

A Selection of Artists' Books from Contemporary British and Irish Collections

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Introduction

The British Library collect **artists' books and fine press publications** from the UK. Our collections also include many important works from the **Americas and Europe**.

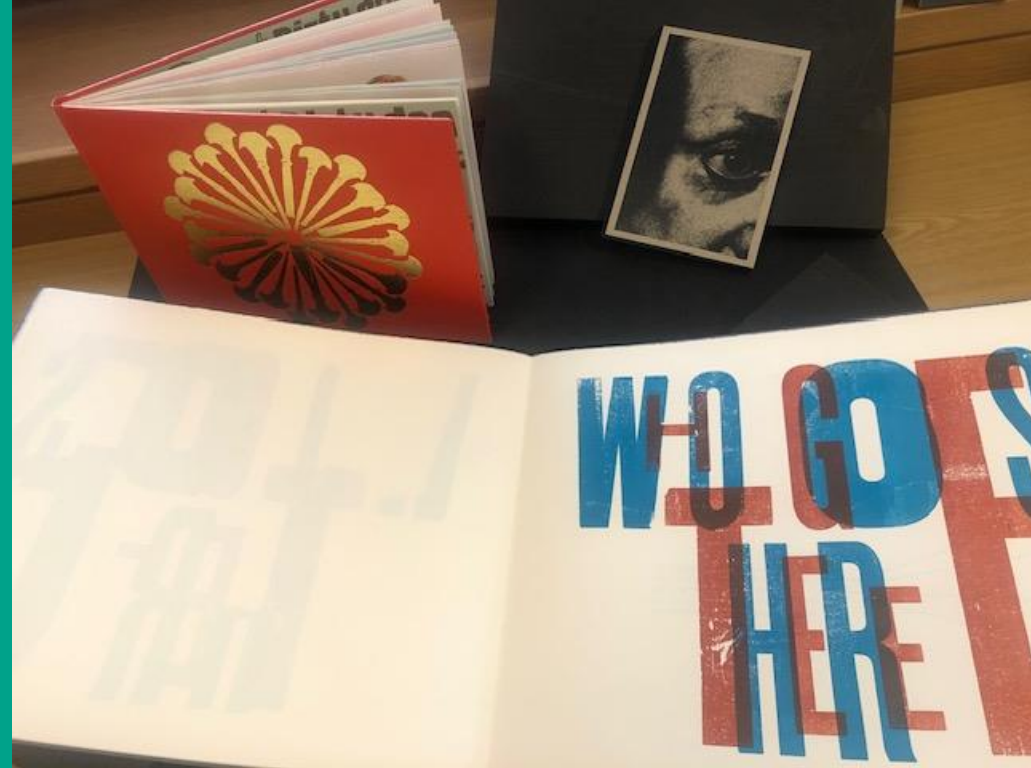
Artists' books show great variety, innovation and experimentation. Our collections focus on the use of **text and narrative**, but also include **visual arts and collaborative works between artists and poets**. Creative collaborations and dialogues in artists' books can be found across our collections of fine press publications, which focus particular attention to **art and craftsmanship in book production**.



Carolyn Trant *My Mackerel Lover*, Parvenu Press, 2004
HS.74/1793

With Kind Permission : Carolyn Trant

Recent Acquisitions



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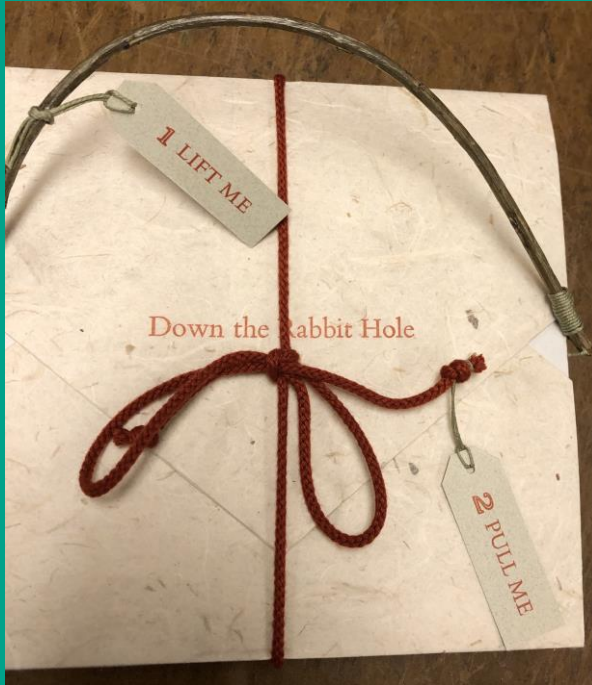
Three books illustrate three distant styles of artists' book which are acquired by Contemporary British & Irish Published Collections.

Alejandro Acín, ***The Rest is History***, a photobook which captures moments on, 31st January 2020 the day the UK left the European Union.

Andrew Mocket, ***The Chapbook of English Tat***, a series of playful woodcuts capturing ornamental objects.

