

READABLE OBJECTS

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Kathy Abbott

Carmencho Arregui

Cristina Balbiano d'Aramengo

Sün Evrard

Charles Gledhill

Katinka Keus

Peter Jones

Jen Lindsay

Tracey Rowledge

READABLE OBJECTS

It is rare for a contemporary design gallery to open an exhibition of pre-1900 books, but in November 2013 we did just that. The Aram Gallery is a non-commercial space for the exhibition of contemporary design. Our exhibitions usually focus on displaying the work of emerging designers with specific emphasis on the experimental and the new. In *Readable Objects* our latest exhibition, we shift attention and hone in, very specifically, on one element of experimentation - experimentation in conservation.

Readable Objects shows the work of International bookbinding collective, Tomorrow's Past who work in the conservation of damaged books. Whilst their members are vast and sprawling, here we show the work of nine - Kathy Abbott (UK), Carmencho Arregui (IT), Cristina Balbiano d'Aramengo (IT), Sun Evrard (FR), Charles Gledhill (UK), Katinka Keus (NL), Peter Jones (UK), Jen Lindsay (UK), Tracey Rowledge (UK).

As a group, their goal is not to imitate and by association, disguise the repair work they do, nor to copy the aesthetic style of a books origins but to conserve and to do so with the utmost care.

In *Readable Objects* each constituent shows between two and five bindings describing an experimental approach to repair. As each maintains a bookbinding profession outside their Tomorrow's Past work, these experimental pieces utilise and builds on that skill set. However one can clearly see from these works, a group of binders letting their hair down, doing some very unexpected things within the conventions of their discipline.

Kathy Abbott for example gives us bright blue colouring on the damaged boards of *Sacred Dramas, Hannah More (c. 1818), 2013*, Charles Gledhill introduces polyester sheet within the process of binding, most visible perhaps in *The Excommunicated Prince, William Bedloe (1679), 2008* where it is laminated to Japanese tissue, Peter Jones creates a long lost cover from sheet acrylic in *English Bards (1823), 2009* and Tracey Rowledge offers a most contemporary geometric pattering of moongold leaf pyramids along the spine of *Imperatoris Iustiniani Institutionum Libri III, (1625), 2013*.

This unique fusing of the old and new is an inviting idea for a non-bookbinding audience such as ours. To further help the public grasp the ideas which informed the practices of each maker, I asked each participant to nominate a contextual object, something they had acquired, not made, which inspired their design decisions. Of particular note is Jen Lindsay's nomination, the revivication of The Neues Museum, Berlin by David Chipperfield Architects from 1997 — 2008. In this architectural restoration, the bomb damaged existing building is respected with the addition of new tonally

similar elements. A harmonious fusion of historic and contemporary which allows both parties to breathe is exactly the effect Lindsay achieves in her conservation of *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches (1673)*, 2013 and so is a fitting selection.

Readable Objects is the second in the *Beautiful Objects* series at The Aram Gallery. The first exhibition which opened at the same time in 2012, dealt exclusively with Jewellery. It, as this show does, included an interview with each participant in an attempt to unpick how these makers do what they do. This revelation of process is what The Aram Gallery strives to provide in all our exhibitions. We hope a varied audience will respond positively to this latest offering.

Héloïse Parke
November 2013

KATHY ABBOTT

Both 'Horatii Flacci Carmina Expurgata' and 'Sacred Dramas' make me think of an inverted Susan Collis' approach. Whilst she carefully inlays precious materials to look like accidental marks or splashes, you have preserved such marks to look like themselves, but highlighted. Is that a fair assessment? Not marks as such, but I have chosen to highlight what is missing: the loss that was incurred during the book's journey.

That your 'work done' in both of these bindings is so subtle, suggests these books were in relatively good condition when they came into your possession. Is that right? 'Sacred Dramas' had lost its spine and the boards were detached, but otherwise the book was sound. 'Horatii' however, was in very bad shape: the sewing was broken in many places, the cover was torn and peeling back at the spine and the whole book was filthy. It required a lot of difficult conservation to get the book into a state where I could then highlight the missing areas: its appearance of simplicity belies the fact that this was one of the most complicated and challenging books I have ever had to repair.

