

# INTERSECTING ARCHiVES

from the Southern Cross University collection

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## 1. Introduction to the Project and Stage 1: Intersecting Archives from the Southern Cross University collection (Leonie)

'Intersecting Archives' is Stage 1 of the Northern Rivers chapter of the Future Feminist Archives research project. Future Feminist Archives is a year-long project across New South Wales in which artists have engaged with archives and collections of all kinds creating exhibitions, workshops, performances and publishing outcomes. The project has sought to forge connections between diverse community histories and current ideas relating to feminism in response to growing interest in the role of archives. The project is based at Sydney University and funded through Arts NSW. It will ultimately create 250 new entries in the DAAO (Design and Art Australia Online) with a regional focus.

The FFA project wanted to source regional NSW archives. It thought Lismore and the region had a history of activism and initially approached the Lismore Regional Gallery. Curator Kezia Geddes felt that LRG collection didn't necessarily reflect the activism and feminism that she had seen in the community so suggested the FFA group work with SCU where she knew there to be a stronger history of such things. I had already participated in an FFA exhibition of feminist poster makers at the Verge Gallery and the Power Institute, Sydney University (*Girls at the Tin Sheds* – catalogue in SCU library collection) in February 2015. Kezia and I brought artists and former SCU staff members (Maree Bracker and Jan Davis) on board to explore ideas and possibilities further around 2 particular SCU archives that Jan and I knew really well – the SCU Library Artists Book Collection and also the collection of annual Visual Arts Graduating Students EXhibition catalogues.

## 2. Artist's Book Collection (Jan)

Southern Cross University's collection of artists' books began in 1998 and is one of only four collections of artists' books held by Australian universities (the others, starting as early as 1990, are at Monash University, Deakin University and the University of Queensland).

This collection, and the Monash collection at Caulfield campus, were largely collected as a teaching resource to support the visual arts programs, where the teaching of artist's books had grown enormously over the past 15 years.

The Southern Cross collection contains 116 works, including books by highly regarded Australian artists Bea Maddock, Judy Watson, Normana Wight, Robert Jacks and Peter Lyssiotis as well as European artists such as Christian Boltanski, Anselm Kiefer and Dieter

Roth. It grew from focused purchases by the University and through the firstly annual, later biennial, Southern Cross University acquisitive artist's book award that ran through the University Art Gallery from 2005 until 2011.

The works included in this exhibition are selected from the SCU collection and are specifically by women who either graduated from SCU or taught at SCU or both (and are therefore represented in the other archive, the SCU graduating students catalogues).

Artists books have very diverse forms - some resemble a tradition codex book with which we are familiar - many do not although they reference the book in some way, for example Ishta Wilson's heavy black ceramic work – *Nightscape* - made in the form of a book, but unable to be opened (referencing the known and unknown aspects of her identity).

Taycee-Lea Jones' poetic rumination '*Just turn the key*' is an example of an altered book, a common enough activity in the realm of artists books, and one which generated a wave of activity here at SCU when the Library collaborated with the Visual Arts program during the heavy de-accession period prior to moving to the new site.

### **3. The graduate catalogue collection (Leonie)**

The culmination of 3 years of full time study is represented annually as the 'Visual Arts Graduating Students Exhibition'. Since 1987, each year 'the grad show' has been supported, acknowledged and accompanied by the 'grad show cat' or catalogue. This small publication is an important archive, resource and promotional tool for teaching and learning of creative arts at Southern Cross University. Since 2000 the catalogues have had a wider audience as the paper version has been made available as an animated book on the Creative Arts Showcase - SCU School of Arts and Social Sciences web pages.

All the catalogues house a representation of the culminating installation of each visual arts student's studio practice outcomes. This installation often marks an important stage in the featured artists visual arts career where thinking and practice converge and move to a higher level.

Since 2002, special sections have been added to showcase outcomes of Honours, Masters and PhD candidates.

When looking at these catalogues, note the evolution and impact of digital technology from early manual cut and paste layout through progressive upgrades of graphic design software.

For eighteen years, while teaching Digital Art and Design at SCU, I was the catalogue co-ordinator. I set the design of the 'grad show cat' as an assessable project for either a solo brave and willing design student or a small team of similar students, with the required graphic design sensibility, a technical ability and commitment to a crazy timeline. The photography lecturers and students came on board with a week of intense installation studio shots forming the core imagery of each catalogue. The outcome was an invaluable real world experience for all students that polished knowledge of publication programs, encouraged a terminal fascination for fonts and graphic style and the wonderful world of publication possibilities. It also provided a very useful portfolio item that would impress curators and employer-designers alike.

