



Swatch installation of aprons. Digitally printed fabric made from original etchings.

DENISE BOOKWALTER

## FSU artist drawn to 'magic of making'

AMANDA SIERADZKI  
COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS



ANNA TRUDEAU  
FSU artist Denise Bookwalter has interest in art books.

As a trained printmaker and artist, Denise Bookwalter seemed fated with a last name to transform her into a bookmaker as well. At the letterpress, a formerly industrial piece of equipment used worldwide and centuries old, she uses her body weight to roll paper through the large machine multiple times to print images and text. Much like a rubber stamp, the ink is transferred from a raised matrix.

It's an art form in revival, and Bookwalter is invigorated to work with digital programs and physical equipment, limitless in her etching, screen printing, relief printing, sewing, and papermaking. She works in large themes for long periods of time, gathering information from collections and museum archives and approaching topics in refreshing ways. Regardless of the medium, however, audience interaction is an important aspect in all of Bookwalter's explorations.

"I like the magic of making, and the idea that you can turn something very simple into something else like paper or fabric," said Bookwalter.

Lately, the FSU professor has taken a special interest in textiles. Her collaborative installation, "Shaping," explored the tactile experience of textiles on the body, using wools, cottons and silks. The series was accompanied by a set of large prints made from handmade paper with printed woodcut images. Another show called "Swatch" used small laser-cut etchings to play with the ideas of color and ink mimicking textiles. She then took those small samples and digitally printed them onto fabric that was then fashioned into aprons that the viewer could try on and wear.

A member of the College Book Art Association, Bookwalter is excited to have her colleagues in Tallahassee for the annual conference this week. Titled, "Conspire: Collaboration, Cooperation, Collection," the conference focuses on the interdisciplinary aspects of bookmaking and how it brings together artists, scholars, writers and more. It will also give Bookwalter a chance to show off the Small Craft Advisory Press (SCAP), an organization she began at FSU that facilitates collaborative artist books, giving tours of their letterpress and other equipment.

In addition to panels and speakers, a keynote speaker from Gainesville's ColLab will present on how to find collaborators and bring groups of people with similar interests together. An exhibition at the William Johnston gallery called "Flash Point" will exhibit another of Bookwalter's collaborative books with other artists in SCAP. The other major exhibition at the FSU Museum of Fine Arts will feature 55 books that represent the association's membership, with an opening reception from 6-8 p.m. Friday.

Bookwalter grew up in Ohio and her mom surrounded her home with opportunities to create, signing her and her four sisters up for music and art classes. Attending Northwestern University in Chicago, Bookwalter was first a geology major, she added art as a major and by the end of her degree had a balance of the arts and sciences.

"It was great because I had something to make work about by studying geology, and I had this outlet for making with my art classes," says Bookwalter. "Studying geology I loved figuring out the world and how things work. I'm interested in things that allow you to understand the world in a different way and I approach subject matter like a scientist, investigating something or looking at it more in depth."

Her most recent work is often her favorite, and many of Bookwalter's artist books come together as collaborations. Recently, working with a book art collective called Shift Lab, Bookwalter completed a book called "Trace" that combines five locations chosen by each artist involved and interpreted these spaces which had been altered by man in some way into images and text.

"What I find most interesting about books is the contained, intimate, relationship," said Bookwalter. "With artist books, you have more control over the experience or narrative story arc than if it's a single image on a wall. A lot of times I think about books as small art installations, where everything that you need to experience the idea is in that space or object."

It's a physical process as well since the artist makes all parts of the book before assembly. When teaching, Bookwalter hopes to empower her students to come up with their own ideas and figure out how that can be turned to art. In her book binding and printmaking classes, she often has students in awe of the translation between digital art on a computer screen versus the ink on their fingers and laborious processes on letterpress equipment—setting up, rolling paper through, and mixing colors, versus pushing print with a mouse click.

Though these ways of making are enticing, Bookwalter often reiterates to her students that their book designs mustn't be overly complicated, lending itself to the viewer's intuition since the medium is a familiar one. While there is apprehension in the art world to interact with pieces, Bookwalter finds that books transcend that feeling amongst viewers. It's instinctual to see a book, open a cover, and page through it,



Pictured from left to right: Sara White, Macy Chadwick, AB Gorham and Denise Bookwalter, the collaborative group of artists working on Flashpoint.

CHRIS CAMERON



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### If you go

**What:** College Book Art Association's Conspire: Collaboration, Cooperation, Collection  
**When:** Opening Reception for Membership Exhibition, 6-8 p.m. Friday  
**Where:** FSU Museum of Fine Arts, 530 W Cal St.  
**Cost:** Free  
**Contact:** For more information, visit [www.mofa.fsu.edu](http://www.mofa.fsu.edu) or [www.collegebookart.org/tallahassee](http://www.collegebookart.org/tallahassee).

leaving behind the "Do Not Touch" mentality of most art exhibitions.

"I tell my students that they have to design something that people can touch, and is strong and sturdy enough that people can look through it, otherwise it defeats the purpose of making it," asserts Bookwalter. "A book is something you're supposed to touch, look through, and experience. If it has to sit on a shelf, it defeats the whole idea of the medium."

At the exhibit, "Many books will be available for people to handle and look at, and many push the tradition of what a book can be," describes Bookwalter. "I think it's a wonderful cross-section of what is happening in the book arts right now. I really like that printmaking is always changing. It's a technology that will never stay the same and I find that keeps it interesting."



Detail of Flashpoint showing letterpress pages with laserscutting.

AB GORHAM



Macy Chadwick, SCAP visiting artist, left, and Denise Bookwalter printing Flashpoint at SCAP on one of the three Vandercook Letterpresses used to produce limited edition artists books.

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