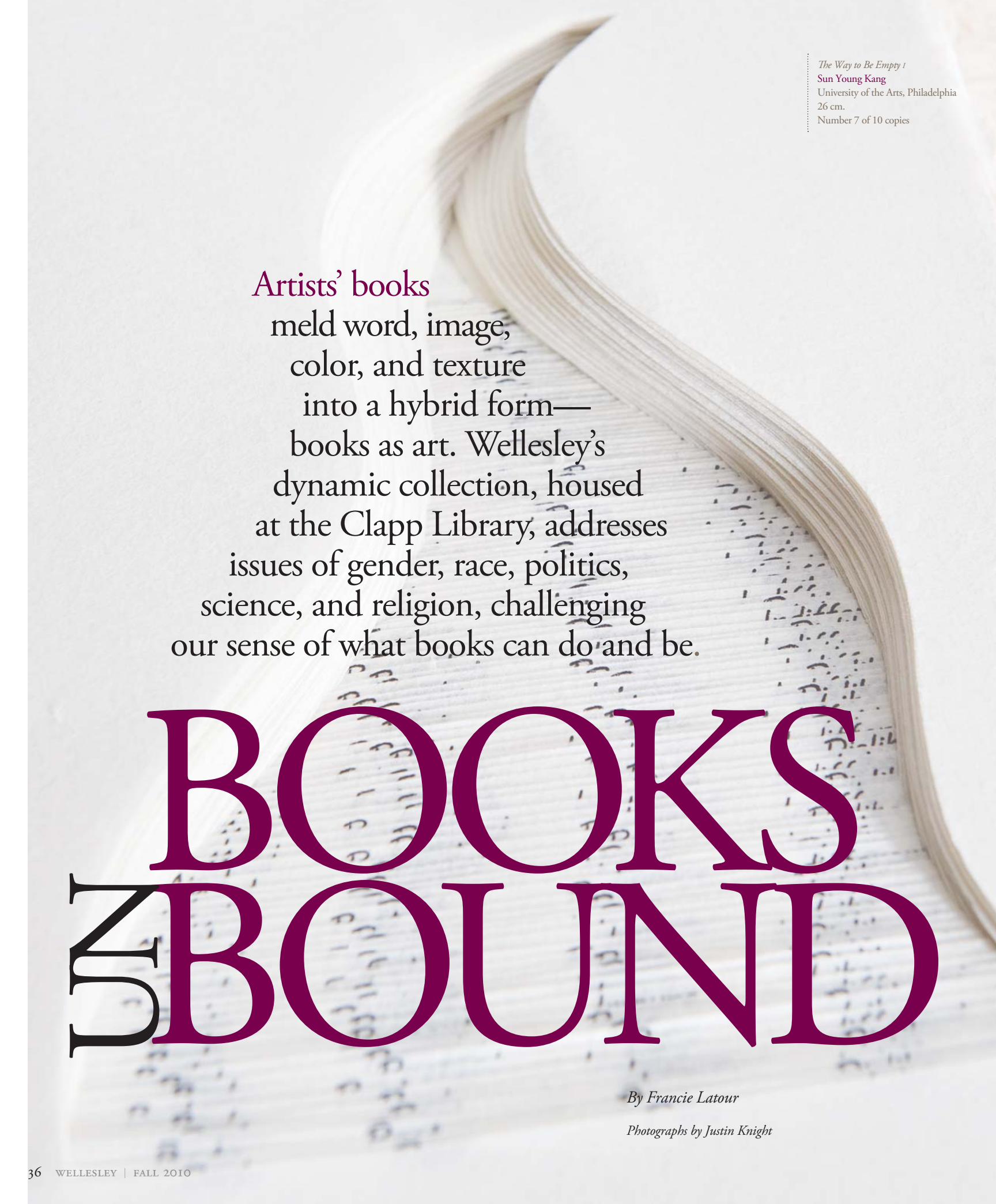


*Our
actions
are
testing
the
resiliency
of the
ocean*

SeaChanges





The Way to Be Empty 1
Sun Young Kang
University of the Arts, Philadelphia
26 cm.
Number 7 of 10 copies

Artists' books
meld word, image,
color, and texture
into a hybrid form—
books as art. Wellesley's
dynamic collection, housed
at the Clapp Library, addresses
issues of gender, race, politics,
science, and religion, challenging
our sense of what books can do and be.

