

Not Simply a Gathering: A Conversation with Sandra Kroupa, University of Washington Book Arts and Rare Books Curator

Alison Mandaville

A story about erased genitals on William Blake's sketches made my first encounter with Sandra Kroupa during a presentation on Blake's work in 1998 especially memorable. Since then, I have found ways to incorporate the art of the book — and whenever possible, Sandra's presentations — into my own teaching. For nearly forty years, from her initial job as Library Technician to her current position as Book Arts and Rare Books Curator at the University of Washington Seattle, Sandra has played a key role in shaping one of the world's finest Book Arts collections. The collection includes over 14,000 pieces, both historical and modern, from all over the globe. It also contains supporting artifacts such as sets of type, paper samples and artists' realia. For me and for many others in the university community, Sandra's deep connection to the aesthetics and physicality of story has opened the world of literature from one of mere prose and poetry "texts" to one in which all senses are fully engaged. Indeed, the collection includes "scratch and sniff" books as well as books shaped like food. According to Sandra,

"Book Arts" encompasses many ancient and traditional forms with as many definitions of the word "book" as there are books to describe. Most people agree that any definition of book arts includes all the aspects of the physical book which I break down into three elements: structure, text, and image and includes bookbinding, typography, papermaking, book design, paper decoration, illustration, calligraphy, letterpress, and offset printing and artist's books.¹

As interesting as the scope and substance of the field itself is, the more time I spent with Sandra - seeing and talking about book arts and the physicality of books - the

more intrigued I became with *her* work as an invisible participant in this world. The first to fade to the background of the collections she oversees, Sandra always sets the artists and the books front and center - and she has a deep ethical commitment to keeping it that way. She is not the point of these collections and yet her presence is felt everywhere, from the overall shapes of the collections and exhibits she curates, to the relationships she has built with artists and dealers, to her commitment to maintaining living, accessible catalogs. Without her, not only would these parts of the library look different, but the ways in which academics, artists and community members use the collections would be quite different as well.

In this interview I asked her to take up the role of a book curator directly. The final product is a cooperative effort, excerpted and edited in May 2007 from a longer transcribed interview from March 2005. Here, we talk about how the collections began and her ongoing role as a simultaneous supporter of artists and academics; about questions of access and user control and how libraries compare to museums; and how, in terms of access, the artwork that is “the book” holds a unique place in our culture. At the intersection of our work in education, we discuss the relatively unacknowledged cultural power of choosing a collection of texts for others, whether for a library or for a course syllabus. Finally, Sandra speaks to how the job of curating feels from the inside. How does her sense of her work—The Collection—compare to what painters or writers might feel looking back on their creations? For, although Sandra herself might protest, an aesthetic collection developed under the oversight of one person for forty years is, itself, nothing less than a work of art.

Sandra Kroupa oversees a wide range of subject areas of UW Special Collections with emphasis on nineteenth century literature and Book Arts. She teaches courses on the book in the Ph.D. program in Textual Studies and guest lectures in a variety of related classes.

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For more information on the University of Washington Book Arts Collection, go to <http://www.lib.washington.edu/specialcoll/collections/bookarts.html>.

Alison Mandaville: You've been working in this library/collection for nearly 40 years. Can you talk about your journey from young creative writer to librarian and curator?

Sandra Kroupa: I started at the University of Washington at seventeen to study with Theodore Roethke, but he had the damn gall to die the year before. I was enamored of poetic drama, T.S. Eliot and the Greeks, in how theater and poetry link. Not a financially viable career, but I took creative writing classes and apprenticed at A Contemporary Theater (ACT) in Seattle. I decided working in a theater would tell me what it was like to *do* things. I guess this has been my approach my whole life. It seemed quite random, as most people's lives do, and then suddenly you realize, "No, there's been a pattern all along!"

Well, I hadn't finished school but I needed money. There were three or four jobs in the UW library. My plan was to stay for three to six months to earn enough money to move to San Francisco. I was twenty-one and have been in Special Collections ever since. I took classes at night, every English class I could. And then I started library school.

