

Course syllabus:
Special Topics: Artists' Books
(ART 3702-224) 9:00a.m.—1:00 p.m.

Susan Stewart has noted, "The closure of the book is an illusion largely created by its materiality, its cover. Once the book is considered on the plane of its significance, it threatens infinity." While literature is often a point of departure, artists' books often bear little resemblance to conventional volumes. Many are sculptural, multidimensional, or made of material other than paper—some have no pages at all.

The class will approach the book as a 3-D object that uses found and crafted materials to create a sequence of complex ideas. Students will make artists' books and book objects, employing studio mediums, writing, and installation art practices. We will cover a few bookbinding techniques and research alternative bindings and structures for individual books. The class will include studio assignments and also topical discussions, group critiques, and possible forays into other media. Bookbinding experience is not necessary.

This course will fulfill a 3-credit Theory & Criticism requirement or a 200-level second Printmaking Studio without petition for Art students. For Cornell Architecture students, the course can fulfill an Art studio requirement by approved petition only. For all other students the course functions as an art studio. This is a 3-credit hour course with a letter grade to be assigned.

Class schedule:

Introduction

[Wednesday] Visit Bruno Munari exhibit at Musei Dell' Ara Pacis

Assignment: Make a one-of-a-kind artists' book in which you focus on a particular moment of your time in Rome. This can be a personal experience or a momentous public occasion. The goal is to "illuminate" the moment of your choice through incorporation of various artmaking techniques, including drawing, painting, and collage. You can work in the pages of a commercially produced journal or notebook (Moleskine makes a number of appropriately formatted books for this purpose, and there are many blank books on sale at the Musei Dell' Ara Pacis bookstore). Due 2/20

No class scheduled. Professor Spector will be participating in a panel discussion, "The Art of the Book," at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN. Students are encouraged to finish the course readings and work on their "moment in time" project during this time.

FIELD TRIP

Discussion of the book in/as installation, sculpture, and altered found object. We will consider works by Dieter Roth, Ann Hamilton, Marcel Broodthaers, and Tom Phillips, among others. Critique of 1st assignment.

Assignment: Make a book object by altering a found book. Artists have altered found books by painting, piercing, or studding their covers; excising or imbricating the text block; or by pasting over and/or tinting pages so as to overlay the text with a supplemental verbal/visual narrative. This kind of work uses the found book as an armature from which to operate, shifting our orientation from the literary to the visual. Due: 3/6

[TBA] Field Trip: Visit to a book conservation laboratory in Rome.

Discussion of the photographic book and of the conceptual relationship of books to museums, annals, directories, and archives. We will look at works by Ed Ruscha, Gerhard Richter, Sol LeWitt, Hans Peter Feldmann, Helen Mirra, and Christian Boltanski, among others. Critique of 2nd assignment.

Continue discussion of the role of photography in artists' book production, focusing on artist flipbooks and the connections between scale, duration and subject matter in hand-activated visual narratives. We will look at books by Stephanie Ognar, Jennifer Hines, Julia Featheringill, and the documentation of "Daumen Kino," an interational exhibit of artist flipbooks at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany, in 2005

Assignment: TBA

Spring Break

Discussion of models of nature in artists' books; how the conditions of reading can be applied to looking at the natural world, both in the sense

of wilderness or in the continuing presence of the natural world in the urban context, with particular attention to the environment(s) of Rome. Artists to be discussed include Helen Douglas, Kim Beck, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Alec Finlay, Karen Wirth, and Coracle Press (Erica Van Horn and Simon Cutts), among others. Critique of 3rd assignment.

Assignment: Make a book about nature in some relationship to Rome. You will construct and bind this book as well as developing its narrative sequence (if narrative is applicable to your project). Due: 4/10

[Monday] Lecture by Cornelia Lauf: “Artists’ Books Works”

[TBA] Field Trip: Visit to the Zona Archive, Florence. Maurizio Nannucci is one of the most important conceptual artists in Italy. Since the 1960s he has worked with artists’ books, among many other studio practices. In 1968 he began keeping an archive of his own work and the works of his contemporaries. The Zona Archive has substantial holdings of concept art, Fluxus, visual poetry, and new media.

Discussion of options for online publishing of artists’ books. Critique of 4th assignment.

Assignment: “The first time I read the dictionary I thought it was a poem about everything.” - Steven Wright. Due 5/1

TBA

TBA

Final review of work done during the semester. Individual student readings from 5th assignment.