

CODEX POLARIS TEXTS

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

The Fine Art and Design Department
University in Bergen

CODEX ■ POLARIS

COLLECTING ARTISTS' BOOKS IN BERGEN

“A book is a room, a quiet room, a dark room, a bright room in flames. A good book is always within. When you open a book you enter the room where we love each other, break each other down, lift each other up, become each other.

All others are shut out; the neighbours stand outside, perhaps peeping curiously in; the talking head of the television stays outside the parliament buildings, courts and burning houses; journalists, biographers and documentarians knock to be allowed in, all on the outside.

The book is already inside, where what is important happens, inside where we become human”.

What is a book?
By Frode Grytten

English translation by Angela Maria Hasselgreen

SAID BY AN ACADEMIC LIBRARIAN AT FINE ART AND DESIGN LIBRARY

“After many years in different faculty libraries I got used to judge books by their quality as information resources. Scholar books in academic libraries are second hand sources and they normally provide digested overview of a subject. These books follow the established linear formats for logical and effective information organisation. This serves a purpose: to present scientific knowledge.

An artists' book is a primary source with a very different nature. It is far from the kind of books normally handled in a university. After some years in an art library my ideas of book-quality

has changed. But if librarians from the other faculty libraries ask me what is the purpose of the artists' book it can be hard to explain.

The Norwegian author Frode Grytten has a definition of "book" that I think suits the artists' book well.

Librarians are book-lovers and we easily get fascinated by artists' books. It might be the paper quality, the binding, the content or the appearance of the book in general. I sometimes think: How is it possible to create these objects in so many different ways – and still make them recognisable as books? With artists' books there is always something new. I think our small collection has a liberating effect on the academic librarian in me. I think these books have the potential of making people open up for new or different attitudes and perspectives. The existence of these books prove that there does not have to be limits.

We do need art at the university. Sometimes a non-academic way of thinking is revealing because a person can get tired or even lost in the knowledge-based systems."

The artists' book is a medium where art/design and the book (and thereby the library) converges, and we, as librarians and artists, want to explore it, learn from it, and create a site available for educators, students and artists to further explorations.

The collecting is done in a non-systematic way, but we keep a special eye on what goes on within the faculty and locally amongst artists and designers.

When the library moved to the new facilities we commissioned a specially designed piece of furniture for our artists' book-collection. It is made by Henriksen snekkeri in Arendal, Norway.



The interest in artists' books practice has grown internationally over the last years and also here in Bergen, Norway. Anyone who wants to come and see our artists' book collection is welcome.

You will find a link to our collection from our home page:

www.uib.no/en/ub/107217/fine-art-and-design-library

Sigrun Ask and Trond Søbstad
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The Fine Art and Design Library at the University of Bergen, Norway, is a special library with emphasis on contemporary art and design. The library is open for all and has existed since the 1980s. In January 2017 we merged with the University of Bergen Library and in June we moved to a new building designed by the Norwegian architecture company Snøhetta. We share the house with the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the University of Bergen.

Now we have access to hundreds of thousands digital documents, but our users seem more interested in our physical collections. We have 25 000 printed books, 160 journals and 1200 films in the library. We also have an artists' book-collection with 300 artists' books and fanzines. In the still early age of digital media and supposedly dematerialized information, the importance of physical spaces and the materiality of documents (in a broad sense) are being recognized by more and more people as something not "outside the text", but as something impressed with meanings.



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