

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 34 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</p>
<p>Title of case study: Influencing the Perception, Practice and Publishing of Artists’ Books</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research at UWE Bristol enriched cultural understanding of creative arts by influencing perceptions of what constitutes an artist’s book (artworks produced by artists in the form of a book) in a period of radical change caused by new digital technologies. The research gave practising artists the confidence to experiment in a variety of formats by providing various events in which their work could be exhibited and discussed, thus enabling their work to be recognised and accepted by curators, librarians and collectors. The research assisted the founding of the UK’s first public centre for book arts, thus altering public perceptions.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research project undertaken by Sarah Bodman (Senior Research Fellow) and Tom Sowden (Research Fellow) that culminated in the free publication <i>A Manifesto For The Book</i> (2010) and online archive (http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm) (1) was a response to a much discussed statement by American critic and book artist Johanna Drucker about the need to establish a ‘canon’ for artists’ books; for artists to discuss and provide a descriptive vocabulary and critical terminology to encourage understanding of and innovative artistic practice for artists’ books. This had become increasingly urgent as advances in digital media led to profound arguments over the understanding and appreciation of what constitutes an artist’s book and its future prospects.</p> <p>Drucker focused on the USA, but Bodman and Sowden’s project extended the debate to an international, participatory audience. It did so by interviewing a carefully targeted range of practicing artists, presses, bookbinders, curators, dealers, collectors, educators and librarians in order to solicit their views on where, how, or even if, digital and ephemeral works would fit within the field of artists’ books. Thus one of the central research aims was to challenge conventional wisdom by encompassing and celebrating new artistic bookmaking practices produced with digital technologies (2), and thereby facilitate dialogue between artists, collectors and a public more used to traditional production processes: letterpress, etching, lithography, screenprint and woodcut.</p> <p>This inclusive investigation of the research involved extensive dialogue with intended beneficiaries: artists, writers, curators, educators and librarians. Questions and a diagram were posted online, asking recipients to make their own ‘family tree’ of ‘book arts’, and respond to questions posed by the researchers. These findings were debated at a major conference and associated symposia, which introduced new publishing by artists and writers from Europe, the USA and Australia to the delegates in order to explore and extend current understanding of artists’ books from traditional print to book as performance, video, and the ‘liberature’ movement. At subsequent participatory events and through an online exhibition of 133 examples of contemporary artists’ books and a reference reading room, the researchers demonstrated the possibilities for contemporary book arts production (3). They also investigated how a contemporary book arts centre might work. (4) Further interviews and articles documented and discussed the project’s research findings. (5/6)</p> <p>As a result of this extensive dialogue, an inclusive terminology of ‘book arts’ was proposed in the free download <i>A Manifesto For The Book</i> and online archive. The <i>Manifesto</i> detailed the urgent need to include books made by artists in any format, traditional or digital, and to widen the corpus to include related ephemeral works such as installation, sculptural books and hypertext. The <i>Manifesto</i> argued that the inclusion of all these formats would enable a wider range of book works to be produced under the umbrella of ‘book arts’ rather than ‘artists’ books’ thus extending the canon and thereby giving confidence to artists to experiment in various formats and to curators to widen their perspective on ‘book arts’ and embrace the rich variety of work now available.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>1. Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden (eds), <i>A Manifesto For The Book</i> (February 2010). Free download 187pp book (ISBN 978-1-906501-04-4) and online archive. The principal outcome from</p>

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the AHRC-funded research project: 'What will be the canon for the artist's book in the 21st Century?' (<http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/bookpub.htm>) – **Available through UWE.**

2. Sarah Bodman: 'Os "livros" são eléctricos: 'Are 'Books' Electric? Some possibilities for the artist's book in the 21st Century' in Edith Derdyk (ed.), *Entre ser um e ser mil: o objecto livro e suas poéticas*, Senac, São Paulo, Brazil (April 2013), pp. 121-43. (ISBN 978 85 396 0359 6).

3. Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden, curated exhibition: 'New Wave: artists' publishing in the 21st Century'. Online exhibition also shown at the Impact International Printmaking Conference, School of Creative Arts, University of the West of England, Bristol, September 2009. – **Available through UWE.** www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/newwave09.htm

4. Sarah Bodman and Tom Sowden, 'A Manifesto for the Book: Book – Artist's Book - Artist's Publication – Book Art?' In Luke Morgan (ed.), *Intersections and Counterpoints, Proceedings of the Impact 7 International Multi-disciplinary Printmaking Conference*, Monash University, Australia, 2013, pp. 75-80. (ISBN 978-1-921867-56-9).

5. Tom Sowden: 'L. Vandegrift Davala, interview with Tom Sowden', in the *Artist's Book Yearbook 2010-2011*, September 2009, pp. 99-105. (ISBN 978-1-906501-02-0). Discussion of interactive technologies in the production of book works.