UN BOOKS BOUND

By Francie Latour

Photographs by Justin Knight



WE KNOW some things about books and art: for example, that works of art generally hang on walls, and literary works generally sit on shelves. We know the feeling of being stirred by a Van Gogh or immersed in Toni Morrison. And we know how different those two experiences can be.

What, then, to make of artists' books?

Not art books, which sit on coffee tables. Or books about art, which students carry in backpacks. Artists' books are something else entirely, and many things at once. They are books *as* art, whose hybrid form and emotional power have made them a force in contemporary art. And among the colleges and universities collecting these art objects, Wellesley is at the cutting edge: Under Special Collections Librarian Ruth Rogers and her predecessors, the College has built an absorbing, dynamic collection of artists' books that speak to the liberal-arts curriculum. With about 1,500 works, and particularly strong selections that address race, gender, politics, literature, and the Holocaust, it's a collection of wide-ranging aesthetics and serious intellectual punch.

Born in the artistic experimentation of the 1960s, contemporary artists' books have come into their own as a distinct art genre. These works deliver far more than the sum of their many integrated parts: Artists' books are meant to be viewed and read, opened and touched. They reawaken us to all that makes books sacred—their intimacy, their universality, their transporting power. But they also puncture, and sometimes even explode, our sense of what books can do and be.

"Artists' books force us to see and comprehend their meaning not through one dimension, such as text, but through the sum of all their elements: form, materials, color, texture, and words," says Rogers. To fully

appreciate them, she says, there is only one requirement: "You must suspend your expectation that a book is a narrative text with a beginning and end, bound securely between two covers."

The value of contemporary artists' books across the curriculum has only begun to be tapped, Rogers says. Currently, about a half-dozen courses draw on the collection, from religion to comparative literature to art history, as well as Wellesley's writing program and the book-arts program. Rogers hopes to expand the collection's reach to Africana studies, women's and gender studies, and political science, among others.

Living With Others
Carl T. Heyward
1987
Carl T. Heyward, publisher,
San Francisco
21 cm.
Unique altered book

Religion Professor Barbara Geller, who teaches a course on the Holocaust, has seen dozens of her students silenced and chilled by these new avenues of expression. "It's a transformative educational moment for them," she says, "and I think it's both about the degree to which they're responding to the subject matter as well as the forms of the books themselves. Each time you return to them, you uncover another layer of complexity."

Few college or university collections can match the richness or depth of Wellesley's, says Betty Bright, an independent curator and leading voice on artists' books who founded the Minnesota Center for Book Arts. "Wellesley is one of a handful of institutions that have built a stellar reputation in the field of the book arts," says Bright. "A number of the books are just stunning in the quality of their execution and in the inventiveness of their construction."

As the following books suggest, the potential of artists' books for interdisciplinary learning is rich and deep. "These are living, tactile, usable treasures by living artists and writers," says Rogers. "They communicate."



behold
 yellow leaves
 shake against the cold,
 twilight
 fadeth
 black night
 seals
 such fire
 on the ashes
 Consumed with
 thy love more strong,
 which thou must leave

Ghost Poems for the Living

Paulette Myers-Rich/William Shakespeare

2005

Traffic Street Press, St. Paul, Minn.


28 cm.

26 copies

HOW DO YOU ALTER the poetry of a man regarded as the greatest writer in the English language? How to reorder words considered to be immortal, and bring new art into being?

