



cunning chapters

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A collaborative artists' book

On display in the Entrance
Hall of the British Library

25 October – 31 December 2007

Thirteen contemporary artists experiment with words, type, visual text and sound to create a unique collaborative artists' book.

There has been much recent debate about how professional conservators should approach artists' intention to use ephemeral materials, to deliberately build into their endeavour eventual loss of information. In attempting archival stability, do we interrupt an artistic process which intends auto-destruction of the object?

Cunning Chapters uses a range of materials that are meant to deteriorate: wood block on newsprint, for example, plant-based colours, papers eaten by snails, buried and excavated manuscripts, rusting staples. It includes these materials alongside those which are long-lasting: rag papers, permanent inks, a linen-stitched and Coptic binding.

The 'chapters' of the work are thematically linked by ideological concerns of 'well-madness', loss and conservation in the production of artwork, using a combination of technologies.

Cunning Chapters is produced by artist-curators Susan Johanknecht and Katharine Meynell.

This display should be appreciated alongside the British Library's new Centre for Conservation accessible from the first floor. The Centre offers an exhibition **Conservation Uncovered** as well as a free behind-the-scenes programme where you can see conservators at work on caring for the Library's collections of book, paper and sound. Conservation has been described variously as 'managing change', 'managing loss' and 'managing deterioration'. The contemporary exhibits of **Cunning Chapters** have been made with the active intention of deterioration. Conservation generally is about managing the inevitable process of entropy and loss.

About the Chapters and their artists

Georgios Boudalis

The repair

Georgios Boudalis' text accounts for the 17th and 18th century repair of book bindings in the St Catherine's Library in the Sinai. This monastery, founded in the 6th century, may be the oldest library in the world still functioning in its original place, preserving an outstanding collection of manuscript books in a number of languages. This multilingual library reflects the multinational monastic community, which in various periods hosted Greeks, Georgian, Arabs, Armenians, and Syrian monks. The editors have taken this text and designed it within a classical format, retaining the original Greek footnotes and making little alteration, allowing a 'sense of translation' to persist.

Georgios Boudalis studied conservation of paintings in Florence and graduated in Conservation from the Technical Education Institution of Athens, specialising in book and paper conservation. He has been a team leader to the assessment teams of the St Catherine's Library project since 2000. He has worked in the conservation of library manuscripts on Mount Athos and the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki.

Stephen Bury

Manifesto for the artists' book

Stephen Bury introduces **Cunning Chapters** with a Manifesto for the Artists' Book. His manifesto may be understood within a radical tradition and approach to materials; one that is analytical and interpretive. For this the editors have used Bauhaus 93 type and brown utility paper, potentially as a poster of intent.

Head of European and American Collections at the British Library, Stephen is the author of *Artists Multiples* (Ashgate Press, 2001), *Artists Books* (with Marcus Campbell, Scolar Press, 1955) and is lead curator of the British Library's exhibition 'Breaking the Rules: the printed face of the Avant Garde 1900 – 1937' which runs from 8 November 2007 – 30 March 2008.

Clippetyclop

Live in Hackney

Clippetyclop artists' band works in a performance tradition of mistakes, which turns all notions of skill on its head. The material used here was shot on a faulty camera stuck on night shot and casually handed to a willing member of the audience at the last minute. The material has then been used as stills, some at the moments of camera flash, further disintegrating the image into a series of digital lines and nightshot green. Lead singer Aaron Williamson has written an account of the band. This chapter was devised and designed by Katharine Meynell, to conjure up the spirit of technological experimentation and questioning.

Clippetyclop singer and songwriter Aaron Williams became deaf over a period of 20 years and uses his memory of old popular music to construct new songs from recycled tunes. The other 8 band members' musical abilities range from virtuoso to beginner 'play in a day' status. Clippetyclop performances include The Serpentine Gallery, London, De La Warr Gallery, Hastings, Brian Caitling & Tony Grisoni's Cabaret Melancholique, The Icon Gallery, Birmingham.

William Cobbing

Earthprinter

William Cobbing's Earthprinter uses copies of printed material, originally made by Bob Cobbing (who performed and published concrete and sound poetry in the 1960's, running Better Books on Charing Cross Road and publishing hundreds of works as Writers Forum). 'These pages have been buried and excavated, resulting in the paper being caked in mud, and the text often barely discernible' (W.C.). This process of distorting text through William's digital printing and burial is a continuation of Bob's own methodology of 'warping the legibility of texts through experimental printing processes, such as using near obsolete photocopiers and printing presses' (W.C.).

