

KAREN HANMER
Design Bindings
2006-2014

This portfolio is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Fine Binding diploma of the American Academy of Bookbinding.

Glenview, Illinois

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Introduction

Karen Hanmer was already established as a book and installation artist when she first came to me for instruction in fine leather binding in 2005. No one could have asked for a more serious student. Lessons she learns are retried immediately at her home studio, new models made, and structures put into practice, always with the aim of improving skills.

A native of the Chicago area with an economics degree from Northwestern University, Karen Hanmer discovered the book art medium through workshops offered by Columbia College, Guild of Book Workers chapters, Paper and Book Intensives, and from much self study. In the 1990s, Karen combined an interest in photography and her experience as a photo researcher with often disparate historic and modern texts to form a unique vision. Clean, nonadhesive and alternative book formats lent themselves well to the book editions Karen neatly produced. She brought these publicly to the forefront with her steady, professional mailings and announcements sent to colleagues, galleries, and special collections, while actively participating in bookbinding exhibits nationwide.

The artists' book is not new. French fine bindings of the early 20th century were innovations in cover design created by contemporary artists of the period, but the actual work was executed by a trained hand binder and finisher. Starting mid century, the trend for the modern bookbinder was to make a fine binding and to be responsible for its overall design and finishing, such as titling, edge decoration, and tooling. Book arts came into popularity in the late 1970s,



distinguished from fine bookbinding as holistic book works with a focus on content, made of simple folded, mechanical, sewn structures that were often developed from historic book models.

It is courageous for a book artist to take on the challenge of learning fine leather binding with its detailed steps and procedures for correct construction, handling of materials, and criteria of accepted standards. With Karen, you have an exemplar American student, now versed in a range of national binding styles. Originally trained by Scott Kellar in Chicago, her mentors include Peter Verheyen, who introduced Karen to German binding methods.

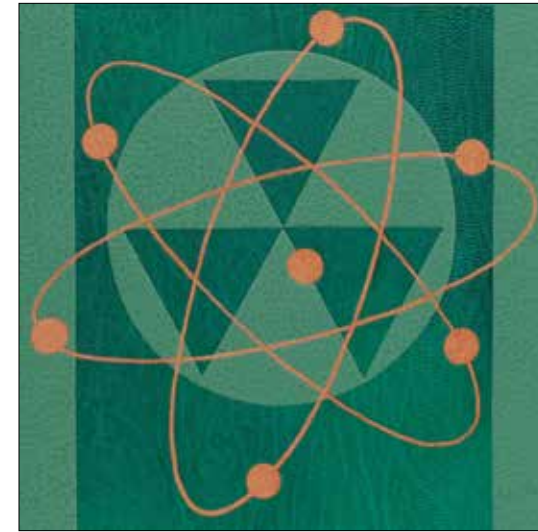
When Karen came to Texas in 2005 she embarked on the study of the English approach to bookbinding, attending a week long fine binding intensive overseen by three English-trained bookbinders: Olivia Primanis, Craig Jensen, and me. Her immersion in English technique continued in classes with Don Etherington. Furthering the fine binding challenge, Karen sought instruction in the French bookbinding style through study with Monique Lallier via the American Academy of Bookbinding in Telluride, Colorado.

The bindings presented in this portfolio demonstrate the range and versatility of the structural and design skills Karen Hanmer has acquired over the last decade in modern fine bookbinding. They are a credit to those binders and teachers whose structures and techniques Karen has incorporated into her own work and designs. Primarily, these bindings display the French binding style from the traditional (edge-to-edge doublures) to the modern (Simplified binding), and refined cultural styles like the Bradel and the New Oriental binding.

A wealth of decorative techniques are employed on these bindings. For example, Karen uses the sanded leather mosaic or *lacunose* technique, developed by Paul Delrue, that yields painterly surface design, like brushwork, that she has contrasted with a solid, organic form as leather onlay in one binding. She employs linear tooling and raised sculptural letters on others. Other techniques evidenced in this portfolio are traditional finishing methods of hand lettering; straight and curved gouge lines tooled in gold, platinum, and colored foils, or blind; text edges that are colored, or gilt, or shine with polished graphite, some sprinkled with gold leaf.

It is paramount to Karen Hanmer that the binding imagery is sourced or inspired by the content of the text being bound. Claiming that she cannot draw or paint, Karen makes use of modern tools like the computer to generate her design blueprints. But the bindings gathered here show a keen eye for composition, for careful choice of color, texture and combination of decorative techniques, even the importance of the selected structure or framework for the text. The covers are illustrative, whether complex or elegantly simple, figurative or abstract. They are focused and serious, yet not without an occasional twist of humor.

Karen Hanmer's discipline and fervor for fine bookbinding extends beyond the works included in this portfolio. It is evidenced by the prolific number of completed bindings and editions



on view at her website, which bridge the world of artist books and design binding. Her work is included in both public and private book collections, and she exhibits nationally and internationally. From 2006 to 2010, Karen served as chair of exhibitions for the Guild of Book Workers and was responsible for organizing the *Marking Time* traveling show from 2009 to 2011. She is winner of the Jury Prize for Binding at the 2009 Helen Warren DeGolyer American Bookbinding Competition. In turn, Karen has begun to pass on her knowledge by teaching workshops across the country.

