Faculty Grant Report / Barbara Maloutas

College Book Arts Association Conference, January 2 – 4, 2014

One thing I’ve learned about a road trip from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City is that it requires twelve hours of intense driving time. On Christmas Eve we packed a lunch and snacks, gassed and loaded the truck and headed northeast to Utah. My daughter, open space manager for the City of Salt Lake, lives in Wanship, 37 miles northeast of the city. I realized that I could combine a family visit with the College Book Art Association (CBAA) conference from January 2 – 4, 2014, a packed 3-day conference.

I looked forward to seeing and talking with book artists Kathy Walkup (who is writing the essay on the upcoming OTIS Ben Maltz Exhibition entitled Binding Desire: Unfolding Artist Books), Julie Chen, Kitty Maryatt, Betsy Davids, Carolee Campbell, Cindy Marsh and Otis faculty, Rebecca Chamlee. Craig Dworkin offered opening remarks on January 2nd at 5:00pm which was followed by a curated Exhibition and Reception. Leslie Dill closed the conference (due to storms on the east coast) via Skype in a very intimate and inspirational discussion of her work, especially the appliqued text on costumes in her opera, Divide Light. Part of the intimacy was the result her very big screen presence in the Orson Spencer Hall auditorium. Instead of Leslie’s face measured in inches, we were sitting in front of Leslie’s face at approximately 20 feet from side to side.

In addition to the distance from Los Angeles, another thing I learned is that I am not a printer on the level of the men and women educators who are members of this organization. I have printed on a flatbed press, but all my “small edition books” are digitally printed or photocopied. What I make however, are also not zines. I am a poet and prose writer. A number of years ago at a book arts conference in Chicago, I learned that I needed to take this authorial approach and think of it as limited edition self-publishing. I agreed with Joanna Drucker—“write your own content”—then package work as artist books. I love the complexity and slow unfolding of artist books. UCLA, Otis College of Art and Design and other private collectors and institutions have collected my artist books. What makes them artist books is perhaps their extreme temporality. I purposefully slow the reading down hoping for a new kind of interaction with a reader.

On Christmas Eve 2013, the weather was good, the care and feeding of the dogs had been arranged and we thought we could make the drive in 10 hours. We made it to Wanship by 12:30 am local time—Christmas Day. Family time was leisurely, restful, filled with jokes, stories and animals including 17 chickens, 2 ducks, 2 goats, one cat and 3 dogs. We watched several segments of Zeitgeist, one of Downton Abbey, grocery shopped, cooked, washed up, ate out and went to my first blues concert by Leftover Salmon in Park City.

Day 1 – January 2, 2014 - Thursday

The conference schedule began on January 1st with a morning Library Tour including the Salt Lake City Public Library designed by an Israeli architect. My
daughter whose government office is across the street let me know (which the librarian tour guide never mentioned) that the sandstone material that was used for the surface of the building and outdoor areas has required substantial repair due to the nearby presence of the salty body of water. It is, however, a beautiful and well-organized library with special attention to the children’s department.

We continued by tram to the Mormon History Library, a little further downtown and across from the Tabernacle Square at the center of the street numbering system for Salt Lake City. The Mormon Faith has a mandate to preserve the oral histories of its members—recordings, films and images. Conservation while at the same time preserving the physical history of a book is the mandate of the conservation department. Books are not conserved to look new.
A former member of the Church, Mark Hoffman, was a master forger of Church documents as well as a murderer and has been imprisoned since the late 1980’s. His forgeries are confirmed using the x-ray equipment in the conservation department.

The afternoon continued with a tour of the new Natural History Museum given by the director of the museum by the museum director, Sarah George. She knew my daughter since the museum is feet away from Open Space and often needs help with trails and other Open Space needs. If preservation of artifacts was the former mission of natural history museums, the current mission of museums is education. Almost every area offered interactivity, particularly for children. We also got a private tour of the storage spaces. The Museum pays 2/3 of the salaries of the University anthropologists whose digs are in Utah and around the world.

That evening there was a Reception and Opening in the Marriott Library of the Juried Members’ Exhibition. Both Rebecca Chamlee and Cynthia Marsh (Chair of Communication Arts in mid-nineties) were selected for the show housed on the 4th floor of the Marriott Library outside the Red Butte Press Lab.
Rebecca’s book is the coming-of-age story of David Samuel Chamlee, born in 1857, told by his grandson in a Humanities term paper written while attending Claremont Men’s College in the 1950s. Cynthia Marsh’s book of hand made paper and letterpress printed words by women in Tanzania was also included in the exhibit.

