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Artists' books are a hybrid genre that incorporates the book form and art. Over the last ten years, artists' books, particularly those authored by Latin American artists, have become an important resource at academic libraries in the United States. This paper explores both the challenges and opportunities in identifying, collecting, housing, and provide access to artists books. Emphasis is placed on the history of Latin American artists' books, as well as issues of acquisition and management. It also reviews trends in exhibitions.

Headings:

Artists' books—Latin America

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APPROACHES TO THE COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF LATIN
AMERICAN ARTISTS' BOOKS

by
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INTRODUCTION

Artists' books stretch the possibilities of the form and concept of the book by incorporating artistic innovations. Over the last ten years, artists' books, particularly those authored by Latin American artists, have emerged as an important resource for U.S. academics, resulting in a greater need on the part of librarians to collect and house these works. Faculty research on Latin American artists' books, the growth of collections, and the proliferation of exhibitions at U.S. universities, are all evidence of the growing interest in the genre. These works constitute a hybrid genre and an increasingly important collecting area because of what they reveal about a culture's book making and distribution practices, literary movements, conception of the book form and art.

Artists' books have become an important part of library collections in the U.S., while at the same time providing many challenges to librarians. The blending of a literary work with an art object has made the genre difficult to define and, therefore, challenging to identify. Beyond the problem of identification, the informal nature of production and distribution make these books problematic to acquire, particularly in Latin America. Small print runs, the transience of small publishing houses, and a distribution process that is often dependent on insular social networks are challenging for librarians in their attempts to collect artists' books. In the Latin American context, these factors are complicated further by language barriers as well as the complicated cultural and political contexts. Conventional sources such as book vendors and bookstores do not have

consistent access to Latin American artists' books, consequently librarians are forced to build personal connections in the world of the book arts.

The inherent abstruseness of this liminal genre greatly affects the librarian's relationship with the works within it. Once librarians acquire an artists' books collection, they face several challenges in managing the collection. The unique format of the books requires careful consideration and individual, book specific solutions to storage and cataloging. They are often housed in special collections, which are typically stored in a closed stacks facility. As a result, librarians must use exhibitions and outreach programs to make the collection available to a wider audience.

This paper will explore the critical history of artists' books and the trajectory of the Latin American artists' books genre. It will also explore major issues related to the acquisition and handling of artists' books. It will examine current practices aimed at improving knowledge of collecting methods, cataloging, and providing access to these collections. Finally, the paper will also review the current trends in exhibitions and the need for innovative presentation of the works. Clearly, librarians will be better able to navigate the challenges of collecting and managing artists' books if they understand the discussions and processes already in progress around these works.

WHAT ARE ARTISTS' BOOKS?

Terminology

The definition of artists' books has been open to much debate because of the variety of ways they combine the essential elements of traditional books with artistic experimentation. Over time many terms have been used to describe the diverse world of art and books. Some of these terms are "*livre d'artiste*", "*livre de peintre*", "*livre de luxe*", "deluxe book", "fine press books", "book art", "artists' bookwork", "sculptural bookwork", and "book object". Each of these terms has a different context, meaning, and set of connotations.

Generally, the terms "*livre d'artiste*" and a "*livre de peintre*" refer to a type of book made popular in the early twentieth century, created by an artist and a writer. Rarely do the artist and writer collaborate; more commonly a publisher arranges the pairing, collects the work from each contributor and produces the work. The layout tends to be text on one page and art on the facing page limiting the interaction between the words and the images (Perrée 20-21).

The terms "*livre de luxe*" or "deluxe edition" commonly are applied to books that are luxury items and collectible because of the expensive, labor-intensive methods used to produce them. They are printed on heavy weight papers, using elaborate printing and illustration techniques, and are enclosed in fine bindings. These books were an important part of the luxury book industry in the nineteenth century (Drucker 2-3).

A fine press book is a term that describes a book that emphasizes the craft of bookmaking. Careful attention is given to the making of the paper, the sewing on the binding, and the hand printing techniques. The content of the fine press books is frequently literary (Bright 4).

The artists' bookwork and the artists' book were terms adopted by the critics in the seventies to refer only to cheaply produced books, the purpose of which was to evade gallery and high art culture and bring art to the general public. These words continue to be used and their previous connotations are still palpable and cause confusion. Finally, the terms "sculptural bookwork" and the "book object" are commonly used to refer to works that are inspired by books, but no longer support the book/reader relationship. These types of books often do not open or cannot be read. All of these terms originated in the sixties and seventies as ways to articulate the wide variety of works being produced at the intersection of books and art (Bright 4-5). Critics and artists use these words in a subjective way to describe many different concepts.

For the purposes of this paper I will use the terms "artists' books" and "book art" as overarching concepts to refer to books conceived of and executed by artists including innovations in format, layout, use of material, content or concept. As a librarian, it is essential to understand the various terms and their connotations. Although the variety of terminology and ideas surrounding the book arts can be confusing it does offer a window into the complexity and diversity of artwork that exists today. The lack of fixed definitions provides a free creative space for artists that allows for innovation, reinvention and redefinition of the book. For librarians this means a wider world of

collecting. It is important for librarians to study the terms and the history of the genre to make well informed decisions about collection and management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A contentious space

Critics have explored the form and meaning of the book and the critical role of the concept of the book to the genre of artists' books. Critics have approached the lack of a solid definition in many different ways over time. The debate over the definition of artists' books was most active during the seventies, becoming less central to discussions of the genre from the eighties until today (Klima, 21-22).

One of the most active, early writers on the topic is Clive Phillpot, a former MOMA librarian, critic, and advocate of artists' books as they emerged as a new genre in the seventies. In his critical writing he works through creating categories for the book arts and defining terms. Intent on carving out and defining territory for the many forms of the genre, Phillpot's thinking was strongly influenced by a political/populist framework. On the cover of the December 1982 issue of *Art Documentation: Bulletin of the Art Libraries of North America* Phillpot clearly lays out for librarians the divisions he saw in the world of books and art, providing the following definitions:

BOOK Collection of blank and/or image-bearing sheets usually fastened together along one edge and trimmed at the other edges to form a single series of uniform leaves.

ART BOOK Book of which art or an artist is the subject.

ARTIST'S BOOK Book of which the artist is the author

BOOK ART Art which employs the book form.

BOOKWORK Artwork dependent on the structure of a book.

