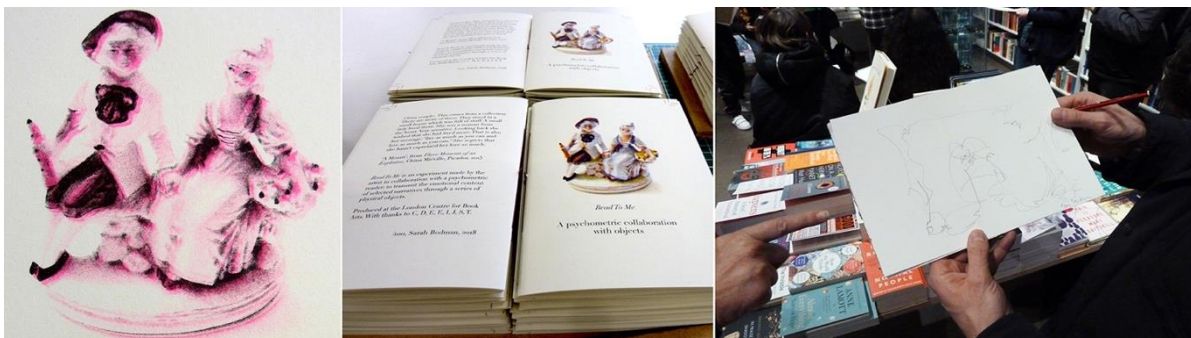


<b>Institution: University of the West of England, Bristol</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 32</b>		
<b>Title of case study: Artists' books: establishing a community of practice</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 – 2020</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Sarah Bodman	Senior Research Fellow	1997 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Art in book form and artists' books, a long-standing medium for artistic expression, have tended to remain marginal to the artistic mainstream. Dr Sarah Bodman's work at UWE has contributed significantly to the recent, measurable resurgence in understanding and recognition of artists' books by the wider artistic community. Building on her own practice-based research, her deep engagement in the field has expanded and strengthened the field of practice internationally, through creating a hub connecting a network of artists across the UK, Australia, Brazil, Russia, South Africa and beyond. Her work has increased and enriched the understanding of artists' books on the part of curators, librarians, the public and the artistic community at large, through her writing and through participatory projects, publishing, exhibitions and events. By widening knowledge and appreciation, she has also expanded commercial opportunities and the market for artists' books.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Creators of artists' books seek to situate and understand their practice. UWE research works with the artistic community to connect artists' books practices and understanding across the international field. Dr Bodman uses her artistic practice to interrogate the creation and reception of artists' books, for example <i>Read to Me</i>, an experiment in collaboration with a psychometric reader to transmit the narratives through physical objects. The touring exhibition project invited artists and the public to contribute to the evolving artwork (<b>R1</b>).</p>		
		
<p>Figure 1: <i>Read To Me</i> artist's book in production at London Centre for Book Arts (2018) and public drawing event at Arnolfini bookshop, Bristol (2019).</p>		
<p>As a practitioner-researcher, Bodman surveys and documents activity through publishing the <i>Book Arts Newsletter (BAN)</i>, <i>Artist's Book Yearbook (ABYB)</i> and <i>The Blue Notebook journal for artists' books</i> as a 'vital research infrastructure' (<b>S5</b>). This shares ideas, exhibitions, workshops, opportunities and artefacts with the community. It has identified significant gaps in the field for critical discussion of distinct artists' books practices neglected by the traditional focus on the US.</p>		

## Impact case study (REF3)

Bodman's practice-led research sought to bring together artists, historians, curators and critics to investigate disparate geographic areas within the wider context and history of international practice (R2). Peer-to-peer knowledge sharing at physical events such as Bristol Artists' Book Event (BABE) and public symposia (*Artists' Books in Australia and Brazil – looking to the past to read into the future*), and in virtual spaces (*BAN, Blue Notebook*) established new, more balanced, and richer understanding of artists' books.

This repositions and strengthens knowledge of Eastern European, Australian and Latin American practices in particular (R2, R3, R4). The research has found and conveyed how artists' books have developed historically in these regions due to political, colonial and geographical factors. Australian artists' high craft skills come from using presses and equipment dating back to colonising governmental offices from the 1850s, whereas Brazilian artists' production and dissemination of printed works brought risks similar to censorship problems faced by Eastern European artists until the mid-1980s. The research considers the context of these in relation to production and materials. It does so from an artist's perspective, in a way that reaches out beyond academia (R3, R5), stimulating discussion and interweaving artists' books into wider publishing practices (R3, R4, R6).



Figure 2: *Book Arts Newsletter* (BAN) published online every 4-6 weeks as a free download, 2,794 subscribers, *Artist's Book Yearbook* (ABYB) and *The Blue Notebook journal for artists' books*

Establishing an international community of practice is vital in creating greater understanding of specific, geo-located artists' books creation. It allows the previously neglected role and value of artists' books to be repositioned within wider art history and presented confidently to the public as cultural, covetable artefacts. Bodman has used her stance as a practitioner-researcher, making artists' books herself (R5), to introduce empathetic and inclusive models which embed artists, librarians, educators and curators into the research investigations.