Even the most accomplished fine bookbinder aspires to do better and better design and work with each finished binding, and hopefully spirals up in achievement. The art and the craft of fine bookbinding, historically rooted yet vital in a modern world, can offer a lifetime of challenge and stimulation to its makers. Karen Hanmer has a passion for ever improving, ever questioning, for trying new techniques, and taking the best from all the bookbinding schools or disciplines. Only the future will reveal the wonder and surprise that will come from the work of Karen Hanmer, as her personal vision is combined with her ever improving skills. Karen Hanmer has emerged as a fine art bookbinder of the 21st century.

Priscilla A. Spitler
Truth or Consequences, New Mexico
2014

Ficciones by Jorge Luis Borges

New York: Everyman's Library, 1993.

Collection of Michigan State University.

Sewn on tapes laced into boards, covered in full yellow goatskin. Backpaired onlays of pale yellow and black. Textured pale yellow endsheets, leather joint. Sewn endbands of black and yellow silk. Acrylic edges. Bound in 2006.

8.25 x 5 x 1"

Design inspired by the theme of duality woven through *Ficciones*, and by Borges' reminiscence of childhood, "I used to stop for a long time in front of the tiger's cage to see him pacing back and forth. I liked his natural beauty, his black stripes and his golden stripes. And now that I am blind, one single color remains for me, and it is precisely the color of the tiger, the color yellow."



Father Louie: Photographs of Thomas Merton by Ralph Eugene Meatyard

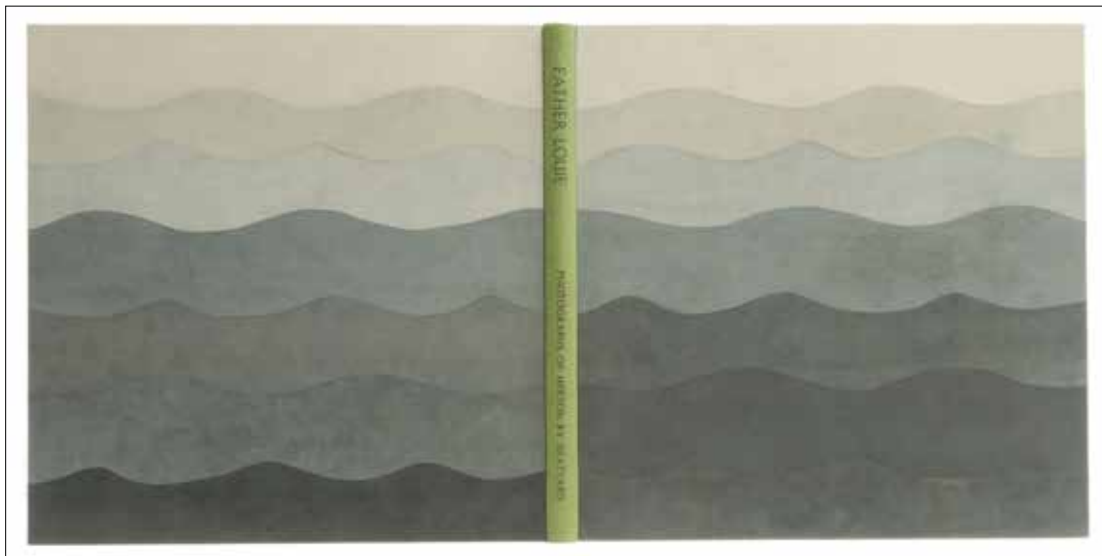
New York: Timken Publishers, 1991.

Full leather in Sün Evrard's "Simplified binding" structure, leather endbands, Hewitt goatskin dyed various shades of gray with Hewitt aniline dyes, graphite edges. Title stamped in carbon on spine. Bound in 2007.

10 x 10 x .5"

The light to dark progression references the spiritual journey, conversion experience and the upward orientation of many of the images in this book of black and white photographs of Kentucky writer and monk Thomas Merton by Kentucky photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard. The horizontal bars represent the structure of monastic life, and their undulation represents both the motion ubiquitous in Meatyard's work and the rolling Kentucky landscape. The seven bars reference the title of Merton's first and best known published work, *The Seven Storey Mountain*.

This binding was included in the 2007 *Voices and Visions: Art Inspired by Kentucky Poetry, Prose and Songwriting* exhibition at the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft, Louisville.



