

Leaf Love

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Abstract

My auto-ethnographic, in-practice creative thesis *Leaf Love*, explores the parameters of what it is to be encased in 'experienced' female skin. I draw upon the techniques of lived-experience as a literary publisher and fine press printer to create unconventional book objects representing the body ego. In reflexive dialogue with the structures that emerge, this material research aims to disrupt values and standards inherent in book culture and in the perceptions of the body as we know and accept them.

The title *Leaf Love*, asks for reflection to our roots in nature to initialize space for new beginnings. *Leaf Love* is a hands-on inquiry into obscurity, transparency, intimacy, and the visceral nature of the body through process, and shares the affect born in repetition and endurance. By addressing ways of intervening on text, creating references to skin in my book objects, and interrogating the dated parameters still resonant in book making, I present my research outcomes with the purpose of stimulating active reconsideration of hegemonic constructs of love and loss.

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to family

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Introduction

Leaf Love is the title of my thesis exhibition. It comprises a series of three-dimensional constructions that examine the metaphorical connections between bodies and books. I see bodies and books as substrates that express histories and experiences as narratives scribed into their surfaces. This research aims to prompt a consideration of the effects of time on skin. The work acts to reveal the intersections of the core themes of textual disruption, skin and books, in an attempt to appreciate and also disrupt their usual connections, encourage a fresh experience of them, and open space for new interpretations.

My autoethnographic practice entwines layers of affect derived from lived experiences: echoes of my grandmothers' lace-making; memories of daunting events as a street youth; transformations wrought in pregnancy and challenges faced in parenting three sons. I came to my graduate studies from a career in graphic design and marketing, typography, hand printing, and book making, and from beginnings in a cooperative creative print and publishing venture (1970-80). Design studio work over decades exercised my tendency to use letterforms to influence the alternate meanings a text can suggest. Most recently, I ran a fine print atelier providing specialty print effects in bespoke, specialty, exhibition printing, and chapbook publishing projects. Arriving in fine art studies from a design studio culture where digital innovations evolve in daily practice, I became interested in those applications that would facilitate tactile, evocative, short-run print effects, especially those that evidenced active hands-on making. For instance, my use of deep-impression letterpress printing, popularized by photopolymer plates and the 'Letterpress Revolution', demonstrates the plate's impact, pushing into fluffy, pillowing paper produced specially for this approach, and applying ink precisely and evenly along the bottom of the impressions.

In letterpress, the printer participates in a generations-deep commitment to the 'pursuit of perfection' while managing archaic equipment and colloquial knowledge. I learned these skills in production of hundreds of fine print projects. In *Leaf Love*, I challenge the rules and assumptions built into my hand-printing and book-making practice. I make every attempt to

evade falling back into ‘the ways we’ve always done it’ by drawing parallels between books and bodies, delving into more sculptural terrain, while shifting my pursuit from design to fine art.

Leaf Love research project is inspired by an incident in my personal experience, in which the crackling of dried leaves underfoot became overlaid with the rhythms of Gertrude Stein’s poetry, stuck and repeating in my mind. I mused on the metaphor of leaves in books and in nature, and of parchment skins and pages in book history. The concerns for my enquiry were seeded at that time—Textual Disruption, Skin, and Books. My reflexive discovery is based on an interconnected examination of these interests through layers of in-hand discovery. As in-practice material research, this project employs studio experimentation in a staged process to interrogate evidence trapped in trace and affect, and presented in the objects that are created. Blending observations from the process with inspirations garnered from a strategic literature review and the works of other female artists, I observe how a synthesis of these influences could be read—echoed, enhanced and interpreted—through the autoethnographic lens of my origins in lace-making, fine printing, and literary publishing.

Initial experiments established printed, shellacked paper as a core substrate for my enquiry: I saw these sheets, like pages or leaves in a book, as thin layers of skin. Hundreds of them were made ready to be combined into free-standing forms. The early works resemble seedpods, membranes, or cocoons; spines of books seem to reflect my own spine, and recall the sinewy veins in leaves; lacerations and mending in the delicate leaves suggest piercings, stitches and scars that connote experienced skin in *Leaf Love*. The impressions the words make on these fragile pages reinforce the metaphor of skin as a page and body as a book.

Leaf Love presents various renderings of two excerpts of text drawn from Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans, Being a History of a Family’s Progress*, impressed into the pages of the book objects. I investigate the power of working with known texts in new configurations: A world of associations connected to Stein and her works (Paris c.1930) populate the pages of my book objects with echoes of her stylistic repetitions as they evolve. Inevitably, my interpretation of her poetry, conferred to the structures that have arisen in this process, add another layer and the experience of a distinct ‘type of reading’ to my observations.

The selected texts are particularly significant. As a primary inspiration for the project, excerpts from Stein's *Americans* are reproduced as text blocks on skin-like pages. Composed in wood type, the title is also inspired by Stein's signature literary style; the repetition of these impressions throughout the exploration alludes to the capacity we have for reading subtext and inference that proximate to the words. Developing innovative techniques in print and moving the pages into sculptural objects that I refer to as 'book objects,' my works invite participants to read differently (read-into, read between the lines, read more bodily).

In this support paper, I will introduce my research methodologies first, recounting the autoethnographic process of exploration into books and bodies, primarily through their materiality and physicality. I consult, ongoing, a core of texts in a strategic literature review. I'm also influenced by artists' works both historic and current, and have incorporated their input throughout this thesis project.

With *Leaf Love's* pages, leaves or surfaces scored by the printed impressions of her poetry, the section on Textual Disruptions mines connections between Stein's strategic wordplay and its presence through the book objects in my thesis exhibit. I consult Astrid Lorange's, *How Reading is Written, A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein*, as the author analyzes Stein's compositional approach and the ideas her works stirred in her time. Stein's poetry, impressed into and laid over translucent leaves, randomly repeated, overlapped and truncated in my artworks, enhance the sense of the delicacy and fragility in the skin, paper or leaves, suggesting the impermanence of knowledge contained in books and in bodies.

In the section entitled *Skin*, *Leaf Love* research delves into ideas, evidence and connotations that position the surfaces of pages as if they were thin, peeled strips of human skin, flayed, pierced, and scarred: marked with experiences. I reflect on the endurance and the strength of skin, fibres and spine. I consider skin a protective surface for the body's organic interiors, an instrument of touch and intimacy, and a screen on which to determine, appreciate and project an identity. Concentrating on a return to our roots as a way to energize a deconstruction of hegemonic beliefs, biases and behaviors, my delving inquiry into skin is informed primarily by Claudia Benthien's *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and World*, where she explores the historical and cultural associations of the body ego.

In the section entitled Books, I probe materials, methods and concepts akin to traditional book making, while thwarting or stretching their identification and operation. I reflect on my early practice in the print and bookmaking industry, before women were invited into ‘the shop.’ Producing print and books in the days, I was also reading to my children every evening, physically connecting with a child and a book, while the ambiance of every reading event amplified the narrative’s expanse in our imaginations. With arms circling, the pitch of the reader’s voice, inflections to characterize dialogue, the images, size and styling of the books, and even the toys that attended our readings, prompted layered interpretations of the texts. With the physicality of books and reading in mind, I designed, and then ‘disrupted’ handprinted literary chapbooks, recalling Johanna Drucker’s observation in “Intimate Authority: Women, Books and the Public-Private Paradox”, that women share issues on “their own terms” by making books, stipulating that, “these activities are ... connected to... traditionally sanctioned women’s pursuits” (14). Throughout my fine print experiences, my participation challenged norms.

Leaf Love is informed by a lineage of female artists whose work is rooted in expressions of the body, nature and books. In *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, contributions by Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Anne Hamilton provide a set of concepts and methods aligned specifically with the Feminist Art Movement and the exigencies of female artists’ lives beginning in the 70s. My introduction to Louise Bourgeois and her works provided a conceptual grounding for my early artistic explorations and gave historic depth to my current practice. In *Leaf Love* I suspect narratives arising from between Stein’s lines of overlapping and evolving texts, recalling Bourgeois’ *Cell* installations, which seem almost-populated by characters like shadows amongst garments, ‘left hanging’. Bourgeois also challenged the traditional form and hierarchical elements of the book, positioning images as primary content, while poetic captions interpret images. Author Eleanor Heartney posits that Kiki Smith’s works give primacy to sensual exploration, intimacy, and sensuously-experienced occurrences, encoded in the frailty and fragility of flesh. Encountering her fleshy burdened female figures I am overwhelmed with an urgency to protect ‘the female.’ I find echoes of this urgency in the urgency of *Cornucopia* and in the tilting almost-erect stance of *Tower*.