From these, the project findings become the shared product of collaboration with their audiences. This enables knowledge exchange at local and international levels (R3, R4, R5), proposing inclusive language and terminology (R4), identifying connections between disparate practices (R3, R6) and examines how physical books can endure given the challenges of digital technologies (R1, R2).

### 3. References to the research

**R1** Bodman, S. (2018) 'Read to Me: A psychometric collaboration with objects', produced at the London Centre for Book Arts July 2018, exhibition: Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, NY, USA, 09/09/18 - 27/10/18; Winchester School of Art, UK 15/11/18 - 20/12/18; Collins Memorial Library, Puget Sound USA, 12/03/19 - 12/05/19, Bower Ashton Library, UWE Bristol 01/07/19 - 31/08/19; Flaxman Library, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 26/08/19 - 27/09/19. Article: *Materiality, creativity, material poetics, Axon: Creative Explorations*, Vol 8, No 1, May 2018.

<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/864672> <https://axonjournal.com.au/issue-14/read-me>

**R2** Bodman, S. (2013) 'Os "livros" são eléctricos: 'Are 'Books' Electric? Some possibilities for the artist's book in the 21st Century' in Edith Derdyk (ed.), *Entre ser um e ser mil: o objecto livro e suas poéticas*, Senac, São Paulo, Brazil, ISBN 978 85 396 0359 6, pp121-43

<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/933057>

**R3** Bodman, S. (2017) 'Communities of Practice: Building an Internationally Connected Practice in and for the Book Arts'. *Keynote: Booknesses: Colloquium on South African Book Arts*, University of Johannesburg, South Africa, 21/03/17 – 26/03/17. *Booknesses: Taking Stock of the Book Arts in South Africa*. Editor: David Paton, University of Johannesburg, pp5-16

[http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/oid/downloads/1/223\\_1\\_01\\_01\\_03\\_PM\\_217\\_6\\_09\\_02\\_15\\_AM\\_Booknesses%20Colloquium%20Papers%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.theartistsbook.org.za/oid/downloads/1/223_1_01_01_03_PM_217_6_09_02_15_AM_Booknesses%20Colloquium%20Papers%20(2).pdf)

**R4** Bodman, S. & Sowden, T. (eds), (2013) *A Manifesto For The Book*. Free download 187pp book (ISBN 978-1-906501-04-4) and online archive. Principal outcome from the AHRC-funded research project: 'What will be the canon for the artist's book in the 21st Century?'

<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/935983>

**R5** Bodman, S. (2019) *I Made This For You*, solo exhibition, 15th AMACI - Giornata del Contemporaneo. Curated by Antonio Freiles, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea L. Barbera, Messina, Italy, 12/10/2019 - 15/11/2019

<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/5572954/sarah-bodman-i-made-this-for-you>

**R6** Bodman, S. (2016) 'Liberatura, literatura i książka artystyczna: kontekst, treść i istotne znaczenie materiału' (Liberature, Literature and the Artist's Book: Context, Content and Material Meaning). Polish translation by Łukasz Matuszyk, in *ER(R)GO. Teoria–Literatura–Kultura, 32–Liberatura*, editor: Katarzyna Bazarnik, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, ISSN 1508-6305, pp91-116. <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/905331>

Dr Bodman uses her own creative practice to widen audience engagement and understanding internationally, from collaborative making for World Book Night, to her own solo exhibitions: *I Made This for You* (Italy) or *Read With Me* (USA) and works included in many group exhibitions internationally. She has been a juror for the Minnesota Center for Book Arts' MCBA Prize (the largest book arts centre in the world), *Turn the Page* Artist's Book Fair (UK), the Designer Bookbinders UK competition, and has given public talks at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia) and FADA Gallery, Johannesburg (South Africa).

#### 4. Details of the impact

Over the last decade, Dr Bodman's research has been influential in a number of areas: bringing practitioners and collectors who were not aware of each other together; helping to develop a market and appreciation for artists' books; and encouraging more artists to make books.

##### Expanding the artists' books community

UWE's research since 2013 has widened artists' engagement and understanding internationally (S1-S4).

