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REVIEWS & PRESS

Betty Bright. *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America, 1960–1980*. Granary Books, 2005.

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Shaw, Tate. "A Tough Commute: Review of *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America, 1960- 1980*." *Afterimage*: 46-47.

As I read *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960- 1980* by Betty Bright, a particular metaphor began to form in my mind: that of suburbs. Bright's safe and expansive term "book art" takes advantage of the spaciousness surrounding the medium's spheres of activity. This history requires considerable transportation as it sprawls noticeably far from its destination. It is organized by subdividing book artists into major demographic-type groups. These subdivisions intersect on occasion, appear identical, and contain many roads that end like cul-de-sacs. A few illustrations dominate the history book's prime real estate. As an account, it is a good example of what is needed in the medium, namely, more critical scholarship.

There have been decades of dialogue to establish the term for a material book made with expressive intentions. Bright has settled on the all-inclusive "book art" for her study, incorporating what she calls fine press and deluxe books with sculptural and multiple bookworks. For Bright, this "umbrella term" (4) is widespread enough to cover—protect even—tangential production utilities (arts in their own right), such as papermaking, bookbinding, typography, and graphic design.

More important than mere technology, however, is a book's logical consistency. Consider the following introductory statement: "Every aspect of the book—from content to materials to format—must respond to the intent of the artist and cohere into a work that is set in motion with a reader's touch" (3). This early point is qualified as being "much more complex" (3), but it provides a framework for understanding what follows. The words cohere and touch, for instance, presuppose a kind of connection or molecular fusion—even naturalness. Bright's wish is to create a safe place for all book artists to reside. She believes it to be an organic outgrowth. Like a suburb, it is planned for, committed to, and produced, then introduced.

Bright has determined where and when book art came of age: the United States, 1960- 1980.

Rather than live in this locus or build out incrementally, she has chosen a chronological approach so the reader is behooved to settle in for a long commute. In section I we pass by the Arts and Crafts movement (including William Morris's fine printing and Aubrey Beardsley's art nouveau aesthetic), by poets William Blake and the symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé, by Futurist typography, and end with Marcel Duchamp's boxes. For section II, we slow down upon entering the U.S.—in a section largely medium-based—for fine printers Leonard Baskin, the Grabhorn Brothers, and William Everson. Continuing past printmakers, painters, and sculptors—including illustrators of major literary works—we move onward to Eugene Feldman's offset printing, photo books by Weegee and William Klein, the works of Duchamp alongside Joseph Cornell, and lastly, the laden, readymade sculpture *Book* (1957) of Jasper Johns.

Nearly all the chapter headings are subdividing terminologies for Bright's selected term "book art." The subdivisions are Fine Press, Deluxe, and Bookwork, which itself subdivides into Sculptural Bookwork and Multiple Bookwork. I thought these subdivisions might prove resourceful, functioning as keys to quickly make hypertext-like reference to a section. However, as I went back through sections I and II, the sections that followed, and reread chapters based on their headings, I found inconsistencies in the organization. Bright explains in the introduction: "Any selective lineage cannot escape the confusions and even the unwitting deceptions perpetrated by terminology" (14). This quote reminded me of a line from a short story by George Saunders: "At Sea Oak there's no sea and no oak, just a hundred subsidized apartments and a rear view of FedEx." (n1) It also brought to mind a statement from William M. Ivins Jr.'s book *Prints and Visual Communication*: "A definition or description that cannot be exactly repeated is not only of little use but it introduces extraordinary complications and distortions." (n2)

Attempting to read *No Longer Innocent* loosely and without direction proved discouraging, but paying close attention to names and numbers was disappointing as well. The books within Bright's subdivisions appear to already have their own separate aesthetic systems. For instance, toward the beginning of section III, "1960s: Ferment," in a Fine Press subdivision centered on Claire Van Vliet's *Janus Press*, "the relief-printed aesthetic" (97) is mentioned with little depth. A dead end, such as this, is only mildly annoying. For the reader less interested, say, in an offshoot about papermaking applying to the content of only a handful of books from just one of Bright's subdivisions, this belies a much larger concern—that of demographics.

