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Turned pages/the artist book in the age of technology

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Turned pages/the artist book in the age of technology

by

Paula Kay Streeter

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Integrated Visual Arts

Program of Study Committee:
Carol Faber, Major Professor
Barbara Walton
Barbara Haas

Iowa State University
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INTRODUCTION

Intention

The intent of this written component is to consider the history, variety and future of the artists’ book as well as relate the influences and processes involved in the writing and designing of my thesis project, a hybridized livre d’artiste entitled Unsure to Be Sure.

Unsure to Be Sure was written and designed after taking a wide range of classes required for the Integrated Studio Arts Masters of Fine Art degree, which included a study in art history, children’s literature and graphic design, as well as digital and traditional media art studios.

Artist Statement

Although the image has morphed into many art forms, it remains the foundation of visual communication and it is particularly attractive to me when partnered with some form of the book. It is this tangible partnering that has been the basis for standardized learning and in so, crucial to the development of civilization. For this reason I love the book in the traditional formats but far greater than the respect I have for this building block of culture, is the love I have for books on an individual basis.

In this sometime manic world in which we live, considering a book can slow us down and provide an alternative place to be. Whether regarding a book for contents or reworking the format to create a piece of art, there is commune with imagination, craft, creativity, tradition and a connection with the potential of child-like discovery. Notes in the margins, dog eared corners, time tested spines and worn pages provide narratives beyond the edited contents. It is from these evidences I draw inspiration, clues of lives and connections that I am challenged to believe will be present with e-books or digital transmissions.

The codex is an object that the artist can use on so many levels. A journal can be the incubator of ideas and in doing so becomes art itself. Using subtraction or addition, an existing book can be repurposed into an all together different object, or altered to remain in book format but carry on a different function and message. The artist has the ability to create entirely new books, manipulate existing ones, marry books and or objects together or build with books. The potential is vast and so with each turning page: I play, learn, share and like the book, evolve.
In the five thousand years of the written word’s existence, the means of delivery and distribution has undergone very few changes, but those changes have been significant. The original tablets of clay or stone or scrolls of papyrus or vellum were the domain of governments and gods, containing irrevocable texts. The earliest books were Egyptian or Ethiopian Coptic manuscripts from the first Century AD and evidence indicates they were made of papyrus. The word codex, or bound book, comes from Latin meaning block of wood, which the wooden tablets of the Romans resembled. Sixteen hundred years ago, the codex replaced tablets and scrolls for some practical reasons: convenient transportation, easier accessibility to any part of a text, the ability to hold it in its entirety while reading any part of the text, and economy in that both the recto and verso of a page could be used all resulting ultimately in the availability of the word to many more individuals. Early books were manuscripts, meaning they were codices (plural for codex) duplicated by scribes who made mistakes, made commentaries and took liberties with the text and images.

Christianity was instrumental in the format transition and popularization of the codex. Books were adopted to distinguish Christian content from Jewish and Pagan texts which were usually presented in the form of scrolls. The codex design was further promoted and distributed when discoveries in the Orient and Europe made duplication of text and materials more possible. Paper was invented in China nearly two thousand years ago and although accordion books and codex books were made there, it took time for the fiber technology to migrate west to the Islamic Worlds. By the end of the eleventh century, Europe was replacing vellum or animal hide and using cellulose fibers to make paper. A century and a half later, German religious images were wood block printed on paper and widely distributed. Early hand printing evolved into a fixed system for distributing consistent astronomical calendars, thus creating yet greater standardization previously unknown. Joannes Regiomontanus’ Calendarium was published in 1476 only two decades after Johannes Gutenberg began his new printing process using separate pieces of type which were put together to create moveable words and paragraphs. The development of the book has historically been involved in the establishment of efficient language and universal understanding.

Formal aspects involving structure of the codex include: The cover—materials used, hard or soft, within a container or not, shape. The Spine-bound or unbound, type of binding. Pages—shape, scale, variation, color, material, flat, folded, scrolled, cut-out, embossed or pop-up. Text—text or no text, font, color, size, handwritten, letterpress, embedded, stamped or typed. Illustrations—media, technique, or text interaction. (See Figure 1) It is important to note that all bound books are
traditionally considered codices but the developments in production changed somewhat the common meaning of codex. Scholars now maintain the term codicology which is the study of manuscripts and bookbinding study.

The advent of the twenty-first century may mark the second major shift in format for the traditional container and maintainer of ideas, of knowledge and of communications. In his epic poem *Cantos*, Ezra Pound wrote, “the book should be a ball of light in one’s hand”. When written, his words were ideogrammic, yet can now be construed to predicate the evolution of written word into a technological, digital format.

The history of book art does not coincide with that of the development of the written word in book format. The word palimpsest originates from the Latin word palimpsestus and Greek word palimpsestos; meaning scraped again, to rub or chew and was first used in English in 1825. It refers to an existing book with pages made of wood tablet, vellum or parchment whose original words were erased by means of rubbing with lava pumice or scraping away of the ink with a sharp object so that the pages could be reused. An alternative meaning is something having diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface. Although this does not constitute book art as such, both definitions apply to the altered book, an off spring of the palimpsest to be practiced many centuries later.