Is that subtlety typical of your Tomorrow's Past activities? Subtlety is typical of ALL of my work!

How did you determine your contextual object for 'Sacred Dramas'? For my Tomorrow's Past work, I always respond to physical properties of the books: colours, engravings, form, etc. For 'Sacred Dramas' I responded to the colours found in the edge marbling. To me, these colours were hugely reminiscent of the colours of a Jay bird (which happens to be my favourite bird). Throughout the whole binding process, the image of a Jay never left my mind and I think the colours I have used, reflect this.

How did the content of Ovid's Metamorphoses influence its new binding? If at all? For this book I responded largely to the engravings on the half-title and title page, but I also wanted to evoke a little bit of the 'transformation' elements into the structure and by using a very marked skin of vellum. The book was originally in a battered, but later (in date), very traditional/formal binding. I wanted to make a much less formal and more flexible binding to 'transform' it into a much more comfortable and sensitive object.

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion. They took about four months each. Most of that time was thinking time: working out how the book will engineer to its best ability and how it should look. Then it's down to making maquettes and sample pieces. The actual re-binding time is probably only a matter of days.

1 Sacred Dramas, Hannah More (c. 1818), 2013

Original boards, cotton, hand-decorated hand-made paper,
Kozo-shi Japanese tissue, acrylic paint

Jay bird

*Photo of kin-tsugi restoration on a Japanese Heian period
(797-1185) sake cup*

2 Ovid's Metamorphoses (1807), 2013

Original boards, linen thread, mottled vellum

**3 Haratii Flacci Carmina Expurgata, Josepho Juvencio,
(1784), 2011**

Original binding, hand-gilded hand-made paper, hand-dyed
alum tawed thongs, linen thread

CARMENCHO ARREGUI

Both 'Le Mariage de Figaro' and 'La Philosophie des Vapeurs' have been made using a technique of your designing called 'Hidden Weft'. A process you have called 'deceitful...' Can you explain the technique and why you chose it for these two bindings? I love making paper bindings and looked for a way to make them sound more "interesting". After trying the Japanese method of lining fabric with paper I started to make some experiments of my own combining the simple gluing of paper and tissue with a more elaborated procedure under strong pressure. This method allows for the use of such materials as velvet and heavy passementerie* because the handmade paper underneath absorbs the swell and the result is neither paper nor fabric that is why I have called it 'Hidden Weft' and consider it deceitful. Was it by chance that these two books tell us about light-hearted deceits?

Is it important then, that the content or purpose of the intended binding has some synergy with the process you use? When I think of a binding for an old book I think of its cultural content and its physical appearance that has been transformed by circumstances and time. An old book is a unique piece and working with it means to be capable of responsiveness and understanding so, yes, synergy is part of the process.

To bind 'La Philosophie des Vapeurs' you have said you had to hold the binding in your hands for hours whilst it was drying to obtain 'a perfect fusion between book and binding'. Yet that time invested is perhaps overlooked, or taken for granted by a viewing public. How important is it to you that viewers understand your methods? The text block looked so 'at ease' with its old wavy paper that I thought it was important not to constrict it into a rigid binding. So not only I used a paper based cover (the hidden weft) but I humidified it and adapted it to the book while it was drying. It was a very sensual approach the shape of the book matching my palms. Not a light caress but a continuous presence and a sure touch, quite an experience for me. I must say that I did not care about the spectators understanding of time or methods but I hope that something is perceived all the same.

I think I'm right in saying that your third book 'Il Teatrino', was reduced to just a stack of pages when you came across it. How did the graphic content of the book inform the work you did? In my view 'Il Teatrino' aimed for the third dimension even when laying as a set of pages in its original envelope and I was searching for a theatrical form for it when I came across the description of the 'tunnel book' that apparently had been devised to show the view of the tunnel under the river Thames. Then it was easy for me to adapt that idea to my stack of pages making a theatrical construction or 'teatrino' (in Italian) with a handmade paper that matched the original folder.

How were your material choices inspired by the necessary functionality of the book? Paper seemed the obvious choice, its shade and texture matching the old pages and coeval folder. Working with old books requires sensitivity to

materials and shades because it is very easy to give the impression that something is wrong.