BOOK OBJECT Art object, which alludes to the form of a book.

Phillpot developed a terminology for works that inhabit the liminal space between books and art, but to what end? He himself expressed frustration with the term artists' book when he wrote, "the very phrase 'artists' book' may prevent us from getting outside the art world. (Edgar 11) This revealing critique indicates his concern with not being trapped by words and, moreover, not being confined to the art world via the use of limiting, and perhaps inaccurate, descriptions. In one of his final essays on the topic, published in 1993, he reveals more about these ideas. In this piece he focuses on the work of Ed Ruscha and Ruscha's seminal work *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, an inexpensively produced book of photographs of gasoline stations. Phillpot holds this work up as an origin of the democratic multiple; an unlimited, cheap edition that is dependent on the book form but is also art. He lauds Ruscha for having moved beyond the confines of the gallery art world and into the realm of populist art. Phillpot argues that the gains in sixties and seventies made by the proliferation of cheap accessible art in book form had, according to him, important and valuable social implications. Books that are democratic multiples, argues Phillpot, could be a valuable resource for literacy projects (Phillpot, *Books* 7-8).

In the eighties the return to "high art" luxury books caused Phillpot to mourn the death of many artists' dreams of making art available everywhere to all people. A tension can be seen in Phillpot's writing as he struggles with terminology and definitions in his attempts to clearly delineate a space for the new phenomenon of the democratic

multiple, with an important, subversive agenda. His critical thinking and writing on the genre of artists' books laid the foundation which later critics and artists would build on and eventually move beyond.

As a part of the development of criticism related to artists' books some critics find it more productive to move past the initial question of definition. They have found it unproductive to define artists' books, or they feel that the lack of definition is an inherent part of this versatile form. Book artist and critic Johanna Drucker, another voice central to the discussion, is more at ease with talking about a territory that is occupied by the artists' book rather than a definition. She describes the artists' books as occupying a "zone of activity" and moves away from categories with specific criteria. She opts instead for a more flexible framework where all of the activity related to artists' books is included and where all of these activities meet and intersect in limitless ways. At the same time, Drucker's "zone of activity" has boundaries and specific activities that fall within its borders. At the same time the zone has boundaries and there are activities that fall beyond its borders. She is specific about what is outside of the realm of artists' books. She excludes *livre d'artiste*, fine press books, and sculptural bookworks from the territory of artists' books. She explains that she has made careful choices excluding works where, "publishing interests overshadow artistic creativity," as is the case of the *livre d'artiste*, that is the brainchild of the publisher for profit. Drucker also excludes works, "where the concept of a book becomes lost or subsumed under another artistic definition such as installation, sculpture, or performance"(Drucker viii). Like Phillipot, Drucker is looking for a space for the artists' book. This desire to claim a space is part of the process of developing a lineage for the genre and interpreting its influences. Drucker

closes her chapter on defining artists' book by saying, "it is an area that needs description, investigation, and critical attention before its specificity will emerge" (Drucker 15). This specificity would emerge in the works of future artists and critics.

Betty Bright, a critic and historian of artists' books influenced by Drucker's work adds another dimension to the literature dedicated to the genre. Her book, *No Longer Innocent*, is an important work that traces the history of artists' books in the United States from 1960 to 1980. It explores twenty years of book art history and criticism. Providing a historical chronology that specifies the seminal works of the genre, Bright's work reminds the reader that the time of innocence and inexperience in the world of book arts is over.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARTISTS' BOOK

Precursors and innovators

Contemporary artists' books have developed from a rich tradition of fine press and the livre d'artiste works. According to Johanna Drucker, there has been too much emphasis on looking for one point of origin for the genre (11). It may be useful, however, to look at some of the seminal works in the genre and examine these points of development. In the late eighteenth century William Blake paired his written work with his engravings, creating a book that is the holistic vision of one writer/artist. Blake was an important predecessor to the artists' books genre because he demonstrated the powerful impact of intimately linking text and illustration (Drucker 22).

William Morris, the late nineteenth century artist, integrated his decorative art designs with text to create unified themes throughout his fine press books (Drucker 26-27). At the same time that Morris was producing his fine press work, the French artist Stéphane Mallarmé was changing long held ideas about the purpose of text with his poem "*Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*" published in 1897 in the French magazine *Cosmopolis*. This groundbreaking work was in the form of a prose poem spread over many pages with the letters in various font sizes and the words arranged in stair steps and other shapes. It was as much a poem as it was a visual piece, and with it Mallarmé brought into being a new concept: the idea that language could form images. He recognized his own innovation at the time and explained it in the preface to the poem:

I shall have indicated a ‘state’ rather than a sketch of this Poem, a ‘state’ that does not break with tradition at all; I shall have extended its presentation in all directions, but not so far as to offend anyone: just enough to open some eyes. Today, or at least without presuming upon the future that will emerge from this—nothing or perhaps what merely verges on art—let us openly acknowledge that the attempt participates, in a way that could not be foreseen...(121)

His analysis indicates that he has taken text, in this case a poem, and manipulated its display to create a new form, opening the eyes of the reader to an image, and prompting the reader to view the poem as art. Mallarmé used language in a new way in order to create a new space where the visual and the verbal meet as an art form. He also recognized the “unexpected” and “unforeseen” nature of his work. With these words he notes that he had broken with the expectation of the reader by experimenting with the traditional arrangement of type, stretching its alignment into unexpected shapes on the page and using the tools of language to form art. Mallarmé’s experiment in language hovered in a liminal state between art and literary books, opening the door to new innovations in the world of literature and art alike.

Following Mallarmé, Futurists and Dadaists in Europe in the twenties produced visual poems where words were appropriated, not for their meaning, but rather as striking visual structures. In Russia similar pieces were being produced that usually involved the collaboration of writers and artists. In particular, the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and the artist Vladimir Rodchenko worked closely together to pair poetry with collages that illustrated the various levels of meaning expressed in the poem. Their book *Pro eto. Ei I Mne* was technically a livre d’artiste, but their philosophical and artistic collaboration

reached a wider public and went well beyond the parameters of the genre, blazing the way for more works of this type (Perée 17).

