

## A multi-coloured life

**ARTISTS' BOOKS** Klaus von Mirbach is inspired by sources as diverse as his children's toothbrushes to the great Flemish painter van Eyck, writes Sarah Bodman

The German artist Klaus von Mirbach studied graphic design, illustration and modern German literature. An artist's book maker, writer and theatre director, he lives and works in Mönchengladbach, north Rhine-Westphalia, where, throughout 2010, he will create a new artist's book every week for a year.

The trigger for the project was his realization of how much artwork and ephemera he has collected and the idea of how they might be recycled with a purpose.

'In my studio over the week there is so much paper gathered in drawers, shelves, maps and the wastepaper basket. What is important, what is unimportant – for me? There are so many texts, excerpts, single lines from poems, things like a drawing a child gave me at the kindergarten where I work once a week, an article from a newspaper, paper for making endpapers, wrapping paper, some of my drawings and a lot of notes, and so on. I am sifting through these materials once a week, where I make a quick, superficial selection, a chance for 'chance', cutting everything to one size and then binding it. Each book is produced to be 20 x 20 cm, perfect bound with hard covers. The first issue was 150 pages with many original drawings. Once a week, that will be 52 books in 2010. I can't wait to see if it works over one year.'

Alongside this project von Mirbach has been studiously working on a large-scale altered book, which he selected for UWE's *Regenerator II* project, which turns discarded library books into regenerated artists' books. The project has more than 60 artists across Europe, USA and Australia creating altered books for the archive, which launches as a permanent online gallery this month, when the books are returned to the library's handling collection of artists' books. The book von Mirbach chose: Sir Martin Conway's *The van Eycks and their followers*, is 500 pages long and he is using every page.

When von Mirbach read the book he had received, he began to feel that 'in a sense, every artist is a follower of the van Eycks'. With this firmly in mind he has been using the original as a sketchbook to record daily life in his home in Mönch-engladbach, six centuries after van Eyck's time. von Mirbach's modern documentary journal focuses on one concept, namely: drawing = recording = storytelling.

The original, battered book was painstakingly taken apart and the covers cleaned before work began. Von Mirbach separated the individual signatures, cut them open and then, for him, a transformation.

'The book becomes a *Szizzenbuch*, an indication book, of whatever arises: a situation, a dream, a philosophical consideration. And it is this slowing down to make a way of seeing, a *Sehmeditation*; in order to draw, dream and see as an experience of chance. For the past few years we have lived here in this road, in this house, built in 1927 for employees of the textiles industry. Around the corner is the



old weaving mill and, further away, the old owner's mansion. In this house: a loud, merry and multi-coloured life with our two children. My book will tell of this life in pictures, through the things I draw and note – in those, this life is contained. There is no objective or correct design, just life, the heart's desire, the melody and the sound of things, no photography, just pencil and paint.'

As a modern-day follower of the van Eycks, von Mirbach's book depicts family life in a particular time and place, incorporating letters received, used travel tickets, paintings of shoes on the floor, wildlife glimpsed through the window, reproductions of brand name items, a table full of food packets purchased, medicine bottles, song lyrics, a still life of the children's toothbrushes on the window sill, drawings by the children, conversations between his family. There is also an imaginative sense of play, as historical characters such as Matisse drop in to visit and discuss Jan van Eyck's work.

Klaus von Mirbach is also sharing his regenerated book with the wider artists' books community. As he completes each new section, he is uploading photographs of the pages onto Artist Books 3.0, for viewing: [www.artistbooks.ning.com/profile/KlausvonMirbach](http://www.artistbooks.ning.com/profile/KlausvonMirbach). He is also recording all his work with the book and his weekly books project at [www.klausvonmirbach.blogspot.com](http://www.klausvonmirbach.blogspot.com)

To view the online archive of all of the artists' books produced for the *Regenerator II* project, visit: [www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/projects.htm](http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/projects.htm)

### Images

Sample pages from Klaus von Mirbach's project to create a new artist's book every week during 2010. Each book page is 200 x 200 mm, perfect bound with hard covers. See [www.klausvonmirbach.blogspot.com](http://www.klausvonmirbach.blogspot.com)