The original palimpsest or recycled book was a matter of economics since early books and manuscripts were created out of expensive, difficult to create materials. This practice was continued over the centuries and by the time of the Industrial Revolution, it was common practice for anyone fortunate enough to have access to any publication, to alter by gluing ephemera, writing, drawing, painting and even sewing the pages to make scrap books of personal expression. Books often became tools for the home naturalist to conserve and dry plant matter. The result of this technique was often embossed pages and ghostly impressions or outlines of where plant material had once been. These creations, whether intentional or not, are often classified as naïve craft. The process of creating scrap books was an activity that drew life and art together as well as trained the hand to work with the eye and mind and was often accomplished with very primitive tools and supplies.

The Palimpsest very naturally led to what is referred to as altered books beginning with the scrap book and evolving into deconstructions as well as reconstruction. In this expressive form of altered book, it should maintain in some form all the structural elements; the spine, cover, and pages but the content has been altered through an additive or subtractive process. There is usually a connection between the structure, the message and the presentation, putting these works more in the realm of fine art. The origins of this are often associated historically with the art movements of the 1950s and 60s. A commonly accepted definition for an altered book of this variety begins with a
book that has been recycled, rescued and then changed or altered by means of gluing, painting, collage, stamping, cutting, tearing, drawing or embellishing in some manner. They are singular objects that may be with or without text but are usually a container with content. They are visual narratives, metaphors, conceptual or iconographic work in which the structures and materials may be the content. They maintain some characteristics of the layers and depth of the history of the original purpose of their container, the book.

A form of altered book that is content driven yet is a unique object and retains the original codex form is created through deletion of words and addition of imagery creating entirely new text. The origins of this can again be traced to the palimpsest in technique but open up the idea of the symbiotic relationship between the words, embellishments and the intimacy of the viewer to the work of art.

Conversely, an altered book may look nothing like the traditional codex, but rather be composed of the components of the book. A book may be transformed into a wholly new sculptural shape and structure. Many critics and writers offer this as yet another specialized category of fine art, not only that of sculptural books but also sculptures that have book-like attributes. Book artist and sculptor-paper maker Catherine Nash noted at a 2010 Encaustic Convention held at Montserrat College in Beverly Massachusetts, when discussing the inspiration for her work stated, “The book form is a starting point for sculpture and sculpture is a starting point for books.” She is alluding again to the partnership of literature and the book arts. Sculptured book art is often a product of the hybridization of many of the techniques incorporated in the construction of the previously mentioned categories within the singular altered book creations.

The history of sculptural books is vague at best but is usually considered to be from the last 30 years, coinciding with the advent of installations and performance arts. Which brings us to yet one more variation of altered book art as presented in the form of installations. These range from compositions of floating objects made from books or pages to structures constructed out of codices to abstracted environs where the book is barely discernible.

Considering a very different aspect of book arts, it is important to consider the five very distinct genres within the category of book making; bookbinding, fine art with book themes, books from alternative materials, objects made to represent books and livre d’artiste. Book binding offers an aspect of book arts which dates to the eleventh century and is generally categorized as a craft. The focus in this area is technique, materials, form, and craft to create a functional codex, all skills which would be difficult to translate into a digital format without the work becoming less about book arts and more about technology.
The ambiguity that is present in so much of book art, not to mention so much of today’s art was found on the “Information Highway”. An article on the art design site www.doorknob describes “As a collaborative performance art project with the Great Eastern Hotel, students from the Royal College of Arts participated in a unique art installation – part of which discussed the bedtime stories component. With just a few sheets, an entire bedtime story can be fit onto a couple of large-print bed-pages. And, of course, as you add pages you gain warmth and move closer to sleep. These would be a bit boring to have the same each night but are perfect for guest lodgings or hotel accommodations where they are new and different for each visitor – innovative bedding designs that are practical but also a conversation piece.” The anti-commodity aspect of performance art is in complete contradiction to the concept of marketing bedding sold as performance/installation book art. What this does do is introduce the concept of alternative materials used in the creation of codices.

A popular trend in bookmaking today is the creation of codices out of recycled alternative materials. The environmental aspect of this becomes a statement more than a practical materials substitute in most cases. Artists are working in everything from garden dirt to plastic water bottles to the soles of shoes. Imagination is the only limiting factor. On the other hand the creation of functional books out of recycled materials using environmental friendly practices is something that cannot be overlooked. Papelon, a company in San Juancito, Honduras converts agricultural by-products such as sugar cane waste into paper and that paper is made into exquisite, unique, handmade books, merging book binding with responsible production practices.

Again objects made to look like books embraces a broad range of examples but perhaps my favorite can be found as the headstone of Karel Capek, the Czechoslovakian playwright who popularized the term ‘robot’ and foretold an era of depersonalization and technology in his 1920 film classic RUR. The bronze open book marking his final resting place serves as a testament to his convictions both physically and metaphorically.