Another important work in the history of artists' books is *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* by Ed Ruscha, published in 1963. It consists of 26 photographs of gasoline stations situated between Los Angeles and his hometown of Oklahoma City. The photographs are snapshots that exhibit a cold, commercial quality and the book was purposefully produced cheaply using commercial techniques with a total print run of 3,900 books. It was one of the first examples of a democratic multiple. (Phillpot, *Twentysix* 7-8). During the sixties and seventies this kind of book was what critics and artists in the book arts world referred to when they used the term artists' book. Arguably, these books were the starting point from which artists from all over the world would experiment with every aspect of the book as an object and a concept.

DEVELOPMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN ARTISTS' BOOKS

Convergences and collaboration

There is little history and criticism written about Latin American artists' books. Some research has been done on individual publishing houses or exhibitions, but there is no overarching study of the history. Analysis is scarce for two key reasons. First, the cultural diversity of Latin America makes it difficult and sometimes misleading to discuss a general art culture that spans two continents. The second reason goes back to the genre itself, which, as mentioned previously, operates between literary and art genres, making it difficult to codify and easily overlooked.

Latin American artists' books began to flourish in the era of the democratic multiple of the sixties, which was also a time of collaboration among artists working in a spirit of pan-americanism. Martha Hellion, who participated in the books arts scene in both Mexico and Europe, was one of the few critics to discuss the history of Latin American artists' books. She used her own experiences to examine the connections between her work and the work of other artists all over Latin America to describe significant convergences and collaborations among artists. The artistic collaborations did not all produce artists' books, but are significant because they demonstrate the spirit of cooperation between artists and writers and the circulation of ideas about the medium of the book. Some of the names that were important to early projects that explored new

ideas about language and communication have reappeared in current artists' books circles in Latin America today.

Hellion lists the significant cooperation between avant-garde artists and writers from Latin America and Europe between 1900 and 1920 that produced magazines such as *Vida Americana*, a publication begun in 1921 by Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, Catalanian artist Joan Salvat Papasseit, and Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García. Other magazines such as *Prisma*, *Proa*, *Martín Fierro*, *Ulises*, and *Cultura*, brought many diverse writers and artists together to discuss art and the theories propelling the avant-garde movements of the time. Mallarmé's influence is evident in the text and typography found in these magazines. In particular, Brazilian poets revisited Mallarmé's project in the fifties by once again focusing on letters as expressive shapes and their ability to communicate with the viewer ("Libros" 25-31, 34). The art of concrete poetry where the typographical arrangement of words is as important to expressing meaning as the meaning of the words themselves was an important part of the Brazilian exploration of space, both textual and visual.

Another important international project was the journal *El corno emplumado*, published in Mexico in the sixties. Beat poet Margaret Randall and her then husband Sergio Mondragón started the journal that published poetry and art from the United States and Latin America with the intention of creating an international community of artists ("La era" 155). In the editors' note of the first issue, the editors declare that it is "a magazine whose pages conform to the word instead of whose words conform to the pages...now when relations between the Americas have never been worse, we hope *El corno emplumado* will be a showcase for the fact that we ARE ALL BROTHERS" ("El

corno” 5). The collaborative nature of *El corno emplumado* brought many artists together to form a far-reaching network across the Americas. Specifically the Cuban artists’ book publishers Ediciones Vigía and Editorial Cuadernos Papiro, as well as the Argentine publisher Eloisa Cartonera are now publishing many of the authors published in this journal such as Enrique Lihn, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Nancy Morejón, César López, Miguel Barnet, and Aime Cesaire.

Martha Hellion and her then husband Felipe Ehrenburg credit their involvement with *El corno emplumado* for their later work in the genre of artists’ books. In 1969 *El corno emplumado* was shut down for political reasons and later that year the couple moved to London under a self-imposed exile in anticipation of further political repression in Mexico. In the early seventies they became involved with Beau Geste Press, which published over 150 artists’ books in a four-year period. Hellion and Ehrenburg published the works of Ulisés Carrión, a well-known critic and editor in the world of book arts as well as a book artist himself (“La era” 156-172).

Ulises Carrión was born in Mexico in 1941, moved to Amsterdam in 1970 where he later opened a gallery bookstore, “Other Books and So” that began in a basement. Central to the bookstore’s mission was the communication and distribution of non-mainstream literature through alternative, non-commercial networks (“La era” 165). A significant figure in the world of artists’ books, Carrión’s work in Amsterdam represents the international reach of the artists’ books phenomenon and the strong influence of Latin America on the development of the art form.

In terms of the importance of individual works, Martha Hellióon names three Mexican texts in particular, *Return Ticket*, *El libro negro*, and *Incidentes melódicos del*

mundo irracional. The first book that she mentioned is *Return Ticket*, made in 1928 by the Mexican artist and writer Salvador Novo. A travel book that included ticket stubs and other travel paraphernalia packed into a small suitcase, *Return Ticket* displays objects from Novo's extensive travels to provide a concurrent narrative that relates with the written text.

Another important work, *El libro negro* was produced in 1943 through a collaboration with the Mexican artists' collective Taller de Gráfica Popular (Popular Graphic Workshop) and Hannes Meyer, architect and second director of the Bauhaus, the German school known for combining craft and fine arts. The mission of the Popular Graphic Workshop was to support political movements through graphic prints. In this case the collective illustrated *El libro negro* Meyer's indictment of Nazi terror in Europe. The collaboration between Hannes and the collective showcased the potential of artists' books to integrate art and political commentary. This collaboration led to the founding of a publishing house called La Estampa Mexicana directed by Meyer. La Estampa Mexicana produced *Incidentes melódicos del mundo irracional* in 1944, combining the art of Leopoldo Méndez, the writing of Juan de la Cabada and the musical scores of Silvestre Revueltas ("Libros" 31-33). Works from these three artists are intermingled and layered throughout the book to tell a series of short stories.

