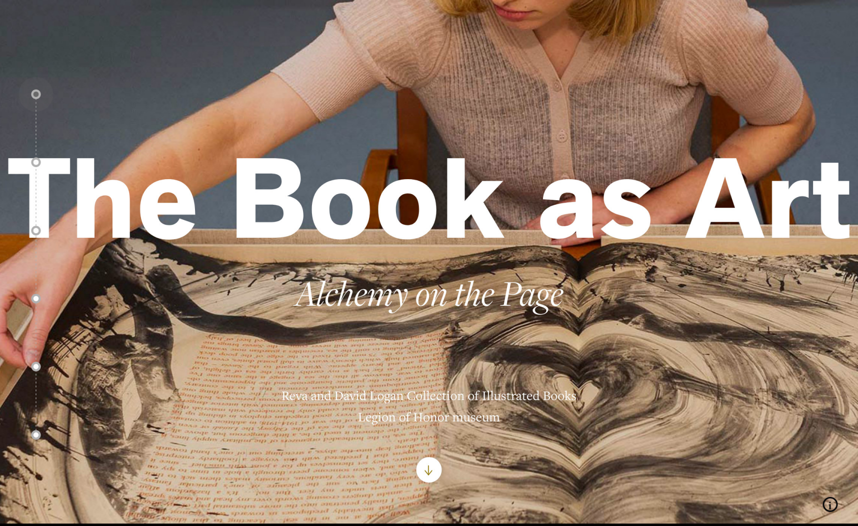


The Book as Art

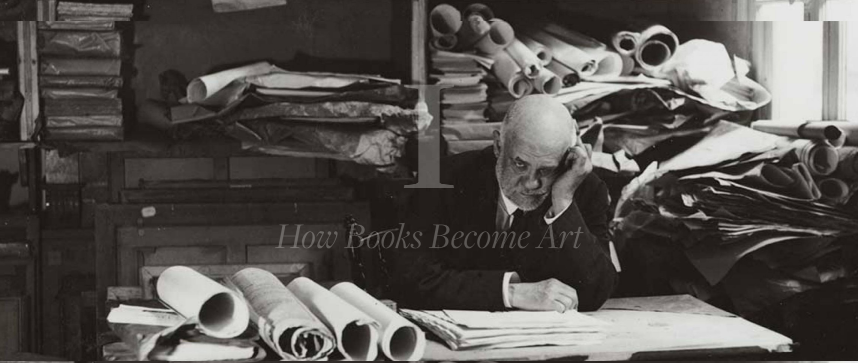
Alchemy on the Page

Reva and David Logan Collection of Illustrated Books
Legion of Honor museum

Introduction

When is a book a work of art? When a book is made as an artwork, the velvet rope separating the art

from the viewer comes down: the book becomes a work of art only in the viewer's hands. The Reva and David Logan Collection at the Legion of Honor holds more than 400 books illustrated and conceived by many of the greatest artists, writers, and fine art publishers of the twentieth century. This edition of Insights gives a closer look at an art form that is too often inaccessible.



I

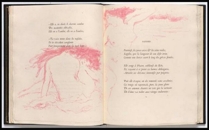
How Books Become Art

At the dawn of the twentieth century, avant-garde artists and writers throughout Europe discovered a new medium, the artist's book.

works of art can be found throughout history, from illuminated manuscripts to the books of William Blake, the art form as a widely practiced medium was born in the twentieth century, with approaches to artist's-book publishing established early in the century. Luxury editions, called *livres d'artistes*, (literally "artists' books," but specifically denoting deluxe editions with original prints) were produced by established art dealers to promote the work of artists they represented, with the books often encased in deluxe bindings.

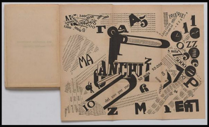
Meanwhile, avant-garde artists and writers, particularly in Russia, produced artistically adventurous works under their own auspices, less concerned with production values and focused more on the book as a hybrid art form. Paris was a major center for the production of livres d'artistes, while in Russia, daring experimentation with the form of the book itself set a standard for innovation. Today, more artists than ever are making books, following paths established more than 100 years ago.

The Development of an Art Form



1900

In 1900, art dealer Ambroise Vollard published what is considered the first modernist livre d'artiste, *Parallèlement*, with Pierre Bonnard's original fine art lithographs illustrating erotic poems by Paul Verlaine. Commingling visual elements with poetry on the page spread was a radical design innovation at the time.



Filippo Marinetti, *Les mots en liberté futuristes (Futurist Words in Freedom)*, 1919

1909

The principles of Futurism were set down in Italy by Filippo Marinetti in a series of manifestos that glorified movement, speed, and the Machine Age, paving the way for typographically adventurous publications. Russian Futurism, an independent movement, approached the book as a total work of art, an expressive synthesis of language and design, reenvisioning the form of the book itself.