Oppenheimer Is Watching Me: A Memoir by Jeff Porter

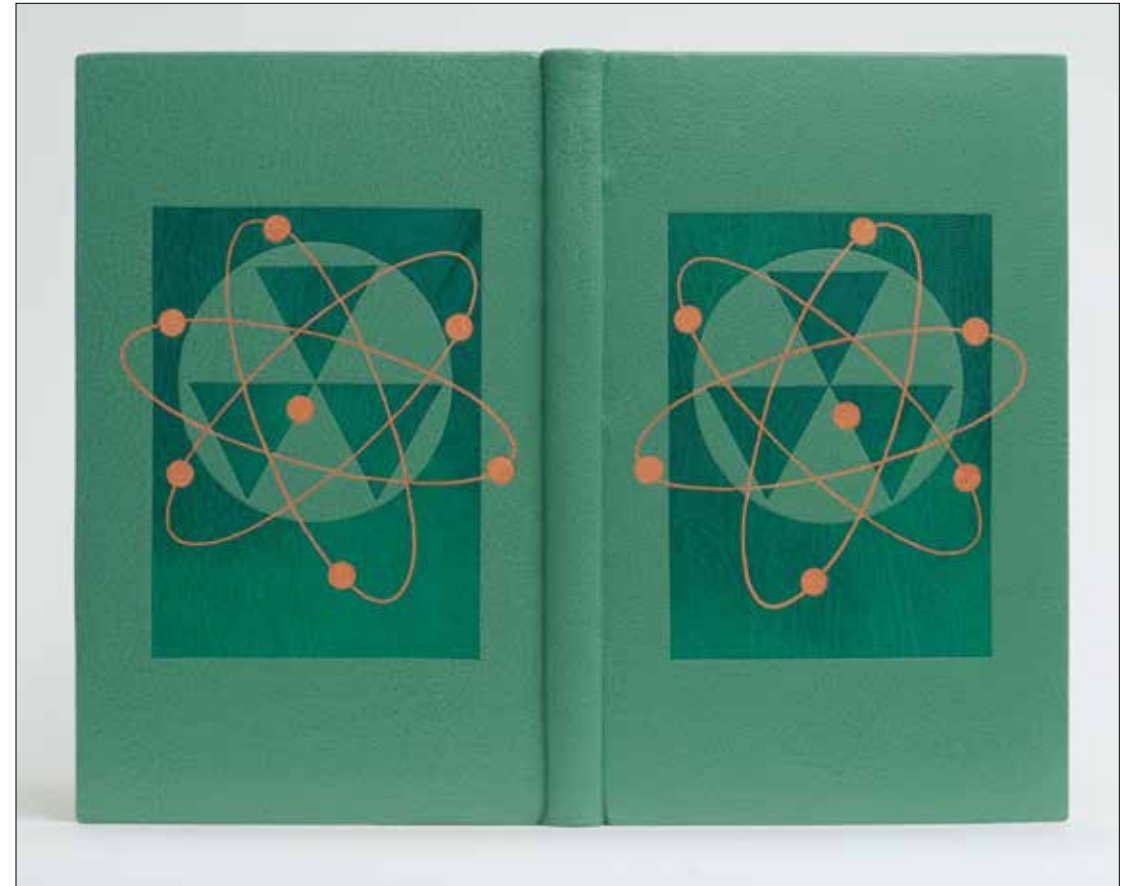
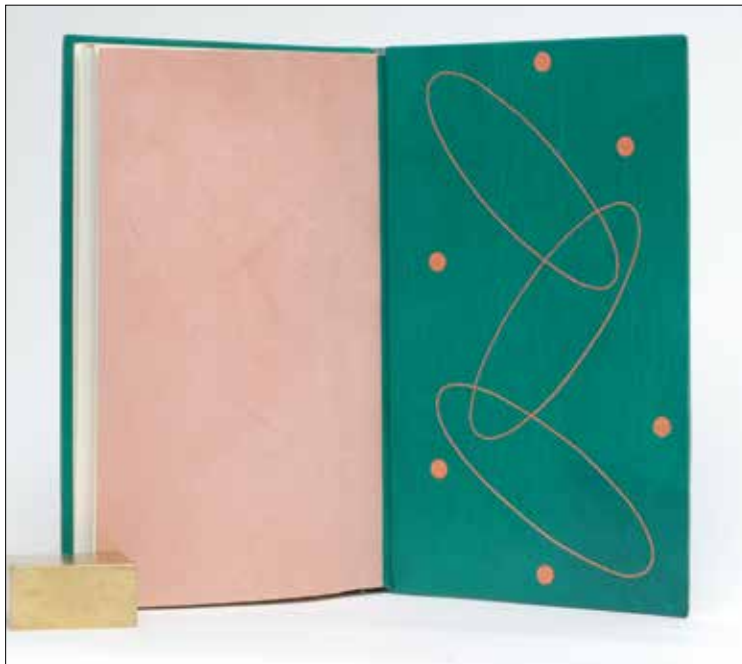
Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007.

Private collection, Oakland, CA.

French technique fine binding, sewn on flattened cords laced into boards, covered in full buffalo. Goatskin backpared onlay and inlaid lines. Goatskin edge-to-edge doublure, with impression from inlaid leather lines visible on suede flyleaves. Hand sewn silk headbands, gilt top edge. Bound in 2009.

9.5 x 6 x .75"

Design inspired by author's vignettes of growing up during the Cold War: both the paranoia of nuclear attack and a landscape filled with playful pop culture atomic references.



Hard Scrabble: Observations on a Patch of Land by John Graves

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.

French technique fine binding sewn on flattened cords, laced into boards and covered in full goatskin using Paul Delrue's *lacunose* technique. Goatskin onlay and inlaid lines. Additional lines incised freehand with Ascona tool. Leather joint, suede flyleaves, green textured machine-made Japanese paper doublures. Hand-sewn silk endbands, gilt top edge. Title gold stamped. Bound in 2009.

8.5 x 6 x 1.5"

Memoir of author's experiences on his Texas farm, the history of the area, and his efforts to rehabilitate the depleted land. Design inspired by topographic maps, satellite photos and author's sketch of the farm.

This binding was winner of the Jury Prize for Binding, *The Helen Warren DeGolyer American Bookbinding Competition*, Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist University, 2009.



