



Blood on Paper: the Art of the Book
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Books and Artists

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Blood on Paper aims to show a selection of works by outstanding artists and publishers – active today and in the recent past – that take the form of books. The artists have all made their reputations through work other than books, that is to say in painting, sculpture, photography or some other medium. Together, they are among the major figures that define Art today. Some of the works in *Blood on Paper* are in traditional formats: they are similar to books that surround most people in their homes and offices. Others may come as a surprise: they take as their starting point the figurative or allegorical idea of the book – the book as container, as order, as a sign and prompt for memories – to produce works which echo the functions of books.

Artists' books have often been presented in terms of surveys or catalogues – recent examples include the New York Museum of Modern Art's *Century of Artists Books* in 1994–5, San Francisco's *Artists Books in the Modern Era, 1870–2000* in 2001, and the Fondation Maeght's *De l'écriture à la peinture* in 2004. The approach of *Blood on Paper* is different. Rather than rely on chronology, it seeks to allow each work to be appreciated on its own terms.

Blood on Paper shows a remarkable diversity of approaches by contemporary artists. It makes clear just how many of the greatest artists of today and the recent past have engaged with books. Selection was governed by a desire to show works that were particularly revealing of the creative processes of the artists involved, this at a time when the variety of technological possibilities was increasing and the future of books themselves questioned. Quite apart from traditional typesetting with 'hot metal' or computer typesetting, there is now digital photography and the display screen. Some artists accept the traditional form of the book, while others use the *idea* of 'The Book' as a vehicle for their work

Few institutions can give a comprehensive account of contemporary and recent artists' books from their own collections. For *Blood on Paper*, substantial support from private collectors, artists and publishers has been crucial: their generosity has allowed rarely seen works to be viewed and recorded in the catalogue. The selection remains a curator's view of some

significant ways in which today's outstanding artists have considered the matter of books.

Are there any useful definitions of what constitutes an artist's book? Artists have been involved in producing books for centuries. Rubens provided title-pages, and François Boucher encouraged the use of his images to illustrate books. There was something rather different when Delacroix produced his illustrations for Goethe's *Faust* in 1828, in that these used the new technology of lithography and appeared as paintings. These summed up the theatrical and satanic quality of the text, attracting both outrage and praise from art critics (Goethe was enthusiastic). Manet's treatment of another avant-garde text, Edgar Allan Poe's *Le Corbeau / The Raven* in 1875 was a similar case. But it becomes a little facile to assume that we have an artist's book each time an artist is commissioned to provide some element of a publication. There was a cult of de luxe books provided for a collectors' market in the late nineteenth century – editions were produced for French bibliophiles from the 1870s that were numbered and richly designed and ornamented; both English and French books were celebrated as examples of the 'Art Nouveau' style that swept Europe from the 1890s. In this environment, the picture dealer Ambroise Vollard decided to become a publisher. His originality was to link up his artists with book production, and to focus on texts that were of interest to the more adventurous literary circles of his day. He was followed, as the conventional account goes, by the dealer that promoted Cubism, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. This tradition of fine printing was virtually canonised for the Anglo-Saxon world by the 1936 exhibition of Monroe Wheeler at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, *Modern Painters and Sculptors as Illustrators*.

By the 1930s, a review of artists' books would include those in the Vollard tradition, beautifully printed by the most accomplished printers in Paris with innovative texts and work by artists whose reputation dominated avant-garde circles. Books of this kind very often insist on the successful union of the writer and artist, on text and image. Also prominent were books that sought to give renewed vigour to traditional book-making practices by using new typefaces and applying time-hallowed woodcut ornament to admired texts – Count Harry Kessler would be a good example. There was also a host of works produced by trade methods for artists to further their polemics – the Surrealist works in this vein were heirs to Soviet Constructivists, Italian Futurists, and adherents of Dada.

What is the situation today? There are still works that are impeccably printed on high quality specialist paper, where the artist might either provide illustrations in response to a text or use the surfaces for their own images and gestures. There are still cheaply produced works by which artists seek to transmit their ideas outside the network of collectors, galleries and art publishers. But there is a greater readiness to transform the idea of 'The Book' into sculptural forms and to guide the experience of using books by carefully considered packaging. Perhaps it can also be said that there is a freedom on the part of some artists to get through to the heart of what books are about by disregarding formats altogether, so that the joyful gestures that accompany a text on a page can also be writ large upon a wall. Given that

books are enormously complicated to produce, those which show total control by the artist and which realise most fully his or her vision are those which give most satisfaction. Some artists take the whole matter of production into their own hands. Where conventional publishing processes are involved, one looks for the extent to which the production routines of printers have served or dominated the artist. And in this environment, the role of the publisher might be deemed to be as crucial as that of the artist. The technical descriptions in the *Blood on Paper* catalogue are designed to make clear the wide range of skills and processes on which the production of a book relies.

