

THE ARTISTS' BOOK ANTHOLOGIST: AXEL HEIBEL An Interview with Judith A. Hoffberg

Editor's Note: My first stop in Europe this past summer was in Dusseldorf to visit with Axel Heibel, with whom I have had a correspondence for more than a year. Heibel revealed his interest as a book artist in the whole bookworks movement, but more especially in anthologizing bookworks from all over the world as well as forming a new organization. The Interview was held on 15 June 1982 in Axel's home.

When did you think about making books, Axel?

In the beginning of 1976, and the most recent two books considered the relationship of one work to another, but not only work for itself. I don't want to have more works on the walls because you can see it at one time. I want to have visible and non-visible things so you can turn the pages and have new impressions. In the beginning I folded the pages, because I made my pictures on the wall, and I folded them on the wall because I cut them. That's because one page has two sides and when I fold one part, I have the back side of the page on the front side, and I can put it together with a line. Yes, I worked mostly with lines in 1976 and 1977.

In 1977 at the Documenta show, I was very impressed with painting. I began to cut in 1978, because I had more possibilities to change the pages and put them together—like 6 and 7 pages together, a little like a sculpture, but you can always have the single pages, and that is important to me. After the Book Object Show in Freiburg (1980) I had the idea of making a book that you could open not only to the left, but also above and to the right, so that the book had other relationships, new relations. I began not only to cut the page in the middle, but also I was interested in having the book open in different directions. More points in one book. The idea of having a tri-part book in one book, which was hexagonal, was being explored, but it's very difficult to make it and then bind it.

Speaking of binding, when you started making books, did you know anything about binding, especially since your books require a special type?

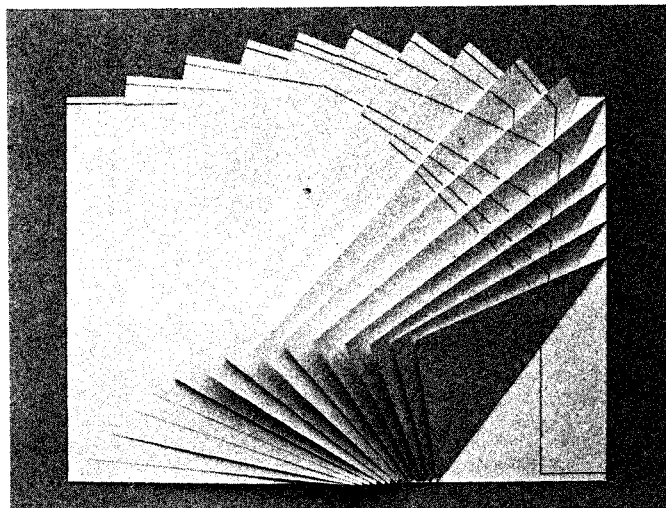
No, my first books were very thin, and I bought the little links that schoolboys use. I saw how they bound double pages and stitching. But with a larger form, I needed professional bindings. I taught myself from a book, using photocopies sent to me by a friend. I read it, didn't understand anything, and then the next day I read it and it was clear. I made the first book with triangular pages in two days. The clean white one was the first. It took much too much time. I learned that certainly wasn't my profession.

Why not mention the tools that you use, because the books look so difficult and require patience and time. Just describe the tools you use.

Sometimes I use a scissors. Then a basic Exacto knife, and a square edge, and that's all. I use a pencil sometimes to add color lines. I fold the page with my hand and a burnisher. Sometimes I must measure because I have critical folds, but only when I have more foldings and cuts into the page.

What kind of papers do you use?

At first I only had offset paper, but I wanted it to be thin, so I could have transparency. But for the past two years, I



Book Object 1977

used normal material from a printer out of a large print shop, and they have various sizes—sometimes larger sizes, so I can cut them to make a larger book.

How many books have you made so far?

Since 1976, nearly 150 or more one-of-a-kind. I have made only one printed book, done in 1978 by the Museum in Hagen, since I had a one-man show of books only. I decided that it was better to print a book rather than a catalog with some pictures of books.

Do you have a growing philosophy about bookworks, or book forms in relation to an audience, or even the growing development of bookworks recently. Or has your concept of the book been individual?

I think that mostly this is a period when I prefer to show books in a museum, in a case, and no one can touch or really see it in entirety. You can only open the book to one set of pages, which you can look at, but really cannot get a full impression. Two years ago, I thought about making larger books but made of wood, so that you could use them, at least more people could deal with them, not as a private experience with a small book. All the time I think of "using" the book. However, it's a little difficult and expensive to do larger sculptural books. I really was concentrating on folding pages, but now I don't work so much with folding.

What do you think about your growing circle of friends and colleagues? Have you seen a change in the development of bookworks? Are more people making books now?

I have more information because I'm working on a book about artists' books from international artists, and I have been very impressed by the material I received from many

countries throughout the world. The fact is that we do not know in Europe, especially in Germany, so much about bookmaking in other countries. We know sometimes more about artists in this area, but for instance, not much about English book makers—really only Stephen Willats—and about other normal books. From my point of view, I am more specialized in one-of-a-kind books, not multiples. Doing unique books, I have more possibilities, because if you print a book, the ideas are too expensive to print. When I thought about printing a book in 1978, I knew that I had to make a very simple book.