Butterflies, Moths and Other Insects: Classic Natural History Prints by S. Peter Dance and E. Geoffrey Hancock

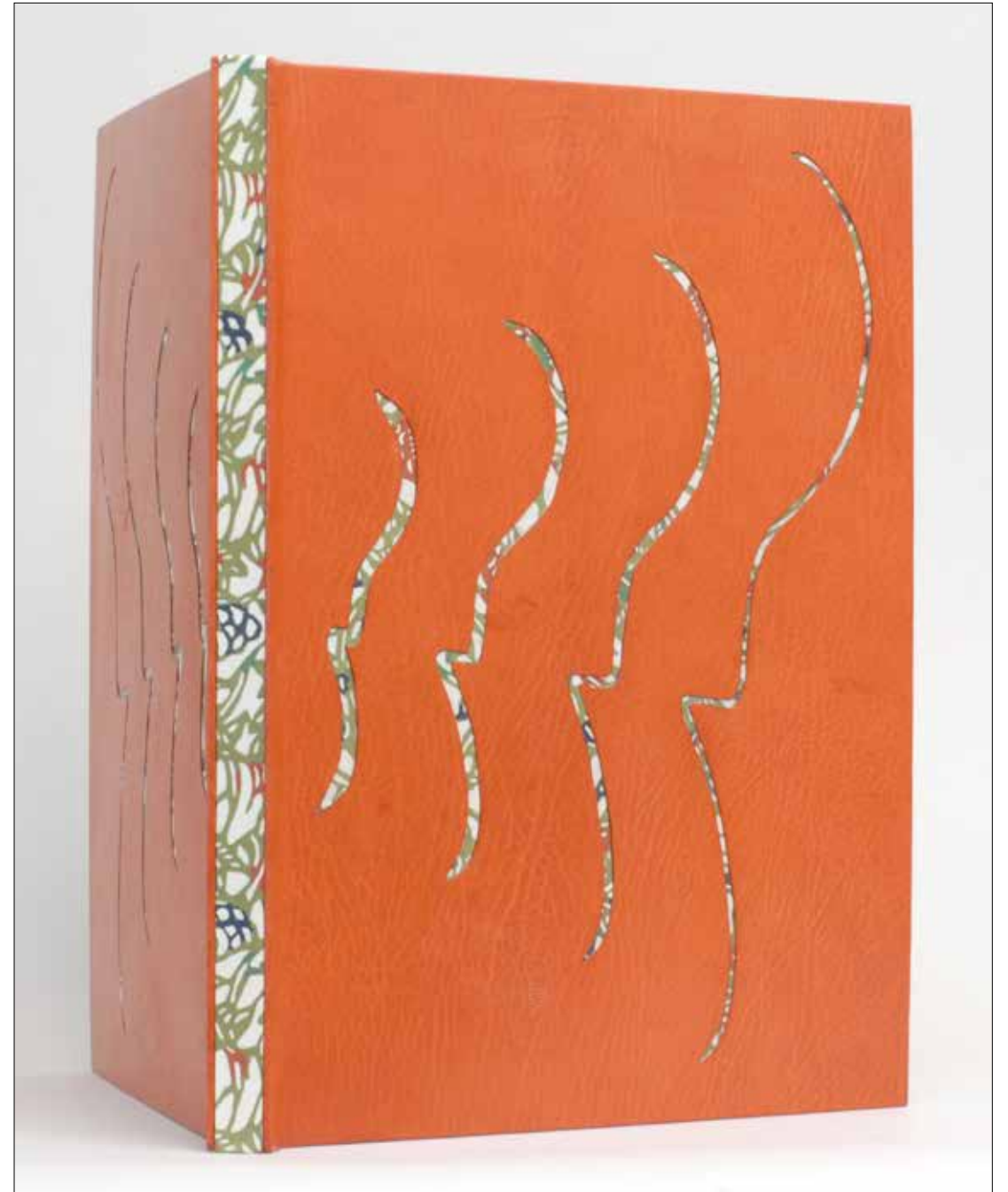
London: Studio Editions, 1991.

Collection of the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library, University of Alberta.

New Oriental binding. Goatskin with Katazome-shi (Japanese stencil-dyed paper) inlays, flyleaves and doublures. Edges sponged in multiple colors with watercolor. Bound in 2010.

13.5 x 10.5 x .75"

Design suggests the Butterfly Effect in chaos theory: one butterfly flapping its wings can have a global effect on future events.



Native Soil: poems from South Texas poets, selected by Naomi Shihab Nye

San Antonio, TX: School by the River Press 2007.

“Gebrochene rücken” variation of the Bradel binding, covered in full goatskin. Goatskin hinges and endbands, three watercolor edges, hand-tooled title, design in black, brown, maroon and gold foils. Bound in 2011.

10 x 7 x .25”



The Right Stuff by Tom Wolfe

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979 (first edition).

French technique full goatskin binding with laced-in boards. Edge-to-edge goatskin doublures, suede flyleaves. Goatskin backpared and cushioned onlays, some laser-printed; some areas sprinkled with gold leaf. Graphite and gold-sprinkled edges, hand sewn silk headbands. Bound in 2011.

8.5 x 5.5 x 1.75"

Design inspired by Wolfe's notion of single combat warriors battling the Cold War in the heavens on behalf of the US and USSR. Further inspiration from space-themed advertising of the era. Various patriotic and space race icons from the US and USSR portrayed as constellations, planets and spacecraft.

Best Binding award runner up in the Chicago Public Library's *One Book, Many Interpretations* exhibition, 2011.



Pictorial Webster's: A Visual Dictionary of Curiosities by John M. Carrera

Waltham, MA: Quercus Press, 2006. Letterpress edition hand-printed by the author, one of only sixteen copies available unbound.

