

# NAVIGATING THE BOOKSCAPE

ARTISTS' BOOKS AND THE DIGITAL INTERFACE

CURATED BY DAVID PATON







## Navigating the Bookscape: Artists' Books and the Digital Interface

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**Aardklop Arts Festival** • 25 – 30 September 2006

**FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg** • 5 – 13 October 2006

[www.theartistsbook.org.za](http://www.theartistsbook.org.za)

David Paton Curator 2006

David Paton is the Head of the Department of Fine Art, University of Johannesburg. He has a Masters Degree in Fine Art focussing on the South African Artist's Book. He curated the exhibition Artists' Books in the Ginsberg Collection, held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1996. The current exhibitions and catalogue form part of an ongoing research project into the Artist's Book and the digital interface lodged with and supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF).

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Book artists have been as enthusiastic in adopting new technologies as have other artists. There are Artists' Books using every imaginable printing and print-making technique and the relatively new computer generated digital imagery has been used by book artists from its inception. It is not surprising that book artists have been particularly innovative in the use of new printing technologies and their websites [1] detail experiments with imagery using photocopies, fax copies (notably also used by David Hockney), ink-jet printers, laser printers (latterly in colour) and even some early experimentation with now virtually defunct dot-matrix printers. Letterists and concrete poets have used letterpress, the typewriter and the computer. Commercial photo-lithographic and offset techniques, usually used to print vast print runs, have been adapted by book artists to print exquisite limited edition books (*Nova Reperta* by Brad Freeman, the pioneer in this practice, is probably the best example).

Artists' Books have evolved in just over a century from the French *Livre d'Artiste*, where word and image were so perfectly combined, to realistic page-turning software on bookart websites! Although the emphasis is still on printing techniques, purely digital presentations using Video, DVDs and web sites are

becoming more widespread and the inclusion of a DVD with an Artist's Book almost commonplace; occasionally the book becoming just a package for the digital component! The digital interface or the use of the computer in some aspect of the production of Artists' Books is ubiquitous and is largely responsible for the proliferation of bookarts courses. The (forced) sequential characteristics (incorporating mobility) which book artists have found so compelling in the presentation of their artwork, has been transferred into the digital age. Hypertext has allowed different kinds of sequencing often giving the reader more options but still directed by the artist. Walter Hamady of the Perishable Press, who has used letterpress in his remarkable books, long ago created a page-based 'hypertext' with the use of footnotes in his innovative Gabberjab series. The more things change....

This exhibition aims to explore what parallel activities might be taking place in South Africa.

[1] see <http://www.philobiblon.com> for the most comprehensive listserve on the bookarts.

Jack Ginsberg, amongst many other things, is an internationally recognised book collector. He has one of the finest collections of Artists' Books in the world. Jack is also a trustee of the Ampersand Foundation and a patron of the arts.



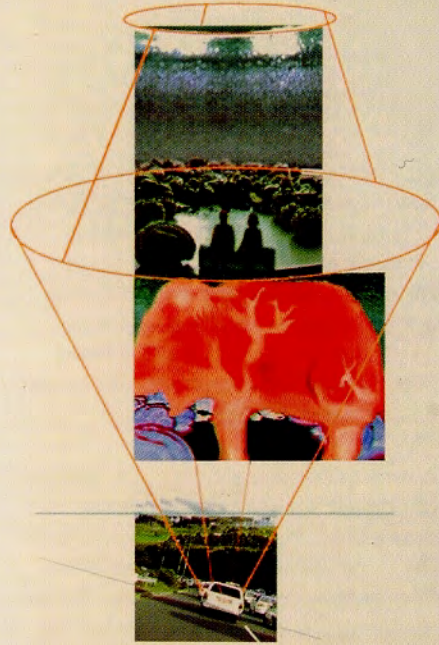
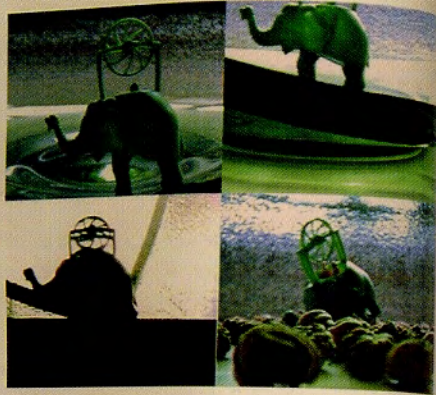


fig. 17 | Giulio Tambellini | Breaking Doll | 2000

Some years ago, I wrote an article on Artists' Books in South Africa which I premised with a quote by Ezra Pound. He said "a book should be a ball of light in one's hands". Thinking of the challenge that David Paton has set himself in curating this exhibition and masterminding this project, this quote becomes not only a poetic reading of any book, but also a literal explication of the cleavage between traditional codex and its electronic or cyber counterpart.

This exhibition aims to do several things. On the one hand it showcases what has been done with the traditional parameters set by the notion 'Artist's Book' and what can be done with the nebulous and often difficult to define medium, container, discourse. On the other, it aims to open up questions around what the digital interface can bring to the conventions of the codex. In teasing out these possibilities, Paton commissioned five artists to make work to contribute to the show, and to justify and balance their work in defining it.

But is the Artist's Book about reading, about looking, about thinking, or about all three? Is it about the artists' sense of wonder and exploration in creating an interactive thing that brings the audience as a collaborative participant in the experience of the work? Is it about the quietude invested in the act of paging through a sequenced narrative of sorts? Each commissioned artist confronts and plays with the notion Artist's Book from a different conceptual space. Multi-media specialist Marc Edwards commented that his work aims to "find my place in the world through a

practice of care, which is rooted in writing". The result of this project is a daily digital self-portrait which earnestly gazes toward an authentic representation of self.

Giulio Tambellini who has been making Artists' Books since the mid-1980s characterises his grappling with the mediums associated with books: "I basically hold onto the rules while thinking in different directions at once. I am excited by the idea of hybrid technology and multi-sensory experiences through my books". He fundamentally still works with the physicality of the book, dovetailing his thinking practices with contemporary insight into so-called 'new media'. "What I have made through the process of interrogation is still a book, not a new-media-based simulation of the experience typical of engaging with a book".

In her approach, Kim Lieberman uses a bibliography for her sources as her visual link to a traditional codex. "The artwork, *Human Current (Circle)*, uses the book as source...the work is about the energetic impact we have on the whole and the information provided is necessary to...give a context for the figure", she explains. Her images are affixed to a digital matrix and thus they "rotate very slowly. The bibliography of each figure folds out into a shape, a pattern that moves, as a current would. These words flow...and interact, intercept or ignore the other flowing words". As though in a kaleidoscope, the words are enabled to take flight and re-form themselves as they move digitally.

Context is something honed by Paul Emmanuel, who draws from his *The Lost Men (Grahamstown)*, a series which exploits the idiosyncratic beauty, yet moving significance of blind embossed text inflicted onto his own body. He takes a conceptual step back in saying "...making and working with material objects as a way of 'cheating death'", yet "the digital world is a fragile, tenuous place, always subject to the threat of wilful or arbitrary change; the ravage of power, interruption, corruption..." In this series, he uses the touch-sensitive screen to replace the page of a traditional book, and "the cold unforgiving surface of a glass screen to talk poignantly about intimacy and alienation". *The Lost Men (Grahamstown)* comprised the names of the men who died in the Frontier Wars fought in the Eastern Cape between 1820 and 1850. "The names were set in lead type and then pressed directly into my skin." He conflates the notion of touching warm skin, inflicting dents into its surface, with that of touching a computer screen in the act of changing an image, developing a concept, disassociating material. The transference of the work from literal to digital represents poetic insight into the nature of touch but also the transience of the gesture of turning a page.

Edwards comments that "as the convergence of mediums brings a dynamism to the digital interface, so does the book find it difficult to keep up". The notion of "keeping up", but also the notion of change is one which André Venter teases out in his work. "The discourse of the book is ultimately what keeps it stable", he says. Engaging with the Chinese Book of

Changes, the I Ching, Venter has created a piece which digitally throws back a continuously changing pattern of the 64 hexagrams of this ancient Chinese means of foretelling the future.

Practically, the book has indeed become as a ball of light, both literally and figuratively. Yet the notion of the codex as an interactive and in many respects collaborative set of read values has a history which goes back to the 15th century, Gutenberg bible, and beyond that to hieroglyphics on tomb walls in ancient Egypt, texts for the dead to read. Traditionally it has been about edification and didacticism as much as it has been about beauty and ownership. It remains to be seen how the digital interface continues to offer potential shifts in contemporary artists' ability to manipulate an understanding of all the values associated with the act of engaging with an artwork, designed and governed by a set of sequences. Venter suggests that old assumptions be let go and process forms and strategies be rethought in the context of new material conditions of possibility. Ultimately, though, artists confront the human condition, whatever they perceive it to be. In this contemporary world, with all its sham, drudgery, broken dreams and ideological givens, with all of our shifting of values, with all of our hubris, the notion of a ball of light in the hands retains that idea of being fragile and yet potentially volatile.

Robyn Sassen freelances as an arts writer and academic. She writes regularly for numerous print and online publications, is the Contributing Arts Editor for the SA Jewish Report, and teaches contractually at several universities. Robyn holds a Master's degree in Art History and is a printmaker and book artist.