The collaboration between artists from different disciplines, geographic regions and political belief systems has always been a part of the history of the Latin American artists' book. All of these elements; interdisciplinary collaboration, internationalism, and political commentary are frameworks through which the genre may be studied. These

frameworks not only inform the work of collecting but may also provide a focus for building a collection.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Considerations and Acquisition

Former Latin America, Africa and Anthropology Librarian Lourdes Vázquez, in her article on artists' books in Latin America explains that each time a school of poetry arises in Latin America so does a publishing house in the bedrooms and kitchens of the poets, supported by those same poets and their friends. According to her these publishing ventures appear and disappear, but the phenomenon itself became a permanent part of the twentieth century cultural scene. In the past these literary experiments have been important foundations that gave birth to the best poetry and literature (47). Vázquez's commentary reveals two very important aspects of the discussion about the collection of artists' books. First, because artists' books are produced by an innovative spirit in uncommon locations, their sources are ephemeral. Second, Vazquez's observation is that artists' books are important to collect, in part, because by doing so librarians are documenting an impulsive cultural phenomenon that is a wellspring of experimental literature and inventive artistic production. Librarians must contend with the need to document this phenomenon despite the difficulty of locating and purchasing materials that are not generally available through direct commercial channels. The instability of the sources for these books greatly affects collection policies. Librarians generally use selection guidelines such as, subject depth, format, language, geographic area, and time periods; to make collection decisions, but systematic guidelines cannot be applied in the

case of artists' books. Many academic libraries mention in their collection development policies online that artists' books are part of their collecting scope. Although many academic libraries acknowledge the importance of the genre by including it in their policy, very few provide details about their criteria for collecting. It is instructive to look at some of the larger Latin American artists' book collections to clarify the questions librarians need to answer in order to develop the larger purpose of their collection and the real challenges they face in doing so.

In this case the artists' books collections at the University of California, Irvine (UCI), Michigan State University (MSU), and the University of Wisconsin, Madison (UW-Madison) are explored for a better understanding of different strategies used to collect artists' books. These universities have developed some of the larger Latin American artists' books collections in the country and have emphasized these collections by developing exhibitions, events and online resources around these books. These are not the only institutions with sizeable collections that have initiated programming related to their Latin American artists' books collections, but they provide some unique examples. The librarians and scholars at these institutions have recognized the importance of artists' books and are keying in and joining the networks that have formed around these works in various ways. The collection practices of these institutions often mirror the methods of production and distribution used by artists. The books are created in social, political, and cultural networks and university librarians acquire these books through organic relationships with individuals in these networks.

At "Special Collections and Archives" at UCI, Latin American artists' books are a central focus. On their "Artists' Books: Collection Strengths" web page they note that the

library holds more than 150 Latin American artists' books and list a selection of Latin American authors and publishing houses that form a large part of the collection. The university has focused on Mexican artists' books because of its ability to acquire them and because the books are an important resource for the work of scholars at the institution. The Special Collections Department at UCI began to develop a Latin American artists' books collection with a book arts purchase made in 2000, focusing on books produced in the last 35 years (Bates, *Beauty 3*). Many of the authors in the collection such as Yani Pecanins and Felipe Erhenberg are leading figures in the world of Mexican artists' books who have created their own innovative work, promoted the genre and started their own publishing houses. Looking at the collection of Yani Pecanins' work in particular provides insight into the politics of the genre itself, as well as the artist's role in collection development. UCI owns twenty-two of Pecanins' pieces spanning the years 1977-2007. Many of them are unique works that are made with found objects that connect women's domestic lives with Pecanins' craft. She stated in an interview published in the Mexican paper *La Jornada* that she purposefully sent her books abroad because she believes that cultural institutions such as UCI, Yale and the National Museum of Women in the Arts invest in the books by forming collections, mounting exhibitions, and designating a department to handle them. She laments the fact that she does not see this phenomenon in Mexico. In this case the artist has taken much of the initiative to place her pieces with institutions she believes will care for her work. Pecanins makes many one-of-a-kind books, which means that the collection of her works at each institution is unique (MacMasters). Collecting the unique works of a seminal artist depends greatly on the library's budget and the relationships a librarian is able to

form with the artist or the artist's distributor and less on a set of preconceived guidelines. With the example of Yani Pecanins the artist has chosen the library rather than the library choosing the artist.

UCI's *Beauty and Meaning: Art and Poetry in the Books Arts of Mexico* exhibit was largely inspired by the library's artists' books acquisitions. According to the exhibit catalog, "the primary objective of the UC Irvine Libraries Exhibit Program is to support the research and instructional missions of UCI by interpreting and publicizing the richness, diversity, and unique strengths of the resources of the UC Irvine Libraries (Bates, *Beauty* 13)." Specifically, the collection supports the work of professor Juan Bruce Novoa in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, whose work centers around twentieth century Mexican artists and writers (UC Irvine Libraries, *Libraries'* ; Dooley). The collection was also integral to the work of a graduate student Lourdes Bates, who wrote her dissertation on Mexican artists' books and curated the artists' book exhibit held at the university in 2002. It is clear that supporting scholars and students is an important part of collection at UCI libraries.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

MSU has focused its collection on a Cuban artists' book publishing collective, Ediciones Vigía. The publishing collective started twenty-two years ago, using a variety of found materials that were available to them. Some of the collective's early editions were made using a typewriter and a mimeograph machine (Ehrenberg 89-90). Still today the group uses bagasse sugarcane paper, scraps, and donations to make their books. It is unique as a publishing model in Cuba because it is sanctioned, but not controlled by the Cuban government. The collective produces artists' books in a variety of formats

usually designed by one artist and assembled by members of the collective. Their books are generally made in editions of two hundred copies. Ediciones Vigía gives twenty copies to Cuban libraries, sells some copies at their author readings, and the rest are often sold at book fairs or through book dealers. The editions sell out quickly as the collective's name has grown increasingly well known in the world of artists' books.

Librarians from the United States in search of works from Ediciones Vigía must contend with a number of logistical and legal challenges. While it is legal for United States citizens to collect artwork, literature and education materials from Cuba, it is not legal to order books from Cuba from the United States. Therefore, collectors must navigate U.S. travel restrictions to Cuba in order to secure books. Many librarians attend the yearly book fair in Havana or go on general buying trips, carrying acquired materials back in their suitcases to ensure that materials are brought back safely (Ehrenberg 92-94). Frequently, the publisher is aware of the demand for their books and responds by promoting its books specifically to U.S. institutions and vendors. Ediciones Vigía in particular engages in informal networking with U.S. collectors at large international book fairs. The publishers' attendance at these fairs makes it easier for U.S. institutions to acquire their artists' books.

