

Disciplining a Craft

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THERE IS MORE INTEREST in book arts now than ever before: dozens of colleges and art schools offer classes in book arts, and centers of book art have been created in nearly every large city in America. Opportunities for education in the book arts abound, and it seems as though something significant is changing in the way people talk about the book arts. A discipline is evolving, a conceptual framework for thinking about making books is emerging.

How are we building a discipline in book arts?

What does it mean for book arts to be a discipline?

It is not obvious what the term “book arts” means: it seems to describe crafts, but it is not self-evident which crafts. In order to understand what the term means, it seems reasonable to start by looking at where the book arts are transmitted, where people form their ideas about what they are doing as they are learning how to do it. There are two main arenas for the transmission of the book arts in America: one is the informal world of workshop instruction, usually (but not always) at nonprofit centers for book arts, and the other is formal academic study at a college, art school, or university. There have been book arts classes in the university much longer than there have been workshops that teach classes in the book arts. Porter Garnett’s Laboratory Press at Carnegie Mellon was founded in 1923, for example. There are many other examples; for instance, 10 of the 12 residential colleges at Yale had letterpress shops for student use and Scripps college press has been around since the 1940s. While there have always been printers and handbinders teaching their crafts, the founding of the Center for Book Arts in New York in 1974 marks the beginning of the contemporary period of workshop-based book arts instruction.

Since institutions are the places that support and create disciplines, let’s examine the institutions that teach book arts to better understand what people mean by the term “book arts.” The two main arenas are quite different in their approaches to instruction: centers of book art have an interest in bringing in the greatest number of people to support their operations and therefore develop courses that are clear and attractive to a large number of people. Academic institutions do not have the same pressure to expand and develop audience and are subject to entirely different forces that shape programming. We might expect academic institutions to frame book arts quite differently.

First I will examine workshop instruction, and then academic institutions.

For this examination, I picked three places that are from geographically different areas of the country. I will look at their workshop offerings from fall of 2006, by title and course description. The purpose of this examination is to understand what most people mean when they use the term “book arts” and to understand the scope of activity.

The Center for Book Arts in New York was the first center of its kind and it is, without a doubt, one of the field-defining institutions. They teach hundreds of workshops a year and offer multiple levels and sections of workshops in letterpress printing, binding, paper decoration, printmaking, conservation, calligraphy, and workshops that deal in artists’ book making. For the fall 2006 workshop schedule, they listed 56 different sections of binding classes, from bookbinding I to boxmaking along with classes dedicated to specific structures, like long-stitch binding classes, Coptic binding, and leather bound books. They offered 30 sections of printing classes, 22 of which were dedicated

to letterpress and eight of which covered printmaking topics, like Japanese wood block printing. They taught six sections of paper decorating classes (suminagashi and marbling), six sections of calligraphy classes (copperplate script to handwriting for books), five sections of conservation classes (including a master class with Gary Frost), and seven classes that are hard to categorize, like Comic Book Weekend, Editioning Mail Art, or Make a Limited Edition Book in a Week, which was a printing class combined with binding.

The Minnesota Center for Book Arts is another large center for instruction in the book arts, which also provides studio space for artists, publishes a book every year and creates exhibition programming. During fall 2006 they taught eleven sections of binding classes, seven sections of letterpress classes, two printmaking classes, three sections of paper decorating classes, one papermaking class, a Japanese calligraphy class, and a book art sampler (three Wednesdays: an introduction to papermaking, printing, and binding). One of the interesting threads in the MCBA's fall schedule was a group of three classes dedicated to making jewelry from left-over bookbinding scraps. MCBA also offers classes designed particularly for teachers, usually held in the summer, which cover binding techniques for teachers, as well as classes on topics designed to help teachers introduce book arts into the classroom. MCBA clearly has primary and secondary education as part of its mission; they also regularly offer classes for families and even preschool children in book arts topics.

The San Francisco Center for the Book is a decade-old vibrant institution in the world of workshop instruction, teaching an ambitious workshop program and creating interesting exhibition programming. During fall 2006 they offered 15 classes in printing, all with a letterpress emphasis, 11 classes in binding (one of which was a class in how to teach book arts to children) and another 10 classes in a category the center calls "related arts": they range from a paste-paper class to a class in writing for artists' books. The SFCB characterizes this third group of classes as the "creative heart of bookmaking, where concept, materials, form and content come together."