Private collection, New Jersey.

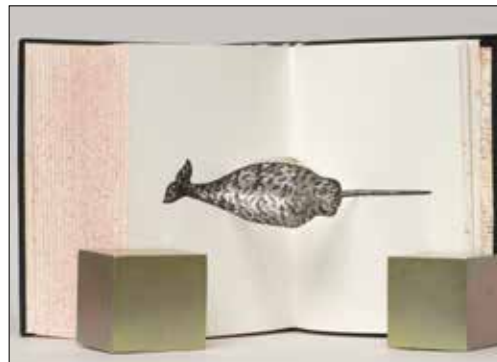
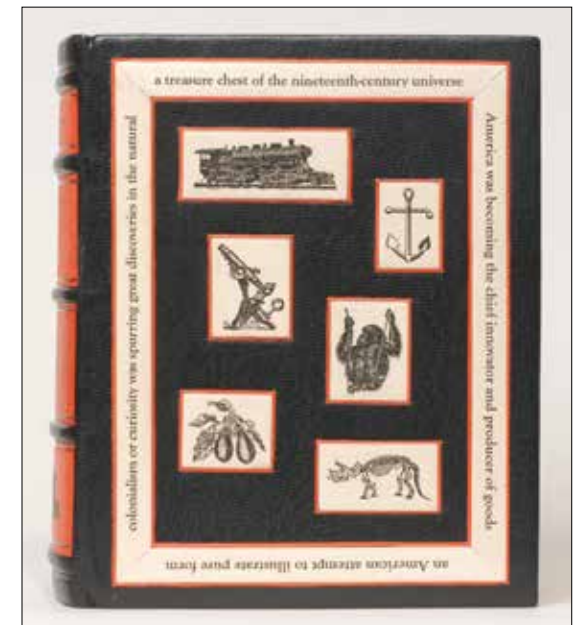
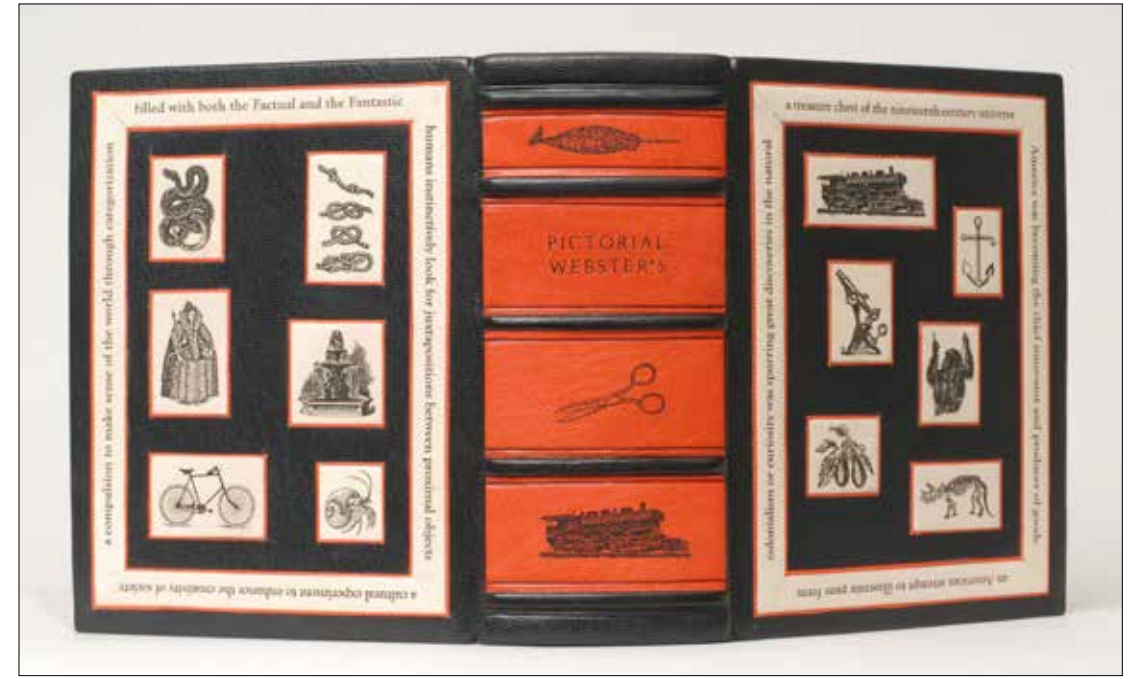
French technique full goatskin binding with laced-in boards. Sewn on flattened cords, false raised bands. Leather hinge, marbled text paper for endsheets and doublures hand-printed at Quercus Press. Hand-sewn silk endbands; three edges sprinkled with red acrylic ink. Title stamped in black foil. Illustrations scanned from Pictorial Webster's wall cards, laser printed onto goatskin onlays, and outlined with inlaid goatskin lines.

Thirty-three additional illustrations inkjet printed onto Mohawk Superfine text, then hand cut into pop-ups, one sewn inside each of the text block's signatures. Bound in 2011.

6.25 x 5.25 x 2.75"

Design is an abstracted Cambridge panel, color palette inspired by modern Webster's dictionaries. Text drawn from the Preface and Introduction describes the original impetus behind the illustrations and the author's vision for them in this work. Because the dictionary was originally printed to optimize text, not image, Carrera's work marks the first opportunity for viewers to truly see the illustrations. Pop-ups further bring the illustrations to the fore.

