

Against the Grain

Manuscript 8384

Let's Get Technical – Cataloging an Artists' Book Collection

Cindi Sandridge

Julia Merkel

Stacey Marien

Alayne Mundt

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries.
Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Let's Get Technical — Cataloging an Artists' Book Collection

by **Cindi Sandridge** (Metadata and Adaptive Cataloger in Metadata Strategies, James Madison University Libraries) <sandricp@jmu.edu>

and **Julia Merkel** (Preservation Officer, Special Collections, James Madison University Libraries) <merkeljm@jmu.edu>

Column Editors: **Stacey Marien** (Acquisitions Librarian, American University Library) <smarien@american.edu>

and **Alayne Mundt** (Resource Description Librarian, American University Library) <mundt@american.edu>

Introduction

James Madison University Libraries' Special Collections acquired a large and important collection of artists' books in the Fall of 2015. The influx of unprocessed and unique items created an immediate backlog with multiple challenges: gaining intellectual control with a customized inventory while still making the items available to researchers, prepping the books for cataloging with student assistants unfamiliar with metadata standards, fabricating custom housings for books with non-traditional shapes and sizes, and creating searchable catalog records.

Background

James Madison University Libraries' Special Collections began acquiring artists' books in 2008 with a modest purchase of fifteen titles from the **Women's Studio Workshop** featured in an exhibit in the campus Art Gallery. The collection grew incrementally after inception with purchase funds contributed from liaison librarian budgets and transfers from stacks. In the Fall of 2015, **Carol Barton's** personal collection of artists' books was acquired which increased our holdings from roughly 100 titles to over 400. The timing was fortuitous because Spring 2015 marked the official launch of the cross-disciplinary Book Arts Minor AND the opening of the Book Arts Lab in the **School of Art, Design & Art History's Studio Center**.

Artists' books are contemporary phenomena that are often playful in both their context and format. They are incredible teaching tools for tackling complex social issues such as race, environmental studies, and feminism in innovative ways. Humor and double entendre are used effectively to jar us from complacency and the status quo. Artists' books can be many things: one of a kind objects, small hand letterpress editions, larger commercially-printed works, and sculptural objects that push the boundaries of what a book is.

The acquisition of **Barton's** collection was particularly meaningful to JMU. **Barton** was the university's first visiting **Wampler Professor of Fine Art** in 1992 and has been a guest artist and lecturer on multiple occasions since then. She is a book artist and educator who has taught at prestigious art schools such as the **University of the Arts** in Philadelphia and the **Corcoran** in Washington, DC. She exhibits her work internationally and is included in major collections, such as the **Library of Congress**, the **Museum of Modern Art** and

the **Victoria & Albert Museum**. She also has curated exhibitions such as *Science and the Artists' Book* for the **Smithsonian Institution**.

The Process

After two separate trips to **Barton's** Maryland farmhouse, gaining intellectual control over the collection was paramount. The many boxes of books were unpacked, cleaned, sorted alphabetically by artist/author, and placed in a folder with a control number assigned to each item. A year later, the books were prepped for cataloging with a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet identified:

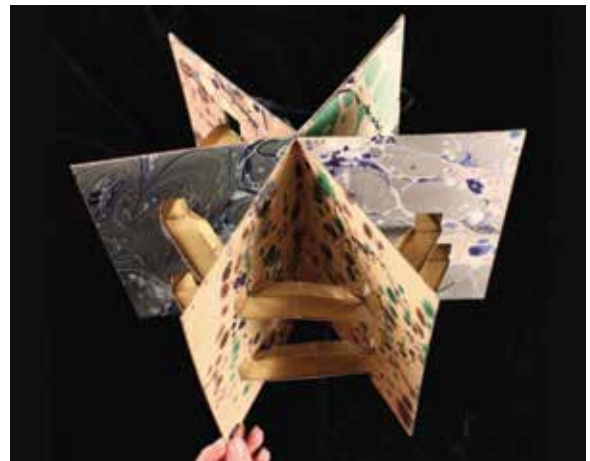
- Control number (i.e., CB-AB-0001)
- Title
- Artist/author
- Dimensions
- Publisher
- Description
- Format
- Subject areas

Specifically, format was described according to **Allison Jai's Artists' Book Thesaurus** created for the **Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA)**. To be most efficient, a tag team approach was used with one person handling the book and another typing directly into the spreadsheet. In addition to the *Thesaurus*, an illustrated glossary of 183 terms was developed in-house to assist with local descriptions.

