

No Place Like Home

ARTISTS' BOOKS Philippa Wood and Angie Butler, in the USA, produce books that celebrate life's quiet and comforting domestic pleasures, writes Sarah Bodman

A seven-month collaborative project by Philippa Wood, of the Caserom Press, and Angie Butler, of Pet Galerie Press, has recently come to fruition with a set of two artists' books exploring the home. Earlier this year, Butler and Wood were invited by Karen Kinoshita (University of Minnesota) to make new book works for the exhibition *A Sense of Place in Artists' Books*, at the Architecture Library, University of Minnesota.

Each of the two specializes in producing artists' books using letterpress; it was their interest in the process that brought them into contact with one another. After Butler was invited to the Caserom Press for a print project, the two artists decided to make something exploring 'a sense of place' for the exhibition that would also allow them to learn more about each other.

As they explain: 'We have got to know each other over the past year and realized that, although we have a few things in common: an appreciation for the culinary skills and standing of Delia Smith, manual typewriters, anything letterpress, vintage knick-knacks, the telling of a good story and so on, we had not yet visited one another's houses. The places where we dwell are intrinsically linked with revealing who we are and often there are also traces left of who lived in "our" houses before we did. So, together, we decided to carry out some domestic archaeology, by giving each other a tour of our own houses, to unearth a variety of narratives and, hopefully, a wealth of new information.'

What unites the artists – apart from their obsessions with letterpress and typewriters, they own 32 portable machines between them – is their attention to detail for the small things in life that bring people pleasure, which is evident in previous books. Wood's *Delia Taught Me To Cook* (Spring 2012) celebrates people's favourite recipes. In another, a most unusual idea for the subject of an artist's book, *The Collection 2* (Spring 2011: a screenprint, typewriter and letterpress edition of ten) explores people's uses of pressed glass celery vases. Butler's book *Mrs Derrick's Blankets* (2011) is a handmade edition of 12, celebrating the knitting of blankets for the local cats' and dogs' home, over 30 years, by one woman, hardbound with a crocheted slipcover (see Vol 20 No. 4), and *Tour De France* (June 2012) a small, letterpress printed maze book, which unfolds to reveal affectionate observations of French culture.

As their ideas for the project evolved through e-mail and Skype conversations, they published online excerpts from the tours of their houses in parallel to the printed project (<http://yourplacemyplaceproject.blogspot.co.uk>). They also selected 12 words to be used for each section of their books and for the post headings on their blogs: *Extravaganza*, *Wooden*, *Feel*, *Blue*, *Flowers*, *Memento*, *Souvenir*, *Inside*, *Utensil*, *Table setting*, *Inherited*, *Collections*, *Cabinet*.

The books were printed and bound individually, over the summer, and fastened with a removable fabric band. Individually titled No. 18 and No. 42 for each artist's house number, each volume opens to 18 x 42 cm.

Each book unfolds its covers to reveal identical flower-patterned endpapers, then the separate journeys through each house begin in bold letterpress typefaces in a range of colours:



pastels, silver, reds, greens and browns, relating to each house. Secret pockets and envelopes open to reveal buttons, typewritten letters and notes, much as bits and pieces are found around the home. The word 'Wooden' inspires memories of a set of antique toy soldiers in Wood's book and musings on gaps between the floorboards in Butler's. For *Inherited* the 1950s' decorative, black and white plate, bought by the previous occupant who lived in Butler's house for 40 years, illuminates the opening page like a welcoming moon. It is also the perfect companion piece for Wood's plate collection, which started with a 1950s' black and white plate rescued from a charity box in her grandmother's house. The stories behind each of the chosen words show the affection held for the histories of each home and the objects within. What these books also reflect is their makers: two artists asking us to consider rediscovering the small things we often miss or take for granted; they welcome the viewer in to reveal just how comforting a sense of place can be.

The *Open House* books are on show at the *Sense of Place in Artists' Books* exhibition at the Architecture Library, University of Minnesota Libraries, until 14 December. In the UK, *Open House* will launch at the *Leeds International Artist's Book Fair* in March 2013, with a tour of domestic spaces from April 2013. <http://yourplacemyplaceproject.blogspot.co.uk>

Images

Open House: No. 18 Angie Butler & *No. 42* Philippa Wood, 2012. Letterpress, typewriter, watercolour, screenprint & digital print, each book 180 x 240 mm