

WHAT EXACTLY ARE ARTISTS' BOOKS?



It depends on whom you ask. Critical analysis on book art is still a burgeoning field and there is no universally accepted definition of which types of books fit within the term. As a general matter, a book created or conceived of as a work of art is considered to be an artists' book. It is not necessary that a book be hand made by an artist, although that is often the case. An artist can design and oversee the production of work performed by others and still qualify. The key criteria are that the work be artist-driven (as opposed to publisher-driven) and that the creator's intention was to express some artistic vision in the book as opposed to a literary or informational one. Artists' books are not just any book by an artist or any book about art. Artists' books *are* art.

— from the *Modernism* magazine article, "Beyond Words: Artists' Books" by Ellen Firsching Brown. Fall 2008, Volume 11, Number 3.

ARTISTS' BOOKS

are works of art realized in the form of a book. They are often published in small editions, though sometimes they are produced as one-of-a-kind objects referred to as "uniques". Artists' books have employed a wide range of forms, including scrolls, fold-outs, concertinas or loose items contained in a box as well as bound printed sheet. Artists have been active in printing and book production for centuries, but the artist's book is primarily a late 20th century form. "Artists' books are books or book-like objects over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself."

Stephen Bury, *Artists' Books: The Book As a Work of Art, 1963–1995*, Scolar Press, 1995.

— from the
Wikipedia entry
for "Artists'
Books"



PERSONAL DEFINITION

"I use the crafts of letterpress printing and hand bookbinding, combined with more modern technologies such as photopolymer plates and laser cutting, to create work that is often designed digitally, but produced with an intense attention to the materiality of the resulting piece. For me, the physical manifestation of the book is often of equal importance to the visual and textual ideas expressed within the pages in conveying meaning and in affecting the experience of the reader/viewer. This experience begins with the initial perception of the container for a piece, and continues through the process of reading/viewing and through the manipulation of the piece's structure and materials. My personal definition of the book is quite broad, with boundaries that are in constant flux. At the core of my interpretation is the act of reading, and the element of time that is essential to this act."

– Excerpt from the artist statement of **Julie Chen**, *Flying Fish Press*, Publisher of Limited Edition Artists' Books. Julie Chen is one of the premier book artists in the United States. Her book work was recently featured on the PBS Series "Craft in America".