Tomes upon tomes have been devoted to William Shakespeare, his pentameter interpreted and reinterpreted by scholars through the ages. Paulette Myers-Rich enters this terrain armed with nothing more than a medium-format camera, handmade flax paper, and 13 Shakespeare sonnets on mortality and middle age. The result is a stirring meditation on loss and renewal: With quatrains vanishing into free verse and images of flowers that seem to curl into vapor, *Ghost Poems for the Living* is a haunting whisper to the Bard across the ages.

In 13 pairings, Myers-Rich presents the original sonnet and an image of nature in decay. These photographs are image poems—seed pods and blades, leaves and sheaths twisting in pure shadow and light. Turn the page, and two ghostly images appear: the photograph again, now with positive reversed to negative, and fragments of free verse excavated from the previous page. In Sonnet 73—one of Shakespeare's most famous, where metaphors of autumn and dying fires abound—Myers-Rich finds a poem inside the poem: "behold/yellow leaves/shake against the cold,/twilight/fadeth/black night/seals/such fire/on the ashes."

 To read Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 in its entirety, visit <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15844>.



Sanctus Sonorensis

Philip Zimmermann

2009

Spaceheater Editions, Tucson, Ariz.

21 cm.

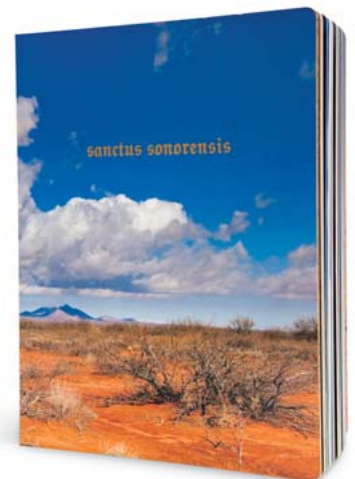
Edition of 1,000 copies

SANCTUS SONORENSIS is a book of prayer. Like ancient religious texts, its power lies in the way it quiets and centers us: through illuminated text, through its weight and gilded edges, through chanted repetition. But this missal speaks to a modern-day American flock—a country divided over the immigrants crossing our borders, and exhausted by the screaming debate that defines immigration politics.

In the Catholic mass, the Sanctus is a hymn sung with solemn voices. *Sanctus* carries that hymn into Arizona's Sonora Desert, a place where thousands slip through searching for opportunity, and thousands die searching. Zimmermann's work shows us nothing of what happens on that treacherous ground. Instead, it opens to hypnotic images of desert sky that progress from dawn to dusk. Each passing hour fills the page with limitless blue expanse, with clouds stretched over sun, with stray lightning or scattering birds—then, with sheets of mournful, gathering darkness. Each sky carries its own beatitude:

*The desert sky:
(above) 'blessed are
the day laborers.'*

*blessed are the pool boys.
blessed are the pecan gatherers.
blessed are the office-cleaners,
blessed are the shepherds.
blessed are the garbage men.
blessed are the domestic workers.*



"I have always liked repeated, or almost chanted, texts," Zimmermann says. Quoting a fellow book artist, he says, "Ritualized language can be an effort to make slow change through repetition. It can be both an effort to change, and a way to deal with the fact that change may not come."

 To read more about Philip Zimmermann, go to <http://philipzimmermann.blogspot.com/>.

Out of the Sky

Werner Pfeiffer

2006

Pear Whistle Press, Red Hook, N.Y.

34 cm. closed; 161 cm. assembled

Number 12 of 52 copies

THE POWER OF THE ARTIST'S BOOK lies in the way it joins content with form; the experience of the object not only echoes the text's meaning, but deepens it. In imagining a book about Sept. 11, New York artist Werner Pfeiffer realized he could only build it in one way: up. *Out of the Sky* is that rare object that fuses printmaking, sculpture, poetry, and history. A monument and a vessel, it requires us to physically construct and collapse two towers in order to read it.