In *Leaf Love* research I aim to disrupt conventions of books and bodies. In my studio process I have created unique spaces that make our usual ways of reading ineffectual. In this way I hope the book objects spark new ways of thinking about what we believe in and thereby instigate renewed re-examination of our connotations of women, books, and knowledge.

Methodologies

Leaf Love is a qualitative project, where the observations from my reflections have been gathered to support my research questions.

How can I approach making books in a way that embodies my lived experience?

What are the effects caused by disruption on material, structure, and text?

In following a previous generation of feminist artists, in what ways can I make connections between women's bodies and nature?

My methodologies interweave: autoethnography, practice-based discovery, and an integrated literature review of selected critical texts related to feminist theory, guide my discovery of embodiment through skin, book arts, and contemporary art practices.

My autoethnographic studio process is informed by my roots in Irish lace-making on one hand and by my involvement in limited-edition, fine print publishing on the other. As I practice material research methodology via this autoethnographic lens, layers of exploration are instigated out of making. My critical in-practice process is iterative, engaging with ongoing reflection. It observes paper printed with texts in random impositions, designed and composed from lead and wood type, photopolymer plates and a selection of traditional book-making components. To these I add paper casting, shellacking, and stitching, and observe the results of combining paper, print, steel rods and string to determine the direction of the final thesis works. I treat my studio works as a subject of study, documenting the works and making notes. This practice is continuously inspired and excited by a literature review of four core texts and a survey of female artists.

Throughout the research, I draw references from my female ancestry born in artifacts the women created and preserved. The characters, times and places in my Irish heritage deserve more inquiry than I can accomplish in this thesis, though their traces populate the objects produced in *Leaf Love* book objects. My forebears' stitchery exhibits their talent and capability built over generations and so carries nuance and affect from distantly related pasts. In *Leaf Love*, mending, stitching and patching connote endurance. I observe that the actions echoing in the stitches also reflect the inner calm achieved in meditative tasks: retreating into the

harmonious patterns, counting and finishing. *Leaf Love's* book objects embody my reflections on these women's whispered stories that threaded through my early years. I was mesmerized by their stitching practices as they provided a sense of continuity. The search for design, production and sharing of beautiful objects seems 'stitched into' the works of those women, and now inform my practice. I speculate about the mental focus they had to stitch perfectly patterned lace in lives packed with dire need and oppression. My family's women wove their pursuit of beauty into perfect utilitarian works, dedicated to perfection. Pushing back in *Leaf Love*, all markings offer opportunities to read the narrative of experience.

I also draw upon my extensive practice in letterpress publishing for this thesis, as I innovate textual disruption and challenge the experience of reading. In the 1970's I was a founding member of a worker-cooperative centered around a rare FAG Standard cylinder proof press and literally tons of lead and wood type, in a shared cooperative household on UofT campus. The commercial print industry had been eschewing hot-lead composition in a progression of inventions and innovations. This was the male-dominated environment in which I learned my trade as a typographic designer, with a specialty in book design and production, literary letterpress publishing and fine printing. The live/work cooperative's mandate was to develop employ for its members, with the intent of developing a cottage industry where art, publishing, and print works would be produced, and profits would be shared by members. Our design and printing skills and techniques were always 'at the service of the texts.' In *Leaf Love*, the use of Gertrude Stein's poetry arises from that literary fine print environment, where I chose typefaces and layouts to encourage reading between the lines.

Out of this material discovery, reflection, and review of literature and feminist artists, three main concerns arose as significant attributes and influences in the work: Textual Disruption, Skin, and Books. I will discuss these in subsequent sections. The practice creates book objects that respond, react and reflect my inquiries into the attributes and values we ascribe to skin and knowledge. In parallel, my research interrogates the hierarchies of the book, examining editorial and structural norms with an intent to disrupt, and thereby find new ground for futures we will evolve.

Disrupting Traditions

Textual Disruption

Leaf Love in-practice research began with paper and printed text, drawing on my interest in literature, garnered from my fine print publishing practice.

A text is commonly assumed to represent in words, a cohesive series of thoughts or a narrative. I wanted to separate the text from its primary or leading role, and allow it to exchange and interact as one of several prominent materials—where each contributes to identifying the nature of a book, and reflects back to add interpretations to a book object’s meaning. This desire to break with traditions from Book History fueled my initial investigations. I began with two text blocks drawn from Stein’s *Americans*. In the first, echoes of love, writing, dedication and art seem woven into the rhythm of the words. The second excerpt presents, in Stein’s signature word-play, a flurry of ideas surrounding “grown men and women”, in their selves and in relationships. Each passage has been typeset and printed in ways that challenge typographic and fine print conventions, while I allow the process of making to evoke interpretations and disrupt prescribed connotations. This behavior, unruly by traditional book design precepts, is evident in my choice of fonts, layout and complex configurations. In one example, mixed typeface weights and styles work to disrupt a single line of text, and in another, a complete mirror-image printing of a panel of text can only be read as usual in Western culture—that is right to left—from the back of its translucent page. Confronting established measures, my choices interrogate the traditional designer’s role *in the service of the word* where design of text was correctly handled only if it appeared as evenly grey overall; promoting access to the reading first. In my practice I eschew these rules in an attempt to carve out space for alternate interpretations of how typography can contribute to the reading experience in innovative ways.

My investigative project’s title, *Leaf Love*, reflects the rhythmic connections I made between Stein’s poetry, books’ leaves and leaves in nature, at the project’s inception. I employ words, excerpts, lines and paragraphs of type as texture, lures, and voices comingled in a sort of symphony with the other substances participating in my research; I enjoy artistic agency in disrupting hegemonic traditions in book making. As I jump off from my print training to a new

reading of type and design, beyond the confines of editorial and book standards, I sympathize with Stein's deliberate attention to obfuscation. My explorations deny access to the usual way we read, to tease interest and confound it. This indirect access to the author's written text forces an expansion in the conceptual interpretations that can emerge: Connotations of text must expand to include the associated nonverbal, non-written, non-linear medium in which the words are delivered. It is incumbent with the parameters of this research to query the materiality of the traditional book, so an interested participant will not gain easy access to Stein's texts, but will discover them *in situ*, on the pages and buried in the book objects.

Stein's excerpts are far-reaching in my experiments. According to Astride Lorange in her study *How Reading is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein*, Stein allows each word to be mined for a wide array of interpretations by deliberately creating obscurity.

Always more and more I love repeating, it may be irritating to hear from them but always more and more I love it of them. More and more I love it of them, the being in them, the mixing I them, the repeating in them, the deciding the kind of them every one is who has human being. (MA 289) (51)

Like the amorphous subjects that come to life in Stein's poetics, my book objects also employ obscurity and repetition to weave text into the book objects. The text, paper, and strings that populate *Leaf Love* book objects, like Stein's subjects and the other materials, become identified by their behaviors and affiliations.

Similarly, in studio, I dismantle the traditional goal of perfect repetition in printing of Stein's texts. Planning each sheet to be unlike the next, I generated multiple impressions of three set-ups on many test papers, in inks coloured from yellow through amber and green, and employing split fount inking [applying shifting blends of colours, that are constantly being remixed on the rollers.] This inking effect was coupled with randomizing of the feed coordinates for each sheet, adjusted continuously to position texts differently on every page. This designed confusion of patterning created a disjointed relationship between pages that recalls Stein's poetry, where texts' attitudes evolve in reiteration.

For instance, weaving through the exhibited works lies evidence of textual disruption which occurs when conventions erupt in unpredictable ways, confounding the reading experience. Words travel insistently over the multi-faceted surfaces of three-dimensional, permanently open, story-telling vehicles. Meanings and interpretations are offered by these forms and the words of course, but also by layers, textures, transparency, typeface and ink, thread, stitching, punctures, folds, overlapping, and string.

