

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Textile Society of America Symposium
Proceedings

Textile Society of America

2006

Textile Narratives in Book Form

Robin E. Muller

Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, rmuller@nscad.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

Muller, Robin E., "Textile Narratives in Book Form" (2006). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 318.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/318>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Textile Society of America at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Textile Narratives in Book Form

Robin E. Muller
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design
5163 Duke Street
Halifax, NS Canada B4A 2M4
rmuller@nscad.ca

I am a weaver and textile artist who has moved into working in the book form. As a teacher at an art college I have been looking for ways to explain this movement by myself and several other textiles artists, like the late Shereen Laplantz who wrote a book on book arts techniques after many decades of making plaited baskets. I have the pleasure of doing that today with three esteemed colleagues: Laura Strand, of Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville, Susan Warner Keene, Toronto, Bronfman award winner, formerly at Sheridan College, and Pam Scheinman, artist and historian Montclair State University, NJ.

I presented my first research paper on the topic, *Silk Velvet and Embroidered Bindings of Medieval England and France* at the Smith College TSA meeting in 2002. Afterwards, Mary Dusenbury invited me to present up to date view at a subsequent meeting. I'll start by reviewing eight medieval bindings and quickly catch up to the present.

Prior to the invention of the printing press, European books were hand written, religious and legal documents owned buy the church and royalty. They were luxury objects and craftsmen and their patrons confirmed that status by using precious metals, gemstones and, for a short period, precious fabrics. The first examples illustrate both uses. The left image is from a painting and shows a loose chemise style cover that is decorative, but also functional. These chemises provided a kind of symbolic protection to bibles and prayer books, protecting their sacred nature from contact with human touch. The second is another chemise that holds the Indentures between Henry the Eighth and the Abbott of Islip in 1498. The metal seals and coloured cords represent the regions covered in the document. Books were stored flat in this era. The flaps on the chemises became impractical when we started storing books up right on shelves.

Many of the medieval fabric books were made in the style of leather books as you can see from Elizabeth the First's velvet Bible 1568(metal clasps) and the blue velvet book from Lyon 1608, that had silver tooling in a panel design.

Others looked very different from leather books and incorporated techniques used in clothing, hats and home furnishings, as you can see in these English embroidered bindings: a decorative pattern on a *dos à dos* binding of the Old Testament and Psalms England 1610 and the figures of Faith and Hope on a copy of David's Psalms, 1635.

Some of the embroidered images were based on engravings and other art for books, left and others reflected the maker's other profession, millinery, cover made of silver wire and silk embroidery. England 1613.

These velvet and embroidered bindings fell out of favour pretty quickly and Moroccan Calf became the binding of choice. Few remain in collections due to the removal of the precious gold threads and gemstones, general deterioration, and the practice of rebinding textile covered books for conservation purposes. Many of these fragile bindings were never collected in the first place.

A few French binders continued in this tradition, but the earliest notable modern examples are from Sonia Delaunay who applied her fabric and graphic design work to book bindings as

well as paintings and other works in the bold geometric style she developed along with her husband, painter Robert Delaunay. She bound several first edition works for Surrealist authors with whom she collaborated on other projects. The first example was made for Guillaume Apollinaire in 1921 and is a copy of his *Calligrammes*, published in 1919. The cover is embroidered in chain stitch and appliquéd using changing taffeta and black satin.

In the UK and Europe the next recognized books are in the 1970's and 80's. Among Book binding "Design Binders" create a special binding based on the content of each book. Angela James did two important works in 1983: *An Intimate Landscape* by L. Clarke and *British Etchings*. Embroideries and fabric collages of landscapes are a part of the overall cloth or leather binding. The fabric work is usually protected by Plexiglas or another panel. Prior to that exhibition, British binders Faith Shannon Created the elaborate linen quilted and embroidered binding of *Alice through the Looking Glass*. Trevor Jones' binding of *Genesis* in 1980 uses the textile dyeing technique of Batik on leather which gives a similar effect.

Bookbinders and textile artists in the US were addressing similar concerns, but working and exhibiting separately in textiles and in the book world. The first Book arts pioneer I'm showing is Claire Van Vleet, a Dutch/Canadian artist who has run the Janus Press in Vermont since 1955. This MacArthur Foundation award winner designs a book structure for each author. The first example is *Aunt Sally's Lament*, a poem about a quilt maker by Margaret Kauffman. Janus press published a beautiful limited edition of hand made letterpress printed books. Later Chronicle Books published a trade version. As the reader turns the pages the quilt pattern evolves and changes.

