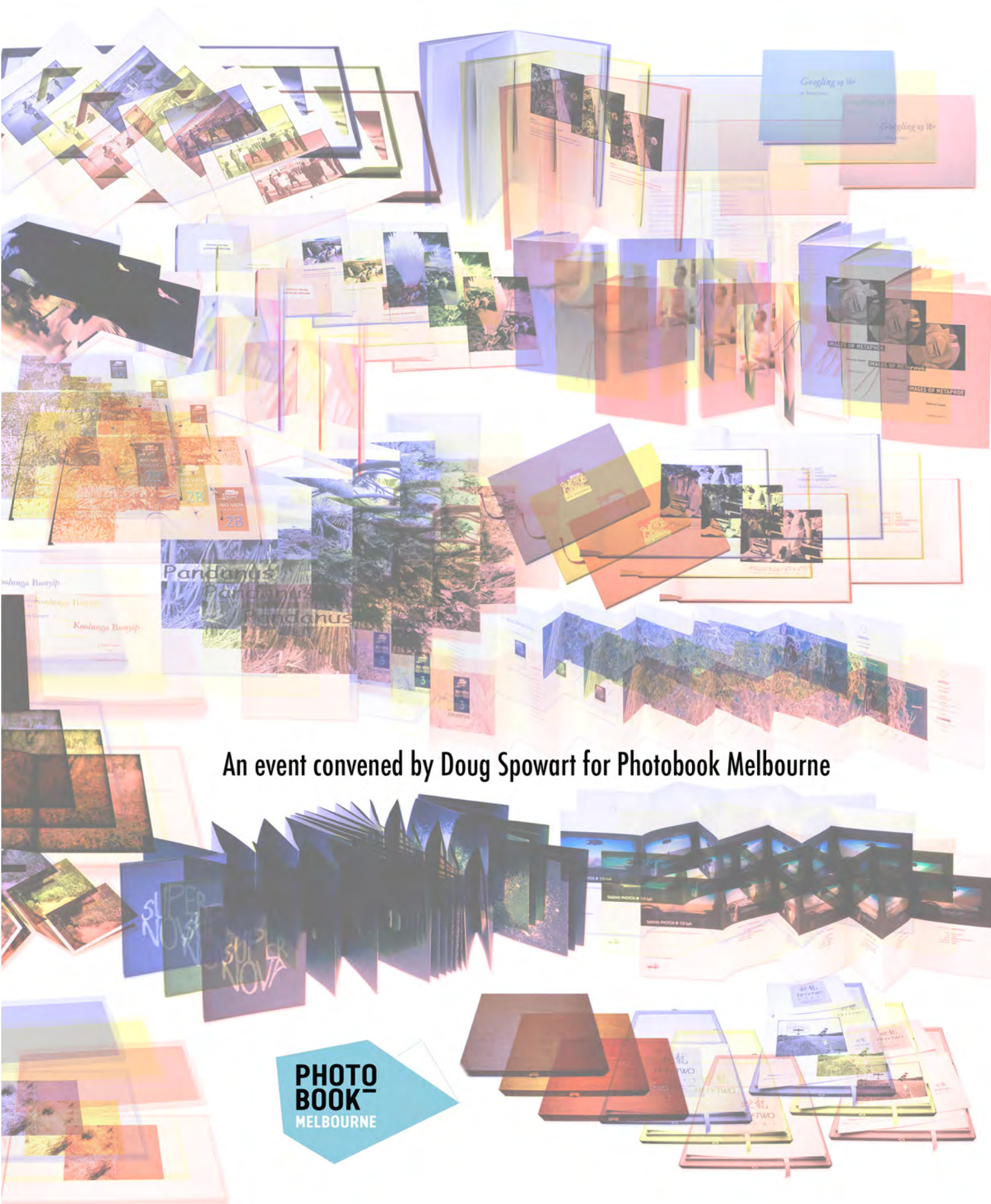


THE 'OTHER' PHOTOBOOK

Artists' Books and the Photobook



An event convened by Doug Spowart for Photobook Melbourne

**PHOTO
BOOK**
MELBOURNE

THE 'OTHER' PHOTOBOOK



PHOTO: Anthony McKee

A PHOTOBOOK MELBOURNE EVENT
convened by Doug Spowart

When: 6pm – 7.30pm, Friday 20 February, 2015

Where: Photography Studies College,
65 City Road, Southbank, Melbourne, AUSTRALIA