In 2002, Jeanne Drewes former Assistant Director for Access and Preservation at the MSU Libraries donated one hundred books she purchased from Ediciones Vigía. This donation would be the backbone of one of the largest collections of Latin American artists' books in the United States. Throughout her tenure at MSU she continued to build and promote the Vigía collection and she curated an exhibit of the books in 2002 at MSU's Kresge Art Museum, called *Wrapped Words: Handmade Books from Cuba's*

Ediciones Vigía. She stated, "the opportunity to exhibit them as art has fulfilled a long held dream for me". The exhibition traveled for two years across the United States to institutions such as the University of Richmond, the University of Kansas, Arizona State University, Minnesota Center for the Book and the Harold Washington Library in Chicago ("Wrapped"). This traveling exhibit increased awareness of *Ediciones Vigía* artists' books collection at MSU.

Drewes wrote an article about her experiences and connections that led to the development of the *Vigía* collection as well as other projects in Cuba. She explains that personal interest and shared goals with Cuban institutions made the work she did in Cuba possible. While she was developing several preservation projects with archives in Cuba she learned of *Ediciones Vigía* from an email on a book arts listserv. In 1999 while working on a preservation project with a small archive in Matanzas, Cuba she visited the *Vigía* collective and upon seeing their work was moved to buy as many books as possible creating a collection with the eventual goal of exhibiting the books. On subsequent visits she organized projects with the collective and brought donations of book making materials to the workshop (Drewes1-2). Her interest in book arts, the relationships she developed with institutions in Cuba, and her many visits, all aided her in finding *Ediciones Vigía* and developing a collection of over 170 books at MSU (Michigan State University).

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON

UW-Madison has focused its collecting on the Argentine publishing collective Eloisa Cartonera. Eloisa Cartonera began producing books in 2003 in direct response to the 2001 economic crisis in Argentina. Eloisa Cartonera established a model of

publishing books in cardboard as a populist response to political and economic crisis that left many people in Argentina powerless and unemployed. Similar publishing ventures arose to challenge globalization in Mexico, Brazil, Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, and Peru. High unemployment paired with the rise in paper costs led to the cardboard picker phenomenon in Argentina where people, known as *cartoneros*, gathered discarded cardboard to sell to industries by the kilo to make a living. A group of young writers and artists who formed Eloisa Cartonera began to purchase cardboard from cardboard pickers to be used as book binding material. The text block used by the collective is mass-produced on a photocopier, covered in cardboard and then the cover is hand painted by members of the collective, which also includes *cartoneros*. Using these inexpensive methods and materials to produce the books, Eloisa Cartonera has published both rising and well-known authors (Eloisa Cartonera). Because the books are hand painted each one is unique. According to Paloma Celis Carbajal, the Ibero-American Bibliographer, at UW-Madison, the library began collecting Eloisa Cartonera books in 2006. As a result of the library's direct relationship with the Argentine Cartonera collective and five other similar publishing projects in other Latin American countries, the collection now includes more than three hundred volumes. The library at the UW-Madison also collects documentaries, stencils, posters, catalogues from Eloisa Cartonera. In 2007 the library began to digitize the collection to make it more accessible. The front cover, back cover, and the title page of most of the books in the collection can be viewed in the Latin American Cartonera Publishers Database. Soon the database will include audio from interviews, transcriptions, a bibliography and a resource guide about the publishers. These works are used in courses at the university as well as faculty research. Ksenija

Bilbija, a professor in the department of Spanish and Portuguese, has studied this alternative publishing model, and the university has organized a meeting with Eloisa Cartonera and its counterparts that will be held in October of 2009 (Celis Carbajal).

When looking at the collection practices of all three university libraries, it is clear that personal connections in which one individual's personal relationships with the genre, author, book dealer or collective have led to the formation of these collections. Since the books themselves are an individual's artistic expression constructed in informal networks, it is logical that the development of a collection of these books would be based on alliances and affinities between artists and librarians.

MANAGEMENT

Storage, Handling, and Cataloging

Artists' books are generally thought of as unique art objects and receive special treatment once they are acquired and added to a collection. When librarians decide to acquire an item they must consider what the item will require in terms of housing and care. Since artists' books are unique and fragile they are often stored in special collections departments (Chemero Siegel, and Wilson 22). At most university libraries special collections departments can provide the security, environmental controls, storage and exhibition space needed for an artists' books collection. Artists' books often are not the size and shape of a standard book and therefore require special enclosures and shelving. In many cases they are made of non-archival materials such as found objects or scrap paper, and a controlled environment can be instrumental in increasing their longevity. Since they are objects that are delicately constructed they cannot stand heavy use by patrons and as a result librarians frequently use exhibition space in order to allow more patrons to access artists' book collections.

Because of the multi-faceted nature of the genre the management and care of artists' books often involves the input of many librarians. In some cases where the collecting librarian works outside of special collections, as is the case at MSU, special care must be taken to communicate and oversee storage, handling, and cataloging procedures. Art librarians, special collections librarians and subject specialist librarians

may offer valuable input and make decisions about storage and access. The MSU collection of Latin American artists' books is a good example of how a collection is a shared responsibility. At the university the art librarian has been very involved in the acquisition of the artists' books, but the collection is stored in Special Collections. The librarians at the university were very thorough in their planning for collaborative management of this collection. Evidence of this planning is present in the collections development policy, which serves as a management guide for librarians and a concrete reminder of the collaboration necessary to manage artists' books. The art librarian, Terrie L. Wilson, helped to create the collection development policy for works housed in Special Collections. The collection development policy recognizes the different kinds of expertise involved in the management of artists' books by explicitly acknowledging the reason to house the collection in Special Collections and offers general instruction about management, so that all the librarians involved are aware of the policies. As a case in point, when the policy was written the Special Collections Librarian was new to some of the issues surrounding access and conservation of artists' books. The policy was developed by Wilson, the art librarian, as a short guide to the housing and access procedures for the books. The policy explains that:

Due to the variety of formats and unique nature of each item, the artists' books collection will be housed in Special Collections. This will ensure optimal conditions for the preservation and security of the collection. If the artist does not provide a protective enclosure for his or her work, the Libraries' conservation librarian will be consulted. Special boxes will be necessary to protect the items. Artists' books must not be labeled or

marked in any manner, as this would result in an alteration of the artists' work and a reduction in the value of the item (Wilson 28).

