

AS MANY HOURS AS IT TAKES:
WOMEN, LABOR, AND CRAFT
IN THE BOOK ARTS

by
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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The growing field of book arts is in a state of change as it struggles to relate to the art world while being cast into the category of “craft.” The majority of book artists are female and their experiences are integral in understanding how the field fits within the arts. In addition, it is difficult to support one’s self on making books alone and most book artists are forced to find other job opportunities. In addition to a brief history of bookmaking and women bookbinders, and a literature review, this study features a pilot study of 7 women book artists from the organization Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts (ILSSA). The interviews look at the ways the women support themselves financially, how they view their art in relation to being a woman, and how they view the field of book arts as individuals. Just as women are continually defined and redefined, considered weak because of their size, and unimportant because of their historic place in society, the artists book encompasses contradictions and is fighting to be recognized by the greater arts community.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I was introduced to the Book Arts in my first semester as a Master's student in Women's Studies at the University of Alabama. Like many people, I had no idea that the field existed. As an undergraduate I had seriously considered getting my Bachelor's of Fine Arts (BFA) but was pulled into Communication Arts and wanted to conduct academic research. There were times that I regretted not getting my BFA and taking the "safer" route—the one with job prospects, albeit academic and mostly low paying. I met several book artists at the annual Kentucky Festival in Northport, Alabama in the Fall of 2006. Subsequently, I took a papermaking class as an elective the following Spring, and promptly applied to be admitted to the Book Arts Master's of Fine Arts (MFA) program at the University of Alabama. I was accepted, and for the past two years have been working on both degrees. Naturally, I began to view my work in book arts from a feminist perspective, just as I began to view my Women's Studies research from the perspective of an artist. Much of the work I create deals with the lives of women, particularly female Saints in the Orthodox Church. While my work is not blatantly feminist, much of the work I see by my peers deals with women's lives and experiences in unpredictable ways. For instance, this thesis features three books created by women from the University of Alabama's MFA in the Book Arts. As will be seen, these books are personal to the artists and reflect their experiences as women.

There are currently more women in the field than there are men, and I am specifically interested in the unique perspectives of these women artists. More specifically I am interested in the ways that women book artists navigate the economics of the field. The work involved in creating a book is tedious, laborious, and time-consuming, especially when one person is responsible for making the paper, printing and binding each book. As I have attempted to sell my work at many art shows and festivals in the past two years, I have experienced firsthand the frustration of someone passing up my work because they believe it is too expensive. However, taking time and cost of materials into consideration, fledgling book artists often pay themselves around minimum wage, if that. The problems for artists living in a capitalist economy are two-fold. First, if art is seen as a commodity, as it often is in the case of crafts, then the consumer would naturally look for the cheapest product. In the case of handmade books, there are so many machine-made counterparts that have very similar aesthetics that is hard for the consumer to justify the price of the handmade book. Why would someone pay significantly more for a hand-bound blank-book when they can buy a machine made counterpart at a chain bookstore? The second problem that many artists recognize is that when charging realistic prices for their work they are limiting their clientele to wealthy individuals. Not everyone can afford a well-crafted handmade book. As many book artists are not wealthy themselves, it certainly does not seem fair to limit their art to the wealthy. This leads concerned artists to create books as a “democratic multiple,” a term coined by book artist and scholar Johanna Drucker (1995, 69). That is, to use affordable materials, and print multiple editions of each project. The democratic multiple is noble in theory, and some artists feel that they must create work that is accessible in this way. Drucker (1995) writes that common misconceptions about the democratic multiple is that it is:

Necessary for artists' books to be inexpensive works in unnumbered or unlimited editions. The second is that they should be produced in small format, through commercial means. The third is that this produces a democratic artform—one whose democracy resides in its affordability rather than in the accessibility of its content (72).

She adds that the misconceptions lie in the affordability of mass production. In order to offset print a large edition of a book one must have large amounts of money upfront. The more copies there are in an edition, the less the piece of art or book is worth. One of the problems with the democratic multiple is that the rarity of artists' books makes them valuable, not only monetarily, but also artistically. An artist's options seem to be limited to creating undervalued work in multiples, that might reach a wider audience, or creating fewer pieces that are sold for higher prices, but at a slower pace.

United States capitalism often does not see art as an occupation with economic benefits. Though the artist will most likely be looked down upon for choosing an unfortunate career, if the artist is female family and peers may at least tolerate her desire to create art. Art has been a seemingly accepted place for women within the bourgeoisie in Western civilization for centuries. Women in the Victorian era were allowed to dabble in painting and handcrafts, but expected to spend the majority of their time in the home. If women were to go to college in the nineteenth century, the art department was deemed an appropriate place for them to study (Stankiewicz, 1982, 48). Ornamental education was appropriate for women, as they inhabit(ed) the domestic sphere they would ornament. Stanliewicz (1982) states that ironically though art has been perceived as feminine, women have not held a prominent place in art (48). The arts are a perfect place for women to "express" themselves with the perception that they will depend on the men in

their lives for financial support. For centuries their crafts served needs within the home. However, those skills are not valued monetarily in modern Western society.

Book Arts is often referred to as a “craft,” and though that term is carried by many with pride, the economics of craft are different than the economics of “high” art. The definitions of high art versus craft are varied. High art tends to be viewed on the walls of major art museums rather than in an average person’s home. Historically, art made by the working class has been seen as craft. Craftspeople serve(d) valuable positions in their community making useful objects that were also aesthetically appealing. Craftspeople who are talented in the arts use their craft *as* their art. It is a myth that craft can be taught while art is a “God-given” gift. Bernier (2006) writes that “Art is high class, takes years to learn, and is only for the exceptionally talented. Crafts are for everyone, can be mastered by even the untalented, and take almost no time to learn. Even many supporters of crafts believe this to be true” (6). Art is hung on wall, admired from afar by wealthy patrons and those fortunate enough to be able to view the piece. Crafts are used. Cooking feeds the family, sewing keeps them warm, and anything else is decoration. Beautiful quilts are put on beds and keep family members warm. A clay pot can serve as a container for food. A well-made book is used and admired by the owner. The economics of craft get muddled when the craftsperson is creating work that blurs the lines between art and craft.

Much has been written about the economics of art. Living in a capitalist society allows artists to have choices about their work and occupation. They have the freedom not only to create art, but also to create art that might question the politics or religion of that society without fear of punishment. While it is beneficial in this regard to live in a capitalist society, capitalism does little to support its artists and often disregards their work as play and expects hard working artists to find other means to support themselves. Art in a capitalist society is often (though not always)

used as little more than a status symbol by the wealthy. Book arts is in a particularly difficult place as it has the task of proving itself as an art form to begin with.

The focus on women in this study is important not only because the majority of book artists are women, but also because the majority of craftspeople are women. Within the Book Arts, women are the dominant of the genders, and yet there is the perception among women book artists that the men in the field are more rewarded, and given more attention for their work. Women's work as a whole is the most economically disenfranchised. The work women create is oftentimes overlooked. Alice Walker's (1974) book of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* has the recurrent theme of art, particularly that of black women. The garden is a place that is typically thought of as a woman's place of decoration outside of the home. Walker challenges the idea of the garden being merely decorative and calls it her "mother's art" (105). Art has been a daily part of her mother's life. Rather than look at the works that fill our homes as practical, or even as crafts, Walker suggests that we are surrounded by the art of our mothers. As women creating books that they want to be used, but also admired as art, they are acknowledging a history of craftswomen.

My thesis focuses on the economics of art from the perspective of female book artists. As previously stated the majority of book artists are female and their experiences are integral in understanding how the field fits within the arts. Also, it is difficult to support one's self on making books alone and most book artists are forced to find other job opportunities to support themselves. In addition to a brief history of bookmaking and women bookbinders, and a literature review, this study features a study of 7 women book artists from the organization Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts (ILSSA). The interviews look at the ways

the women support themselves financially, how they view their art in relation to being a woman, and how they view the field of book arts as individuals.

It is important to consider the history of making books by hand when looking at the work of modern book artists and makers. As this thesis is written for a Women's Studies community, it is understood that the majority of readers are unfamiliar with the book arts as a field. The second chapter will include an overview of book history, women bookbinders, and a description of the book arts. The term "book arts" is hard for many in the field to define. It means different things to those working in the different areas of the art. I reviewed literature and did my best to define the term fairly so that those without a background in book arts would better understand the thesis. The third chapter includes a review of literature that was written in response to works by female book artists. After the literature review, I look at "grrrl" zines and how they fit into book arts and self-publishing. Zines are form of self-publishing that was popularized in the 1990s. They are not always recognized as a part of book arts, but the zines being handmade by women are important to explore as they give the artist and author a way to create and distribute works in a cheap, artistic, and accessible manner. After looking at grrrl zines, I include a review of works by female book artists. This chapter ends by exploring Marxist themes in the book arts. The content of chapter four is the data of the case study. It includes the interviews from the 7 women book artists who were members of the organization Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts (ILSSA). The organization employs a theme similar to a labor union, and their thoughts on the economics of the field seemed especially relevant. The female members were asked several questions to gauge their relationship with book arts, the economy, and ILSSA. The fifth, and final chapter, includes a conclusion of the data from chapter four. The conclusion will compare the interviews to the literature review and discuss the findings of the study.

The interviews that were conducted with ILSSA members sought to better understand how and why the organization was founded, why individual members chose to join, how they view their work in relation to their gender, and how they navigate the field economically. In my initial research, I was interested in the types of artists that joined ILSSA, the viability of this fledgling organization, and the hopes of both the founders and members for the future of ILSSA.

The following chapter will consist of a literature review of current work dealing with book arts, as well as a review of current artists' books by women. The interviews will be used in the final chapter to either support or contradict what the literature states about artists' books, craft, and the economics of art.