Pfeiffer watched the actual towers burn from a Brooklyn rooftop. His piece began with sketches of what he witnessed—bodies in free fall as victims leaped to their deaths. A chaos of limbs evoking Picasso's *Guernica*, the woodcuts open into cubes that stack over inner support structures. As the towers rise, so do the victims' names, in letterpress type alternately bolded and unbolded to echo the corrugated steel of the World Trade Center. Once built, the twin towers can be deconstructed and folded back into the recessed metal cavities of the accompanying hand-made box.

As a child in World War II Germany, Pfeiffer's house was bombed, forcing his family into the basement as the upper stories caved in. Pfeiffer's accompanying booklet speaks to those triggered memories and our collective need to heal, "to probe for guiding spiritual markers within ourselves."

➡ To view a video of Pfeiffer discussing *Out of the Sky*, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh9ovBzCYw>.



Billy Rabbit: An American Adaptation

Ann Tyler

2007

Ann Tyler, publisher, Chicago

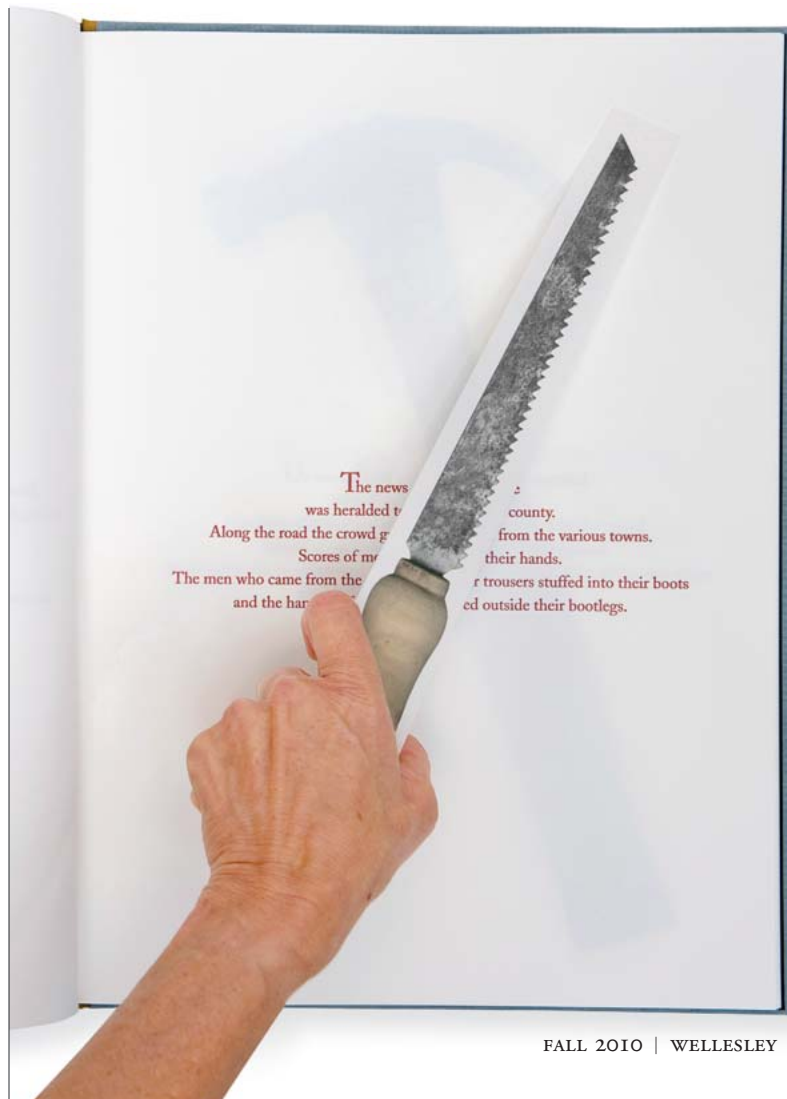
39 cm.