There are many other centers of book art instruction all over the country. Pyramid Atlantic is one of the few centers that offers classes in any depth in papermaking. The Columbia College Center for Book and Paper Arts, which is the host institution for the graduate program where I teach, also offers workshops in printing, binding, and papermaking. There are so many other great places: BookWorks in beautiful Asheville North Carolina, Garage Annex School, and Penland, are only a few. They all offer a range of classes, generally, though not always, with a technical orientation. All of the centers offer some non-technique-oriented instruction. The SFCB, for example, outlines a programmatic ambition to support artistic activity through the "related arts" series of workshops. But the focus in these centers, at least as defined by how much time is spent doing what, is on teaching craft.

Based on this not-very-rigorous survey of centers of book art instruction, I conclude that in the fall of 2006, at places that use the words "book arts" as part of the definition of what they do, binding is at the heart of book arts, closely followed by letterpress printing, based on numbers of classes. There seems to be a constellation of other crafts—paper decoration, papermaking, calligraphy, and printmaking—that are taught in the context of the book arts, but at a very low frequency. It seems important to point out that while the world of papermaking has an intimate relationship with the book arts, papermaking is a medium on its own terms. Papermaking supports other activities (sculpture, for example) and crosses into many other activities, but is not offered at book art centers with anywhere near the same frequency as binding or letterpress classes. Of the three centers we examined in detail, none of them offers extensive programming in papermaking. There are places that offer many classes in papermaking, but they tend to be specialized studios. The classes that all of these institutions offer are a carefully considered blend of what they can do, given the facilities they have, and what they think their communities will choose to support. It is important to reiterate that centers that teach workshops must offer classes that will fill and run: it is pointless to offer a seminar in narrative book theory if nobody will take it. When we talk about book arts, it is important to try to understand what those words mean to the people who take these workshops. This is clear: to a lot of people, "book arts" means the crafts of hand binding and letterpress printing.

The academic world of book arts is larger than you might expect. In nearly every art department there is some kind of activity involving books, usually as part of a printmaking program. Typically (or perhaps not untypically), artists' books are mentioned in an upper-level printmaking studio as a potential outcome of printmaking. There are not very many dedicated departments of book arts, but there are a surprising number of colleges that offer one, two or more courses in the book arts. I collected course descriptions from 23 colleges that teach more than one class in book arts, and I found a very different approach to teaching book arts from the way workshop approach the field. Instead of classes with techniques as their subjects, making it easy to count which crafts are taught as book arts, most classes at schools have a conceptual framing, a title that talks about the ideas in making books, rather than techniques in how to make books. This is indicative of something important, but for now let's try to use this information to understand what is included in the category "book arts." It seems reasonable to look at undergraduate introductory classes as the place in the academy where the field of activity would be delimited. In other words, intro classes ought to offer a definition of the book arts as a part of the activity of teaching students to make books. So, here are some phrases culled from course descriptions from introductory experiences in the book arts at nine schools, picked almost at random. Frequently, the first class (where there is more than one class) is a class called artists' books.

From Mills College, which is one of the few schools with a stand-alone undergraduate book arts focus. They offer a group of at least 15 classes in the book arts, a concentration in some depth:

Introduction to Book Arts

...an introduction to the techniques, structures, tools, materials and processes used in creating artists' books. Students will explore a broad range of studio practice, including letterpress printing, hand and computer typography, simple book structures, and basic relief printmaking as they examine the relationship of verbal, visual, and structural content in books.

From California College of the Arts:

Bookmaking.

In this class, we will concentrate on recognizing the book within your own work and making it real in your chosen media. Basic book structures and letterpress printing from handset type will be introduced and more advanced instruction will be tailored to individual needs.

From the School of the Art Institute of Chicago:

Artists' Books

In this multi-level course we investigate the use of books in the context of studio practice. Bindings, such as pamphlet, side stitch, accordion, and codex forms and variations are introduced and practiced. Strategies for utilizing material and form in relation to content, and for articulating pagination, such as pacing, juxtaposition, and simultaneity, are addressed in individual projects.