6. Sarah Bodman: 'Made to Measure Online: artists' books and the Internet', *Printmaking Today*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Summer 2009), p. 12. Copy at <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/21777/> – **Available through UWE.**

4. Details of the impact

This research had a range of beneficiaries through introducing new works by book artists to an international audience of other artists, collectors and the public. It also impacted upon artistic practice and the development of book art festivals and exhibitions, gallery curation and outreach, and fed into ongoing debate about the production, dissemination and appreciation of artists' books and altered public perceptions. It also extended opportunities for artists internationally through exhibitions, sales and awards. Some key examples are:

a) Introducing works by Polish artists and writers to an international audience of artists, librarians, curators and educators through focused interviews and conference presentations (videos and downloads at <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/poland.htm>). An independent Polish writer/artist, who participated extensively in the project, states: "the interview and videos of my work published from it have helped me with my contacts with Polish universities and libraries (invitations to give lectures, exhibitions, workshops, and purchases of my books)" [source 3]. After interviewing the organiser of the Polish Book Art Festival (a biennial, travelling public exhibition), Bodman was invited to curate a section of books by British artists for The 9th iteration of the Festival (Jan 2012–December 2014), showcasing 84 artists from Europe, the USA and Asia. Bodman's selection of 42 artists' books, promoted works by British artists to a Polish audience, one of which was awarded the Jury's first prize (<http://korespondencja.bookart.pl/en/awards.html>).

b) The research assisted the establishment of the London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA) in February 2013, the UK's first open-access, not-for-profit independent book arts resource and educational centre, (<http://londonbookarts.tumblr.com>). Its founder read one of the project case studies on a model book arts centre, the Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA), Minneapolis, USA. After our advice at one of the project's surgeries, and the recommendation to the director, he travelled to MCBA on a fact-finding mission. He states: "After much advice and input from Bodman and Sowden, the Centre opened its doors in February this year, with more than 400 people attending the open day and features in the *Guardian*, *Creative Review*, *a-n*, *Crafts Magazine*, *Print Week*, *Design Week*, *El Pais* and *O Globo*" [source 1].

c) Bodman and Sowden provided free artists' books examples to the organisers of a new book art festival at the Limfjordscentret Doverodde, Denmark, where artists' books were relatively unknown (June 2008 – May 2009). These were used to promote and explain the significance of artists' books to regional librarians, printers, museum curators, small publishers and staff from the municipal culture department. The researchers gave public talks at two of the festivals, and from

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their support, the festival received funding from the Danish Rural Development Programme and Culture Fund to expand. The festival organiser, states: “This attracted more artist participants in our exhibitions and festivals from Europe and the USA, and more visits from the general public, collectors and librarians to the events, which generated sales for the exhibiting artists” [source 2].

d) The published outcomes from the project (<http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm>) extended knowledge for educators: The South African artist David Paton (University of Johannesburg), interviewed for one of the case studies, states: “my involvement has had both direct and indirect impact on my work as a teacher in a tertiary academic institution as well as on my own research in the field of artists’ books. A direct benefit is the way in which our fledgling book arts curriculum has grown over the past three years, as a result of such a dialogical climate” My involvement in the project provided me with an opportunity to present a conference paper and accredited textual output for a South African conference on Practice-led Research.” [source 4].

(e) The director of 23 Sandy Gallery (Portland, Oregon), a well-known dealer of artists’ books in the USA, uses the *Manifesto* to inform library and museum collectors when purchasing artists’ books, and public visitors to the gallery. She states: “Between the gallery and its outreach programs to various audiences, I have frequently relied on *A Manifesto for the Book* for vital documentation of our field... I cite the work frequently when I lecture about both contemporary and historical aspects of artists’ books... to reach the general artgoing public who may have never before heard of such a thing” [source 5].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Testimonial letter from the Founder and Director of the London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA), which confirms that he founded the centre based on the model used by MCBA proposed by the researchers, and their input into his centre – **available from UWE Bristol**. [1 on REF portal]
2. Testimonial letter from the organiser of the Doverodde Book Arts Festival, Denmark – **available from UWE Bristol**. [2]
3. Testimonial letter from an independent writer/artist, Bodzentyn, Kielce, Poland, interviewed for an in-depth project case study – **available from UWE Bristol**. [3]
4. Testimonial letter from a Senior Lecturer: Department of Visual Art, University of Johannesburg, South Africa - an artist / writer interviewed as a case study for the project – **available from UWE Bristol**. [4]
5. Testimonial letter from the Director of 23 Sandy Gallery, Portland, USA, detailing her use of the *Manifesto* to inform collectors and visitors to the gallery, and in her outreach programmes around the USA – **available from UWE Bristol**. [5]