It wasn't until 1990 that I became a "librarian." And, although what I've always done could have been called "curatorial," I have only had that title for a relatively short time.

AM: How did you end up in the rare books and books arts?

SK: Well, I was hired to work in the Pacific Northwest Collection, part of Special Collections, the area of the division that still has the majority of staff. I read newspapers and turned facts into three by five cards. I read Seattle newspapers and something like thirty-six regional newspapers daily for five and a half years. My boss, Robert Monroe, who did everything in Special Collections that *wasn't* the Pacific Northwest—the poor man couldn't go to the bathroom, because if he did, the collection was closed—from the outset he counted on me to fill in. And the more I helped the bigger that square of my job became.

And Bob was terrific. The collection really reflects him. He taught me the importance of understanding how your own time period will someday be someone else's history. So I focused on collecting work coming out now, rather than waiting for thirty-five or forty years until critics approved.

Originally, we were collecting twentieth century poets who had an impact on the face of poetry. We already had Eliot and Pound and I collected William Carlos Williams, e.e. cummings, and Auden. I bought *Patterson*, first edition, all five volumes—it was five-hundred dollars. This was 1974 or '75. A lot of money. Pristine copy. But—we already had a copy in the circulating collection—beat to shreds, but still, there was no variation except one was pretty and one wasn't. At that point I said, "Why are we

doing this?” Right around that same time, someone came in and commented when looking at a sixteenth century book, “Gosh, it’s too bad they don’t make those anymore.” And I thought, “Maybe they do. I should find out. How hard can that be?” Well, that’s what I have spent my life doing.

To a certain extent it’s the path Bob put me on because he collected nineteenth century cloth designer book bindings by Margaret Armstrong and others. He bought all UW’s William Morris stuff when it was dirt, dirt cheap. No one liked it in the early 1960s. And now they’re worth a lot. But Bob was astute. He knew Morris was an important figure and would come back into fashion.

So, we had the core of the Book Arts Collection, but older, rather than modern. What we were showing as modern, fine book-making, was the Black Sparrow Press, good publishing. I don’t want to denigrate the publishing. But it was a very sixties aesthetic. Covers of fluorescent green with purple and yellow. I couldn’t believe this was as good as it got. One day walking past this storefront in the Central District [of Seattle] that had little half-café curtained windows, I looked inside. There were big pieces of equipment and two people making paper. And so I stopped in. It turned out they had just come from the University of Wisconsin Book Arts Program. I got to make paper and so on. Pretty coincidental.

AM: You have often said to my classes that you no longer try to define “book.”

SK: I think five years into it I could have told you what I thought a book was. But when you’re twenty, you’re smart. When you’re thirty-five you’re stupid. One reason I don’t define “book” is librarians tend to narrowly define, tend to exclude stuff. Book arts is such a growing and changing and morphing field. Could I have imagined this book? [*Kroupa reaches for a sculptural, manipulatable piece from the collection.*] This is *Inside Chance* by Linda Smith, Picnic Press.² No. If I could, I’d be the artist and someone else would be the librarian.

We are in a historical period like the Middle Ages or the Renaissance but we’re not calling it that because we’re still in the middle. Because of that, it’s not up to me to decide what books are. My job is to collect all the things that are books to someone, could be books, might be defined as books later on. It’s going to be up to someone else to make those determinations. And hopefully, in twenty-five or fifty years people aren’t going to say, “God, who was this idiot, and why is all this junk here?” I mean, it would be really interesting to see who comes after me—how they react to the books in jars?³



Tony White, *From the Literary Kitchen of Tony White* (Walla Walla, WA: T. White, 1992). Images courtesy of the artist and UW Special Collections.

AM: I find those really interesting.

SK: Yeah, lots of people do. But I talk to many of the creative writing students and they hate those. I mean that's just a total anathema, just *wrong, immoral*—right up there with child pornography. You know the book with the folded pages? [*Kroupa refers to another sculptural book in the collection*]⁴ Well, to take the original writer's "intent" and to *hide it* in this kind of way...to hear creative writers talk about it, it would be like taking kitties and pulling their toenails out. So I'm working on getting a stash of historic books I can rip in half in class and see what happens. Terry Belanger does that at Rare Book School [at the University of Virginia]. He starts his descriptive bibliography class by taking a seventeenth century book and rips it in half. I'm not sure I could do it, but I'd like to think I could work up to it.