Livres d’artistes are books exemplified by the inclusion of original art complimenting original or existing texts, executed with quality production methods on superior papers and in limited codex editions. These differ from the early press editions in that ‘art’ and ‘the artist’ became the focus and in fact, they may have been used as a marketing tool to promote original art sales. Albrecht Durer created Della simmetria de I corpi humani, libri quattro in 1591. Another early example was by English poet and artist William Blake and his wife Catherine in the late 1700s. Their Songs of Innocence and of Experience was written, illustrated, printed, colored and bound exclusively by the couple. The construction and execution were influenced by the early hand illuminated manuscripts,
merging handwritten texts and images. The difference between the two genres is the writing and illustration, as well as the fact that the construction of the book in the former was done exclusively by the artist.

Livres d’artistes were more popularly born in the late nineteenth century, a reaction to the mass production and standardization of the industrial age. The Parisian art dealer, Ambroise Vollard, began commissioning artist such as Pierre Bonnard to create art for limited editions to be sold in the exclusive art market. These books were typically large format and the hand set text and original prints were hand printed and hand bound or boxed. The list of artists who contributed artwork to numerous projects or broader collaborative efforts, a contradiction to the original definition, is many and includes such greats as: George Rouault, Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Salvador Dali, Fernand Leger, Max Ernst, Jean Arps, Joan Miro, Larry Rivers, Robert Motherwell and the list goes on. In a departure from the true definition of the genre, specialist in various techniques joined with the artists to create exceptional editions in which every stage of the creation was executed by individuals highly skilled in their area.

In attempting to create a vocabulary that helps to identify book arts, it is not the intention of this brief to limit the parameters of the subject but rather create a standard for expansion into the inevitable changes brought forth by the introduction technology. Thus far book arts represent a physical presence. Whether the object is a unique creation or one of an edition, book arts are, for the most part, experienced on an individual basis both in the creation and ultimate interaction. The book arts have not outwardly embraced new technology, but this is not to say that it cannot serve as a valuable tool in various stages of production.
Whether Ezra Pound was a madman or genius, his statement “Good writers are those who keep the language efficient. That is to say, keep it accurate, keep it clean.” are difficult to question and apply as much to good writers as to most aspects of communication including the arts. Yet in practice, we frequently deal with ambiguous terminology, undefined concepts, and words that have morphed from a defined object into catch-all terms. The word ‘book’ as a noun has represented a distinct meaning and object that has undergone very few physical changes since the inception of the codex some sixteen hundred years ago. “Book”, when combined with “art”, has been studied and investigated to determine an accurate definition or definitions of the many resulting formats since the late 1800s. We are at a point in history when these broad and ambiguous definitions of book art, artists’ books and all the associated phrases are blurred and now the element of technology is being introduced, further complicating the creation of an efficient language. The common element in book arts, the “book”, the traditional codex, is facing unprecedented changes, where the vehicle for transmitting words, art, ideas and fact is being influenced by technology and may potentially be replaced by the “digital book”. This introduces the possibility of entirely new art genres but the question arises, will the book continue to be the common denominator in book arts?

Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary defines the word book thus: noun [M.E. book, boke, bok; AS. bok, plural bec, a writing, record, book, from boc, bece, a beech (beech bark probably formed the original writing material of the Teutonic nations); Ice. bok, a book, and a beech tree; D. boek, a book, a beech; G. buch, a book, buche, a beech.]
1. any literary or scientific composition or treatise which is printed, distinguished by length and form from a magazine, tract, etc.
2. any number of written or printed sheets when bound or sewed together along one edge, usually between covers.
3. a volume or collection of blank paper or of printed blank forms, intended for any kind of writing, as for memorandums, accounts, or receipts.
4. a particular part of a literary composition; a division of a subject in the same volume; as, the books of the Bible.
5. a volume or collection of sheets in which accounts are kept; a register of debts and credits, receipts and expenditures, etc.; as, to keep a set of books; hence, a record; an account.
6. a writing; a written character; a deed. [Obs.]
   By that time will our book, I think, be drawn. ---Shakespeare
7. the Bible: commonly written the Book.
8. any formal composition of length, whether printed or manuscript; as she has written a book.
9. in whist, six tricks taken by one side; in bridge and some other card games, a specified number of cards or tricks forming a set.
10. anything considered as a subject for study; as, the book of nature.
11. the words of a play; libretto of an opera; as, A wrote the music and B wrote the book.
12. in betting, the list of bets made by a bookmaker; and individual’s bets upon any sporting event.
13. a book like package, as of matches, tickets, gold leaf, etc.
   by the book; according to the rules; in prescribed or usual way; to bring to book; to give and account. without book;
Objects used or invented by civilization, are created, then altered to meet man's needs and or wants. The oral tradition was supported then replaced when symbols (writing) were used to record and convey information. This ability to preserve words through the oral tradition, codices or computer is arguably the foundation of structure in societies and although the oral tradition has not gone extinct, its function has evolved and it is not as valued in the society as when it was the only means of transmitting history, information and tradition. Is this too the fate of books in general and book art by association? And what are the ramifications for the status quo, books.