*This 'has introduced artists from Brazil and Europe to Australia, and from Australia to Europe through exhibitions, articles and public events...with new ways of thinking about the types of artworks made here and abroad' (S5, S6).*

Independent curators and publishers in Kirov, Krasnogorsk and St Petersburg feel more connected through using Bodman's research infrastructure as a resource. A *Rukssian* [sic] *Artists' Books* exhibition tour (2014-2015), stimulated understanding and knowledge exchange between 60 artists from Russia and the UK (S1). They note:

*'we have new artists sharing artists' books and knowledge from Norway, Great Britain, Italy, Denmark (and now India) who have become regular participants in our exhibitions' (S2). One commented that "being included in Dr Bodman's publications has given me an extensive network of contacts and artists to connect with and I can also promote my work to a wider audience' (S3).*

UWE's research brought speakers from Australia and Brazil (where the importance of mail art to Brazilian artists was explored) to join UK counterparts for public discussions on contemporary artists' books practice in the two countries. This included over 100 examples of physical artefacts for handling and analysis with the public (S5, S6).

### **Contributing to the artist economy**

Bodman is co-founder of the biennial Bristol Artist's Book Event (BABE) at Arnolfini Bristol (established 2007). The event has evolved into an international showcase for artists' books, with 100 plus exhibitors and a growing public audience (7,150 visitors in 2015; 9,630 in 2017; 13,000 in 2019). BABE seeks to create a direct connection between the public and the book arts (S7). Visitors handle books and meet makers in a friendly environment, with free talks and performances. Artists sell to collectors and the public and meet their peers. An independent exhibitor remarked:

*'BABE 2019 was the busiest artist's book fair I have participated in, in the UK, since 2005. It was financially successful and led to me publishing several very successful series of books' (S8).*

UWE's research has led to greater legitimisation of artists' books, such that it has secured a place for these artforms in a national collection of printed works. The Head of Contemporary British Collections at the British Library stated that it now not only actively collects artists' books but also holds regular events (*Artists' Books Now* series), and exhibits artists' books.

*'Almost the entire back catalogue of significant artists such as Ken Campbell and Ian Tyson have been acquired in the confidence that there is external benchmarking of their significance...Dr Bodman and the various kinds of active research infrastructure she has established, has had a profound impact on the collecting and dissemination work of the British Library' (S7).*

UWE surgeries give expert advice on making and marketing. One independent artist observed that:

*'The surgery has proved to be a pivotal, and defining moment in my practice as a Book Artist... Dr Bodman's research has resulted in my books being exhibited in national and international group shows, and sales to collections and collectors' (S9).*

### **Enriching public understanding of artists' books**

Artists' books are a recognisable, non-intimidating means of presenting ideas on a one-to-one basis with the viewer/reader. Creating participatory projects such as World Book Night (WBN) events extends public understanding of what artists' books are and how they are made.



Margaret Atwood mentioned UWE's 2016 WBN project *Serena Joy* on social media after receiving the artist's book made in tribute to her *Handmaid's Tale* novel. The artefact is now in the collection of Tate Britain.



Figure 3: *Serena Joy* (collaborative artist's book for World Book Night 2016, in tribute to the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood), and Margaret Atwood's Tweets about the project.

Bodman's WBN event in 2019 saw 47 contributors respond to *Under Milk Wood* for the *Gwalia Gazette* which is in 20 national and international collections, including the Yale Center for British Art, USA. In 2020, despite disruption caused by Covid-19 forcing the WBN to move online, 98 contributors participated; double the number of the previous year (**S10**). Over twelve years, Bodman's curatorial research model has loaned hundreds of artefacts to 85 plus exhibitions, workshops, community classes, schools, libraries, galleries, prisons, clubs and bookshops around the world. This brings audiences into direct contact with these artefacts. For example, a selection of artists' books loaned for 'Book Lab, Artists' Books', a handling exhibition at Hauser & Wirth Somerset, September 2018 – January 2019.

It is not often that visitors to galleries can handle the artworks. Bodman's model has inspired staff at The British Library to establish regular events where artists bring their books and talk about them to the public audience.

*'Only two decades ago the artist's book was an anomalous artform, not especially welcome within an art collection or a library. Dr Bodman's work has helped change that, making it a worthy 'genre' which we now know explores the nature of the book and the nature of art at the same time' (S7).*

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**S1** 'Rukssian Artists' Books exhibition catalogue (pp.10-11)

**S2** Testimonial from independent artists' book exhibitions curator (Kirov), member of the independent International Association of book artists Kniga Khudozhnika, Russia

**S3** Testimonial from organiser of publishing house "Yulzdat" (Saint Petersburg), curator of museum projects.

**S4** [Booknesses: Taking stock of the book arts in South Africa Colloquium](#), Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, [University of Johannesburg, South Africa, 21 - 26 March 2017](#)

**S5** Testimonial from Lecturer in Fine Art, Griffith University (Queensland, Australia)

**S6** [Artists' Books in Australia and Brazil – looking to the past to read into the future, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2018](#) and [exhibition catalogue](#)

**S7** Testimonial from Head of Contemporary British Collections, The British Library

**S8** [Bristol Artist's Book Event 2019](#)

**S9** Testimonial from independent artist

**S10** [World Book Night 2020 - Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?](#) and [exhibition catalogue](#)