Another reason I don't like to define the word "book," is that I've been to so many conferences where four days are spent debating, quibbling, and yelling in very emotional fashion about what is a book, which usually means, "What I make are books, what you make is something else." There are only twenty-five people in the whole world that care about this stuff, why are we fighting? What we should be doing is encouraging people who only watch videos, who only listen to music to see artists' books. But people want to draw little lines in the sand and say, "This is my territory, stay off it." I feel a library can be more neutral ground, where hopefully you don't take sides. That's very conscious on my part. I do not take sides. Nobody would have any clue whether I really, honestly, in my soul, love this book or hate it, because it is inappropriate for me to share that.

AM: Can you talk a little bit about what role you see books playing in the human world?

SK: I can try. This is one of those ongoing questions. I would compare it to the relatively new trend in teaching history where historians have class participants bring in an object from their own families' pasts and talk about it—that tactile reality about things. The reality of books is, if you have an exhibition, and you have a book on a pedestal without a vitrine, no matter how many signs you put on it—"DO NOT TOUCH"—people are automatically going to pick it up. They're not going to see signs. They literally will not. No matter what color you make them. Because we're not intimidated by books—yet. The culture is not intimidated by books. Books are things you pick up and handle.

Now think about any art experience, museum or gallery experience you've ever had. No one has ever encouraged you, unless it's in a kids' museum, to go up to a Burne-Jones and feel the paint. You can't do that. Books keep us in touch with the tactile parts of our lives. In the United States we have turned away from being a culture that allows physical contact.

When they make books, artists mostly pick materials and structures to accentuate that tactile quality. People always say, "Gosh, you're not asking us to use gloves!" No. No artist would want you to use gloves unless the book is in a gallery for sale, then they don't want you to mess it up. But past that, once it's sold and belongs to somebody, no! They picked that handmade paper because it has tooth and it feels a certain way. They don't want you to have gloves on—that truly is love-making with a condom and goes against what the artist intended.

I also think that books offer a feeling of authenticity in comparison to what we see on a screen. So much of what we're exposed to are computer screens, television, movies. It's all *pictures* of stuff. There's a wonderful video I use for the "History of the Book" class of a letterpress printer showing individual pieces of type and he says, "It's a thing, it's not a picture of a thing. It's a *thing*."⁵ I think books are part of that world of "things" that we're losing. My sense is a lot of people are sorry. In a period where we're going to the fastest, newest, shiniest, why is *Antiques Road Show* is so popular? So I don't care what anyone says. Nobody is going to replace that aspect of books with the handheld screen that you turn on. That whole concept of an e-book you can curl up with is stupid.

AM: In your article "In the Artist's Shoes: Collecting in Support of Creativity" you say it is important to you to "have a direct and personal approach" when describing your philosophy of book arts curation.⁶ And when you talk to my classes you tell us great stories about the artists, about how you acquired one or another piece. But, you have also said that much of that personal knowledge may not be passed on.

SK: Actually, if I gave the impression that it was all going to go away when I left, I didn't mean to. What I was acknowledging, was that if I, or somebody, didn't do something about it, it would go away, just because stories do. I bought a little recorder that has little teeny tiny tapes. My plan was that I would spend some time on a regular basis to talk to myself about the books and at least leave behind tapes. I

think I did one half of one tape. And I think I bought the tape recorder seven or eight years ago. For a little while, Mare Blocker [book artist] and I got together and did some tapes because, as well as our library having quite a lot of her work, she's giving us all her journals, which she's been keeping since she was about seven.

AM: Scary. I've been thinking of burning mine.