Number 3 of 50 copies

THERE'S A REASON little kids find lift-the-flap books so captivating. The play between words, pictures, and peek-a-boo makes children active participants in a fairy-tale world—not just watching and listening, but moving the story along.

In *Billy Rabbit: An American Adaptation*, Ann Tyler pulls us into a distinctly American once-upon-a-time, a tale of hide and seek marked by mob ritual and harrowing violence: the lynching. Weaving together an English children's story about a rabbit stealing a turnip with accounts of lynchings from US newspapers, Tyler injects ferocious cruelty and suffocating doom into a genre normally reserved for singsong innocence. The device for her cautionary tale couldn't be more apt: In *Billy Rabbit*, we not only turn the pages, we hold and lift the well-used instruments. The hammer, the saws, the butcher's knife, the pitchfork.

In the original 1912 story (also in Wellesley's collection), the rabbit is rescued by his mother. But lynchings don't make for happy endings, a fact that makes Tyler's decision to end her book with lines excerpted from the original version all the more chilling. "When Billy didn't come home by dusk, Mrs. Bunny began to get anxious, so she took down a lantern and walking-stick and set out to find him. 'And I heard somebody say that rabbits were in season, too,' she thought with a sigh."







Le 6 Avril, 1944

Jacques Fournier/Edward Hillel

1999

Éditions Roselin, Montréal

17 by 25 by 10 cm. (box)

Number 41 of 44 copies

BOOK ARTISTS CONSCIOUSLY SEEK to push the boundaries of the book form. At the same time, their craft reminds us of the book's essential place and symbolic power in human civilization. In considering the Holocaust, a collaborative work by Jacques Fournier and Edward Hillel takes our understanding of what a book should be to its outer limits. One of the most viewed books in the collection, it has the effect of stopping students in their tracks when they encounter it.

The subject of *Le 6 Avril, 1944* is the deportation and gassing of 44 children from the village of Izieu, France. We lift a box lid in the unmistakable, Nazi-era yellow of the cloth patch Jews were ordered to wear to mark them in public. What we find inside suggests a haunting, electric presence floating in empty space: the stamped names and ages of the victims, entombed but also rising from a village hillside depicted along the box's reflective inner walls.

But is it a book? Fournier, a book-binder by trade, chose to line his work with a heavy, lead bottom, intensifying its coffinlike feel. Ruth Rogers, head of Special Collections, says *Le 6 Avril* meets one of her essential criteria for artists' books, works that "reinforce the liberal-arts curriculum by saying something that can't be said in any other medium."

*The
Duke of Exeter's
Daughter*



*The Ropemaker's
Daughter*



*The Lady of
Place de Grève*



Femmes Fatales

Maureen Cummins

2001

Maureen Cummins, publisher, High Falls, N.Y.

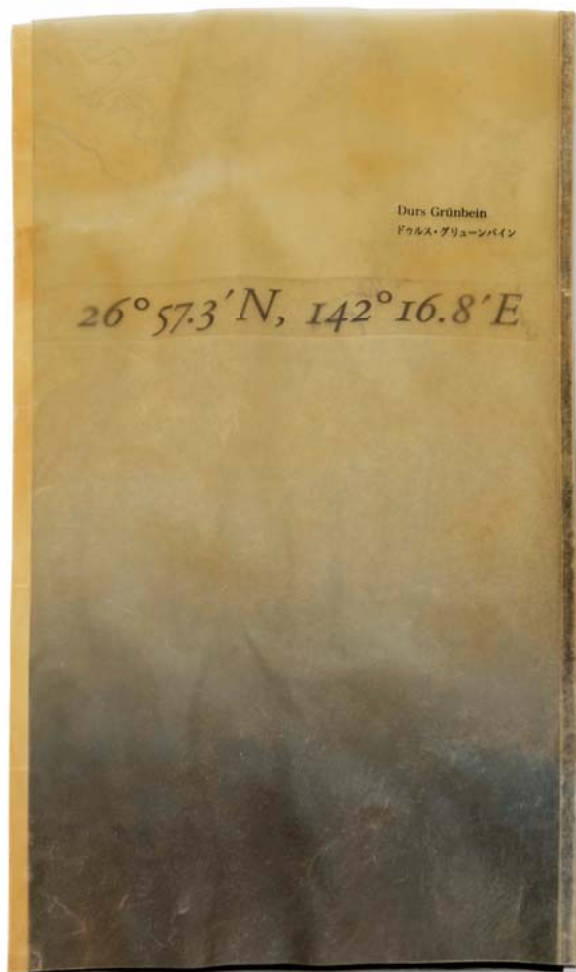
29 cm.

