

The following chapter includes unedited all the statements *Art-Rite* received in response to this request:

"If you feel inspired to write something informal, but brief and concentrated, about your views on any of the issues related to artists' books, please do so. Why are you attracted to artists' books? What are the best potentials and also the basic difficulties concerning this form of art (either innate to the medium itself or to its superstructure/or lack of it)?"

The collective quality of these statements functions as the most basic and genuine definition of artists' books.

M A R K E T R E S E A R C H

Kathy Acker

Forget all the shit about "artists' " and books. I write three to four pages a day and have been doing so for the last ten years. When I want to wash my face, I take soap and water and scrub my face. The rest is technique.

One Zen master (I forget the direct quote) says that once a person's enlightened, that person can walk with the Buddha or any of the Bodhisattvas that have lived and are living. I used to hate reading the books of dead men and women and I've always hated schools. It's now possible to meet Blake and Yeats and Nietzsche and all the writers who knew that. Yeats speaks of beauty, Blake of holiness and fire, let me put it this way: who knew what is true and how a person caught to his or her own attachments, not only to luxuries but also to the forms of the mind, as if all forms were real or false, could as Blake put it break out of prison.

"by artists and poets, who are taught by the nature of their craft to sympathise with all living things, and who, the more pure and fragrant is their lamp, pass the further from all limitations, to come at last to forget good and evil in an absorbing vision of the happy and unhappy."

Break out of prison for everything is holy. On the gross historical level. Kissinger and Mao.

The self.

Thoughts second-to-second, that portrayal "These three primary commands, to seek a determinate outline, to avoid a generalized treatment, and to desire always abundance and exuberance, were insisted upon with vehement anger, and their opponents were called again and again 'demons' and 'villains' 'hired' by the wealthy and the idle" "for he who half lives in eternity endures a rending of the structures of the mind, a crucifixion of the intellectual body"

Note: My friends are (mainly) artists and I live in an art community. When I sit in my room and write, I'm not separate from my friends so I write "artists' " books. I can't imagine what else you mean by "artists' "

I hope I'm not being brusque: I don't mean to be. I'm 29 years old and I've spent a lot of that time reading, writing, and thinking with mind and body about writing. I can't compress ten years or more into a simple statement. The shithole commercial and small-press publishing world, the philosophy of all who, because of the absorption in active life, have been persuaded to judge and to punish.

Roberta Allen

I am primarily involved with the book form as an indeterminate structure: to suggest the possibility of alternative choice to the reader who can rearrange the random sequence of loose pages in my books. One may or may not take advantage of this. The book format is flexible enough to provide an opportunity for "playing with possibility" through presenting spatial ambiguities of position, placement, and direction.

In a book of 40 loose pages, the number of

sequences possible is so great that no exact number can be determined. If one reader created trillions of different sequences an incredible number would still remain. In a book of 10 loose pages millions of different sequences are possible.

When one considers that a book is produced for public circulation, i.e. many readers can possess copies of identical printed material which can be sequentially altered or not, the idea of indeterminacy is staggering. However, this particular book form is used to encourage an intimate, tactile connection with the individual reader through possibility of choice combined with sense of touch.

John Baldessari

Re. your request for statements on books: I enjoy giving books I have made to others. Art seems pure for a moment and disconnected from money. And since a lot of people can own the book, nobody owns it. Every artist should have a cheap line. It keeps art ordinary and away from being overblown.

Luciano Bartolini

1. (I'm attracted to it) because I consider it a "hypothesis," the artist's book is an "offering" of an individual experience not corresponding to any real necessity other than the artist's own need, in contrast to the industrially produced book, which corresponds to a "need" previously ascertained by marketing research (in order to provide the right product).

2. Recovery of the dimension of *craftsmanship* and of dexterity [Italian *manualita*].

3. Wider room for expression by (means of the "book") an object already full of historic connotations, but which nevertheless becomes more detached from the structure of requirements of the art market.

4. Possibility to distill a number of experiences in a single book (artist's book as a poetic sampler of his own work).

5. Artists book as experimentation, continuation and complement of the artist's daily/routine/normal work.

Concerning the superstructure or lack of it: insufficient (or little or no) distribution is not a good quality. A book is born to be communicated.

PS. (small per-or-i ps.): my books are conceived with the prospect of being sent directly (thru the *mail*) to whomever I want.

Ulises Carrion

Director, Other Books and So, Amsterdam.

Nowadays, the only trouble with artists' books is, that they have gained the attention of museums and collectors. The sabbath dance of the signed/numbered, limited first editions has began. I hope with all my heart that finally, as usually happens, the amount of talent and production will surpass the amount of available capital. There will always remain a surplus of unsaleable beauty.

Daniel Buren

I am interested in books when their purpose or meaning fit with my interest, or when they teach me something or rectify some wrong concept I had, or look beautiful, or make no sense, or are extremely well done, no matter which is the classification or profession of the author. In connection with that, the majority of artists' books are meaningless.

Robert Delford Brown

One of the values of artists' books is that the calligraphic nature of words is being revived. Also, with drawn words, collage, and instantaneous printing techniques a vast new territory for innovation in communication has opened to people who are slathering at the mouth for a wild and woolly new frontier.