The visual arts have been another building block supporting the stability of culture so it was natural that the book and art should join to establish a new genre. As presented earlier the term book art was coined by the conceptual art world in the 1960s but in fact it has a much older and richer history although blurred and multi-faceted in its definition. The book as art poses a number of considerations such as what is the definition and history of book art, and in fact should book art be considered a Craft or Fine Art. The book as art is frequently confused with a book about art: it is art in book form (not always traditional material or methods), or a book containing or composed of art. Two and three dimensional art that contains or features words is often misidentified as a form of book art but the presence of words alone does not constitute book art. Words, narratives or story lines do not automatically equate to book arts. It is this misconception that often facilitates the ready acceptance of the 'book' to the digital format. It is quite easy to establish what book art isn't and a very different thing to consider the many facets of what constitute book art today and in the future.

The book arts have not outwardly embraced new technology, but not all technology is in the formal electronic or digital presentation. In reality almost every area of book arts have benefited from new advances. Substances have been developed to neutralize acids in older pulp papers. Tool quality, new inks, paints, adhesives and advances in paper quality and variety can be directly attributed to technology and a definite plus for all book arts.

Electronic technology offers much simpler solutions when the integration in book arts is considered. Altered book artists who formerly labored with scalpels and scissors now employ laser cutters and computer programs to create delicate inclusions. Computer software programs such as Adobe Photoshop ® and In-Design ® offer great potential to design process and work well with traditional techniques used. There is a new generation of livre d'artiste books whose illustrations are digital and the layout of the books are accomplished entirely on such software programs. Although these are titled and marketed as livre d'artiste, they do not live up to the tradition. Not only is the printing of the art accomplished in mass by machine, the pages and books are compiled into book form by machine and overall the personal investment is limited and the production much
greater. A number of artists are working with photocopiers to create books. The artist Betsy Davids used “found” or existing texts or images as a basis for their work. She composed *Dreaming Aloud* on an outdated Macintosh computer and used computer scanned video images in a manner never before imagined possible. Her first book was published using her home Xerox machine. She is very often noted as a pioneer in the process but ironically her product is elusive and images are not published in other books or on the Internet. This introduces the idea of the home press where given a quality copier, computer and a few programs it is now possible for the individual to create their own livre d’artiste.

Study at Iowa State University afforded me the opportunity to sit in on a 400 level creative writing class. (See Figure 2) The assignment dealing with new media fiction was of the most interest to this application. The students were instructed to write and illustrate in any media of their choice, an original composition then design and present using Power Point®. As an aid to them the instructor suggested looking at www.dreamingmethods.com, a site that provided a forum for individuals to submit new media work. Although this was a literary based assignment, the stories were illustrated and developed in such a way to offer a study in how a livre d’artiste may present their work in a digital format.

While viewing all of their ‘productions’, in a darkened room, with the entire class present, it seemed obvious to me that they had reinvented silent movies without a piano accompaniment. The perception may have been different if viewed individually, on separate computers but given all the other technology available on a minute by minute basis; the work seemed a benign product unable to compete with other dynamic visual media and certainly had very little relationship to the book other than the narrative nature.

That being said, the growing movement to employ digital e-books, on-line web sites and videos as alternative artists’ books is alive and growing and it appears that once technology is embraced for a genre and definitions have morphed, there is no turning back. Publishers who are making the decision to convert their product to an e-book or video format are often doing so for a financial and logistic basis are often secondary to marketing ploys to promote e-book usage. It is predicted by Fredrich A Kittler that by 2525, over 75% of material formerly distributed in book format will be consumed in the form of e-books and because of the already evident peripheral affect on art books, the environmental footprint, and sustainability of each vehicle should be discussed.

Environmental statistics regarding the e-books are subject to wide interpretations. Firstly the way and frequency in which consumers use the tool radically alters the statistics as does the length of time before the device is replaced. Most e-readers can be used for more than reading books.
There are so many different companies producing digital readers that the user friendliness of each product varies. Some companies are still using mercury and arsenic in their LCD display glass as well as bromiated flame retardants and PVC components. E-readers require plastic made from a non-renewable resource, oil. The social, economic and political costs and ramifications to war torn regions of Africa due to the sourcing of such minerals as columbite and tantalite, needed in all technology, will never be computed. When considering recycling, much has been written about the outsourcing to other countries where children are often employed to harvest the most valuable components and the remainder of the often toxic materials have devastating ramifications on the workers and residents of the area. And lastly, e-readers require continued consumption of energy not only on an individual basis but also in powering the servers, modems and infrastructure for storing and transmitting information.

Daniel Goleman and Gregory Norris How Green is My iPad in an April 4, 2010 New York Times article “with respect to fossil fuels, water use and mineral consumption, the impact of one e-reader payback equals roughly 40-50 books”. They further conclude that in terms of impacts on human health, “one e-book has 70 times impact of one printed book, with the primary impact being particulate matter form energy use and production”. The statistics presented by Goleman and Norris are supported consistently in research. I was unable to find any information on the resulting impact from radiation.

Paper production has long been associated with waste and devastating results on the environment but as technology has pushed society into new, unknown computer frontiers, it has also been employed to fix known problems in paper manufacturing. Inks, production methods as well as paper and recycling, has vastly improved to date as has sustainable harvesting of wood products.

Only time will tell if consumers fail to heed the warnings and continue to embrace computer technology. But the fact remains that traditional codices are safely and economically recyclable in a number of venues. Aside from post consumer products that can be used in the production of new books like livre d’artiste books, in their original forms they can find new life and provide inspiration as altered books.

