

Lost and Found

ARTISTS' BOOKS Sarah Bodman explores The Library of Lost Books, an initiative to salvage and transform discarded library volumes

I first met Susan Kruse, the curator of this project at the Manchester Artist's Book Fair in 2011. Kruse's table was adjacent to ours and we quickly got chatting about books and in turn, her remarkable project. The Library of Lost Books, based in Birmingham, UK was founded that September, when Kruse realized that withdrawn books at the central library were destined for recycling as pulp, as the library staff began preparation for the move to a new purpose-built library. Kruse confesses that, when she noticed the large blue bin, 'being nosy, I opened the lid to discover that it was full of old books'. Horrified, she began to salvage those books she could carry and decided to curate a project that would give them new life as works of art. From the discards, Kruse selected 48 titles including novels, manuscripts and music sheets and sent them out to invited artists and printmakers to turn into altered books.

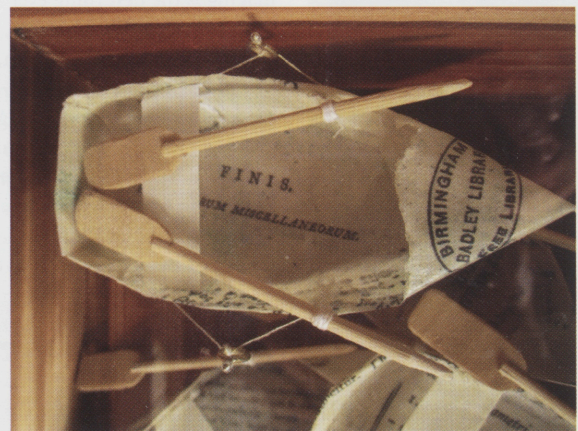
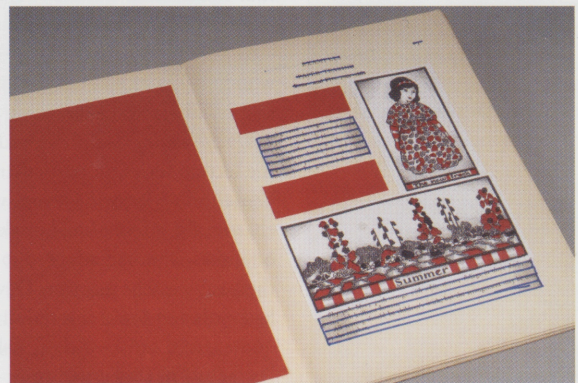
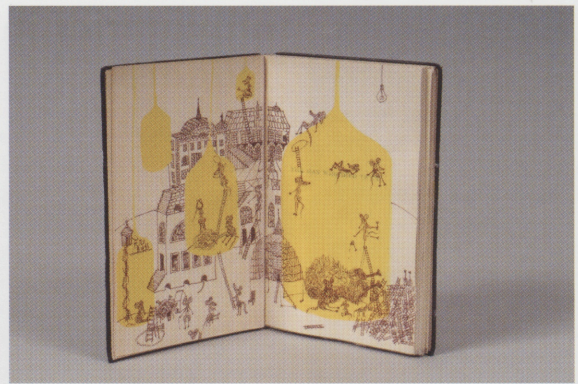
The idea of recycling withdrawn library books into artists' books has surfaced previously, most notably in the project *Long Overdue: Book Renewal*, a collaboration between Maine College of Art and the Portland Public Library, that saw 200 artists turn withdrawn books into works of art to re-enter into the library system for the public to borrow. And of course many individual artists create altered books; Brian Dettmer, Su Blackwell, Alexander Korzer-Robinson and Guy Begbie for example, produce wonderfully inventive works from discarded books.

Kruse is not making any protest at the discarding of library books, as she explained at a talk she gave about the project at Manchester Artist's Book Fair a year later in 2012, 'partly because I agree with many of the arguments for it, partly because Birmingham Libraries have helped to enable the project, but *mostly* because if they hadn't thrown the books out I wouldn't have got my greedy mitts on them!'

Kruse's dedication to the project is admirable. From starting out two years ago with no funding, Kruse has determinedly curated the project, encouraged people to join in, devised membership schemes to help with exhibition costs, and built a network of artists and academics who have supported the project through their contributions, whether creating books or arranging associated events. Kruse has a small army of dedicated supporters, referred to as 'the project's fairy Godmothers and Godfathers', and acknowledges a great amount of encouragement and support from staff at Wolverhampton University, in particular Jessica Glaser, and from Sheaffer, who are funding the production costs of a book about the project.

The new Library of Birmingham opened its doors to the public this September, as one of the largest public libraries in Europe. The Library of Lost Books returned a selection of its books for exhibition as part of the opening festival in November 2013. Alongside the exhibition, a three-day conference celebrating the book in all its forms was organized in collaboration with the Library of Birmingham, Dr Matthew Day from Newman University College, Birmingham, and Caroline Archer, head of the typographic hub at the University of Central England. 'Resurrecting the Book' took place in the new library (www.resurrectingthebook.org), with plenary speakers including the American critic Johanna Drucker.

The list of participants who have altered books for the project includes some well-known book artists: Les Bicknell, Kate Bufton and Elizabeth Willow are just a few of the 48 contributors. Some



beautiful examples of works in the exhibition include Linda Carrerio's piece, which was returned from Calgary, Canada. The cover of the 1806 publication was cut into a boat shape, but the book remains intact, presented in a maplewood case full of tiny handmade paper boats. I especially like how the Birmingham Free Libraries stamp from 1901 has been carefully incorporated into the prow of the uppermost boat. *The Man Who Died Twice* by Edwin Arlington Robinson, was reworked by Freya Pocklington. A completely transformed cover now contains drawings of mythical creatures depicting life in the inner-city rat race. *Pictorial Paper Cutting for Children* by Ellice G. Benton (1936), has been meticulously hand-altered by the artist Ian Pyper into a beautiful new work. All the books, having resided temporarily in Birmingham's new library – a building that is full of hope for the future of the book – are off again, and will travel in exhibitions around the UK during 2014. Catch them if you can!

For project updates visit: <http://thelibraryoflostbooks.blogspot.com>

For details of the Library Membership Scheme visit: <http://thelibraryoflostbooks.org>

Images

Freya Pocklington, altered bookwork for the Library of Lost Books, 2013. Photograph: Prof David Knight

Ian Pyper, altered bookwork for the Library of Lost Books, 2013. Photograph: Prof David Knight

Linda Carrerio, altered bookwork for the Library of Lost Books, 2013. Photograph: Linda Carrerio