Robert Cumming

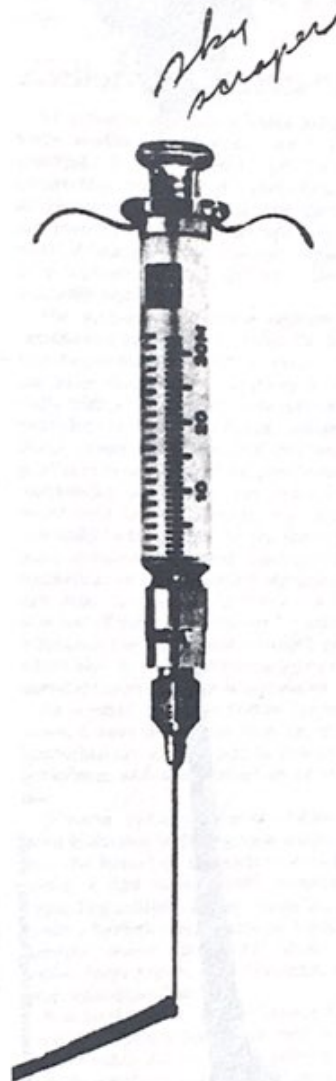
I lost the letter we talked about earlier, but tried to recall what it was about; it went something like this.

"I had a friend who graduated from college with a degree in English Lit., and he had a roommate with a degree in philosophy, and they both recently became conceptual artists. In conversations with museum directors and curators, I've come across three who ultimately define themselves as artistically ambitious; they're just artists sitting behind desks biding their time and waiting for the big break. . . further enumeration is no big news; performance artist/dancers, artist/writers, conceptual artist/philosophers and politicians, photographer/conceptualists, etc. etc., to the point of definition dilution.

I was a painter in my artistic adolescence, became a better sculptor and found photography simultaneously, moon-lighted as a Mail artist, did a book or two, became recognized as a conceptual artist and photographer, wrote a lot, now doing a little video, back into sculpture and may try out painting again this spring.

The open ground we now stand on is the result of the avante-garde's muscular grinding-down of the walls of specific media notions like life-long maturation and the idea of the masterpiece, craft, casting side glances at historical precedent. It took decades of conscientious revolutionary fervor applying the "Less is More" principle to get down to bedrock. Attainment is here and now; the dam is down and the floodplain is awash.

To extend the metaphor (God, we even banished metaphor), water/gravity factors level-off in time till a common level is reached. I hope the annotators of the '80s and later see us in good humor cause we all had a good time; dropped our palettes & brushes, kicked-away the easels, locked-up the garrets behind us, and saw for the first time with excitement our names in print, our faces on TV, got standing ovations stage-center in the spotlight. Now it can be



thing that will do

ected overnight cause craft is crummy and interferes with real communication.

I know this was supposed to be about books, but I've been feeling this weird compression of time the last couple of months ever since I found out that the properties of illusion I'd so painstakingly found out in my photographs had been set to paper by Galileo in the 1600s, and the cultural bind between puritanism vs. hedonism; Boston vs. L.A., was thrashed-out by St. Augustine in his "Confessions," 397 A.D. And that's my temperament this month."

. . . and words to that effect.

Ted Castle

Director, TVRT Press

The terrible thing about the concept of artists' books is that it contains all the radical flaws of the concepts of art, artist and book. Although the book is not a new invention, artists realize its advantages: it is portable, easily stored, relatively inexpensive and, thus, easily accessible. No other forms of art have these desirable advantages rolled into one, perhaps except for those which do not as yet exist. Thus we have the recent development of a plethora of all kinds of artists' books. This development is probably still in its infancy. Books have an aspect of being objects, but they hardly pretend to uniqueness. They are uniquely suited to the presentation of sequential material, having been invented for the presentation of the graddaddy of the time-arts, literature. Books are also good for storing records of experience.

Ever being on the lookout for new forms and on the lookout against banality, artists approach books warily, like a cat approaching a Christmas present, and once having gotten into it we seem to produce books like a dog produces dogshit, carefully depositing our books in certain places at the requisite moments for souvenirs. One of the problems with artists' books is that they are too easy to do. Another problem is that they are only regarded seriously if the artist works primarily in other ways. This is largely because most artists don't take the book form seriously. Many artists have a horror of literature, to which the concept book is highly indebted. Not always, but frequently, artists are people who have either been intimidated by books or who have despised books. Thus many of the books are as un-book-like as possible. This effect is closely linked to mythologies of language.

A brief not like this cannot begin to elucidate the preceding sentence. A consideration of such frequent usages as "vocabulary of painter" and "syntax of sculptor" may clarify what I mean. Having gotten over the novelty of it, I think we can embrace the book form and use it more effectively than as some kind of "Picasso guest towels."

Agnes Denes

For the past several years I have been working with nine books. These books are usually exhibited with my work to give access to other aspects of my art.

The book idea is a serial viewing procedure, with great possibilities for mapping structural/analytical processes, when contemplation of the material at hand is called for.

My work is an evolutionary process and my projects take years to complete. The books echo the various stages of development and change with each presentation. Structuralization and thought sequences become apparent in a way one would not be able to show in a "finished" work of art.

The books don't contain information as to what I had for breakfast or how I felt on a certain day (although it was a serious consideration at one time to record the

Skyscraper in the form of a hypodermic needle from Notes in Hand by Claes Oldenburg (detail)

seemingly endless row of disasters of the past years); these are organic notebooks in a constant state of flux and have to be seen anew each time. It's like watching a forest grow or a landscape change with the seasons. We see cross-sections of ideas move from simplicity to complexity, from disorder to order and vice versa. And so the books become manuals to my work—they show the intent along with the realization, they visualize underlying structures, the invisible processes of art making and reveal a very personal art experience.