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion. Binding is a slow process and we get along with different projects that we carry on simultaneously. It is almost impossible to talk about how much time is needed to make a given binding, not to speak of the changes we introduce during the process or the silly mistakes we make when working late at night, or the importance of going out for a walk when we are losing control, hopefully before we make the wrong cut. In my case, generally speaking, I am a long thinker and a quick doer. Once I start to work everything is already in my mind even the smallest detail.

* Elaborate trimmings of applied braid, often by hand in gold or silver cord

1 La Philosophie des Vapeurs, Abbé C.J. de B. de Pomerelle (1774), 1995

Passementerie on old handmade paper (Hidden Weft)

Japanese kimono

Polished stone

Japanese fan

2 Le Mariage de Figaro, M.de Beaumarchais (1785), 1998

Decorated silk on handmade printed paper (Hidden Weft)

Silver spoon, David Clarke

'Cosi fan tutte', Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 1789

3 Il Teatrino (date unknown), 2006

Handmade paper

CRISTINA BALBIANO D'ARAMENGO

You have chosen a folding ruler as one of your contextual objects. Why? The ruler has a behavior which is very similar to the binding, before and after the making: before, the pages were just a series of loose sheets stapled together with rusty staples, and couldn't open at all... like when you try to pull open the ruler in the wrong direction. Yet, when you do the correct move, then it opens easily like a concertina and you can see it in its full length. That's why I converted the single sheets into a concertina, to facilitate the opening. The two paper covers meet at the spine with a hinge held together by a wood peg, covered with Japanese paper. The peg can be removed to flatten the concertina for a more comprehensive view of the alphabets.

In your essay 'Protecting the Alphabet', you say you want to be 'respectful of the book, trying to match old and new ideas.' Would you say that is a Cristina Balbiano d'Aramengo concern or a Tomorrow's Past one? Surely both my and Tomorrow's Past. Being both designer bookbinder and book conservator, this approach is often the only one I can have while dealing with books.

You have described the cover of 'Art de construire en cartonnage' as a 'waiting binding' can you explain what that means? I chose this structure ('Reliure d'attente', namely 'waiting binding') to protect the text-block before and during the conservation process. This kind of cover is particularly useful for books with loose gatherings that could be easily lost. It allows a safe and thoughtful choice of the final binding. Double turn-ins provide additional strength to the covers decorated with blind tooling. A page of directions, written in Italian, is placed inside the front cover's fold. It reads:

'A quick approach to the state of the volume until a more accurate record can be drawn up.'

Dry cleaning and paper restoration has to be undertaken. The decorated cover needs slight repair but the sewing is not in bad condition and the spine is almost intact.

What condition was this book when you came across it?

It was exactly as it is now. Still waiting for any kind of intervention — hence, the waiting binding is still appropriate...

You're showing maquettes of each of your bindings. Can you say a little bit about how each has aided your making process? In any project I undertake, I always make trials, maquettes, samples. It's fundamental, as it allows me to understand how the structure will have to work, how the measures have to be calculated, how materials work together. Often a dummy smaller than the book is enough, yet sometimes it's truly needed to make a sample in the

same size of the book, especially for very small or very big books, because the 'extreme sizes' have a different behavior than medium ones.

Lastly, I like to keep a model of the binding, for future reference and to show the sample to my customers and students.

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion. The 'waiting binding' was rather quickly made, once the idea came in my mind. Let's say one week, to make first the dummy and then the real binding, allowing some time for the picture of it to settle in my eyes, to eventually deciding how to make the blind tooling. The wooden peg hinged binding took much more time. I would say at least two months: one to get to the point, and one to carry out the repairing process and to make the binding.

1 Art de construire en cartonnage (1834), 2006

Khadi paper

Folding ruler

Carnet

Calcareous Stone

2 Nuova Raccolta d'Alfabeti Artistici (c. 1860), 2007

Gray Zaansch Bord (Dutch handmade hemp linen paper),
terracotta Japanese paper, wood

SÜN EVRARD

You have explained that the two volumes of ‘Sucre Indigène’ ‘sort of belong to each other’ what do you mean by this? The covering material of one is the flyleaf of the other, same structure, same subject.