Welcome by Doug Spowart

Acknowledgement of country: “Our forum this evening is being held on the traditional lands of the Kulin people and I wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Owners. I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today. Melbourne has always been an important meeting place and location for events of social, educational, sporting and cultural significance and, a place of artmaking.”

The ‘Other’ Photobook: Back Story by Doug Spowart

Every photographer loves books – have you ever encountered a photographer that doesn’t have a library...? But everything changed around 15 years ago with a new revolution heralded by books by Andrew Roth and the International Centre for Photography as well as the tomes by Gerry Badger and Martin Parr. A new respect and recognition has now developed not only for photobook history but also for the history of photography itself. It is now commonly accepted that the history of photography ***IS*** the history of the photographically illustrated book.

Through these books we began to see concepts, design strategies and photographs presented as sequences, groups to express a narrative. The revolution made older photobooks highly collectible – although even recent books, like Trent Parke’s *Dream Life* (2000) have become sought after inclusions for collectors/photobook lovers’ libraries.

Whilst photographers may love other people’s books, they love even more, the opportunity to have their own photographs and ideas published in books. However they often found the path to achieve that objective a difficult one. Particularly if publishers were not interested in their work.

Then came the POD demand revolution – starting with Apple’s iPhoto and amazingly ahead of the game, in Australia, Momento Pro using Hewlett Packard’s Indigo Presses. Now anyone can make a book and research indicates a continuing boom. We have witnessed in Photobook Melbourne the energy and behind this indie DIY publishing phenomena – and it’s worldwide support network of:

- The Asia-Pacific Photobook Archive
- The Photo Book Club
- POD publishers like Blurb and Photobook Melbourne sponsor Momento Pro
- The Indie Photobook Library
- Hundreds of Blogs and websites
- Significant events
- And great places to see and buy photobooks like Perimeter
- An emerging critical debate through commentators, judges and critics.

But there is another story of the photo and the book – that is, the artists’ book and the zine disciplines. They have been active indie, DIY publishers worldwide for sixty years or more. They have well established networks, events activities, awards, critical debate and collectors both private and public. Many of the great photobooks of the past have been from these artists, designers and creatives crossing-over into the pantheon of photobooks – Ed Ruscha being a fine example.

It is interesting to note that Badger and Parr acknowledge the influence of the artists’ book on photography by saying:
... in general, the artist’s book has had much more influence upon photography than photography has had upon the artist’s book.

In many ways photobooks and artists’ book/zines are the same–concept, images, texts (not always), narrative and the object or form of the book. In 2002 Anne Thurmann-Jajes co-curated an exhibition entitled *ars photographica* that discussed the intersection of the photographer and the artist making books with photographs. She stated that photographers:

The authors of photo books followed photographic tradition, according to which the photograph as such was decisive, becoming the bearer of meaning.

And that artists:

By contrast, fine artists developed a different approach to the photographic work. For them it was not the visual capacity, but the intellectual nature of the image that was decisive; what counted was a picture’s power of reference and not the object it portrayed.

What is interesting, and is the discussion for this evening’s panel, is this ‘other’ branch of the photo in the book. So this evening we will hear from artists’ book and zine makers about the inclusion of photography within their respective practices.