Recently, the University of Akron published a book of my work, titled, *Sculptures of the Mind*. With the publication of the book I have allowed this constantly changing, evolving process to be arrested, or be frozen in time so-to-speak. We have sliced off a section of an evolutionary process in order to contemplate its implications. Enlarged for scrutiny, a sentence cut off from the rest of a text, motion caught in a still—the work has turned in on itself to become its own examiner.

We are dealing with two different kinds of books here. One analyzes the process, the other the self. They are both absolutely necessary for the total experience.

Published Books: *Sculptures of the Mind*, Emily H. Davis Art Gallery, University of Akron, 46 pp, 1976. *Paradox and Essence*, Tau/ma, Rome, 54 pp, 1976.

Peter Downsbrough

as relates to: page, pages—turn the page—read recto/verso verso/recto to place to locate on the page—pages and to handle—to write, to read and contain there on the page, here/there, a page—one after the other or before, to read—page, pages, a book

Mary Fish

Briefly, what I like best about making books is:

1. A book offers one alternative to how one disseminates art if it does not fit conveniently onto gallery walls or into gallery time. (My own work involves private performances of ritualized activities which extend over expanded periods of time.)
2. A book allows me to present both visual and verbal images sequentially, thus providing and imposed order or structure (perhaps I should compare it to the proverbial grid of formalist painting) which lends a coherence to what is otherwise seemingly very disparate information.
3. I "perform" my art. The book or documentation (in a very loose sense of the word) comes after the fact. Thus I have the freedom to expand and extend and more fully explore the ramifications of the particular piece I am doing the book about. Just as a book provides the reader/viewer with the luxury of time to peruse at leisure, the doing of the book allows me that same reflective gesture towards my piece.
4. I have in the past and am sometimes concurrently involved with the making of art objects, some of them very large. A

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from *A Few Palm Trees* by Ed Ruscha

book has come for me to have ever increasing advantages: it is easily shippable and packable. It does not break. It is even more easily stored. It is not heavy. It can be given as a remembrance to friends. In short—how nice to be able to carry around one's art in one's hand!

Jon Gibson

Artists' books are for artists who want to make artists' books and for people who enjoy looking at artists' books. For instance, Jon Gibson made an artists' book about some music he had written and he thinks many people will enjoy looking at it. It is being published by Printed Matter. They also have a record of his.

Peter Grass

Books can be repeated, translated and many places at once; are accessible, economic, compact and democratic; have authority, glamor and power in their large number; they cannot be burned (Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*).

The artists' books I am most interested in are pictures in book format. I prefer pictures over 'philosophical thought and scientific discoveries.' H.G. Wells wrote: 'Artistic productions, unlike philosophical thought and scientific discovery, are ornaments and expression rather than the creative substance of history. . .'

Post-Gutenberg artists' books share or should share the attributes of regular books. By using this powerful vehicle for ideas, artists' books can be effective in helping to release artistic productions from obscurity.

George Griffin

I have been making flipbooks of sequence drawings and photographs as outgrowth from and input for my animated films. These booklings allow one to read form and movement without the intermediating tyranny of the forward direction, 24 frames per second, darkened room, red "exit" sign, projection situation.

Reading a flipbook is an active, private act, requiring a certain degree of skill, by which synthetic or real time sequences are reconstructed at the reader's own speed.

Collating and binding, so close to the film editing process (which uses cement) can, in a flipbook, add another dimension of viewer choice. In one instance I use 2 Chicago binding posts which can be easily unscrewed and disassembled, hoping that readers will experiment with arranging the pages according to their own scenario.

As a highly accessible, even disposable artform, the flipbook subverts the elitist nature of the traditional art context and market. It is utterly useless under glass and must be manipulated, broken in, to be thoroughly enjoyed. It is a "novelty item," an heir to an honest tradition of popular diversion. . . like the movies.

Judith A. Hoffberg

Executive, Art Libraries Society of North America; manager, LAICA bookstore.

Artists' Books: Alternative or Real Thing

The "phenomenon" of the artist-produced book is now being explored, but is no longer a phenomenon. The Dadaist, Surrealist and related movements of the early 20th Century used books by artists as a significant medium of expression. But it was the 1960s that produced the "phenomenon" which only now is being recognized as important. The development of commercial printing and production technology created an impetus for artists to produce unlimited editions, which were inexpensive and widely distributable. Ed Ruscha was a pioneer in this venture, with work by Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Ian Burn, Oldenburg and Dick Higgins, among others, and the artist produced book developed into a Renais-

sance paralleling a graphic revival and interest in multiples. Ruscha's great foresight allowed him and others to see the book not only as artwork in itself, but a new source of income.

The book as an alternative to gallery and museum offerings allows a democratization of art, a decentralization of the art system, since books can be distributed through the mail, through artist-run shops, through friendship; books take up less room are portable, practical and democratic, and create a one-to-one relationship between consumer and artist, between owner and creator. The artist-produced book is not only an instrument of communication, but also an extension of the artists' vision achieved through mixed media. It is as permanent as the artist desires it to be, as ephemeral as a cloud, involving the owner in a solitary act.

As a librarian, it is not difficult for me to see that a well-stocked bookshelf could, in theory, be an art gallery or museum. The artist-produced book belies the new-fangled technology which is replacing the book with microforms. It has provided visibility for artists outside the mainstream, and more important, it permits the artist to present his or her work without the intervention of critics or other intermediaries. As Lucy Lippard has stated, "the additional need to find new vehicles for new esthetic ideas has led back to one of the oldest of all—the book is still the cheapest, most portable conveyor of ideas, even visual ones."