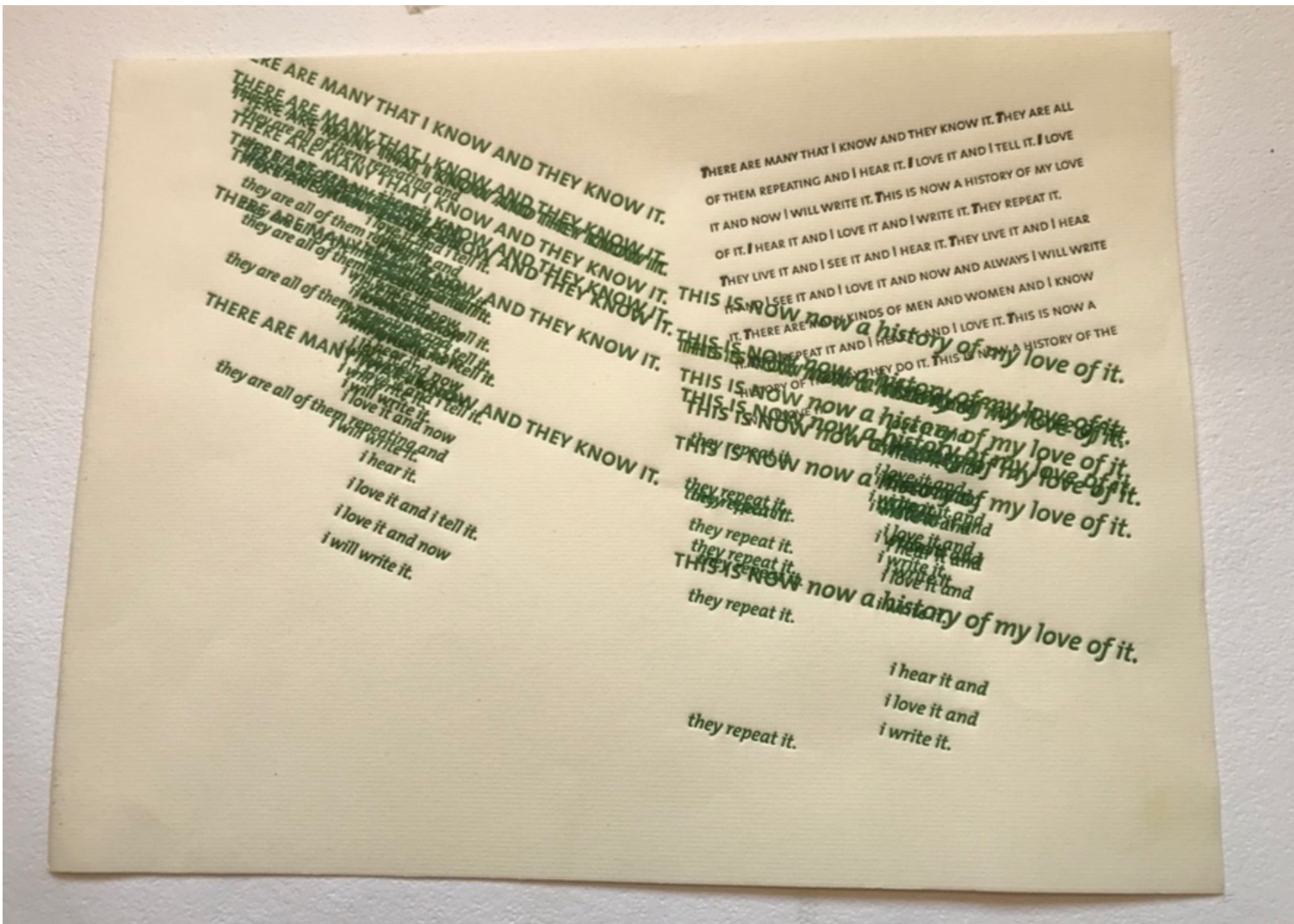


Figure 01: Process capture, print proof.
Regarding textual disruption, obscuring by overprinting; from photopolymer on vintage Strathmore 100lb laid.



Figure 02: Process capture, stitching sampler. 36" x 26 x 8"

After printing, pages are soaked, formed, layered, shellacked, patched, perforated, tied, tacketted and stitched.

Also inspired by Stein's repetitive word structures, and their unpredictable directions in meaning, *Leaf Love*'s shifting of the art of the book aims to dislodge our usual measure and focus.

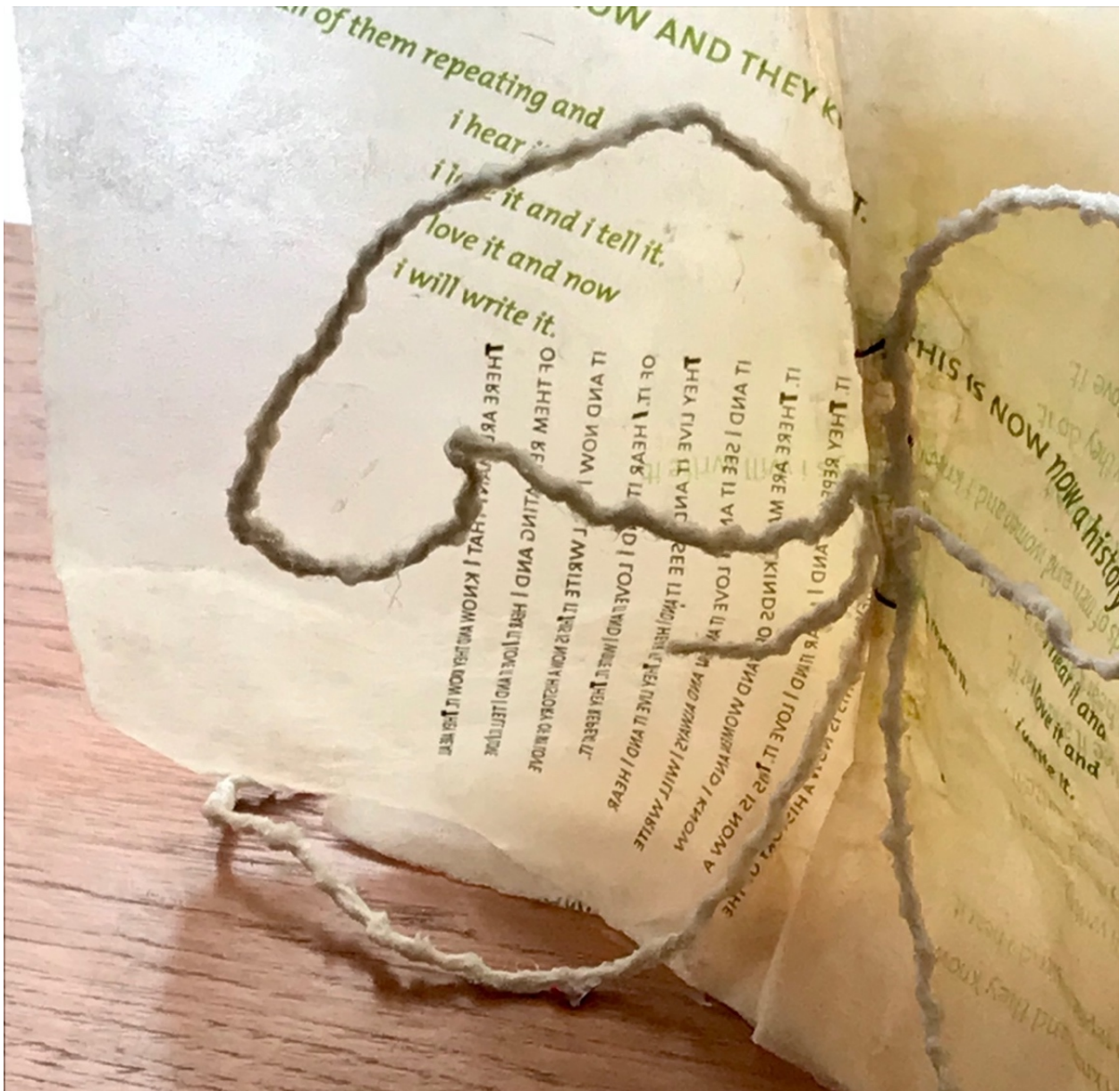


Figure 03: *Flayed*, detail.