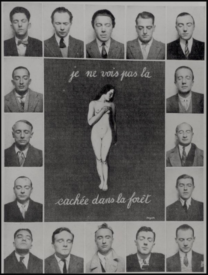
1916

In response to the horrors of World War I,

Hugo Ball reading at the Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 1916

Dadaist poets and artists held a mirror of absurdity to the society they deemed responsible. They intended, as Jean Arp said, to “destroy the hoaxes of reason and to discover an unreasoned order.” Dada publications leaned heavily on collage and skewed type.

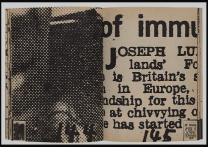
1924



Photomontage with René Magritte painting published in issue 12 of the journal *La révolution Surréaliste*, December 15, 1929

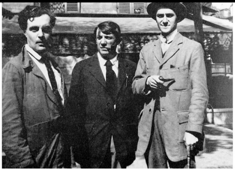
Unsatisfied with the nihilism of Dada, which he saw as a dead end, poet André Breton announced in 1924 the arrival of a new movement, Surrealism, invoking Freudian notions of the primacy of dreams and the unconscious. Surrealist writers and visual artists found the artist’s book to be a natural home for cross-disciplinary collaboration.

1960



Dieter Roth, Collected Works, vol. 10, *Daily Mirror*

In Europe, Dieter Roth reinvented the book as a conceptual work. A few years later, Ed Ruscha did much the same thing in America with *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, the first in a series of books beginning in 1962. Both artists poked holes in the idea of the artist’s book as strictly a luxurious fine art commodity.


Amedeo Modigliani, Pablo Picasso, and poet André Salmon in front of the Café de la Rotonde, Paris, 1916. Photo by Jean Cocteau

Artists and Writers

In Paris, the early twentieth century was a time when artists of all disciplines frequented the same cafes and salons. Artists and poets had a strong affinity—eager to collaborate, they found the book to be an opportune medium. The extent of these creative partnerships, particularly in France but common also in Russia, may have been unprecedented. Work preserved in the Logan Collection captures the spirit and momentum of successive cultural movements created by artists and writers.

See Insights on artists and poets in Paris.

Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in the studio of Picasso, 1907

The Art of Publishing

Two visionary Parisian art dealers provided an early impetus for what would soon become a widely practiced art form.

Born in 1866, Ambroise Vollard established his first gallery in 1893 and began publishing livres d'artistes in 1900 with the debut of *Parallèlement* (Bonnard/ Verlaine). One of the most successful gallerists of his time, he took a particular interest in livres d'artistes, producing editions with many of the great artists of the era, including Auguste Rodin, Raoul Dufy, Odilon Redon, Pablo Picasso, Georges Rouault, and others. He published twenty-four titles in all, leaving twenty-seven more projects in progress at his death, in 1939.

Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, born in 1884, was known for his prescient early support of the Cubist work of Picasso and Georges Braque, as well as his insightful appreciation of little-known writers of the avant-garde. The first livre d'artiste under his imprint, *L'enchanteur pourissant* (1909), was Guillaume Apollinaire's first book, and featured André Derain's first book illustrations. Subsequent artist/

author pairings under Kahnweiler's imprint included Max Jacob with Picasso and Apollinaire with Dufy, both in 1911.

> To a greater extent than at any time since the Renaissance, painters, writers, and musicians lived and worked together and tried their hands at one another's arts in an atmosphere of perpetual collaboration.

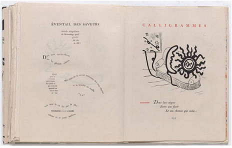
Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, 1968

II

Revolutions

relationship to a literary work or art movement, an artist's book can provide a deeper understanding of the artist than we otherwise might have.

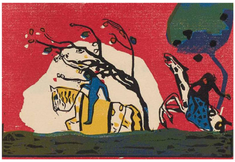
succession of revolutionary movements, from Abstraction to Cubism to Futurism to Dadaism to Surrealism and beyond, and the positions of artists within those movements. Virtually every art movement from the beginning of the twentieth century up to now has produced its testaments in book art, a phenomenon that has escaped the notice of many art historians. The deeply hybrid nature of an artist's book affords a wider context for understanding and appreciating the spirit of a particular time.



Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, illustrated by Giorgio de Chirico, 1930 ⓘ

A Surrealist's Tribute

Twelve years after the death of Apollinaire, who had coined the term "surrealism" and whose verse frequently made reference to the sun and stars, his friend Giorgio de Chirico paid him homage with an illustrated edition of one of Apollinaire's most adventurous books. The artist's vision connects the sources of heavenly light with the modern phenomenal world. It was a highly original interpretation of the work of a poet who had an immeasurable impact on the artists of his time, yet who did not live to see his vision of Surrealism take root as perhaps the most far-ranging, pervasive art movement of the century.