Chapter 2

A Review of Book History

Books hold an obvious place in history as vessels of information. Though printing and book production are often associated with Western civilization, the Chinese were the first to make handmade paper and movable type. Paper was invented in the 2nd Century BC during the Han Dynasty. The Chinese used the bark of mulberry trees to make their paper. Their original methods of papermaking are still being used today. These traditional processes are primarily used in Asia, but are also used in the United States by book artists and hand papermakers. Paper traveled through China and into the Islamic world during the 8th Century AD. Papermaking made its way into Spain and Italy with Moorish invasions around the 12th Century AD. Before printing technologies, writing on tablets began between 3rd and 7th century BC on clay and wax tablets, as well as on parchment and papyrus. Eastern philosophers, scientists, and poets transcribed their works into books and libraries existed in the Middle East and Greece. Most famous is the Ancient Library of Alexandria, which originated sometime in the 3rd Century, BCE. Illuminated manuscripts saw their peak during the middle ages with monastics writing and illuminating the scriptures, psalms, and holy writings on parchment and vellum. Gutenberg invented his famous printing press using movable lead type sometime in the 1440s, and this new invention created a need for paper. Once in Europe paper began being made with cloth rag, which produced thicker paper more able to handle the impression of lead type.

Letterpress printing was the landmark invention that gave books a more prominent place in Western Europe in the mid-1440s. Where only religious leaders had seen the Bible as transcribed by hand in monasteries, religious literacy began to spread at a slow, but noticeable pace. According to Howard (2005) books saw their “youth” during the Protestant Reformation. Anti-Catholic literature began to be distributed among those who could read in the form of chapbooks and broadsides (55-59). It could be said that letterpress printing has been a vocation promoting dissent from the beginning. In the 18th and 19th centuries publishing companies were established in Europe and in America printing everything from Puritan prayer books to works of great literature. Most of these first letterpress printed books were printed and bound in very similar formats, using traditional typefaces and the codex form.¹ Large printing houses were responsible for most of the printed material in the 15th century. Each printing house would have one master printer. Most famous is Aldus Manutius, of Italy. He was the first to print handheld, portable, books. Prior to this books were being made in dimensions too large for the average person to carry. He was also the first printer to use italic type, so that more words could fit on each page. Books were sometimes published in subscriptions, so that the financial support of the patrons was gained before printing the book. Books were still tedious to produce at this point in history because of the work involved with printing and hand-binding, but in the 1870s offset printing was invented. The image or text was offset from the printing plate, to a rubber mat, to the paper. This method of printing allowed for greater reproductive abilities. Today it is used primarily to print for books that will be hand-bound and business printing. Photocopying and laser printing catapulted mass printing. In addition to new methods of printing books, computers were being introduced and the first of desktop publishing software was introduced in the 1980s.

¹ The codex book form is what those in the West are most familiar with. The separate pages or folios are sewn together in the center of the section and typically housed in a hardback binding.

The need for multiple people to print a book was lessened due to the introduction of these technologies. The craft and trade of bookmaking became a unique occupation, limited to skilled craftspeople.

Today letterpress printed books are made in limited quantities, generally to be housed in hand-crafted book bindings. This is by no means an exhaustive review of book history, as book history is not the point of my research. Nevertheless, there was the need to include a basic overview of book history so that the craft of book arts would be better understood by the reader.

A Brief History of Women Book Makers

Just as men have historically controlled literacy, they have also controlled printing and book production. And just as women have been involved in all forms of craft, they were helping to produce manuscripts and books from the beginning. As women have always been affiliated with sewing, they almost certainly participated in sewing textblocks since the beginning of book history. These women have been largely unrecognized. One of the first specific examples of women bookbinders is of Angioloa and Laura, the nieces of printmaker Bernadino de 'Benagli (*Women Bookbinders*, 12). Bengali reportedly left the young women supplies for illumination and bookbinding when he died. He was an active printmaker during the years 1480-1517. A few female bookbinders have been recorded from the 18th century including Mary Weir who bound with her husband in Roger Payne's bindery in London (17). In the 19th Century women were accepted as bookbinders, however it wasn't a trade that they sought out initially. According to Tidcombe (1996), when Victoria took the throne at 18, women began to feel they could profit from their labor. A few wealthy women were taught to bind during this time (19-21). Later in the century the Chiswick School of Arts and Crafts was founded in Bedford Park and taught

bookbinding to the attending pupils. T.J. Cobden-Sanderson taught in the Bookbinding Department, and started the Doves Bindery, and taught more than a dozen women (24-5).

The website and exhibition housed by Princeton University Library (2004) displays the history of women in bookmaking, as well as a timeline of women bookmakers and printers (“Unseen Hands”). The timeline begins with nuns at San Jacopo Di Ripoli who composed type and printed their works in their convent between the years 1476-1484, and ends with Kara Walker, the modern silhouette artist whose books reveal the history of racial inequities in the United States. In the early twentieth century women worked openly as bookbinders, sewing textblocks. Though there are many women not mentioned here, one can do more extensive research on specific women bookbinders. The main point for this study is to note the ways in which women were introduced to bookbinding, and their relative silence compared to male bookbinders and printers. This theme of women’s work being silenced and unrecognized is one that will be explored thoroughly in the chapters to come.

One of the specific ways that women were historically involved in bookbinding was through embroidery. Tidcome (1996) points out the important fact that embroidered bindings cannot be called “women’s bookbindings” because the actual binding was generally done by other professional binders (77). However, women played an important role in this particular practice. Women artists would embroider elaborate cloth for the covers of prayer and holy books. S.T. Prideaux (1989) writes about embroidery as one of the earliest ways that women participated in bookbinding. The art of embroidery was first made by the ancient Egyptians, who taught the craft to the Jews (141). Throughout time it was particularly used in religious art, and eventually used to cover prayer books by Catholics in Europe. Though the art had been derived from the ancient East, Prideaux (1989) makes the assertion that “in its highest perfection

embroidery was exclusively an English art...” (151). Puritanism nearly did away with religious embroidery on book covers. However, several original books still remain including *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* (c. 1619), which is housed in the British Museum (153). By the 17th century embroidery was an accepted art relegated to wealthy ladies. It goes without saying that embroidery as an art form is now associated with women’s crafts. There are still a few women who embroider book covers, but not the extent that was seen in the 17th century.

With the reclaiming of craft in North America, however, there may be a resurgence in the use of embroidery in books. Book artist Miriam Schaer uses embroidery in some of her works. As opposed to the fine-bindings the embroidered covers have been typically used for, her books are highly sculptural and interpretive (miriamschaer.com). In addition there is a class being taught at the Pratt Institute in the Fall of 2009 titled, “The Embroidered Art Journal: Embroidery as Narration and Illustration” (Pratt.edu). The course taught basic embroidery and how to use embroidery in artists’ books and journals. Even though the art of embroidery on books is only one example of the ways that women have been involved in bookbinding historically, it is necessary to include it specifically because embroidery remains a craft done by many women, and it was a recurrent theme in literature about women bookbinders. Just as it is important to briefly discuss women bookbinders as background for my research, understanding the field of book arts is integral in supporting the rest of this study.

What is Book Arts?

Book Arts envelops traditional book making while also seeking to use the book in alternative ways and to question every aspect of the structure. Book Arts derives itself from the traditional fields of bookbinding and letterpress printing. Nearly everything is done by hand. Though some book artists specialize in bookbinding, letterpress printing, or hand papermaking, many book artists utilize both printing and binding in their own work to create books that are considered fine press and use fine bindings, or completely question the traditional codex structure. Many artists' books stray from traditional book design and structure so much that it is difficult for those outside of the field to recognize the art as book. Book artists are constantly asked to define their work, and justify its existence. According to Hubert and Hubert (1999) one of the characteristics of book arts is that it takes "into account the historical development of book production" (7). That said, they also contend that the "artist book discourages even the most painstaking attempts at precise definition" (7). Artists have been trying to define book arts throughout its history, and it is hard to get differing schools of thought to agree on a definition. However, it is important to know what an artist book is not.

It is important not to confuse artists' books with *livre d'artiste*. *Livre d'artiste* are books that showcase the illustrations and prints of artists. Many well-known artists have been featured in *livre d'artistes*, including Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. Though many of these books contain original prints by the artists, they are not artists' books for several reasons. Johanna Drucker (1995) has articulated the ways that *livre d'artistes* are not artists' books. She notes that though the books are finely made, they do not interrogate "the conceptual or material form of the book as part of its intention, thematic interests, or production activities" (3). Editors usually take control over the production of *livre d'artistes*, and the artists do not have a say in typographic design or binding. Artists' books are not books *about* artists. Large, glossy, books containing

photographs and factual history of art are also not considered to be artists books. And as Drucker points out, not “every book made by an artist is an artists’ book, in spite of the old Duchampian adage that art is what an artist says it is” (9). There is a lot of confusion surrounding artists’ books and their definition.

Those outside of the book arts community might assume that a book should maintain a codex structure. However, artists’ books are housed in multiple structures. At times the structure of the book is critiqued such that the “bookness” of the artists’ book is put into question. According to Clive Phillpot (1998) book arts occurs as a spectrum (38). One book that is considered to be an artist book can look drastically different than another. Books are interactive. The reader interprets the book in her own way and becomes a sort of author (40). Phillpot writes that “what really characterizes artists’ books is that they reflect and emerge from the pre-occupation and sensibilities of artists, as makers and as citizens” (33). The place of book artists as makers, craftspeople, and active participants in their community, are seen in the work they create. Narratives within their books often flow from personal experiences, and though each book takes a considerable amount of work, most of the artists do not want to limit who has access to the book.

Within book arts there is also the idea of the democratic multiple. Because books are sometimes produced in large quantities, the belief is that they should remain affordable to the average person. Some people hold fast to this idea, and pride themselves in their ability to provide art to people who might otherwise not own any. However, the idea of the democratic multiple also drives down the prices of artists’ books and prints. Craftspeople who spend backbreaking hours making paper by hand, letterpress printing, and hand binding books have trouble making a livable wage from their work. With this knowledge it is sometimes hard for

outsiders to understand why a person would chose an occupation that is antiquated and impractical. The combination of the impracticality of book arts with the need to make a living wage is one of the driving factors of my research. In addition to understanding what an artist book is, it is also important to understand the alternative book structures used by many book artists.