Individual artists do not necessarily tell the whole story in a field impacted by publishers and librarians. It is unfair to criticize Bright for specific exclusions from her history. But if you look at *No Longer Innocent* in quantitative terms, then even a cursory glance through the index and picture illustrations shows the limited population of this very broad context. A few names, especially Harry Duncan, Walter Hamady, Dieter Roth, Ed Ruscha, Keith Smith, and Van Vliet, appear most often, and their work takes up the majority of illustrative space. Pictures are valuable real estate in a history book of a visual medium. *No Longer Innocent* covers a significant amount of ground in 350 pages—including the preface, timeline, resources, and index, and yet, we see several illustrations repeated, they appear in black and white throughout the history, as well as within a separate, eight-page color section.

The limited population is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of *No Longer Innocent*. With such open outlying area, I expected to find more people in constant interaction, a symbiosis between different groups of producers. By the time we arrive at a section called "Explosion," beginning in the 1970s, there is without a doubt much activity. This is where the metaphor falls apart, because it seems we have been going in the opposite direction. We are not heading home but to the city, where there are multiple cultural hubs such as the Center for the Book Arts, the Women's Graphic Center, Franklin Furnace Archive, and Rebis Press. Organizations such as the Visual Studies Workshop, Printed Matter, and the late Book Bus begin to assimilate function (distribution, not craft, in this case) with production. This period indeed warrants a more thorough study—one that resides within its limits and takes a full census, gathering information from this dense population before its inhabitants cease to exist.

FOOTNOTES

(n1.) George Saunders, 'Sea Oak,' *Pastoralia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2000).

(n2.) William M. Ivins Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1953).

Drucker, Johanna. "No Longer Innocent." *Art on Paper*.

Anyone interested in the history of book art will welcome Betty Bright's newly published volume. She notes early on—fully aware that her definition is contentious—that artists' books are simply books made by artists. Whether or not you agree with her, critical engagement of any serious kind is generative, and Bright has made a considerable contribution to the field.

The core of Bright's study is the fine press tradition and the deluxe book in America, although her historical reach also extends to multiples, offset works, and sculptural interventions. Her introductory chapters revisit familiar precursors—Stephane Mallarme, William Morris, a handful of Italian Futurist and Surrealist publications—before moving on to her founding figures: Harry Duncan, Leonard Baskin, the Grabhorns, and their European inspirations.

One strength of this book is its careful research and clear presentation of information about artists whose work is exemplary and should be better studied, such as the intellectually and artistically adventurous mid-century offset artist, Eugene Feldman. Equally important is the book's methodology—a social history of connections and influences—and Bright's attention to communities of practice, including California's "Small Renaissance," The Center for Book Arts in New York, and the Visual Studies Workshop Press in Rochester. Her discussion of important collectors (Peter Frank, Ruth and Marvin Sackner, or Clive Phillpot, who shaped the library collection at MoMA), as well as institutions and mentors (such as Claire Van Vliet and Walter Hamady at the University of Wisconsin) demonstrates the importance of social frameworks for understanding artworks. For the critical study of artist's books, this is an important step; and Bright's scholarship reflects an historians training, in its careful attention to verifiable, specific

details.

No book can do everything, however. Conspicuously absent are discussions of Russian Futurist work, bohemian publications in California, and other expressions of radically independent book work and their theoretical formulation in texts by El Lissitzky, Velimir Khlebnikov, and others. Anti-aesthetic, activist, and independent sub-cultural traditions are given only cursory attention here. At times, the book focuses on institutionalized practices (schools, fine presses, workshops) that are often remote from contemporary aesthetic debates. In the well-heeled, special-collections world of deluxe and fine-press printing, which is at the heart of this book, questions about what books should get made, how their formal structures express cultural values, or whether they have anything to tell us about our lives and experiences are, unfortunately, often treated as abrasive and impolite intruders, even as they spawn compelling creative work.

