

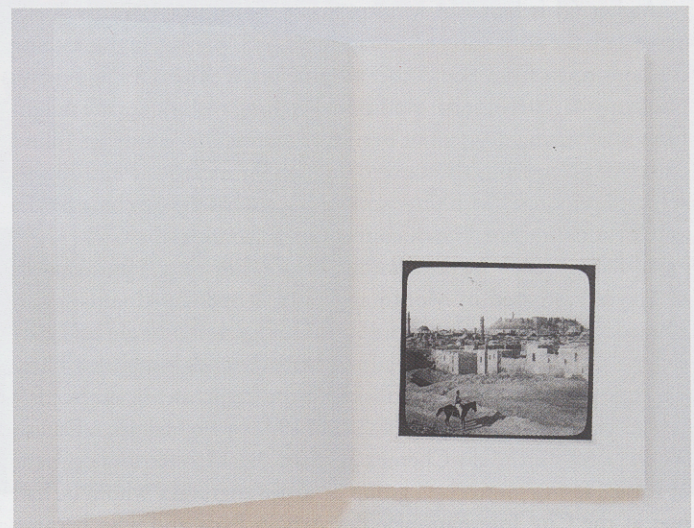
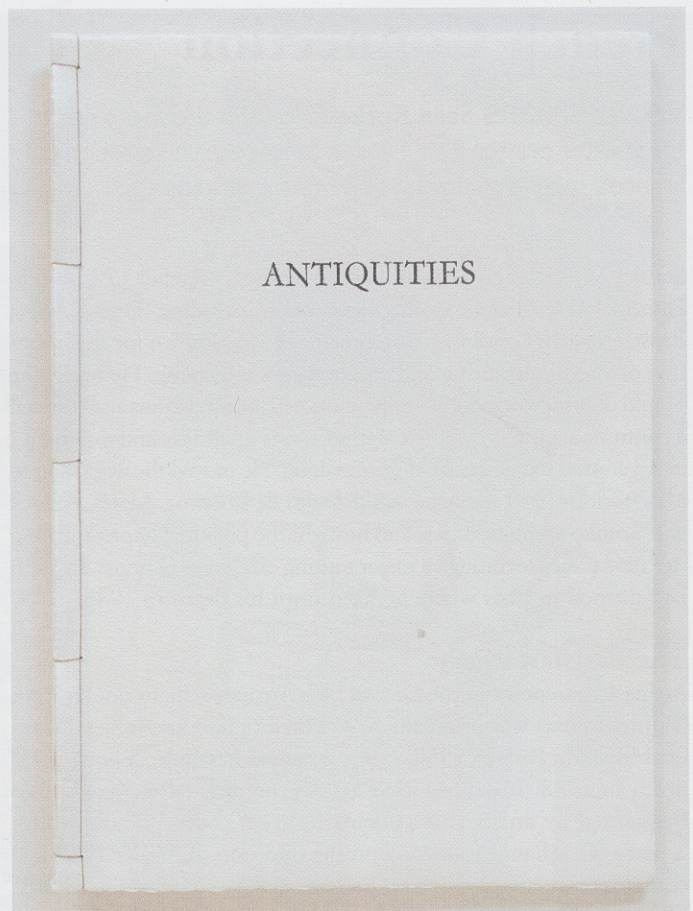
# The Heart of the Matter

**ARTISTS' BOOKS** Sarah Bodman spoke with Marian Crawford at the Artists' Book Event Brisbane about her recent artists' books made as part of The News Network Project

The seeds of these books were sown when Crawford travelled to Saudi Arabia over the period of 2013 and 2014, teaching printmaking and art and design skills to lecturers at the Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh. As she was unaccustomed to Saudi culture, Crawford began reading national newspapers such as the *Khaleej Times* and the *Arab News*. The tone of the newspapers was different to those she read at home in Australia; she started to notice tiny paragraphs within larger features that contained references to world events elsewhere. These paragraphs contained shocking news, piercing stories that had been buried within the longer copy, presented as a small matter of fact. She realized that we have to fully study the news that we read in order to not only understand its significance, but also how fast it moves on. These 'representations of anxiety', she explained, held her attention and she began to copy out the buried paragraphs: war in Syria, climate change, the plight of refugees, asylum seekers, situations that we as individuals cannot solve; and the newspapers continued to bring these stories to her from around the world. Back home in Melbourne, she noticed how similar events were broken down across rolling screens on television news programmes. There were social and political conflicts everywhere in a stream of ever faster-paced transmission; atrocities zipping past in an instant, one after another.

Unable to solve what she calls these 'intractable conflicts', Crawford wanted to make them matter. She also felt exhausted by everything she read. If she could commit these transient stories to something physical, it could become a container to hold these anxieties (akin to going to church or meditating), providing a form of release and memorial. Crawford reprinted the paragraphs with the slowest printmaking processes she could: letterpress, intaglio, photopolymer plates and a typewriter. Creating these books provided time to absorb and release the stories so that people would take time to read them and ingest their contents. She says of her process: 'Making a print transferal from the matrix, of ink onto the page is like speaking how you feel; it makes it material. It gives it a voice in another language, it externalizes it, makes it objective.'

Three artists' books in the series have been completed this year: *News*, *News Diary* and *ANTIQUITIES*. With each, what strikes the viewer immediately is the softness of their appearance – pale cream covers stitched with white thread and a plain letterpress printed title indicate a gentle subject matter. They look elegant and soothing, and initially they seem to be. *ANTIQUITIES* opens to reveal a set of images from old glass lantern slides (c. 1900) showing romantic views of the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II in Nimrud, the landscape of Aleppo with its minarets and towers, and the Grand Colonnade of the Roman temple at Palmyra in all its glory. But what are we reading alongside? Snippets of text, from newspaper headlines that begin, 'Iraq troops edge closer...'; 'IEDs are the leading cause...'; 'Saudi jets pounded', and 'Priceless, unique museum'. If the reader were to skip the text altogether – flitting as we do from one news story to another when we read the newspaper – they will stop short when the page is turned to present the next image, one that reveals the bitter facts of today, also beautifully printed in black and white. It shows a still from a video posted by Islamic State showing their destruction with sledgehammers of antiquities in the Mosul



Museum in Iraq. This arresting image sharply introduces the viewer to the violence and turmoil of the book's subject matter. This is no beautiful photo album or cherished memento of idyllic travels – it is a brutal and shocking witness to now, a lament for the suffering and losses of a people and their history. Through the slow pace of hand-set letterpress and intaglio, the time sewing these pages into their innocuous-looking covers, Crawford opens our eyes to the reality of the news. Whether we want to see it or not, we too are part of the anxiety in the heart of the present.

#### Further information

The News Network Project is a collective of artists in Auckland, Dunedin and Melbourne, whose practice involves printmaking and the relationship between the news and contemporary politics: [thenewsnetworkproject.org](http://thenewsnetworkproject.org)

#### Images

*ANTIQUITIES* (2015) by Marian Crawford. Letterpress and intaglio, 300 x 210 mm, edition of 6