Our forum panellists this evening are:

- Georgia Hutchison has for family reasons had to withdraw on Tuesday so Victoria Cooper will stand in for her
- Dr Lyn Ashby
- Gracia Haby + Louise Jennison
- Des Cowley
- Peter Lyssiotis

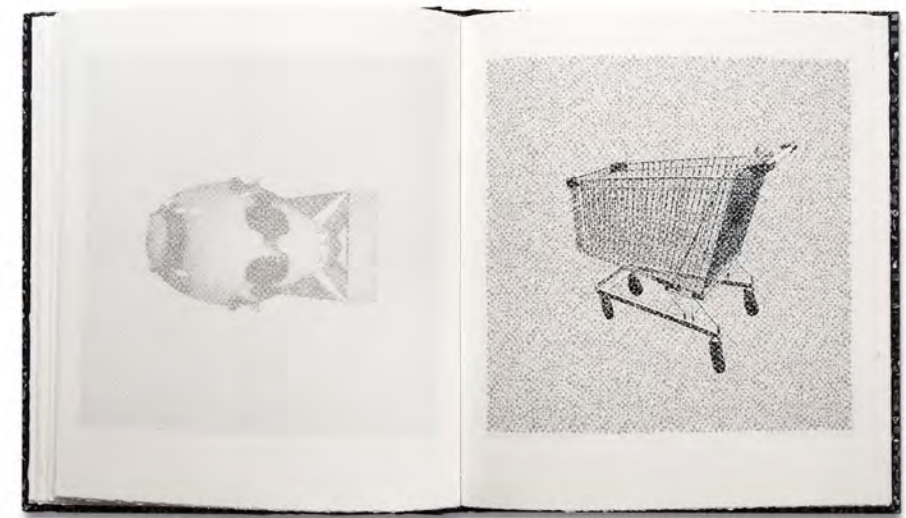
Shortly I will introduce each panellist and they will discuss their work. We will then discuss a number of prepared questions and, towards the end take some questions from the floor.

Lyn Ashby



PHOTO: Lyn Ashby

Lyn Ashby has studied literature, visual art, film-making, graphic design and the art of the book. He has worked in teaching, photography, design, animation and journalism, and has been producing limited-edition artists' books for the last 10 years, which are held in collections in Australia, the UK and the US. He lives and works on the outskirts of Melbourne.



Lyn Ashby

The Ten Thousand Things (2010)

Digital archival prints 21x25cms, 80pp, hardbound, section-sewn, limited-edition artists' book.

Notes on my own artist's books and the use of photography

I make books. With few exceptions, these are hand-made, limited-edition books that would generally be considered to be "artist's books" using the standard codex form. These are not photographic books. That is, the photograph is rarely the core of the meaning or purpose of the book. But I often use components or aspects of photographs and composite these with graphics, texts, drawings and painting etc, all of which feed into the overall material on each page. The photographic elements are subservient, as are all the other elements, to the overall purpose of the book itself.

The first obvious difference here to the more standard use of photographs in photobooks is the violation of the photographic frame. I trained as a photographer years ago, and I understand and appreciate the power of the frame: its power of inclusion and exclusion, the perimeter that shapes a composition. But for now, I usually don't want to activate that particular framing device. This is because the more important framing device for me is the boundary of the page.

And so the second obvious difference of this way of using photographs compared to many standard photobooks (but by no means all) is the relation of the photographic image to the page. In the way I work the page has primacy as the final image referent. Among other things, this is a disregard for the technology that captured the photographic image, which in the end is an arbitrary



Lyn Ashby
I decline myself (2008)
Archival digital prints on translucent
paper, 33x30cm, handmade, softcover,
screw-bound, limited-edition book.

device and aesthetic. In some photobooks (once again, by no means all) I feel that this relation of the frame of the photograph with the frame of the page is problematic or unresolved or unconsidered.

I see my own books as part of an international experiment in the book itself. This experiment involves the exploration of what a book can do, can say or contain, how it can work. The experiment of interest for me is what happens inside the book, between the covers, rather than being an experiment with shapes and materials, binding and other physical interventions with the book form.