There is something about bringing between 40-60 divergent artists practices under the one roof as a cohesive exhibition or in between the covers of one book – an umbrella entity – that I find fascinating. It embraces a unity - notions of teamwork, collaboration and shared capacity.

Seen as a collection, these catalogues trace changes in design influences, styles and attitudes. Each year's catalogue look either bounced off the previous years or provided the opportunity for a student to try out their own idea. One year's passion for matt paper might give way to the following year's insistence for heightened colour on gloss or satin. Sustainability issues were at the fore. The science and provenance of paper, ink and printing processes combined with investigations into printer proximity, led to questions of cost, both economic and environmental.

Many ideas were tried. Page layout experimented with variations of image and text heirarchies, typographic decisions, considered spatial arrangements and alignments.

Various methods of binding were explored. Postcards doubled as book pages in a wrap around folded cover. In-screws replaced a permanent codex bind. Perfect, spiral binds and even a blind Canadian bind were tried over the years.

Formats varied: square, DL, A4, A5, DVD in a double ended pocketed boxboard sleeve, web-only led to web-enhanced. The A5 landscape perfect bind has dominated - cost effective and a maximum impact of the double-paged landscape spread for each student.

Print enhancements: embossing, de-bossing, special fluoros, matt or gloss varnishes, di-cuts, plant based inks and varnishes, duotones and monotones, foil stamping have all been put to the test.

These catalogues have become an extraordinary resource to all: potential, new and current students and high school students to name a few. They provide future references for further research and for drawing into other archives like the DAAO. The catalogues provide opportunities to map many shifts and changes e.g representation of men and women in the program. Interesting to note... that in 1997 there was approximately 50% of each gender in the graduating year. In 2014, 32 females and 10 males were represented.

They are also a record of a change of emphasis in teaching visual arts. Look at the rise in the moving image in installation practice over time.

Design styles and tastes ebb and flow and carry references to contemporary graphic design and art publications. It is also interesting to look at those graphic design elements and how they are translated in the artists books in the exhibition.

### **Eco -Feminism (Jan)**

As outlined at the beginning of this presentation, it was difficult to identify examples of radical feminist arts-based activity in this region documented in any archive. As we looked at themes emanating from women artists in the graduate catalogues (and by implication from the local community and from the teaching program) we can see evidence of what might be called an eco-feminist thread.

**Ecofeminism** is an activist and academic movement that sees critical connections between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women.

These women's practices articulate concerns about environmental urgencies expressed through materials and practices traditionally associated with women's crafts. Within the intimate space of a book, their keen observations about key issues of climate, land, water, energy and community are inferred and proclaimed.

For example Heather Matthew, *'Pencils are provided'* was made in response to the Brisbane flood, Jenny Kitchener's *'Burnt Offerings'* responds to bushfire, Shelagh Morgan's *Weed Habitat* deals with land use and subsequent weed invasion.

Broader notions of place and belonging and the long history of land occupation are explored in the *Wilson River Experience Walk* project by Leonie Lane and team (through the SCU Office of Regional Engagement and Lismore City Council), and also in Julie Barratt's book *Wilcannia Wilderness*.

More mainstream feminist practice of concerns around the body are played out in the work of Lyndall Adams *'Intimate Collusions'*, Courtney-Ann Griffiths *'A recipe for making matches'*, Sally Anderson *How to make music* often employing traditional women's crafts such as knitting and sewing. Racheal Best's *Incrimental*, *Vessel number one* and *Levels* continues the bodily theme through an engagement with the senses – sound made manifest visually. Peta Hansen's *Laundered Undies* is a humorous observation of garments in intimate contact and with the skin reflects on how the female nude has been depicted in art history.

Jan Davis and Noreen Grahame collaborative work - *The Case of the Extremely [Glad] Sad Gallerist* - constructs a dialogue between curator and artist in the architectural space of a book.

## **Stage 2 Country Women Artists: Northern Rivers Chapter (Leonie)**

We will select the book-artists best suited to the Feminist Futures project, add selected other artists from the SCU graduate archive and represent their work together in an eco-feminist poster/artist's book/catalogue. Envisaged at this stage as 700 x 1000 mm sheet, printed with artist's works and captions on the front and perhaps a brief summary of eco-feminist activity from the archives, printed flat yellow on the back, scored, slit and folded into book form. Yellow and black – nature's warning colours - reference the infamous and now global Knitting Nana activism during the Anti CSG campaign at Bentley and beyond.

The final resolution will arise from the next discursive stage and will be presented at an exhibition and seminar in Sydney at Cross Arts Projects, Potts Point. The exhibition will open at Cross Arts Projects on 16 April 2016. The exhibition will continue and finish with a seminar on 7 May.