Collaboration between staff from Metadata Strategies, Special Collections, and Preservation began with a series of emails and meetings regarding bibliographic record fields with sample records created for review. The workflow began to take shape: a box of artists' books was brought to **Sandridge's** office; those that had copy records were cataloged first, and the box was then secured in Preservation at the end of each day. A list of the cataloged records was sent to **Merkel** (curator of artists' books) and the Special Collections Librarian, **Kate Morris**, for review, and modifications to the records were made by **Sandridge** based on their feedback. Artists' books that required original record creation were tackled after the known entities.

Some cataloging was enhanced by outside sources; for example, **Richard McClintock's**

In & Out: A Marble Book required further study. Additional information turned up in a traveling exhibition catalog, *Books & Bookends: Sculptural Approaches, 1989-1991*, by **Barton** and **Henry Barrow**. The patent **McClintock** took as inspiration was **Raymond Crawford's** "Marble raceway design no. 256,811," and this information was included as a note in the record. Another exciting find in the collection was *Yum cone: One Offset Book* by **Marisha Simons**. The packaging for this little gem led us to believe that it was designed for consumption via vending machine, possibly "Art-o-mat" (*artomat.org*) sponsored by **Artists in Cellophane (AIC)**.



In & Out: A Marble Book
by **Richard McClintock**

Lessons Learned

Originally, we thought that the automatic entry of records versus singular record creation would be possible based on the level of detail in the spreadsheet. However, there were too many variables within the metadata entries. For example: subjects were not always consistent with **Library of Congress** standards (student created vs. cataloger supplied using **OCLC** database); **LC** call numbers were used rather than inventory control numbers; 264 fields contained multiple entries for publisher, printing, etc., and occasionally metadata was found that was not listed on the spreadsheet (such as a copy number or signature tucked in an obscure spot).

Bibliographic fields were created with input from both Special Collections and Pres-

continued on page 69

ATG Profiles Encouraged from page 68

WHAT EXCITES OR FRIGHTENS YOU ABOUT THE NEXT FIVE YEARS? I see the need for recalibration that causes Big Deal breaks, but it feels like a giant step backwards, as users lose tremendous amounts of access for what are usually small financial gains. I hope we can develop the truly sustainable and flexible solutions that maintain broad access to content for our users, and that will take creative thinking and bold, collaborative actions.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU THINK OUR READERS SHOULD KNOW? I am grateful every day to work with such engaged and thoughtful people at every level of our member libraries. Virginia has phenomenal libraries – come visit us!

Back Talk from page 70

guard who's also encouraged to be helpful probably has a better and more interesting job than the one who stands around glowering.

So, what have I learned from my retail adventures? Well, for one thing, libraries do many things right. But the experience emphasized for me that we should be thinking of our libraries as, first of all, places where people are encouraged to come for their needs, not just to serve our idea of what we're there for. Second, we should work hard on those discovery systems and the metadata that users require. Third, if a **Target** security guard can be that helpful, we should be supporting every last library employee to be potentially the answer to a patron's question about where to find a book about Whatchamacallits — and with a smile.

