

# A Stitch in Time

**ARTISTS' BOOKS** Sarah Bodman catches up with book artist **Candace Hicks** as she returns to printmaking after intensive work on hand-sewn books

Candace Hicks has been making the *Common Threads* and *String Theory* series of hand-sewn artists' books for 10 years. She recently began work on a new edition of screenprinted books, after an eight-year break from printmaking. 'The new printed books are related to the *Common Threads* notebooks. They still look like notebooks, the first one contains hidden messages that can only be read with special glasses, and the series should be ready later this summer.'

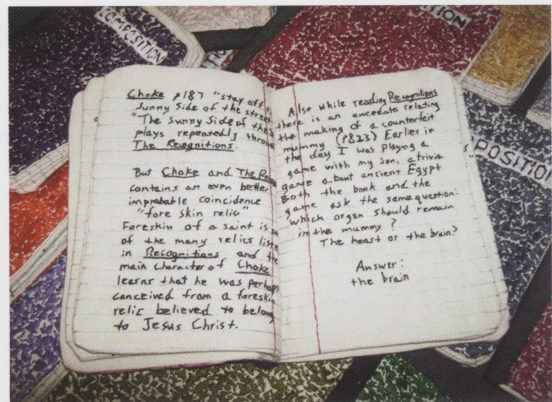
Having previously worked with screenprint and relief print to produce small editions Hicks switched to producing the *Common Threads* books in 2008, 'because I didn't want to use special art materials and processes'. She continues, 'I'm a little opposed to artists being dependent on big studios and expensive equipment. I like to use something ordinary that doesn't require specialized knowledge. If I have the opportunity to use sophisticated equipment, I will take it, I just don't like to rely on that. I live in rural Texas and I'm sure that influences my choices.' Does she enjoy bringing complex ideas to an audience through the accessibility of craft – is it a quiet subversion? 'Well, yes, sewing is a way of being quiet.'

Hicks produces around six books in the *Common Threads* series each year, each one takes around 40 hours of sewing time to finish, and encompasses 40 hours (or 2,000 pages) of reading. 'The sewn notebooks in *Common Threads* are always eight pages. All three of the books in *String Theory* are 48 pages each. Cloth books are too thick to have the same number of pages as a regular notebook, but they are similar in weight.' Hicks carries pages and threads in her backpack at all times, ready to work on in free moments. 'I work on them, for example, when a movie is playing or I'm travelling in a car or plane. I use the thread like I'm drawing with it.'

## Reading list

'Reading is such a big part of my work. I joke that I make art as an excuse to keep reading. I'm a binge reader, so I might read 10 books in a week and then make a book. I read fiction and non-fiction interchangeably. The key to maximizing good coincidences in a personal reading programme is to vary the material. I never read two books by the same author back to back. I usually try not to read the same genre in the same week. I prefer literary fiction, but some genre fiction is good, Nabokov's *Pale Fire* for example. I'm a dilettante in all subjects, but I like neuroscience, cognitive psychology, physics, cryptography, aesthetics and semiotics. Another important goal when reading for coincidences is to read often and to read fast. I like to accentuate the feeling of reading one big book. In some ways that is the thesis of my project. I'm reading all the books I'm going to read in my lifetime. I'm very aware that it is a finite amount. I fill a new one when I have had enough coincidences occur to start.'

Hicks sees the *Common Threads* and *String Theory* projects as meditations on reading and memory. 'I don't take note of anything until I see it twice. I like the way that these repetitions can skew the content of what I have read. Coincidences are the little stories that we tell ourselves about our lives, because we like to be surprised and find delight in things. I was once reading a William Gibson book, and there was a description of a sculpture hanging from the ceiling. It looked like "antique dental instruments". I remembered thinking that the phrase was evocative without really conjuring a clear image.'



The next book I read was by David Sedaris, and he lists things that he finds at a French flea market. "Antique dental instruments" is one of the items. When I read this, my impulse was to look over my shoulder. Two gears had just interlocked in the great mechanism of the universe, but I was the only person to witness it. It was great, and I just wanted to tell people.'

Does the scale of Hicks' artwork reflect that of the original books? 'I always return to huggable size, because that is the most generous and personal way to experience art. That said, my upcoming big project this year is an installation *Napoleon's Wallpaper*, with many elements and interactive parts that will be on show at Box 13 gallery in Houston, Texas later this year (<http://box13artspace.com>). I enjoy experimenting with changing scales, but everything I do ends up being book-like.'

Candace Hicks is represented by Booklyn Artists Alliance, New York [www.candacehicks.com](http://www.candacehicks.com)

## Images

*Common Threads* Volume XLVI 2013 Embroidery on canvas, 155 x 230 x 30 mm  
*String Theory* Volume II 2011 Embroidery on canvas, 450 x 600 x 150 mm  
*Common Threads* Embroidery on canvas, 155 x 230 x 30 mm, ongoing series