I think of this experiment as being upstream, so to speak, of the photobooks that I have come into contact with, and even most other types of book that I can think of. By this I mean that the experimental artists' book is a quest to move closer to what I think of as the "essential" book, closer to the stem-cell book, with the greatest options or possibilities for what might happen, with the least prescriptions or conventions attached. It's the raw event or container, the first primal transmission of ideas from mind to mind. Perhaps all I mean by this is the quest for the core of that mental-sensual-material event we call reading.

Artist's books usually don't sell well. Thus, as a general rule, are of little interest to publishers and therefore don't suffer the pressure to conform to any specific format.

This is one of the attractions of the form. But this has its drawbacks, of course, one of which is audience size. The audience for these works is often those with an interest in the book in its broadest sense (perhaps not with a specific interest in photography), but an interest perhaps in anything or everything and its expression in the book form. The reader has to have the patience and care to contemplate a book that might give little obvious clues as to how to go about reading it.

In the real world this means that such books end up mainly in public collections, where a certain open concentrated focus is required for attempting to read them. The reader has to jump through a few hoops to get to the books in the first place. They have to get to those public buildings, search on the catalogue for what they want, wait for the books to be brought to them. They have to be silent and wear white gloves. I love all of this and think of it as a certain set of preparatory rituals we must go through before undertaking that mysterious event called reading. Without these public collectors, then perhaps there would be virtually no outlet or audience for these works, which is a very depressing thought. Many artists of the book might have to give up this foolishness and attempt to get a real job.

Gracia Haby + Louise Jennison



PHOTO: Gracia Haby + Louise Jennison

Using an armoury of play, humour and poetry as lure, Gracia Haby and Louise Jennison are artists besotted with paper. Fine Arts graduates of RMIT, their limited edition artists' books, prints and other projects hard to pin down are often made collaboratively. Their work is in the collections of the state libraries of NSW, Queensland, Victoria; the university libraries of Charles Sturt, Melbourne, Monash, RMIT and the University of West England (UWE), Bristol; and Artspace Mackay, Burnie Regional, National Gallery of Australia, Print Council of Australia, and the Tate (United Kingdom).



Gracia Haby
Salvaged Relatives
editions I, II and III.

“ I saw that I'd get nowhere on the straight path,
and that to go crookedly was straighter.

Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls: A Novel*

For those of you who we have yet to meet, we are besotted with paper for its adaptable, foldable, cut-able, concealable, and revealing nature. In our artists' books, prints, zines, drawings, and collages, we use play, humour, and perhaps the poetic, to lure you closer. And sometimes this will incorporate photography. For us, it is not the medium that is always of greatest import, but the message. And so, we use found photographs in our artists' books and zines not because they are photos, but because of what they can enable us to say, and what we hope you might feel.



Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison

As inclination directs (2013)

8 Page concertina artists' book, single colour lithographic print featuring collage. Edition of 10

Though, of course, what you feel is entirely up to you, and to this end we favour open endings above all. You can see in our work what you will. You can make of them what you will. You can see yourself. You can see your own link with nature. You can see human nature reflected in the movements and actions. You can see charm. Along the way, some people have seen our zines to be artists' books, or our 'this' to be 'that', and as this is something beyond our control, we're fine with that. Like anything, the closer you look, the more you see.

The animal is oft present and easily detectable, the centre of our paper stage. Hard to miss, over here and over there, the animal runs up hills, scales rooftops, and sometimes appears to take flight. Gliding through a scene it is too large to be contained within or perhaps too manmade to call home, that it has a tail or feathers or furred muzzle is not solely why its form appears. For us, the animal is there to question our very behaviour, those moral principles one governs the self by, and to explore our relationship with the natural world. Yes, "the longer and more carefully we look at a funny story, the sadder it becomes". And so we seek to invite you to ponder and perhaps find that things are not always as they first appear.

Based in Melbourne, we work from home. And more often than not, we collaborate. We rather fell into collaboration, many years ago now, and it is one based on harmony. In 1999, our first series of artists' books were made with the two of us working on the one image, side by side at the computer. With our collaborative installation as part of *In Your Dreams* at Counihan Gallery last year, the process has shifted somewhat, but then, it is now some 15 years later.

