

series. Of course, it helps if one can call on celebrities such as Paik, Julia Kristeva and Laurie Anderson, a fact that itself signifies the American avant-garde's capacity to throw up personalities – crossing the line between art and popular culture. Some of the work was the result of an active relationship established in the States between gallery-based video art and cable and satellite television, a dialectic between institutions which cannot be over-estimated. Andy Lipman suggests in the accompanying booklet that such integration bodes well for a 'populist television art', which seems a justified claim on the basis of the work shown in *Ghosts in the Machine*.

A preponderance of humorous tapes marked off Wyver's selection, and it is a known characteristic of American video that it uses wit, irony and sheer slapstick both as a weapon against the establishment and as a general mode of expression. Fortunately, the art aspect of American video is not too readily identified with 'seriousness', an affliction common to much socially-inclined art. On the contrary, American brashness, raw energy and sheer verve makes a refreshing change.

The humour ranged over the cynical charm of Ilene Segalove's *More TV Stories*, Les Levine's stropky *Selling of a Video Artist*, Cecilia Condit's impressive black comedy *Probably in Michigan* and the hard-faced daftness of Sanborn and Fitzgerald's *Ear to the Ground*. Zbigniew Rybczynski, who made the brilliant Oscar-winning *Tango*, gave us more technical high-jinks in his surrealistic homage to Bunuel, *The Discreet Charm of Diplomacy*. It did not lack the edge of political criticism (if in an East European view), as the stuffy diplomat slips under the buffet table to join the parade of farm animals.

At the other end of the spectrum, the minimalist subtlety of Bill Viola's *The Reflecting Pool* had an exquisite beauty that contrasted sharply with Joan Jonas's sci-fi extravaganza *Double Lunar Dogs*. The hypnotic, haunting quality of Laurie Anderson's video *O Superman* revealed her skill and control as performance artist.

In many ways, it is the articulation of broad social and political themes using experimental formal devices and borrowing from other genres like B movies, sci-fi, opera and pop song, that is most impressive about this work. The gain is in accessibility, a freedom of expression and, in the end, a more varied range of emotions and stances made available for social criticism in art. In other words, it avoids the strictures of conventional 'radical' forms.

If video is to become more than formalist tricks or first-person indulgence, then it must surely wield imagination in a maturer emotional scale in its service of the social, and refuse the narrow shrill voice so characteristic of much 'socially-conscious' video work. Scratch video in Britain has recently made some steps towards reclaiming humour for radical ends, and *Ghosts in the Machine* points to an ever wider set of alternatives. Let us hope that Channel 4 will give more space and a better slot to video work of such an order, in the future. It will be seen then to be fulfilling its commitment to innovative practices.

Water sculpture at Ackers



William Pye's water sculpture for Ackers, Small Heath, Birmingham, which is discussed on Page Two.

Artists Books

NEW YORK 1986

Cathy Courtney

The future of London's Book Works is uncertain as it waits to hear whether any financial aid at all will be forthcoming. It has no regular funding at the moment and each time it has a show it must raise the money from scratch. There's not enough earned income to pay a part-time administrator so the enterprise is run by energetic and imaginative voluntary labour. In order to give those concerned a rest and allow them time for their own work, the next show will not be until April 16. All this is despite a highly successful first year. In contrast, Richard Minsky of New York's Center for Book Arts speaks airily about his funding. 'We've stayed in the \$30,000 rut for the past few years. I want to work on a new campaign for funds and new programmes.'

Minsky began the Center after his own show in 1974 at the Zabriski Gallery. He went to look at a small ramshackle building on Bleeker Street, played his violin on it, liked the sound, and decided the place was right. A State Council grant was forthcoming after a year and that plus money from the Kaplan Fund and from the NEA have supported the venture ever since. In November 1984 the Center moved into its spacious and well-lit larger premises on Broadway, having taken on a lease for eight years in order to expand its activities. As well as grants it brings in a substantial income from its teaching programmes, sales and membership (there are approximately 400 artist members at the moment). Minsky reckons the Center is about ten times as strong as when it started, 'People are doing the same things, but better. Their interests are still the same, but the work is getting stronger.'

Minsky is himself at work on the bindings for his three-volume version of Tom Phillips' *Inferno*, using Nigerian goat skin which is the nearest he could get to Florentine leather. His aim is produce a modern English equivalent to medieval Florentine binding to correlate with Phillips's twentieth-century English translation of Dante's poem. He tanned and dyed the leather himself and is using Florence's



PLACE#11

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lily as the overall emblem. The book will be held shut by two metal clasps on which Phillips has drawn hands, and it has un-sized unbleached linen for the inside binding as Minsky considers this the most durable. His aim is that all the elements 'should look as if they were always there.' The book will be part of the Center's exhibition of Phillips's work, the first comprehensive showing of it in America, which opens on April 2 and includes the *Heart of the Humament*, hitherto unseen in the U.S., and the premier showing of his video interpretation of *The Inferno*. The Center will be selecting a show at the Watson Library in the Metropolitan Museum this Spring, *Survey of Bookworks by International Photographers*.