This exhibition, in many ways, picks up threads left tantalisingly at the end of the *Artists' Books in the Ginsberg Collection* exhibition held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1996, then purportedly, the 2nd largest exhibition of Artists' Books ever staged in the world. In the final room of the JAG exhibition, three isolated computer monitors looked down on the viewer; the centre monitor blank with changing images and texts moving silently within the screen space of the outer pair. In this work, entitled *codex*, Michele Sohn attempted a number of things: a questioning of our expectations of what a book is, a meditation on the silent mutability of content and where exactly this content resided, and a critique of the alienation which technology often imposes. In taking 'the digital' as a loose basis on which to explore some contemporary artists' concerns with the book, I have attempted, in this exhibition, to open up a place for debate and ponder on what the 'digital' and the book have to offer each other when they meet, blend and collide.

I have no intention to offer conclusive evidence of the superiority or inferiority of one form in relation to the other, despite the frequent claims that digital or electronic books 'supersede the limitations' and the 'drawbacks' of paper-based and traditional books. Clearly a bound codex is fundamentally different from a digital image: the light absorbing nature of the paper page as opposed to the light emitting nature of a screen, and the defined sequential narrative of a book against the rapid update, varied and optional window organisation of the screen. In addition the ability to resize images and manipulate a document is something

which the codex does not allow. The belief, however, that the codex embodies fundamental limitations and drawbacks is premised on the book as a supposedly static, fixed and finite form. That these limitations and drawbacks can only be overcome through the interactive features of 'the digital' is a position I wish to contest.

Johanna Drucker (2003) states: "The distinction that supposedly exists between print and electronic books is usually characterised as the difference between static and interactive forms. But a more useful distinction can be made between two ontologies, active and passive modes that are relevant across media. Interactivity is not a function of electronic media. The capacity of a literal book to be articulated as a virtual dynamic space is exhaustible while any attempt at reducing a work to its literal static form is probably almost impossible".

It is the book in the hands of the artist which upsets claims of limitations and drawbacks and which provides examples of active, interactive and dynamic forms. This reminds us that the idea of a book should be grounded in replacing the identity of what a book is with what it does and that we should "ask how a book does its particular actions rather than what a book is".

And so with Michele Sohn's *codex* repositioned to ask us what it was in fact doing, I encountered Kim Lieberman's *Amazon.com - digital* on Marcus Neustetter's *switch on/off* exhibition at KKNK in 2001. "In this work" says Colin Richards (2000), "we can link the dots between forests, books, information and in

fact the entire cultural ecologies we inhabit. The wired world in which everything comes to connect with everything, nothing is ruled out... The intimacy of the globe is woven by threads of a million messages floating and spinning in ethereal space." In *Amazon.com - digital* I was confronted by what was happening, what the work was doing. The screen was a book containing pages; each page became a book containing more pages and the pages contained threads of text, each containing the whole image and starting the reading process from scratch.

The Amazon, a place from which paper is derived; amazon.com, a place from where books are purchased. I read this work as a book whose pages, like digital images of the forest, seemed to be, at once an image of the connectedness of life and, at the same time, a text in which everything comes to connect with everything and in which nothing is ruled out. What the work was doing was suggesting that pages of a book be digitally constructed (without the kitsch simulacrum of page drape and gutter as nostalgic icons of the codex as a material object) as a program for the way in which a book facilitates a visualisation of the textual narrative. *Amazon.com* suggested to me that an exhibition on the intersection between the codex and the digital book was needed.

If, as Drucker suggests, "the idea is to mark the shift from the conception of books as artefacts, or documents as vehicles for delivery of content, and instead demonstrate the living, dynamic nature of work as produced by interpretive acts" we realise that "the

traditional codex is also, in an important and suggestive way, already virtual".

My experience has been that many of the conventions of the digital work or electronic screen have been presupposed, suggested or in fact achieved in the 'phenomenal' or Artist's Book and that the book, in the hands of the artist, becomes infused with interpretive acts. And so the first part of this exhibition is devoted to the suggestive ways in which the codex is already virtual, where the codex is an interactive and dynamic form and in which the idea of a book is grounded in what it does rather than what it is.

The exhibition is centred around two parts. In the first I have again plundered Jack Ginsberg's remarkable collection of Artists' Books. I have attempted to find South African work which, in some way, uses and exploits the digital, but also, and most importantly, suggests that the differing conventions of the codex and digital media intersect within them. These Artists' Books presuppose, suggest and exploit some important and fundamental conventions of the digital environment which the traditional codex cannot do.

The second part presents the work of five South African artists, who I have invited to explore the slippery terrain between the book and the digital interface. I am indebted to them for taking up the challenge by producing new work for this exhibition and offering new readings on this interface. In this part I purposefully open up, rather than focus in on, this interface and what the book has to offer and be offered by the digital environment.

Two key conventions of the digital or electronic environment are its scroll-like presentation on the screen and its interactivity. A work which introduces the first of these conventions is Giulio Tambellini's *The Journey: Scridler's Procession Book*. (fig. 1) Unlike a conventional codex, Scridler's Procession consists of a number of independent intaglio-printed sheets of paper, rolled out from a cylindrical container and read as a scroll. As each sheet is of a different length, when the scroll is unrolled, the edge of one sheet positions one's space on the image below. As a means of navigation, such edges and spatial relationships become, along with the thickness of the scroll still to be unravelled, the haptic equivalents of the progress gauge to the right of the monitor.

The second convention of the digital or electronic work is interactivity, yet in Sonja Strafella's *The Violinator*, (fig. 2) this interactivity is foregrounded. The book includes manipulating 'buttons' which, when activated, transform the imagery and thus the content of the book. In Drucker's terms, the interpretive act of manipulating this active, interactive and dynamic form seems to suggest and prefigure the hypertextual function of the digital form. Of further interest to me is Strafella's decision to bind *The Violinator* as a concertina-fold book. By doing this it is possible to view the book as a singular, double or multiple set of pages and thus transforms the codex into something more complex, more suggestive and non-linear. In digital terms, the possibility of having multiple windows open on the screen for comparison and referral through alteration, toggling and change, is provocatively suggested in Strafella's binding decision.

Although neither the Tambellini nor the Strafella have any conscious relationship with digital media, both

containing handmade intaglio imagery and bindings, what seems most provocative is their non-conventional form and language. It is in the exploitation of non-linear narrative, book structure and materiality that the language of these forms seems to speak of the digital.

The singular recto vs. verso and double page nature of a codex's paper pages is, in Belinda Bignaut's *Antibody* (fig. 3) provided with an interesting and important tweak. By replacing paper with acetate, the viewer is able to glimpse elements of the book's totality, with a transparent accretion of imagery and text defining, updating and redefining the narrative on each side of the spine, as the pages are turned. It is important to acknowledge that *Antibody*, a bleak and foreboding little square, in which cover boards and interior are marvellously integrated, operates through the visual text and images bleeding upwards between the pages. This is achieved through the manipulation of the interplay between transparent and opaque information, signifying content as deeply imbedded wounds and the passage of time over which damage is done and healing needs to take place. As the acetate facilitates this change through each successive turn of the page, so the analogical *Antibody* becomes metaphorical, indeed in Drucker's term, a 'program' for the way in which the digital image may be overlapped, made transparent and brought into conjunction with other visual phenomena.

Cheryl Gage's *A Dedication to the History of Medusa* (fig. 4) exploits more than transparent layers and foldout pages, which provide a potentially non-sequential narrative, emulating the manner in which we can negotiate information on a screen. Here, Gage acknowledges, as part of the imagery of her domestic goddess, the digital origins and manipulations of the

original images, by including screen grab information, such as clock and date data, battery life and other information associated with a digital source. Through the inclusion of these visual/technical elements Gage builds her content by associating her historical protagonist with the contemporary moment. Along with self-conscious remnants of the digital manipulation of her imagery, Gage's book facilitates the domestic tensions of a digital goddess.

Fascinating examples of hybrids of digital animation and the sequential turning of pages in a conventional codex are William Kentridge's *Macba Flipbook* (fig. 5) and *Cyclopedia of Drawing*, (fig. 6) All aspects of these books have been digitally prepared and manipulated from existing historical texts – the former includes a series of charcoal and colour drawings onto Jeroni Marva's 1933 *Curs Practic de Gramatica Catalana Grau Elemental*, and the latter, a series of charcoal and coloured crayon drawings imposed upon the original book published in 1924 by American Technical Society, Chicago, U.S.A. Kentridge has scanned and printed the drawings upon the original texts and faithfully reproduced the paper quality, including foxing, in these editions. Notwithstanding the handmade visual elements of these digitally produced books, the cinematic and animated element is only brought to life when the reader rapidly flips the pages to reveal their stories. *Macba Flipbook* and *Cyclopedia of Drawing* provoke an intriguing interplay between the haptic and the digital, the cinematic and the static in book form. This allows the hand to control the pace at which the narrative unfolds and indeed at what point the narrative should begin and end. The physical structure of the codex is the dynamic agent here, reminding us of the centrality of sequential drawing on paper in the history of animation and film. What is also of