Text block positioning is purposefully randomized, and words can be read from both sides of pages.

Skin

I identified skin and bodies as primary metaphors for pages and books at the outset of my material discovery. In studio, hundreds of leaves of Japanese writing paper were soaked, moulded and shellacked, producing a wide range of shapes and textures. The pages felt rubbery or crackly, suggestive of animal skins; or my skin. They also sounded like rustling leaves. The organic shapes had fibrous, multifaceted surfaces and embedded textures. The translucency of the leaves varied, and damage occurred, even though this paper's long fibers stubbornly resist all but the most aggressive assaults. Scars, mends, patches, tackets and suture-like stitches shaped the flat printed leaves into contours suggesting cupped structures we might see in nature. Gathered together complete and broken leaves contributed to what seemed like a 'community.' In this way, I recognize the differentiation of each page in a book, and each experience etched into skin; and in their accumulations, the book and the body.

My interpretations of the paper leaves' physicality, textures, colour and translucency are influenced by Claudia Benthien's *Skin*, where the author examines a wide range of associations connected to skin, derived from a range of disciplines, including ancient and modern, scientific, etymological, literary and historic references. Early *Leaf Love* pages could be seen to allude to the transformative behavior of a snake shedding its skin, or to a moth's cocoon. The pages in *Flayed*, for example, most evocatively suggest peeled skin, conjuring imaginary echoes of the violence and pain associated with this practice while simultaneously growing appreciation of the thinness, fragility, and strength of a single layer of skin.

This initial book object, *Flayed*, seems to breathe as Stein's poetry and reflected light bounce off its surfaces, creating a sense of airy movement between the leaves. The pages appear as almost *temporary*; the book object looks weightless, and yet, sewn together, its leaves slouch into their base. The form takes on bodily attributes where its pages could represent lungs, assembled together with a few swift stitches that connote its spine. By association, the skins feel like my skin, and the spine reflects my own. The stitches themselves are red, and the holes made by the sewing seem to cut the flesh of the pages, leaving bloodied traces like sutures in skin.



Figure 04: *Flayed*

Leaf Love book object of vintage mulberry paper, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and sewn. 8.5 x 20.5 x 15.25"

I identify *Flayed* with Benthien's confirmation of the creative opportunities offered in flaying and piercing. She points to transitions inherent in the experience of flaying as "an

allegory for an act of liberation or (violent) modification ... [that] signifies both the loss and the gaining of the self” (94). The pages, skins, and leaves in *Flayed* seem capable of defining boundaries as Benthien suggests: “...skin is used as a stand-in for 'person,' 'spirit,' 'body,' or 'life,’” and also as “the other of the self, as its enclosure, prison, or mask” (13).



Figure 05: *Flayed*, inner spine detail.

In anthropomorphizing the effects of the gathered, shaped pages in *Flayed*, impressions of the experienced female body surface. The worn skins in *Flayed* seem to sink, providing an implied narrative about pain, punishment, and fear, underscoring the illusion that such pages

could have been peeled from a body. Benthien's insights reveal that while historically, flaying was a method of medical research and of torture, it can be perceived as way to gain access to the protected inner spaces of a body by peeling away its outer surface.

Flayed's pages themselves do not carry text in a traditional style: the words seem free-floating, not contained by, or pinned to, the surfaces in this book object. In some ways, the pages promise secrets, almost hidden, but sketched in the words impressed into their surfaces: stories gathered in experience. In its translucent leaves, snippets of printed texts are revealed. Two excerpts of Stein's *Americans* are presented in fragments over the pages, often remaining incomplete. Type can be read from either side of translucent pages. Words dissolve and overlap repeatedly, cramming heavily into the gutter where pages meet. These leaves are gathered together in a pamphlet-stitched signature, with its rounded spine strengthened somewhat by a stiffened string bow stitched to its back. Even with this brace, *Flayed* threatens collapse, as if giving into the weighty affect of its pages' impressed storylines. Like my own, the book object's spine is responsible to provide strength, cohesion, and metaphorically, a stance or purpose. However, *Flayed's* back's brace is inadequate to support or protect its filmy pages. It attempts to produce something like a cover, or as Benthien's title provides, a "boundary between self and world"; a conceptual interface to represent the attributes and qualities of the 'guts' [inside pages.]

Along with a sense of impermanence and fragility, *Flayed's* exposed and delicate pages also suggest bravery in their naked slump, akin to my ancestors whispering behind their perfect lace doilies. *Flayed* comments on the skin as a very thin, layered boundary, facing outwardly representing the self. In its surprisingly delicate skins, this book object begs a protective approach, where love is understood as appreciation—the willingness to examine closely.

Continuing to observe book objects that focus on skin, the series entitled *Seedpods* is comprised of a total of 22 pods made from 44 skins. Cupped shapes combine to suggest emptied husks, and parts of their perimeters are left open like invitations to inner spaces.



Figure 06: *Seedpods*. Three unnamed examples stacked.

Book objects of vintage mulberry paper, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and sewn, in an edition of 22 unique and untitled copies. Each 12 x 10 x 7"

The translucent and overlapping leaves appear as venous membranes; on their own or sewn to printed card bases, these objects stretch the concept of book in their non-conventional forms. Like *Flayed*, *Seedpods* aim to capture, instigate and share ideas, but in this instance, words are not the primary vehicle for communication; some iterations do not carry words at all. In fact, it is the non-verbal stories these pieces generate that underscores their most vital importance in my observations.

I submit that in returning to our common human origins, we may be able to scoop out ill-conceived and infectious constructs that describe our beliefs, as they reference the past. This cleansing of our conceptual palettes allows re-consideration, agency, and evolution. Perhaps these book objects represent refreshed, empty shells, to be inhabited by new identities re-using the exoskeletons or husks as membranous wombs, homes, and shields.

The *Seedpods* are colourful, and each is approximately head-sized. They make crispy dried-leaf sounds as I move amongst them, and they slide into the corners of the space on air. Coming-full-circle, I revisit the origins of this *Leaf Love* project as outlined in the Introduction; I recount a full year of examination of those concepts that were rooted in my first inspirations. In Figure 06: *Seedpods*, a few samples of the works are stacked, including one book object with a printed cover, a red version that reminds me of lips or vaginas, and another that suggests an embryo. The *Seedpods* interconnect fleshiness, intimacy and sexual spaces, with the commercialization of romance, historic worship of fecundity, and also the meaty nature of the human heart. They are constructed from organic tissues held together with rough and random stitching. A small opening seems to gasp as it reveals emptiness that prompts recall of the sensations of loneliness in an empty kiss, broken marriages, and post-partum wombs. Pain and bliss connect in this object as it associates with life and our species' inevitable demise: love and loss. As a single mother of three grown men, I associate notions of birth and abandon, joyful creation and departure, in my reflexive observations of individual *Seedpods*.

As a group, *Seedpods'* resemblance to blowing leaves in Fall ignites concepts of seasonal return and cyclical motion.



Figure 07: *Seedpods*, detail.

Cornucopia, *Cocoon* and *Kiss*, referred to as the *Spirals* book objects, are formed from the leaves printed with Stein's text, shellacked again into a diagonally-oriented spiral shapes. Like *Flayed* and *Seedpods*, it is the skin that contributes their strongest statement.

These skins have much in common, but each leaf chosen for these experiments is unique. By this stage in the process, they are worn and sometimes also repaired. In an initial experiment I learned that pages bound diagonally around similarly-sized tubes and shellacked repeatedly, could add stability to the three-dimensional free-standing book objects I was investigating. Expanding on those observations, in these *Spirals*, each page touches the ground at an almost predictable interval [as their unique shapes and some specific commonalities allow] providing almost mechanically-regular spaces for air to pass. Their tips touch down lightly, even on very rough surfaces, in a way that a solid horizontal baseline cannot. In this way, the objects created from these spirals have a sense of being ready for lift-off, like a leaf blowing in autumn. In the round, the tips of the pages work together to support their verticality in a vigorous swirl of stitches, textures and colours. These pages are quickly, and maybe brutally, tied in intimate relationship with each other. In the *Spirals—Cornucopia*, *Cocoon* and *Kiss*—the structures and surface textures work together to connote love, sexuality, and romance.