OK, this day I need to go to **Liuzzi's**, Connecticut's best little Italian grocery. Hmm, I wonder if a library should be putting out those great samples of sliced breads and imported cheeses for everybody who comes in. That could do wonders for our gate counts... 🍷

Let's Get Technical from page 67

ervation. A series (490) field "Carol Barton Collection" was inserted. The local description (500) field would be taken directly from the spreadsheet when applicable. For *Duz: Magazine #2*, the local description reads: "Shoe box printed inside and outside in black ink; inside a gold shoe wrapped in tissue paper (original tissue paper replaced); Color printed map of Brazil with a narrative text printed on the back; Small wire-bound book with illustrations on how to dance the cha-cha printed over with narrative text by the artist, white clay-coated pages printed in black, red, blue, and grey ink; Halftone and offset printing; Narrative text is about a mother writing a letter to **Lawrence Welk** asking him if her daughter could play piano on his show and the daughter not wanting to; *DUZ Magazine* information printed on the bottom of the shoe box: — from local description." The Local Note (590) field was inserted as: "Forms part of the **Carol Barton** Collection (CB-AB-0001)." The Subject Heading (650): "Artists' books" was always used with additional topical headings. The Genre/Form Subject Heading (655) contained "Artists' books (delimiter 2) rbgenr." In addition, the **Allison Jai** thesaurus was consulted, and more specific form/genre headings were included when applicable. Agreement on use of the thesaurus was made prior to cataloging

the records so student assistants could easily list the entries in the master spreadsheet, but this still required double-checking for usage (singular versus plural, being one example).

Other collaborative decisions were made after cataloging started. Two examples were 1) the identification of miniature books and 2) modifications of metadata in the records based on curatorial expertise. Miniature books are 3" x 3" or less and were separated from "regular" sized works into smaller housings to save space and to keep them from shifting in larger folders. For these, an "S" was added to the control number ex. "CB-AB-S-0108." A modification to the description based on curatorial expertise included the change from "coldpressed" to "cold-press" paper for the book *Small Oddities*. (Cold and hot-press refers to the finish on a paper. Cold has more texture or "tooth" and hot has a smooth finish.) On another work, *Short + Story*, the students doing the initial inventory labeled the process as "intaglio" when closer inspection under magnification could only determine that the work was a line drawing — perhaps a reproduction of an intaglio print but not an actual print.

The Results

Today, the Artists' Books Collection is the most heavily requested resource in Special



Collections. Class visits happen multiple times a semester from Photography, Graphic Design, Art Education, and Book Arts classes seeking to jumpstart ideas for projects based on structures

and printing processes, etc. We have hosted classes as varied as high school students at the **Shenandoah Valley Governor's School** in Fishersville, Virginia to K-12 Art Educators attending **JMU's** Content Teaching Academy for "Art & Media Literacy on Growing Inclusivity" to a geometry professor teaching "Research Experience for Undergraduates" through the **Institute for Visual Studies** here on campus. **JMU Libraries** continues to collect artists' books in support of the curriculum, and the **Carol Barton** Collection is *still being processed* with over 700 pop-up or "movable" books in the queue for cataloging, and several boxes and portfolios of **Carol Barton's** papers awaiting manuscript processing. The occasional artists' book continues to turn up in her papers, but we expect a final tally in 2019.

Resources

<http://allisonjai.com/abt/vocab/index.php>
<https://omeka.lib.jmu.edu/specialcollections/exhibits/show/carol-barton>
<https://omeka.lib.jmu.edu/specialcollections/collections/show/4> 🍷

Biz of Digital from page 66

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my wonderful colleagues for taking time to peer review and proofread an earlier version of the manuscript.

Aaron Mayes, Visual Materials Curator, University of Nevada – Las Vegas

Carrie Gaxiola, Nevada Digital Newspaper Project Coordinator, University of Nevada – Las Vegas

Cory Lampert, Professor and Head, Digital Collections, University of Nevada – Las Vegas

Emily Lapworth, Digital Special Collections and Archives Librarian, University of Nevada – Las Vegas

Kelsey Lupo, Library Technician II, Digitization Lab Manager & Student Supervisor, University of Nevada – Las Vegas 🍷