How is the exhibition *Blood on Paper* organised? It begins with a majestic and arresting work by Kiefer, *The Secret Life of Plants*, that acts as a summons and refers at the same time to the conclusion of the display. Alongside this book are iconic works that defined the genre of *livres d'artistes* after 1945, books which signalled French dominance in the field. Matisse's *Jazz* of 1947, produced by the method that the publisher Tériade had encouraged the artist to develop, and Picasso's *Deux Contes* reflected a standard that was much emulated internationally. Tériade's publication of Giacometti's *Paris sans fin* (1969) encapsulates the milieu from which these works emerged. A more inventive streak is seen in the publications of Iliaszd, both his celebration of Dada in *Poésie de mots inconnus* and in Miró's *Courtisan grotesque*. The latter revels in what pigments on paper can achieve, and the former translates the noises and shouts of Dada into typography. If the publishing background was similar, quite a different agenda was served by Dubuffet's *Les Murs*, where founts used for advertising appear next to images of dilapidated urbanism.

Facing these largely Paris productions are books from a very different environment, one that provides a distant echo of the notion that 'New York stole the idea of modern art'. The Rauschenberg book was produced by Tatyana Grosman's celebrated Universal Limited Art Editions near New York, while the *1 ¢ Life* of Sam Francis and Walasse Ting joined up artists from the COBRA group, New York, Paris and elsewhere to produce a work overflowing with spontaneous energy, remote from the careful finesse of what Tériade would have admired. The difference is underscored by works placed in this exhibition next to *1 ¢ Life*, the humble publications of Edward Ruscha, Sol LeWitt and Dieter Roth, all of them of Minimalist and Conceptualist sympathies and seeking new means of circulating their messages. Sol LeWitt's modular grids, shown here by juxtaposing geometric colour figures with sunrises, achieve a full power as a prefatory framing device that readers experience as they read Borges' *Ficciones*. Paul McCarthy's reworking in 2003 of the International Situationist publication of Guy Debord and Asker Jorn, *Mémoires*, hauls the political and artistic polemic of the 1950s back into the twenty-first century.

The juxtaposition of works by Richard Long and Daniel Buren at the end of this section contrasts two artists associated with interventions in 'the great out-doors'. The differences between someone famed for recording walks in words, maps and photographs and another who imposes a set grid of stripes at 'strategic' points in our visual universe makes the comparison surprising

and fruitful. Buren's *D'une impression l'autre* takes us to the heart of his enterprise in a way that only a book can. Richard Long's *Walking and Sleeping* guides us through seven walks in different countries with his straight words and beautiful memories encapsulated in black and white photographs.

The next sections of the exhibition are structured around an aisle marked at one end by the *New Religion* cabinets of Damien Hirst and at the other by three books by Anselm Kiefer, flanked by the book-mural *Naiv* of Not Vital and the *Wound* of Anish Kapoor. The works of Kiefer and Hirst show the creation and modernisation of mythologies, that of Hirst supplemented by smaller publications that enshrine his philosophy. The *New Religion* cabinets are containers; like medieval chests they house artworks and give them the character of sacred relics. The cabinets are flanked by two enormously imposing books of Chillida, linked together by the Ivory Press publication of drawings and photographs by Isamu Noguchi. Both artists are renowned for monumental sculptures in open-air environments. These last works show how the message of artists no longer alive can be loyally re-created and presented today. In the case of Chillida's *Reflections*, the role of his son, Ignacio, a collaborator of the artist for more than twenty-four years, was essential during the process of design and the production of the book. Also crucial was the participation in the concept of the Noguchi book of Bonnie Rychlak, an artist herself, assistant for years to Isamu Noguchi and currently the curator of the Noguchi Foundation in New York. Further examples of this can be seen with the *Detritus* of Francis Bacon, of which the concept and design is due to the artist Brian Clarke, and with *Projekt Westmensch* of Joseph Beuys, both works that take us to the heart of the working methods of these artists.