Future critical histories of artists' books should draw on the lessons of Bright's study, synthesizing her keen attention to the social circumstances of production with equal focus on the complex values of the aesthetic artifacts. In a field where so little serious work has been done, this is another in a series of important milestones—many, it should be noted, sustained by the dedication of publisher, Granary Books' Steve Clay.

Lange, Gerald. *Ampersand* (Summer, 2006).

An endearing and engaging quality of this important work is Betty Bright's self-awakening manner of reporting on her investigative discoveries. Unlike previous surveys into the artists' book, she does not exhibit a political agenda, thus her exhaustive research is non-exclusionary and allows her to probe causation and historical precedent with a higher degree of authenticity. There are obvious omissions but the study does not pretend to be definitive; it is rather an examination of the social and cultural influences and events of the formative and furtive years of the book arts movement, and of historical causal agents as well.

Refreshing is the inclusion of the fine press renaissance of the period (deliberately excluded from previous studies) and her attention to technical changes in the printing field that allowed certain types of publishing activity to spawn. Interestingly enough, Bright's first chapter, "Books for a New Century," begins with an examination of William Morris's Kelmscott Press, correctly seeing this printing-publishing phenomenon as the pivotal influence on twentieth century book arts.

A very nicely produced addition to Granary Books' distinguished publishing program, *No Longer Innocent* marks the beginning of a more mature contextual understanding of contemporary book arts; it is an invaluable resource, sorely needed.

Crai, Melissa Jay. "No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America, 1960-1980." *The Bonefolder*, (Spring 2006), 3:45-46.

"In the 1970s, book art leapt to life in America. Terms were argued over. Organizations were started. Book structures were rediscovered or revised. And printing technologies were stretched to produce unrecognizable effects. Possibilities expanded in that period regarding who could make a book, how a book's contents could disport across a page, and how a book's materials and form could welcome or repulse a reader. The potential for expression seemed unlimited." - Betty Bright

I began to make book art just a few years after the time period addressed in Betty Bright's erudite *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America, 1960-1980*. I inherited the expansive view of the previous decade that she describes so well; I saw the book arts as being tremendously exhilarating, limitless, and vast. As I became aware of the dissonance surrounding the field, from the transgressed-upon outrage of many very fine bookbinders to the multiple strident claims of exclusive domain, my enthusiasm dimmed. I slid into a love-hate relationship with book art, from which I've never quite emerged. However, during my 17 years as a teacher, I've tried to pass to my students that original sense of breathless possibility, by striving to present an unbiased, inclusive view. This has required the distribution of mountains of photocopied writings each semester; there has never been a single book that I've felt able to use as a comprehensive reference, though a few have come close. Betty Bright has written the first.

In her introduction, Bright states that, "I am able to let the differences as much as the likenesses inform and illuminate the story of the book's continuing appeal to artists."

This she does, and admirably. She also seeks to address a very important aspect of the field, an "amnesia" which "has produced an increasing number of artists' books... whose content or strategies were long ago exhausted." Her wide-ranging history succeeds in this goal as well, and it is another reason her book is invaluable.

Working chronologically, with concise, informative, and highly readable prose, she tracks the progress and lineage of fine press books, deluxe books, multiple bookworks, and sculptural bookworks, including altered books and performance and installation bookworks. Her coverage is not limited to the two decades or the continent that the title suggests; she begins with the Kelmscott Chaucer, William Blake, Aubrey Beardsley, the Russian Constructivists, and of course, Duchamp. Periodically, European and British books make appearances. But Betty Bright doesn't simply focus on descriptions of the books and their underlying conceptual framework; she situates their history by examining all the attendant circumstances surrounding their development: the adoption and availability of printing methods including photocopiers and photo-based processes; she looks at artists as publishers, at influential exhibitions, publications, and conferences, and at the development of book arts centers and distributors, and she covers collectors, both public and private. She even takes a concurrent and informative look at what was happening in the mainstream publishing trade. It's a comprehensive, meticulously researched history, not only in the context of taking an inclusive, view of what was produced, but of how it was produced and through what means, and of how and where the book works met their readers. And, from Marinetti's challenge to Mallarmé in 1913 to several views still hotly debated, she also notes the ensuing flurries of reviews, criticism, dialogue and territorial