William Cobbing was ACE/Helen Chadwick Fellow at the British School in Rome 2005 – 2006. He was joint winner of the Oriel Mostyn Open 11 in 2000. Exhibitions include 'A Secret History of Clay: from Gauguin to Gormley' Tate Liverpool; 'Library of Babel' Courtauld Institute; Blueroom, Rialtosantambrogio, Rome, and he is currently working on a solo exhibition at Netwerk Galerij, Aalst, Belgium in November.

The peasant painter's studio

Sigrid Holmwood works with pigments, combining unearthly colours dating from Tudor recipes with modern Day-Glo. **The peasant painter's studio** is a woodcut washed with woad, weld, madder and fluorescent tempera on newsprint. 'During 15th and 16th centuries in Europe the woodcut was a cheap and mass-produced artform that even peasants could afford. They were often washed with plant-based colours that were not light-fast and pasted directly onto walls. As a result a huge number of these prints have been lost, apart from those which were bound into books. In the darkness of a closed book even the fragile colours will survive ... in this case, however, the cheap acidic paper will not' (S.H.).

Sigrid was educated at the Ruskin School, Oxford, and the Royal College of Art, London. She was Sainsbury Scholar at the British School in Rome 2003 – 2004. Recent exhibitions include: Frieze Art Fair; Transition Gallery; 'The Spiral of Time' Estorick Collection Gallery; OHOS, Reading; 'Pocket-scopic', Sartorial Contemporary Art, London; 'If you go down to the woods today', Rockwell, London; 'La Pittura Sale Sugli Alberi', 42 Contemporaneo, Modena, Italy. She is represented by Annelly Juda.

Armour-piece

Pages of Susan Johanknecht's **Armour-piece** are linked with metal staples; these appear in the margins of the hyphenated text at points where descriptions of medieval armour veer into the contemporary ('stealth-bomb', 'body-bag', 'friendly-fire'). Each handling of this chapter (oils on fingers) speeds oxidization, rusting, staining, of the paper. In **Revisions Piece** hand-drawn images (derived from children's science text books) are scanned and outputted onto photo-polymer plates, then printed with traditional letterpress onto Offenbach Bible paper. 'The formality of original page layouts is retained yet there is a loss of information' (S.J.).

Susan Johanknecht is proprietor of Gefn Press. She will have a retrospective exhibition at the University of Vermont, Burlington, USA in 2007. Projects from the last decade have explored relationships between digital sequences, photo-animations outputted onto CD-ROM or DVD and the physical book. She is course leader, MA Book Arts, Camberwell College of Arts.

B-Attitudes

Katharine Meynell's chapter **B-Attitudes** was made within the wider context of women's live art practice and conjecture about the ephemeral. It is based on the miracles and the events of Santa Chiara's life – which are not ostensibly special in themselves. 'I conclude that it was the performance of these events that made them acquire particular significance for others' (KM). Those represented here are: curing someone of a headache; removing a stone from a child's nose; a visiton of sucking St Francis' nipples; a dialogue with a cat; imagining the events in a church service that she was not present at (the miracle for which she was made Patron Saint of Television in the 1950s).

Katharine Meynell is Reader in Fine Art at Middlesex University. Her artists' books include **It's inside** (Marion Boyars Publishers), **Seas of the Moon, Emissions, 'Eat Book'** and **'Volumes (of vulnerability)'** (all with the Gefn Press). She is currently working with a broken camera that only records in 'nightshot', making a serendipitous connection between dysfunction and surveillance.

Counting recounting

Louisa Minkin handset her chapter in Perpetua, a font designed in 1928 by Eric Gill. 'The relationship to gravure is important, the words have a different weight when they are made of lead, and the process itself is absorptive. The text is about time, craft and craftlessness. Recounting something of my grandfather, who was a clockmaker, and countering this with the sense [via Serres] that the world has its own time. The font is running out as the letterpress declines ... [which is agonising – I ran out of 'n's on Friday] the spacing and placing is a revelation to me, it operates like maths or music. In the centre fold I am attempting to make a star field or constellation out of fullstops' (L.M.).

