited.

I’ll be teaching the course at the Idea Forge (<https://www.colorado.edu/ideaforge/>). As its website puts it, the Idea Forge is “a cross-disciplinary collaborative space where students can imagine, design, create, and test their ideas.” In addition to providing well-equipped maker spaces, the Idea Forge offers workshops in electronics, welding, digital manufacturing, and so

on. It will thus provide my students with many of the technologies, tools, and materials necessary to facilitate their book-making projects, including safety workshops, and workshops in soldering, woodworking, laser cutting, and Arduino (an electronics program that enables light, sound, and movement).

I will organize an exhibit of students' final projects at the end of the semester either in Norlin Library or the CU Art Museum (depending on availability) and I also hope to send the exhibit to the Boulder Public Library so that it can be appreciated by the larger Boulder community.

A number of faculty in the Department of English and their students could greatly benefit from the Idea Forge, but it is not generally known about in my department. I will hold a workshop for faculty and students to educate them about the Idea Forge and its resources as early as possible in the fall 21 semester. Currently, in English, Professors Brylowe, Carr, Emerson, Kuskin, and Labio study artist books, graphic novels, text and images studies, digital humanities, and the history of the book. They and their students are an obvious audience, and I will also invite faculty and students from ATLAS/TAM, CMCI, and Art and Art History.

I appreciate ASSETT's flexibility and understanding regarding the postponement of these activities from the spring 2020 the semester when I needed, for health reasons, to teach remotely (I have an ADA agreement specifying my compromised immunity). Many thanks.

Office Hours: on Zoom, by appointment
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ENGL 4026-001

Professor Karen Jacobs
Tu/Th 5:30-6:45
Idea Forge, 33 Fleming Building

Fall 2021: Special Topics in Genre, Media, and Advanced Writing
Artist Books in Theory and Practice



COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course will introduce students to an exciting but neglected body of work: artist books. Beginning in the twentieth century, artist books joined the ranks of developed art forms, appearing in every major movement in art and literature. More recently, digital technologies have expanded the ways practitioners, theorists, and critics can conceptualize, create within, and respond to this vital body of work. While some artist books are unique works of art, new technologies have made it possible to create longer editions and even mass produced printings.

The first half of the course will introduce students to the history of the book and to artist books created in a wide diversity of styles and materials, including novels, poetry, and criticism that use text, image, and design experimentally. The class will read criticism and histories of the book (Joanna Drucker, Amaranth Borsuk, Keith Houston), and will write short papers on individual artist books from Norlin Library's and the CU Art Museum's Special Collections.

In the second half of the semester students will create their own unique books and/or editions. These books will be the culmination of students' research projects in an area of their choosing, and will require them to design forms that are fully consistent with their subject matter. The class will then function as a workshop, with tutorials in a variety of book-making tools and techniques, and group critiques of works-in-progress.

"Artist Books" proposes to educate students in these various traditions and practices while encouraging them to think beyond existing binaries that separate creative from critical work or words from images, and to enable them to think about and produce books in entirely new ways. No previous artistic experience is required; the class will provide tutorials on safety, materials, and techniques. Students should plan to buy their own materials, but cutting mats, drill presses, soldering irons, etc., will be on-site at the Idea Forge:

<https://www.colorado.edu/ideaforge/>.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Theory:

Amaranth Borsuk, *The Book*, MIT Press 2018.

Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, Granary Books 2004.

Johanna Drucker, *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, metaLABprojects 2014.

Keith Houston, *The Book: A Cover-to-Cover Exploration of the Most Powerful Object of Our Time*, Norton 2016.

Practice:

London Centre for Book Arts, *Making Books: A Guide to Creating Handcrafted Books*, 2017.

Center for Book Arts, *Bookforms: A complete guide to designing and crafting hand-bound books*, 2019.

Shereen LaPlantz, *The Art and Craft of Handmade Books*, Dover 2016.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

Johanna Drucker, *Figuring the Word*, Granary Books 1998.

Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word*, Chicago UP 1994.

Alisa Golden, *Making Handmade Books: 100+ Bindings, Structures & Forms*, 2011.

Reed and Phillips, *Artists and Their Books / Books and Their Artists*, 2018.

David Hornung, *Color: A workshop for artists and designers*, 3rd Edition: 2020.

Salamony and Thomas, *1,000 Artists' Books: Exploring the Book as Art*, 2012.

ATTENDANCE , PARTICIPATION, AND GRADING *Because this is a student-centered workshop, more than two unexcused absences will lower your grade.* Attendance of tutorials on equipment safety, use of technology, and book-making practices are required. Turning work in on time, contributing to class discussion, and actively engaging with the ideas of other students in group critiques are all essential to making this class a success.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. In-class exam on Borsuk, Drucker, and Houston's main ideas. 20%
2. 15-minute presentation analyzing the form and content of an artist book chosen from Norlin's Special Collections or the CU Art Museum. 10%
3. 1-page proposals for your research project that will become the basis for the content of your artist book, delivered in oral and written form. 5%
4. 10-page research paper based on your proposal. 20%
5. 2-page proposal for book content, design, materials, and organization, oral and written. 5%
6. Final project: your artist book. 40%

OFFICE HOURS: I have scheduled three regular office hours per week, and I'm also available by appointment. Students *are strongly encouraged to attend office hours at least once* over the

course of the semester; but please come as often as you need to. This is the most effective way for me to give you individual attention and to get to know you better.

PAPER FORMAT: Use MLA or Chicago style (consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*). Use one-inch margins, double-spacing, and a standard font (such as Times 12-point). Please number the pages of your paper (last name and page number in upper right corner of every page). All work must be carefully proof-read for typographical and grammatical errors.

MATERIALS: I will provide a brief list of useful materials to purchase, and will advise students individually once their projects come into clear focus.

SCHEDULE:

- Week 1** Introduction
- Week 2** Borsuk's *The Book*; Drucker's *The Century of Artists' Books* (excerpts)
- Week 3** Drucker's *The Century of Artists' Books*, *Graphesis* (excerpts)
- Week 4** Houston's *The Book: A Cover-to-Cover Exploration* (excerpts)
- Week 5** In-class exam on readings
- Week 6** Visit Norlin Library's Special Collections artist books
- Week 7** Presentations analyzing an artist book from Norlin's Special Collections
- Week 8** Workshop 1: book-making materials + woodshop safety tutorials
- Week 9** 1-page proposals on your research project, toward book content
- Week 10** Workshop 2: book forms and construction; 10-page research paper due
- Week 11** 2-page proposals on content-editing, form, materials, layout, palette, fonts, etc.
- Week 12** Workshop 3: book forms and construction, soldering and Arduino tutorial
- Week 13** Workshop 4: individual conferences
- Week 14** **FALL BREAK**
- Week 15** Final project due, in-class critiques

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<https://www.talasonline.com/>

<https://www.colophonbookarts.com/binding>