To date, we have made 82 artists' book titles. And combing through the archives last night, we have also made 82 zine titles. That these figures are in accord is purely and beautifully accidental.

We decided early on in our collaboration, through an organic process, not to polish the same skills. We naturally lent towards different things and now bring those different things together to make one work not possible without the other. Working this way, a third work is made that belongs to us both. Sometimes, drawings are made to mirror collages, like the imagined portraits of the last pair of Great auks and their spinning-top egg. With gold trims painted on the sides of the drawing to complement the found cabinet card works from the *Salvaged Relatives* series. At other times, it is the collage with scissors and glue that will respond to the drawings. Sometimes, we pool our work together and see what we have before racing in our related but separate directions. It is a definite, but flexible pattern. And creating a sleight-of-hand is often our shared objective.

Similar things influence us, but to the collaboration, I bring my love of natural history, science, and wannabe bookbinder's precision. Gracia enjoys inverting these facts about extinction and the plight of endangered animals to give them a different meaning. Armed with a pair of honeybee scissors, she tosses in the red herrings, but not always. Our work as part of *In Your Dreams*, was inspired by the choreography of Graeme Murphy, Jiří Kylián, and George Balanchine, and it was about loss; loss of our Siamese cat of sixteen years, Omar; loss of species; loss of possibilities. It was about the body inevitably growing older and knees that now creak. It was about all the things that are now only possible in dream. It was inspired by the stories of Katherine Mansfield, which pull the rug out from underneath you, and the writing of Patrick Hamilton and John Williams for their sadness and the beautifully ordinary characters on the page. It was inspired by Charles Dickens' description of a character "building castles in the sky" as much as it was by the muted colours of the costumes of the Ballet Russes. It was inspired by all the things we love.

Incidentally, the Salvaged Relatives series of Gracia's collages on cabinet card photos rescued from a collectibles store was initially prompted by a photographer's comment that her collage work with its "mindless stickers" was an act of "vandalism". The salvaged troupe in their ballet costumes from The firebird to Petrouchka are part in retaliation to this. They have also been given the chance to soar weightless on the stage in costumes designed by Matisse. And this perfectly embodies the notion that where things begin are not always where they end up.

We work together because we enjoy it and we could not imagine it any other way. We have never questioned it and find that it keeps us motivated. It sharpens our Can Do spirit. As well as being pleasurable, it is also reassuring setting up an installation that is fiddly and precise with someone else. We can take turns to lose confidence or faith. Moreover, as we both thrive when working, it makes sense to do that together.

The two of us have been fans of the book in its many guises for a long, long time now, and it is perhaps that no work is ever 'just so', just as you'd imagined or saw in the mind's eye, that we keep going, that we keep working with books, paper, and collage.

Every step, every part of the process, every learning curve, holds us entranced. We love the challenge artists' books present, the possibilities, the history they hold, and the intimacy they awaken, all this and the unexplained keeps us working with artists' books. The flexible medium of the book holds us in its palm rather than us holding the book in our own palms. We seem, for this reason, unlikely to cease making artists' books. It is often to the cabinet displays

in exhibitions that we gravitate, wishing that we could turn the pages. Not only do we like their awkwardness to display (where not every page can be seen at the one time), we like the presence they command beneath a sheet of Perspex or glass. Peering down at something so tactile yet untouchable, the book's magnetic pull is strong.

In the beginning, the medium of the artists' book seemed, to us, to be free of rules and regulations. It also presented many new things to consider, from page layout and sequence to typographical decisions. *Which paper stock ought we use? Will we be able to draw over the printed areas? Will a watercolour wash make the paper ripple excessively? How can we get the most out of a singular sheet when it comes to printing a costly small edition?* These questions we tossed in the air and arranged upon their landing. And working together meant that we could start to figure this out through mock-ups and trial and error, and groundwork. From the outset we knew next to nothing of the logistics of binding, but a love of reading books, and a limited knowledge of the history of artists' books, coupled with a stint in Switzerland to studying experimental binding techniques (on a Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship for Emerging Artists in 2002), has guided us along the way. And blind faith, or whatever you wish to call it.