Non-Traditional Book Structures

Book artists are well known for using structures other than the codex. This rebellion against conformity to traditional structures propels these books into the art world. It also makes them a curiosity. Hedi Kyle, one of the most reputable bookbinders in the Western world, creates and discovers book structures that are based on origami. Many of her structures do not use glue, but are held together through a series of folds. Her structures include the “Blizzard Book” a book that is made without adhesive and is held together with a series of folds that create pages and pockets within the book. The "Flag Book" is especially useful to artists who want to show in a gallery space. The flag book is an accordion structure with tipped on pages on three levels, so that when the book is open the pages act as flags and cross each other. Usually the top and bottom level are pointing in the same direction. If the book is open on a table, the viewer could see images from one side, and a different set of images from the other. The text and images are fluid in this way and one does not take precedence over the other.



Amy Brock-Reed, *Use Me for Kindling When it All Goes to Pot*, 2008

Used by permission of the artist

The accordion structure is also very popular for the multiple ways that it can be used and explored by the viewer. In addition to the non-traditional materials used by many book artists, and the care put into handmade paper, alternative structures allow for artists to explore the work beyond the rules and expectations put upon them.

A Review of Literature in Response to Work by Female Book Artists

Art has been a seemingly accepted place for women within the bourgeoisie in Western civilization for centuries. Women in the Victorian era were allowed to dabble in painting and handcrafts, but expected to spend the majority of their time in the home. If women were to go to college in the nineteenth century the art department was deemed an appropriate place for them to study (Stankiewicz, 1982, 48). Ornamental education was appropriate for women, as they inhabit(ed) the domestic sphere they would ornament. Staniewicz (1982) states that though art has been perceived as feminine, women have not held a prominent place in art (48). Artists in

twenty-first Century America tend to be viewed as flighty, inconsistent, and unneeded—which makes the arts a perfect place for women to "express" themselves with the perception that they will depend on the men in their lives for financial support. As has been stated, for centuries their crafts have served needs within the home.

The majority of participants at book arts events, programs, and conferences such as the annual North American Paper and Book Intensive are women. Perhaps women find book arts an accepting field to work within because of the changing identities of the art. Feminism is widely accepted, and some of the artists have backgrounds in Women's Studies and were at the forefront of activism in the 1970s. Karin Spitfire (2007) is a poet, book artist and a freelance teacher of Women's Studies. She wrote of her poem, "The Making of Power" that "the experience of violence is a great narrower of reality; the use of violence is the traditional way to enforce a view of reality, the basic world model for 'power.' Feminism gave me the right to claim power, and define my reality" (Trivia). Her work with artists and bookmakers to publish her work is an example of how women book artists use community and collaboration. A poetry book that is not letterpress printed can still be an artist book in this way because it breaks traditional means of publication. *Women: Three Generations* is a photography book and not an artists' book but the lines blur, "especially when they confront the taboo against art that deals with 'real world' issues" (Lippard, 1985, 53). The chapter "The Artists' Book as an Agent of Change" in *The Century of Artists' Books* shows several feminist artists' books including *Industrial Woman* by photographer Peter Lyssiotis, with Jas Druke and Vivienne Mehes. It was produced by the Industrial Woman Collective in 1986 (Drucker, 1995, 289-30). *Industrial Woman* focuses on the injustices that working women in Australia faced, and the text was translated into seven languages, representing the languages spoken by the women who worked in the factories

represented. The book format gives artists the ability to use both art and text in their works and thus broaden what they are able to tell the viewer. Artist Joan Lyons used the experiences of all born women in her book *The Gynecologist*.

She said of her work that in the 1960s she felt that she was “out on a limb” with the subjects she was dealing with because feminism was just being articulated (Wasserman, 2007, 65). Autobiography became accepted in art and she had wondered how to use personal events in her art. The Doctor in *The Gynecologist* does not understand women’s bodies and minds. The book discusses a male doctor who has for years been trying to remove a woman’s ovaries, uterus, and cervix. Her “‘afterward’ contains a strong feminist assessment of the American Medical Association’s attitude toward women’s medicine (Drucker, 1995, 293). Artists use book arts to disseminate their ideas, tell of their life experiences, and attempt to create change.

Race, gender, and sexuality are exclusive themes in the art of Kara Walker. The books published under her name are not the handcrafted limited editions that some book artists limit themselves to, but are reproduced digitally. Walker’s (2007) *After the Deluge* juxtaposes images of her silhouettes with images of art from Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. The book was created in response to Hurricane Katrina. The images from the MOMA are of various subjects, including wealthy white people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and paintings of slaves. The text has been typed onto notecards. The first of this text reads, “Dear Cruel and malevolent Master, What irks me, you know this, is that I am and forever shall be a slave to that which brought (~~said: “brung”~~) me here. And while I know that the better part of me understands—um—that thing you say that—I am more than just a product of black history or American history, or women’s liberation...” (sic, 33). Her use of the Victorian silhouette in the form of paper cutouts is sometimes deceptive as the unknowing viewer sees the beautiful images

only to realize with closer inspection that the subject is slavery. Her book *Freedom: A Fable; A Curious Interpretation of the Wit of a Negress in Troubled Times, With Illustrations* uses pop-out silhouettes that show a group of recently emancipated slaves going to an unknown destination. "...the tale addresses the sexually and psychologically violent history of race relations in America" (Wasserman, 2007, 44). Walker uses antiquated fonts that along with the Victorian images create an "oppressive atmosphere of the postwar South" (44). The extended title also references books printed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Grrrl Zines

Zines and chapbooks had a comeback in the mid-1990s among punk youth hoping to get their messages out in a cheap, artistic, way. At the same time, feminism was undergoing another major change with the Riot Grrrl movement, which had its identity primarily in music and art. As artistic youth with little money, zines made the most practical form of dispersing information. This DIY (do it yourself) ideology remains important in feminist circles today. Though zines are pamphlets rather than books, they are integral to print culture, particularly when discussing artists' books.

Though a zine photocopied on cheap paper and a fine press leather-bound book seem to have little in common, they are both now becoming a part of the same genre. Zines can be made to contain finely detailed art, or be taped and stapled together haphazardly. Ken Miller (2008) posits that "the surge in independent publishing, afforded by easier access to cheap commercial printing, is blurring the distinction between zines, magazines, and artists' books" (70). Access to photocopiers, word processing programs, and a little creativity make it possible for anyone to publish. The modern distinction of a zine from a magazine is that a magazine is produced using

advertising, large scale printing techniques, and is run by corporations, whereas a zine is created by individuals and is a “labor of love.” Rather than being driven by commercialism, the zine is “personal and esoteric” (72). Instead of facing the beaurocracy that comes with large press publishing, small press printers and independent dissenters with access to computers are able to forgo rules and “ethical” guidelines that are set by publishers. In an essay discussing the need for ethics in large scale publishing Glikes (1981) writes with concern of the need for “integrity” within all forms of media. He focuses on the plight of 1960s, when, in his view, things went downward for society after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Things that went wrong include, but are not limited to: divorce rates rising, energy running out, cults “coming in” and “women rising up” (11). He later states, “[o]nce responsible to the society, the publisher is now responsible *for* the society” (12). Book artists who work in small press publishing are, for the most part, uninterested in being responsible for society and are primarily focused on presenting new poetry, short fiction, and political ideas in an accessible manner. This creates a perfect environment for feminists to express and distribute works of dissent.

The Global Grrrl Zine Network, subtitled, “Grrrl, lady, queer, and trans folk zines, distros and Do-It-Yourself projects from all over the world” is an organization that works to introduce zines to a broader audience to spread radical ideas and unite feminist grrrls from all over the world. Nikko Snyder (2008) proprietor of *Good Girl* zine in Canada said that for her “women making zines, or art, or anything else creative is about taking the media back--challenging the bullshit that goes on in the mainstream media, reclaiming public media space, and above all, expressing ourselves creatively...” (grrrlzines.net). Zines represented by the organization range in topics such as queer life, environmentalism, art and music, and reproduction. Anyone can go to the website and search through the independent zines that are being made and write to the

author/s for a copy. The zine author can collaborate with a community of other zine-makers and crafty women to make a zine for very little cost. This accessibility allows for any girl, no matter her wealth or education, to express her views. Just as zines allow for women to express their ideas, experiences, and opinions, letterpress printing and hand binding books allows women artists to use their creativity and skill to create change and educate readers.

Review of Works by Female Book Artists

Storytelling and oral histories are an important part of the historical South. Fiber and book artist, Jerushia Graham produces prints that depict African-American figures, usually alone. She writes in the “works” section of her website:

“The works derive from the rich narrative of oral and aural history found in the international community of the Black Diaspora... Each piece is a dialogue about history and memory. The works ask the viewer to consider who shapes our understanding of various groups' contributions to the "advancement" of mankind...Where does common sense, self awareness, self reflection, compassion, and solidarity find a home in spaces where the ugly side of humanity has persisted century after century? As a visual storyteller, Jerushia has designed her work to inspire action, encourage desire for intellectual stimulation, and nurture self-awareness within a global framework...” (“The Work,” artbyjerushia.com).

Graham’s work consists primarily of woodblock prints of women of color wearing traditional African garb. She also incorporates quilting into her art, and in this way she is retelling the stories of women of past generations who quilted in circles as a part of their community, making something artistic that was also practical.

Book artist and designer Jessica Peterson (2009) authored, designed, and letterpress printed the book *Cause and Effect* in Gordo, Alabama. Peterson (2009) says that the book is about “...how racial identity is formed through geography and history. It is an autobiographical story about the connections between a race riot in my hometown, my upbringing and my racial awareness” (<http://www.papersouvenir.com>). The book is printed entirely on handmade paper and uses a drum leaf binding. Peterson was raised in Rochester, New York in the late 1970s-early 1980s. Her parents chose to live in an urban neighborhood and sent both Peterson and her brother to a majority African-American school. She grew up with a better understanding of race than most middle-class American youth. However, when she moved to Alabama to earn her MFA in the Book Arts she became interested in race in the deep South.