claims, many written by preeminent critics and curators, but just as often, by artists actively involved in the field.

While Bright aptly shows us the significance of the attendant discourse, she allows the writers to expound on their theories and reveal their positioning agendas in their own words, and then gently brings us back to the authenticity of the times. Of one, particularly voluble critic, she writes, "From today's perspective, Clive Philpott's inexhaustible proselytizing achieves its own heroic stature. It would be incorrect, however, to characterize the period as viewed through his aesthetic, which so resolutely separated different kinds of artists' books. As has been noted, exhibitions at The Center for Book Arts and other organizations displayed multiple bookworks alongside sculptural bookworks, fine press, and deluxe books."

I have my own agenda in praising *No Longer Innocent*. It takes an involved historian and curator such as Betty Bright to remind us that this "one" book artists inhabit is a single country, though it contains a wildly varied topography and distinctive zip codes within its borders. Her book finally captures the wide range of approaches that, happening simultaneously, fueled the energetic explosion of the book arts in this country.

In short, she shows us what actually happened.

It is to be hoped that what Richard Minsky predicts for *No Longer Innocent* will come true: that it will become the standard reference work in the field, and that future histories of later periods will seek to follow Betty Bright's long overdue example.

I still firmly believe that the future of the field is contingent on its continued diversity. To paraphrase Betty Bright, the field is a "realistic if motley" entirety, and artists still produce work that is to be "paged through, circled around, and perhaps gaped at." Inheriting an awareness of a truthful, encompassing overview will help keep artists and students alike from being falsely educated away from their individual passions, and allow enthusiastic, informed explorations to continue on, well into the second century of artists' books; or even into their own millennium.

Buy this book.

For more information on Melissa Jay Craig, read the article on her work in this issue of The Bonefolder. She can be reached at: craigmjay@sbcglobal.net and online at: <http://web.mac.com/melissajaycraig>.

Walkup, Kathleen. "Reviews: Granary Books." *Parenthesis XIII* (August 2007): 34-35.

Betty Bright. *No Longer Innocent: Book Art in America 1960-1980*. New York: Granary Books, 2005. US \$39.95

When were the book arts innocent? Was it when Blake made the contemporary equivalent of

zines in his back garden? When Morris succeeded in diverting one small byway toward handcraft on the relentless path of technology? When Duchamp tossed some stuff in a suitcase and called it a book? When Ed Ruscha tossed a typewriter out of a car window and recorded the results?

Betty Bright, in her terrific new book, not only answers all of the above, she goes on to prove her point through a careful and thorough compendium of the history of the a medium, complete with quotes from virtually anyone who ever has had anything meaningful to say on the subject of book arts.

Bright begins by tackling head-on the thorny and tenacious issue of definitions. As any artist's book maker or fine printer who has ever had to answer that cocktail-hour question, "So what do you do?" knows, defining the medium remains one of the more elusive aspects of the work.

Bright divides book art (*sic*: she prefers the dropped "s") into four categories: fine press, deluxe, multiple, and sculptural. These are not new categories. (Clive Philpott was writing about multiples as a defining characteristic—in his case the defining characteristic—in the 1970s, and Johanna Drucker coined the term "democratic multiple" early on in her writing.) What Bright does is synthesize and clarify these terms while broadening the list of exemplars and artist-practitioners—the Chicago photographer Eugene Feldman comes to mind—in a way that makes these definitions accessible and inclusive.