Fredrich A. Kittler, a noted contemporary literary scholar and media theorist as well as a spokesman for the humanities wrote “Understanding media remains an impossibility precisely because the dominant information technologies of the day control all understanding and its illusions”. This also includes the creations resulting from technologies. There is a suggestion then that dependence on technology could evolve into a reliance on that very technology as well as those who have created the technology for the very existence of art. His writing also presents the ques-
tion that if the artist does not have understanding of the process and control over all aspects of the technological media, is he truly doing the creating? Kittler takes the point farther when he noted in *Technische Medien (Technical Media)* that technology is “Driving the spirit out of the humanities.”

In his publication *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Kittler writes, “Increasingly, data flows once confined to books and later to records and films are disappearing into black holes and boxes that, as artificial intelligences, are bidding us farewell on their way to nameless high commands. In this situation we are left only with reminiscences.” Certainly traditional book art is limited in audience, requiring effort to personally engage in the intricacies of the object. The creation of book art has been influenced by the digital age, not necessarily in an adverse manner, and still the efforts to create all varieties of book arts seem to take huge amounts of skill, time, thought and patience in this push button age. All these attributes seem to indicate the possible obsolescence of the book and the art that is born from the intimacy of the codex.

Ironically the digital vocabulary has adopted the word codex for a computer program. As the world and words are evolving, the question of book arts may come down to semantics. Digital media may evolve and in doing so appropriate the terminology that relates to the tangible object… the codex. But the book is the substantial, consistent, tactile symbol of the preserver of knowledge. It can be visited and revisited and has become society’s tool, not to be disposed of lightly. James McCoy, director of the University of Iowa Press stated in an August 3, 2011 Iowa Public Broadcasting interview on the future of the book, which in his opinion technology will take over the distribution of best sellers, text books and news publications. In essence, time based and popular trend material would be digitalized but the traditional format would continue to sustain classical literature, children’s book as well as art books. Although he was referring to art books as pictorial books his prediction should be applied to the book’s offspring…book arts. Hopefully book art will not become an artifact commemorating the end of the codex, or a nostalgic, sentimental craft revived form the past but rather a vital, evolving, relevant art, not on the cutting edge but rather adaptive, full of the complexities of the object of its namesake.
ABOUT THE WORK

Unsure to Be Sure, one story out of many, is the culmination of a number of personal efforts and advancements presented in one codex. Having worked in assemblage art and altered books for a number of years, a hybridized livre d'artiste featuring a children’s story was an ideal departure. This offers the opportunity to continue to work within the book format, while providing an occasion to learn and incorporate areas of technology with traditional art materials.

The implementation of technology in Unsure to Be Sure has allowed for manipulation of images and text placement as well as mass production of the book rather than the traditional definition which is limited to hand printed editions. Conversely the project employs the traditional elements of the livre d'artiste in that the illustrations and the design of the book is original as is the text.

The year 2007 was a very bad year. I was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer and as a result the life I loved and embraced dissolved. Although the character Monsieur Unsure had been a part of my creative life prior, he re-emerged during the years of treatment and the longer term adjustment to the many life changes and uncertainties that ensued. One of those changes was returning to Iowa State University to pursue this MFA in Integrated Visual Arts. Monsieur Unsure very nearly became Miss Unsure, in that there is a consideration in the text that returning to ‘letters’ is a form of redemption, but the off rhyme seemed too good to discard. The original Monsieur Unsure was written and drawn as a collaborative effort with the poet Gary Gildner, but was abandoned when cancer was diagnosed. Perhaps it was a project left undone or the persistent sense that due to treatments it was increasingly more difficult to find control in my life and access memories that I felt a need to revisit Unsure’s world. Elements from the original were maintained in the writing but the text and most of the illustrations have been completely reworked.

In the final draft, Unsure lived with his companion, Sir Burr, an odd pink porcupine, in a distant cave in While-a-Way Woods. He was simply too unsure and afraid of nearly everything to continue his life as a clown in the circus. Unsure moved to a remote cave where there was security and routine, but he became anxious in his solitude and unsettled with himself. He decided that letters, words and all that they could give him were the solution to his dilemma. So he fashioned a plan to steal all the letters from the nearby village of Sans Serif. The theft was successful but on his retreat he encountered a young man named Patch and his friend the dog Muttley.

Fearful, Unsure ran headlong trying to lose the young boy and dog, but his efforts to evade the pair were unsuccessful. (See Figure 3) Shortly after he arrives home, the door flies open and the
two uninvited guests burst in and engage Monsieur in an insightful conversation. (See Figure 4) After a time, Patch follows Muttley back to Sans Serif, where he discovered the town was missing their letters. By morning the rain had left the community an island and the town was trying to determine what had become of their letters. Patch was excited to know that he could help his friends and told them the letters were in the cave deep in While-a-Way Woods.

A posse of citizens was formed to retrieve the letters at the same time Unsure was fleeing his flooding sanctuary and he quickly found himself in deeper trouble. (See Figures 5 and 6) Fortunately the search party happened upon him and saved Monsieur so that he could face his punishment for stealing the letters. A trial was held; Unsure confessed and readily accepted his sentence. He had had an epiphany and in the end saw the value of letters and community. In short, the clown stopped thinking only of himself.