The benefit to this collaborative working model is that the expertise of each librarian is consciously employed to better support the collection. In many cases the art librarian offers valuable specialized knowledge of artists' books while the special collections librarian provides experience with the handling of rare materials and the knowledge of the special collections facility, workflow, and staff. Community and cooperative relationships among librarians are essential to the effective management of artists' books. Particularly in special collections, where staff is the link between the patron and the collection, it is essential that the staff understands the value of the collection and is dedicated to providing access to it. Catalogers must find innovative ways to make the collection more accessible in the catalog, conservators often must make special enclosures to house the unusually shaped books, and librarians need to be dedicated to learning about and promoting the use of the collection.

Reviewing the collection management procedures of the Ediciones Vigía collection at MSU provides further insight into the issues that arise with an artists' books collection. The Vigía books generally are made by hand from non-archival materials. Many of the editions have delicate cut outs or flaps and incorporate organic materials such as twigs or dried flowers. During the first stages of the development of this collection Drewes, the former Assistant librarian in Special Collections at MSU, modified archival newspaper boxes to store each individual title in order to meet the preservation needs of the collection. Inside the boxes she used acid-free board to construct an inset that fits each book and prevents movement of the fragile material inside

(Graveline 28). Artists' books often require specially made enclosures for each individual piece.

Placing the Vigía editions in special collections departments means the books receive special conservation measures that increase the longevity of the works. In addition, housing these books in special collections, where handling of the books is restricted, reduces the wear and tear on the artists' books. When thinking about management, librarians must consider the original intent of the publisher, the purpose of the collection, and the way the collection will be presented to users that honors the intent of the publisher. This is more complicated than it may appear at first glance. For example Ediciones Vigía's artists' books are objects of beauty created through labor-intensive techniques in the craft tradition, but out of found materials, as necessitated by the scarcity of resources. Librarians may feel a tension between the original intent of the publisher and their own desire to preserve fragile works when they place this kind of material in a closed stacks repository. How can librarians in this situation manage the books with preservation in mind while making them accessible as the populist tradition of Ediciones Vigía dictates? Drewes chose not only to store and show the artists' books like unique art objects, but also to express and share as much as possible about their history and production through lectures, projects with students and a traveling exhibition ("Wrapped"). Librarians responsible for this kind of collection must be mindful of the many layers of meaning that the works acquire during production and distribution and to translate those meanings to the public through every aspect of the collection's management.

An essential part of management is providing access to the collection through the library catalog. There have been several different options for cataloging artists' books. One option is to enhance traditional cataloging methods intended for print resources, a second option is to create a system tailored to a particular collection. A third option is to employ some combination of the two (Ford 19). Each solution presents specific challenges.

Artists' books are likely to end up in a work backlog in special collections because they require extra attention from catalogers and preservationists. As a result, artists' books are often given interim backlog records in the catalog, which means users have limited access to the books through the catalog, or there is no record at all, and it is therefore hidden from the user. When there is a full catalog record it is still challenging for the cataloger to identify the books using traditional cataloging methods, which use the title, author, and subject matter to make books accessible. Sometimes there is no discernible author for the work or there is an entire collective of artists responsible (Stover 4). Also the conceptual nature of the books can make it difficult to determine the subject matter of the book.

Most libraries use AACR2, MARC21 cataloging methods with Library of Congress Subject Headings. Artists' books often lack standard bibliographic information and their rarity means that their cataloging records are often not found in shared cataloging databases, which requires original cataloging (Stover 14-15). Artists' books have many possible access points that are not generally included in traditional cataloging such as printing techniques, illustration techniques, and type of press. Traditional cataloging was created for print material and requires the addition of notes or the use of

non-standard subject headings from additional thesauri to provide the user with access to information about the structure and content found in artists' books.

ARLIS/UK & Ireland, an art libraries society, addresses the challenge of cataloging artists' books with traditional cataloging by producing a cataloger's manual for artists' books. The manual gives a brief history of cataloging and discusses succinctly the problems with definitions and the various challenges catalogers face when working with an art object. The manual suggests that a cataloger should use notes and provide the highest level of description in order to represent the works as fully as possible in the catalog (White 9-17). In this way, the cataloger may provide users with information about all physical aspects of the artists' books as well as information about its content. Providing highly descriptive notes and extra subject headings is both labor and time intensive, which stretches a library's staff and resources. Another challenge of traditional cataloging is that it does not provide an image of the artists' book. A well-developed text-only record is still limited in what it can convey about a three dimensional object. Newly purchased catalog records have begun to include a thumbnail image of book covers, a development in the catalog that could be very useful for artists' books, but would require each institution to produce and store images of its own collection for the catalog. This solution is also further complicated by the fact that for some artists' books, providing a thumbnail image of the cover would still provide incomplete information. A book with an accordion binding, for example, would need more than one image to demonstrate its physical attributes.

Creating a new cataloging system or a separate database may be useful for a particular collection, however, the lack of standardization means the cataloger is working

in a vacuum and does not have the support of a name authority file or the input of colleagues using the same system. If catalogers develop a new system they cannot share records with other institutions and run the risk of making it difficult for their successors to interpret and use the catalog. Thus far no critics have advocated the sole use of a separate database.

Many librarians feel that an image database is the only way to provide information about the format of the artists' book (Chemero, Siegel, and Wilson 23). Like enhanced cataloging, this solution can be costly and time consuming. The use of an image database coupled with a catalog presents challenges but provides users with a great deal of information. Users may utilize each of them for different purposes. If users already know what they are looking for, the catalog is an excellent resource. If users want to browse a collection then a separate database with images quickly narrows their search and provides them with an experience that is as close to browsing the physical collection as possible.

The librarians at UCI and the UW-Madison have used a variety of strategies to promote and expand access to their collections of artists' books that add to the discussion of cataloging artists' books. The Special Collections library at UCI has developed several approaches to facilitate access to the collection while continuing to use traditional catalog records enhanced with the detailed genre/form information, added as an access point. The UCI library website provides informational pages that contextualize the collection, give instruction on searching the catalog, and link directly to catalog records for artists' books in the collection. The main page introduces the artists' book collection and presents some general information about the size of the collection, the time period

that the collection encompasses, and the main collecting areas. The page also displays images of a few examples that inform the users' expectations about the variety of material they will find in the collection. The UCI Artists' Books webpage displays a work by Ed Ruscha, a unique artists' book that includes found objects by Yani Pecanins, and an illustrated edition of Mallarmé's groundbreaking poem "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard". These images help users anticipate what they will find and may help them search more effectively for a particular author, format or time period. These images also remind users who are consulting a text-only catalog of what the catalog record for an artists' book represents: a link to a dynamic book format that is a vital research and instructional tool. From the main page of UCI's Special Collections and Archives website there are links to five additional pages about the artists' book collection at the university. The second item on the sidebar menu links to a webpage that provides a definition of the term artists' books, preparing users further for the complex works housed in the collection. The definition reminds users that there is no universally agreed upon definition for the genre and, as a result, users may or may not agree with the categorization of the items in the collection. Patrons are made aware that an item they consider to be an artists' book may not be cataloged in this manner and therefore they need to search for specific items by several methods. If users consult all of the artists' books web pages they will enter the catalog with images and concepts in mind that introduce them to the collection and orient them in the catalog.