There is a contrast in the next two sections, which face each other across the aisle that leads from the Hirst cabinets to the Kiefer books. In one are extraordinary examples of artists as illustrators: Baselitz, Balthus, Louise Bourgeois, Paula Rego and Tom Phillips have all taken over texts through their images. They are arranged around a new work by Richard Tuttle, *NotThePoint*, a series of books containing texts about colour (the artist insists that the colours themselves are the authors). These are set in a delicate stand resembling the belly of a mandolin. The disposition of the books suggests a balance between order and disorder, the rational and the irrational.

Opposite these works is the *Danger* book of Cai Guo-Qiang, a work which threatens to explode if not opened with care. In apposition to potential destruction are works which suggest future directions. One goes back in time: the *Livre des portes* of the poet Pierre Leconte de Lisle is printed on papyrus, one of the oldest surfaces used for writing, to carry a majestic text set in architectural shadows. Another uses photography housed in modern plastics – the photographs of Bustamante show peripheral landscapes of human habitat matched by powerful texts of Bellatin in anguished contortions. Contemporary forms of consumerism are the subject of a commercial paperback designed by Jeff Koons, published jointly by Thames & Hudson and the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, one where the artist comments at length on his work in an

environment he himself designed. Another form of consumerism appears in the work of Martin Parr, *Benidorm*, a series of photographs mounted in an album but still a limited edition of ten; the message of this format is that we can all make artists' books.

The final section provides a climax to the exhibition. In reply to Hirst's cabinets containing works that dress up in contemporary garb elements of Christian iconography, we meet the qualities of permanence suggested in Kiefer's books, that is to say the qualities of the physical and organic world which will outlive us all. There is permanence too in the sculptures of Anthony Caro, though here they carry as their 'open secret' poems by the combative German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger and passages from Shakespeare in Caro's own hand. As in the east end of a cathedral, the mural of Not Vital and the mounted sheets of Anish Kapoor's *Wound* provide a visual climax.

What, finally, of the title, *Blood on Paper*? In some cases it is literal. Edward Ruscha's *Stains* contains sheets bearing his own blood. In this exhibition, it is placed as a comment on the works in Hirst's *New Religion*, with its images of Christ, systematically tortured as a sign of humanity's ability to destroy what is good in itself. Anish Kapoor's *Wound* again bears a direct reference to the cutting open of the body or the soul. Blood is omnipresent in Christian iconography: it is the means of redemption and the sacrifice necessary to achieve it. In English, the word takes on the meaning of regeneration ('new blood'), of youthful passion ('young blood') or exuberant human energy ('young bloods'). But perhaps above all it signifies commitment and passion ('blood boils over'). Printing has always been an extraordinarily physical and intense activity. Conversations with anyone who produces artists' books will show that they are driven by a passion and by an obsessive interest in every aspect of materials used, from papers and inks to sewing threads and boards, quite apart from founts and pigments.

This is the quality that the title *Blood on Paper* seeks to express. It takes its cue from one of the most extraordinary and celebrated artists' books ever produced, Vollard's *Parallèlement* of 1900, where Paul Verlaine's sensuous poetry was printed against rich red lithographs of unparalleled sensuality, a work of passion and of the palpitating body in every sense. It can be no accident that the colour red was the first to be used to articulate texts written in dark inks. From medieval times, red was the colour that made texts navigable: it was used for capital letters, for rubrics, for headings and for the ornament that articulated the text. Red will be found throughout the works in *Blood on Paper*. In each case it has a message waiting to be decoded.

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Artists' books (or book arts) are works of art that utilize the form of the book. They are often published in small editions, though they are sometimes produced as one-of-a-kind objects. Artists' books have employed a wide range of forms, including the traditional Codex form as well as less common forms like scrolls, fold-outs, concertinas or loose items contained in a box. Artists have been active in printing and book production for centuries, but the artist's book is primarily a late 20th-century phenomenon. Artists' books are books made or conceived by artists. There are fine artists who make books and book artists who produce work exclusively in that medium, as well as illustrators, typographers, writers, poets, book binders, printers and many others who work collaboratively or alone to produce artists' books. Many artists' books are self-published, or are produced by small presses or by artists' groups or collectives, usually in limited editions. Artists' books that maintain the 30 books based on 5 votes: Portraits: Talking with Artists at the Met, the Modern, the Louvre and Elsewhere by Michael Kimmelman, The Negative by Ansel A...
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