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The University of Michigan Library's collection includes three Artists' Books by Japanese artist Kyoko Matsunaga. While different in binding, size and content, the similar themes of the three works demonstrates how Artists' Books can convey complex ideas about place.



Whether real or imagined, Matsunaga's books create immersive places and despite their small size, they transport the viewer to a place of her making. For Matsunaga, Artists' Books, are a chance to "reassemble [my] memories and give them new meaning. It is like finding a constellation" (Matsunaga, 2016). In addition to memory, her work often focuses on place because, "Any place has personal and social memories and I'm interested in the multi-layered aspect of place" (Matsunaga, 2016). By turning the page to see a half hidden image or rotating the book to see the next subject to jump across the stones, Matsunaga reconstructs her memories to form ideas about place and perception. She compiles and configures memories of places to create new experiences. Matsunaga's books converge many memories of a single location and layer them to form a distinctly different place.

With this exhibit we hope to overcome some of the obstacles books present using video clips. Kyoko Matsunaga's books demonstrate this unique art form's ability to both transcend and utilize traditional book structures to create meaningful and beautiful works of art.

Curated by Maggie Johnson as part of the Michigan Library Scholars summer internship at the University of Michigan Library.

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What are Artists' Books?

The term Artists' Books is an unexpectedly controversial one. From the placement of the apostrophe to what belongs in the category, Artists' Books are heavily debated by art historians and critics. There is no solid definition of Artists' Books, rather, there is a vague outline of what they are not.



An example of an Artists' Book

Johanna Drucker, a producer and scholar of Artists' Books, defines the term by giving examples of what do not qualify as Artists' Books. Two large categories are often confused with Artists' Books: Livres d'Artiste and Fine Press Books. Livres d'Artiste are beautifully illustrated books with work done by a well regarded artist. Fine Press books are finely bound and crafted books that are usually special editions of popular and classic titles. Because Livres d'artiste are more akin to illustration and do not use the book itself as art, they are not usually considered Artists' Books. Fine Press books are not often considered Artists' Books because they do not have an idea that inspires their production; they are produced to demonstrate skill in creating the book. In order to be an Artist's Book, there must be an intention of meaning and the book form must enforce that meaning.



An example of a Livre d'Artiste

While there is no definitive start to what is accepted today as an Artists' Book, 1860s France and symbolist poets like Mallarme would inspire the movement and the form fully emerged in the contemporary sense after World War II. Since then most major art movements include examples of Artists' Books. The ability of books to be reproduced en masse was appealing to movements that wanted to challenge the traditional gallery and museum system of the art world and books were an excellent way to do this. Objects with multiple pages do not lend themselves to museum display cases, and since they are often printed in multiple, galleries see little profit from them. Books require more interaction than simply looking to appreciate their content making them both intimate and distant since only a few people will ever hold them.



An example of a Fine Press book

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Artist Biography

Kyoko Matsunaga was born in Hyogo Japan in 1981. She received her BFA in Printmaking in 2004 from Kyoto Seika University which inspired her to pursue Artists' Books. After graduation, she studied with Yo Yamazaki, a celebrated bookbinder in Japan, for three years. In 2010, she moved to the Bay Area of California and enrolled in Foothill College to study Print and Book Arts. She has received several awards in Japan and in 2015 she received the Hedi Kylie award from 23 Sandy Gallery in Portland, Oregon.

Matsunaga's artistic background makes her art unique in its mix of contemporary style, historical inspiration and eastern and western influences. Her use of white space, a hallmark of Japanese art, "connects the real world to her dream and beyond" (Matsunaga). Her use of thin, Japanese paper and white spaces reminds us of the effect of our perception on what we see. All of these stylistic choices result in a dream like quality in her work that is unforgettable and unique.

To view all of Matsunaga's work, visit her website.

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Artist Interview

This interview was conducted by Maggie Johnson over email on June 21st, 2016.

Some edits were made for clarity with the artist's permission.

•*What inspired you to become a book artist?*

Michel Butor's livre d'artiste, Fluxus. That I majored in printmaking.

• *You have an extensive education in book making both in Japan and in the United States, how did these experiences shape your work? How did your time in California affect your book making style?*

In Japan, I acquired fine bookbinding skills and this experience surely supports my books' exterior. However, I had to make a conscious effort not to become an artisan because book art (as contemporary art) is not known in the country and I felt that too much skills disturb my creativity. My time in California made me more confident to make books as art. I moved to the Bay Area by chance, but fortunately there were a lot of fellow book artists and plenty of opportunities to learn the book arts. I was surprised that many book art classes started with the one fundamental question "what the book art is," and how much importance was given to the concept of an artwork. That was just what I wanted, but hardly to be expected in Japan.

• *Walk me through the process of creating a book, how long does it take, what are the steps etc?*

It depends on the book, but in most cases I start from a motif, then take several months to find out the suitable structure, gather/make images, do some digital work, print, bind, and so forth. To complete one edition, it takes a couple of months to several years.

• *What kind of software and equipment do you use? How do you combine techniques like inkjet and other forms of printing?*

Photoshop, Illustrator, inkjet(dye) printer, table top platen press. I use inkjet for the texture of dye ink, and letterpress for pigment. Usually images/photos were printed with inkjet and letters were letterpress printed.

• *You use a lot of old books as parts of your pieces, are you inspired by historic book formats when creating your books?*

I use old books to make a comparison of different generations of books (or media).

