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STORYTELLING: ARTIST'S BOOKS

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STORYTELLING: ARTIST'S BOOKS

by

Nancy Jo Ann Steele

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Karen Kunc

Lincoln, Nebraska

May 1999

STORYTELLING: ARTIST'S BOOKS

Nancy Jo Ann Steele, MFA

University of Nebraska, 1999

Adviser: Karen Kunc

My thesis exhibition presents mixed media artist's books inspired by autobiographical stories originating from my family. These stories relate to the lives of my family and the natural environment of my home in a small-town farming community with deep Appalachian roots. With a sense of humor and solemnity, I make artist's books about the events and stories related to our religion, work, animals, neighbors, land and superstitions.

I mournfully watch the slow disintegration of our way of life. Vital aspects of our lives, such as working on the farm as a family, speaking with an accent, and making much of our own food, clothes, and tools by hand is slowly fading in an homogenized and industrialized world. This nostalgia encouraged me to research my own identity where I learned that Appalachians are famous for their storytelling and oral traditions. My father displayed an obvious talent for storytelling that was an integral part of the whole family. I tell stories in my own way as I preserve my family's history by using personal stories as the content for inspiration to create art.

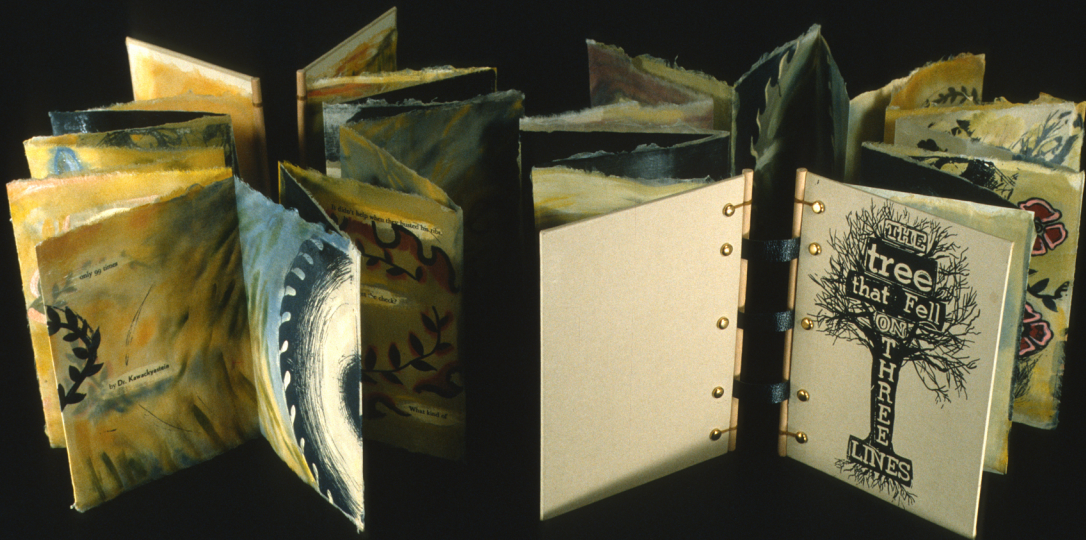
My books are the physical embodiment of my continuing research into a variety of book structures using two-dimensional imagery on paper to create three-dimensional objects. Construction of the books has been a major exploration as it suggests possibilities for the book to be viewed as sculpture. Traditional book formats encourage the viewer to leaf through the book and read in a linear fashion from beginning to end,

such as in my two books, raisin' baccar and The Tree that Fell on Three Lines. Many of my most recent works, however, are not "read" but function as sculptural bookworks.

The materials and processes that I use often have a direct correlation to the stories inspiring the work. Materials familiar to my childhood and farmlife, such as fabric, twine, burlap, thread, and wood recur again and again in the various works. As a child, I came into contact with these materials on a daily basis. As an adult artist, these materials add an essential tactile quality to my work that references the content of the pieces. Also included in the works are the media and methods of the artist, such as drawing, painting, and a variety of printmaking techniques including relief printing, letterpress, intaglio, xerox lithography, and silkscreen. Not only are the materials related to the content of the books, but also the nature of my working process parallels work on the farm. The physical nature of printmaking and bookmaking requires repetitive actions, hand manipulation of multiples, and the gathering of numerous parts, all of which are similar to the physical actions of many farm tasks that require intensive manual labor such as planting, cultivating, and harvesting.

The nature of these artist's books is not to recount word-for-word my family's stories, but to use the stories as inspiration in creating art. I am beginning from the oral stories, which include our memories and experiences, and through artistic "license" choosing to tell parts, change, emphasize, and abstract. In storytelling, incidents that originate in truth become an abstraction through time and transmission. Likewise, my artist's books are an abstraction of truthful events that have been synthesized into art.