Number 24 of 50 copies

IT'S THE KIND OF TREASURE you'd find in your grandmother's attic: vintage photographs of women from another time, bound in a Victorian-era album with a brass clasp and gilded pages. But the alluring women of *Femmes Fatales* signify something much darker than their sepia tones suggest: Their titles, spelled out in gold lettering, all refer to torture and execution devices through the ages. The Ropemaker's Daughter, a nickname for a noose. The Lady of the Carousel, moniker for the guillotine. Yellow Mama, otherwise known as the electric chair.

Maureen Cummins is as much an archival historian as she is a book artist. Her award-winning works, many of which are in Wellesley's collection, illuminate matters of gender, race, and power by going to the source. Cummins' *The Business Is Suffering* quietly chronicles the woes of a Virginia slave-trading firm in decline, as revealed in a collection of business correspondence. The playful *Anatomy of Insanity* uses century-old psychiatric records from McLean Hospital to disturbing effect: While men at the legendary Boston-area psychiatric hospital were found insane for a wide variety of reasons, women were found insane mostly due to their own biology—menstruation, lactation, menopause, desire. Cummins offers up these histories with a gorgeous sense of aesthetics, inviting us to make connections while carefully avoiding telling us what to think.

➔ To view more of Cummins' work, go to <http://www.maureencummins.com/>.



26° 57.3' N, 142° 16.8' E

Veronika Schäpers

2007

Schäpers, Tokyo


46 cm.


Number 3 of 44 copies



CAN A BOOK RECREATE THE EXPERIENCE of being at sea, in search of an underwater creature? Herman Melville used every literary device in his arsenal to put us on a ship deck with a wandering sailor, voyaging to capture a whale. In Veronika Schäpers' diaphanous book, the artist uses her own tools—color, texture, and even sound—to interpret the ocean's mysteries and the discovery of another mythic monster: the giant squid, captured on film in its natural habitat for the first time in 2004 near Japan.

The book's elongated form evokes the traditional nautical log; its title represents the coordinates where the giant squid was found. But it's Schäpers' stunningly delicate printing and inking techniques that submerge us. The vintage, translucent paper on which she sets her text—poetry, line-drawn maps, and nautical data from the 2004 voyage—recreates the rush of ocean waves as we turn the pages. Carefully folded to leave narrow openings that evoke both the horizon and the lens of an underwater camera, the pages reveal inner layers of partially visible text and shifts of luminous color, from blurred blues and grays to the black of the ocean floor.

Schäpers, a German native who lives in Japan, has seen her work enter collections such as New York's Museum of Modern Art. Within Wellesley's collection, *26° 57.3' N, 142° 16.8' E* offers a meditation uniquely suited for the liberal arts—an exploration of myth and marine biology, of high art and rigorous science. 

 To see more artists' books in the collection, go to <http://www.wellesley.edu/Library/SpecColl/rbooklet/intro.html> or <http://web.wellesley.edu/web/Dept/LT/Collections/SpecColl/bkarts.psmi>.

Francie Latour is an associate editor of Wellesley magazine.