Cause and Effect, Jessica Peterson
Used by Permission of the artist, 2009

Through research and speaking to her parents she discovered that race riots had taken place in her New York town in the 1970s. *Cause and Effect* deals with her own personal journey through understanding race in America. She says in the book, “I didn’t begin to understand race emotionally until I moved to Alabama. Once you live in a place that has a history of chattel

slavery you begin to understand the scars. But I had no idea that the residue of these scars stretched north, upwards through the country to Rochester” (2). Peterson used images from newspapers and microfilms of the articles that dealt with the race riots that she researched. Through making the book Peterson explores her own prejudices and experiences. Personal experience is a continued theme in the many of the works by female book artists.

Annie Herlocker (2008) of Paper Revival Press authored, designed, and letterpress printed the book *Allowed to Be*. The book features a series of poems that she wrote about grief from the perspective of dealing with her father’s death. She handmade all of the paper and did so because the process is laborious, just as the process of grief is laborious. Herlocker (2009) says of her book, “This hand-bound edition explores the fleeting and simultaneously irreparable feeling of grief due to the loss of someone close. I wrote this as a response to my own grief that has ebbed and flowed since the loss of my father in 1996” (paperrevivalpress.com).



*Allowed to Be, Annie Herlocker
Used by Permission of the artist, 2009*

Herlocker's book uses a traditional flatback structure and includes letterpress images of cells. Just as Herlocker used her father's death as a theme in her book, personal themes are common in letterpress printed books and art.

Artist Bridget Elmer (2009) of Flatbed Splendor designed and letterpress printed the book *We Can Go Beyond It* using EEG's of her father's brain as the primary images. She writes about the book:

Flatbed Splendor's latest book explores the theory of neuroplasticity—an assertion that the human brain is capable of changing itself. Inspired by the source imagery, generated from EEGs of her father's brain, the artist simulates the neurological process of synaptic change. The original brain maps are dismantled and transformed. The resulting symbols

and color fields are recombined into new images, new openings. The reader is invited to take the book apart, rearrange it, go beyond it (flatbedsplendor.com/books.html).

The book is bound using bookbinder Hedi Kyle's non-adhesive accordion structure. The three accordion sections insert into the three covers using tabs. The reader can literally take the book apart and rearrange the brain patterns. This book is a profound example of using non-traditional structure in order to further investigate the subject matter of the book. Elmer's letterpress work ranges from broadsides printed for poet's readings to a program cover designed and printed for a Joan Baez show to a miniature accordion titled *I Open the World*, which was printed for the 2008 Interlude Editions Small Book Edition box set, based on Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*.

The books that have been discussed here are very personal in nature, but they use their personal experiences in a way to create change. Many artists' books use structure, style, and content to question societal inequities. Not only does their art promote change, but their lives as artists question the capitalist economy that would encourage them to seek other means of supporting themselves.

Marxist Themes in the Book Arts

Though artists are viewed as marginal, they are also often held to high expectations, and perceived as having a "God-given" gift. Johanna Drucker (1994) writes that the notion of "artist as genius" was constructed in the nineteenth century and is "one of the most forceful legacies of the nineteenth century as a basis for legitimating the rarified artistic commodity" (113). The Modernist view of artist as genius has altered the view of artists, how artists interact with society, and ultimately predetermines their place in society. Book artists have the particular struggle to sell their work for a livable profit. Artist and economist Hans Abbing (2002) explores why those

who choose to create art when they will most likely not be financially rewarded, and wrote that part of the problem for artists is that their art cannot be defined. He asks, "[h]ow do people define art? Do some people have a larger say in the definition of art than others? And how do these differences translate into the economy of the arts?" (19). Lucy Lippard (1985) writes that "Artists' books are not books about art or on artists, but books *as* art. They can be all words, all images, or combinations thereof. At best they are a lively hybrid of exhibition, narrative, and object—cinematic potential co-existing with double-spread stasis" (49). Artists' books tend to be less valued than "high" art because they are portable and cheaper, and the book itself is a devalued object in our culture.

Artists are asked the question, "What is art?" Book artists are asked, "What is a book?" or "How is a book art?" This is similar to Toril Moi's (1990) question, "What is a woman?" These questions cannot be answered by one person, or even one group of people, for the meanings are fluid and change as society and technologies transform. It can be asserted that in a Capitalist society those who have economic investments in art ultimately define them and determine their worth. Handmade books are given less value because of their machine-made counterparts and their relatively small size. Books are typically made in small, handheld sizes. Andy Warhol made a statement about the size of art in relation to its perceived worth with his dollar sign series, "letting the relative sizes of his canvases function as if they were denomination of bills" (Drucker, 1995, 102). The larger the art object, the higher its price. As books are typically small in size, patrons who are uneducated in the art of books are unwilling to pay realistic prices for artist books. This is a continual strain on those entering the field, but many artists are more concerned with their work itself than the profit it gains. However, there are artists who seek to create small art in response to America's culture of bigger being better.

The Micromentalists were organized by the late painter Patrick Welch in the early 2000s. They believed in small, affordable art. They post their manifesto at each gallery at which they are shown. They maintain the rule that the manifesto must be larger than the largest piece of art. To price their work they added the hours that it took to make a project, and then ask the patron to pay what they make in the amount of hours it took. If the patron is wealthy, the art is generally more than they are willing to pay. If they are not wealthy, it's a relief to be able to purchase art. The "Micromentalist Manifesto" proclaims that artists should "reject the idea that great art must be made monumental in scale," "we should be affordable," and "We OWN the means of production" (2008, Micromentalists.com). Welch (2007) is quoted as saying, "If an artist says, 'I'm a Micromentalist,'" Welch explains, "that should encapsulate not only a political stance but also an aesthetic to a degree. I defy anyone to not be able to find a piece of art in this show that they would enjoy having in their home" (ChicagoJournal.com). Through owning the production and distribution of their work they ensure responsible pricing, so that the patron is able to buy the work and the artist is able to earn a livable wage. Certainly ILSSA's mission statement resonates with the themes in the Micromentalists' work.

Though it would go too far to say that all feminist book artists have Marxist tendencies, enough women in their field are exploring the book through the perspective of class, labor, and community that it is certainly worth noting. The paper that the book is printed on changes the way the reader interacts with the book. If the paper is handmade, with visible natural fibers, the reader understands that human labor went into its creation. Book artists are increasingly concerned with community building and equal distribution of labor and resources. I explore these ideas in the following chapter through the interviews that I have conducted with female book artists who are members of ILSSA. Not all of the members see their role in the craft

movement as questioning the economy, but there are themes in each interview that allude to the financial difficulties faced by women in such an underappreciated field. Each woman deals with these difficulties in different ways, from choosing a life of relative poverty as an artist, to getting a second job to support their artwork.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In order to better understand the economics of art from the perspective of female book artists I have conducted interviews with several female members of the organization Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts (ILSSA). Book arts *is* impractical, which is arguably why it is considered art. It's true, one can walk into a large bookstore and pick up leather-bound blank book to use as a journal. A publishing company can hire a graphic designer to design a book to be offset print in mass by a large company. However, this all goes against why dedicated artists spend backbreaking hours making paper, setting lead type, and letterpress printing their publications. Perhaps not all book artists claim to make books by hand as an act of dissent toward Capitalism, but their work by its very nature does just that. The impracticality of book arts is part of its appeal to many artists. This fledgling organization has 70 Union members from across the United States. The founders send out a quarterly, which includes a brochure about recent events, an article or two about craft and labor, and a skill for the members to work on. The union members meet up and sell their wares at arts and crafts festivals and conferences across the United States. They also organize for collective art projects including the first annual Plead for Skills festival (2009), where participating members created 55 miniature pieces that utilized a new skill. Though the interviews were conducted only with female book artists, members of ILSSA are craftspeople from a variety of backgrounds including but not limited to: book arts, sewing, quilting, embroidery, and pottery.

Bridget Elmer (2008) is the co-founder of ILSSA. Their mission statement states:

“Impractical Labor is a protest against contemporary industrial practices and values. Instead it favors independent workshop production by antiquated means and in relatively limited quantities. Economy of scale goes out the window, as does the myth that time must equal money. Impractical Labor seeks to restore the relationship between a maker and her tools; a maker and her time; a maker and what she makes. The process is the end, not the product. Impractical Labor is idealized labor: the labor of love” (Impractical-labor.org). Their organization answers the question, “what are you going to do with that?” by printing affordable pamphlets on community affirming topics that discuss the craft movement in the United States. Elmer’s (2008) letterpress printed pamphlet deals with Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic. Elmer printed the pamphlet on cheap drawing paper, so that the pamphlets could be sold for just a few dollars, or given away for free. She begins by stating that, “Ours is a culture of wish... ‘Happiness’ has been redefined as the impossible, unending pursuit of satisfying desire. A necessary question results: How do we reclaim happiness from desire?” (ILSSA). DIY in feminism is widely attributed to the Riot Grrrls, and more than a decade later feminist women are even more involved in craft. Not only are women making music and zines, but they are also making soup, their own clothing, and growing vegetables (*The Post-Subcultures Reader*, 254). The act of “doing” or “making” one’s material possessions and being responsible in that way for their livelihood is incredibly empowering. The DIY ethic as seen in Impractical Labor unites Do-It-Yourself women into a collective of makers. As Impractical Labor tackles Capitalism, they are dedicated to ecologically conscious means of production, beginning at the ground up.