fig. 1

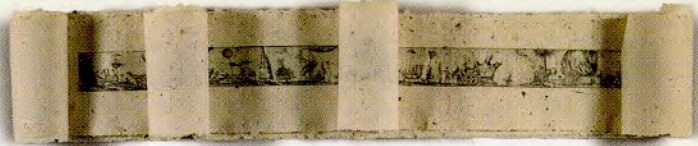


fig. 2



fig. 3

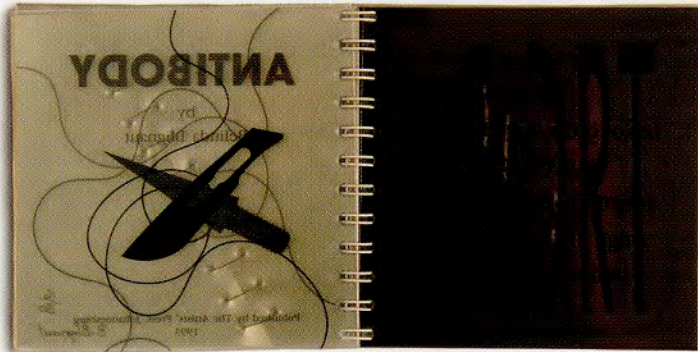
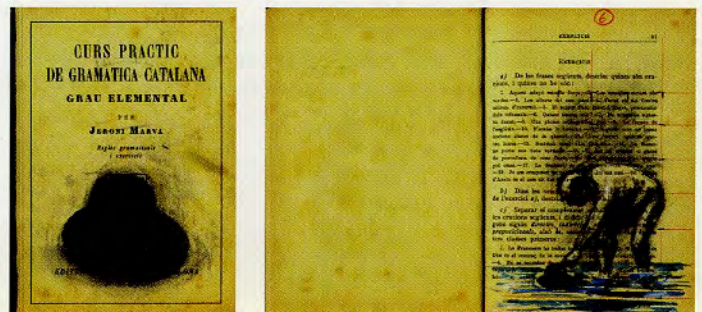


fig. 4



importance here is the dominance of the image over the text, a rare occurrence in a tradition where visual illustration often serves the 'higher' need of the textual narrative.

What I restate here is that it is often in the mediating space of the Artist's Book, what Drucker terms the 'phenomenal book', that we find a shift from the codex as "fixed artifact to that of a work whose existence is contingent on the active engagement of the reader. Always true...this principle re-imagines the space of the book through artistic imagination, revealing the dynamic properties of the codex."

I am intrigued to find that these qualities are beginning to enter the commercial novel, albeit slowly, when visionary writers like Jonathan Safran Foer exploit the dynamic properties operational in Artists' Books in an attempt to expand and deepen the content of their narrative. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* Foer exploits the conventions of the flip book in suggesting a hypertextual, parallel narrative with which to end the book. By altering text through strikethroughs and the dramatic manipulation of leading and kerning; with the conventional typeface sometimes imposed upon by seemingly haptic additions in red pen; and with the text block dismantled and redistributed in a manner which recalls Stephen Mallarmé's seminal 19th century *Un Coup de Dés*, Foer explodes the notion that the textual narrative of the novel alone carries the full responsibility of constructing and delivering content.

This active, participatory, multimedia and phenomenal experience, so familiar a convention in the gaming world needs, it would seem, some mediation and hand-holding in the world of the book and the visual image.

Marcus Neustetter's (2001) curatorial decisions, in *switch on/off*, acknowledged that: "Viewing works of new technology also requires a new approach...The majority of the art audience in South Africa has not been exposed to such conditions of viewing and therefore many require an entry point to such works. One solution is to illustrate the transition of artists' creative interventions by showing works by the same artist, related in subject matter, but realised in different media." The resulting dialogue between digital and conventional media seems now, to have been taken up explicitly by the artists.

There are two books which present themselves as both bound codexes, as well as digital presentations. The first, Abrie Fourie's *Philippians 4.8* (fig. 7) is a digital book consisting of changing screensaver images which rapidly appear and change in a matrix of 16 blocks on the screen. The seemingly random changes, both in order and location within the 16 blocks is undermined and ordered somewhat by the position of the cursor. When the cursor is moved into a block, subtitles appear providing a textual theme to the images playing out in that block. As visual representations of the chaos and unexpected beauty of the urban environment, the viewer is encouraged, as the biblical passage asks, to think on "...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" imploring us to reconsider our notions of beauty. The codex, which accompanies the digital book, when flipped through, provides a starting point for the observation and rendering of the complex mutability and changeability of the urban world. This is something which the flip book can suggest and prefigure for more complex digital arrangements.



The second book is Gordon Froud's *Turning the Tables*, (fig. 8) a flip book of manipulated black and white images. Here, Froud presents both a digital and a flip book codex of tables turning in space, gaining speed and morphing into new forms as a witty pun on both the subject matter and the form of their rotation. In interrogating the stasis associated with black and white photography by presenting them as sequential images to be flipped through manually, a wry comment is made on the book's ability to reconfigure iconic references, alter them and undermine the stasis associated with the medium. It is, in fact, the book which gives rise to the digital work as the codex has the ability to realise first what the digital can achieve.

Tambellini, one of South Africa's most prolific makers of Artists' Books, attempts to combine the digital screen's elements of rapid update, transparency, image manipulation, animation and the potential to read multiple open windows simultaneously in his *Pig's Ear Merger*. (fig. 9) Layered scans of direct male relatives are overlaid with digital photographs to show different levels of identity through genes and blood. The result is a quick journey through a slice of time in which lineage, self and other are explored. In this form, the artist expects the viewer to handle each page of the book – as it is unbound – as if it were a window open on a screen and consider the subtle transformations which each screen manipulation offers. The pages appear like transforming 'screen grabs', each locking in the graphical manipulation of the image through time. As the pages are unbound, it seems possible to reorder them and reconstruct the book afresh with each viewing.

Like Kentridge's books, Ian Marley's *Dyslexic ABC* (fig. 10) incorporates scanned drawings which, when

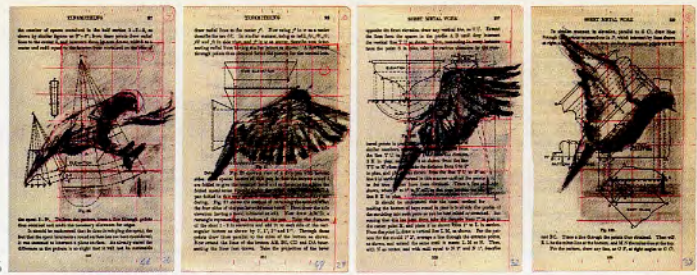


fig. 6

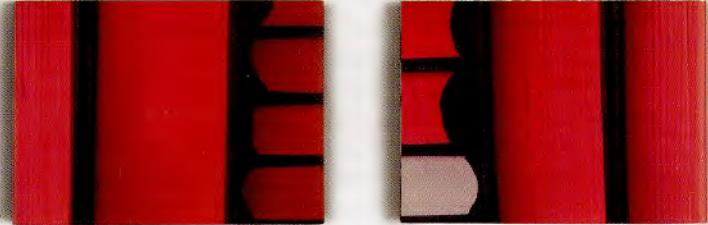


fig. 7



fig. 8



fig. 9



fig. 10

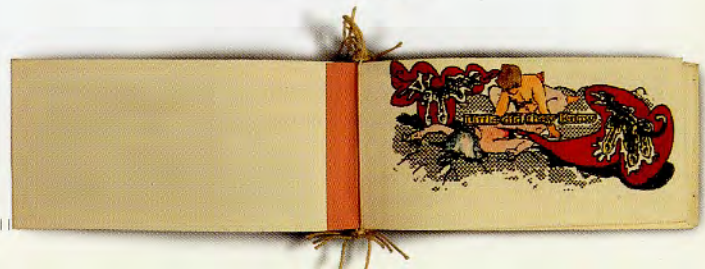


fig. 11

viewed together in a line of images, transform to become letters, words and sentences. In this way, each image can be deciphered as a code in the construction of textual meaning, with tags and bookmarks abounding like electronic indicators in virtual space and on the page. Similar to Tambellini's dot matrix-printed *Nice Game Nasty Stuffing* (fig. 11) which was drawn using the relatively random accuracy of a mouse, this work derives its meaning from the digitisation of haptically derived images and texts – in Marley's case, exploring the complexities of dyslexia and in the Tambellini, the transmission and ravages of AIDS.

I have included John Moore's *A Book of Dreams* (fig. 12) as an example of the digital's ability to be integrated into diverse media. At first glance the book consists of images, texts and blind embossed elements, hand cut and printed from relief linocuts. On closer examination you will see that the text is in fact produced digitally from a font developed by Moore which he has named 'Bushman Iconography'. The text is then digitally transferred to offset litho plates and printed in close registration with the hand cut lino blocks. The integration of handmade and digital imagery in such a seamless and unified manner seems unique to the Artist's Book.

Another book which exploits a particular digital process or function is Abrie Fourie's *Giant Protea*. (fig. 13) The artist presents images of casual and available sex "amidst the bizarre back drop of Afrikaaner, Voortrekker, narrative. It is impossible to sanction such acts in our society, that is why these images are so provocative" (Kellner 1995). What is of interest to me is Fourie's cutting of squares and rectangles into the page similar to censor's strips. What appears to be a deliberate and strategic cut on the recto often becomes arbitrary and non-aligned on the verso

allowing for seemingly independent, new visual and content-based relationships to be forged between the main image and the view-through-the-cut. For me, what is suggested here is a haptic program of hypertexts, 'links' to an ever expanding body of information and inference, remote and virtual, yet surprisingly attainable, even if the 'link' is, in Kellner's terms, a bizarre one.