From what appears to be the work's primary face, *Cornucopia* (Figure 08) looks something like a giant Valentine's card, with the usual graphic shape, and red 'ruffles' made from its pages, gathered by multi-coloured string bows. Not immediately apparent the red inside pages fill a hollow cone made by a contrasting endpaper, seen only from side and back. The structure of the book object is thus obscured at first glance. This piece brings to mind the cloud of symbols, memes and industries that revolve around the ideas of romance, love, and sex. *Cornucopia's* ruffles suggest baby clothes, lingerie, and intimate apparel. Female body connotations are elicited by *Cornucopia* along with fecundity, bleeding, and the abject body. Though more buried and cloaked than in some of Kiki Smith's works, such as, *Tale* (1992) mentioned earlier, I suggest that these skins reflect concepts of evolution and change as emphatically as they evoke biological processes, insinuate sexuality, and connect to embodied emotions. *Leaf Love's* skin pages and stitched constructions parallel the urgency and frailty of the skin that covers Smith's *Lilith*, and the figure's folded-inward shape seems to echo *Flayed's* 'exhalation.' Returning to the text months afterward, I recall threads of my own heritage when I connect again with

Heartney's reflection, that Smith "employed embroidery and textiles, she shaped forms out of papier-mâché and plaster, and she sculpted crushed paper" (196).

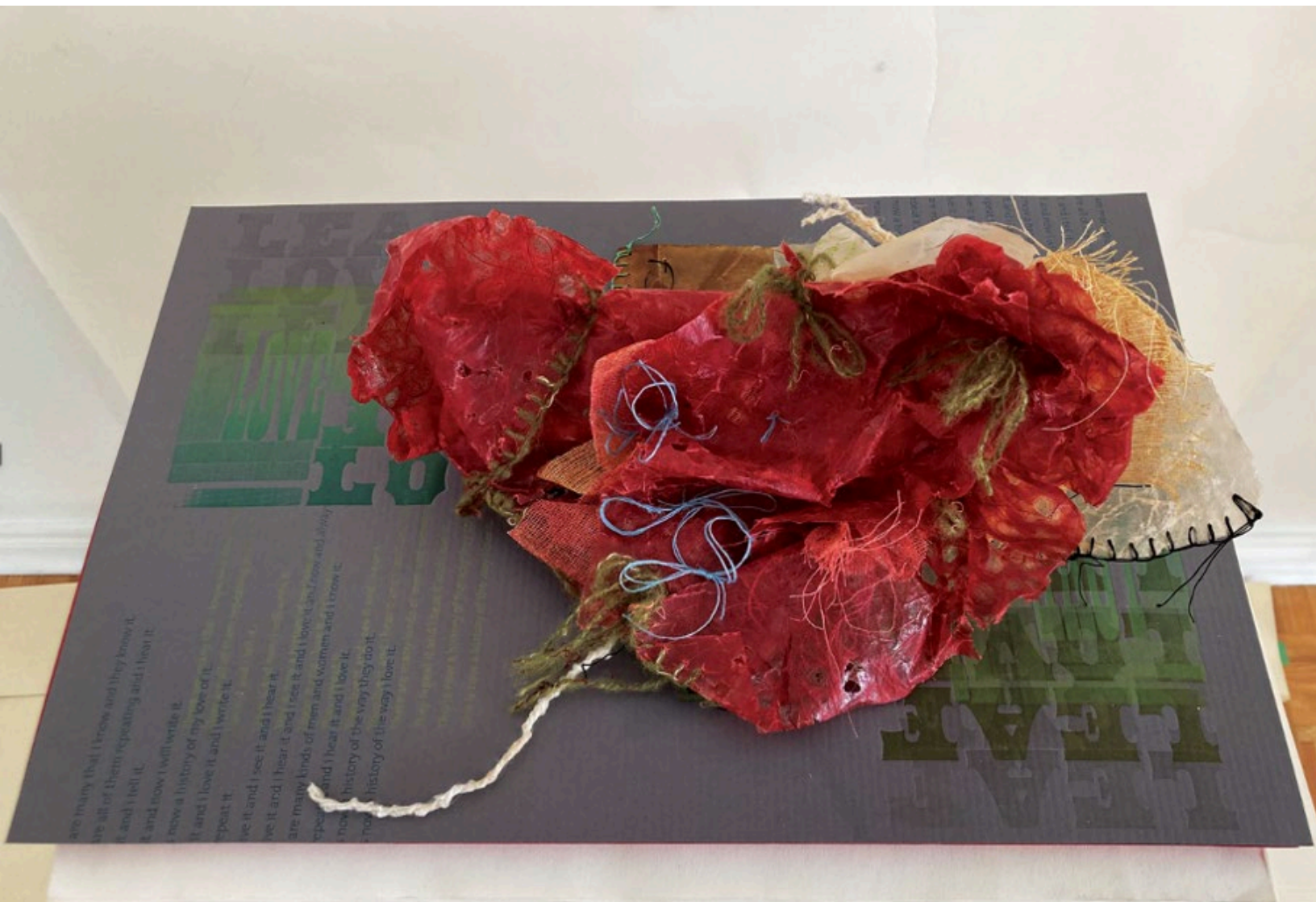


Figure 08: *Spirals: Cornucopia*

Book object of assorted vintage paper, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and sewn, one titled example in an edition of three. 12.5 x19 x 8.5"



Figure 09: *Spirals: Cornucopia*, detail.

Cornucopia initially inspires connotations of flirty, carefree fun, romance and casual sex. Closer, an interiority of intimacy is suggested in the surfaces' erosion and from the way the cone of the endpapers, like a blossom's calyx, envelops and secures them to the printed cover below. The pages are bound and contained but also stable and grounded.

I reflect on the lack of control women have over bodily functions, evidenced in monthly bleeding, birthing our children, or passing excrement, and reflect on what it means to gain control over the ways we are perceived, categorized and understood by others; how we read, authorise, and identify our 'selves' in our own outer skins. The intensity of the redness of the pages and their volume in this pillowy cushion could be seen as lush and sensuous or abrasive and overwhelming. The paper is crisp and dry as if the once-pretty gathers were temporarily placed for decoration and then forgotten. Reflecting back to my personal contact with homelessness, I gain no comfort in these 'love' symbols; there are no predictable patterns in the threads—just a 'quick fix'—stitches holding paper and patches of unravelled book binder's mull in place in its endpaper cone. Bows look temporary, knots are left untrimmed, and threads untied.



Figure 10: *Cornucopia*, detail.

With only two pages or leaves connecting to one another in *Cocoon*, intimacy and sexuality are suggested, along with coupling, duality and pairing. Like *Cornucopia*, the 'text pages' are red, and here, the roughly erect, cylindrical shape suggests entry into deeper realities, with its vertical, pointed-oval opening reminiscent of the 'yoni' in ancient female iconography. The wet-looking, sensuous, central passageway is partially wrapped with another skin of contrasting colour. Stein's words seem to armour the skin that protects the fleshy entryway.



Figure 11: *Spirals: Cocoon*

Book object of assorted vintage paper, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and sewn. 12.5 x 19 x 8.5"
One titled example in an edition of three.

The title *Cocoon* suggests concepts of new life, birth and private places, hidden growth and evolution. A precious exchange balances the leaves, where there is evidence of something like a core or shield, but no spine. Rather, the contact of two distinct shapes stabilizes the fragile book object, balancing the inclinations of the pages as they lean on one another.