Wells College, another of the few schools with a dedicated undergraduate book arts department, offers two introductory experiences:

Hand Bookbinding I

This course introduces students to traditional bookbinding techniques by familiarizing them with the tools, materials and techniques of the craft. Students are expected to produce a set of book models that are clean, structurally sound, and consistent with the class demonstration.

Letterpress: Introduction to Typography

Demonstrations, readings, and assignments on the mechanics of handsetting and

printing from metal type. Traditional and artistically innovative approaches to using this medium will be covered. Each student will create her or his own individual projects: post-cards, broadsides, book, etc.

From Wellesley College:

Book Arts Studio

In an interactive setting, students will gain hands-on experience in bookmaking, with an emphasis on the creative possibilities of ancient craft and contemporary art. In the Library's Book Arts Lab, students will learn to set type by hand and print on hand presses. Students will create limited edition broadsides and artists' books.

From the San Francisco Art Institute:

Artists' Books—Structures & Ideas

This class uses the form of the book as a source of inspiration and as a medium for expression, building upon many traditional bindings and newly created structures. Students will acquire technical skills and explore different media as they create a series of contemporary artists' books. For each book, emphasis will be placed on the interactions between words and images and on using materials and a binding that support the theme or meaning. Conceptual approaches, sequence, design, editioning, and experimental books will be discussed.

From the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston:

Artist's Books: An Introduction

An in-depth introduction to one-of-a-kind artists' books. This course is for artists of any discipline who want to work in the book format. Students learn many book structures, including portfolios pamphlets, multi-signature, concertinas, Coptic and clamshell boxes. We also explore a variety of image and text-making techniques. During open studio time students develop ideas and complete 'a book a week,' which may include edible books, altered books, books made of natural materials, visual books or books that tell stories.

From Middle Tennessee State University:

Book Arts The Book Arts Program offers two classes in book arts (ART 3550 & ART 4110) and two classes in letterpress printing (ART 3770 & ART 4770). In Book Arts I and II students learn various book binding and book designing techniques and skills. The concept of the artist's book is explored and students are encouraged to work with both traditional and non-traditional book forms and materials. In Letterpress I students learn the basics of letterpress printing using raised metal type to form text and relief printing processes to create images

From Smith College:

The Book: Theory and Practice I

Investigates (1) the structure and history of the Latin alphabet, augmenting those studies with an emphasis on the practice of calligraphy, (2) a study of typography that includes the setting of type by hand and learning the rudiments of printing type, and (3) the study of digital typography.

Of these nine schools offering introductory experiences in book arts, eight schools promote the technique of binding as central to the practice, six of the nine schools use letterpress as the method of choice for creating text, six of the nine list artists' books either as the title of the class or as a potential outcome for the class. It is really fascinating to note that seven of the nine approaches frame book making as an expressive or artistic form and talk about conceptual issues in making books. The

relationship of form to content seems to be at the heart of much of this activity; at these schools, the focus is on the book as a place to make art. Wells College uses the terms “artistically innovative approaches” to letterpress printing, signaling an intention to use letterpress as a mode of art making. Smith College alone does not use any language explicitly talking about art or expression, but Smith also teaches a class called *The Artist’s Book in the 20th Century*, so *The Book: Theory and Practice* (just look at the name!) is clearly taught in a historicized and theory-rich environment.

It is hard when reading these course descriptions not to conclude that book arts means something different in the academy than it does in the workshop world. The methods used in book arts seem to be the same in both worlds. Hand binding as a way to create book structures is a common technique in almost all introductory experiences in book arts closely followed by letterpress printing as a way of generating the text and images that are also at the heart of this activity. Seen from a purely technical standpoint, workshop instruction and academic instruction seem to be about the same activities. But the activities are framed differently: “recognizing the book within your own work” (from CCA), and “investigate the use of books in the context of studio practice” (from SAIC) sound very different from “course will familiarize students with the basic materials, techniques, and history of bookbinding, or “learn the basics of hand typesetting and letterpress printing. We will cover the essentials of good presswork, including inking, imposition and impression” (from the CBA). The difference, of course, is the context for these learning experiences. The context for the academic instruction of the book arts is an academic department, the intellectual nucleus of the academy.