An international catalog and distribution service is being attempted for all artists' books. These once unprofitable items seem to be surfacing in more bookshops, and new systems for distributing artists' books are being forged by Franklin Furnace and Printed Matter.

The alternative has become the object—and the object is the book—and the book is produced by artists.

Douglas Huebler

Artists' books provide the most accessible and "off-the-wall" location for ideas/works whose essential form is not a function of traditional media, specific material or environment.

Alan Kaprow

When you consider artists' books, two kinds should be kept in mind: the book conceived as unique art work, and the book (like any other) that happens to be designed by an artist.

The first is a sort of pre-Gutenberg throwback, like a medieval manuscript. The second is a mass-produceable object that may incidentally be artfully designed.

Unless it turns out that the artist makes her or his living designing other people's books, the second kind usually will be related to, or specifically concerned with, art. Thus it will have a limited market and might as well be considered a unique object.

The major book companies will not touch either kind of artists' books for obvious financial reasons (with a few coffee table exceptions). But if many of these books and

pamphlets were accounted for around the world, it might be possible for a business to promote and sell them profitably, as a special interest line of the same order as science and technical publications. Scattered as they are now, there is no way for people to see them much less purchase them.

Richard Kostelanetz

As someone who made books before he made anything considered "art," I feel gratified, if not amused, by "artists" discovering the virtues of books—that they are cheap to make and distribute, that they are portable, that they are spatially economical (measured by extrinsic experience over intrinsic volume) and that they are infinitely replicable.

The economic difference between art-objects and book-objects is that the former need be purchased by only one person, while the latter needs many buyers to be financially viable. The trouble with commercial publishers is that they will not publish anything unless their salesmen can securely predict at least ten thousand purchasers. To commercial publishing, not even Robert Smithson's collected essays, say, are economically feasible. It is obvious that what is most necessary now are book-publishing companies and distributing agencies that can deal in smaller numbers and still survive. Thus, the literary world has witnessed the emergence of small presses which are, by now, publishing more consequential Literature than large presses.

As a small press proprietor for several years, I have discovered that the biggest headaches are distribution to sympathetic bookstores and then collection of moneys due.

Whereas sometime visual artists seem most interested in fitting their visual ideas into the format of a standard rectangular book, I find myself more interested in expanding initially literary ideas into other media—ladderbooks, oversized books, undersized books, newsprint books, card books, large prints, wall drawings, audiotape, videotape, film.

It is hard to know where "artists' books" begin and literary books end, and it would be self-defeating to draw definite lines, dividing territory, in advance of exploration and discovery.

My major quarrel with the category of "artists' books" is that it defines work by who did it, rather than the nature of the work itself. The term thus becomes an extension of the unfortunate community custom of defining an "artist" by his or her initial professional ambitions or, worse, his or her undergraduate major. Artistic categories should define work, rather than people, and the work at hand is books and book-related multiples, no matter who did them.

What would be most desirable now would be a situation where an artist-writer (or writer-artist) would feel equally comfortable about making an object, a performance, or a book, their choice of medium depending upon the perception and experience he or she wanted to communicate.

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"Fibonacci Igloo" from Fibonacci 1202 by Mario Merz

Sharon Kulik

Artists publishing their works in book form create an accessible format for their work to be seen more widely and rapidly, as well as creating a market for themselves should the books sell.

Apart from those factors a corresponding element arises by choice or chance: politics.

The political implications of an artist working entirely on his own, calling his shots about his work can be viewed in terms of Marxism and a revolt against the art establishment middle men who have been known in the past to bleed artists through profit making and dictatorial decisions regarding the artist's work and "reputation."

Publishing works is a spontaneous extension of the piece/s involved, free from the established art business aggravations, and it returns the power and authority back to the artist regarding his decisions about his creations.

Robert Leverant

Basic difficulty: My belief is that today people don't read, and if they do read, they have no time to read. The books I am involved with use this premise. They are more like TV commercials than TV shows.

Positive: I believe it is important for the artist/writer to design their own book, rather than another person, rather than be part of a process. It is more whole to the individual creator and "creation," i.e. the product, i.e., the book. Each book content-wise is unique, why is the form the same? Form is content and content is form.

Aesthetic: The sequential nature of the book and the montage of facing pages makes the book form a filmic medium. The most successful visual or silent book I know is *Cover to Cover* by Michael Snow, a filmmaker.

Sol LeWitt

Artists' books are, like any other medium, a means of conveying art ideas from the artist to the viewer/reader. Unlike most other media they are available to all at a low cost. They do not need a special place to be seen. They are not valuable except for the ideas they contain. They contain the material in a sequence which is determined by the artist. (The reader/viewer can read the material in any order but the artist presents it as s/he thinks it should be). Art shows come and go but books stay around for years. They are works themselves, not reproductions of works. Books are the best medium for many artists working today. The material seen on the walls of galleries in many cases cannot be easily read/seen on walls but can be more easily read at home under less intimidating conditions. It is the desire of artists that their ideas be understood by as many people as possible. Books make it easier to accomplish this.