SK: Well Mare's a very interesting person because her work, superficially, can look funny, energetic, colorful to many people on first examination. But the undercurrent can be dark. I'm anxious to get those journals to have her tell stories about her books. They will give more of an indication of how an artist can drag themselves out of misery and make wonderful work—things that you might not get out of the piece itself.

I think stories are important. The final artistic product is an interesting artifact. It has something to do with the artist, with the context, the time and the place it was made, and with the person who is looking at it. But for me, the most interesting thing is the whole creative process. What is it that drives people to write symphonies, to make books, prints, whatever? Why is it some people respond to abuse as children by drinking themselves into a stupor every night and other people turn that pain into symphonies? I don't know. But, if we could figure out what it is, and we could manufacture that pill and give it to everybody, we'd have a lot happier world. It doesn't mean that you don't have your troubles. What it means is that you can take those troubles and cobble them into something that's productive.

Colleagues who only buy one or two things from an artist and buy through book dealers never get to know the artist at all. They know the artist's name, but don't exactly know where the artist lives. I want to know what the studio looks like. I want to close my eyes and imagine the studio. And the artist is there with their cat or dog or whatever—the things that make them people. For me, that's like getting back to the real artifact. Or, like looking at a 16th century book and trying to imagine two paper makers making the paper. You can find beard hair of the paper makers! We've got one book that's got blond and dark beard hair in the paper. And you can tell that one guy was sheet forming and the other was couching—and someone was sweeping in the background.

For me, we stand on the shoulders of centuries of generations before us. I care about that 15th century guy setting type as an apprentice. I want to feel that he existed. Because he's left behind an artifact for me to hold—that's my only link to the past. The great advantage of collecting living artists is that you can *talk* to them. You can get their baby announcements, valentines, moving notices.

It's the sense of—well it's like the Virginia Woolf's book, *On Being Ill*.⁷ I mean the book is signed. She bound it. She letterpress printed it. This book was in her hand. I can hold the book to my chest and feel her presence. Now, is that a good thing? I don't know. But I can.

My advice to new librarians is take every workshop you can. Learn how to *DO* as much of it as possible. Not that you'll be good at it, but, if you have a book in your hand and an artist is showing it, you damn well better know what kind of printmaking technique it is. You'd better be able to say, "Oh, wow, ten passes through the press." Nothing will impress them more. Or "Oh wow, now the other time you did this binding you did this, but you've changed your chain-link stitch and now it's much more effective." And you can only say that if you've done it. If you understand how much work it is. And appreciate the talent and hard work it takes.

I am trying to put myself in the shoes of the artist, because the institution is going to roll on like a Humvee. There's no stopping an institution. And we can either run over those artists or pick them up as we go along. If I do what's best for the artist, in the end it will be best for the collection as well.

Also, I cannot imagine how you can teach anything, or collect anything, if you don't have the basic building blocks of what they are doing. You've got to have a sense of how it happens. There was this guy who had pretty much finished his dissertation, which was based on some element of text that was different in different versions. He came in and made some comment about this textual variant and how the author had made this change. And when he explained this to me, I said, "Ehhhh...well, no no, it's a typographic or composition issue—see they picked up this line of type and moved it over here and didn't pull this line." And he just turned white. I thought he was going to faint. He didn't know what letterpress printing was. He didn't know how the little letters had gotten on the page. So I gave him a ten-minute description of how books were printed in the period and blew his dissertation into Swiss cheese. Because he had no idea of how the book was made. He got over it, luckily, and didn't hate me. He wound up going back, finding the printing records and actually got to interview a couple of people who'd been in the printing shop.

AM: I think you just answered my next question about how you balance your allegiance to the scholar and institution with your commitment to advocate for the artist in your collecting.

SK: Yes.

AM: In terms of balance, you also have talked about weighing the needs of the student and scholar now, with the needs of the imagined future scholars and students.

SK: Well the imagined future is the hardest part. There is nothing that makes me feel smaller and less competent than imagining the future. And that, I think, is one of the hardest parts of getting older. So I constantly ask students: What did you like the best? Why? How did you feel about this book? I always want students to tell me. I always want feedback. They are always very shy about it—it really is pulling teeth.