Once users are acclimated to the context and methods for searching the catalog they are prepared to focus on the actual content of the collection. The link on the site leads to a page that outlines the collection's strengths. The UCI collection is

characterized as having, “three major foci: works by and about women; works that explore contemporary American politics; and works produced in Latin American countries” (University of California at Irvine, *Special*). On the same page the collection is then divided into thematic categories. These categories include seminal artists, Latin America, Women and other artists’ books. Under each category is a selection of artists who are representative of the category provided. Each artist’s name is linked directly to a list of their works in the catalog. The authors of this page are careful to mention that this list of artists names is just a selection from a larger collection and direct the user to a page that explains how to search the catalog for more artists’ books. This search instruction page offers users four different search strategies. Users may search for books by place of publication, by author or press, by type of artists’ book or by subject, via keyword search. Each suggested search strategy is also a link that leads to a list of Library of Congress Subject Headings, keyword search results for the subject, or to the catalog search box. This kind of guide is necessary when searching for artists’ books in a catalog because there is no standard method for cataloging and users need instruction about the possible access points they can use to find the books. The artists’ books web page also links to a list of artists’ books exhibit catalogs from exhibitions held at UCI and a list of reference resources. The exhibit information is important because the patron can see the frequency of exhibitions and the ways in which the curator has conceived of and organized the collection for exhibition. The resource page provides valuable books and articles about the genre and gives patrons a list of key authors and works from this area of scholarship. All of these pages work to minimize the limitations of traditional cataloging without having to create a completely new system.

UW-Madison uses both the catalog and an image database with specialized records for artists' books, however, the database and catalog are not linked. The Artists' Book Collection contains over eight hundred works and 760 of those have been digitized. The database is described on the UW-Madison site as an "illustrated descriptive index" and a "visual finding aid" that includes images, providing visual information about the format and content of the books. The collection is part of the UW-Madison Digital Collections, founded in 2000. One of the purposes of the digital collection is to provide access to fragile or rare items with value to researchers in a wide variety of disciplines. These collections are available free to the public online (McLimans). It is logical that artists' books would fall under the scope of this project because they are fragile, are an important cultural resource for scholars in the arts and humanities, a challenge to access via the catalog. The digital collection is organized into thematic categories; where the Artists' Books Collection falls into the Arts Collection category. The records in the database include:

the title of the book, creator's name, publisher, date (if known), subjects, physical description, and a complete transcription of the colophon. In addition to searching names of book artists or press names, one can also search type of book structure, type of binding, medium/technique, and contributor roles. All words in each record are searchable and these in-depth records are paired with images of the artists' books (University of Wisconsin, Madison)

UW-Madison's Digital Collections has paired these in-depth records with images of the artists' books. Generally there are one or two images of the essential visual elements of the book, which include the cover, title page, spine or an aspect of the format. For

example, images of books with an accordion binding usually include a photograph of the cover as well as an image of the book opened completely, showing all the folds. The homepage for the digital artists' book collection links to a page that allows the patron to search by keyword or subject heading. It also links to a guided search that instructs users on how to navigate the many search criteria named above. In this case users can search for artists' books through the catalog or through the artists' books database.

UCI's solution of contextualizing the catalog is a helpful way for a library to enable users to find artists' books. It prepares users to utilize a traditional catalog to look for art objects, and provides digitized images that prompt a better understanding of the artists' books. It is a possible step many institutions that cannot afford an image database could implement. The solution that the UW-Madison has chosen addresses many of the challenges of collecting artists' books by providing users with many ways to access the books and communicating the maximum amount of information possible. However, the time required and the cost of having both systems is prohibitive for many institutions. In the end, each institution has to decide how it can best provide access to its artists' books collections. Many universities increase access to their collections not only via the catalog but also through exhibitions, an important way to give users visual access to collections.

EXHIBITIONS

Challenges and opportunities

The hybrid nature of the artists' book as a functional work to be handled and read, as well as an art object to be appreciated, poses challenges to librarians who are concerned with the issue of access. Artists' books are often held in rare book or art library collections that are closed stacks, limiting the ways in which viewers access the materials. Frequently, prospective users must approach the collection already knowing what they want and have to look at materials a few at a time. At the same time there are restrictions on the handling of the books, depending on library policies. Many academic libraries and cultural centers have turned to the exhibit in order to make more of the works available to the public. The questions and complications that arise with offering access to artists' books collections only mutate and reformulate when one considers how to exhibit them. Housing artists' books in a glass case removes the possibility of handling the books, interrupting the interactive experience of touching the book, flipping through its pages or reading it from cover to cover, which informs the viewers understanding of the work. When the texture of the paper, the feel of how the pages are held together and the content are lost, many of the meanings conveyed by format and message disappear. In many exhibits where display cases are used, either the cover or only one page is open for observation. In these cases the old adage holds true, the book is being judged by its cover. With a closed artists' book the content and purpose may or

may not be revealed on the outside. For example, the flexagons produced by Taller Leñateros, a book making collective in Chiapas, Mexico appears to be a flat square with a few fragments of poetry on the front and back. When one bends and manipulates the flexagon many hidden facets are revealed, each containing more bits of poetry. The writing and the design are equally important, and the meaning of the writing is lost when only one side or the cover is displayed (Perée 67-68).

Showing one page is another option exhibitors use to reveal at least a partial picture of the contents of a book, breaking the flow of meaning from one page to the next is disconnected and rendering a disjointed and incomplete picture of the book. One example is book artist Keith Smith's *Book 91*, held at the Rhode Island School of Design. Linen threads are woven into a jumble throughout the book, and only by leafing through the book can viewers see that this tangle stays intact and creates shadowed forms on the page (Chong 10). When the book is only opened to one-page viewers miss the process of turning the pages and seeing the movement and continuity of the unchanging mass of threads. Thus, the form and experience, which brings meaning to the work, is lost.