What are you planning to do now? You're going to publish an anthology of artists' books, isn't that right?

At this time, it's not easy to find a publisher, but perhaps I have found one in Switzerland. I'm not at liberty to say at the present time.

What has this developed into, since you have had communication with artists all over the world? Have you something new in mind?

I had a scholarship in Paris last winter, and met a Chinese artist and she asked me if I would found a group with her of artists who are making printed books. I said, yes, because in Europe there are not very many people who are doing very much for artists' books. Now we are 6 people: two in Germany, two in Paris, one in Zurich and one in Australia. And we will have a stand at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October with our new books, under the name of KLAB, which means in three languages, Kunstlerbuch, livre d'artiste, and artists' book.

The group is going to show our new books, and we hope to have a review that will inform people not just about artists' books, but which will include pages which are created by artists. Our first issue will include the artists in our group, and then we will have guest artists.

Besides the review, what you are you planning to do as a group? Are you going to use the review to promote yourselves, artists' books, or just to disseminate information about other people?

We want to be an international club, and want to help ourselves. We will try to distribute our own books, and also to be international because people in other countries can make contacts to print our books with other publishing houses, and other printers. We are looking for publishers to print our books. That is the reason for KLAB. Distribution is very difficult, and we must find people to do that.

How do you intend to increase your membership in KLAB? To print a book under the name of the KLAB, one every year, to show at the Book Fair in Frankfurt with a small stand, and to make some pages for the KLAB review. This should also be distributed at Frankfurt. Perhaps only one issue a year at first, and then there should be news in the Review, as well as book reviews, international as well. It's difficult for me being in Dusseldorf to gather in all the news, so I am asking for information for our first issue. For the book about books, I am now organizing an archive to have it open for the KLAB archive, full of information and material, and I can also use it for the KLAB Review. I intend to use it for exhibitions. We want to organize exhibitions for

the group and also for non-members of the group who are guest artists. For my personal interest, I want to organize artists' book shows. I met in Paris a Japanese artist who knows a museum in Tokyo, and he knows the director. He asked me if I'm interested in organizing an international artists' book show in Tokyo. We sent them 26 photographs, and they were interested to do it in the spring of 1983. So far (*as of June 1982*) I have received no response from them.

The basic emphasis is on the printed edition for KLAB. If someone prints a book each year, can they get into the club? How do they apply for membership?

Write to Axel Heibel and send some material. It's a little difficult to work with us, because you must have money to print a book at your own expense, but I think the book under the name of KLAB is more important than to be part of the Review. It can't be too thick. I will be the contact at first, under the name of KLAB, in order to have the stand in Frankfurt.

Can you tell a little about the stand in Frankfurt, and what it means to you all? Have you noticed a difference in the audience that now comes to Frankfurt?

I think the stand is a propaganda medium, because the Book Fair in Frankfurt is very famous and many people come to the Fair. Also, it allows us to make contacts, people who may be interested in buying, distributing, including publishers. We just don't want books printed under the name of KLAB, but we must find other publishers who will print our books under their publishing house.

Do you want artists who only make books, or how exclusive does "artists' books" mean to your members?

No, artists usually do more than artists' books. Some of our members paint, make films, etc. But I think it's important that artists deal with the book medium and are interested in it, and that they want to meet other artists who make books.

What do you think of the book of the future?

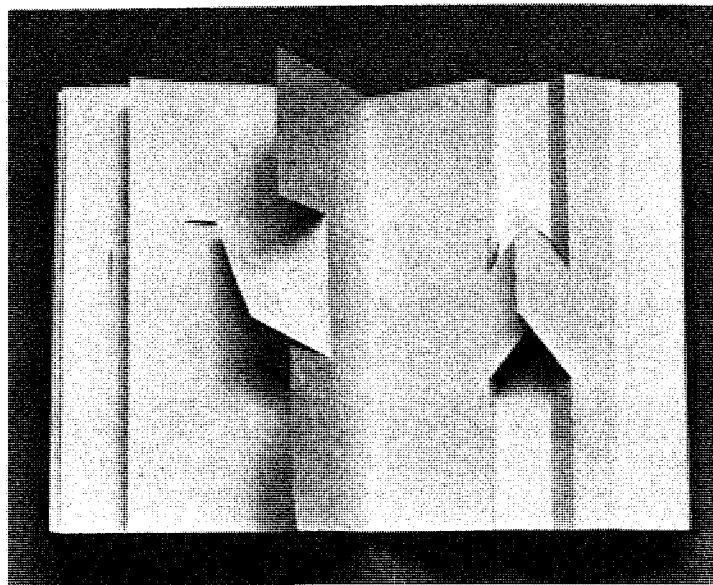
Yes, I think there is a future for the book, also for the normal book because it is a very natural medium, and when you have it in your hands, you can deal with it better. But the problems of the normal book are not my concern, but artists' books are very special to me. Books will change, because they will be part of a performance, or part of a videotape. I think that we must deal with it. Personally, I'm not interested in that angle, but perhaps a visual way of dealing with the book can be realized in my books. And that relationship and the things you cannot see if you open the book. You can only see what you can see now. The other pages you cannot see, and that's part of my work.