David Armes, ***Here Others*** offers an insight into English society's suspicion and scepticism to the other. The phrase set in wood block emerges page-by-page and is followed by a text that interrogates such attitudes.

Speaking to the Existing Collection



Down the Rabbit Hole, Tara Bryan,
Walking Bird Press, [2016]
RF.2019.a.126

This tunnel book, with the leaves have die-cut with a **square holes** in their centre, **positioned at different angles** and diminishing in size giving the impression of **false perspective**. Extracts from *Alice in Wonderland* is printed on the leaves. The work cleverly **incorporates handling instructions which echo the narrative** in a playful yet functional way. The structure of the work offers a physical interpretation of the classic story. Illustrating how the materiality of an artist's book can be in dialogue with the narrative.



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Responding to Contemporary Issues

Carolyn Trant, *Map of Lost Cuckoos*,
Parvenu Press, 2019

Trant's *Map of Lost Cuckoo's* created from woodblock and printing on **recycled cardboard and newspaper**. The work is in a 'cartonera' style cleverly allows a dialogue between the newsprint and the woodcut to re-emphasises the **decline of native species** due to **climate change**.

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Fine Press Works from established and New Artists

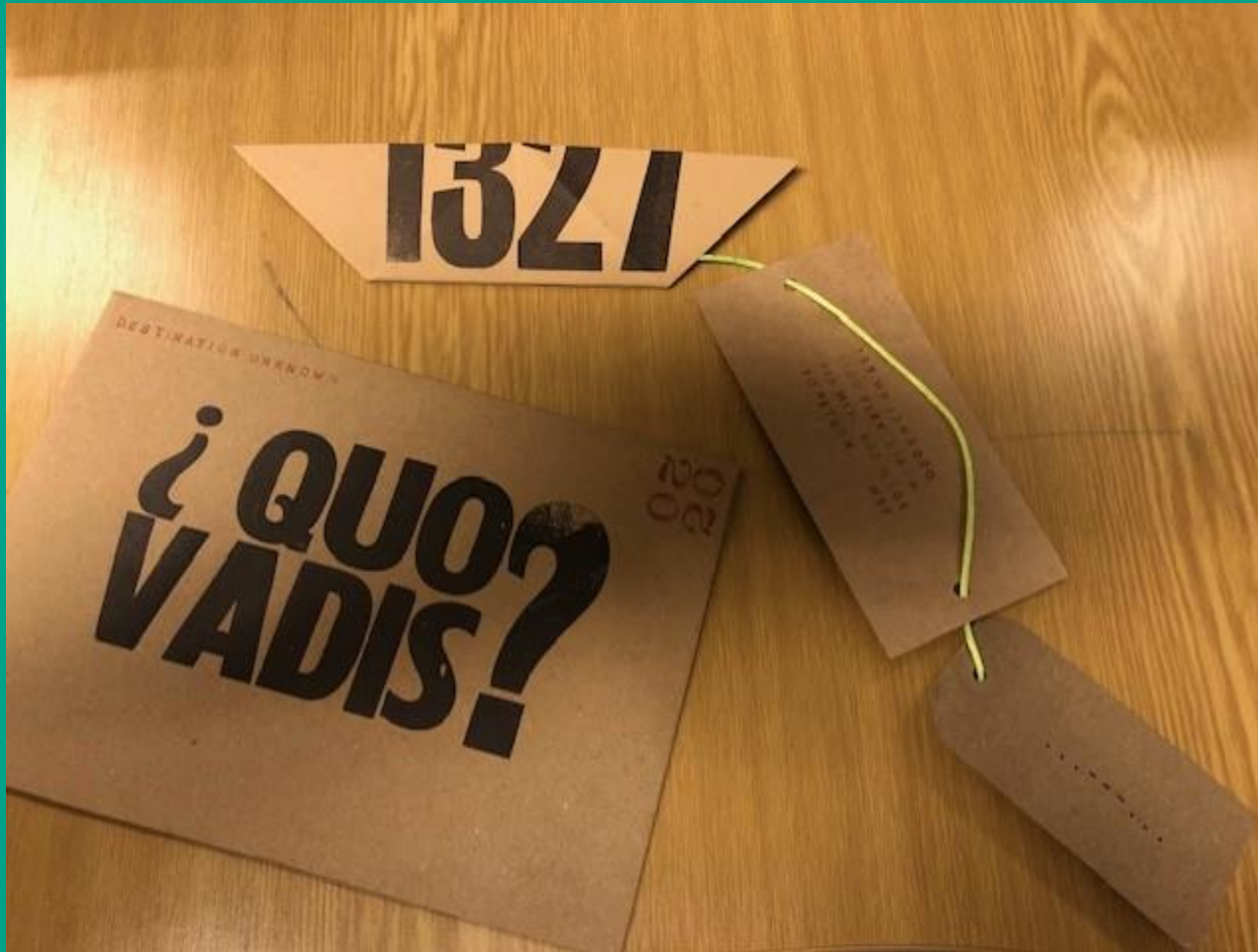


Susan Allix *Sea Air*, Susan Allix, Artists' Books, 2018, HS.74/2374

Sea Air is an **exemplar of a dialogue in an artist's book** between well-known poems on the themes of the sea and air interplaying with a **wide range of printing techniques, typographies** and design **giving fresh and exciting interpretation** to the poems while offering an insight to how the **artists' book can elevate** well known poetry.