How did this fact influence your rebinding of them? Both speak about how to resolve the problem of the English blockade so cane sugar cannot be delivered to France. Both bindings went to an exhibition to the Belgian Sugar Museum and the use of the leathers attempt to underline their sisterhood.

I notice in all the bindings you are showing that there is a distinctive fixing detail on the spines, a ‘staple’ for want of a better word. Can you explain the presence of this ornate yet functional item? These staples are above all functional. The double sewing system gives a good opening to books - this appealed to me. First I have been using threads for the secondary sewing but as I was using gold wire on the boards of my bindings already at that time I had the idea of replacing the linen threads with gold wire. They always sit on a tiny piece of wood, so the holes of the leather are hidden. Over the time these “staples” have become a sort of a trade mark.

The book ‘Voyage Philosophique au Japon ou Conférences’ has a contextual object of a Japanese ceramic cup. You say because the ethos of ‘less is more’ was of influence. Is that a general practice influence or just relevant to this binding? It is a general practice. I try to limit decoration to the strict minimum, tending to express the atmosphere by the choice of the materials, their contrast, linking form to function.

‘Voyage Philosophique’ features a sliced leaf which looks as though it is designed to promote a user curving the page. Can you say something about this design detail? The covering leather is in one piece going from the inside to the outside, around the book and then into the back cover. When working on larger books I did not always have enough leather to do this so I started to fill in the inside of the covers with vertical strips of the material. That led to many interesting features: the strips could be of different colours and textures, the gaps in between could contribute to the design, and last but not least, the cover curves in when opened so the tension on the staples is reduced. Form and function always going hand in hand: solving one technical difficulty might bring new ideas in the form; a dreamed form needs a technical solution...and so on...and so on..

In ‘Théâtre, Alex Dumas’ we see not only the aforementioned ‘staples’ but also a dowel being used on the edge of the cover. Can you explain something about it? In all of the bindings the covering leather is turned over a wooden fore-edge rod. It makes the flexible cover lie flat. It is another contemporary version of an old feature in bookbinding: the yapp edge, i.e. a 90° fold on fore-edge of the old parchment bindings’ covers. Same idea as for a piece of paper

you want to make to stand: if you fold it, it becomes rigid. The parchment cover had a fold at the fore-edge so it did not warp so much. My rods do the same job. I like them so much, once for a series of small incunabulae for our national library I made the fore-edge rods in 18 carat gold, even though one cannot see much of them!

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion. About 20-30 hours. But the decision is sometimes only the choice of the leather and a quick sketch. For the sugar books I had the “cube” in mind, then the “glitter” of the crystal sugar. Hence the checker-board leather, the brilliants and the colour tooling on the red leather.

1 “L’alchimiste” d’Alexander Dumas (1839),

Flexible calf leather binding, with blind and gold tooling. Original gray coloured leather peeled off with adhesive tape, gold staples at head and tail edges of spine [endbands].

Japanese mug

Heaps of sugar cubes and crystal sugar

2 Voyage philosophique au Japon (1788),

Flexible pigskin binding, decorated with coloured cloth aligned to the 10 gold-wire staples on the spine.

3 & 4 “Du sucre indigène – suggestions and debates of the French Parlement to avoid the consequences of the blockade of cane sugar (1833 and 1836),

Flexible grey-and-black checker motif calf leather, six brilliants inset in the front and in the back cover. Red calf-leather split flyleaf. The second one’s covering leather is the first one’s flyleaf: red calf-leather, decorated with colour-foil-tooled squares. In both bindings the covers are held to the textblock by three white gold staples.

CHARLES GLEDHILL

Materials are repeated across these bindings. Each, for example, includes a polyester sheet layer. Is this theme characteristic of your practice? Or is it a Tomorrow's Past specific concern? It's really specific to Tomorrow's Past. The work that earns me a living, that I do every day, is involved with the conservation and repair of books within a more traditional context, defined by historical precedent. Archival polyester is used in that context for encapsulating objects, but not as a part of the process of binding.