*Unsure to Be Sure* was developed empirically. Several paintings were done to establish the environment in which Unsure lived and define some of his personality as well as some of the other characters. The plot was launched from these initial watercolors. Giving consideration to the artwork, the text was fleshed out, from which more paintings were designed. This give and take process continued, more curiosity than linear, until the story was completely outlined and the details were left to fill in. The text was written to intentionally leave out details that could be included or referenced to in the drawings. This was done to create a dialogue between the illustrations and the text.

While three copies of the book have been created and hand bound for the completion of this work, the fulfillment of the entire project is projected into the upcoming year when the work will step away from the hand bound livre de artiste format and fifty copies will be professionally printed and bound. It is my intent to have several shows at regional art centers featuring the framed art work and books for sale.
ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

The text of *Unsure to Be Sure*, like the use of technology with traditional methods, can be considered a hybridization in that the story line is addressed as much to adults as children. *The Mouse and his Child* by Russell Hoban and illustrated by David Small written in the 1960’s, deals with very adult themes, economic woes, abandonment, survival in violence yet is written and illustrated in a manner that could be suited for sophisticated children. *Unsure to Be Sure* falls between this and another favorite, Gary Larson’s, *There is a Hair in My Dirt, A Worm’s Story*, a graphic story dealing with the life cycle and importance of dirt. It is illustrated and written to be absolutely universal. Children can be entertained by this book whether they understand the storyline or not because the illustrations are so engaging. I certainly am not claiming that Unsure is on a par with either of these books but simply citing two sources that were instrumental in influencing the writing and design.

As a young adult, I was given the book *A Bird’s Christmas Carol*, a novel written by Kate Douglas Wiggin published in 1887. The illustrations by Katherine R. Wireman were typical of Victorian era steel engravings; black and white, realistically drafted romanticized images of ideal family settings. The story however was what intrigued me. By today’s standards it is sentimental and almost cliché, but as a young person I thought it was so honest and heartfelt. The heroine of the story contracts an illness and by age ten her condition has deteriorated to the point the reader knows it is terminal and yet the young girl is the strength in the story. She, in true Victorian style, dies but more importantly she lived fully to the end and took charge and helped the adults cope with the situation. I remember reading it for the first time thinking how wonderful that a child was the heroine. No doubt that influenced the inclusion of Patch as a proactive child and why Unsure is influenced by a child.

The Victorian era was the age of children’s books, their coming of age as entertainment and vehicles of education, and to the thinking of many, passé in the inclusion of a moral. Regardless of popular thinking, I miss morals in a great many applications and wanted Unsure to be contrary to this trend as well.

The colors offered by the turn of the twentieth century four-colour process was intense and provided the possibility of increase tonal subtleties. Although Unsure is not printed in this process, the colors have been chosen so that digital printing might emulate vibrant colours used by Raphael Tuck and Sons in London, G. P. Putnam’s Sons in New York, Harper and Bros. in New York, McLoughlin Bros in New York and a multitude of other quality printers.
Having collected children’s books for years, I have spent countless hours perusing the effectiveness of designs used from around 1900 to the 1950s. My favorites are from the teens to the end of the thirties. Picture vignettes were spread throughout the books to compliment the text and interesting page compositions resulted from the fact that smaller paper bound books were designed, a result of the depression and limited access to all types of material. The perfect bound style of book, with a cloth spine was frequently used during this period, also a result of economic constraints and the limited availability of cardboard. It seems appropriate that in these trying times the same methods of production be employed except by hand.

So many of these vintage books have influenced the design of Unsure to Be Sure, such as Gammon and Spinach, illustrated by Stewart Orr and verses by John Brymer (the illustrator did get top billing), any number of versions of The Babes in the Woods and Collections of Fairytales, The Story of Snips by Angusine Macgregor, and or Wonder Book, by Honor Appleton. The library of influences on the design, illustration and writing is simply too great to acknowledge them all in this writing.

Beyond the affect of a plethora of children’s books is the influence of my own life’s events on the plot. Although not autobiographical, there have been periods in my life when I have attempted to escape as a solution to uncertainties and fears; aspects of Unsure’s story have been introspective.
PROCESS

Creating Unsure to Be Sure included much more than writing, painting and putting the book together. Narrative has always played large in my work in any media. Every assemblage piece I have ever done was created after firstly going on a sort of scavenger hunt for objects that “work well” together to create a visual story. Since the components of the book are two dimensional this same process went from the physical search to more of an inspirational quest for components to incorporate into the project. It has involved many satisfying hours of working in other media, contributing on many levels to the development of the story line and or artwork and has offered me the time to play and nurture that very sacred part in all of us, the child.

When I encountered a problem with any phase in the making of Unsure, I found stepping into another media helped resolve the issues. The two media most attractive to my creative instincts during this process have been very tactile, dimensional, natural products; bees wax and wool, not together although that offers an interesting possibility for the future.