It seems safe to conclude, based on this not-very-rigorous methodology, that the term “book arts” in the studio art programs (where most of the classes in book arts are taught), refers to creative, expressive activity that is part of a studio practice in art, which involves book structures (binding), image and text (probably made by printing letterpress), mostly in the service of making artists’ books. The Wells program and the University of Alabama program seem to operate from slightly different definitions: both of these programs seem to conceptually frame book arts in the same way as in the world of workshop instruction. On the University of Alabama MFA in book arts web site the program overview states, “The general goal for the M.F.A. program is to develop professional *artisans* (my italics) who are technically proficient in the book arts and cognizant of the historical background in which these various crafts evolved and of the professional environment in which our graduates will work,” which is a very different sense of the book arts from the idea of “recognizing the book within your work.” This does not mean that these programs do not value artistic expression: on the contrary, as I will show, they both seem to foreground it. In the world of workshop instruction, classes are almost always driven by technique, but in the world of academic instruction, these activities are framed by disciplinary thinking.

What is this disciplinary thinking?

“Discipline,” in this academic usage, means a field of study. It seems like we use the word interchangeably with the word “profession,” but it isn’t the same thing at all. Some disciplines do have a direct professional practice, and some do not. Medicine, law, and architecture all have licensing requirements, and the results of study in any of these disciplines have concrete implications in the way one performs the work of a doctor, a lawyer, or an architect. These disciplines support professions in an obvious way. History, English, and a host of other disciplines mostly support the profession of professor. The central qualification for a professor is a terminal degree in, ahem, one of the disciplines.

Clearly, one needs a discipline to be a professor.

Sometime in the nineteenth century, the idea of academic disciplines arose out of the increasing specialization of higher education: the classics curriculum of Greek and Latin—which had been the only curriculum in higher education outside medicine, theology, and law—was replaced by the need to educate people for increasingly complicated occupations. Right before the Civil War, land grant universities were created by Congress through a program of giving federal land to state legislatures with the charge to sell the land and use the proceeds to create institutions of higher education. These new institutions were given the charge to create universities “where the leading object shall

be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life” (Morrill Act, signed into law in 1862 by Lincoln). This financial incentive to create institutions of higher education with the express purpose of providing vocational education, created new kinds of academic divisions: departments dedicated to formulating curricula for professional practice of what had formerly been occupations learned through apprenticeships. This should sound familiar: when occupations turn into professions, especially in the context of higher education, a great deal of thinking about what constitutes necessary knowledge and identifying basic principles goes into forming a curriculum. The discussion revolves around knowledge and ways of knowing, rather than around ways of doing. It is this kind of thinking that creates the idea of a discipline: the transmission of skills is now based on abstract knowledge, since the teaching happens in a context removed from the actual practice of those skills. Thinking about doing creates a new awareness of that practice, and the focus of this new discipline becomes thinking, not doing. A farmer turns into an agronomist, a blacksmith turns into an engineer, and in the case most interesting to us, a painter turns into an artist. During the twentieth century, studio fine art became a discipline in American universities.*

So, in this context, an academic discipline is a branch of knowledge that is taught and researched at an institution of higher education. Markers for a discipline are an academic journal (peer-reviewed is considered most desirable), professional organizations, and discrete departments in academe, especially graduate programs in the field. The presence of all three of these cultural institutions certifies that there will be a developed body of thought about the endeavor, a conceptual framework for thinking about how and why practitioners adopt one way of doing things over another, and a philosophical framework for explaining the central issues of that occupation.

So, to get back to book arts, let’s look at studio fine art, one of the two major sites of book arts education. There can be no doubt: studio art is firmly a discipline in the academy now. Using the marker test, we can see the College Art Association as the umbrella professional organization for college art professors. It publishes two journals, both of which are peer-reviewed. There are at least 250 NASAD-accredited undergraduate departments of art in America and something like a thousand colleges and universities that offer degrees with some concentration in art—out of perhaps 2,500 four-year public and private institutions in America. Clearly, studio art is firmly ensconced in the academy as a disciplinary kind of knowledge.