In *Kiss*, several leaves are sewn along one common squared edge, then opened at the center, allowing the leaves on each side to roll back towards their sturdy vertical spine. Conical surfaces meet each other as columns bend back as if from a magazine center-fold, to each side. Seen from the reverse, their common spine, a messy over-stitched core, reveals the 'seamy side' and hidden parts. The spiral structure supports the verticality of this book object as well, as the bottom corners of its leaves expand the base and stabilize the object, knotted to its cover. In *Kiss*, the repaired spaces are stitched and patched with red paper, providing common accents that visually connect the pages. Just as the re-knitting of bone surrounds a break, the mending and patching of the pages strengthens the skin. The stitches also provide ornamentation and clues to the narratives embedded in the assembled book objects. Arguably, the most distinct attribute of the *Spirals* can be seen in their stitching. Mending, lacerations, darning, and patching holes and tears, speak to the healing in skins worn over a lifetime, coupling the skin's role as a protective sac with its ephemeral duration.

All *Spirals* works proceed from a second stage complication introduced into ongoing leaf creation in the studio process. I am reminded of Alicia Henry's exhibit *Witnessing* (Power Plant, 2019), where hundreds of her masks are pushed through various experiences, evidence of the wear and tear that marks their survival. Similar to the pages in the *Spirals* book objects, Henry's masks share common roots and evolve in different ways to express individual components of the narrative they inhabit as a community. In doing so, the faces unite, stand together, and face a common observer. Similarly, in the *Spirals* books, the pages may have their individual scars on display as records of their particular experience, but their individuality is not lost in their similarity with others. Rather, the skins find new purpose in combining to support a larger experience. Together, their visual movement, achieved in the powerful, diagonally-curved, repetitive aspects they share, describes connection in a series, family or community. Their similarities allow their conspiratorial occupation in space, and a shared experience of time.



Figure 12: *Spirals: Kiss*

Book object of assorted vintage papers, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and sewn.

13.5 x 20 x 11.5"



Figure 13: *Love*

Book object of vintage mulberry paper, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and threaded onto $\frac{1}{4}$ " steel rod. 10 x 180 x 10"

One of *Leaf Love*'s larger book objects, *Love*, was reiterated three times before aniline dies were introduced into my practice: first with pages threaded onto a frail and elegant dogwood branch; next with leaves impaled on a single, unyielding segment of ¼" steel rod; and finally, where the pages were displayed on an assembled five-segment-long rod, bridging open space in an arc between two walls in my thesis exhibition.

In these progressive iterations, *Love* has grown through three distinct identities, affording numerous interpretations. The stages in this progression are differentiated by the support structure or spine [branch or threaded steel rods] that brings the pages together. In the final iteration *Infinity*, which I will discuss, the spine becomes as important as the leaves. It appears [seen only up close] to drill through layers of dried, translucent skins with little regard to damage caused in breaking through. Importantly, it is in both the frequency, sequenced order, and intervals of the leaves on the rods, and the rods' behaviors in various lengths, that *Love* contributes to my *Leaf Love* process.



Figure 14: *Love*, detail

In *Love*, thirty paper skins were impaled on a 130-inch, segmented, ¼" threaded steel rod. At first the piece presents most prominently as an arc, grouping pages, skins or leaves, drilled into and squeezed between two facing walls. The type on them, their subtle colours and shapes, as seen from a distance, are attractive and invite closer scrutiny. The rod is barren between leaves and sharp to the touch, tearing the pages as it penetrates them. The threaded steel is mechanical and human-made; the rods are enduring and static within each segment's thirty-inch length and enjoy no prospect of movement until attached in longer segmented lengths.

In the next iteration, *Infinity*, we see this change in character that develops when rod lengths are added, when rods assemble leaves onto a hoop forty feet in diameter. Individually, the rods are not differentiated and have no story to tell except as delivered in the leaves they carry. However, in the multiple connections of this grand circle, festooned with crackling leaves, the steel flexes, vibrates and literally bounces almost out of control until contained by the boundaries of the room itself. In *Love*, and in *Infinity*, the spaces between pages seem bereft of any warmth, suggesting the leaves could be crowded together for protection. And in both, their environments contain and constrict them.

In my photos, these larger pieces are positioned for documentation, however, these works exist only in relationship to confinement, and therefore take on the shape of the space they are installed in. Thus, the integrity of the form is in its detail, and its leaves are almost continuously in movement. These aspects of *Love* and *Infinity* reflect on humanmade boundaries brought to bear on natural forms and underscore the flexibility required to adapt. Enjoying the steady incidence of leaves strung along *Love's* length, and in *Infinity's* cyclic rotation, I reflect on repetition and sequence, attributes integral to time and to printing. It could be argued that every print in a letterpress edition is unique, where each carefully controlled action, meant to produce an exact copy of the last and the next sheet, falls almost imperceptibly short, or unaccountably beyond, this goal. Because letterpress' archaic machinery, methods and approaches leave many parts of the process to the printer's examination and their hands-on adjusting and management, the prints vary.



Figure 15: *Infinity*

Book object of vintage mulberry paper, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and threaded onto $\frac{1}{4}$ " steel rod. 10 x 576 x 10"



Figure 16: *Infinity*, detail

The numbered units in an edition are meant to be exact copies, but are they truly exact? When are sets of copies called a 'series', when a 'folio' or 'multiple,' and when do their specifications connote an 'collection'?

Springing from *Love*, *Infinity* employs a total of sixteen connected steel rods to form a very wobbly, constantly moving, giant hoop. This book object tells the story of my experience in studio as I created leaves, but specific to this work, the number, style and attitude of each grouping offers another set of associations, especially in the way each leaf wraps the spine rod. Several knotting and stitching methods were invented and applied to relate the pages to their spine. Long shafts of rod remain naked too, and when really far apart, the leaves could be perceived as echoes from another season, reminiscent of individual leaves we might see straggling on nearly empty branches in Fall. The random frequency suggests an unpredictable sequence that nevertheless repeats in a cycle.

Like *Love*, *Infinity* resists, responds and identifies itself in relationship to the confines of the room. The tensions produced in pushing the shape to conform to boundaries, expose the relative flexibility of the rods in relationship to their reach, length and load. *Infinity* tells a story of a continuously renewed, cyclical, seasonal passing of time and ignites concepts of the duration of years, periods and eras. In *Infinity*, the many types of leaf groupings may connote various knowledges, and suggests an organic pacing in the accrual of new information where the vacant spaces between are as meaningful as the leaves themselves. My works hope to sponsor creative agency, asking readers to re-think and re-read from new points of view.

In the case of my book objects, it is not just in the skins' pierced and scarred surfaces, but in those moments and incidences where presumed experiences conflict with the action of 'reading-as-usual', that disruption invites new interpretations. In *Flayed* we see Stein's lines interrupted, and experience reading words through translucent paper; in *Kiss*, the text is almost inaccessible in the fray of movement and stitched repairs; and in *Tower*, organized under the next thematic heading Book, re-ordered book elements interrogate expectations from the past by re-ordering processes and relative authority of each material to whole work. In each, it is in the moment, suddenly out of order, shifted, or changed in direction or orientation, when a disruptive shock is delivered: an incongruous element takes our attention and suggests that we need to read differently.

Books

Reflecting on the bookmaking industry over the ages, *Leaf Love* processes shine light on materials traditionally used in the inner layers of spines and covers, recalling the once-meaningful contribution each made to the books while hidden behind decorated endpapers and lush covers. *Leaf Love* book objects give rise to enquiries in the book arts field surrounding the definitions and attributes of artists' books, while evoking the 'transdisciplinarity' offered by Michael Hampton's approach to books in *Unshelfmarked: Reconceiving the Artists' Book*. Hampton's reviewer identifies that artists' books are "The unshelfmarked ... representative of our current 'highly dynamic, disruptive state of affairs' ... resistant to any single physical state and highly adaptable in these times ... a hyperobject" (28).

As I reflect on skin, bodies, and knowledge within my thesis works, I observe book history, taken out of its usual context, into relationships that question the fundamental rules of publishing. All of the book objects in my thesis works contain stitching and translucent leaves, but in the following book objects particularly, the most striking elements are presented in the use of vintage commercial paper and other familiar fine print and book making ingredients: In *Meditation* a tall stack of paper became a plinth for the book object (Figure 17); in *Remnants* (Figure 20), the vertical banner of layers of card stock worked as a multi-layered ground; and in *Pending* (Figure 26) the form is made almost exclusively from mould-made cotton paper.