At the back of our minds, the feeling that if we stuff this up, it has all been in vain, and this is a powerful motivator when joined with a love for what you are doing.

In true show of how our collaboration works, never sharpening all our arrows equally: I am reading from notes penned by Gracia.

Des Cowley



PHOTO: Supplied

Des Cowley is the History of the Book manager at the State Library of Victoria, and has worked with rare books for over twenty years. He has been a judge Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, and regularly reviews books and music for Rhythms magazine and Australian Book Review. He is co-curator of the State Library of Victoria's permanent exhibition Mirror of the World: Books and Ideas and is the co-author of The World of the Book, published by Melbourne University Press in 2007. He recently co-edited the publication Creating and Collecting: Artists' Books in Australia (2015).

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One of the challenges for libraries and collecting institutions is to build representative collections of contemporary books and ephemeral works created by artists, photographers, and zinemakers. Artists books, photobooks, and zines generally circulate outside mainstream distribution channels – publishers, general bookshops, distributors – and are effectively off-radar for many libraries. It is therefore incumbent upon staff in these institutions to build networks and relationships with the communities creating this work in order to be informed about what is being produced, and to ensure this material is acquired and preserved for future researchers.

Peter Lyssiotis



PHOTO: Doug Spowart

Peter Lyssiotis is a photomonteur/photographer, writer and book artist who has worked in the field of bookarts for over 30 years. He was the only Australian artists' bookmaker to be listed in Johanna Drucker's seminal text "The Century of Artists' Books" in 1995. He has been the recipient of a State Library of Victoria Fellowship and been sponsored by Melbourne University's Bailleau Library, both of which culminated in significant books. He is an artist who generates associations that lead to collaborative works with other artists including Theo Strasser, Angela Cavallieri, Humphrey McQueen and Monica Oppen. His photographs and limited edition artist's books, can be found in private collections, libraries and galleries throughout Australia, the USA, Switzerland, France, The Netherlands and Cyprus.

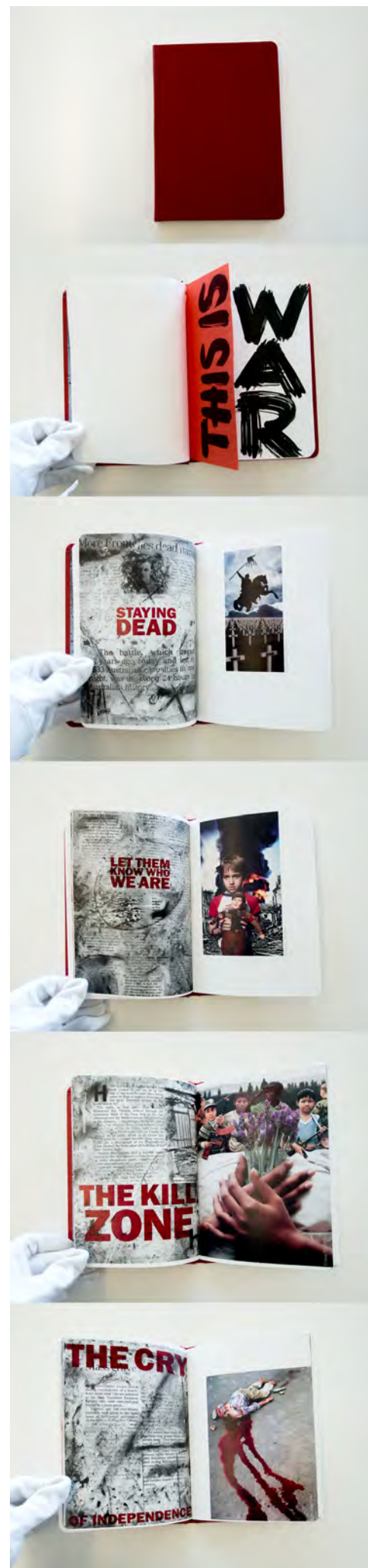
Date 1

I had a friend who lived in Belgium. He died a while back. Before he did, though, he painted a pipe on a canvas & underneath it he wrote "This is not a pipe."