AM: Well, that would seem to be quite an advantage to being at a teaching institution as opposed to a private collection. You have access to the younger people.

SK: Right. One day long ago—this is a penultimate moment—I realized, “I’m on the right track.” I had just bought a book from this artist from whom we had maybe eight or ten pieces, whose work is of very high quality. This particular book came and I HATED it, I mean really hated it. The book is well made but the images in it are ugly. I bought it anyway. I got it Tuesday. Thursday I was teaching a class. I brought it along, because I always want people to see the newest pieces. So I spoke my blurbs and everybody looked around and then I asked my typical, “Tell me what you like the best.” A young woman picked up this new book, clutched it to her chest and brought it to me, saying, “I like this one the best.” And there’d been 150 books out. I thought it was a good lesson.

See, it’s really easy, *really* easy, to collect what you like. It is hard to collect good work that you don’t like. And one of the things I would fault the profession for—though I don’t think it’s as true now as it was twenty-five years ago—is that people collect things they like, no matter whether or not they work for institutions. I will often have people ask me, “What do you like best in the collection?” And it’s like asking, “Which child do you like?” or, “Which was your favorite dog?” I’m sorry. It doesn’t work for me. I pick something *for the collection*. The minute it walks in and becomes something in this collection, I love it. And that’s my public face. I won’t tell anybody what I personally like. In fact, I almost don’t speak it to myself. My job is to be an advocate for the collection *and* for the artists in it.

Something that’s not spoken about in library school much is ethics. If you go through a museology program, there are classes in ethics. Say you get a job at Seattle Art Museum and your specialty is Arts and Crafts. You sign something saying you will no longer personally collect in the field that you know the most about. Because it is unethical. But libraries don’t have staff do that and there are many possible conflicts of interest.

AM: That’s a really interesting point though. How that ethical concern is *not* dealt with in some professions. Because the same thing is also true in teaching literature. And we don’t talk about that. There are sometimes discussions about the politics of teaching different texts but only one time in my graduate school literary training did someone say, “Be very careful about teaching stories that you love.”

SK: Yes.

AM: I think a lot about that when I teach books because the students assume if I’m teaching it I must love it. And so they are saying to each other “I don’t understand [Virginia Woolf’s] *Orlando*.⁸ It doesn’t have any point. But *she* loves it. *She* must understand it.” I have to say, “Yeah, I’m not sure what the point is yet either. But a lot of people have liked this book, so I’m going to keep going with it and we’ll do it together.” I teach texts I don’t personally enjoy all the time. But we don’t talk about

this much in the profession and that's a funny thing, because we have so much power in deciding what people are getting and honoring in terms of culture.

SK: When I'm collecting, it's not even "like" and "don't like." Such as representing minorities. The Contemporary Collection is primarily white women oriented. Why? Because they're currently the biggest voice in the field. There are hardly any minorities working in book arts and only a few of those actually talk about "minority issues." I think it is important to understand what your prejudices are and what your bigotry might be, whether you mean for it to be there or not.

AM: Yes. I have to very consciously pay attention. Some literature I'm more attracted to for personal reasons and I have to pay attention to parts that I'm not attracted to because they are just as important for the students to have experience with.

SK: Well, for me it's like comics. I come from a generation where comics were trash, considered trash. It is hard for me to overcome. Whereas I look at Mayan codices and graphic novels of Lynn Ward and think, "This is art." What's different? Nothing. It's just in my head. So I've got to get past that.

AM: Well, there are bad comics out there.

SK: Well, sure. But there were probably bad Mayan codices too, I'm just too stupid to tell.

AM: You say, "A collection is not simply a gathering of single books; it is working as a whole, gaining from relationship between pieces." So a single artist's work might gain a different reading depending on the shape of the collection in which it is found? Books are dependent on the other books they are next to on the shelf?

SK: Absolutely. Before I even thought about going to library school, I had a choice. Do I stay in English literature? And I couldn't stay in literature because it was a time period in which "one" looked only at the poem itself, not the author, not when they grew up, not who their daddy was nor what their love life was like. Just the text. The text was sacred.