The second pioneer is Hedi Kyle, recently retired from University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Her work was recently featured in *American Craft* in issue that had article by panellist Pam Scheinman. In that article I learned that Kyle lived and worked in Berkeley during the height of the contemporary fiber art movement. It is exciting to think that she could have met and worked with textile artists whose work has inspired all of us. Kyle has invented many new and novel sculptural structures that happen to be books. She is a generous artist and teacher who shares her ideas and likes to have emerging artists create works using her structures.

Lenore Tawney is one of the pioneers of fiber art who has had both a constant theme and a great deal of variety in the work she creates. She's well known in textiles for early textural tapestries and monumental formal slit pieces woven of linen. In the 1970's she began adding some collage and paint to the works as in this one *Waters over the Firmament*, 1976. She created a huge body of work that included drawings, sculpture and collage, many pieces revolved around the altered book. She began these in the 1960's at the same time fluxus artists doing similar works, especially altered furniture, and continued to create the works into the 1980's documented in the exhibition and book *Lenore Tawney* at the American Craft Museum. These images are from the retrospective book published in 1990. The *Altered book Creatures and Window* was made in 1985.

Kay Sekimachi, a California artist who hosted some of us in her studio in Oakland at the last TSA, became well known in the 1960s creating translucent monofilament pieces of 6 layer double weave. In 1980 she applied her analytical weaving mind to creating boxes, baskets and books on the loom. This piece, *Views of Mount Fuji* has ikat imagery using warp transfer printing.

Ed Rossbach worked in many textiles media. Suzanne Baisserman reminded me, in her talk on California Craftsman at last conference, that he also created artists books, though few were exhibited. I saw his book for Points of Contact at Fiberworks School in Berkeley in 1978, part of the Fiberworks conference. It was a very simple typed and collaged book describing some of his thoughts on the possibilities of weaving.

All of these elements have inspired me as I've tried to marry my two interests. My earliest books used photocopied photographs, and textiles, in sculptural structures, to pay homage to traditional and contemporary craftspersons. More recently, I've used the Jacquard loom at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, but mills, made available through the Jacquard Centre in North Carolina, to make fabric to cover books and make scrolls, in the Design Binding tradition, to document travel experiences during which I met traditional weavers and dyers. In some, the scroll represents back strap looms, which were both carriers of information in various forms of language.

Stephanie Dean Moore of Fall River Nova Scotia is another artist who started as a weaver and knitter. In these two works she has created fabric for the covers: a knitted silk chemise with a fern pattern and books covered with her versions of marbled paper redone in needlepoint and the knitting of silk threads.

Martha Cole and several other book artists in Saskatchewan use a variety of textile Techniques in their books. Martha also works as a quilt maker and dyer, and used these skills to create imagery for pages and very special book cloths to cover the books.



Figure 1: Kantha by Martha Cole, 2000, 6.5 cm x 15 cm. (rolled), or 77 cm x 15 cm (opened). Photo by Cathryn Miller.

Jane Merks of Nelson British Columbia is a graphic designer by training and runs a small limited edition press. The work illustrated in figures 2 and 3 uses vintage embroidered handkerchiefs as pages in the star book structure.



Figures 2 (left) 3 (right). *Hankies by Jane Merks, 2006, 110 cm x 110 cm when open, approx 28 x 28 x 32 x 18cm closed. Silk and cotton handkerchiefs, ramie fabric and embroidery floss. Photo by the Artist.*



Figure 4. *Shibori Scroll by Robin E. Muller, Computer Jacquard tapestry, mill woven, cotton based on photos by the artist. Japanese style box. Rolled in box: 25 x 5 x 5" Photo by the artist.*



Figure 5. *Shibori Scroll by Robin E. Muller, Computer Jacquard tapestry, mill woven, cotton based on photos by the artist. Unrolled: 18" x 65". Photo by the artist.*

My colleagues will be elaborating on a variety of concerns of students, emerging and established artists and other pioneers in this field. In this age of interdisciplinary endeavours, I hope we encourage others to consider the overlapping concerns and working methods of textiles artist and book binders.