In fact, fully one third of the book is taken up with this discussion of terms and their complex and various histories. Throw in the final chapter, which discusses contemporary trends, along with the Foreword, the Introduction, a the Conclusion, several appendices, and a comprehensive index, and the pages devoted to the twenty years of her study are more limited than the title suggests. This is not a bad thing: her coverage of these decades ranges from the pioneering work of Claire van Vliet to Syl Labrot's *Pleasure Beach* and the nailed and lashed books of Barton Benes. Along the way she drops in on fine press gatherings, some newly emergent academic and public institutions, feminist presses, and a few of the important collections and their founders. The title, in other words, bears a modesty of intention that belies the resourcefulness of the book's actual contents. The book is worth purchasing for those back-matter resources alone: Bright has included a timeline that begins in 1800 and extends to 1980, along with a brief resource list and an excellent and thorough bibliography and of course that very useful index. As for the intended meat of the book, the two decades that by nearly any standard witnessed the catapulting of book arts if not into the mainstream (as a field it has still arguably not arrived there) at least to the front entrance, the material is compendious but Bright leaves very little out. She is equally at home discussing McLuhan's media analysis and Lucy Lippard's theory of dematerialization as she surveys a broad swath of books and their makers, all in an extremely reader-friendly style that does not, in its accessible language and lack of jargon, smack of the PhD dissertation that it is.

Because of the breadth of material covered (remember those four categories of books?) the separate sections devoted to the various types of books may seem truncated. Fine printers in

particular might feel themselves short-changed, since the scale in this section is clearly tipped toward the early letterpress hybrid experiments such as Rebis Press' soft-porn novel, *The Softness on the Other Side of the Hole*, or the work of Poltroon Press in Berkeley and Walter Hamady in Wisconsin. But the few examples that Bright has pinpointed here are important for their fundamental contribution to the movement of fine press printing into artists' bookmaking; fine printers, in fact, can see their work situated within the larger context that often is denied them.

Bright's strength in this book is as an art historian; the depth of her research is apparent and impressive. When she applies descriptive or critical language to individual books the results are not always as vibrant, although some ~ j descriptions are particularly compelling. Describing Ruscha's multiples, she writes: "Ruscha's flat nonstyle leeches away emotion to leave behind a neutral artlessness that recontextualizes forgettable content in the spirit of the readymades that he had seen at Marcel Duchamp's retrospective in 1963." That's a sentence with a lot of power per word.

While issues of technology and type are not paramount in the book, when they are addressed there are some odd lapses in accuracy that the hands-on printer or designer might find puzzling. For instance, Bright correctly describes the Vandercook proofing press as a flatbed cylinder press, but then writes, ". . . a moving flat bed holds the form (with type) while a fixed, rotating cylinder holding a sheet of paper rolls over the form," rather than the correct explanation, that the bed is fixed and the cylinder moves. There are a couple of other small lapses. In the book John Baskerville is credited with introducing modern typefaces into England in the late eighteenth century; this designer of what we now generally categorize as transitional types died in 1775. The compacted explanation of industrialization leaves the uninitiated reader believing that modern types, wood pulp paper, automatic presses, and mechanized typesetting all sprang forth miraculously at the same time. These points, however, will nag at the informed reader, but they are hardly central to the focus of the book.

Another non-central aspect of the book is the final chapter, which Bright has given the title "The Next Chapter." This section seems gratuitous, and while it provides Bright with an opportunity to frame what might be the next part of the discussion, the few books and printers mentioned here don't nearly do justice to the explosion of work that has taken place since 1980. For that we can eagerly await the sequel, where this material will more properly be handled.