AM: New Criticism. Before Deconstruction and Cultural Studies.

SK: Right. And pretty much you would just wipe out who the author was. The text was an independent thing. And I thought that was such a crock. I just couldn't accept it. There were some people questioning, "We don't know about this." But it wasn't a strong voice. And I just didn't see myself going for that. So I got a B.A. in creative writing and shelved the idea of going to graduate school in English lit.

AM: So you were interested in the material context even then?

SK: Oh yeah. For me context was what the whole thing was about. One of my favorite examples: There are wonderful love poems of e.e. cummings. Some of his best poetry was written early on in Paris to a whore. And they're fabulous poems. But if you don't know how old he is and you don't know he's having the first sexual experiences of his life, they don't make nearly as much sense.

The perfect books to come into this collection are by someone we've gotten at the "emerging artist" stage—and they are emerging more. I like to get them at the seed stage and then get them like plants this big [*Kroupa gestures seedling size*]. And the physicality of the kind of book I want to collect is such that the materials are of interest, the image-making technique is of interest, and maybe the structure is of interest, so that even though you may not care about Mare Blocker, it's a Coptic binding, so I can use it as a structure. Or, it's on handmade paper, it's got a paste-paper cover, so if someone's interested in paste-paper covers there's another use for it. And maybe it's about the Persephone myth and it goes with the Enid Mark book about the Persephone myth. And so you have a vision of Persephone by ten artists. I'm still looking for more Persephone myth books.

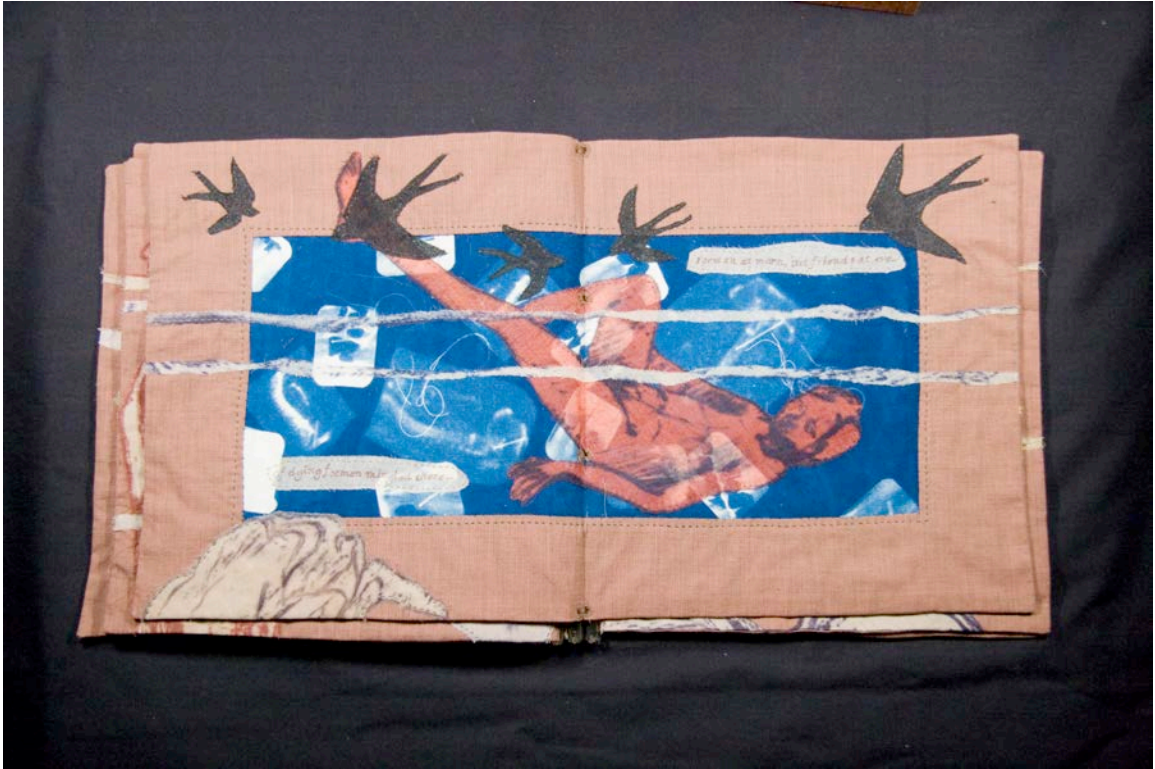
I want context and I want that context to be contributing towards something else in the collection.