Chapter 4

Data

I conducted interviews with seven female book artists who were members of the organization Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts (ILSSA). It should be noted that these interviews were not comprehensive, but rather a part of a study that looked at the work and opinions of female book artists from different points in their careers. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama to conduct the interviews I sent an e-mail to the members of ILSSA soliciting female book artists as participants. Nine women responded with interest, and six were interviewed. Three of the women in my study were located in Alabama, and they were interviewed in locations convenient for them. Everyone I interviewed was on the East Coast, but were in various locations and points in their education and careers. Even among the students interviewed there was varied amount of time spent in the field. The other three were out-of-state and were interviewed using a program called Skype on the internet. Skype is a free phone service that uses the internet to facilitate live video chats. I recorded those interviews using a digital recorder in the same way that I recorded the interviews that took place in person. In my original proposal for this study, I had planned to interview any female book artists who were willing to participate. It was decided that because the focus of my study is on the economics of book arts that I should limit my study to female members of ILSSA who are also book artists. ILSSA's mission statement focuses on the labor that goes into the art, and the relationship the laborer has with her tools and the means of producing her work. I felt those who agreed with their mission statement would be a good fit for

this study as they are already questioning their place in art as it relates to the economy and capitalism. As no one can plan for just who will respond to an interview, I did not anticipate that the majority of respondents would be students. Because they are students their place in the economy is already unique. Two of the six women interviewed are out of school and working. The other four women were in competitive MFA programs and near the end of their education. Because I limited the study to ILSSA members the responses themselves were limited. The field of book arts is already small, and to limit a study to members of a particular organization leaves out many women. However, due to their participation in ILSSA, and an understanding that they already held to the beliefs of ILSSA, I felt that the views of these women were more pertinent to my study. I used pseudonyms when discussing the answers from the respondents and avoided using information that might compromise the respondent's identity.

Because this study is written primarily for a Women's Studies audience, there is the assumption that readers may have little to no knowledge about the field of book arts. The first question I asked the interviewees was, "How do you define book arts?" This is a question that I anticipated respondents would have trouble with. Many book artists hate to define what we do because it is so complicated. There is also the fear that by defining our field we will be leaving certain artists out. My own definition of book arts would be more conservative than some. For me, the book object has to, in some way, convey information, as books are vessels of information. Alternatively, I could see the definition book arts being broadened to include any art object made using book processes. For example, a papermaker may use her paper in her handmade books. The same papermaker may also make pulp paintings (a painting done while the sheet is still wet. The artist literally paints the wet sheet with overbeaten pulp). She may very well consider her paintings to be part of book arts. This seems legitimate in that even if she tried

to sell the painting as a painting, unless the patron was knowledgeable of book arts, would be confused by her process. The book arts is a world that would readily accept her work.

The union-like attitude of ILSSA is what drew me to their organization for this study. Not only is the product valued, but the making of the product also takes on new importance. They discuss on their e-mail listserve and on their blog how to balance the need to make a living with making an affordable piece of art. I personally know one of the founders of ILSSA and watched as she helped form the organization from the beginning. I readily joined, though I did not know how the organization would grow or whether or not it would exist in another year. However, ILSSA did quite well in its inaugural year. They spent their first year developing literature, adding members, and creating awareness. Many of their new members met the founders personally at craft events and festivals where they had set up information tables. Book artists understood where the founders' vision and wanted to be a part of the organization. If anyone understands the need for unity, collaboration, and support in the art world, it is craftspeople. Throughout the ages they have been disregarded and their art has been called into question. ILSSA creates a space for these craftspeople to discuss their concerns, converse about the meaning of their work, and ultimately support each other as though they were in a union.

A blog entry from February 25, 2009 references a New York Times article on “the ‘new’ slow food movement in Brooklyn echoes much of the ILSSA ideology: an emphasis on pre-industrial processes, a disregard of large outputs and cost-efficiency, an interest in craftsmanship, an appreciation of the labor involved. Except they get to eat what they make. That must be nice. Note to self: is it possible to make things that are more *useful*?” (www.ilssa.wordpress.com/). The link of crafts to the slow foods movement has been made before. Many craftspeople consider the making of practical art objects to be a way of rejecting Capitalism. Hand

papermakers like the experience of using natural fibers, sometimes harvested from the ground themselves, to make the paper they will use in their work. This is similar to a person who grows her own organic vegetables to feed herself and her family. She is no longer dependent on chain grocery stores to provide herself with her sustenance. A papermaker is no longer dependent on large paper corporations, many of which are overseas, to provide them with the substrate for their work. The process of making the paper and book is often as important as the created object itself. It is hard for consumers to understand how to value the process, just as it is for them to understand the field itself. I have split this chapter into six sections that correspond to themes that emerged in the interviews. I begin with defining the book arts, then explore the responses about selling work, followed by a review of the responses regarding being a woman in the field. The last three sections deal with how the artists view process, their place in ILSSA, and what they foresee as the future of the field and ILSSA.

Defining the Work

The first question in the interview was, “how do you define the book arts?” I anticipated that it would be difficult at first for the interviewees to answer the question. My reason for asking this question was twofold. First, I wanted to see how the answers related to the research I had read defining the field. Second, I wanted to see how the respondents’ answers related to one another and whether there was any continuity in the results. After reviewing and coding the answers to this question three general themes became apparent: nobody wanted to limit their definition to specific kinds of work within the field, nobody had a definite answer, and materiality was important to the respondents in defining what an artist book could be.

I will address limiting the definition first. Four of the respondents stated explicitly that they did not want limit what art could be in the field. Estelle, an adjunct instructor of book arts, responded, “I don’t think everything is book art, but I am much more open to the definition. Sometimes when we get bogged down in worrying about the definition it brings down the field, and it can marginalize the field more” (Personal Interview, September 28, 2009). The three other respondents who considered their interpretations of the book to be broad made similar statements alluding to the need to not further fracture the field. Here, it is important to note that four of the seven respondents were from the same MFA in the Book Arts program located in the Southeast, United States. Being that their program is very traditional, the perspective of artists coming from this program might be swayed by the program’s rigid view of the book. The two women who both stated that an artist book was a “book object,” and also did not consider themselves to have a broad definition of the book, were from the same program. Because of my association with some of the students in this program, two of the women interviewed who were not from that program mentioned the tradition of our program in their responses. Estelle noted that while she would never limit book arts to traditional bookbinding and letterpress printing, she wished that she had been trained in fine binding. The benefit that was noted by Estelle to being from a traditional program is that when a person leaves the program and wants to create non-traditional work, they have the skills to make their art extremely well. While this is true, the work that comes out of the UA program tends to adhere to a more rigid interpretation of the book. However, everyone agreed that process and materiality were integral in defining the book.

Materiality and process were two words that showed up repeatedly throughout the interviews, beginning with the answers to the first question. The artist book was defined by the processes and materials used. Handmade paper, letterpress printing, printmaking, and

bookbinding were all terms used to describe what would be considered book arts. However, what is considered to be book arts and what is considered to be an *artist book* can be two different things. What ties them together are the processes and materials used in making them. Five of the respondents cited specifically the materials and methods they use in their work. For instance, Beth and Mary said that for them book arts used a lot of papermaking, Naomi and Estelle were from a printmaking background and noted printmaking as being important in their work, and Claire discussed bookbinding as part of defining book arts. Another part of the materiality that was mentioned was the structure and form of the book object or artist book.

Words such as “flexibility,” “open,” and “broad” were used by four of the respondents and speak to the fluidity of the field. Part of the reason the book arts cannot be defined in one way is that the artists themselves are leery of definitions. If they define their work then they leave out a multitude of other works, and the artists behind that work. In a field that is already so small and unrecognized by society and the art community, they cannot risk further alienating themselves. One of the most interesting answers given was by Beth, a teacher of book arts and current MFA student. She said in her definition, “I actually think that I have a very open mind, in that I don’t have any requirements. Some people define it and say, it can’t be sculpture, or it has to be sequential or a codex. I like to ask the question instead, ‘is it a successful artist book?’ because the question ‘is it an artist book?’ cycles through continually. To me, it’s about serving the idea and at the same time being extremely conscious of the form. For instance, I had asked my students to ask the question before beginning, ‘why a book?’ and maybe a book isn’t what they need to be making. If it engages the book, both for its historical identity and its potential as a form, that’s what I’m paying attention to” (Personal Interview, September 24, 2009). In that it

is hard to define the work for the artists themselves, it is hard for consumers to know just why they are buying the work, and how much to spend on an artist book.

Selling the Work

I asked three questions that related to selling ones work: How do you sell your work, what are the biggest obstacles when selling your work, and how do you support yourself financially and in what ways, if any, does this conflict with your work as a book artist?

The answers to the first question were extremely similar except for one respondent. All of the women said they try to sell at book and arts festivals. Heather and Beth said they have a website that they sell their work on. Heather, Estelle, and Beth sell through Vamp and Tramp, a traveling artist book dealer or a similar dealer. Heather stated that she made a color catalogue of her work that she sent to libraries and potential patrons. Heather and Estelle, both further established in the field than the others, said that they sold their work through gallery shows as well. Most artists sell their work in multiple ways, and two of the MFA students that were interviewed stated that they wanted to explore more ways of selling their work but for now find selling work at festivals was the easiest method of selling their work. One of the MFA students stated that she has not sold her own work yet, and I will explore her answers further later.

As has been stated throughout this thesis, selling work is not an easy task for many book artists. There are only so many well-established artists who can count on selling their work consistently. Most artists go through times of selling a lot of work, to times that they do not sell as much. The two women that sold their work through websites both stated that selling ones work on a website is problematic as a book is something to be held and looked through, but they have made a few sales this way and keep the option open for patrons. If an artist can sell through

a dealer like Vamp and Tramp their likelihood of being collected grows. Vamp and Tramp keeps a website that catalogues all of the work they carry (vampandtramp.com). They are well known nationwide and artists and patrons both check their website regularly for updates. They are also a traveling dealer, and take the books they carry to book fairs across the United States. They sell the books for competitive prices that are more realistic than the prices marked by fledgling book artists who want to sell their work, but know they cannot sell their books for realistic prices on their own.

When asked what obstacles they face when selling their work, the answers were varied. Three women said they had trouble pricing their work to begin with. As has been stated selling work that is not readily recognized as art is harder to price and sell to a predominately confused audience about the very nature of producing an artist book. Four of the women interviewed expressed frustration in being unable to explain what the work they make is to potential patrons. Two women made almost identical statements that a lot of people are more willing to spend a lot of money on things they can hang on the wall. Mary, a fledgling artist, said that she just was not sure how to go about selling her work to begin with, much less how to price her books. Making the book as an art object is what drives these women, but in order to support themselves they must learn ways of selling their work.