I understand the use of polyester sheet in this way is not commonplace. What experimentation led to your using this material in this way? To begin with it was just an idea. Although the polyester has impeccable archival credentials, it is rather ghastly to look at, so I wondered if it could be adapted in some way. It turned out that it could easily be laminated to tissue, where its transparency was a great advantage, and the resulting material was versatile to handle and pleasant to touch.

What effect does its inclusion have on the functionality of the book? It has a combination of substance and flexibility which provides an ideal support for the sewn sections of a book without any need for glue. It has a marvellous memory so that it flexes and returns exactly to its original state. That act of opening and closing is the real focus, the primary function, of a bookbinding.

In 'The Excommunicated Prince' the polyester layer is shown, rather than being hidden by a wraparound cover. What was it about the pages' stitching that you wanted to be seen by viewers? Traditionally, the sewing structure of a book is hardly visible — occasionally from the inside if you know where to look. Many styles of binding rely on an abbreviated form of sewing, and the application of glue. The bindings I'm showing do not use glue, so the sewing is much more extensive, travelling the full length of the book inside and out. It is interesting to be able to see that, slightly ghost-like through the transparent polyester and tissue layer.

You select Jasper Morrisons' glasses for Alessi as your contextual object. One can clearly see similarities in the quietness of 'Fiori Poetici Barbarigo' and this product. Can you explain this choice? The traditional French bistro glass — a very recognisable design — is thick and quite clumsy. However full of cultural resonance, it's not really very nice to drink from, except in the most rough and ready circumstances. Jasper Morrison takes the shape, with all its history, and refines it, turning it into something delicate and more formally elegant. This in turn improves its function, enhances the experience of drinking wine from it.

That particular binding is a very simple echo of an earlier form, unadorned but actually an improvement in terms of functionality. The bindings, like the glasses, are essentially generic — they are meant to be everyday objects built around material, structure and function, avoiding decoration. They are not meant to say anything about the content of the book - only to reflect its origins in place and time.

We're showing here two other contextual objects which relate to your working environment. A recording, R.L. Burnside's song 'Wish I Was in Heaven Sitting Down' which you say says a lot for anyone who works standing up, and 'Hawksmoor's Christ Church Spitalfields' viewable from your workshop window. How much of what you surround yourself with feeds into your practice? Doing this kind of work for a living, and this was always the way, you spend a lot of time in one room, surrounded by the same four walls. We often listen to music towards the end of the day at work....recently a lot of R.L. Burnside's extraordinarily varied acoustic and electric blues recordings spread over forty years or so. They're all on Spotify.

Almost all of the activity in binding a book has to be done — or is best done — standing up. It's also quite myopic in nature, close detailed work on a smallish canvas. When we look up, and out of the window, we see the church.

Can you say something about the design of the binding 'Avon'? Including the choice of marbled paper? 'Avon' was the third of Baskerville's books. Slight in content, it was issued roughly sewn into paper wrappers. The leaves still bear the marks of this sewing. This copy had been bound at a later date and then crudely repaired. All that was really left to work with was the marbled paper, which I reused. The binding is constructed in two interconnected layers — the inner lining onto which the book is sewn becomes the cover, the spine covering becomes the flyleaf. On opening, the text block is suspended within the binding - or at least, that's the idea.

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion. In general I try to work as quickly as possible. In my day to day work, I handle books that were put together for the most part under intense commercial constraints — time was money — and they reflect the facility and precision of craftsmen well trained in working at speed and with economy of thought and action. It is best for something to look as if it hasn't been laboured at. These bindings are complicated to think through and you never know exactly what will happen till you try a thing out — but once everything falls into place, making a book shouldn't really take more than a couple of days, sometimes less.