For me, that's what the "collection" part is. I find most people say, "I like this book." Me, I'm looking at how the book applies to the whole collection. For example, here's one you haven't seen. This is a piece by Lois Morrison, a Melville poem.¹⁰ She's a fiber artist and does small editions that look like one-of-a kinds. She actually makes two. She keeps one and sells one. She's got about fifty-two of them at home. It's made of folded cloth panels, has handwritten text, MRI images printed on fabric, woodcuts on fabric appliquéd, glass rods as the spine attachment. And then there's the poem. You look at this poem in the first edition and subsequent "fancy press" editions and this one is totally, totally different. Perhaps it's strange, having a collection of art that comes from these dead white guys that people think nobody really reads unless you're an English geek. But my studio artists really like this. You can touch this. The two fabric books I have of Morrison's are nineteenth century writers—the other one is a Bret Harte poem with embroidered text—both are anti-war poems.



Herman Melville, *Shiloh: a Requiem* (Leonia, NJ: Lois Morrison, 2004), cover (above) and inside (below). Images courtesy of the artist and UW Special Collections.





So, we are looking at the context of this piece as part of the Nineteenth Century Collection, we're looking at the physical form of it, and we've got fibers students who will be interested in the book with fabric. And, this piece is also an artist's reaction to the current political state—her way of talking about the war we are in. So, for me this contributes to what exactly this collection builds to be.

I have a limited amount of money and I'm trying to do two things. One, I'm trying to answer questions of people who come here, whether it's about structure or printmaking, or a faculty member who's interested in a theme or time period. And two, I want to see if I can anticipate where the field is going. I think that's one of the problems with library collection development policies, is that we often react, we're not advocating. Maybe that works in some fields, but I think in book arts it's totally inappropriate. In our Nineteenth Century Collection it's inappropriate too. I decided to collect nineteenth century women's literature twenty-five plus years ago because it seemed to me as important as Melville. I didn't see how many more PhD theses could be done on *Moby Dick*. Sure, some of the literature isn't *Moby Dick*, isn't the quality, I wouldn't argue with that at all, but the role of women in society during that period, the kinds of writing that they were doing *for each other* to support their needs of death, mourning, child rearing and all kinds of issues seemed to me to be worth collecting. Few libraries were doing it, now they are. Seems like an ok decision. Yay! One hates to look back twenty-five years and say, "Woo boy, did I make a mistake there!"

The trick here is living long enough to be able to see the outcome. My analogy is, I walked in here and Bob explained how wonderful trees could be and how wonderful

plants could be and then handed me a bunch of packages of seeds without labels so I ran around and dug holes and planted seeds and dug manure and raked and hoed and watered and now, after thirty-nine years, I've got a wonderful little forest going. I didn't know whether I was growing potatoes or redwoods or what. I wanted redwoods. I didn't want a bunch of philodendrons that would die off at first freeze. I think that's what we do with our lives, we try to build something but it's kind of hard to know what you're building until it's mostly built. And then you say, "Oh, I had no idea I was doing this." If I get to live long enough, I'll be able to walk out and stand on a little bit of promontory and look down on the forest I've been trying to grow. I have to hope like hell whatever I've done here is substantial enough that people will say, "Let's turn this into a park" rather than say, "Oh, let's put in condominiums and cut all this shit down."

AM: What do you see as the role of the academic library and librarian in the teaching mission of the University?

SK: Well, I would really like to see libraries take a much more active role in teaching. Not in just supporting other people's teaching, but actually helping design curriculum and teach classes. One of the things that characterizes Special Collections is, because we are so artifact oriented, we tend to think of how to make the artifact visible and handle-able by someone, rather than "How do we make images and put them up on a screen?" I'm starting to do a lot more teaching where I pair digital things with real items.