Lucy Lippard

One of the reasons artists' books are important to me is their value as a means of spreading information—content, not just esthetics. In particular they open up a way for women artists to get their work out without depending on the undependable museum and gallery system (still especially

undependable for women). They also serve as an inexpensive vehicle for feminist ideas. I'm talking about communication but I guess I'm also talking about propaganda. Artists' books spread the word—whatever that word may be. So far the content of most of them hasn't caught up to the accessibility of the form. The next step is to get the books out into the supermarkets, where they'll be browsed by women who wouldn't darken the door of Printed Matter or read *Heresies* and usually have to depend on Hallmark for their gifts. I have this vision of feminist artists' books in school libraries (or being passed around under the desks), in hairdressers, in gynecologists' waiting rooms, in Girl Scout Cookies. . . .

Christof Kohlhofer

Books are a very unifying thing: wise guys 'n' idiots can write them and even blind, deaf and dumb can read them.

Jane Logemann

The inexpensive paperback art book presented as a work by the artist is long overdue in our so-called equal opportunity society. These books also can't help but destroy a certain pejorative stereotype of the contemporary artist as a dealer in arcane and inaccessible ideas. This medium gives the artist a chance to bypass a decadent and closed art distribution system. It provides a new space for the propagation and reception of art ideas.

Paul McMahon

Lots of artists are publishing books (by themselves). Books have certain advantages over art works in other media. They are relatively inexpensive to mass produce. And they suggest alternative systems of distribution. It is interesting to consider artists' books from the point of view of merchandising, because it forces one to imagine the demands of a wider market than other artists. At present other artists are the primary audience for new art. The artist today is insulated in the art community, which acts in some respects as an asylum. The public regards artists at a distance, separated from the masses by their harmless although potentially disturbing actions. How do artworks touch the rest of the culture? Artists disseminate artifacts in book form.

The book has disadvantages as a medium of artistic production. It is regarded as a carrier of art. Therefore the book itself is boring. Some artists try to counteract this by referring to the book as a book. Stupidity enters the picture somewhere around here. *A* and *the* by Andy Warhol are books that bridge the gap mentioned above. *A* slightly to one side, *the* apparently slightly to the other. Many books by artists function well as art works. A few books by critics function well as advocacy for kinds of art. Books are, however, a relatively quiet medium.

Robert Morgan

Artists' books are not art books are not books to be read. The revolution in the printed page is sometimes electric, the reproduction that fits the image, makes the image numerous, is visible as the structure it represents. These books are meant to be turned, are curved, from page to page; the book may be revolved—it is the rhythm of the swim, the toehold in uneven space. Select the image, dissolve it, reveal it—repeat the sequence, its meaning, once found. What is seen is heard, in a sense, reverberated thru pages like walls, forwards and backwards, either way; that is the revolution to which words do not speak, only images in relationship, in place; we look at what we see page by page; the time it takes to view is the compression of a material instant in order to hear it.

Mauritio Nannuci

artist and director, Zona, Florence

It was around the sixties that there occurred a wide diffusion of artistic operations which found a productive place only on the edge of that which is called—rightly or wrongly—mass culture, because these expressions were deemed either too specialized or too new to be taken up immediately either by the general public or by those sectors more specifically interested in experimentation.

This coincided with the realization by many cultural operators that art cannot be limited to the fabrication of discrete works, but rather that alternate categories must be marked out so as to create new connections in their work, widening the distribution of their research.

Consequently there has been a whole series of initiatives concerning books, records, photographs, videotape, rubber stamp, postal messages, telephones, and film, but the phenomenon of largest proportions, closely connected to all the others, have been the "small press scene" and "book as artwork", which have made it possible for those artists, poets, architects, and musicians engaged in experimentation to avoid any sort of external interference and to have at their disposal an autonomous instrument with which to spread their own work and ideas, and which at the same time serves to link together operators and analogous research topics.

Thus self-managed editorial enterprises have sprung up everywhere, supporting original contributions and favoring the diffusion of new artistic experiences; they have determined one of the rare moments of synchronization of creativity and communication.

Richard Nonas

I was an anthropologist writing a book about Papago Indians; trying to communicate two years of their and my lives with words—and I couldn't do it; didn't even want to do it. Words seemed too specific,

too pointed. They carried more and less meaning than I wanted. They were always too personal. They were nobody's business but mine. So I stopped. And I made sculpture.

And that was better; more general, more diffuse, more ambiguous—but also more immediate. People could trip over them.

Yet something was lost. Something important to me: a narrative quality that moves and excites me. Something I can't get and don't want in my sculpture. It's a temporal quality; specific memories used as building blocks in sculpture that snakes through time.

So I make books too. But differently than I did before. My books are like sculpture now; built for the same reasons and in the same way. They aim at the same ambiguous feelings, work with the same not quite regular forms and the same preshaped materials—they are objects; objects to deal with. But, they do what my sculpture can't: they jump, they move, they snake with the richness of real incident—they are the space between the sculptures.

Adrian Piper

Cheap Art Utopia

Suppose art was as accessible to everyone as comic books? as cheap and as available? What social and economic conditions would this state of things presuppose?

(1) It would presuppose a conception of art that didn't equate spatiotemporal uniqueness with aesthetic quality. People would have to be able to discriminate quality in art without the trappings of preciousness, e.g. the gilt frame, the six-figure price tag, the plexiglass case, the roped-off area around the work, etc.

(2) It would presuppose a different economic status for artists. Since art would be cheap and accessible, artists could no longer support themselves by receiving high prices for their work. Their situation would be comparable to that of writers, for whom first editions, original manuscripts and the like play virtually no economic role during their own lifetime.

(3) Therefore art dealers would bear much the same sort of economic relationship to artists that agents bear to writers: perhaps just as symbiotic (we should no longer fool ourselves into thinking of the relationship as parasitic), but not nearly as lucrative an enterprise as art dealing is now. Economically, artists' and art dealers' profits would diminish proportionally.