1 Tragedie, Vincenzo Monti (1822), 2011

Vellum, polyester, linen thread

2 Fiori Poetici Barbarigo (c. 1700), 2010

Japanese tissue, polyester, linen thread

3 Avon, John Huckell (1758), 2013

Polyester, eighteenth century tissue and marbled paper,
Japanese tissue, paste board, linen thread

4 Speeches of De Mirabeau, James White (1792), 2009

Eighteenth century tissue paper, Japanese tissue,
polyester, linen thread

5 The Excommunicated Prince, William Bedloe (1679), 2008

Eighteenth century tissue paper, Japanese tissue,
polyester, linen thread

Jasper Morrison for Alessi, Old French bistro glass

Copy of first single volume edition of Henry James, The Princess Casamassima

View from the workshop, Fournier Street, Spitalfields

'Wish I was in heaven sitting down' R. L. Burnside

PETER JONES

'Music Fragment' is a single sheet of manuscript, sort of locked into its binding. What condition was it in when you came across it and what made you select it to re-bind? This came to me as a single piece of vellum, described as a 13th century music manuscript of German origin. On one side is written "the original flyleaf" in a different script which might indicate that it was included in a binding and has since been liberated. Quite possibly the origin of the script was ignored and it became hidden within a later binding, maybe as part of the board structure. This history, whether real or imagined, gave added interest to the vellum leaf and made it worthy of some carrier in which it could be presented. I devised a framework which would hold the leaf, but in such a way that it could be removed and refitted to show the reverse side.

What prompted the use of wood veneers and leather in this cover? The structure was based on a much larger triptych which I had made not long before. It seemed to lend itself well for the presentation of this manuscript. The woods on the outside are prepared from the solid, allowing me to vary the thickness and in turn giving depth and a tactile nature to the piece. The leather forms a simple hinge.

In your binding of 'English Bards' you have included a wood panel. It is the second of your bindings we're showing which uses thin strips of wood. Is the use of this material characteristic of your practice? Yes. I have worked with wood for most of my career whether as a binder, carpenter, joiner or furniture restorer. Apart from its natural beauty, wood is relatively easily shaped and retains sufficient strength in thicknesses suitable for binding. In particular, it allows me to experiment with different structures and effects.

'English Bards' also has a clear acrylic cover. What was it about the front page of this found text-block that you wanted to continue to reveal/ show in your new binding? Acrylic also makes frequent appearances in my work - I am still experimenting with it and using it in different ways. In this instance the first page of the given book bore the title and some of its history in the form of inscriptions, presumably of two former owners. I thought this made for an interesting front cover for the book, achieved by simply overlaying the clear acrylic. It protected the text block, was a suitable weight for the book (physically and visually) and was perfect for the structure.

Both of your bindings have an advertisement for a 'Velosolex 3800' as their contextual object. Can you explain that inspiration? I am extremely fond of the Velosolex in all its forms. They were first introduced in 1946 to meet a need for affordable, reliable personal transport in immediate post war France. It was a wonderful piece of engineering, absolutely right for its purpose and time, and was continually updated and refined over the following 65

years of production. The 3800 was their last model. On the surface, it is a deceptively simple machine: a bicycle frame made from bolt together pressed steel with a motor mounted over the front wheel. However on close examination it becomes clear how carefully considered each element is, how fitting to its purpose, and often how astonishingly clever in satisfying more than one requirement at a time. It invites inspection, has no pretensions, travels at its own pace, and puts a smile on the face of its rider.

In my bindings I strive to provide similarly considered solutions to the needs of each and every text block, elegant in its approach and execution, yet sometimes light-hearted and with a similar touch of humour.

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion. The time taken to reach a decision about what to do with a particular piece varies enormously depending on the challenge presented by the original material. Once a decision is made, the making time depends on what else intrudes. I prefer to work on one piece at a time though this often proves impossible. In the case of these exhibits, the 'Music Fragment' took about 20 working hours over 6 days, while 'English Bards' took 10 hours over 2 days.

1 English Bards (1823), 2009
Vellum, Acrylic sheet, Pearwood

Velosolex 3800

2 Music Fragment, (c. 1200), 2006
Various hardwoods, Hide

KATINKA KEUS

You describe the pages of ‘Catalogue Verzameling Boeken’ as ‘stab sewn’ when it came into your possession. Could you explain that technique and its impact on the work you could do in rebinding? ‘Stab sewn’ also known as ‘saddle stitch’ means to pierce the leaves through the section and not the fold, which makes opening difficult, if not impossible.

