

# CODEX POLARIS TEXTS

A collection of texts about books from  
**Denmark · Finland**  
**Iceland · Norway · Sweden**  
with Faroe and Åland Islands

**Bókverkahópurinn ARKIR**

CODEX ■ POLARIS

## BOOK ARTS IN ICELAND

Book arts can be said to have arrived in Iceland in the late 1950s with the Swiss-German designer and artist Dieter Roth (1930 – 1998), who was one of the most prolific designer of artist books in Europe and the world during this period.

His influence on Icelandic visual arts is undeniable.

Roth lived in Iceland for several years in the 1950s and brought with him fresh ideas. Due to his association with the Fluxus movement, these ideas had widespread influence on the Icelandic arts scene.

The Fluxus movement can be traced to the Dada movement of the 1920s and 30s, a movement that was unknown to Icelandic artists at the time and was novel and exciting. Dieter Roth played a part in ending the isolation of Icelandic artists and introducing them to trends in international modern art.

Roth's work is highly diverse. Some pieces are very meticulously put together, while others are rough and haphazard. He brought with him innovative use of material and experimentation that lead to unexpected solutions, for example by creating new work from garbage and other disposable material. His disregard for pomp and solemnity was a common thread. *Kinderbuch* (1954–57) was the first artist's book that he attempted to have published, first in Switzerland and then in Copenhagen, but there was no interest in the book. The book was published in Iceland in 1957. Dieter Roth was one of the pioneers of modern book arts, and we are lucky to have been able to experience his work.

In the 1960s Icelandic artists started using the book form as an independent artistic medium. In the book, artists found a different exhibition space, whether it was one page in a book with others or an entire book. Book arts were introduced at the mixed media department of the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts around this time, and in the 1970s, Icelandic art students

began to study abroad to a greater degree and it became more common for foreign artists to visit Iceland and teach there. Both of these factors had an immeasurable effect on the progress of visual arts in Iceland. Minimalism and conceptual art were dominant trends in Icelandic visual arts during this period, and most of the artists' books reflected that. Copying methods were more primitive than they are now — photocopiers were often used instead of more expensive printing.

There has been tremendous growth in artists' books over the last 20 years, both in Iceland and internationally. There has also been a great increase in the diversity within book publishing and many exciting developments in the design and format of artists' books have taken place, although they are still usually considered a side venture for artists.

Until recently, there was a book shop in Iceland that only sold artists' books, but it has unfortunately closed now. The Living Art Museum has the most extensive collection of artists' books in Iceland and displays them occasionally. The library at the Iceland Academy of the Arts also has a collection of approximately 500 items from period of the last 50 years. Half of the books are Icelandic, and a portion of them are student work. They can be viewed on the library premises.

Many Icelandic artists use the book form, and the art group ARKIR has been prominent in this field. The group was founded 20 years ago by several faculty members at the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts, a precursor of the Iceland Academy of the Arts. Since then the group has grown and currently consists of 11 female artists from various fields, including printmaking, textile, graphic design and literature.

ARKIR meets regularly to consult and co-operate, and the group's work has been exhibited in Iceland and internationally. ARKIR's exhibitions often have a particular theme, and various themes have been deployed throughout the years. The group has also accepted offers to take part in collective exhibitions by groups and individuals from other countries where the approach has been determined by a set subject matter.

ARKIR's working methods have no limits except professional and aesthetic ones. All methods are accepted: photography, computer graphics, origami, cutting and trimming, drawing, painting, various textile and printing methods. The group's work is highly diverse, both in terms of content and technique. Some use text more than others, but all the work is mainly guided by the language of visual art. Prominent characteristics of the groups work are diversity, playfulness and experimentation with form and content that stretches the boundaries of book arts.

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[www.arkir.wordpress.com](http://www.arkir.wordpress.com)  
[arkirnar@gmail.com](mailto:arkirnar@gmail.com)

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