Heather was one of the established artists that I interviewed. She stated that her biggest obstacle was that much of her work is one of a kind and cost more than multiples. She makes unique books using women's clothing and houses the books inside of the garments. One thing she has done to make her work more accessible to more patrons is to make multiples of the books that go inside of the garments and sells them separately. Another thing she has done is to make books that sell at a variety of prices. She said, "They really like the work, but I have a lot

of fans that don't buy and I don't know how to reconcile that" (Personal Interview, August 21, 2009). The newness of book arts makes it confusing for people to know what to do with the work once they have purchased a book. They cannot hang it on the wall, but if they spend a lot of money on it they do not want to touch it, or use it as a trade printed book. They are asked: how can something precious be handled?

Because of the complications that arise when selling one's work, none of the artists were able to financially support themselves on selling their art alone. Heather, Estelle, and Beth taught as adjunct instructors at universities. Heather and Estelle taught at multiple universities. Naomi, Claire, and Mary were supported through various student financial aid and part-time jobs. One of the instructors who taught at multiple universities stated that teaching was enjoyable to her but that it definitely got in the way of her ability to create art. Estelle and Bridget said that they did not feel that teaching conflicted with their ability to make books as all of the classes they taught were related to the book arts and the teaching positions gave them the opportunity to work in the studios. When asked if they felt that their future occupations would conflict with their ability to make art, Mary and Beth stated that they plan on getting their Master's in Library Science as to support themselves in a book related career. Naomi wants to go into some form of social work and teach part-time as to lead a balanced life that involves both art and helping others.

Naomi, the student artist who had not yet sold her work, stated that she was not that interested in selling her work because she did not want to view the art object as a commodity. She lives an anti-consumerist lifestyle in all parts of her life, and it is fitting that she would face trepidation when selling her work. As a young artist she has time to deal with her feelings about the book as a consumer object, and the book as her art. She also added that she saw the merit in selling her work because of some situations she had been in where she had received funds for

making art but had been held accountable to the people giving the money and felt constrained in her creativity. She now wants to explore selling her work, but in conjunction with working in some sort of social service to support herself and lead a balanced life (Personal Interview, September 4, 2009). Her particular responses are important because of the ways that it shows the multitude of struggles that these artists go through when selling their work.

Being a Woman in the Book Arts

There was a lot to be said about being a woman working in the book arts. The economics of being a woman craftsperson are already arduous. As we know, women's work is not appreciated in the ways that men's work is within the economy. To combine the disadvantage of being a woman with being in a field that few understand, makes supporting oneself all the more difficult. Only two questions in the interview referred to being a woman in the field, but they yielded some of the longest answers. The questions were: Does being a woman affect your place in the book arts? How? And, How does being a woman affect the work you create?

These questions had some very similar answers. All but one respondent made some sort of statement referring to the field being primarily female in their answer to the first question. Only Heather, an established artist, said that she did not feel that being a woman affected her place, in that it did not hold her back in some way. Beth, a student close to graduating with her MFA and part-time instructor of book arts, said that she felt that right now was an exciting time to be in the field because the gender-based roles at the top were starting to change. She felt like the older men who had positions within book arts related councils or organizations held those positions because of time spent in the field--not necessarily because they were men. Three

women made direct references to the process of bookmaking drawing women into the field.

Naomi had this to say about her experience as a woman book artist:

Before [being an MFA in the Book Arts student] I was in fields that were mostly male, working in construction and things like that. Most of my friends my entire life have been male. And I'm suddenly in a environment where I'm surrounded by women, and as a whole I think it's great. I enjoy that element of it. Yet I ask myself: why does book arts attract women? And maybe it's because the book is inherently feminine. It has an interior. It thinks about insides and outsides, as opposed to a sort of masculine art that just throws everything out there. Why aren't men comfortable doing it? Why aren't they attracted to it? Is it because it goes places they aren't used to? Is it because there's sewing involved, which is traditionally coded as female? I don't know. But, yes, being female and being in book arts you think about your place in the field (Personal Interview, September 4, 2009).

The idea of the book itself being feminine was mentioned two other times. Beth also referred to the book as having feminine qualities and said that perhaps the female community in the book arts had to do with a "desire to communicate and the intimate relationship of being involved with your reader" (Personal Interview, September 24, 2009). For some it is that connection of the book to the feminine that can be problematic. Margaret has been in the book arts for twenty years and teaches book arts classes to undergraduates as an adjunct instructor. She said that she is continually asked if what she does is like scrapbooking. If she were a man, she does not believe her work would be compared to scrapbooking, a popular craft among middle-aged American women (Personal Interview, September 30, 2009). Not only would her work not be compared to

a hobby, but she, and many of the women I interviewed, felt that their work was not as valued as the work of male book artists.

The “star-status” of men in the book arts was mentioned in three interviews. Because of the lack of men in the field it was felt among many of the respondents that the men were treated differently. It is important to note that are many men who work in letterpress printing, typesetting, and even binding, but perhaps do not consider themselves to be “book artists.” However, among those who use the craft of bookmaking in their art, it is perceived that the men hold a more prominent place. Whether or not this is true cannot be confirmed or denied within this thesis, but the perception of place in the field certainly changes the way a woman book artist might view herself, her work, and her co-workers. Estelle discussed her frustration with the status of men in the field. She is currently working on a book that her friend was getting ready to present at the 2009 Friends of Dard Hunter annual conference. The conference gathers papermakers and book artists from around the country for three days of workshops, lectures, and collaboration. Mutual friends of hers were also presenting at the conference from the Combat Paper Project (CPP). The CPP is was founded by Drew Matott and Drew Cameron as a way to help returning soldiers from the Iraq war deal with their grief through papermaking and art. The soldiers literally cut up their uniforms and make handmade paper out of them. From the wet sheets they paint and screenprint images with pulp. The organization also holds writing workshops for the veterans. They also presented at the 2007 Friends of Dard Hunter conference and have grown exponentially since then. While nobody, including Estelle, denies what a great project CPP is, Estelle wonders if a woman-based collective would ever receive the attention of CPP. She explained a conversation with her female book artist friend, “we were talking about how no matter how awesome we become we could never compete with the Combat Paper

project, and it deserves the attention it's gotten, but I feel like the community is like, 'oh! And they're boys!' Our field is so saturated with women, that when a man does something it's perceived as being larger than it is. It's really hard to be considered really good as a woman" (Personal Interview, September 28, 2009). Mary was also concerned about the status of male artists in the field. She made the point that though there were more women being trained in the arts, there were more males as instructors. In addition, though these women were being trained as artists, the majority of art shows she had gone to featured only work done by men. Perhaps as time goes on women will make greater strides in the field and be recognized as the artists that they are, but until their work is recognized there will be an underlying sense of dissatisfaction among the women artists. Because of their experiences it would be impossible for being a woman not affect the work they create in some way.

When asked how being a woman affected their work two women simply stated that their work was "feminine" or came from a "feminine" perspective. The other four women had more to say about their work and being a woman. They all answered with an emphatic "yes" or "of course" when asked if being a woman affected the work that they create. Naomi made the comment that though she does not identify as feminine, her work has to be affected by her being a woman because your experiences shape all of your decisions. Mary, Estelle, and Beth all noted that their work could be identified as having been made by a woman. Mary added that her work tends to use "candy-coated" colors, a lot of pink and blue and wonders if she uses those colors because she was assigned them by society. Thus, even when her subject matter is not related to her gender, she is aware that her work carries a "feminine" aesthetic. Estelle felt that the work she shows publically would not be identified as made by a woman, but that her private work is more "girly" and if she were to put them in a gallery it would be differently received. Mary

elaborated on her answer by discussing a male/female artist duo that came to her university and presented recently. The artists worked together with the man setting up the print and the woman setting up the colors. In one of the prints they showed the duo had switched roles, and though they did not tell anyone, people responded to the print as being more feminine.

Two women mentioned their use of nature in their work as an example of how their work is affected by their being women. Margaret said of her work that explores nests and nesting in nature in this way:

As a woman I have the ability to create a nest, to have a child--I'm not going to--but I can, and my work looks at being a woman and the things that come out that--the ability to wear frilly clothes and the ability to have a baby, and how can I bring that out and compare it to how women creatures are in the natural world. I think about Sotomayor as the Supreme Court nominee and I think it's impossible to take our perspective out of our work and it's the driving force of what we make whether it's conscious or not (Personal Interview, September 30, 2009).

The tie to nature is not new, though it could be perceived as essentialist. The strong sense of ecofeminism among the work of these women is relevant to themes of nature in these women's work, but also in the time spent papermaking by all of these women. For all of the women that I interviewed the processes in book arts is what drove them. Even if they are not always recognized for their work, they continue to produce paper, prints, and books because it is what they love--not because they will be rewarded for their work.

Process over Practicality

Three questions were asked that related to process: “What gives you the most joy about your work?” They were also asked to describe the kind of work they conduct in the book arts. The third question stated, “ILSSA’s mission statement implicitly discusses using antiquated means to produce their work. Do you use “antiquated” methods of printing and binding, and if so, why do you choose it over modern means (i.e. offset printing, laser printing, machine binding)?”

Without exception all of the respondents stated “process” as the answer to the first question. It has been established that much of the work done in the book arts is “impractical” in that it could be done more easily by modern machines or computers. Margaret answered the first question with, “The process. A lot of this is ridiculous, how much time it takes to make these things, and to what end, but I love the process of it. I love the challenge of how to engineer a book object that’s related to an idea and creating some kind of continuity but that’s interactive, unlike a painting, and talking to other people and working with other people. I have to go to different places to do different things” (Interview, September 30, 2009). Mary stated that the finished product is nice, but the process is why she makes books by hand. Many of the women liked the control that they had over the entire process. From the ground up they build their books. Naomi explored how her past work ties into her current work:

I like handwork. Coming from a construction background I’ve realized, and this ties into the gender thing, I was having a hard time with the construction thing and I was constantly pissed off having to work in a male environment and having to justify my place there. So it’s nice working in an all female environment where I don’t have to deal with that. I think my work in construction is why I was attracted to binding, in a way it’s a lot like construction work on a smaller scale. Also, I’m a printmaker, so I like that

aspect, too. And it can involve both. I like the elements of book arts that let you feel like you're getting to the root of things. I like that one day I will grow the plants that I will be making the paper out of. You can make your own adhesive. I just like that you can make all of the materials that you're working with (Personal Interview, September 4, 2009).