To continue my friend's mission I say "This is not a book."

The artist's book is rather a work shop, a garage; a space where a time-honored craft is practiced: it is here that the world gets repaired, reconditioned, reassembled.

In my section of this space, there are 3 managers: John Heartfield from 30's Germany; the Soviet designers from the 20's & Duane



Peter Lyssiotis
This is war (2011)
 Digital press, 40pp, 15x21cm
 Edition 18

Peter Lyssiotis
 (continued)

Date 2

Michals from the 70's U.S.A.

John Heartfield invented political photomontage... he told me to "...use photography as a weapon." He was always out there, where, as Hunter S Thompson said "Where the real winds blow."

The Soviet designers: Rodchenko, El Lissitzki, Goncharova & Larionov took design on a roller-coaster ride whose dizziness is still being copied.

Duane Michals perfected the photo-narrative & used it to shine a light on his sexual life & those surreal moments of living in the U.S. His has

Date 3

always been a personal vision, a combing through his interior life.

All 3 managers in the workshop insist on using text as well as images (& they have a preference for photographs that are made, rather than taken.)

... so the book is not a book, because it is something more.

The book-artist doesn't use text or image in the received way - they are not an author, they are not a standard-issue artist. The book-artist marries text & image according to their subject

Date 4

The book-artist knows they can't do it all, they know they have to call on other people, other skills: pre-press people, printers, binders, paper merchants. So the notion of collaboration is in-built to their work ... it is welcomed ... it is not dangerous.

We know what happens when an artist turns into a signature, & then into a house-style & then into a corporation (witness Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst...) The best book-artists successfully avoid such success. It is here in the mine fields of the market place that the dedicated maker of artist's books is particularly blessed, because like the Three Stooges they're



Peter Lyssiotis
7 disrupted interviews with history (2007)
 Digital press, 20pp, 16x21cm,
 Edition 25

Date 5

always slipping on the banana
 peel & sliding ghost-like between
 the 2 Big Signatures : Literature
 & Art

I feel good as a book-artist
 because I have a tradition to
 draw on (witness the work that
 came out because of Volland, Skira
 Kahnweiler & Teriade) because
 as always, something doesn't
 come out of nothing.

I'm fortunate to have 3 managers
 in my part of the workshop. If
 there were only the Soviet
 designers I'd see only in red, black
 & white - & geometrically at that!
 If there was only John
 Hartfield & his social/political

Date 6

perspective, I'd go loopy because all the causes I support have already ^{been} lost - before I even get to them, & I hate losing all the time. (Besides what sort of propaganda - even though it is accompanied by a choir of angels - has ever been made in an edition of 10, 20?). If Duane Michals was the sole manager of my workshop I'd be committed to my personal, interior cravings I'd wander about in a creative fog that would lead from my belly-button to my navel!

Finally, being a book artist means having to look outside the Establishment's box for support, understanding,

Date 7

acknowledgement ... maybe it's always been that way ... maybe it's because of that, that we draw ^{on} our resilience...

But, for me, I'd like to thank Daniel & Heidi for organizing the book week ... & Doug whose contribution to photography has never been fully credited & Des who works inside the box but knows enough to live outside of it.

Thank you.

Victoria Cooper



PHOTO: Stacey Russell

Victoria Cooper has a background in the scientific disciplines of human and plant pathology (1977-1989), which has continued informed her arts practice (1990-present).

Cooper artists' books are held in national and private collections including the rare books and manuscript collections of the National Library of Australia, Australian Library of Art in the State Library of Queensland and many regional art gallery collections and internationally in the Carleton College Artists' Book Collection, United States of America.