(4) Since artists' revenue would depend more on volume of sales than on making a killing on the yearly masterpiece, artists would gradually feel increasingly disposed to make their work palatable or relevant to a larger segment of society than that which now constitutes the art world. Some would equate this increased popularity (literally) with a decline in aesthetic quality; these individuals would become bitter, dogmatically elitist, and comfort themselves with the thought that their work represented the last bastion of aesthetic integrity. Others would find that this state of things no longer fueled their images of themselves as rare and special persons, and so would



From top to bottom: Catalogue by Gilbert & George; Notes on Water by Joseph Kosuth; Sonora Cows by Richard Nomas; Walls paper by Gordon Matta-Clark

dessert art for flagpole-sitting.

(5) Artists would get feedback on their work from this larger segment of society, and no longer just from the relatively small, highly-educated percentage of the population that have the leisure and developed aesthetic inclination to frequent museums and galleries and read art magazines. This would be a particularly unpleasant experience for those artists whose work requires for its appreciation the advanced cultural education on which it currently feeds.

(6) The social role of art critics would be invested with greater responsibility because they would be legislating aesthetic standards (as they always do in fact) for a much larger audience, the political and economic orientation of which would be very different from that of the current art audience.

(7) It would be easier for more artists to publicize their work without going through the political process of selection now required (i.e. where you went to art school, who you know, where you live, whether you've gotten "written up" and by whom and where, who you've slept with, where you hang out, etc.). So new, *aesthetic* standards would have to evolve in order to discriminate mediocre from first-rate work, rather than the standard of simply having been sifted through this process itself. Also, people would actually have to develop these new standards themselves instead of leaving all the hard work to critics, since there would not be enough famous critics to pass judgement on all the work.

(8) The social responsibility of artists would increase proportionally with that percentage of the population her or his work affected. Some artists would meet this challenge by becoming more conscious of, and exerting more control over, the social implications of their work. Others would get scared and retreat to the old "Don't-ask-me - I - just - make - the - stuff - God - works-through-me" routine. Still others would run for President.

Distributing art in books would make it as cheap and accessible as comic books. And that would change a lot of things.

Lucio Pozzi

Books have a time structure built in them, because, unless they are of the foldable kind, you can never perceive them all at once. Books also normally have standard sizes, even though one could, if one wanted, make baseballfield-sized or microscopic books.

Books can be burned. They are, more often than not, transportable. When one doesn't have time to read them, one can stack very many of them on shelves and either use them as a reference or as a reminder.

Artists' books are easy to read because they often are a translation in word codes of non-literary experiences. Many artists' books are only visual experiences—basically cartoon kinetic products. If it includes words, an artists' book becomes a sculpture or a painting when it is made in such a way that you cannot open it and read what is inside it. It ceases to be an artist's book



from *Learning to Swim (Le Style Français)* by Robert Magoon

when the artist, carried away by enthusiasm, extends his/her book to poem, short story or novel size. A long artist-written story is a novel. The artist thus becomes a novelist. Maybe, if the novel were very long—say a thirty volume story (600 pages per volume, all filled with text, 10 pt. type)—then maybe it would become an artists' book again and the artist would not be a novelist anymore and be reinstated in his/her artist status.

Marcia Resnick

Dear Edit and Michael,

When I wake up in the morning I take a shower, brush my teeth, drink a cup of coffee and phone my printer. I have been doing this for one and one half years, since I first decided to self-publish three books: *Landscape*, *See*, and *Tahitian Eve*. I am still waiting for the printing job to be completed. Due to limited funds, I was

forced to cut the enormous costs for printing books of photographs by sacrificing quality and professionalism in production.

After the initial series of printing mishaps, I received my first batch of books and entered the "quality control" stage of book publishing. I examined every single book for printing errors. About 50% of the books passed inspection. I then embarked upon my distribution campaign and soon was to find myself inundated in vast quantities of papers, invoices, bills, sheets of corrugation, brown wrapping paper, cord and packing tape. Months later, confused and disillusioned, I took the papers, invoices and bills, neatly wrapped them, instead of my books, with the corrugation, brown wrapping paper, cord and packing tape, sent the bundle off to a corner of my loft and resigned as my own distributor. One year later, Printed Matter picked up where I left off.

Though disillusioned, I still believed and still do believe in the art book as an art form. It is an art form which has the auspicious quality of bypassing the politics of the art gallery and is an expedient way of vicariously disseminating ideas to a large public, not just to the select few who purchase art. After an art book is purchased, it can be perceived in a time-space arena that is totally unknown to the artist and is thus incorporated in the mental and physical world of the perceiver. But in order to sustain this art form must artists continue to invest large amounts of money in their books, only to find that Jaap Reitman will purchase five books outright and the rest of the world will accept books on consignment? Why are there no grants for individual artists to produce artists' books (CAPS photography grants stipulate that monies cannot be utilized for the production of books)? Aren't books, like sculpture, dimensional art objects? Why then are art books not commissioned as sculptures are?

Book stores will not purchase artists' books because there is no market for such a thing as an art book with its all too often obscure content range. In a culture where the only book people read is the TV guide and where bibles are no longer made of paper and ink but are manufactured by SONY and Panasonic, the aesthetic experience can now be attained without suffering the arduous task of turning pages.

Then what, other than education and organized attempts to create markets, will sustain the Artists' Book?