Your binding ‘APVLEI PSYCHE ET CYPIDO’ uses only natural materials, weaving and stitch to hold it together. Am I right in assuming then, that the whole binding can be reversed? How important to your practice or to a Tomorrow’s Past ethos that the work done is reversible? This text printed on handmade paper presented the opportunity to make a sample limp binding using natural materials, including red native dyed goatskin, vellum and alum-tawed calf for the sewing. There are no adhesives. My other auction catalogue ‘Romans’ is also of exclusive weave and slot construction. The whole construction of these bindings can be reversed, for me, this is an important element.

‘P.C. Hoofds Gedichten’ is the second binding you are showing whose volume was originally sold ‘uncut’ and so had to be top edge opened by hand. Are tomes in this original condition particularly fascinating to you? This condition occurs from time to time and it is not a problem, essentially the text should remain as original as possible. The sections were sewn on three cords with new acid free endleaves. The spine is pasted and lined with Japanese paper. The text block is covered in a decorative carton from the studio folded at the edges. The cords are woven through the cover and lie under the boards.

Your contextual objects are all found, natural items. How have they inspired your bindings? These objects are chosen because they have their own organic function. This fascinates me and I try to achieve a similar quality with my binding constructions.

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion? Time is not an issue for this kind of work.

1 P.C.Hoofts Gedichten, W. Bilderdijk (1832), 1999

Decorative paste, paper carton cover

Assorted natural objects

2 Romans (1853),

Vellum and decorative paper

3 Catalogus Verzameling Boeken (1853), 2013

Carton board, tinted Tyvek, decorative paper

4 APVLEI PSYCHE ET CYPIDO (1893), 2008

Native dyed goatskin, vellum board leaves, alum tawd
sewing supports and ties

JEN LINDSAY

How did ‘Certain Sermons or Homilies’ first come into your possession? About twenty years ago, I found this book lying on the floor in a shop in Great Museum Street, London. It had suffered serious water damage and what remained of the binding, which had been of plain, unadorned dark brown calf, was rotten and extremely distorted. The laminas of thick paper which made up the boards had swollen and separated, areas had disintegrated and the subsequent mould growth had eaten through the binding into the pages of the text-block itself, invading the book much as nature occupies an abandoned building. I could not bear the thought that eventually it would be discarded. It had a certain dignity in its dereliction, a certain poignancy: so I bought it.

Alongside ‘Certain Sermons Or Homilies’ you’re showing a full size maquette of the book. Can you say a little bit about how this maquette aided your design process? It was essential. The book itself had already sustained so much damage and repair that it could only support one attempt at binding, so it had to be right first time. Making a maquette helped to establish the correct thickness of the linen cords on which to sew the text-block; the correct thickness of thread and method of sewing (so that the spine area didn’t have too much ‘swell’); whether the proposed binding structure was technically viable; and gave me a chance to practise the best method of doing particular tasks. In our conversations, you explained that the original intended use of this tome was readings at a pulpit.

How did that knowledge shape the restoration work you did to it? And did that prior use inspire the addition of any elements? As the original purpose of the book was for clergy to read it aloud from the lectern of a church pulpit, it was important — as for all books, but the more so for a lectern book — that the book should open to its fullest extent, easily readable, and remain flat when lying open. This required a highly flexible structure, creating no impediment to the flow of the pages.

Aesthetically, the rather austere contents and purpose of the book suggested a similarly ‘pure’, ascetic approach; so I chose white alum-tawed goatskin. It is also very beautiful, so I aimed at combining the quiet beauty of plain, unadorned material with simplicity of structural presentation.

As the original book was written during the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, I thought to introduce a hint of the richness of some of the garments and furnishings of the Tudor court by incorporating a gilded bookmark. This was made of alum-tawed goatskin backed with a piece of gilded vellum, the gilding visible through excisions in the leather, to be attached with a purple, silk ribbon to the tab at the head of the book, with the title of the book written on the vellum side of the bookmark. However, I decided that the whole concept didn’t work well enough, so I abandoned it.

David Chipperfield's Neues Museum is your contextual object. Your 'La Favola di Orfeo' has a particular resonance with Chipperfield's phrase, 'the new reflects the lost without imitating it'. Chipperfield uses this passage to describe his wish to ensure the construction of new parts worked with the existing damaged structure of the museum. Is that an accurate sentence to hone in on? Yes, exactly.