Painting in beeswax, or encaustic has not only provided time for ideas and narrative to incubate, it inspired colors and patterns for the illustrations. While painting Portrait of Youth, a self portrait from childhood (See Figure 7), I was working out aspects of Unsure’s character. The painting Orbs (See Figure 8) is one of many exploring circles and shapes that influenced the architecture of Sans Serif and were in fact helping to develop colour schemes. Having difficulty working on the computer and often times creating more stress than good work, wax fulfilled my need to work in a very tactile, malleable medium. (See Figures 9 and 10)

Beyond the study of color and character, working in felt harkens back again to the child within. The process of creating felted objects requires repetitive actions that remind me of the craft projects done as a child. This has been very necessary a number of times in the overall process; to step out of the present. The objects that have resulted from this play have not directly influenced the appearance of the characters in Unsure to Be Sure but have assisted in development of the individual personalities. The expressions, shapes and placement of eyes, nose mouth and ears on variously structured heads were explored in felt and then translated into two dimensional watercolors. Characters made of felt and layered on watercolor backgrounds using Adobe Photoshop® were at one point considered for the illustrations in the story. Although tabled for future projects, the idea was explored in the making of a series of postcards created as advertisement for a hypothetical company making felt toys, games and soft sculpture. (See Figures 11 and 12)

The development of the book was unorthodox in that it was not linear as was advised by a
number of sources; that the typical method is to write the story in its entirety, then illustrate. For me this process seemed to hamper creative potential. I needed a dialogue between the words and paintings.

Early in this give and take process it was necessary to determine the format and move on to more finalized paintings. A landscape format was selected to fit a lap and accommodate panoramic illustrations. It was also considered that this format, 10 inches by 8 inches, would allow for a number of creative page layouts inspired by the afore mentioned vintage books.

The images for the book were based on memories of drawings and doodles done as a child. There was no attempt to make objects correct in proportion or perspective but rather rely on childlike intuition. They were drawn in sketchbooks then transferred to Arches 180 lb cold press paper, inked, painted in Schmincke and Windsor & Newton water colour and details enhanced using coloured ink and coloured pencil. The images were painted in such a way to work with the juxtaposition of complementary colors and intensities. Rather than fill in the inked areas with one color as was common practice in the children’s books of the 1930s, Unsure uses a range of values and hues to create greater dimension in the forms. Because of the smaller size they could be detailed in process using very fine brushes.

The paintings were rendered in proportion to a 10 inch by 8 inch book format. Contrary to the method of many illustrators the paintings are not large format to be reduced for printing but rather slightly larger than presented in the book so that they are very evidently hand done. The human aspect of creation has been an important element to maintain in the illustrations in the book. That being said, technology has been an asset in some circumstances such as when minor mistakes in composition or painting need to be reworked using Adobe Photoshop ®. Paintings, once scanned, were be cropped, merged or rescaled, important since, for instance, Sir Burr was not a porcupine in the early paintings, but a rabbit. The colors of every illustration lacked the intensity and vibrancy of the originals in the first printed versions so it was necessary to employ technology to maintain some of the original hue and value authenticity.

Some of the scenes however, were painted in water colour two and three times. Often this repetition was as much to develop the painting as work out details of the language of the text. This reworking has never seemed like a waste of time or mistakes but rather as an investment in the final work. There are a number of paintings that are not included in the story since the text developed away from the original ideas. (See Figures 13 and 14)

The book layout was developed after the plot and the majority of the images were completed. A grid system consisting of eight overlapping rectangles was established for the diversity in layout this provided for in page to page transitions. The pages were planned, referring to vintage books, using
Garamond Premiere Pro was chosen as the main font for its classic structure, traditional usage and ease to read while Helvetica minimally used as a Sans Serif accent font. Adobe In-Design® allows for careful consideration of line length, font size, leading and spacing and provides a format for placement of the text into blocks. Working in a rather traditional format, I chose not to employ the possible techniques for letter manipulation.

It was my intent to maintain another element of the tradition of the true livre d’artiste by scanning and printing the three proof copies using my home computer but problems with centering on the page and lining up copy front to back made it nearly impossible to create consistency in the formats so commercial printers were employed.

The covers of three books were printed on 80 lb. linen textured card stock while the interior pages are 40 lb linen paper. The method of binding is called perfect bound and uses an acid-free quick drying PVA adhesive that remains plastic. It is my sincere hope that these books are viewed, enjoyed and the pages are turned often. (See Figures 18, 19, and 20)
CONCLUSION

Since the onset of this consideration of the artist book in the digital age, I have read several e-book in an effort to understand, on a personal basis, the pros and cons of technology as a format. The experiences have been less than satisfying. Referring back to earlier pages, knowing roughly where the content of the text is in relationship to the overall codex, making notes in the margins and turning pages are my way of interacting with an object that has a history and physical nature unique to each book; In other words, experiencing all the layers of the traditional format. I have been fortunate to be involved in every area in the creation of traditional books from making environmentally friendly paper in San Juancito, Honduras to studying and executing pages of an illustrated manuscript to letterpress printing and now employing technology as a tool in the production of an original book.