- 1) Someone might invent a motorized page turning apparatus (Laurie Anderson has done some work with wind in this area).
- 2) The one page book might attract a larger market. Thus, the public can be spoon fed one book over a long period of time (in this way, many who ordinarily never read novels have ploughed through as many as five chapters by the likes of Kathy Acker and Connie DeJong).
- 3) Art-Book of the month club—a way to save precious dollars while building an art book library.
- 4) Readers Digest-type condensed Art Books (*The Finest from the Fox*, for

E 1.35
 C 6.1
 D 1.14
 A 1.33
 A 1.39
 A 1.21
 A 00.30
 A 00.33
 A 00.50
 A 00.57
 A 00.32
 A 00.79
 A 00.47
 A 00.42
 A 00.79
 A 00.33
 A 00.33
 A 00.25
 A 00.29
 A 00.41
 A 00.36
 A 00.59
 A 00.41
 A 00.59
 A 00.34
 A 00.37
 A 1.39
 A 1.39
 A 1.35
 A 1.56
 A 1.08

example).

5) Academy Awards for Artists' Books, with categories such as Best Book, Best Foreign Book, Best Printer, Best Special Effects, Best Male Book Artist and Best Female Book Artist (Jeffrey Lew should perhaps be commissioned to design the trophy).

Writing this letter has afforded me my digital therapy for the morning. My fingers feel refreshed and strong. I think I'll sign off. I'm ready to suffer the arduous task of turning a page in a book I am reading.

affectionately
Marcia Resnick

The Roseprint Detective Club

"A BOOK IS TO MAKE USE OF BOTH SIDES OF A PIECE OF PAPER, OR INBETWEEN"

Carolee Schneemann

Carolee Schneemann as Self-Publisher

how to be out and stay in or out is my story, ours we're in touch thru the effort I provide the means the method cheap&simple available books / first 1972 *Parts of a Body House Book* at Beau Geste's mimeopress then 1975 *Cezanne, She was a Great Painter* my corner copyhouse edition of 300 sold out for 2nd edition of 500 now (soon) a 3rd / contact by rumor word of mouth a few lucky mentions the obscure shops (not those ART bkstrs, where dealers look blankly hold the book like a damp rat say... not enough photographs / not enough text/in any case not for us!) and still now adjust my intention to what is possible for someone with no gallery affiliation in usa no income from works for awhile unemployment checks to ease... but income? from books? is information/response. the disproportionate effort: to sell at \$3 w/cost per 1.50 then envelopes postage trips to PO the cottage industry attention one by one & taking/placing ten here ten there income? minus cost plus effort... still worth it!

John Shaw

An artist who sits down to look at his own book feels the air move across his face as he turns the pages.

Bob Smith

Director, LAICA
"Alternative" Publications in an
"Alternative" Space—A Report

In an effort to redefine the functions of an institution devoted to contemporary art, LAICA (Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art) has experimented with differing combinations of organizational structures and programs. While guest curators were given *carte blanche* by the dozen and guest editors given "total authority" for the LAICA-financed non-house organ *Journal*, most exhibitions tended to look like "muse-

um" shows and the magazine like most other magazines. The cause of these prosaic beginnings can mostly be attributed to the paucity of local activity (museum exhibitions). It is difficult to be an alternative when there is nothing to be an alternative to. True, this process has produced an unusual variety of programs, but most succumbed to the "see only the old environment while in the new environment" McLuhan phenomenon.

The LAICA *Journal*, after almost three years of publication, has found no singular purpose or function. It has provided a historical focus and identity for regional art, but questions concerning support, staffing and content abound. What are the new imperatives for an alternative art magazine in Southern California? Will the *Journal* find its home? Will another Douglas Fir go down for the sake of *Artforum* or *Art in America* rejects? A managing editor, Michael Auping, has recently been appointed to provide continuity within the guest editor concept.

Like their museum ancestors, LAICA's exhibition catalogs have tended to reinforce the position of the institution and curator in the name of documentation. Some have directly involved the artist in essays and interviews, but the need to more accurately define work by encouraging more artist participation in preparing essays for idea-specific (thematic) exhibitions is increasingly apparent. Artist-specific exhibitions often offer the opportunity for the creation of artists' publications in lieu of documentation. An artist's book, a work in its own right, can have greater validity in representing the artist than easily misread photographs and second-hand interpretation.

The implications of a growing interest in artists' publications, periodicals and other information indicate profound changes in the way exhibitions are produced and perceived. Many artists have produced autonomous publications as part of exhibitions. The Institute for Art and Urban Resources recently sponsored a magazine show in *Artforum*. LAICA has plans for exhibitions that appear in publication form only. Art librarians, trained in the organization and dissemination of printed materials, will surely take a central role in the "museums" of the future.

