

## **Publishing, Mediating and Archiving Artists' Books**

Associate Professor Victoria Browne, KHiO

### **Publishing**

As Covid-19 travel restrictions impact on the zeitgeist of art book fairs in the Nordic countries, our students' engagement with artists' books at Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO) continues to flourish. Additional blended teaching mediated through screen-based devices, has only amplified the demand for workshop-based activities and tacit knowledge. We can no longer take for granted the embodied phenomenon of material-based art production and with public exhibitions cancelled or postponed; students are exploring alternative methodologies to the gallery locus for disseminating their artwork, including publishing as artistic practice.<sup>1</sup>

These activities are supported at KHiO by our publishing workshop run by a dedicated verksmester; as a unique resource for bookbinding, typesetting, risograph and proof printing. Pedagogic workshops are delivered by academic staff and guest artists, to impart their publishing knowledge as post-disciplinary artistic practice.<sup>2</sup> Co-ordinated study trips to Berlin, Bergen, London and Maastricht have already enabled our students and research fellows to run bookstands at Miss Read,<sup>3</sup> Bergen Art Book Fair and Offprint London,<sup>4</sup> and attend workshops at the Jan van Eyck Academie.<sup>5</sup>

Engagement with artists' publishing is further explored through KHiO library's growing collection of artists' books with new guidelines for acquisitions. A dedicated librarian is responsible for curating the archive, coordinating exhibitions and hosting artist's book events. Documentation of our artists' publishing activities is accessible on KHiODA and CRISTiN, the national research information system of Norway.<sup>6</sup>

### **Mediating**

As a student in the late nineties and with the Internet still in its early incarnation, I was reliant on browsing university, local and national libraries for visual or textual inspiration. This was my first introduction to Dieter Roth's artist's books, which further led to workshops as an undergraduate and fieldtrips as a postgraduate studying abroad; visiting the Centre International De Poésie in Marseille, Florence Loewy in Paris, Printed Matter in New York and BookArtBookShop in London.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bastardbok.mystore4.no/products/ma1-i-think-youre-muted>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228805691\\_Cultural\\_hybrids\\_post-disciplinary\\_digital\\_practices\\_and\\_new\\_research\\_frameworks\\_testing\\_the\\_limits](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228805691_Cultural_hybrids_post-disciplinary_digital_practices_and_new_research_frameworks_testing_the_limits)

<sup>3</sup> <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2505691>

<sup>4</sup> <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2507336?locale-attribute=en>

<sup>5</sup> <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2507300>

<sup>6</sup> <https://khioda.khio.no/khio-xmlui/handle/11250/2711963>

When I relocated to London, exhibiting artist's books like 'Dark Matter' rather than editioned prints was problematic.<sup>7</sup> Galleries were apprehensive of their audience when handling artworks; preferring works on paper to be exhibited behind glass in protective frames. In reaction, I established a project space to curate a rolling programme of artist's book exhibitions.<sup>8</sup> The gallery was located on Redchurch Street in Shoreditch alongside several independent project spaces including Trolley Books.

By the early twenty-tens I was curating exhibitions at Saison Poetry Library in London's Southbank Centre. The space of mediation became nomadic and I began representing artists' books at London, New York and Paris art book fairs. As my network of artists, curators and collectors grew, I was also representing to international special collections; V&A Museum, MoMA, The Met, MACBA, Brooklyn Museum, Boston Athenaeum, Clarke Art Institute, Yale Center for British Art, Chelsea UAL, RISD, Yale University, Swathmore College, Lafayette College, Newberry Library and SAIC.

Over the past twenty years mediating artists' books between museums, galleries and collectors has grown into a multichannel online platform of websites, social media, video conferencing and virtual spaces. Curators of special collections may now reach out to artists' publishing internationally. But art book fairs also continue to mediate local engagement. The activity of browsing material-based artefacts as a haptic experience, as a journey of discovery and a meeting of like-minded individuals is a ritual, pleasure and politics of co-operation.<sup>9</sup>

## Archiving

'Museums as slow looking invitations to really deep considerations of histories, differences and complexities, are very rich things.'<sup>10</sup>

When art historian and cultural analyst Griselda Pollock spoke at the Nasjonalmuseet on the relevance of museum collections, her insightful account was aimed at those who remain circumscribed by their own historical value systems, who are failing to adapt to the changes in our contemporary society. 'Inclusion is not [about] adding one by one, it's naming the problems, that enables us to see class, race, gender as it plays out and to being part of the transformation.'<sup>11</sup>

The guidelines that regulate how artists' books are acquired by museum archives or who is responsible for curating these permanent collections are as varied as the number of museums, universities and institutions that I have had the benefit of working with. But as Pollock asserted,

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kaleideditions.com/product/dark-matter/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.kaleideditions.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Sennett, Richard *Together: rituals, pleasures and politics of co-operation*, Yale University Press, 2013

<sup>10</sup> [https://nasjonalmuseet-no.zoom.us/rec/share/U2GPI\\_vq0098-1LwHUVuoprebKbWouoqzF\\_RTDQH1r80xDHM0zcbBgPOMAguiAc8.VfhlRNzGbiPqxXJg](https://nasjonalmuseet-no.zoom.us/rec/share/U2GPI_vq0098-1LwHUVuoprebKbWouoqzF_RTDQH1r80xDHM0zcbBgPOMAguiAc8.VfhlRNzGbiPqxXJg) (Password: t%2DHA58)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/exhibitions-and-events/the-national-museum--architecture/events/2021/6/mot-et-nytt-museum-griselda-pollock/>

it requires a visionary leap before ‘a museum can ask itself not what I should do to preserve culture, the canon, but what can I do in order not to commit the crimes of diminishing the humanity of those who will learn with me?’<sup>12</sup>

The Nordic countries are currently without a national artist’s book collection. If the status quo were to continue, museum curators will in future be reliant on the loan policies of other international institutions and private trusts to exhibit Nordic artists’ publishing.<sup>13</sup> Archiving artist’s books does not demand a large acquisition budget or sizable storage facilities. But it does require the appointment of a curator with autonomy and knowledge to develop to regard a collection of artists’ books, in the same way that a national collection of paintings or sculptures is valued for its cultural equity.

With the recent upheaval of Norway’s cultural institutions from their historical locations in Oslo to new spaces of mediation, including Deichman Bjørvika, Munchmuseet and NasjonalMuseet; there is now a growing expectation from artists’ publishing in the Nordic countries for the establishment of a national artist’s book collection for future public access.

Victoria Browne

Associate Professor of Print and Publishing  
Art and Craft Department  
Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo

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[www.print.khio.no](http://www.print.khio.no)

[www.khio.no](http://www.khio.no)

[www.victoriabrowne.com](http://www.victoriabrowne.com)

[www.kaleideditions.com](http://www.kaleideditions.com)

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nasjonalMuseet.no/en/exhibitions-and-events/the-national-museum--architecture/events/2021/6/mot-et-nytt-museum-griselda-pollock/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/about/Collections-Management-Policy-2020-04-20.pdf>