• *Servane Briand mentions in her posting on 23 Sandy gallery that you invented the binding technique she used, how does your relationship with fellow book artists affect your work?*

It's enjoyable to see what other artists make, and share new techniques. I always learn a lot from others, but I don't think it affect my work directly.

• *These works seem to be inspired by a place, either real or imagined, why/how do you think books can convey place?*

Any place has personal and social memories and I'm interested in the multi-layered aspect of place, not as a scenery, so books are more befitting than separate pictures.

• *Time and memory also seem to play a major role in your books, how do you use books to portray the passage of time and perception of time's passage?*

When a book focuses on a line of time, like *Intersection*, I'd use simple chronological order, but I usually follow the shift in location more than the passage of time.

I prefer accordion books and scrolls than codex style books because those structures portray a succession of something very well. After spending some years outside Japan, I felt a need to rediscover Japanese Emaki scrolls as book arts. The influence of emaki on Japanese manga is well known, but I also have a hint that it certainly affects my own usage of books.

• *The Intersection and Kamo both center on rivers and roads, two passageways, a theme that appears several times in your books, what do you find so interesting about rivers and roads/pathways?*

I like observing things/people in my daily-life and find some modest beauty of it, because everyone can find it in their own ordinary days, not on special occasions. (Rivers are everywhere in this island but people in desert areas may feel different about it…) Also, roads/pathways and rivers have been shared with many people's memories for a long period of time, and I'm interested in the layered aspect of them.

• *In your works that include people, the faces are always painted over with white, what purpose does this serve in your art?*

It was derived from my dreams at first, somehow I can't see people's faces clearly in my dreams, then I use the method to describe unspecified person. Plus, you usually forget about the people who passed by on the road.

• *What is your favorite part about book making?*

That I can reassemble my memories and give it a new meaning. It is like finding a constellation.

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The Intersection



Using an accordion style binding of her own invention, *The Intersection* documents a cycle of a street light in Tokyo. Matsunaga took a picture every seven seconds to capture the way people hurry past without noticing one another. The pictures are printed on transparent Japanese paper allowing the past, present and the future to bleed into one another. Faceless people represent how in memories "you usually forget the people who passed by on the road" (Matsunaga 2016). Every person in these pictures has his or her own unique memory from this intersection but no one will remember one another.

The Intersection



View Item

by Kyoko Matsunaga

date 2011

Please note: To play an animated GIF file of the book, please click on the first image.

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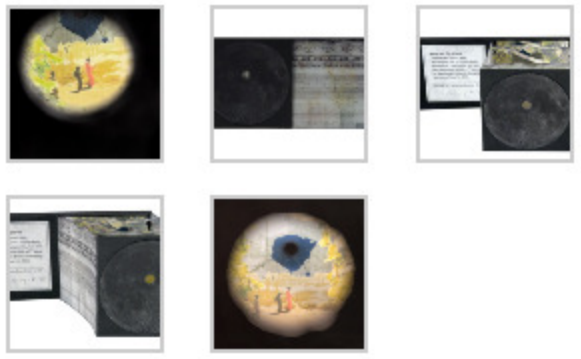
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Moonset Cordiero



The title for this tunnel-pop up book hybrid came to Matsunaga in a dream while the scenery inside comes from her experiences and dreams. When the viewer opens the book and looks into the hole, the delicately constructed interior is revealed and her vision comes to life. The book's construction limits the view so only a small portion can be seen at a time. The mirror in the back of the book reflects the eye back at itself as well as offering an alternative view of the landscape. In this piece, she compiles memories and dreams to create a new, ethereal place.

Moonset Cordiero



View Item

by Kyoko Matsunaga

date 2013

The text on the panel reads "An ancient site of typography situated on a peninsula that was once mentioned within a TV show in Matsunaga's dream in the early morning of June 16th, 2012".

Please note: the first image is a gif, please click on the image to play the gif

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Stepping Stones



On the Kamo River in the artist's home of Kyoto, people of all ages hop across the river on stepping stones, which served as the inspiration for this piece. Along the river, Matsunaga found potshards, remnants of pottery from Kyoto's past as a capital of Japan. She includes one of these potsherds in every book. Beneath every panel with images of modern people crossing are the potsherds to remind us of the layers of memory in all places. The accordion panel style binding is best displayed in a circle to create a loop of old and new memories.

Kamo Stepping Stones



View Item

by Kyoko Matsunaga

date 2015

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Kamo Stepping Stones by Kyoko Matsunaga



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Moonset Cordiero by Kyoko Matsunga



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The Intersection by Kyoko Matsunaga



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About This Exhibit

This online exhibition is one of multiple exhibitions that pull from the collections of Artists' Books at the Art, Architecture, and Engineering Library Special Collections.

This exhibit was made as a part of the Michigan Library Scholars Program an internship that encourages scholarship with an international focus. Interns are assigned to mentors in the library to create projects. The mentor of this program is Jamie Vander Broek. Staff members Meghan Musolff, Breanna Hamm, Susan Garrett, Rebecca Price, Eleanor Schmitt, and Ana Enriquez, also provided guidance on this project.

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Accessing Artists' Books

You are welcome to browse artists' books in the Art, Architecture, and Engineering Library Special Collections online database. This database includes images of and information about the more than 400 unique artists' books the AAEL Special Collections holds.

The Artists' Books are a non-circulating collection. Researchers and University of Michigan community members are invited to view the collection by making an appointment with Jamie Vander Broek, Librarian for Art & Design.

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