Louisa Minkin is Subject Leader in Painting, Camberwell College of Arts. She studied at Ruskin School of Drawing & Fine Art and the Royal College of Art. She was awarded the Abbey Fellowship in Painting, British School at Rome in 2006. Recent exhibitions include 'Huis Clos' Five Years, London; 'Surface Wave', Foxy Production, New York; 'London Assembly', 'In the cold cold night', Arcola Theatre, London; 'Transit 1', Accademia Britannica, Rome; 'Transiti', Spaca Cultura, Bologna.

(I want to be your) databody

Redell Olsen and Drew Milne of 'The Electric Crinolines' release their first single as a (non-functioning) piano roll. 'Tired of keeping up with endless format wars? Bored by the demise of cassettes and floppy disks? Sick of the encryption of machine-specific musical material so beloved by the i-generation corporate cowboys? Conscious of the dematerialization of the musical work and its restless digital hybridity, Electric Crinolines offer their first single in the nearly indestructible format of a MIDI file. This file combines the functionality of a traditional pianola scroll with all the modalities of digital code. By a peculiar historical paradox, although MIDI files can take different forms, the most familiar embodiments are nearly identical to the mechanical piano music format which became known as the Pianola. (R.O.&D.M.)

Drew Milne is the Judith E Wilson Lecturer in Drama and Poetry, University of Cambridge and Fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He is the co-editor, with Terry Eagleton, of *Marxist Literary Theory* (Blackwell Publishing, 1996) and the editor of the journal *Parataxis: modernism and modern writing*.

Redell Olsen is Lecturer in English at Royal Holloway. Her PhD thesis 'Scriptovisualities: Contemporary Women's Writing and the Visual Arts' examines the cross-overs between writing strategies in the visual arts and contemporary poetry. She is editor of the journal *How* (2) and she is currently researching the development of digital poetics and its relationship to recent experimental writing.

Twigs

Kate Scrivener prints on bright (optically teasing) paper, using tiny digital dots, micography and eloquent gouache paintings to invite contemplation of the wider physical world. 'These phenomena have the potential to be outside of our control, and involve the extra ordinary, the extreme and the seemingly unaccountable. Small painted texts are ordered through attention to microscopic details of the intimate and the immense' (KS).

Kate Scrivener was winner of the 2002 Jerwood Drawing Prize. Recent exhibitions include: 2006 'The World is Turning', DomoBaal Gallery, London; 'Natural Causes, Wings Projects', Art Space, Switzerland 2005; 'Lisa Feilding-Smith, Polly Gould and Kate Scrivener', Danielle Arnaud Contemporary Art, London; 'Folklore', APT Gallery, London; 'appearance', Whitehall Waterfront, Leeds; 'Button Up New York', d.u.m.b.o arts centre, New York; 'For Millions of Years Great Things Have Grown Here', Yard, Nottingham; *Mostyn* 2005, Oriel Mostyn, Llandudno, Wales.

Finlay Taylor

Various states of decomposition

The work of Finlay Taylor uses 'snail technology', where 'text' is that which is eaten away, in treated areas of paper, consumed by snails. His chapter uses heavy printmaking paper with insect-eaten areas. 'Each sheet laid outside in folded sections (20 at a time) for a fortnight, April – July 2006. Slugs, snails and some worms. Yellow is urine. I'm not sure what else to add and the paper type has been forgotten by me, a job for a future conservator/researcher circa 2150' (F.T.)

Finlay Taylor established Pupa press in 1999 to produce book art, prints and multiples and collective bookworks. The collective works have included Jananne Al-Ani, Dalziel and Scullion, Jem Southam, Kate Scrivener, Denis Masi and Bruce Mclean. Recent exhibitions: 2006 'The World is Turning', DomoBaal Gallery, London, group show. 'Dream Alps', Fiort di Bard, Bard, Italy, group show. 2005, 'For Millions of Years Great Things Have Grown Here', Yard, Nottingham.

Kelly Wellman

Binders Notes

Cunning Chapters has been bound by Kelly Wellman. Binders Notes are pasted onto the mill board cover.

In this edition of sixty each one differs slightly, is an original as well as a copy.

Kelly Wellman graduated from Mills College, California in 2000 with a BA in Women's Studies and Book Arts. In 2000 she published 'Body of Text', a collaborative work, as part of the 'Love Letter to Gutenberg' project in Germany. After graduating she helped found bookartbookshop, which provides exhibition and retail space for book artists. She teaches book arts, binding and letterpress printing.