Maybe the medieval manuscript I'm showing is only about six inches tall. I've spent most of my career holding stuff up and saying, "You can't see this but..." Well, now I have the best of both worlds, as long as I have the time and energy and wherewithal. I can say "here the thing is" and then, pointing to the larger digital screen image, "here is what you should pay attention to."

AM: I love the actual parchment you share with classes showing the shape of the goat, legs and all, with a rectangular page cut out.

SK: Yeah. And then I try to explain how the skins are scraped using images of the process—get across that these are dead creatures, and here, in pictures, are the three most predominant European dead creatures [goat, sheep, cattle]. Books on the hoof.

AM: Can you talk a little about the connection between book history and contemporary book arts?

SK: Well, the historical collection offers models for contemporary book artists who come to me wanting to do something, with a particular problem, and we look at the various ways a particular binding problem has been approached historically, and across cultures.

Also, people come to me all excited that they've "discovered" a single part of contemporary book arts—like it's something new. Through the collections I can show them a wide variety of pieces all the way back to cave paintings. Likewise, people will come in to see an historical piece, say medieval manuscripts, and I can show them that manuscripts are part of a much larger story of the book that continues today. I can use the two collections together to show how we are, right now, someone else's history.

I think sometimes it's hard to understand that continuum for books. But trade the word "book" in for anything else— like "architecture." Look at the architecture of 1910. Can you look at it without thinking medieval cathedrals or without knowing something about Frank Lloyd Wright?

AM: You have also said your job is "not only to make this collection accessible, but to alter basic stereotypes about libraries."

SK: Well I think the hardest thing that people come to any special collection with is the idea that they can't touch anything, they have to wear gloves, and they come with a chip on their shoulder. And our job is to make them see the advantages. This isn't a museum where you walk in and basically all the decisions are made for you. If there's a book in a museum exhibit, it's already opened to a particular page. You haven't picked the opening. You haven't picked what it's in context with. The curator has made all the contextual decisions.

But in a library, as long as you follow the rules, you get to ask for things and build your own context. So you can come in and say, "I want all the Persephone books," or "I want all the things that are Coptic sewing" or "I want all the things that were letterpress printed in Albuquerque between these two dates." You get to formulate whatever your vision of this collection is. We give you the parts and you get to assemble this exhibit for yourself. And as long as you treat things well, you can come in and do that as often as you want. I want people to leave Special Collections thinking, "Wow, that was great!" and "I have to come back." That doesn't always happen, but I think it's important for people to get the sense that it could happen for them.

¹ Sandra Kroupa. "Book Arts Definition." Email to Alison Mandaville. October 23, 2007.

² Alberto Rios, *Inside Chance* (Phoenix, AZ: Picnic Press, 2000). Artist book by Linda Smith.

³ Tony White, *From the Literary Kitchen of Tony White* (Walla Walla, WA: T. White, 1992). One-of-a-kind paperback books pickled in jars.

⁴ Roger Piottin, *Missel Romain* (Lyons, France: R. Piottin, 1996). One-of-a-kind altered book.

⁵ *Letterpress Printing*, produced and directed by Chuck Kraemer, with John Kristensen of Firefly Press (Somerville, MA: No date), <<http://elsa.photo.net/firefly.html>> (accessed June 9, 2007).

⁶ Sandra Kroupa, "In the Artist's Shoes: Collecting in Support of Creation," *Rendezvous*, 29, no. 2 (Spring 1994, issued Spring 1996): 13-42.

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (London: Printed and published by L. and V. Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1930).

⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928).

⁹ Sandra Kroupa, "The Book Arts Collection of the University of Washington," *Book Arts Collections: A Representative Selection* (New York: Haworth Press, 1988), 81-95.

¹⁰ Herman Melville, *Shiloh: a Requiem* (Leonia, NJ: Lois Morrison, 2004). One of two. Artist's book.