The conference theme and title (print, produce, publish) although promising unusual submissions, they were for the most part traditional. Affadavit by Robin Silverberg was one of the most conceptual entries but described in the catalog as stemming “from an essential materiality. The artwork reflects on material sensibility as much as on the content and issues that comprise its core.” “Affadavit...an artist’s book about a ‘day in the life of an artist...’ spans seven official affidavits that were notarized in New York City by different notary officers.” The book is both a performance piece and an artist’s book. The notaries’ service would often segue into complex discussions concerning signatures, identities and their signifiers. The text is from a Hungarian writer from his One Minute Stories. One of the amazing issues is that there were numerous white acrylic paint alterations, not usually allowed on notarized documents. Luckily, I had the chance to visit Robin’s table during the members showcase on Friday and found it strange and dark that once again, forgery came up.

January 3, 2014 Panels and Dinner - Friday

9:30 am - Textures: Text & Typography of Artists’ Books
Of the three presenters, while all were interesting, Susan Viguers, professor
at my BFA alma mater, proved to be the most interesting for me. She values the written word and likes that you have to take time to read, to sit down, to unfold, so that the materiality is the context, the context is materiality. Text is an aspect of materiality. A wall of words doesn’t invite reading. Commercially if you can’t read it, it’s wrong.

3:15 pm - Space & Specimen, Muse & Museum:
After the members’ showcase, the final panel of the day related to my experience of the Natural History Museum. The Panel Synopsis reads: Using the concept of “specimen” and theories of the natural history museum as a lens, this panel examines work by contemporary book artists and implications for pedagogy, publishing and collections. Drawing from research in poetics, natural history, and collecting, the panel poses questions about the communicative function of artists’ books. It was a performance by very articulate young women out of The University of Iowa and Parsons – difficult to talk about unless you were there.

7:00 pm - Art and Sustainability Dinner Party and Presentations in Wanship
Later Thursday Evening after the CBAA Members meeting with business reports and awards in yet another nearby campus building, my son, Alex picked us up from the Marriott Library and drove us to Wanship for a “Arts and Sustainability” dinner party at my daughter’s home with friends and colleagues from the sustainability division of the Salt Lake government. Emy called it a fun evening of cross-pollination and asked for 3 minute informal presentations. Cynthia and Rebecca showed their in-progress books and I read my poem “One Island Earth”. In true sustainability fashion, one of Emy’s colleagues drove the Book Artists back to the University of Utah Guest House on her way home.

January 4, 2014 Panels – Saturday

9:30 am – Women at the Press, Then & Now
Moderator: Cynthia Marsh, Professor, Art + Design, Director Goldsmith Press & Rare Type Collection, Austin Peay State University
Panelists included Kathleen Walkup from Mills College and Otis essayist for the upcoming OTIS Book Arts Show, Betty Bright, Independent Scholar and Curator and Emily Larned from the Universit of Bridgeport.
The elephant in the room was of course why this title and focus on women printers. Kathleen Walkup’s very straightforward and clear history of women
printers was informative. I had never heard the story isolated that way. Evidently, women once widowed could keep their means of support, so Mary Goddard printed the Declaration of Independence after her husband’s death. And since women could compose type it was the women who were literate. Betty Bright reminded us that women were trying to move out of the pampered life and featured Virginia Wolf at a type case in one of her images.

11:15 am – Gathering, Linking, Impressing: When Less is More
Panel Synopsis: Four book arts teachers discuss how they use a limited number of classes to create synergies and a broader appreciation of the book arts in the higher education setting, and offer related but differing perspectives on how they operate and continue to develop book arts programs at their institutions.

This panel seemed most closely related to our Creative Action classes in terms of collaboration with outside communities, traveling, fostering interest in the school and student initiative. Their “just do it” attitude was inspiring. Faculty and students overcame many roadblocks on their way to slowing down and setting type. They saw the book and papermaking as agents for change and community. The faculty were from different disciplines and brought this to the plate.

2:15 am – Content/Context: Teaching the Same Class in as Many Different Ways as Possible
Moderator: Aaron Cohick Printer of the Press at Colorado College. The Panel Synopsis reads: This roundtable features four visiting professors that have taught different versions of the same introductory book arts class at The Press at Colorado College. The structure of the class derives from one question: what type of letterpress/book arts class would you most like to teach?

Two things happened for me at this panel: 1) I learned that there is something interesting about blocks-of-time structure for a semester. A block lasts for three and a half weeks, beginning on a Monday and ending on a Wednesday four weeks later. 1 block is equal to one class on the semester plan. That means 4 blocks per semester; 8 blocks per year, plus optional Half Block in the winter and summer session during the summer. Class typically meets 9 a.m. - 12 p.m., Monday through Friday, with applicable labs in the afternoon, but professors are free to schedule classes in the format they feel is most suited to the subject matter. They are immersive and intense. This seemed ideal for a book arts minor. 2) There can be a collaborative and responsive approach to making folios that I could use for my charette in the spring Foundation Design Elective where students would be forced to respond to the work of the student beside them thereby giving up authorship at this early stage in their development as designers.

Leslie Dill’s Talk by Skype began at 4:15 followed by the Banquet and Live Auction at the University Guest House Ballroom. Instead of the Auction and Banquet, I left for Wanship to pack for my departure on January 5.
Dog walking in Wanship and then, on the road home.