But the very idea of fine art as a discipline, i.e., a branch of knowledge rather than a craft of making, still seems like an odd construction, a kind of unintended consequence of putting studio fine art instruction into the context of the American university. Centuries of artists learning their craft through apprenticeship, a kind of learning where the how and why of doing are transmitted simply by imitation, have been replaced by studio art courses, that on the one hand frequently don’t teach young artists how to do anything at all, but on the other hand excel at investigating the cultural role of art, at teaching artists to think critically about what they do, and at positioning what they do within a larger context.

My favorite undergraduate art professor (Dick Lebowitz, a photography professor at Rhode Island School of Design) came into my sophomore studio class, on the very first day in my major, and announced, “Technique is the only thing that can be taught, but I am not going to teach any technique in this class.” We were all stunned, since what we wanted to know was how to create cool pictures, not to spend hours and hours looking at and talking about our work. But, in fact, all we did, for six hours every week, was look at our work and talk about it.

This was not a waste of time, by the way. I learned how to think about art, discipline-style by talking about it incessantly and I believe it helped me make better art.

And yet, there is still some kind of cognitive dissonance in the study of studio art as a discipline in the academy. Study can be as creative a practice as anything else, but there is a real difference between the mode of thinking in study and the mode of thinking in making art. Study is analytic, a

taking apart, a dissection of an existing corpus of thought. Art making is synthetic, a putting together, the creation of a new corpus. This is too reductive, but in this overly-simplified dyad we can see the fundamental tension between art and the academy: the friction between doing and thinking. As a professor myself for nearly 15 years now, I am only too familiar with the problems untenured artist/professors in universities and colleges have in explaining how what they do has rigor, or seriousness of purpose. Merely making things seems like too much fun to many serious members of the profession.

Or, as one of my colleagues in another, non-art, discipline once said, “Art school seems like having dessert all the time.” Sometime in mid-twentieth century America, the MFA became the terminal degree for studio art and thus, through some special logic, equivalent to a doctorate. An MFA, according to the CAA, is supposed to be disciplinary certification of professional ability: in this way of thinking, a person with an MFA is a professional, university-trained artist. An MFA in book arts, that rare and worthy achievement, certifies that someone is a professional book artist, I suppose.

So then why does that sound so odd? It is interesting to think about nondisciplinary approaches to any of the traditional professions: the power of certification is so powerful that phrases like “jailhouse lawyer,” “shade tree architect,” or “amateur surgeon” seem like a warning, like you would be crazy to trust those people with anything other than a damp paper bag. Contrast that with the term “outsider artist,” and we begin to see some of the problems with art as a discipline. Outsider artist, more often than not, suggests someone with a fresh viewpoint, an authenticity of expression, that a university-trained artist clearly wouldn’t have. In fact, the term “university-trained artist” sounds like a negative value judgment: my own imagination paints a picture of the university-trained artist as someone comfortable with difficult literary theory, someone who makes work that would make an ordinary person feel alienated or uncomfortable, someone who would not be able to earn a living from the sale of their own work unless they succeeded in being certified by an unimpeachable authority like the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Obviously (at least to my own imagination) the work of a university-trained artist would be difficult in some way, sexually or politically challenging, certainly not merely pleasant or life-affirming. And all that coming from someone who likes difficult art and spends his time training future MFAs!

The notion of professionalism in the arts, particularly in the visual arts, is haunted by the persistent myth of the artist as a hero, the artist as a cultural outsider, the rebel who has special access to feelings and knowledge ordinary people cannot tap into. The idea that there could be a professionalization of a supernatural ability is patently absurd and is the source of the cognitive dissonance: if you have to be a weirdo to be an artist, then obviously training can’t make you weird.

Or can it?

The problem is with the myth, though, not with teaching artists to think hard about what and how they do things. Moving book arts into the academy, shifting the emphasis from how to make things to asking why we make things the way we do, and questioning how they will be seen and used is a transformation that has already happened. And it has improved book arts: people are making better work as a direct result of this transformation.

What characterizes this emerging discipline of book arts?