David Chipperfield on the Neues Museum project:

"In 1997, we inherited the enormous physical context of what remained of the Neues Museum. There was something both sad and beautiful about it...time had created a strange monument that was neither building nor ruin, and yet both...we didn't want to spoil what remained of the original material. It's our physical connection to history — not interpretation, not projection, but reality."

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion. Hard to say, I just keep going till I get it right. Thinking probably started in April and came into sharp focus by July; work on the maquette took roughly through August. The actual book took from August/September through till end October. Sewing the maquette, for example, took roughly a day and a half; sewing the actual book took a day.

1 Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches (1673), 2013

Sewn on five linen cords with 25/2 linen thread; covered with alum-tawed goatskin

David Chipperfield Architects revivification of The Neues Museum, Museum Island Berlin (1997-2008)

2 La Favola di Orfeo, Angelo Ambrogini, known as Poliziano (1749), 2013

Hand-made paper; silk threads; 'Dutch Gilt' decorated paper.

TRACEY ROWLEDGE

What condition was ‘Select Fables of Esop and Other Fabulists’ when you came across it? The book covers had been re-attached with crude leather straps that went horizontally around the spine and onto the brown sheepskin covers. It was also broken into two parts, approximately half way through the book.

Can you say something about the treatment you have applied to the cover of this binding? And how was this design informed by your initial findings? I decided that I didn’t want to envisage what the book would look and feel like before starting work. Instead, I only made enough decisions to begin the process of re-binding the book. From that point on I made decisions simultaneously: it left me wondering along the way if I always need to aim at making something beautiful. This took me back to working far more intuitively — enabling me to be more open to respond to materials as I was in the process of working with them. This meant my blinkers were off: I wasn’t set on a fixed ending. It may seem difficult to fathom but it was the way that Dieter Roth worked that guided me through this process.

Your second binding ‘Imperatoris Iustiniani Institutionum Libri IIII’ sat in your possession for some time before you began working on it. Is there often a gestation period between acquiring a book and working on it? Or does each book’s cycle vary? Each book’s gestation period varies: in all honesty if it takes a long time, it’s normally because I don’t have a deadline or its due to the fact that its out of sync with my technical dexterity. It took a long time for me to be able to add to this binding, as I questioned if any addition I made would actually detract from its integral beauty. I also questioned if I could technically resolve adding a spine without disturbing the sound structure of the book and binding.

What condition was this book when you came across it? As you see it now but without the added decorative spine covering. The covering material was gone, but the original boards were still soundly attached to the alum-tawed thongs the book was sewn on.

This piece is adorned with an intricate pyramid motif. You said in our conversations that you had become ‘a little bit obsessed with triangles’ was that a personal obsession which fed into your bookbinding, or a professional concern to start with? And do you think it matters? My complete obsession with triangles is a current personal obsession. To start with it felt indulgent to explore the possibility of a triangular pattern, but I sensed it would work if I made a small enough triangular brass tool and if the gold tooling was in the same tone as the book boards. So, a personal obsession was transferred into a professional concern: this tells me that I should in future always be open to this transference.

Approximately how much time did the making of each of these bindings take? From making a decision on what to do, to completion. I don't keep a record of times for this type of work, but roughly I can tell you that 'Imperatoris Iustiniani Institutionum Libri IIII' took years and 'Select Fables of Esop and Other Fabulists' took months. This doesn't of course mean I work on each continuously over these periods, but on and off, so there was space for thinking time and making time, then more thinking time and either re-making or continued making time!

1 Imperatoris Iustiniani Institutionum Libri IIII, (1625), 2013

Vellum, Moongold leaf and Evacon R adhesive

2 Select Fables of Esop and Other Fabulists in three books by R Dodsley, (c. 1788), 2013

Hand-made paper, acrylic paint, linen tape and thread, acid-free buffered board, paste and Evacon R adhesive

Dieter Roth producing two-handed speedy drawings.

"Trophies", a series of 2 x 5 drawings, Chicago/Stuttgart 1978

Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg

C/Dieter Roth Estate, courtesy Hauser und Wirth

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