In all, I choose materials and methods from rule-bound Western book design to disrupt their presumed use and relationships. I reflect on how book making evolved, developing out of trade concerns to effect production efficacy and disseminate knowledge. Bookmaking became a pillar of economic investment over centuries, and the tools, equipment and materials surrounding book making, also were subject to review and innovation. They were designed to meet revolving demands for more: more efficient processes, more control of intended effects and appearance, and larger quantities to reduce unit costs. While regularly reiterated systems brought books faster to market, a book's endurance was foremost in the earliest bookmakers' purpose, as their inspiration emerged from the calligraphic incunabula of the 15th century. I reflect on what compromises in artfulness and endurance were sacrificed in the interim.



Figure 17: Process sketch. *Love in the Nick of Time*, above; *Meditation*, below.

I observe the historic models fractured and rebuilt after they are disrupted and transformed in *Leaf Love* research. Even to determine if these experiments in other-bookishness are ‘successful’, it is necessary to break down and reconsider the measures that define the ‘correct’ bookmaking processes (and related sought-after qualities) that have been introduced through generations of makers, machines and cultural demands.

My experiments shine light on the values we ascribe to the inner layers of spines and covers, by recalling the once-meaningful contribution each makes to the book experience, while hidden behind decorated endpapers and lush cover creations.

My thesis exploration requires that these elements be identified and interpreted in new contexts and behaviors, where ‘invisibles’ deliver meaning in subtext, and take on more evocative roles in reconsidered forms. I delve for traditions that still make sense, how, and in what specific instances. Does the use of binder’s tapes and mull still make any sense? Is an articulated spine for opening and closing a book still germane to a book’s identity? By putting these elements into nonconventional and sometimes disturbing relations with each other, the resulting reflection is designed to inspire an appreciation for, and simultaneously a critique of book making. By taking them out of their presumed contexts, we can reconsider the aptness of their current functionality, the complication of their origins and their contributions to the future of the book.

Leaf Love’s reiteration of previously held canons of print and bookmaking, stirs hope: in parallel, and as evidenced in their participation in a male-dominant world, my book objects infer that books—and women—can survive new constructs in their worlds. My research begs for a return to history, to root out behaviors still in place that were implanted in ignorance and biases affecting the industry since its inception. In two thesis works, *Meditation* and *Remnants*, a historically-inspired single signature or quire is used in broadly differentiated approaches. In the triptych, *Love in the Nick of Time*, book art is displayed as ‘fine’ art on the wall. Its title is meant to confer a sense of urgency, temporality and co-activity between the panels. And in the pieces, *Tower* and *Pending*, I deconstruct the art of the historical and rule-bound Western book, to disrupt their presumed use and relationships for reconsideration.



Figure 18: *Meditation*

Artist's book of assorted vintage papers, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and stitched. 10 x 30 x 15". With stacked paper plinth, 38 x 30 x 15"

In contrast to the sweeping arcs of *Love* and *Infinity*, two single-signature explorations *Meditation* and *Remnants* arise from my interest in single-signature pamphlet bindings. These book objects are comprised of translucent skins as pages in both instances, and include the addition of binder's mull as leaves. Both rely on commercial paper as base, ground or cover, but otherwise have little similarity with one another. *Meditation* and *Remnants* are also both exercises in layering, but in *Meditation*, the skin pages are predominant in the composition overall, whereas in *Remnants*, it takes time even to recognize the quire, stitched toward the top of a 10-foot-tall banner that informs the height of the space it is hung in. In *Meditation* the layers of commercial papers pile beneath the single signature composition as if supporting the horizontal surface activity, imbuing it with echoes of the origins of print and paper. In *Remnants*, the surface collects bits of production overflow, prize pieces or detritus from each stage of the experiential process, and allows them to work in conversation with each other in a vertical progression.

The assemblage of *Meditation*, brings a desk-like writing surface to mind; the amber-shellacked vertical pages at the left connote history, knowledge and books, almost-formed. To the right, the flat surface presents Stein's text on love and writing. The piece also mimics the size and shape of my press. The work inspires my reflection on dedication to creativity in making. The printed mulberry sheet is not shellacked and stitched as with other works; it is smooth and translucent and the printing on it displays 'perfect' kiss-fit letterpress printing. The tissue reaches out past the writing space or base of the work where it is not supported, and seems fragile in its simple delivery and the transparency of the text's substrate. The papyrus employed here as a base for the piece is inclined to scrolling, a 'closing' gesture, interrupted by a package of new lead type, still boxed from the 1970s, situating the beginnings of this book object in moveable types and manuscripts.

The folded grouping at left connotes a single signature in *Meditation*, but its leaves are not stitched together. The attributes establishing these pages as part of a traditional gathering, signature or quire, are carried in the pages' commonality: their size, colour and roughly staggered but similar folds.



Figure 19: Meditation detail

Six skins and one panel of mullein balance at the left side, and a flat surface extends to the right, reflecting the size, presence and action of my cylinder proof press and printing movement, inking forward and rolling back and repeating. This association positions my body in front of the work, in the creative and focussed mind-set that printing induces. These statuesque skins present the longer excerpt from Stein's *Americans* that speaks of adulthood in relationship, interpretation, and context, calling to mind generational aspects of education: how knowledge is provided from various origins, to inform new knowledges, leaning on one another for strength.

The ground of textured cover stock links the two editorial passages, so that the ordering of texts becomes a key attribute of this assemblage. Reading from left to right is encouraged by the arrangement, while the work presumes that ideas yet to coalesce are brought together by their common ground. This construction is supported by stacks of relatively contemporary Western book papers underlying papyrus and mulberry paper which are both drawn from the earliest book forms.

In *Remnants*, the single signature book heads up a range of pages and treatments, collecting prize bits from each procedure, as found in all other book objects in my thesis exhibit. Assembled on a surface more than one hundred inches tall, the banner describes the height of the exhibition space and displays stitching, skin or paper, mullein and threads that connect all *Leaf Love* book objects. In *Remnants*, the binders' mullein and tape, used to strengthen historic and specialty bindings at their hinges, are re-positioned as accessible and ornamental materials with their own chronologies to add.

While *Meditation* works to instill a pause, *Remnants* suggests that some parts will no longer fit our assumptions or previously conceived purpose and effect. Binder's tapes, linen threads, treated leathers and mull performed well in their times, and while responsible for protecting the oldest and finest books, they are not often offered in today's commercial bindings. In these works, I consider the parallel effect of economic and distribution factors on duration—of the book as object and of the ideas repeated and contained. I reflect on the endurance of books and bodies, and their reliance on invisible structures.



Figure 20: *Remnants*.

Book object of assorted vintage papers, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and sewn. 13 x 100 x 20" Building on the idea of the signature as a core element of books as we've come to know them, each of these explorations is constructed differently to examine book materials, patterned behaviors and technology over time. We see again that it is not only in the words that book objects idiosyncratically carry the qualities of history and traditional forms, but also in each object's shape, colour, patterns, sequence and folding, stitching and presentation; that is, in complex nets of overlapping, layered, and subjective experiences. Within this thesis project, *Remnants* echoes with the processes it strings together while associations with skins and bodies juxtapose words and poetry in the single signature near its top. Seen anthropomorphically, the quire may be identified as the head of a human figure. Another smaller book adorns this figure's 'throat' and pages of text occupy the broader central expanse of what could be its torso; roots made from binder's sewing tapes trail onto the floor, as if searching for sustenance.



Figure 21: *Remnants*, detail.



Figure 22: *Love in The Nick of Time*

Book object triptych. Left to right: *Fringes*, *Bound*, and *Relic*.

