

Turning the pages

This year I had the pleasure and honour of being one of the judges for *turn the page*, the annual extravaganza for artists' books in Norfolk, UK. I also used my time to interview Jules Allen, founder of *turn the page* as we finished reviewing the applications for this year's event. Allen is a formidable champion of printmaking and bookbinding and has built this wonderful event from scratch. After cementing her passion for printmaking during her degree studies at Norwich University of the Arts, Allen taught herself bookbinding from any manuals she could find and then was lucky enough to continue her studies through the expertise of retired trade experts keen to pass on their skills at Norwich's John Jarrold Printing Museum, where she now in turn, volunteers.

Allen's determination to promote printmaking and bookbinding across the region as part of *turn the page*'s mission, extends from her love of both and an inspirational turn of events in 2010, when she was selected for a retreat on the theme of Distribution at the Wysing Arts Centre in Cambridge. Allen's concurrent collaboration with the musician Marina Florance on a book project developed the idea of holding a specialist event that would showcase and promote artists' books to the region's audience. There are many fairs around the UK, but this would be the first in Norfolk, and the first to focus on printmaking. After researching suitable venues in the city, she settled for the iconic Forum building in Norwich and assisted by Florance with the administrative practicalities, Allen dived into developing the event, self-funding the first *turn the page* in 2012. Now in 2016, celebrating its fifth anniversary as an established, major event on the national book arts calendar, *turn the page* has hosted exhibitors from Australia, Europe, Japan, South Korea and the USA. Allen has also successfully applied for two series of Arts Council funding, allowing her to expand the programme and outreach events in recent and coming years. The Arts Council funding has enabled a roll-out of mobile printmaking workshops in the local community in partnership with making *The Norfolk Longbook*, a large-scale artist's book created by the people of Norfolk (currently 10-metres and growing) that is added to annually and displayed at each *turn the page* event.

The venue itself, lends to the celebratory festival appeal of the event, The Forum is a huge community building that also houses The Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, which has held the title of most popular library in the UK for seven consecutive years. And with 13,000 visitors to each iteration of *turn the page* it is easy to understand and appreciate the popularity of this showcase event. Turn the page isn't your average artist's book fair - it's a unique experience.

Alongside the free readings and workshops you would expect at this type of event, there's a different atmosphere created through scale and access. A variety of installations of sculptural and interactive works and curated plinth and cases displays are on offer for the public to meander through and enjoy at their leisure. Exhibiting artists show their works on stands arranged within these spaces, allowing visitors the chance to stop and talk and appreciate all the works on show in a liberating environment. Having such a huge open space means that artists and the public can intermingle in celebrating works by national and international solo artists and collectives and guest curated displays - such as the selection of works that will be on show from the Laurence Sterne Trust's Shandy Hall collection this year.

Allen is adamant in her belief in the passing on of skills in traditional printmaking and bookbinding, and actively invites colleges to exhibit student works as the next generation of book artists. Student participation is encouraged through awarding a Graduate Prize. Caroline Penn (who studied MA Book Arts at Camberwell College of Arts), the winner of the first Graduate Prize last year, returns this year with a solo display as a result of her cash prize to develop new work and exhibit at the following *turn the page*. She also plans to collaborate this year with Jo Stafford and Vicki Johnson founders of 'Print To The People', which offers workshops in a variety of printmaking techniques.

turn the page artist's book fair takes place at The Forum, Norwich, UK, Friday 24th and Saturday 25th June 2016, 10am - 6pm each day. Free Entry. And, as Allen has phrased it herself, it's a celebration of "Books... but not as you know them".