Donna Kukama's *Hair* (fig. 14) seems to embody the idea of images as a set of singular steps in an attempt at becoming something other: in this case, the transformation of hair into visual static, visible noise, a silent transmuted otherness locked on paper as a record of some Brad Hammond-like digital interference. In becoming, through this interference, something unlike hair, Kukama seems to need the idea of a book as a record of this temporal electronic event. The book thereby seems the ideal space of recording what, in digital form and like the static which builds up on hair, might be lost.

I have included two books by Chris Diedericks. Diedericks describes *Residue* (fig. 15) as a "survey of the audiovisual residue of the previous century, both macroscopic and microscopic." In it Diedericks explores the parallel texts of exhibition catalogue and socio-political critique of prejudice and bad taste.

*Bitter Love* (fig. 16) was digitally printed by the artist and bound in mauve linen with a slipcase by Peter Carstens. The seven linoleum cuts are hand printed and stamped and signed by the artist. In working one's way through this book, the reader/viewer is confronted with a multitude of graphic and book conventions. But it is in the act of manipulation: turning, folding out, folding back, viewing one set of visual phenomena through the visual trace of another; revealing and hiding, that the full extent of the book as a virtual space is revealed.

It seems fitting to end with another work by Giulio Tambellini. I find parallels between his *Breaking Doll* (fig. 17, p. 7) and Diederick's *Bitter Love*, not only in the overlaps in content but also in the way in which both the haptic and the digital find a home within the coverboards. Hidden in the page binding for each digitally and self-consciously manipulated page of *Breaking Doll* is a drawing on buff coloured paper. These literal pull-downs and pop-ups infuse the work with a wonderful interactivity which reminds the viewer of the work's source as well as its hypertextual links to a field of related ideas, concepts and processes.

As these two books unfold, their very dimensions alter. They seem to breathe, reaching for and revealing information, seemingly outside of themselves, and then revealing more, literally from within. These are exquisitely conceived and crafted objects and seem apt examples of what Drucker terms: "An interface that creates a platform for interpretive acts to be noticed as such, called to our attention as performance" marking a shift from book as artefact or vehicle of delivery of content, to "the living, dynamic nature of works as produced by interpretive acts."

#### Texts Cited:

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Neustetter, Marcus (2001) *switch on/off*. Outshoorn, KKNK 2001. pp5-21.

fig. 12



fig. 13

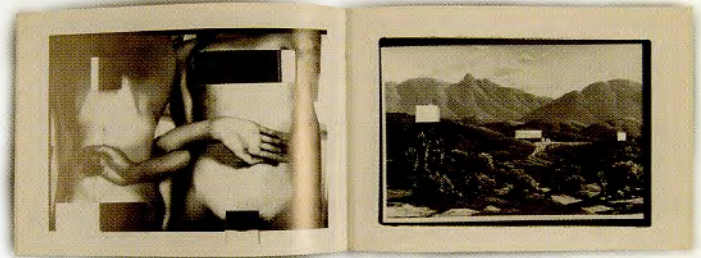


fig. 14



fig. 15



fig. 16





**Kim Lieberman**

DP: *'Being Digital' could imply that what you are making for the show is not a book at all. In what way does your work, promote the idea of 'bookness'?*

KL: Human Current (Circle) (2006 5766) is in its primary format an oil painting on blank postage stamp paper. It has a digital sequel which makes the painting 'come alive' or be more explanatory in its concept.

The sources for the figures are all found in books. Below each figure I give a 'bibliography' – I also include any interesting caption that went with the photograph. Between the silhouette and the writing the viewer can glean certain cultural, historical and conceptual backgrounds to the figure which play into the total concept of how each person, no matter how far a field, influences the shape of the current of the 'whole'.

In the digital sequel the figures are the same as they are in the painting but they rotate very slowly. The 'bibliography' of each figure folds out into a shape, a pattern that moves - as a current would. These words flow out from their own silhouette and interact, intercept or ignore the other flowing words.

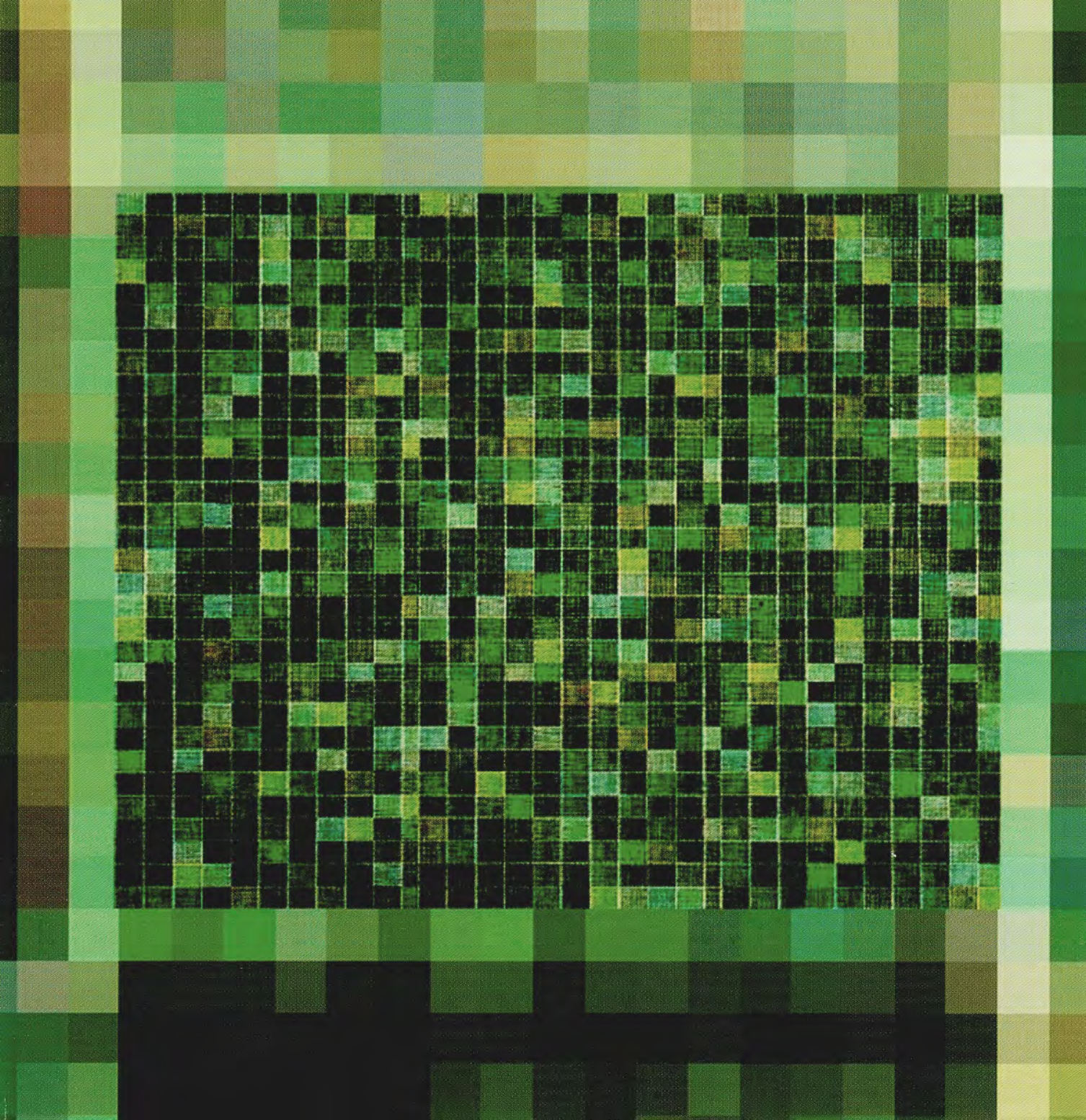
DP: *If, in the hands of the artist, the book is interrogated, questioned, altered and transformed into a 'hybrid, intermedial*