Many librarians and museum curators have sought to restore some of the meaning that is lost when artists' books are displayed under glass. One option is to contextualize the book by adding supplementary material, which may take many forms. One mode of presentation is to display the entire book in another form; either as a digitized version of the complete work accessible by computer, in a slideshow, or as a physical facsimile of the work for viewers to handle and examine.

At the Center for Fine Print Research in Bristol, England *Arcadia id est: artists' books, nature and the landscape* was an exhibit where each book was digitized and

available on the exhibit website and accompanied by artist's statements about their sources of inspiration and how the books were crafted (Bodman 18) The potential to look at the book in its entirety online closes the content and usage gap. In addition to displaying the book and providing a digitized version, librarians may also provide information about how the book was made to further inform the viewer's experience of the book. It can help link the viewer to the object, its content, and its construction.

Information on the production of the book may inform viewers about methods and materials used in bookmaking. Another way to provide useful background information is to show photographs of the workshop or studio where the book is made. At the *Hecho a Mano Book Arts of Latin America* exhibit at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2008, the Latin American Bibliographer, Teresa Chapa, traveled to several of the workshops where the exhibition books were made. Her travels took her to Taller Leñateros, a book making collective in Chiapas, México, which was a centerpiece in the exhibition. Chapa took pictures of the studio spaces and documented the artists making paper, printing, and binding the books. At the exhibit space she set up computer stations to show a short documentary about the workshop and displayed photographs illustrating the book making process. Viewers could see what materials went into the paper and the kinds of presses being used, as well as the binding techniques. One of the problems with showing the books from Chiapas in a display case is that the sculptural nature of the book covers and the rich grain of the paper were lost. A lot of these essential qualities were brought to the attention of viewers by watching the documentaries, through these films, viewers saw the variety of plants that were mixed in their industrial blenders to make paper, the clamshell presses in action and the use of a household iron to finish the binding

process. All of these visual aids returned some of the vital texture to these handmade books shown under glass.

Thus far this discussion has focused on ways to minimize the limitations of exhibiting artists' books in display cases. However, it is also important to note that the display case makes special collections more accessible to the public and may provide the librarian or curator the opportunity for innovative selection and grouping.

The librarian/curator must choose specific page or moment to reveal within a sequence, exposing it and leaving the rest of the book tantalizingly unavailable. When the inherent function of the book is denied-active page turning, intimacy, reader-controlled revelation of content, materiality-a different kind of reading takes place. A still-life narrative develops across objects, with the vitrine itself becoming a big glass to peer into (Johanknecht 3).

There are many ways to construct this still-life narrative that provides an opportunity for interactive, experiential learning. At the Centre des Livres d'artistes in Saint-Yrieix-la-Perche, France, the curator asked several book artists to curate their own show. One artist added to his own pieces a selection of his personal books and prints. Through his selections, spectators could see the pieces that attracted him and influenced his work (Mathieu 24). At the same gallery artists have also been asked to exhibit their works with pieces from the permanent collection related to their works. This method of associative display illustrates the connections artists make between their own work and other works.

An artists' book show may also be an opportunity and the impetus for political and cultural debate. In the case of the Argentine show *Desaparición memoria, arte y política* in 1999, forty-four artists were called to participate in a book show on the theme

of disappearance and the politics of forgetting. Their work had to be in black and white and of a uniform size for easy reproduction. Like the democratic multiple, the collective artists' books were photocopied and bound in a larger manuscript that was widely distributed to the public, and displayed to provide a forum for political discussion. By asking artists' react to artists' book by selecting a particular theme and distributing an inexpensive compilation of those reactions, a public event transpires.

CONCLUSION

One might read old art in the belief that one understands it, and be wrong. Such a misunderstanding is impossible in the new art. You can read only if you understand. (Carrión 6)

In conclusion, the critical history, unusual form, and informal modes of production and distribution all require the librarian to be very engaged with all aspects of the artists' book. Librarians need to immerse themselves in the history and criticism of the genre to knowledgeably understand and identify artists' books. In particular, Latin American artists' books require an understanding of a genre produced in many different countries that share a common language and some general historical and cultural similarities but are produced in a wide variety of unique local realities. To find and acquire Latin American artists' books librarians often must make personal connections with the artists and the collectives that produce the works. The formation of these connections is an important part of the collection development process because they allow librarians access to the materials and deepen the librarians' understanding of the artist's and collective's motivations and output. Librarians form both economic and personal relationships with the producers of artists' books and become a participant in the culture of book arts. The relationship is two-way because librarians rely on artists to share their work, and the artists look to librarians to invest money and time in their endeavors.

After librarians acquire artists' books they become an interpreter of the work to a wider audience, and an integral part of realizing the vision of the author and/or the publisher. With considerations for preservation in mind, librarians make decisions about management and access that shape the user's relationship with the collection. Since many times artists' books are a creation that interweaves art and literature they require the expertise of many different librarians to thoroughly address issues related to collection and maintenance. Subject specialists, art librarians, and special collections librarians all offer vital knowledge about formats, handling, storage, and access.

Providing access to artists' books collections via the catalog is challenging because of the three dimensional nature of the books. It is difficult to represent the physical aspects of an artists' book in a text only catalog record. Librarians have proposed several different solutions, including enhanced traditional cataloging, new cataloging systems, and image databases. Ideally a library provides users with both a database of images and a catalog with augmented records, but this solution puts heavy demands on library resources.

Many libraries improve access to their collections not only through the catalog but also by staging exhibitions. Exhibitions are an important way to provide users with visual access to collections that are held in closed stacks repositories. Public exhibitions are a useful way to present a large number of items from a collection at one time. In this way users may gain a wider perspective on a collection as a whole and the connections between various works. Exhibitions afford librarians opportunities to expand access through innovative curating that highlights important themes in a collection, but is also presents challenges. The glass cases generally used to display artists' books create a

distance between viewers and the work and deprive the audience of the full experience of interacting with the books.

Librarians' relationship with this genre of new art is fraught with challenges, but if librarians seek to understand artists' books they become readers and interpreters of the genre. They read the language of the new art and present its many meanings to the patron via the catalog and exhibitions. Librarians become a vital link between artists' books and patrons.

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