The Library of MoMA is also basking in the satisfaction of new, larger premises to which it moved in the Spring of 1985. It is now housed in what was once the Members' Restaurant and Founders' Room and new fittings and interior walls, plus the addition of a mezzanine floor to house stacks, mean that it can expand the collection for the next three years without facing any housing problems. Clive Phillpot, Director of the Library, says that his budget for artists' books is sufficient 'to buy everything I need'. This is partly because of the Library's policy which is to collect mostly multiples in open editions and which 'broadly speaking' are in book form. This usually means that the work is relatively inexpensive and there are very few costly limited edition or unique books amongst the collection (which numbers approximately 2,000). Although Phillpot was one of the key figures who got the ball rolling for artists' books in this country before we lost him to America, he now feels out of touch with what is happening here and suggests that artists who feel their work fits into his purchasing policy send their books to him with a *pro forma* invoice. There is a high chance that they will be added to the collection; if not, they will be returned. Phillpot was one of the speakers at last year's conference on the book arts, held in Boston. These are informal bi-annual meetings, usually organised by different people each time. His talk was hard-hitting, intended to raise a few hackles, as he feels now is a time for reassessment of what is important for book arts. Unlike the impression given by the catalogue for the 1985 Beaubourg show, he believes there to be a steady increase of activity, with more people making more books than ever. I think he's right. There's recently been a tendency to suggest that the impetus behind book art is now much diluted in comparison to the

activity of the late 1960s, early 1970s. It may be that the work produced at this time had a distinctive character which makes it appear more robust, but those years represent only one stage in the continuing history of the form. Phillpot has been involved in discussions with New York Public Library which is apparently sympathetic to the idea of becoming a museum of the book, and drawing the various strands of book art together. Moma's library is open to everyone; the artists' books are stacked in alphabetical order, and those particularly interested can browse among them.

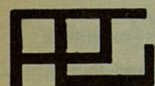
Franklin Furnace's tenth anniversary show opened on February 10 with a thematic exhibition drawn from its archive. Meanwhile Chicago Books has three more projects underway, maintaining its practice of inviting artists to collaborate to make 'something unique, something in book form which is not a reproduction'. Work has begun on Leon Golub's *Facings*, an edition of 1,000 casebound books of altered photographs of Golub's paintings and on a book in the form of a cross with alternate horizontal and vertical pages by Steven Cortright, *East→→ West, A Book of Fortunes*. Margerie Keller's pop-up, *Moon on the Porch*, is planned after these, an edition of 700 with all the drawings done direct onto the plate by the artist.

Timothy Ely, a former apprentice of David Sellar's in England, has received a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation to enable him to make a printed book. It is the first time he has been involved in making a multiple and he is drawing all the colour separations out by hand, learning to think in black and white as he does it. His search for 'visually aware in commercial printers' led him to Waterstreet Press in Brooklyn and it will give him the opportunity to get his work into collections that don't buy unique books. However, Ely is intending to give each volume an individual binding so that, although it will be a printed edition there will be a link with his other books. Among other work in progress is *Farn* (cockney for 'foreign') bound in grey leather which has been commissioned for The Eightieth Anniversary of the Guild of Bookworkers Exhibition later this year.

Ely is one of the fortunate artists represented by Tony Zwicker, who has been instrumental in getting his work in many public and private collections. She now handles the work of over a hundred artists, and forty-eight of the fifty-two books in the University of Chicago's *The*

Book Made Art: A Selection of Contemporary Artists' Books (February–April 1986) come from her stock. She also has work in the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester's exhibition *Beyond Words: The Art of the Book*. (February–March 30). An exhibition at Dallas Public Library has led to another at the University of Texas. Recent arrivals include new material from Swiss artist Warjia Lavater and from Bruce Schnabel both of whose work Zwicker has promoted successfully for some while.

The interest in artists books and the healthier market in America allows the mushrooming of ventures and exhibitions which in turn fuel further projects. There's not the feeling of operating in a vacuum which is sometimes overwhelming in the U.K. Although the Kathryn Markel Gallery is closing down, The Hand in Hand Gallery on Broadway has opened up. Despite the criticism it has invited by not giving a clear focus to its shows, it is still making over to artists' books an amount of space tantalising to the English eye. It's already mounted two shows of them and will always have some on display. The Library at the Metropolitan Museum housed *Paradise & Purgatory: West Meets East* during January and February, giving exposure to the Paradise and Purgatory Pie presses. Stephanie Brody Lederman has been collaborating with the latter since 1985 and as well as being in this show her work was recently seen in Florida (fourteen pieces in a show of miniatures), in *The Terminal Art Show* and at Purchase, *The Book in Time*. Her *Domestic Screams* was given space in Rizzoli's 57th Street store window, and she took part in Caroline Corre's Paris show of work on envelopes. A one-person exhibition is planned with Corre later this year. She's also represented in Judith Hoffberg's travelling show, which can be seen in California. Another of Zwicker's artists, Lois Polansky, has just had a retrospective at the Lincoln Center. A further outlet for multiples has been provided by Leta Stathakos of *Art News* magazine. Former Co-ordinator of Marketing Services at the Albright Knox Museum, she has established a number of pages in the journal as a market place for artists' books. Marilyn Rosenberg's *Kaleidoscope* sold out after it appeared here (edition 100) and Stathakos is also encouraging galleries and museums to display and sell these books. She hopes to go into production with Susan Share's necklaces constructed from unfolding miniature books, and already has her own selection of work in Rizzoli's.



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