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Raising Awareness



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Lucy Guenot *? Quo Vadis ?*
Posted/Unposted British Isles, 2020.

This ephemeral pamphlet is part of Posted/Unposted project, where 28 artists, poets, printers and publishers **employed letterpress printing techniques.** *? Quo Vadis ?* or 'Where are you going?' explores the **experiences of migrants** from North Africa crossing the Mediterranean. The number 1,327 printed on the **folded paper boat** represents the number of people who lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean in 2020.

In dialogue with Myth

Shirley Jones *The Quest*, Red Hen Press, 2016, shelfmark: RF.2015.b.75.

The Quest contains five of the most sumptuous **coloured mezzotint** plates augmented with gold. The story is drawn from the **middle Welsh epic** Culhwch and Olwen. It explores a stimulating and imaginative narrative of Gwrhyr's search for Mabon, the son of Modron, which picks at the **threads of folk tales** which extend back to some of the very earliest oral and folk traditions.

This work emphasises the connection between the **rich narratives within library collections** and how a contemporary artists' books **bringing them to new audiences**.



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The Democratic Multiple



With kind permission of Tom Sowden.

Various Democratic Multiples by Tom Sowden.

A selection of Sowden's **democratic multiples**, which are based on a philosophy and practice of creating affordable, **widely distributed art editions** of artists' books that challenge the exclusivity of traditional art markets. The term emphasises accessibility, egalitarianism, and the **democratisation of art ownership**. Along with mimicking and riffing off and early exponents of the form such as Edward Ruscha.

Discovery

Given the very personal and **idiosyncratic nature of artists' books**, description in a way that **aids discovery can be challenging**.

Subject headings might be **difficult to define and find**.

A book may have one or **multiple contributors** and may incorporate **fragments of text** from **multiple sources**.

The process of description is often aided by the presence of **descriptive information** (such as a **portfolio or prospectus** supplied by the artist.) In many cases, these are retained in the Collection as they provide additional **context for the reader**.

Where an artists' book is identified as such at the point of acquisition, a **subject heading of 'Artists' books'** is **added to the catalogue record** to aid discovery.

Following some **additional research** **the reader** may also be able to **search for an artist or press** that they are interested in.

A **subject guide on artists' books**, and **blog posts** to publicise new acquisitions and events, are used to help **support awareness**.



Winter : a collection of 19 Great War poems from the hands of 14 Irish poets, The Salvage Press, 2016
RF.2017.b.26

With Kind Permission : The Salvage Press

Catalogue Sources

To locate artists' books in the British Library Collection:

[British Library Interim Catalogue](#) (Collection to April 2023)

[JISC Libraies Hub](#) Giving you access to details of materials held in many UK national, academic and specialist libraries including the British Library Collection.

[English & Drama blog](#) A range of blog posts about artists' books by using the "Artists' books" subject tag.

Information Sources

Further Reading :

Artists' Book Year Book. Shelfmark: ZC.9.b.6181

The Blue Notebook. Shelfmark: ZK.9.b.25182

Art Monthly. Shelfmark: P.421/733

Sarah Bodman, *Creating Artists' Books*, London: A&C Black, 2005. Shelfmark: YK.2005.a.11394

Book Arts Newsletter. Hardcopy at shelfmark: ZK.9.b.23115

P. A. H. Brown, *Modern British and American private presses (1850-1965)*, London: British Library, 1976. Shelfmark: RAR094.4016 ENG Open Access. An alphabetic list of the modern private presses in the Library's collection.

Stephen Bury, *Artists' Books: the book as a work of art, 1963-1995*, Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995. Shelfmark: YC.1996.b.1827

Roderick Cave, *Fine Printing & Private Presses*, London: British Library, 2001. Shelfmark: 2708.h.952. A selection of essays on the history of fine and private presses.

Roderick Cave, *The Private Press*, 2nd ed. New York: Bowker, 1983. Shelfmark: RAR 070.593 Open Access

Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, New York: Granary Books, [1995] (2004 printing). Shelfmark: YD.2005.a.773

Jean Khalfa (ed.) *The Dialogue between painting and poetry: livres d'artistes 1874-1999*. Cambridge: Black Apollo Press, 2001. Shelfmark: YC.2002.a.10131

The Journal of Artists Books. U.S. journal that ran from 1994-2003. Shelfmark: ZA.9.b.2807

Matrix: a review for printers and bibliophiles. Shelfmark: Cup.510.dga.35

Parenthesis: the newsletter of the Fine Press Book Association. Shelfmark: ZC.9.b.7208

Online Publications & Resources :

[Home - Printed Matter](#) : A leading non-profit organization dedicated to the dissemination, understanding and appreciation of artists' books

[Book Arts Newsletter](#) : News relating to artists' books published 7 times a year

[Book Arts](#): Centre for Fine Print Research University of the West of England

**Thank
you**