Included in *500 handmade books volume 2*, Lark, 2013.



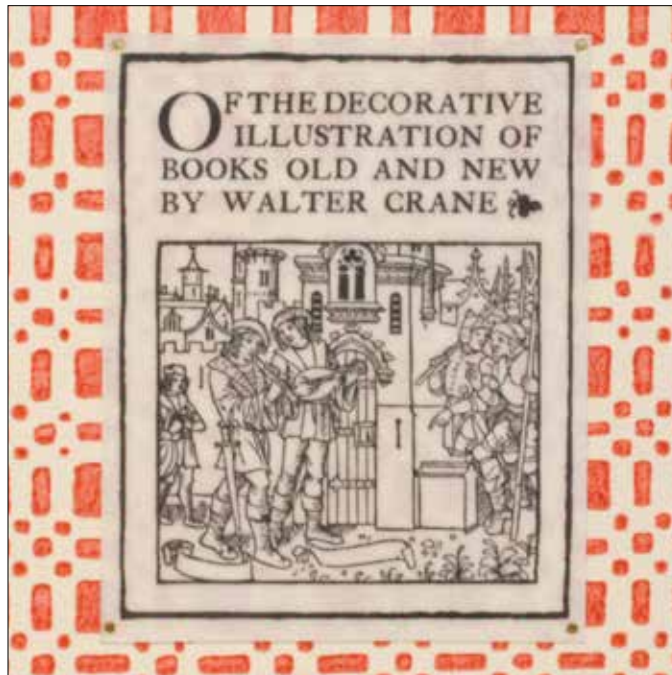
Of the Decorative Illustration of Books Old and New by Walter Crane

London and New York: George Bell and Sons, 1896, printed at Chiswick Press (first edition).

Modified Simplified binding. Book disbound and re sewn on ramieband. New endpapers, double folio of "W S H & Co" watermarked handmade paper from Wookey Hole Mill, could possibly approach the age of the book. Boards covered in decorative paper acquired at a Guild of Book Workers auction marked "Italian old." Handsewn three color silk endbands. Spine piece covered in Harmatan goatskin. New label is frontispiece from text, scanned and inkjet-printed onto calf vellum. Minimal gold tooling on spine echoes pattern of the decorative paper. Bound in 2011.

7.5 x 6.25 x 2"

Bound for *Artistically Reversible: Where Conservation and Art Meet*, an online exhibition "to create compelling new work that applies non-destructive and completely reversible book structures" based on the work of the Tomorrow's Past movement.



A Thousand Acres by Jane Smiley

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991 (signed first edition).

French technique fine binding sewn on flattened cords, laced into boards and covered in a variety of hues of green goatskin. Hand-titling and tooling in 23 kt. gold, black and brown foils. Edge-to-edge goatskin doublures, flyleaves of green Cave paper. Hand-sewn, French style endbands, watercolor top edge in a variety of greens. Bound in 2012.

9.25 x 6.5 x 1.5"

Abstracted aerial and cross-section views of cultivated land adorn this retelling of *King Lear* on an Iowa farm.



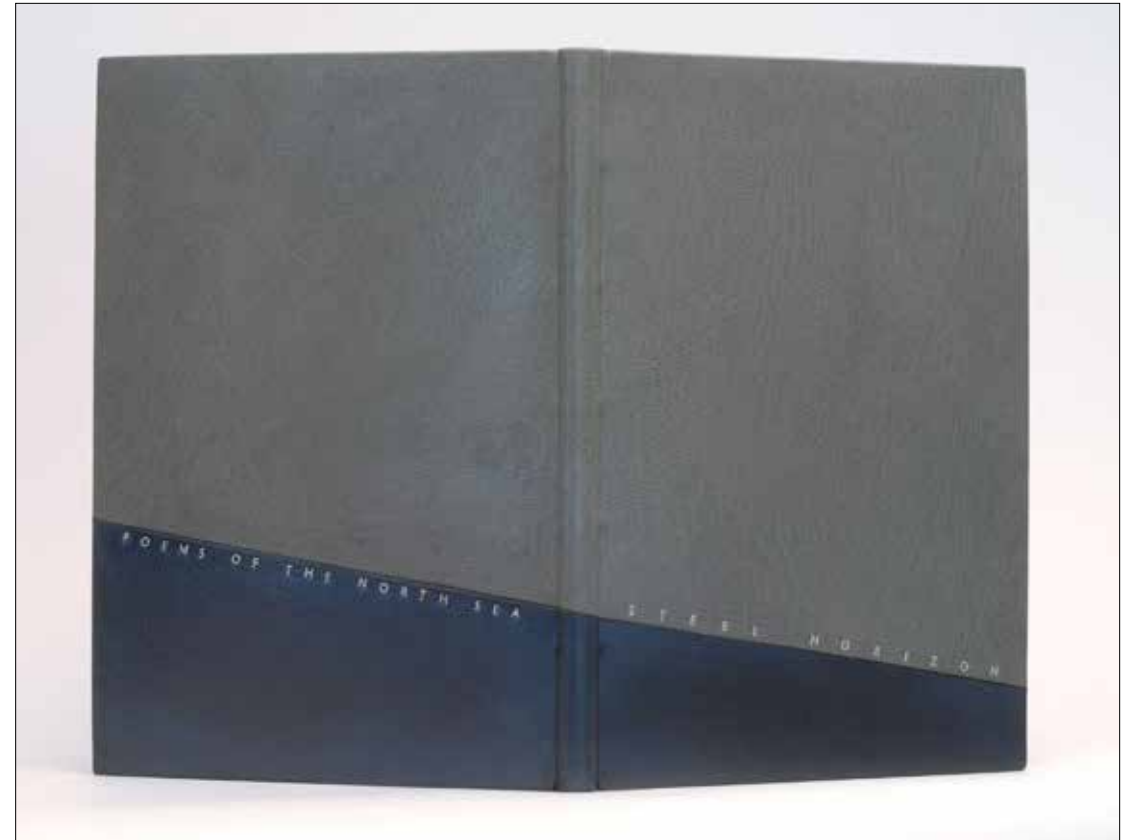
Steel Horizon: Poems of the North Sea, poems by Jonathan Wonham, linocuts by Nick Wonham