The making of every aspect of the book was a common theme in why these women love to make books. Though not all of them work with the same materials, they all work with more than one process. Claire, Naomi, Beth and Mary used letterpress printing, papermaking, and binding in their work. Heather and Estelle used hand binding but also used modern printing methods in their work such as the offset press and Xerox.

Heather works with found objects, Xerox, cut lettering, embroidery, and fine binding in her work. She is dedicated to making all aspects of the book by hand and stated:

I love the materiality. I do a lot of very intensive hand labor, like embroidery on my books. And I've had artists say, "why don't you send those to Guatemala and have some ladies there do it?" and that's not me, It's not my hands doing it. I mean, I guess at some point if I wanted to do a large edition, I might have to consider that but for now, it's important that I do the work (Personal Interview, August 23, 2009).

As was explored in the section on defining the book arts, everyone approaches the field from their own perspective as an artist. Some are printmakers, or bookbinders, or letterpress printers, and they all view the book from the perspective of what method of bookmaking they utilize the most.

The answers to the third question largely had to do with process. All of the respondents use antiquated methods of printing or binding in some way in their work, but most use modern

methods alongside the old. While they all recognized that they used antiquated methods of producing work, they did not all agree that it was important to do so. Naomi stated that she did not think it was important to use antiquated means to produce her work and that she enjoys laser printing the interiors to chapbooks that her friends have produced and screenprinting the covers (Personal Interview, September 4, 2009). Heather paused before admitting to using antiquated means in her work. She said she thought she did not, but had just sewn a book on cords, and “you can’t get more medieval than that” (Personal Interview, August 23, 2009). Estelle commented:

I love the material possibilities. All the commercial and more modern stuff is very sleek and clean, and I feel like it doesn’t have a soul. We had an offset press and I’ve enjoyed using it, but I love when the feel of the paper is a romance. Holding a book that has been handmade has a unique feel. I love the sensitivity to the process. There’s a different connection when you hold something that’s handmade (Personal Interview, September 28, 2009).

If one uses modern machines to create her work, she takes that part of the process away from herself. Even if the consumer never knows that a modern machine was used in the production of the work, the object means something different to the artist. Margaret stated that so much could go wrong when using modern machines to create work. If something goes wrong with the vintage press that she uses, she knows how to fix the press. She added that she likes thinking of the tradition of the press and the people who have used it before her (Personal Interview, September 30, 2009). Beth stated that she had never used polymer type in her letterpress printed works and instead chose to spend hours setting lead type. She elaborated:

One of the reasons I chose to use obsolete tech in my work, it makes things harder, but it means I'm paying more attention to my work and what I'm doing and I'm asking questions about process. But I'm not a Luddite; I don't only use obsolete technology. There are differences in what you're using. How is the internet different than a book? How is lead type different than digital type? (Personal Interview, September 24, 2009).

Though the organization Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts is open to any craftsperson who uses obsolete technology in their work, it makes particular sense that these women are members.

Impractically Laboring

The final questions were in regard to the respondents participation in ILSSA. The respondents were asked: How did you get involved in ILSSA, What do you get out of being a member of ILSSA, and What do you see as the future of ILSSA? Three of the respondents were members because they worked with Bridget Elmer at the University of Alabama and were interested in the organization. Two respondents had met either Elmer or co-founder Emily Larned of ILSSA at various conferences and book arts events they tabled at during the years 2007-2009. The final respondent started getting e-mails from the listserve and assumes she was put on the list by Larned (who she knows personally). After reading some of the posts and hearing about the Festival to Plead for Skills, she joined. Two other women participated in the 2009 Festival to Plead for Skills and had become more involved since then. The Festival to Plead for Skills is an annual event that takes place on July 7th (07/07). Based on a Chinese festival that encourages people to find new skills to learn on the holiday, ILSSA members tried new skills by

making 50 miniatures using their new skill. This was the first time the organization has had the festival and it was one of the first times that members had a chance to interact.

Because the organization is new, the interviewees were unsure how to respond to some of the questions, especially when discussing the future of ILSSA. The answers to the second question showed that there is hope for the organization but that overall consistency has not been established. Margaret stated that she liked the idea of being in a union. Estelle answered,

I'm still figuring it out. We're figuring out how to network in this thing they've started up. Right now, I've posted once or twice [on the listserv] things that I think are relevant to ILSSA. We're all very shy right now, and we need to be more open and talk to each other about our work. I've been to three conferences in the past year, and there are these younger artists that want and need to talk about their work and the content of their work, so hopefully we can do that through ILSSA (Personal Interview, September 28, 2009).

Overwhelmingly what the artists want from ILSSA is a sense of community. ILSSA provides a place of understanding for artists who are constantly asked to defend their work, and all are hopeful for a strong future for the organization.

Because the organization is new some people were wary of predicting its future. Estelle mentioned that it would be great if ILSSA could have some sort of gathering or conference where members could talk about their new work and begin new collaborations. She also made the point that ILSSA needs to decide if it has non-profit status or not. She is concerned that if they choose a non-profit status they will fail because they do not have a large endowment, but if they go entirely commercial it defeats the point of the organization. As someone with organizing experience, she was hopeful that the founders would decide how they fit as an organization.

In a conversation with Bridget Elmer, co-founder of ILSSA, she said that she and Larned founded the organization after working together for years in Brooklyn, New York at Booklyn. They were both interested in self-publication and education, and spent a lot of time exploring the book arts. They eventually went their separate ways. After working at Asheville Bookworks in North Carolina, Elmer moved to Alabama and began the MFA in the book arts program. Larned began an MFA program at Yale for graphic design. Out of frustration as female artists they joked about starting an organization called “Booklette.” During Elmer’s first year at UA Larned visited her in Alabama. After they discussed what it was they loved about making books, and how they felt about being craftspeople, they formed ILSSA. Elmer stated about starting ILSSA:

I don’t want to have to defend my art, I just want to make it and rejoice in it! And the work that we really admired at the time, was really innovative use of the discarded and we were always being told, “what you’re doing doesn’t sound very practical” so we started this organization, and we can support each other. Happily we found out that there are an amazing number of people who feel like they’ve found something with ILSSA.

We made it because we wished that it existed (Personal Conversation, October 1, 2009).

Elmer also hopes for community and solidarity for ILSSA’s members. She discussed the need for alternatives--the need for collaboration as an alternative to working alone, the need for alternative values to labor. She elaborated, “In a Capitalist system you’re supposed to find value in your work via the monetary return and that’s how people value their time. We want to create an alternative value system, so you could get a spiritual return, or create community. We just want to create an alternative value for our labor, something other than money.” By creating ILSSA Elmer and Larned have done just that—they have made a space for craftspeople who consider themselves to be artists to discuss their work, collaborate, and get something other than

a financial gain out of their work. The ILLSA website divides the member directory geographically in hopes that the members will connect in the future and collaborate. For the future Elmer sees regular publications, event-based work, continuing the Festival to Plead for Skills, and building a collective bibliography of ILSSA's work. The future for ILSSA looks bright, and the organization is growing. The members might not know what the future is for ILSSA, but there were some strong feelings about the future of book arts.

The Future of Book Arts

The final question that was asked of the interviewees was: What do you see as the future of book arts? This question is difficult to answer because the field itself is defined in such nebulous terms. There was some concern among two respondents that the field will continue to split. With those who believe that the book arts must be confined to a certain set of rules, and those who believe that the book is more interpretive, it is hard to imagine the two schools of thought coming together. Two women stated that they could not say what the future held at all. Three respondents hoped that the future held greater growth. Mary and Margaret both discussed the popularity of book arts and hoped the popularity would lead to greater understanding of the field. There is the concern that the popularity will lead to a devaluation of the field. Margaret mentioned that she has seen die-cuts, nice paper, and bookbinding tools in box craft stores. On one hand, she feels that this is a good thing. On the other, she worries that it will perpetuate the idea that the book arts is a "craft."

Heather dreamed that the future of book arts would provide a space for women craftspeople to be recognized for their labor. "The whole craft/female thing is where labor is really devalued. Then you get this male artist, who embroiders, and everyone's like, 'wow, this is

great!’ and I’m like, ‘hello? Why is it so great that he’s doing it? There are so many people that have been using the same processes’” (Personal Interview, August 23, 2009). She was the only respondent to mention women in her vision of the future for book arts.

The future of book arts depends on the future of technology. Two respondents were concerned about technology and the book. Margaret was interested in how Amazon’s Kindle would affect the book. Her concern was that as the book is digitalized that people will make the book into a fetish object, that the book will become so precious that it will never be taken off of the shelf. Beth views technology and the book from a more hopeful perspective. She sees the ways that the book can work with technology, and *as* a technology. She elaborated on this idea:

I think that this is a totally awesome time to be involved in the book arts because if you look around at the cultural landscape of wiki and the book disappearing and print being irrelevant. The book is in a state of flux, and the potential for the book to be an art form is growing. People are really thinking about the book, culturally, in a grand sense and because of that there’s a lot of potential in the field. It’s also going to get confusing, just like art is confusing with each media and different programs are going to interpret work differently. The field is young, yet finely organized (Personal Interview, September 24, 2009).