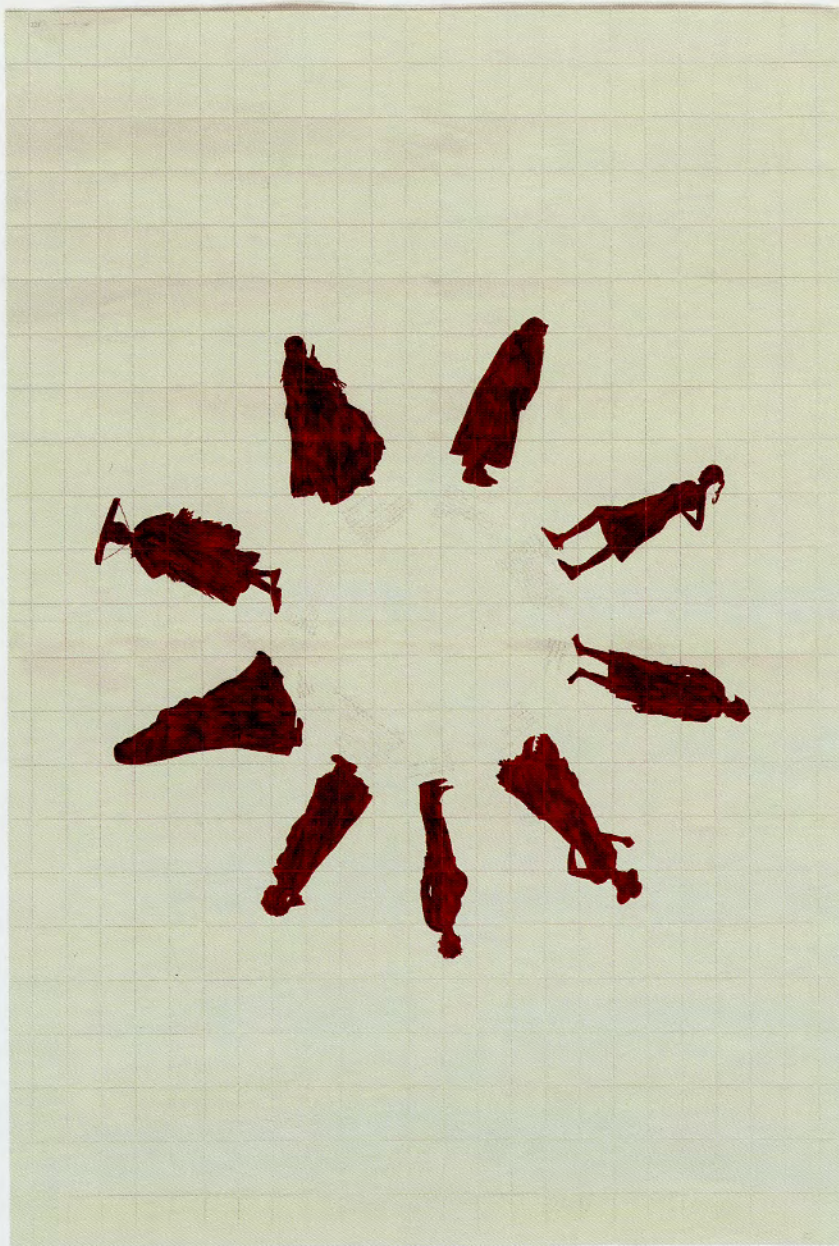
*thing', how has your artwork moved beyond merely digitising the idea of a book?*

KL: The artwork only uses the book as a source. I trace, very accurately figures from photographs found in books, then I use the information from the book to reference where I found the figure and to give a context (cultural or historical) for the figure. The work is about the energetic impact we have on the whole and the information provided is necessary to show that the figures are specific, real people, but they are also symbolic of all specific people. Our actions all add to and impact, to a certain extent, and the concept underlines this using the textural reference of particular people's silhouettes to do so.

DP: *If the Artist's Book is an interrogation of the qualities of a book, in what way does your work attempt to emulate or maintain any of the codex's materiality, structure, shape and literary-structural conventions?*

KL: In both the stamp paper work and the digital sequel I use text in a bibliographical way to present information. In the digital sequel, the work interrogates 'bookness' by transforming the experience of reading static text into a more visually complex activity of tracing moving patterns of letters and words, allowing for the position of the letters, and perhaps their meaning, to influence their movement across the digital 'page'.





*Human Current (Circle)* | 2006 5766 | postage stamp paper, oil paint, pencil | 735 x 1 095 mm





**Giulio Tambellini**

DP: *If the exhibition aims to open up questions and debates around what 'the digital interface' might bring to the conventions of the codex, which might enhance and expand our notions of, and/or experience of 'bookness', what do you believe your work might contribute to the debate?*

GT: I believe that artists as bookmakers are only limited by the materials available. Recently on television I saw an insert showing sheets of paper, which could capture and play back recorded sound as well as new format paper CDs. These two paper-based items were manufactured in the Far East and in the long run aim to revolutionise. Currently, digital media can't be cast like paper, woven in working form or manipulated in ways which only artists are capable of doing. Until such a day, we have to print our visual content on limited stock (anything) with little dynamic interaction possibilities or resort to other computer-based technology, such as web formats, projected or avi based communication mediums loosely known as 'new media'. If we as artists could get hold of flat, flexible, interactive computer screens which we could physically print onto, fold, or bind together, in some way to resemble a book, then we would probably have a fully digital book on our hands.

My work explores something in this direction by taking the traditional elements of a book's make-up and running amok with it using digital technology. During the late eighties I was exploring the possibilities of taking electronic music synthesisers apart and embedding their trigger keys into cast paper and making interactive book objects. I have always worked in music, photography, video, but primarily exhibited the traditional art form of printmaking. The Internet has largely evolved the experience of content delivery beyond the need for the physical book as ideal package. I produce websites with the same excitement as I do books because they both possess similar interactive possibilities through navigation options. But this is another category all together. I basically hold onto the rules, while thinking in different directions at once! I am excited by the idea of hybrid technology and multi-sensory experiences through my books.

DP: *If, in the hands of the artist, the book is interrogated, questioned, altered and transformed into a 'hybrid, intermedial thing', how has your artwork moved beyond merely digitising the idea of a book?*

GT: In my view there are clear boundaries between anything simulated by light-based media such as a television screen, computer monitor, data projector, cinema reel or slide show as opposed to the tactile, bound object defined as a book. Computer monitors and projectors of light content are merely devices that exploit the physical assets of natural light and optics to project images, create illusionary space and simulate content in the process.

If I had to sever the binding threads between the pages of my book, the definition 'book' would cease to exist. If I had to include a projection of the filmed footage included in the book's binding onto the pages even when they remain bound to the spine unit, it would probably become an installation by injecting the dominance of sound and light as medium onto the books pages. When does a book become a sculpture or a performance piece, or rather, when does a performance piece or sculpture become a book? Greenaway's *The Pillow Book* is clearly a movie and not a book. I have always been fascinated by the old ring-binder and arch lever files...are they books?

Digitisation has brought about a number of debates surrounding its impact on traditional processes and meaning. The largest problem is that of semantics and not the identity crisis of any new media or production form. Words such as publish, virtual, notebook, 'new media', network and digital, have been co-opted by computer companies to define new versions of traditional processes. We in fact need new words with new definitions for 'virtually' doing things within the Internet, telecommunication platforms and light projection media.

My book does not merely simulate the experience of a book through digital means. It remains a book as it is bound together (although expansive to the doors of installation art).

(Right) MW5 1-4-7 (detail) | 2006 | digital print | 210 x 210 mm





What's happening tomorrow?' I foolishly asked resorting to a grim to cover up my inanity in lieu of her recent endeavours in the name of her art.

'Can I work for you?' she begged with a soft frown needing to escape the world she was in.

I laughed. 'I can only offer you a photographic modelling job and even then there's no payment at the moment' I surrendered, knowing I should never have opened my mouth. What the fuck was I thinking, getting into the peripheral ranks on the great global dance underground. I know this world from a distance and it's another kind of magic but its drug and power based.

'Thank God! Something different. I have a heavy session of dancing at Dazzle, but I know how to disappear from time to time.' She smiled.

I met her in the old town one morning early because this was the best time to escape the world she was in as most of her people were still profoundly lost in their slumber from the ravaging hedonism of the previous night. I gathered that she was not totally reliant on drugs for her mission and that maybe she wanted to be involved in the classical idea of art. Its subject.

It did transpire that we met and she looked slightly unsure about this new chapter. Like myself she was asking the exact same questions - 'Why do all this in the name of some three-letter word Art?'

We drove to my family's rented villa on the precise day that they were all out on the beaches for their day. Beniras was the traditional ruling beach as it had two restaurants, convenient loos and was off the beaten track for people without transport.

Gravel crunched under the tyres of the small Fiat and for a moment over dubbed the waking Cicadas. The pool was crystal clear and mirror still. The view from the villas sprawling brown slate terrace was spectacular and showed off the ancient mound town of Ibiza in the far distance. The town we stayed in was called Jesus.

I offered her a drink and she was obviously impressed at the villa and signs of culture. It was noon and I opened a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc and tossed some bread I baked the night before into the oven for a wake up call. Behind me, the deep crashing sound of water raced through my senses as she surrendered to the freedom of the plunge. I hadn't even gotten her name. Was I also a propagator of twenty-first-century human trade?

I walked over to the pools edge and met her with her wine and a snack. She was naked and her intentions were to relax into a new pressure free day away from the mob. I suggested that we had a snack and then got straight to business as the early afternoon sun was ideal for what I had in mind. She smiled with an informed gaze and nosed her Sauvignon Blanc like an informed soul. I paused before asking if she knew about wine.

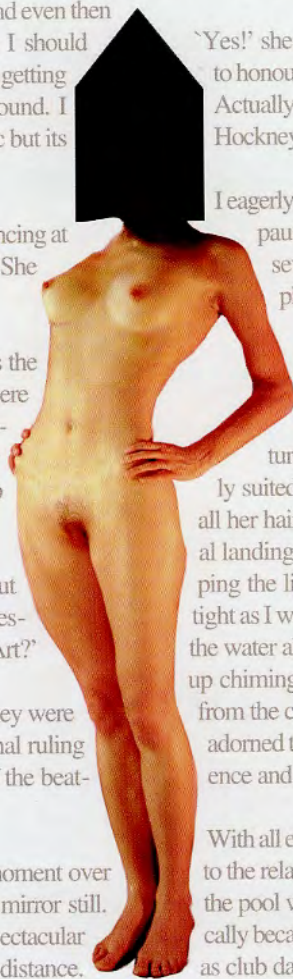
'Yes!' she whispered and dove right back under the undulation water to honour David Hockney's classic pop images of Dave under water. Actually the previous holiday in Cala Longa was the exact replica of Hockney's painting.