Oldham, UK: Incline Press, 2013.

Full navy and gray goatskin fine binding sewn on flattened cords, laced into boards, inlaid leather line. Hand-titling in metallic foil. Edge-to-edge leather doublures, and flyleaves of granite Cave paper. Hand-sewn silk French style endbands, graphite top edge. Bound in 2013.

12 x 8.25 x .75”

This binding is included in the Designer Bookbinders UK invitational *Inside/Out* exhibition, traveling in the UK and US 2014-2015.



The Memoirs of Benjamin Franklin

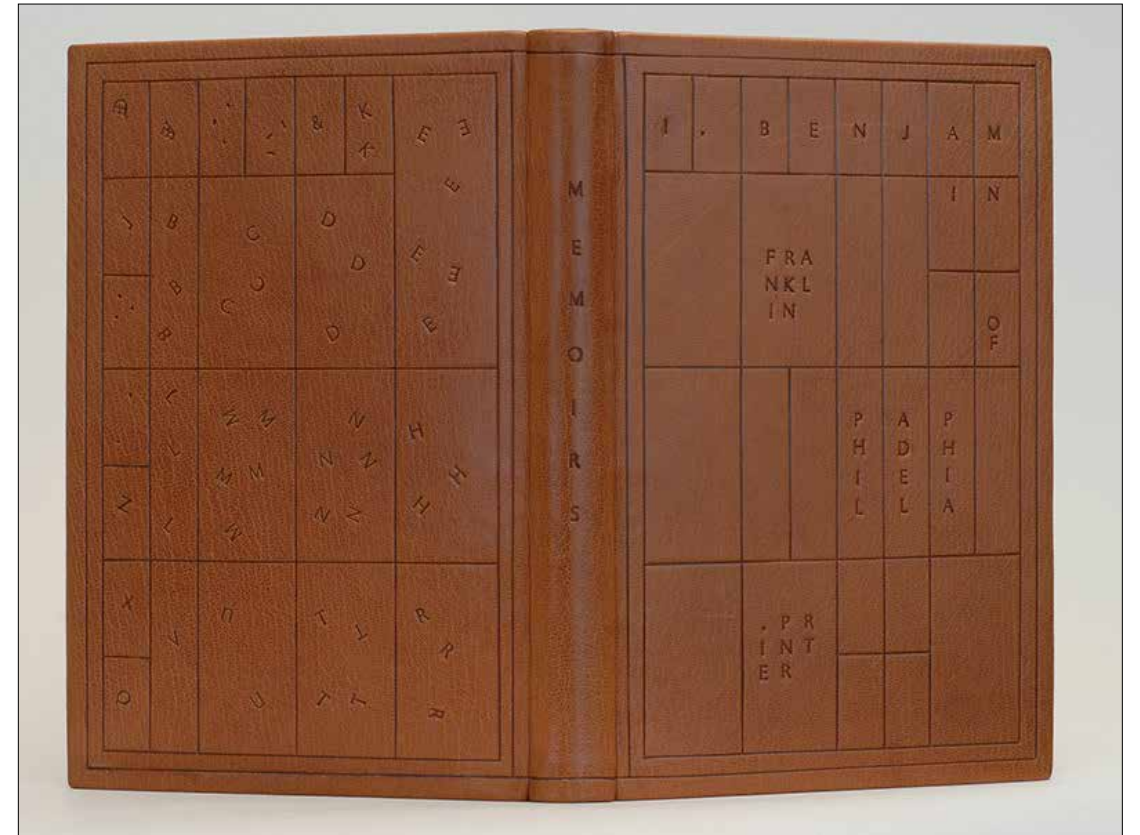
San Francisco: The Arion Press, 2006.

Full brown goatskin fine binding sewn on flattened cords. Hand-sewn silk French style endbands, top edge gilt. Hand-titling and tooling in blind. Doublures and flyleaves of Cave Alphabet paper. Bound in 2013.

10 x 6.75 x 1"

World-renowned as a scientist, inventor, philosopher, publisher, statesman, diplomat, and founding father of the United States, Benjamin Franklin chose to identify himself as a printer. The text on the front board is the first line of Franklin's last will and testament, arranged as if in a type case. Additional type is pictured distributed on the back board.

This binding is included in the Designer Bookbinders UK invitational *Inside/Out* exhibition, traveling in the UK and US 2014-2015.



