

# Artists' Books Collection

## Special Collections

### James Madison University Libraries

This is a transcript to the video highlighting the artists book collection held by Special Collections, James Madison University Libraries. The video located on this webpage:  
<https://guides.lib.jmu.edu/c.php?g=627970&p=7938444>

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### 1. Title

Artists' books in Special Collections have been supporting the Book Arts on campus since 2008.

### 2. What are artists' books?

What are artists' books? They are books made by artists. They come in all shapes sizes, and formats. They may be one-of-a kind, a small press run, or a larger commercially produced edition. They are often playful and can push the boundary of what a book is thru material choices and structures. Their secret power is being able to tackle diverse and difficult content in a 3D immersive experience.

### 3. Brief history of artists' books at JMU

In 1992, Carol Barton was invited to teach book arts at JMU as the very first Dorothy Liskey Wampler visiting professor of fine art (I was in that class!) Fast forward to 2008 when Women's Studio Workshop

founders Ann Kalmbach and Tatana Kellner came to campus as visiting artists in conjunction with a artists' book exhibit in Duke Hall. The Library purchased 15 works from the show and officially started collecting artists' books. The next year, the Madison Art Collection transferred 35 books (to JMU Libraries Special Collections). In 2015, the Book Arts minor and the Book Arts Lab launched AND the library acquired Carol Barton's personal collection of over 300 titles.

#### **4. Pistol / Pistil: Botanical Ballistics**

Pistol, Pistil: Botanical Ballistics created by Kalmbach and Kellner was one of the original purchases from the Duke Gallery exhibit. The wooden boards are attached with leather straps and shell casings protecting an accordion / flutter text. There are pamphlets and pockets sewn into the folds with "specimens" like a slice of squash. Speaking of squash, there's clever word play at play 😊 squash and shell and mushroom have double meanings in the natural and military realms.

#### **5. Forgotten Closet**

Forgotten Closet by Edward Hutchins is about the simplest format in the collection. It's a book made out of a single sheet of paper known as a "zine" this deceptively simple book includes: a fold out flap, a window cut-out, and an accordion that functions like a tunnel!

#### **6. Wayfinding**

Wayfinding by Julie Chen is one of our largest and most complex works. Chen is the founder of the College Book Arts Association, proprietor of Flying Fish Press, and a visiting artist in 2019. This large format book with absolutely impeccable craftsmanship uses cast paper, laser cut-outs, magnetic closures, and the sound of crackling paper to evoke wind-whipping semaphore flags for an immersive sensory experience. Wayfinding is about learning and language and translation across boundaries.

#### **7. Unbound**

Unbound by Jessica Peterson is an example of an artists' book tackling a difficult subject. In this case, segregation. Unbound pays homage to the students of Prince Edward County Schools who endured a five year lock-out beginning in 1959 until their case reached the Supreme Court. This double accordion style with attached boards is letterpress and front to back with sewn fold-outs that include timelines and court documents and interviews with the students.

#### **8. Borderbus**

Borderbus by author, Juan Felipe Herrera and artist, Felicia Rice is one of our largest books. It also functions as a sculpture with a plexiglass slip case that lights up and illuminates a fingerprint and a line from Herrera's poem on the base "We are everything hermana because we come from everything." The pages are printed from letterpress polymer plates and features a dialog between two migrant women being transported on a DHS/ICE bus. A USB drive with 2 versions of the spoken poem is included. Subjects include: citizenship, racism, migration, surveillance and HOPE.

#### **9. On the Line**

On the Line by Linda Johnson and Kristy Lewis is a non-traditional book format and playful in content while delivering some punches to the male dominated art world. Their project collected "dirty laundry" printed on cotton muslin panels, and is meant to be hung on a clothesline for airing. One of the tamer examples reads "Van Gogh was a schizophrenic"

## 10. Pumping Iron

Pumping Iron by Kerri Cushman, another visiting artist is a fabricated steel lunchbox encasing a clothes iron. Pumping Iron functions as both a sculptural object and a book with a double and triple entendre: iron worker, clothes iron, weight lifting. The handmade paper is cast from blue collar shirts, and the box is lined with blue jeans the evoke domestic labor and the American Dream.

## 11. Prairies

Prairies by Dawn Hachenski McCusker is a flag book with a blind stamped cover of cloth covered boards hiding a delightful accordion red flag center. The long horizontal format is evocative of the great Plains and features a poem by William Cullen Bryant. McCusker founded the book arts minor and is a professor of graphic design at JMU

## 12. Sehnsucht Wien

Sehnsucht Wien was created by a team of students documenting their Summer 2016 Vienna trip with architecture professor William Tate. It has a sewn, buttonhole binding, 8 signatures, and these fabulous Turkish map fold outs. It incorporates photography and design beautifully with red elements including the thread that binds it together. Ashley Roth, preservation student extraordinaire was responsible for the book design and assembly and gifted this copy to special collections.

## 13. The Lookout

We'd be remiss not to include a work by Carol Barton since over 300 books from her personal collection are a major part of the libraries' artists' book collection (and she's taught and curated exhibits all over the world. The Lookout is an excerpt from her series Five Luminous Towers. This one features a tower superimposed on an antique map of Genoa, Italy. An observation tower is a beacon with a practical defense purpose but in Barton's words: "the tower best serves poets and painters who make nocturnal ascents to draw visions from the vast profusion of stars." Likewise, we invite you to find inspiration in the artists' book collection here at JMU Special Collections.

## 14. Want to Learn More?

The slide contains this information in a bullet list.

- Advanced Search for "Artists' Books" in the JMU Library Catalog located at [search.jmu.edu](http://search.jmu.edu)
- Request and make an appointment at [aeon.lib.jmu.edu](http://aeon.lib.jmu.edu)
- The Special Collections website is:
- Contact Special Collections at: [library\\_special@jmu.edu](mailto:library_special@jmu.edu)

## 15. Acknowledgements

This video was produced by JMU Libraries.