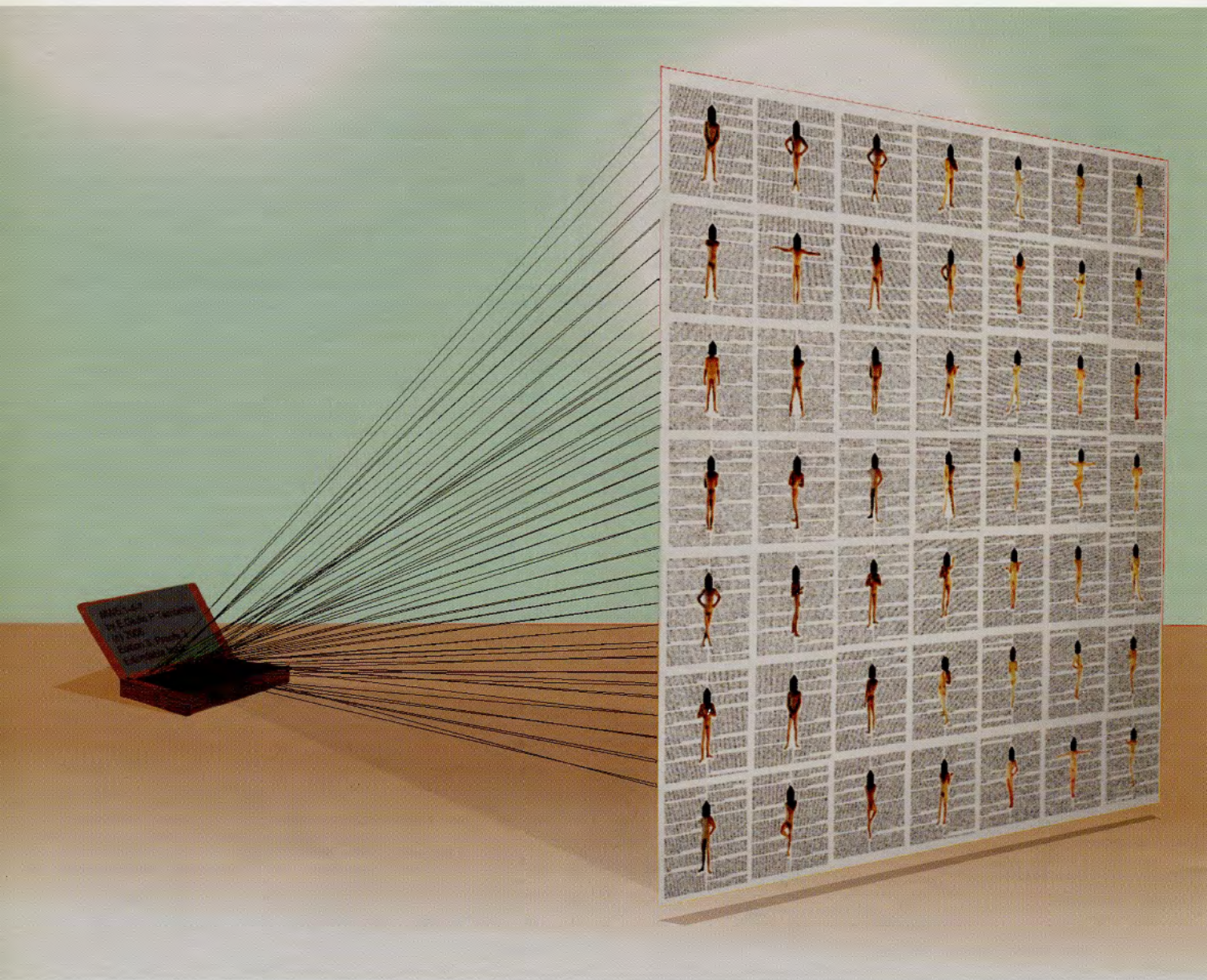
I eagerly rose and got my camera's ready checking the film speed and pausing to decide upon a shooting style. In my hand I clutched several rolls of metallic chrome foil which was the point of this photo shoot.

She presented her perfect body to me after a while of swimming. She was a true muse. No naïve questions or clues please. She stood silent and still, covered in a myriad of fortunate drops licking her youthful skin. Her breasts were ideally suited to her body and not on the large size. She had not shaven all her hair away but maintained a gentle presence in the conventional landing-strip style so to speak. I did not hesitate and started wrapping the light metallic plastic ribbon around her body. Initially quite tight as I would be shooting her in various stages of uncoil in and under the water along the length of the extensive pool. She turned like a pop-up chiming ballerina with a titter and loved where she was at. Away from the crass dolling up of theme raves and the quasi-celebrity status adorned to the dancers and their pimp agents. Here there was no audience and it was a new slice of her life.

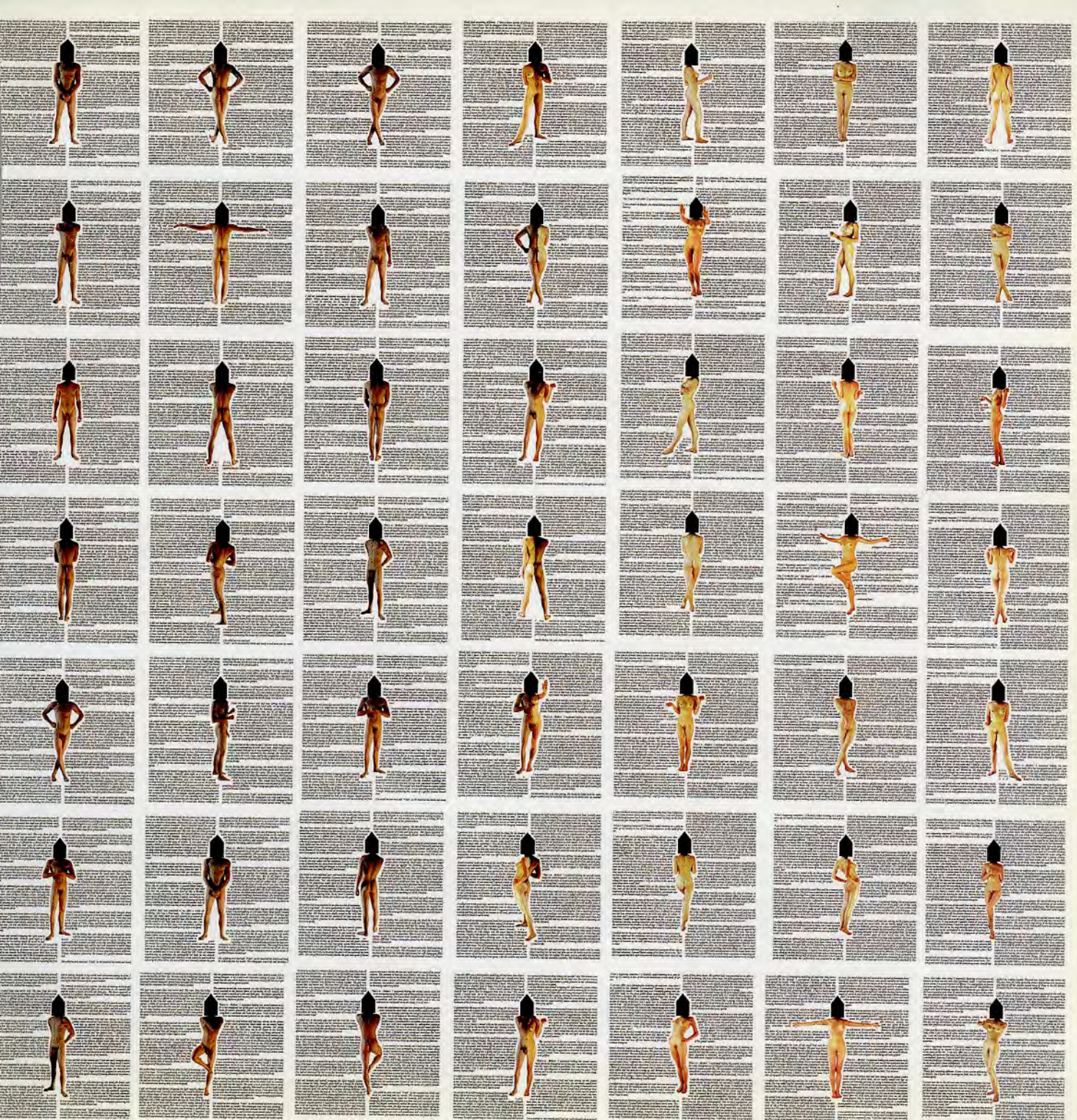
With all elements synchronising to perfection she surrendered her body to the relaxed, elegant posture I suggested and cheerfully swam across the pool with me shooting her from above. She was perfect and ironically became the part once again of bound splendour like her profession as club dancer. It's weird how destiny works by her needing this part in my world with characters casting in place. I don't think that she saw this in that way as this was a holiday for her soul right under the noses of her grand masters.

The contrast at mid-day was extreme, the idea of shooting in black and white resulted in the desired effect of sun-bursts on the metallic foil and the water a dazzle of white and dark grey. Her figure appeared distorted.