It is true. If the digital book does replace the traditional book the field of book arts will change with the changing technology. The traditional book arts may come to be even more valued. The artist book may be better understood by society. The Western culture will have to re-evaluate how it views the book and ask themselves what the book means for society and for their history. The timing for an organization like ILSSA is prime. Economics in America are currently

unstable and people are beginning to value handmade objects. There is still work to be done, however, in making society open and willing to accept the work of craftspeople for its artistic merit.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The growth in the field of book arts does not seem to be slowing down. That said, the economic recession does not seem to be getting any better. In a healthy economy, an artist, unless established, can expect to have at least one other occupation to provide for herself. This was seen in the two artists who teach at multiple locations, and the four artists who are students and do not have faith in their future ability to sustain themselves financially on book arts alone. The instructor who taught at only one university and felt that the exchange of teaching for studio space was worth the work showed the most hope. However, there are only so many faculty positions to be had, and other job plans need to be made in order for the artist to financially survive. It has been pointed out since this research began that it is not only not impossible for an artist to survive in a Capitalist economy, but that also some artists become wealthy and receive great recognition for their worth. The problem with this argument is that only a handful of artists will be able to succeed in this way, so for the majority of artists who do not have faculty positions at a university, their ability to support themselves on their art alone is difficult if not impossible.

The unanswered question ‘what is the book arts?’ served as one theme in this research. The literature review showed what the book arts is *not* as well as some opinions on what is considered book art. More important than what could be considered book art, is what is recognized as art by galleries and universities. The trend as of 2009 seems to be leaning toward

the interpretive and conceptual arts within the book arts. This trend may act to create further divides between traditional programs and artists and those who think they are too rigid in their perception of the book object. As with most disagreements, the two schools of thought could learn a lot from each other about the fine craft of book making, and the skill it takes, to interpreting the book in a new way and being open to explore conceptual book objects. The beauty of the book arts is its fluidity and the multiple forms it takes. The variety of backgrounds from these artists work together to form a field that is admired, but ultimately misunderstood.

It is not until their work is viewed as art that it will be respected in the greater arts community. This is true for all craftspeople who take their work seriously and have spent years perfecting their craft only to be told that a machine-made counterpart could serve in its place. The book arts is a unique hybrid of craft and art, in that it takes skill to make a book but a different kind of talent and artistic ability to make the prints that are featured in that book. As Beth stated in the interviews, a print might sell for more money than a book when a book might house seventy prints (Personal Interview, September 24, 2009). It is not only for the process that the book artist situates those prints together, but also for the need to tell that particular story or narrative.

Though they primarily represent those in the “high” arts, the work that the Micromentalists have sought to accomplish is very similar to that of ILSSA. The terminology used by the organizations is very similar. There is the need to own the means of production, to provide art for the masses, and to be a community for like-minded artists. It has not yet been seen how the organization will grow with the death of their founder Patrick Welch in 2008. However, their existence is important in understanding the issues that modern artists face in the distribution of their work.

The first question in the interviews: “how would you define the book arts?” showed how both varied and also similar opinions are on defining the field. The majority of respondents seemed eager to prove that they did not limit the term. In regards to Johanna Drucker’s research showing what is and is not considered book art, none of the respondents said what the book arts is *not*. While everyone came to the term from their own backgrounds, they also incorporated other forms of book arts into their definitions. The debate of “what is a book?” is central to the book arts debate. Can a sculpture be a book? Can a computer be a book? Conversely, can a hand-bound fine press edition of a book be considered book *art*? These questions remain largely unanswered.

The place of women in the field is particularly interesting as it relates to craft and economics. If the field were primarily composed of men, would it be recognized by the greater art society? When men take part in a “craft” that is considered feminine, would their work then be considered art simply because they were breaking boundaries? Would they get paid more? Would they receive greater attention from the art community? The answer, sadly, seems to be yes. Even if there appears to be equality among the sexes at book arts conferences and gallery shows, the perception among women book artists is that there is not equality--that for every man who gets a gallery show, or is allowed to be a keynote speaker at a conference (sometimes multiple times), there are dozens of more qualified women. In a field that is so dominated by a female presence it is easy to get excited when men want to participate. It is not that women book artists do not want a male presence in the field, but rather that they want to be treated as equals to those males. They want their work to be recognized as art, and not tossed out as craft simply because they are women.

There are certainly women who are creating work that is blatantly feminist. For the majority of female book artists, including those fledgling book artists featured in this study, their work is extremely personal. This study would conclude that their art *is* feminist by nature of being an art that is largely misunderstood, and their subject matter coming out of experiences as women. Both the act of making the artist book, and also choosing to make a book that interrogates themselves and their experiences, is feminist in nature. It should be noted that (some of) the work of Karin Spitfire and Johanna Drucker, both well recognized in the field of book arts, is openly feminist and openly questions societal inequities. There are many up-and-coming artists who use feminism and sexuality openly in their work as well.

It was important to Bridget Elmer and Emily Larned that the organization they found not be built as a response to frustration with the field, or with being women in the field. Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts was founded not on frustration, but on a need. It was a need for a community for struggling artists and craftspeople. It was a need to learn new skills, and to teach one's own skills to others. It was a need for collaboration. The organization has grown since the beginning of this study and more people are learning of ILSSA and joining every week. Now that they are beginning to establish themselves in the arts community as a legitimate organization they can begin to respond to the needs within the community they have built. As seen in the interviews there is the need for the members to meet in real life, so that they better know how to work within the organization, and have the opportunity for collaboration. ILSSA should either have their own miniature conference, or organize a meet-up at a conference that multiple members will already be attending. Regional conferences are also an option. Once members understand how to use the internet, listserv, and blog participation will surely grow. For now, new members are shy and unsure of what to post. Encouragement from the moderators

might be a way for them to begin posting independently. Both the listserv and the blog are potentially great places for members to interact and connect, and discuss important topics that do not come up outside of the arts and crafts community.

The roles of women in crafts and that tie to the book arts is integral to this study. A way of dealing with frustration over being compared to a craftspeople is for a book artist to claim the term with pride. The term needs to be legitimized by both craftspeople and artists. If book artists (particularly women book artists) are only battling the term and constantly trying to prove their place in the arts, they are denying the craftswomen before them the right of being considered artists. However, if they accept the term they risk justifying low prices for their work and mistreatment from the arts community. What needs to happen is a radical change in how the arts community recognizes craftspeople. Perhaps this even means that further divides need to be made. There is certainly a difference in someone who sews felt stuffed animals and sells them on Etsy (a popular website where crafts are sold) and someone who has had formal training in the arts. It is not that one is better than the other but that they need to be recognized differently. That said, there is little difference in someone with formal training in the arts and someone who has spent their life learning a craft as a trade. They can both be artists and at times overlap one another in skill. As women artists in a field that is oft-considered craft, we need to alter our view of past women artists and craftswomen. Perhaps our mother and grandmothers were not only being practical in their creation of household items, but also trying to express themselves the best they could in a restrictive environment. Recognizing the roles of women in the crafts throughout history is important in claiming women's current place in the arts.

The differences in "high" art and "craft" are muddled and unclear, particularly when looking at modern art. DIY and reusable objects have infiltrated even the arts scene. In regards to

book arts, there are multiple artists using text in their work, particularly in installation pieces. Graphic artist Barbara Kruger is sometimes associated with book arts because of her graphic arts books and installations. Her work involves using photographs in shocking ways to pose proverbial warnings, ironic statements, and messages of protest. One example is “Your Body is a Battleground” (1989, barbarakruger.com). The woman’s face is shown split in both a positive and negative. The text, “Your Body is a Battleground,” is large in white sans-serif font on red blocks across the woman’s face. This image alludes to race as the woman is represented as both black and white. The text could relate to several issues that women face, such as domestic violence and abortion rights. The current redefinition of the book could help catapult book arts into modern art.

Book Arts is growing in popularity and though there are only a handful of academic programs available to those wishing to pursue a BFA or an MFA in the field, there are more developing across the United States. As has been noted, women are especially present in these programs and the unique place of books in the art world allow for the artists to create work that breaks barriers and transcends a historically defined object. Through making their own paper, and using soy-based rather than oil-based printing ink, book artists are making an environmentally responsible craft. Most female book artists do not claim Marxism as being important to their work, but do incorporate community building, as well as espousing an unimportance on financial gain that can be attributed to Socialist themes. Book Artists continue to play with book structures in order to create more ways to display their work in gallery spaces or make them interactive to the viewer. Just as women and other socially oppressed people are continually defined and redefined, considered weak because of their size, and unimportant because of their historic place in society, the book arts encompasses contradictions and is

fighting to be recognized by the greater arts community.

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Appendix B
University of Alabama
Informed Consent for a Research Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study entitled "*As Many Hours as it Takes!: Women, Craft, and Labor in the Book Arts.*" The primary investigator of this study is Master's candidate, Amy Brock-Reed.

This study is being conducted to better understand how women book artists view their work in relation to their gender, how they support themselves financially, and to gauge their participation in ILSSA. This study is important as book arts is a rapidly increasing field, women are the majority in this field, and many women seem to struggle to support themselves financially on book arts alone. The new organization Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts is a collective of artists who pride themselves on using outdated means (i.e. impractical means) to produce their work.

You have been asked to participate in the study because you are a female book artist who is a member of Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts. Approximately 10-12 participants will be part of this study.

If you agree to an interview, you will be asked to do these things:

- schedule the interview at a time and place convenient for you
- answer a series of questions that will be asked of all participants
- give permission to audiotape the interview

Being in the study will take about one hour. There is no financial compensation for participating in the study.

If you decided later that you do not want to be a participant in the study, you may withdraw from the study and your interview will not be used in any presentations or publications about this topic. You may at any time refuse to answer any of the questions.

There are no direct benefits to participating in the study; however, your perspectives and viewpoints will contribute to a growing body of literature that is examining how Women's Studies department can be re-shaped to reflect the concerns and needs of a new generation of women and men.

There are no risks involved in participating in the study. Confidentiality will be protected. All records will be kept locked in the principal investigator's office. All people and places will be given pseudonyms. If there is any information that you do not want included in the public presentation of the

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data, the investigators will respect your wishes.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you start the study, you may withdraw at any time.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to ask me about them anytime. If you have questions about the study later on, please call Amy Brock-Reed at (205) 305-8483. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Ms. Tanya Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205)348-5152.

I have read the consent form. The study has been explained to me. I understand what I will be asked to do. I freely agree to take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Research Participant	Date
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Investigator	Date
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