Contemplation of this new age media as a tool, creates in me a sense of contradiction. Having had no previous experience with computers before pursuing this MFA, I am grateful for the knowledge gained through the process of creating Unsure to Be Sure, and appreciate how so many steps in the designing of a book can be accomplished with greater ease than traditional methods. Technology becomes more than a tool but rather a partner in production. Thinking back to the theories of Fredrich A Kittler, is standardization and mass production an advancement to art and letters? If a designer requires a software program or machine to complete a project, are they truly the creators or merely contributors in a process? Is it an improvement on history that the ensuing products look more standardized and professionally manufactured and can be produced in bulk with greater ease than singular objects created by an artist’s hand? My personal satisfaction is in the original process, the hand eye and mind working harmoniously, as well as the exclusivity of one thoughtfully developed unique edition. I have tried a number of times to print Unsure to Be Sure on handmade paper but the individual nature of each piece of paper makes digital printing impossible. Simply employing a digital media seems to make the idea of complete investment in empirical development and uniqueness of object obsolete.

The consequences of technology on the environment are tangible and will affect and limit my future use of computers. The capability of more people being able to produce more product with greater ease seems counterintuitive to thoughtful consideration of quality development of art and society. I can’t speak to the effects of digital technology on the creative process. It is a much studied subject that seems very difficult to quantify and results are often subjective representations. Although Unsure found solutions to his personal dilemmas through letters and the associated
community, I remain confounded by my personal and academic involvement with the technical age as well as the greater picture of the destiny of the artists’ book.

I am not so idealistic to think that society can ever turn back the clock on the use of technology. It is however, my hope that we, as civilized peoples, will continue to recognize and maintain value in the history and uniqueness of artists’ books and the multidimensional value of the turned page.
APPENDIX: SELECTED WORKS

Figure 1-J. B. Green, Codex Cut Away Model, Laced Construction, 1985

Figure 2-Images of the Creative Writing students at Iowa State University working on, then viewing new media fiction.
Figure 3-Unsure’s Getaway
Figure 4-Unsafe and the intruder Patch
Figure 5-Sans Serif’s search party
The ducks sounded off like firecrackers in a seven layer cake and they returned off toward White-A-Way Wood, coincidentally near where young Panch said he had encountered the unpleasing clown. The top branches of the tallest trees were breaking through the waves and in the highest points in a distant evergreen, one of the sailors spied something resembling a huge Christmas tree topper. The closer the rescuers got, the more they were able to make out that it wasn’t angel ornament or a tree topper of any variety. Wrapped around the tree, acting erratically, was a windblown figure weighted down with vamping, belching parcels.

Monseur Unmore was clinging for dear life and now didn’t know what to do...cry for it, fight, or just surrender it all. He was exhausted and anxious and now a boat full of horned devils was coming to take him away. He knew there were some forces with which it was impossible to engage and demons were top on that list. And then, terror upon terror, Unmore spotted that blue, looming monster was at the front of the boat in an offensive posture and heading directly for him. Oh the inhumanity! The clown, soaked to the bone, wished he could wring himself inside out. The noise coming from the boat was so loud and so penetrating that Unmore froze, unable to move or talk or think.

The boat grew closer and in his current state, the clown was unsteady. Within moments the only person on board with a wild-eyed cat on his head, was prying him from his perch. The bags of coot and burl were lowered into the large and for the second time in that twenty four hour period, Unmore saw those stars. The rescue party, with unintended arms received

Figure 6-Page 24 showing Unsure’s dilemma
Figure 7-Portrait of Youth, Encaustic, 2011
Figure 8-Orbs, Encaustic, 2010
Figure 9-Beauties, encaustic 2011

Figure 10-Beach Madonna, encaustic 2011
Figure 11 and 12: Postcards created from three dimensional felted alphabets.
Figure 13-Painting of rescue not used because of change in text and characters.
Figure 14-Painting of the trial not used because of changes in text and character.
two he in any possible water? This should be a cake walk, a Sunday stroll in the park for water sports. It was decided that these noise-makers did not want help, they wanted to help. They stretched their necks, lowered their heads and paddled off in the direction of a huge slug of debris. "Follows those ducks!" directed Mr. Dewey.

As if they had been doing it all their lives, the barge was positioned upstream and floated toward the range. The librarian acted as spotter and called out, "Ahoy mates...on the starboard side. Throw out the life line!" There caught among broken trees and bridge parts was a large space pipe hat with what appeared to be a quivering pink pincushion sticking out. After a great deal of maneuvering, the hat and its passenger were hauled on board. It was then that the cargo in the hull of the hat was revealed as Sir Bus, much relieved to be rescued, waddled in a scrabble out of the hat as letters spilled all over the floor of the barge. There was a confused husk on board, this geriatric pink pincushion shuffled across the deck and rolled up into a ball, something his type was known to do. He rolled around on the floor until he became frightfully sea sick and decided it was much better to spread out a lay as flat as possible. This was not the image of the chief Patch had described. It was difficult to imagine this character pulling off the heist of the magistrade at San Serif. And if he did, where were the notes?

Figure 15-Page 23 employing vintage style page layout.
Figures 16 and 17—Opposing pages 12 and 13 of Unsure to Be Sure.
Figure 18: Sans Serif cover image before Photoshop alterations
Figure 19: Sans Serif cover image after Photoshop alterations
Figure 20 – Image used on the Colophon page cropped from image on page 10
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