MW5 1-4-7 | 2006 | digital prints, video tape and card box | 1 470 x 1 470 mm x variable depth





**André Venter**

DP: *If the Artist's Book is an interrogation of the qualities of a book, in what way does your work attempt to emulate or maintain any of the codex's materiality, structure, shape and literary-structural conventions?*

AV: This exhibition is about challenging the limits of the 'e-book' concept which is stuck in 'conventions' at many levels. If the 'bookness' of the 'e-book' can be analysed in terms of formal and functional properties and relationships then I would argue that the tight relationships between form and function need to be questioned before we can proceed to re-invent or 'enhance and expand' the 'e-book' as 'Artist's Book'. In this process we also need to be critical of our own reliance on formal attributes as a dominant strategy in visual arts for identification and classification. We may ask if our reliance on formal characteristics is not partly responsible for our blindness to the radical changes in the functionality of new media like the Web.

My work will not accept the 'bookness' of the 'e-book' uncritically, but will ask intermediate questions at many levels. The state of affairs we are investigating here may be described as: { d { c { b { a } } } } where "a" is the artifact exhibited in this exhibition.

There are four fronts where we may launch an assault in order to free the 'e-book' form imposed structures: (d) observer conditions, (c) material conditions, (b) disciplinary conditions and (a) information conditions. This exhibition advances on all four fronts simultaneously. By exhibiting to the public it hopes to transform (a) the observer's concepts of the Artists' e-Book and the 'Artist's Book' by transforming (c) material conditions, (b) disciplinary practices and (a) the information conditions of artifacts designated here as 'Artists' Books'.

The 'Artist's Book' is the best choice for a beach head because it is open to re-thinking and relies least, of all books, on the observer's approval and patronage. By designating an 'artifact', 'e-book', it may seem that the change in (c) MATERIAL conditions from light reflecting paper were the ink dries, to dynamic light emitting technologies have been accounted for. But this is surely not the case. This exhibition lays siege to the bastion of 'materiality' with weapons of virtuality. In its conception this exhibition is cast as a politic between static light reflective and dynamic light emitting

technologies (or material conditions). It is suggested that the artist questions this level, the level of presentation and its material limits. But there is another level, the level of pre-facture. It is at this level – the level of writing itself – where my work will pose its most significant questions, while also engaging with the level of presentation suggested.

i. I employ the I-Ching method of 'divination' in ancient Chinese culture as a writing method. The use of this method allows me to automate the process of writing itself.

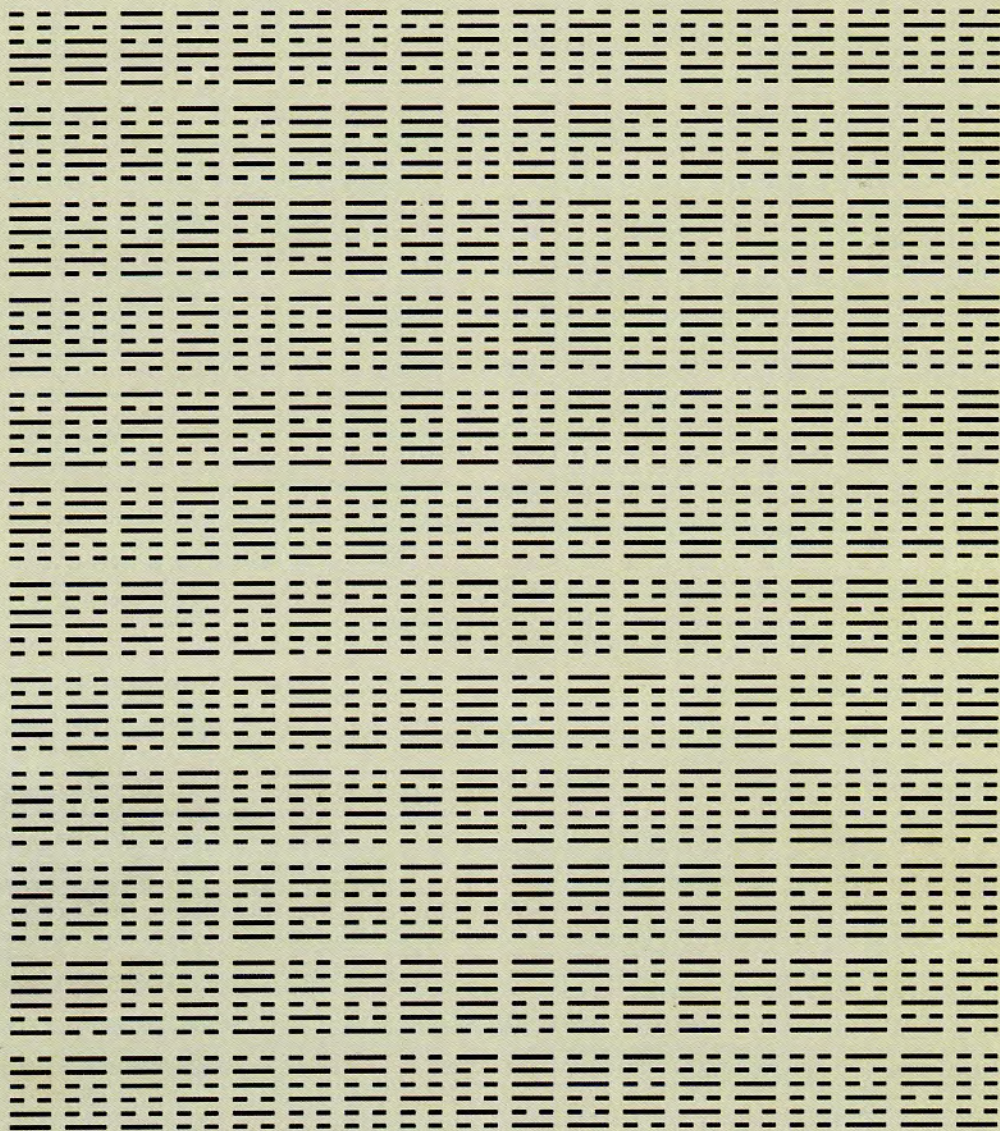
ii. I use the I-Ching Hexagram as a symbol for writing, replacing the phonetic alphabet with a symbolic system which is not in use as a general writing system in any culture. The Hexagram is normally used as a system of logic (functioning as keys) leading to text fragments in the I-Ching. My work maintains the link between the Hexagram and the texts as well as its associated symbols.

iii. The Hexagrams are arranged in a regular grid – thus maintaining the planar arrangement of symbols found in Western writing, but the form of the symbols will not express a visual hierarchy as Western convention dictates.

iv. For the web-based work the planar surface will be extended beyond the web page convention of vertical scrolling. It will extend far beyond the width and height of the screen and web browser. The surface will be a grid of Hexagrams which are uniquely rewritten every time the site is accessed. The hexagrams will allow access to Symbols and Texts from the I-Ching.

v. The Print-based work will limit itself to the conventional technologies of paper and printers – whatever is available to us in this case.

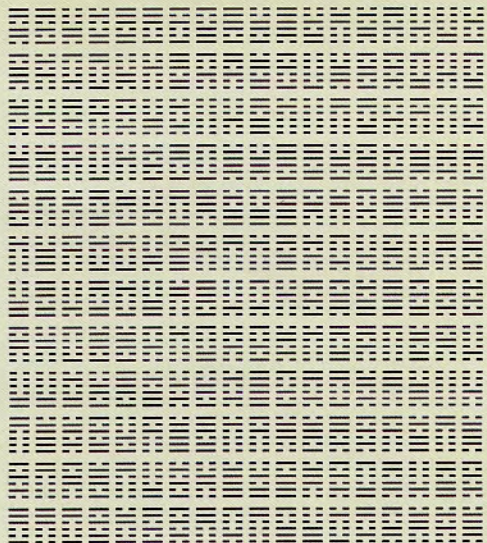
There is another level, (a) the level of information conditions. To say that the 'e-book' or e-codex functions as a valid form for content, is to say that 'bookness' is in fact the primary condition for validity as an 'e-book' artifact. If that is the case then the only front open for assault is to show how the original material conditions may be transgressed. Our assault then becomes a critique of the conditions of paper; page and binding not a critique of the information conditions as 'book' or 'codex' which – along with the book's material conditions - make the concept of 'e-book' possible. This exhibition and my work also assault the information conditions of the 'book'.