When people receive their training, even in the supposedly simple case of learning a craft, it always includes so much more than just technical instruction. When we teach classes in letterpress printing, or hand binding, we are doing something much more than teaching people how to make things using commercially obsolete technology. An enormous range of values and assumptions is always transmitted in even the simplest technical instruction: values about what is appropriate to do or to use, what is proper or permitted in a particular mode of making. All these values, transmitted unconsciously or consciously through instruction, shape how we decide what to make and how we make it. In other words, teaching technique always includes a conceptual framework for activity.

So, how are we conceptually framing these activities?

Starting with the dumbest level: people make books in book art classes. Why do they make books? Here are some rationales: “They will be encouraged to use the book form to meet artistic

goals” (Nova Scotia School of Art and Design); “Traditional and sculptural books provide exciting options for artistic expression.” (MCAD); “Graduates leave with knowledge of the fluid integration of text, image, structure, materials and technique, able to use the book as a vehicle for personal expression.” (OCAC). I think it is easy to see that the reason most schools offer classes in book arts is to include making books as a form of artistic expression. Most programs are teaching book arts in order to get people making books that are works of art. I think this means, gasp, they are really teaching artists’ books.

Well, that’s not a very controversial conclusion, is it, when most of the intro classes are called Artists’ Books? The controversy might arise if someone asserted that book arts are about the idea of traditional book crafts being used to make traditional books, with no idea of expression as a part of that project. This would be an exaggerated crystal goblet idea, where the maker’s duty is to transparently reveal the words of an author to a reader, in a dignified and appropriate context. But none of the academic programs we examined are actually saying that: they are all in basic agreement that the purpose of the book arts is to encourage artistic expression. For example, the University of Alabama MFA program, arguably the most craft-oriented degree granting program, states, “We are interested in developing craft skills based on historical principles and techniques, and the artistic expression that follows,” a clear declaration of interest in expression as the final result, the object of study. So, the discipline of book arts focuses on making books as an artistic activity. The term “book arts” includes artists’ books as part of the discipline: a central part, especially when the instruction happens in art departments, but not the only outcome from activity in the book arts. The outcome from study in the book arts might thus be characterized as learning to make books as vehicles for artistic expression.

When we teach people to make books that are expressive vehicles, how do we encourage this expression to be embodied in the object? “Students realize the potential of narrative, sequence, and pacing, together with the importance of combining word and image” (Purchase College’s Art of the Book class); “Students explore the book as an art form that incorporates three-dimensional as well as two-dimensional structure, time and sequence, text and image.” (University of the Arts MFA program description); “We go over simple bookbinding methods, including a session on paper mechanics (pop-up structures), but the emphasis will be on how the format enhances the concept.” (the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston); and “Students will explore a broad range of studio practice, including letterpress printing, hand and computer typography, simple book structures, and basic relief printmaking as they examine the relationship of verbal, visual, and structural content in books,” (Mills College).

This points to one of the very central ideas of the discipline: that the book delivers a time-based experience created through interaction of the format (or structure) with text and imagery. A book articulates this time-based experience and projects a voice through use of a multitude of crafts and other disciplines: typography, book structures, image-generating media (which includes practically every artistic medium ever used), creative writing, papermaking, and, if you get right down to it, almost anything imaginable, including performance, video, and sculpture. This is starting to seem odd: This defines a discipline that seems at the very least intermedia and, at its most extreme, interdisciplinary. It also sounds strangely familiar: let’s see: an activity that works with words and images to create communication, using a variety of media...

There is a tremendous overlap between the academic teaching of graphic design and the academic teaching of book arts: typography, page design, book design, issues with communication and semiotics, narrative, investigation of how ideas are invested into objects: these are all examples of issues common to both activities. The biggest difference, as far as I can see, and it is a complex one, is the issue of creative authorship. In artists’ books, at least, authorship is a central issue. In book arts, not so much. For example, we might all agree that the Arion Press *Moby Dick* is an impressive achievement, a beautiful slab of a book, a noteworthy achievement in book arts, but I don’t think anybody wants to call it an artists’ book. And I think we would agree that substantial creativity went into making *Moby Dick*, but is it a unique work of art? I don’t think so. By the way, that doesn’t take

anything away from it. Not everything has to be a work of art.