THE
tree
that Fell
ON
THREE
LINES





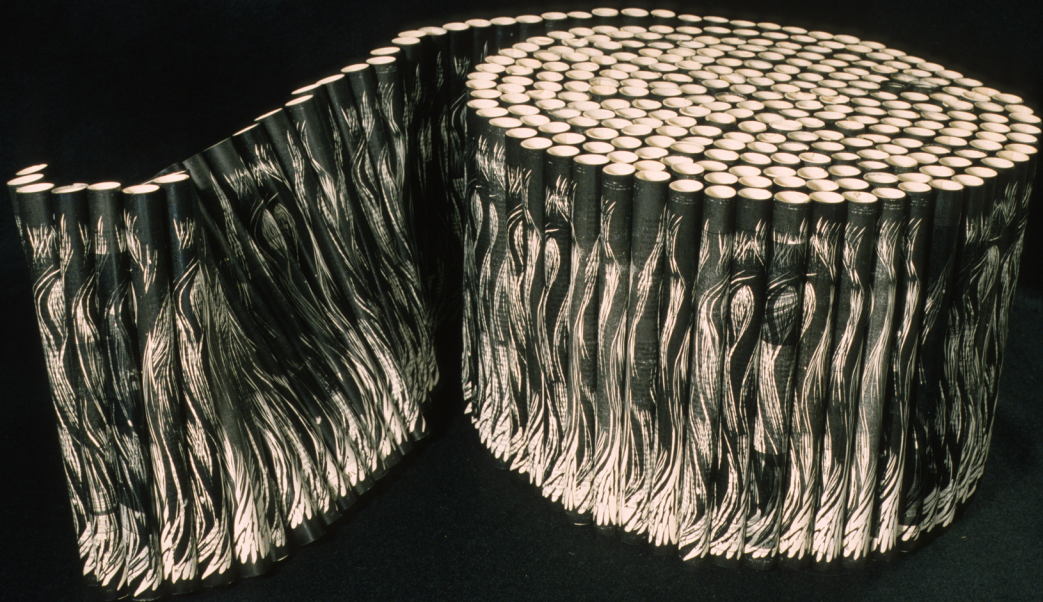
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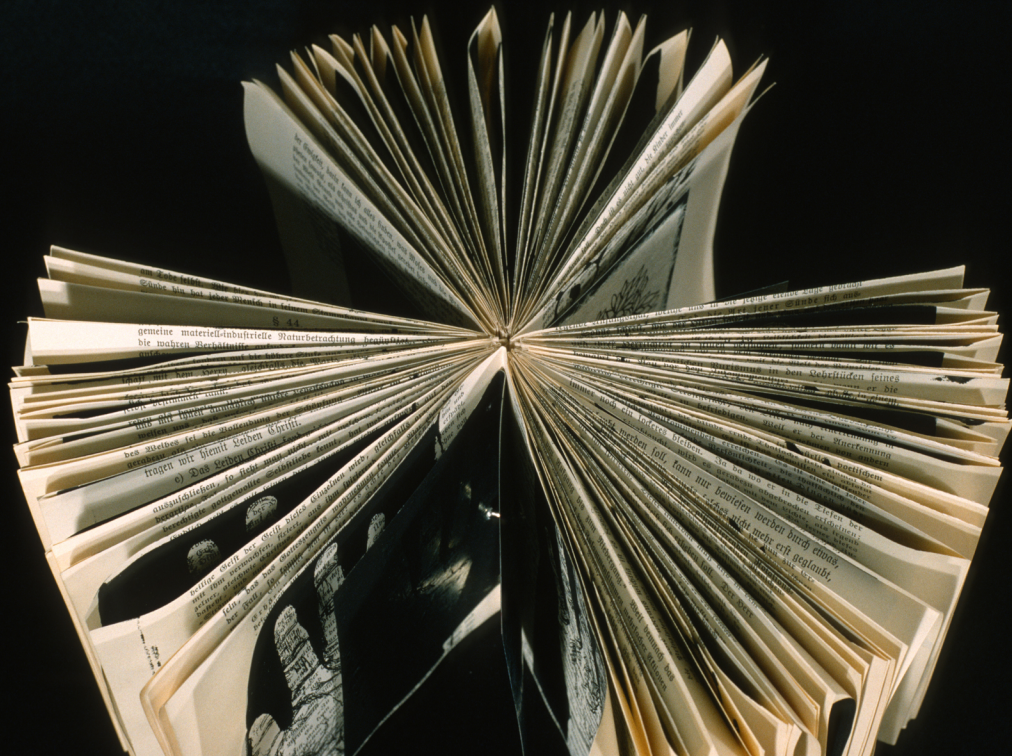
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N. J. Steele

MODERN ITALIAN POETS

&
THE
JOHNNY
SERIES

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