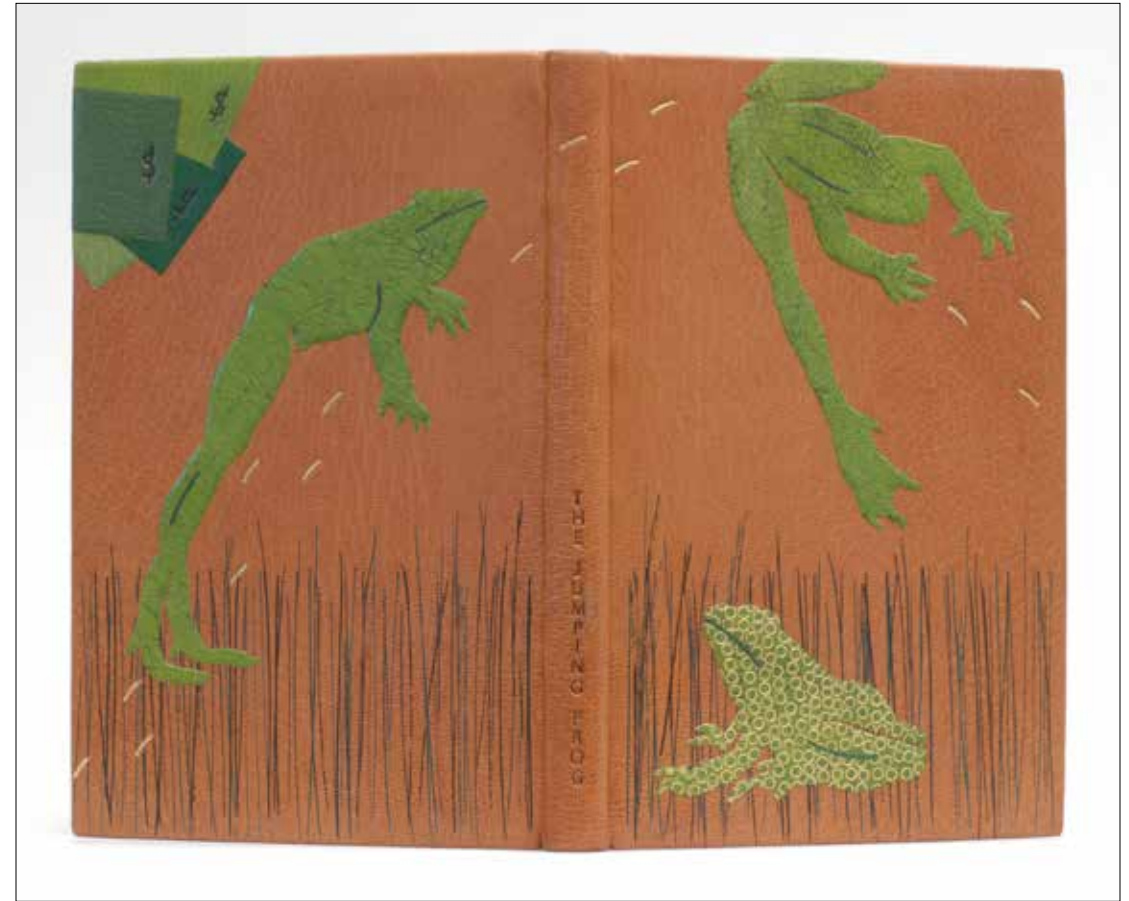
The Jumping Frog by Mark Twain

Easthampton, MA: Cheloniidae Press, 1985.

Full goatskin fine binding: sewn on flattened cords laced into boards. Goatskin onlays and inlaid lines, some craquele with India ink. Tooling in gold and colored foils, title in blind. Hand-sewn, French-style silk endbands, head treated with watercolor in a variety of greens and browns. Impression of onlay on edge-to-edge doublure offset onto suede flyleaf. Bound in 2014.

8.5 x 6 x 1”

In Twain’s short story, a man who loves to bet is swindled by a stranger who immobilizes the gambler’s prize jumping-frog by filling it with shot.



The Voyage of the “Fox” in the Arctic Seas. A Narrative of the Discovery of the Fate of Sir John Franklin and his Companions by Captain M’Clintock, R.N., LL.D.

Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860 (author’s edition).

Full goatskin fine binding: text disbound, outer folios guarded and resewn on flattened cords laced into boards. Buffalo and calf vellum inlays, and back-pared and traditional onlays. Blind tooling and title. Hand-sewn, French-style silk endbands, graphite head. Cloth from original, damaged case bound in at front and rear. Ruscombe Mill handmade paper endsheets. Impression of onlays on edge-to-edge goatskin doublures offsets onto suede flyleaves. Public domain images of historic shipwrecks inkjet printed, then laminated behind vellum. Bound in 2014.

7.75 x 5.24 x 1.5”

Sir John Franklin’s 1845 expedition was one of many to search for the elusive Northwest Passage, a sea route through the Arctic connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Franklin’s two ships, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, became trapped in sea ice and were abandoned in 1848. None of the 129 man crew survived, and the ships were believed to be lost. *The Voyage of the “Fox” in the Arctic Seas. A Narrative of the Discovery of the Fate of Sir John Franklin and his Companions* is an account of one of numerous expeditions to search for Franklin’s ships and crew.

The design for this binding was inspired by historic and contemporary photographs, paintings and illustrations of sea ice and Arctic exploration. The latest expedition to search for Franklin’s ships began in August 2014, concurrently with work on this binding. The well-preserved wreckage of HMS *Erebus* was found on September 7, 2014.