A note or two on the design: The overall structure of the book provides real challenges to a designer. There are voluminous footnotes, many of which add substantially to the main points. Philip Gallo, the designer, has wisely placed these as margin notes, making them easily accessible to the reader without the necessity of tracking them down at the end of the book, which in any case is already packed with information. Also included are numerous black-and-white photographs of nearly all of the books under discussion, along with a welcome eight-page colour insert. The fifteen chapters are divided into as many as nine sections, each with a title and nearly all preceded by one quotation at least, generally two, as are the chapter heads.

Gallo uses a thick black line to divide the sections and to divide the chapter epigrams from the body text. The combination of lines, marginalia, quotes, titles, and subtitles can be confusing, sometimes requiring large blank spaces between sections in order to accommodate all of this information. The result is that the reader may not be certain which section or chapter she is reading.

In the end it may be that all of the quotes that Bright provides us with, bracing as they are, in fact interfere a bit with the author's own voice. This is a strong voice, one that is not afraid to analyze, theorize, draw conclusions and speak from the authority of long and deep scholarship coupled with a genuine love for the medium of the book. Granary Press is to be applauded for adding to the small but, thankfully, growing and thoughtful dialogue about book arts. Now we must do our part as well: buy and read this book.

Peterson, William S. "Book Reviews." *Printing History, New Series No. 2. (July 2007): 40-41.*

Bright, Betty. *No Longer Innocent. Book Art in America: 1960-1980.* New York: Granary Books, 2005. xx, 302 pp. ISBN 1-887123-71-7. \$39.95 (paperback).

Betty Bright (one of the founders of the Minnesota Center for Book Arts) has written a lively, entertaining, and well-informed account of the development of the artist's book during a two-decade span in the twentieth century. The difficulty that she faces at the outset is one of definition: the artist's book seems to be struggling perennially with a search for identity, in particular how to differentiate itself from traditional fine printing. Ms. Bright's solution is to break her subject into three categories: the *fine press book*, the *deluxe book*, and the *bookwork* (with two subcategories of the latter: the *multiple bookwork* and the *sculptural bookwork*). Such distinctions are useful in a notoriously intellectually muddled field of investigation, but it seems unlikely that she will be able to make everyone happy with this Lear-like division of the kingdom. In some circles the very mention of artist's books is likely to produce mayhem (verbal, at least), and Betty Bright's study reflects these internecine struggles. She tries very hard to offer an even-handed account of various kinds of fine and limited editions, but from time to time poor Abe Lerner is dragged onto the stage as a traditionalist straw man and then vigorously denounced for his alleged parochialism. Ms. Bright, at certain moments, seems to be flirting with conspiratorial fantasies, as when she suggests that hand-presses used in teaching university courses in bibliography were actually a covert attempt to indoctrinate (that's her word) unwitting students with the false beliefs of typographical traditionalism (p. 57). Even the magnificent *Moby-Dick* (Arion Press, 1979) is faintly praised as a "hybrid," because it carries the suspicious taint of Abe Lerner's world of beautiful typography.

The most stimulating part of the book is Ms. Bright's excellent reading of the more-or-less contemporary scene, based upon extensive interviews and conversations with artists. Her approach is essentially journalistic (in the best sense), and here the book comes joyously alive. But the introductory section, which is a historical survey of fine printing in the nineteenth century, mainly in England, France, and the United States, is perfunctory and unbalanced. She tells us about Morris and his followers, but one can search in vain in her index for references to

names like Pickering, the Whittinghams, the Chiswick Press, Bulmer, Bensley, and Bewick. (Only Blake and a handful of French book illustrators really quicken her pulse.) As for fine printing before the nineteenth century, its very existence is scarcely acknowledged.

Ms. Bright writes very well as a rule, but occasionally her usual clear, unpretentious prose becomes clogged with the sludgy academic jargon of our day. There's a great deal of *subversion*, *valorization*, *encroachment*, and *violation* going on in this book; a reader who picked it up accidentally might perhaps be misled into believing that he had stumbled upon a narrative of a violent urban uprising by some hitherto unknown revolutionary insurgents.