One of the things that always struck me, back when I taught graphic design, is how graphic design, unlike all the other areas in a traditional (whatever that means) art department, is not medium-based, but is a conceptual framework for activity. Basic graphic design is about form and communication, and it can be executed in a variety of media. Book arts, as a discipline, is also about form and communication. I am happy to see that some schools are creating centers where the issues common to book arts and graphic design are being explored by students. The Text and Image area of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and The Center for Word, Text, and Image of the San Francisco Art Institute, are dramatic examples of this, but there are many places where letterpress shops are kept as typographic labs for design students. I hope that as the discipline of book arts becomes more consolidated, the connection to the practice of graphic design also strengthens: books arts could be the research and development zone for graphic design, and if more places like these interdisciplinary centers are created, it will enrich and expand the study of the book arts.

Let me try a definition: Book arts is the study of making books as expressive artistic objects. This practice focuses on thinking about how books create meaning, how books function culturally, and how a book can be a unique experience in art.

That is my simple version of the discipline of book arts, but I am left with a great many other questions: why do the book arts, as a name for a practice, make such a fetish of the hand made? If the conceptual focus of the discipline is on the way a book creates a time-based experience, wouldn't that allow any methodology for making? Why privilege obsolete methods?

Why do we have such an emphasis on traditional techniques in book arts classes?

Here is a really interesting statement from the wonderful and rigorous UC Santa Barbara program (from the college web site): "Book arts reflects the understanding that as new technologies emerge, older technologies persist as art forms." Here is a quote from Inge Brugeman "The traditional and craft foundations give such a complex and important starting point for any contemporary artist book maker that I would hate to see us distance ourselves from them. I would like to see us continue to critically define the distinct areas that fall under the umbrella of artists' books (book art) and educate the larger art community to understand its different and unique facets." (a reply posted on the JAB Online website) I agree. One of the hallmarks of this discipline may be an understanding that the history of the craft traditions is important to understanding how meaning is created: in typography, for example, an understanding of the history of type is crucial to understanding how type creates a voice for text.

It is the growth of book arts instruction within art departments that is driving the creation of a conceptually defined discipline. Departments that are separate from art departments are free to teach however they want, as long as they have the support of their administration. Book arts instruction that occurs within a larger department are subject to the same standards and criteria as any other instruction within that department: in our case, the teaching of the book arts, when it happens within a studio art department, must fit in with all the other art teaching. The hallmark of teaching art as a discipline is thinking about craft activities in terms that stress the conceptual rather than the technical aspects of the activity: In other words, the why and what for of making, rather than the how. And that explains the difference between the way workshop-oriented book arts are taught and the way book arts are taught in the academy.

So, finally, I want to be explicit here: I believe that the central practice in art is the making of things. Art is not philosophy, in fact it is a bad, sloppy place to do philosophy. Art making is always concerned with materiality is the service of expression. So, when I talk about a conceptual framework for teaching book arts, I am not trying to reject craft in anyway. Craft is a way to talk about how we interact with materiality, how we shape the things we use to embody whatever it is we are trying to express. People like to make things, and why not? The making of things is a delightful, playful, joyful part of being human.

The pleasure of making something, of making something well, is frequently a complete experience for some people. I do not want to take that joy away from anybody. But I think it is a problem

when I assume that the joy I had in making something, the pleasure I took in creating a well-made object, should be enough for all the viewers of my work. It is not. There has to be some other aspect to a work to make it engage an audience, some kind of exchange of value to make it a worthwhile experience. I love to look at beautiful things, but when I read a great book, it isn't the type that takes me away.

The movement of studio art instruction into the academy has been accompanied by a shift in teaching priorities. A discipline is a conceptual framework, a way of framing activity, and art as taught in the academy has become about ideas. The model of what an artist does has shifted from the talented craftsperson, someone skilled at creating representation or form, to the notion that an artist manipulates ideas by creating form, and that the ideas are the juice behind the form. Book arts are becoming another part of the world of studio art, and young artists are making books as just another way to make art.

* I am heavily in debt to Howard Singerman's excellent book *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* for my understanding of the development of art departments and the professionalization of art in the academy. I urge you, if you are interested in this at all, to read his lucid and interesting book.