Is there anything else you're working on presently?

Well, before going to Paris, I conceived the idea of having a gallery with the material for the KLAB archive. I would like to have one here in Dusseldorf, for it is important to inform more people about bookworks. When they come to my place, people can handle the books. They can get information from me, and the books can serve as a means of dialogue about this medium. I can always supply them with more information. I think it's a better way than having just a show in a museum, because museums cannot inform people as much as the personal touch.

Postscript: Well, KLAB really did have a booth in October in Frankfurt. Participating in the KLAB Review (Ausgabe) which was issued for the Frankfurt Fair were Axel Heibel, Christian Appel (Frankfurt) and Peter Lyssiotis (Australia). KLAB Review is available for DM 6 or \$2.50 from Axel Heibel, Aachenerstr. 118, 4000 Dusseldorf 1, West Germany. Axel's printed book under the logo of KLAB is also available from him for DM 20 or for \$10.00 from Printed Matter, 7 Lispenard St., New York, NY 10013. The name of his book is: *Allmabliche, raumlich-zeitliche Annaberung* (translated as *Gradual, Spatial-Temporal Approach*). Heibel is also looking for artists who make bookworks, both printed or unique. He would like large black and white photos, a statement about your work, and biographical, bibliographical and exhibition history. Send this information to him at the above address. He plans to include it in the artists' book about artists who make books, as well as use the material for forthcoming exhibitions.

Juan Agius (Editions Da Costa) in Amsterdam has published 20 copies of a rubber stamp book by Heibel. It has two parts to open, in two colors. It costs 600 guilders. Edition Hoffman, romerstr. 47 D-6360 Friedberg 5, West Germany has also published a new book-object by Heibel made from rubberstamps, costing DM 280, ed. of 30 copies.



Book Object 1981

PROFILE: champion publications, melbourne

In 1977, Backyard Press began in Melbourne with writers and enthusiasts adopting the printing industry as their allied trade, rather than the traditional choices of teaching, journalism, copywriting, graphics, etc. Taking on the work of Champion Books and R.A.S.C.A.L.S., with a great amount of courage and dare, this collective began by taking on commercial work by doing odd handbills and advertising for a food coop, and so Backyard Press prospered. Business grew, and more people came. They did Rock 'n Roll posters, menus and all that goes with commercial printing.

But they really wanted to do creative work, and so Champion Books was born to be the creative arm of the business, concentrating on small editions of books, by pushing the boundaries of bookmaking. For example, Ted Hopkins, one of the collective, has created a book called *Teledex*, a metal telephone directory container, which instead of phone numbers contains poems. To be sure the tension of poetry and technology are reflected in the book design itself—a metal box which contains ruled cards which fit politely on loose-leaf rings. There is an A to Z index, and the 100 pages contain typed poems—poems that begin with the letter on the card index. Included is a warantee to guarantee replacement of faulty parts (within reason) and a desire on the part of the artist to hear from the owners of these books, so that if he has new inserts, you can be a recipient.

Then there's *Business As Usual* by Paul Green, which is a collection of drawings and words which attempts to put in some perspective the business of creation and some of its more sordid activities, including war, and heroes, tourists and invaders, somewhat full of cynicism, sarcasm and comedy too.

Don't miss *Suppression Alienation Oppression* by Glen

Clarke, which is a photographic documentation of an art performance event in Morwell, a town in Victoria's LaTrobe Valley. Clarke wore a caged cube on his head (much like a Sol LeWitt cube) and two smaller rectangles on each of his hands (looking like LeWitt rectangles) and walked around nonchalantly through this very conservative town. The captions include *Portrait of the Artist as an Anarchist*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Malcontent*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Twentieth Century Village Idiot*, and so on.

Well, being a small press in Australia is not as easy as distributing small press editions in the United States. The books are basically ignored, both by the critics and the public. The problem of distribution continues to be the basic hang-up of the small press world, and especially of Champion Books.

One of the mainstays of Backyard Press is RASCALS (Rational and Sane Citizens Against Liberal Supidity). The Liberals have been ruling in Australia, similar to the Republican Party in the U.S. and the Conservatives in the U.K. RASCALS publishes leaflets much like the McDonald's leaflet illustrated here and postcards with political messages, and political posters. But when an artist approaches the press, and the press likes what they see, the artist or writer must contribute something towards the production of the book, either in terms of labor, distribution, production, helping with RASCALS, or in fact, when the book is expensive, even money. Others come with government grants, and this helps to finance production.

Journey of a Wise Electron and Other Stories by Peter Lyssiotis, which was reviewed in *Umbrella* last year, shows the blending of innovative technology and access publishing. Since many of the photographs required a strong background