Pat Steir

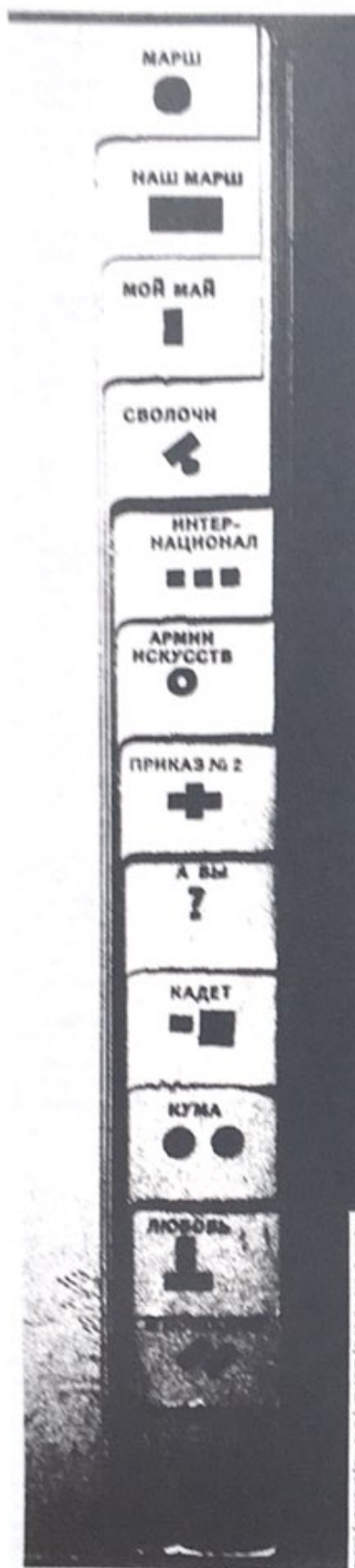
for *Printed Matter, Inc.*

I like artists' books because they are:

1. portable
2. durable
3. inexpensive
4. intimate
5. non-precious
6. replicable
7. historical
8. universal

Ellen Sragow

The book form is the appropriate medium for much of the narrative art being produced and it allows an artist's statement to reach



From For the Voice by Lashley and Margherita (Spain)

an audience outside of the gallery audience. It is more accessible financially and physically.

Ted Stamm

The book is an encapsulated format in which to exploit the multiple variations of a specific idea. For this reason I have executed and remain interested in books.

Peter Stansbury

It is quite simply the problem of locating the market. Even if you blanket mail every locatable individual interested in art, most of the mailing will be wasted, and advertising is equally expensive and wasteful. But there seems to be no alternative. Our solution so far has been to combine those two with an ordinary over-the-counter retail shop, whereby advertising, mailing and point-of-sale all serve each other. Also I think that the more people who become aware of artists' books the greater the number who'll buy; in a sense we have to create the market.

Richard Tuttle

Dear Mimi,
There is no book.

Richard Tuttle

Dear Edit,
Here's the letter. Let me know if there is anything else. Love to you

Mimi

Fred Truck

in my view, the issues related to artists' books are 2, namely the mechanical process of reproduction, & 2) the final form what is reproduced takes.

in terms of the mechanical process involved, offset is almost universally utilized because of quality & economic factors. what is often overlooked however, is the availability of color reproduction—if the size of the work, pagewise (not sizewise, but numberwise), is kept small, loads of color can be used. in addition, few artists are familiar enough w/what different types of presses will do. web presses, those fed by roll, will do 4 colors on both sides in 1 shot thru the press, but the finish size, unless you wish to waste a lot of paper, is inflexible. sheetfed presses, on the other hand, offer flexibility in size, but require more passes through the press for color, & therefore waste is accrued. also, assuming all things are equal, the larger the press, the easier it is to maintain high quality production standards. as I am a pressman by trade, I speak from experience. I've had it w/A.B. Dicks, Multi's, Chiefs, etc.

in terms of the second issue, the final form the printed material takes, I find the past history of written texts to be instructive. the Aztec & Mayan codices, the Mixtec folded screen books, splashed w/color offer alternatives to the book form. the diptychs, triptychs etc. & the illuminated manuscripts of the Medieval period are inspira-

tional. I also find the Chinese position challenging—the artist-poet often was not only responsible for the ink painting, but the calligraphy that went w/it. this position offers the possibility for collaboration.

Lawrence Weiner

THEY (BOOKS) ARE PERHAPS THE LEAST IMPOSITIONAL MEANS OF TRANSFERRING INFORMATION FROM ONE TO ANOTHER (SOURCE)

Robin Winters

Freedom of Sleep
OR
Cancer of the mouth

The government should print 500 copies of any book which a citizen wishes to have printed on a non-discriminatory basis. There should be a re-printing of any book which is out of print & in public demand. All books should be free, and all authors should receive a fee of \$5 dollars per page of manuscript.

(The above suggestion would apply as well to film photography music performance dance etc. with varying services and varying price & production considerations)

I would like to further suggest that the wealth be divided equally (wealth includes money property industry etc.) and that there be a massive identity bank destruction in every country no more passports no more borders no more police no more jails no more courts no more laws.

Electricity should be as free as water. Power to the People. The Ruling Class can kiss my ass.

PS. Here are some books I am reading right now.

- Marinetti *Selected Writings*
- *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Fredrick Engels
- *Victory* Joseph Conrad
- *Selected Writings* Blaise Cendrars
- *Europe on \$5 a day* Arthur Frommer
- *The Management of Pain* John J. Bonicia, M.D.
- *Defiled* by Walter-Jeremy Lipp
- *Against Nature* J.K. Huysmans
- *Impressions of Africa*, Raymond Roussel

Rachel Youdelman

For some artists, the use of commercial printing equipment is an extension of the traditional hand-etching and lithography methods of printmaking.

For others, it is a means of expressing concepts whose appropriateness is unmatched by other media.

Whatever the motivation, the graphic-multiple-as-art-object, produced with commercial printing equipment, lends itself to being less "precious," more affordable, more accessible to its audience, and more portable.

Modern technology itself has made traditional painting and sculpture appear to be hopelessly anachronistic; but at last—and perhaps most significantly—artists are able to view technology as a great resource rather than to perceive it as a threat to their existence.