Other aspects of her art practice include an investigation of the analogue processes of photography: the cyanotype, camera obscura and pinhole photography. In many of these projects Cooper collaborates with her partner and fellow artist, Doug Spowart. She has found that each of these processes and collaborative experiences have their own unique visual character and dialogue within her ongoing and evolving relationship with Place and being in the world.

In 2013 I completed a Doctorate of Philosophy at James Cook University exploring an alternative approach the contemporary narrative of freshwater in Australia through a montage of research across science, myth, history and sensory experience from three freshwater sites in Australia. In this research, I re-sited/sighted the microscopic waterscape within each place and constructed visual narratives in the form of the book.

My work is informed by living with, and within, a changing landscape. Through the medium of artists books I reflect on the consequences of human – more-than-human relationships. I create visual narratives utilising my photographic documentation of subject and *Place* as 'quotations'¹ within digital montage compositions.

The digital cutting, dissecting, layering and suturing of the photographic quotations is an absorbing process through which the visual story emerges. I then materialize this virtual image of the narrative as a physical book in many forms: scroll, concertina or codex.

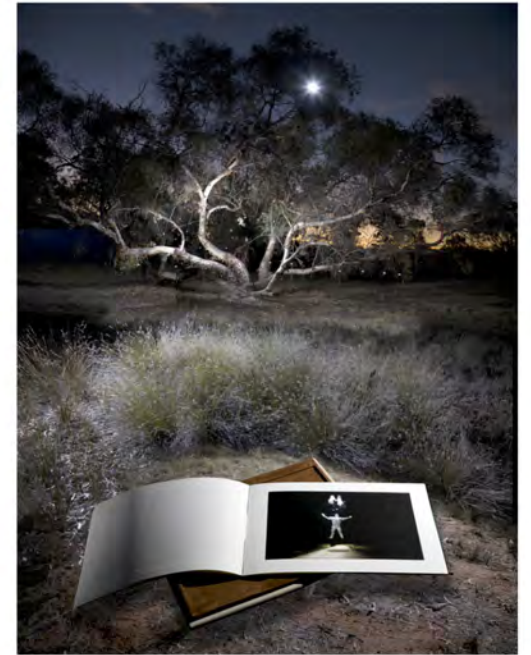
Rather than images on a gallery wall, the narrative space of the book offers for me an endless potential for interplay of the corporeal and the imagination through the idiosyncratic experience of reading.

¹ 'Photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote from them.' John Berger from Berger, J and Mohr, J 1982, *Another Way of Telling*, p 96.

Victoria Cooper (continued)



Victoria Cooper
Five stories from the Gorge (2001)
 Ilford Archiva inks on Hanamulle inkjet rice paper
 Presented in acrylic box
 Image size: 146x24cm, Scroll size: 250x29cm,
 Box size: 13x32x13cm



Victoria Cooper
 Site specific instalation of the books from the *Borderlines*
 series in Myall Park Botanic Garden, Glenmorgan, Queensland.

Top left: *Day garden*, codex 36pp, 21x30cm (2009)
 Top right: *Night garden*, codex 36pp, 21x30cm (2009)
 Bottom left: *7 Gates*, concertina, 21pp, 15x22cm (2009)

After the individual presentations had completed the following questions were posed to the panel in a Q&A style:

- Do you have any connection with the 'mainstream' photobook world?
- Where does commercial success 'fit' with your practice?
- Institutions and collectors – Who supports your practice?
- What are your thoughts on unique state or limited editions?
- In making a book – after getting the inspiration for the work, what is your workflow – do you make a dummy? Etc...
- Do you think that your aspects of your genre or approach to work can have relevance in/to mainstream photobook?
- What is/are the most important aspects of artists' book/zine world that assist you in doing your work?

Followed by questions or comments from the audience or others.

Thank you to the panelists and concluding remarks.

The forum closed at 7.30pm



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