Assorted vintage papers, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and stitched. 25 x 38 x10"

Unlike the series of individual *Seedpods*, and the multiples of the *Spirals* book objects, each work in the triptych, *Love in The Nick of Time*, relates conceptually with a role in the narrative of a whole. These compositions are sewn to similar backgrounds, producing a commonality where their fleshy skins are nailed with threaded steel posts to the wall. The

backgrounds are comprised of layers of vintage Esse cover weight paper, a textured sheet from the 1980s that resembles suit cloth. Separate and connected narratives provide comparisons between the panels with their manufactured grounds and organic leaf arrangements. In *Fringes*, ornamental displays of skin and stitchery rely on their background's conventional hanging from its two top corners for predictable, aligned display. In *Bound* the skins seem controlled by their bindings where the pages hang loosely from two posts, nailing this book object's ground or cover to the wall almost aggressively, with the top curving down and forward against the posts' penetration. In *Relic*, the skin pages seem to roll vigorously out from their 'cover' which hangs in repose from a single post, with corners coving.



Figure 23: *Love in the Nick of Time*, detail, *Bound*.

Focusing on *Bound*, the centre panel of this triptych, its printed pages are not shellacked but printed and torn into small squares, a little like beads strung on a necklace. The work stimulates reflection on the constraints, both protective and limiting, that bindings contribute in books and bodies. Bound by the posts that fix the work to its background or cover, and then to the wall behind, the pages are situated at the mechanical centre of its cover's height, where the background is scored. This panel is skewered to the wall; the harmonious suggestions of its surface, evoked by the centered, traditional ornament of the book pages, is disrupted by a sense of strict confinement, as if the book object, anthropomorphized, is pinned at its 'waist' to the unrelenting wall of its environment.

The *Love in the Nick of Time* triptych ignites a progression through time, arranging a sequence of ideas connecting how we are supported in the progress of life and the accrual of knowledge. We can imagine a beginning in *Fringes*, alluding to a time for learning the conventions of our time and place in conventional but relaxed structure, even to the extent that the pages can break boundaries of their covers, and affect the wall outside. In *Bound*, we may suspect that the book object is overwhelmed and possibly used poorly by those social constructs that are in place to protect, love and appreciate its fragility. This reflexive progression ends in the third panel, *Relic*, where the pages scribed, scarred and repaired, present their accumulated knowledge in forceful waves while their cover, protector, and interface with the world, has faded in its effectiveness.

The *Leaf Love* piece called *Tower*, is comprised of a many layered structures, suggesting the use of pasteboard in early book making processes, where a harder cover was needed to protect the contents of the book before cardboard was available. Layers are most evident in this book object, reflecting layers of skin. I am reminded of the historic book in the positioning of the label, in its pamphlet-stitch that uses gravity to hold the roof of this book house in place, and in the card-weight stock employed to protect and cover the pages. Still resonant of historic book making but reaching back to elemental forces, the pages are weighted with a cluster of 'standing type', string-tied in the tradition, for another print run. This weight stabilizes the exploded book form in its relationship with the earth and acts as a pendulum, marking time.



Figure 24: *Tower*

Book object of assorted vintage papers, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed and shellacked; steel rods, lead type, Oasis kid skin, with vintage pedestal.

50 x 13 x 11"

A blood red patch on the leafy ground of this book object symbolizes that the pages of knowledge may incur damage. The steel rods that produce the expansion of the form, introduce instability overall. Wiggly on its make-shift stand, the piece comments on the rules of the book: the assumption that 'this is the way it's always been done' is no longer a stable idea. *Tower* is a book taken out of its usual order, a disruption that encourages appreciation for how the parts of a book and by extension, of a body, contextualize histories within their forms.



Figure 25: *Tower*, detail

Pending, the final book object in my thesis exhibition, is about birth. In this form the sheets began as a book block, formed from pages, gathered, sewn and prepared for binding. The two-inch thick stack of pages drilled through top and bottom and tacket-tied, was derived from pages I employed to clean dies from my brushes.



Figure 26: *Pending*

Book object of cotton handmade paper, letterpress-printed, soaked, formed, shellacked and sewn.

66 x 8 x 8" [57" hanging cord]

The pages swelled by moisture and caught together at top and bottom, form a cylinder of pages like a spindle. *Pending* presents more than a hundred bristling cotton pages, camouflaging a womb-like hollow apparent from only one view, and includes layered yarn as an ‘umbilical’ cord. Suspended, *Pending* acts like a plumbline, connecting with the elemental force of gravity similar to the lead type which hangs from the roof in *Tower*. The heavily coated red surface of *Pending* that curved into a pear shape in my process, conveys a shiny contrasting interior which appears to have the texture of an organ and the suggestion of a womb. The block contains a hole—almost hidden in the bloody core—that was originally a test for drilling through the block. This hole now contributes a sensation of intimacy, a passageway buried deeply in the core, that leads somewhere unseen, creating mystery and allure.

Leaf Love book objects

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_acfVXZJaQ

Conclusion

Leaf Love in-practice research creates book objects. These describe, demonstrate and mark my inquiry into the attributes and values we ascribe to skin and knowledge. In a many-layered material discovery, the process interrogates the hierarchies of the book, examining editorial, structural and forms. I approach making book objects in a physical way that embodies my lived experience, seen in my use of pigmentation, shellac, formulations, and stitching (mending fleshy pages with the suggestion of scars), and also through the selection and handling of texts and innovations in letterpress printing. Further, this discovery examines the effects of disruption on surfaces, forms and texts in the creation of these book objects that thwart expectations derived from Book History. The book objects interfere with our potential to read in the same way as a traditional book.

Re-visiting the materiality of the book in *Leaf Love* explorations, each step in the critical discovery questions the specifications of book-making as they have become. In following previous generations of feminist artists, I have experienced connections between bodies and nature by addressing book leaves to leaves underfoot, and using the form of the book as sculpture. *Leaf Love* book objects apply the metaphor of books as bodies, launching a parallel investigation into the rules that hold gendered constraints in place, despite inappropriate and unconscionable outcomes they may generate.

I am excited by the disruption of traditions of the book. I see value and purpose in delimiting the expression and interpretation of each book object as it emerges. The *Leaf Love* book objects simulate bodies, skins act like pages filled with experiential trace, and together they chronicle abstract notions, available between the leaves, for the viewer to interpret. This disruption of traditional book descriptions parallels breaking down preconceived and outdated ideas, assumptions, categorizations and interpretations about bodies. A re-interpretation practice repeats in layers, an additive process, to shed light on the ways we understand women in their skins, and how meanings are literally *captured* in the pages and covers of books as objects.

Leaf Love book objects are profuse in detail. Their words (visible and presumed), pages (leaves and skins) and forms (underfoot, free-standing, wall-mounted, and hung) explore traditional behaviors and entrenched beliefs with an invitation to learn to read differently. *Flayed* and *Seedpods* speak to the nature of skins, while *Spirals* books appear to lift off from their covers. *Love* and *Infinity* support reflection on time, patterns, predictability and rhythms. *Love in The Nick of Time* presents a triptych of three panels addressing gender, constraints and ownership, asking for renewed awareness of societal limitations affecting women. *Meditation* and *Remnants* demonstrate alternative positionings for single signature bindings while *Tower* explodes the construction of the historic book. Like cutting the deck again, this piece asks that all suppositions be re-examined to build something new. *Pending*, chunked together as a tool to manage shellac waste, has come to suggest a womb. The works reveal and exchange notions of interiority, fragility, community; damage, repair and rejuvenation—of bodily love and loss. Stitching is immediate, strained, and over-worked, colours are shared across book objects and these too tell their stories, alone and in groups. Words cling to surfaces that hide, present and disrupt them. Mends double the threads and thicknesses producing opacity and connotations of finality, cemented ideas, and overworked, patched knowledge.

By aligning books and bodies, my works invite reflections that rely on our shared human physicality to refresh the ways we perceive ourselves and our world. The book objects draw parallels between life's story writ in scars in skin and words printed in texts, as evidence of lives lived. Intertextualized with Gertrude Stein's poetry, repetition and obscurity foster new interpretations in structures that challenge traditional book reading, encouraging re-consideration of historic beliefs. Re-visiting the materiality of the book, my critical discovery complicates the body-book metaphor, revisiting and reordering hegemonic constructs in book objects by encouraging text, paper, ink, shellac, stitching and steel to inspire innovative interpretations of books and bodies from my studio process. In reconfiguration, *Leaf Love* objects reflect on what it is to be housed in experienced female skin.

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