

## Building Communities through Artists' Books

Four years ago in February 2013, the London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA) officially opened its doors for the first set of workshops at Britannia Works, Fish Island, London. Having spent years buying and rescuing equipment and planning ahead, Simon Goode – artist and co-founder of LCBA, visited Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA) in Minneapolis, USA and used their hugely successful community model as the template to which LCBA would aspire. Since opening, LCBA has gone from strength to strength in the UK, launching new classes and workshops, publishing artists' books with visiting and resident artists, launching new studio projects, and even its own shop. I caught up with LCBA co-founders Simon Goode and Ira Yonemura at the centre in February for some public artist's book surgeries and to hear about their exciting future plans and crossovers with MCBA in the coming year.

This summer is going to be a busy one for both centres in the UK and USA. July 2017 will see many artists, printers and small publishers converge on Minneapolis for MCBA's Book Art Biennial event. This year's focus 'Shout Out: Community Intervention, Independent Publishing, and Alternative Distribution' will celebrate the collective aspects of artists' books practice. MCBA has also received a 2017 Joyce Foundation Award to commission an exhibition of new work by renowned letterpress printer Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. ([www.kennedyprints.com](http://www.kennedyprints.com)), who will lead free community workshops for participants to hand print posters in the run-up to the Biennial. These posters form the basis of the *Open Book Takeover*, an exhibition of 5,000 community-made prints that will cover the entire Open Book Building (55,000 ft<sup>2</sup>) throughout the Biennial.

A central part of the four-day event is the MCBA Prize which runs concurrently. The winner is announced at the Biennial from the five shortlisted artists whose works are displayed for the audience to enjoy. It's a huge celebration of international artists' books practice, and this year Jeff Rathermel - Executive Director of MCBA has invited LCBA's Simon Goode to be one of the judges alongside Steven Daiber, book artist and proprietor of Red Trillium Press, and Karen Kunc, book artist and proprietor of Constellation Studios. The MCBA Prize is a popular event, encouraging a diversity of bookmaking that invites entries from artists all over the world. Ken Botnick's 150pp, letterpress printed *Diderot Project* won the last award in 2015, selected from 168 entries (all of which can be viewed online at [mcbaprize.org](http://mcbaprize.org)). Goode is looking forward to seeing the variety of approaches to book arts from international artists, as he says, "I'm familiar with practices in Europe but I'm curious and excited to see new examples of books that I haven't encountered before." Simon will also give a talk at the 'Shout Out' Biennial explaining LCBA's work with the art and design community in the UK, promoting artists' books and building skills through the plethora of workshops and training that goes on in their studios.

Back in London, more developments have been taking place at LCBA. This year Ira Yonemura launched a new A6 artists' books, zines and publications project inviting artists to submit A6-sized works for sale at LCBA ([www.a6books.org](http://www.a6books.org)). This open submission programme aims to promote the book as a democratic multiple, with a stock of affordable books for sale that LCBA will also take to national and international fairs and events.

In between all of this Ira and Simon have been busy co-authoring a new publication that will be released with a series of celebratory events at LCBA on their return from Minnesota. *Making Books: A guide to creating hand-crafted books* by the London Centre for Book Arts (ISBN 9781911216209) will be published by Pavilion Books on 10th August 2017. The book introduces new audiences to hand bookbinding and sets 20 different book projects to undertake, all photographed step-by-step in LCBA's bindery, in between public workshops.

What strikes me most as a visitor to both, is the warm welcome that awaits anyone who calls in; each of these centres is built around a community of artistic practice that actively encourages public engagement. Each centre also hits the road, taking community classes and workshops out to the wider public in both countries. Studio members and the public drop in each day at the centres for workshops, exhibitions, launches and readings, or just for a coffee, browse and chat about artists' books. Both LCBA and MCBA provide a great environment to engage with and build a community around artists' books.

For LCBA information and events visit: <http://www.londonbookarts.org>

For the MCBA Biennial programme visit: <http://www.mnbookarts.org/biennial/>