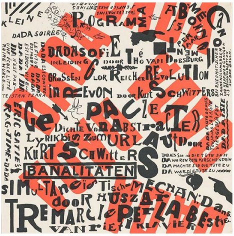


Zwei Reiter vor Rot (*Two Riders before Red*) (detail), from *Klänge*, by Wassily Kandinsky, 1913

The Birth of Abstraction

With *Klänge*, Wassily Kandinsky was engaged in a quest to merge image and text in synergistic expression, here evoking sound (*klänge*) to effect a deeper resonance. The horse and rider image appearing throughout the book is Kandinsky's symbol for the pathfinder, in this case finding a way beyond representation in art. The boldly experimental nature of this work, in both text and image, inspired the Dadaists and Futurists. Kandinsky was an "artist's artist," and *Klänge*, though commercially unsuccessful, was perhaps the most influential artist's book of its time.

> ***“There was no art form that [Kandinsky] had tried without taking completely new paths, undeterred by derision and scorn. In him, word, color, and sound worked in rare harmony.”***
>
> Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* (*Flight Out of Time*), 1927



Kleine Dada-Soirée Programma (*Small Dada Evening*) poster by Kurt Schwitters and Theo van Doesburg, 1923

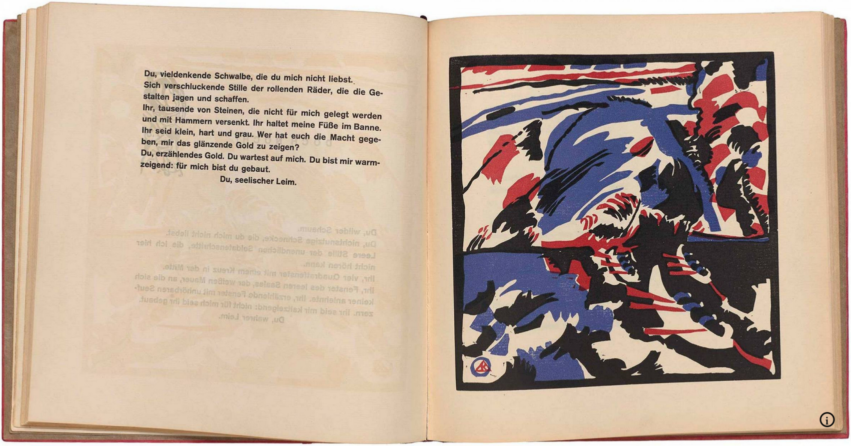
The Design of Absurdity

Founded in 1916 in Zürich, Switzerland, by poets and artists who gathered at Cabaret Voltaire, the Dada movement quickly spread throughout Europe and to New York, only to be ultimately eclipsed by the advent of Surrealism. This lithographed poster advertising a series of Dada soirées in the Netherlands, visually captures the anarchic spirit of Dada.

Saint Matorel by Max Jacob, illustrated by Picasso

The Fractured Mirror

Picasso's illustrations for Max Jacob's poetic texts *Saint Matorel* and *Le siège de Jérusalem* are considered to be among his most important Cubist prints, created early in the history of the movement. One of Picasso's first friends in Paris, the resolutely avant-garde Jacob, who was also a serious visual artist, was considered a "Cubist writer," seeing his subject from multiple angles and in multiple states, much as the Cubists did visually.

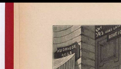


Du, vieldenkende Schwalbe, die du mich nicht liebst. Sich verschluckende Stille der rollenden Räder, die die Gestalten jagen und schaffen. Ihr, tausende von Steinen, die nicht für mich gelegt werden und mit Hammern versenkt. Ihr haltet meine Füße im Banne. Ihr seid klein, hart und grau. Wer hat euch die Macht gegeben, mir das glänzende Gold zu zeigen? Du, erzählendes Gold. Du wartest auf mich. Du bist mir warmzeigend: für mich bist du gebaut.

Du, seelischer Leim.

A Collage Narrative

UNE SEMAINE DE BONTÉ
LES SEPT ÉLÉMENTS CAPITAUX
LE LION DE BELFORT
MAX ERNST
UNE SEMAINE DE BONTÉ
LES SEPT ÉLÉMENTS CAPITAUX
L'EAU
UNE SEMAINE DE BONTÉ
LES SEPT ÉLÉMENTS CAPITAUX
LA COUR DU DRAGON



Surrealism was the most enduring of twentieth-