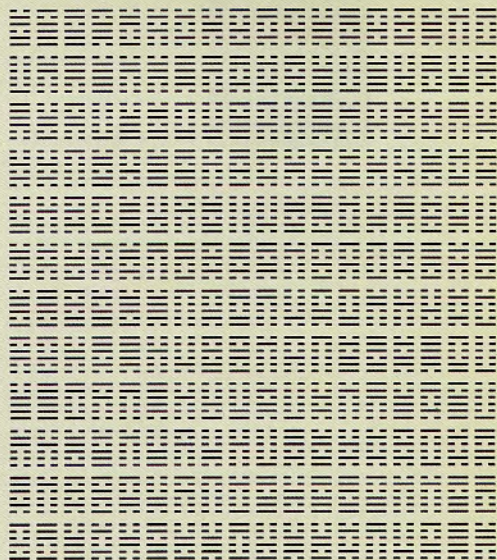
# I-Ching for the 'African Renaissance'

*'I-Ching for the African Renaissance'*  
2006  
digital prints and digital animation  
size variable





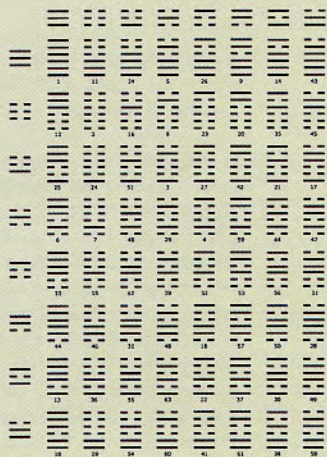
6



7

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 Keightley, D. 1983. *The Origins of Chinese Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
 Loewe, M. 1979. *Ways to Paradise*. London: Allen & Unwin.  
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 Whitfield, R. 1990. *The Problem of Meaning in Early Chinese Ritual Bronzes*. London: University of London.





**Marc Edwards**

DP: *'Being Digital' could imply that what you are making for the show is not a book at all. In what way does your work, promote the idea of 'bookness'?*

ME: In this work I have used a technique of the self as a means of making, where cyberspace is considered as a site for practice. As a site of a politics of identity, where we have difficulty in truly identifying the authentic, I begin with the production of an online diary, not unlike a blog, not as confessional, but as self writing. I produce identifying documentation in an attempt at an authentic finding of my place in the world through a practice of care. Although this practice is rooted in writing and as a result refers to the idea of book, the outcome is a daily digital self portrait. These portraits are taken with my Sony Erricson P910i phone and processed in Photoshop.

DP: *The exhibition aims to open up questions and debates around what "the digital interface" might bring to the conventions of the codex which might enhance and expand our notions of and/or experience of 'bookness'. What do you believe your work might contribute to the debate?*

ME: The convergence of media brings dynamism to the digital interface; the book finds it difficult to keep up.

*Authentic – not authentic, self practice from 11/04/05 to 12/05/06 | 2006  
wall-mounted double screen DVD and digital prints | size variable*

*Right: 20050502 (detail) | print size 590 x 590 mm*

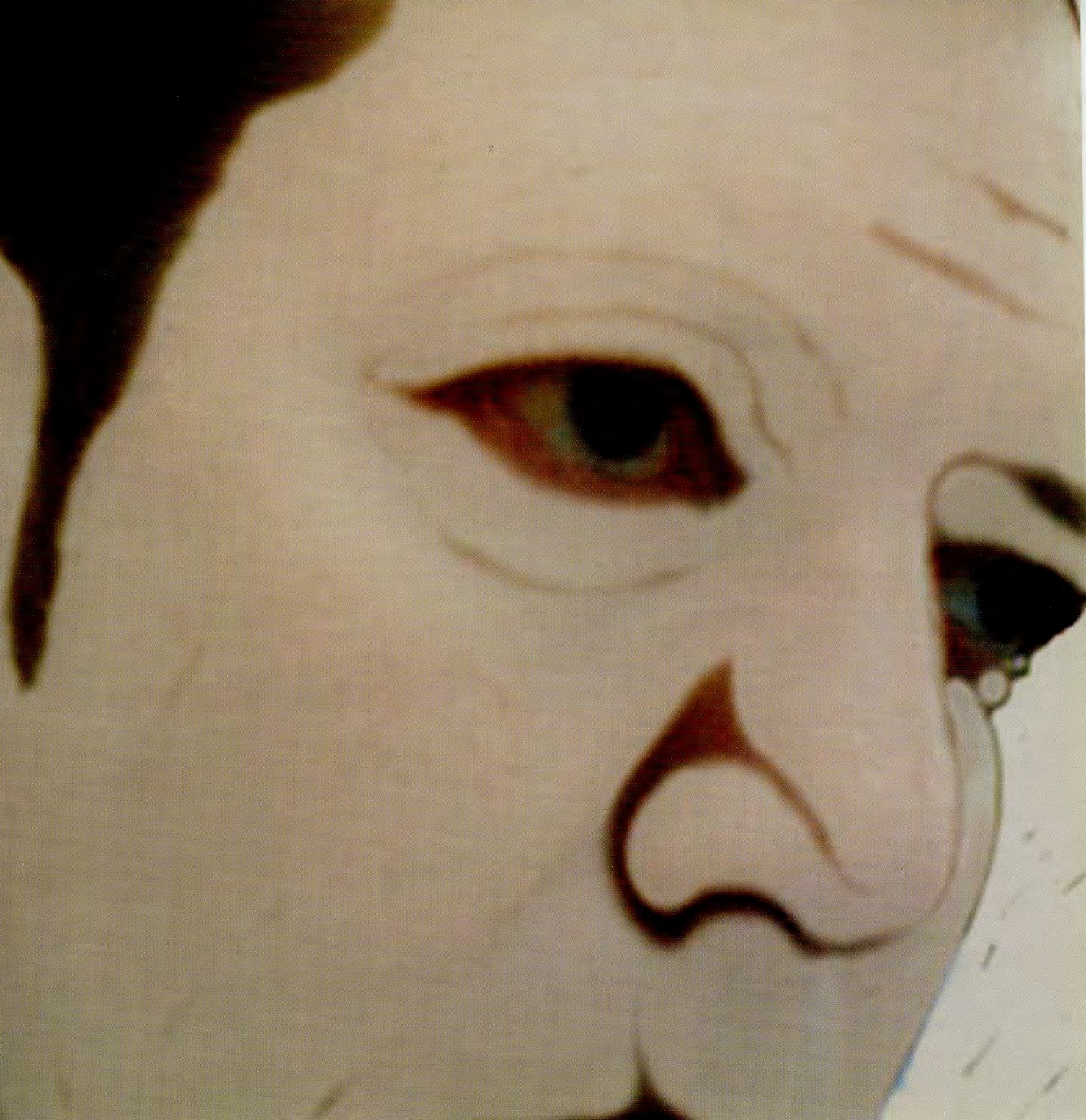
*Overleaf left: 20050513 (detail) | print size 590 x 590 mm*

*Overleaf right: 20051125 (detail) | print size 590 x 590 mm*











**Paul Emmanuel**

DP: *'Being Digital' could imply that what you are making for the show is not a book at all. In what way does your work, promote the idea of 'bookness'?*

PE: For me, the viewer-'book' relationship is an interactive one: physically, emotionally and conceptually. To experience a 'book' one is enticed to engage with separate revealed 'stations' or parts, not the entire object all at once, as one would experience a single image. I also feel that in the 'book' experience, this engagement is initiated by the viewer: I have chosen to use a touch-screen monitor as the 'interface' between viewer and 'book', each 'page' being revealed in response to the viewer's touch.

DP: *The Artist's Book employs and often subverts image/text relations. How does your work explore the relationship between image and text?*

PE: The images in this work are photographs of different parts of my body, blind embossed with the names of men who died in the Frontier Wars fought in the Grahamstown area in the 1820s and 50s. The names were set in lead type and then pressed directly into my skin. When withdrawn after a few minutes, a photograph was taken quickly before the remaining impression disappeared. It was a painful process. After touching the screen, a new 'page' is revealed and the remaining impressions of these names slowly fade away.

DP: *If the Artist's Book is an interrogation of the qualities of a book, in what way does your work attempt to emulate or maintain*

*any of the codex's materiality, structure, shape and literary-structural conventions?*

PE: Materiality and Structure: The touch sensitive screen replaces the 'page' of a traditional book. By touching the screen, the page is 'turned'. The tactile quality of paper is often used to 'talk' about the subject matter of an Artist's Book. I wanted to use the cold unforgiving surface of a glass screen to talk poignantly about intimacy and alienation, the body being soft and warm to the touch.

Shape: At the moment, anything in digital form has to be engaged with through an "interface mechanism" – usually a processor of some sort i.e. a computer and its monitor; a DVD or CD player or projector something to convert ones and noughts into energy forms that can be processed by the five senses. These items of hardware still determine the physical manifestation or 'shape' of 'digital artworks'. I have chosen to conceal the computer processor and keyboard. None of these physical forms emulate traditional books directly, apart from hopefully enticing the viewer to engage, much the same way as a book's cover would compel the reader to open....

Right, overleaf left and right: *The Last Men Project (Grahamstown) (details) | 2006 digital program, touch-screen monitor on pedestal | size variable (photographs: Andrew Meintjes)*



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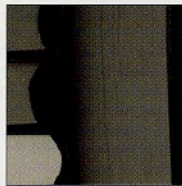


**Part One**  
1.



**Giulio Tambellini**  
*The Journey: Scriddler's Procession Book*  
1987  
Box: 210 mm  
Leaves: variable in scroll form  
Edition: unique

7.



**Abrie Fourie**  
*Philippians 4.8*  
2001  
88 mm oblong  
Publisher: MTN Art Institute  
The book is accompanied by a digital sequence

2.



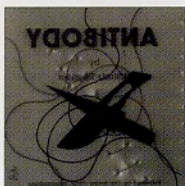
**Sonja Strafella**  
*The Violinator*  
1991  
340 mm  
Edition: unique

8.



**Gordon Froud**  
*Turning the Tables*  
2005  
150 mm  
Edition: unique  
The book is accompanied by a digital sequence

3.



**Belinda Blignaut**  
*Antibody*  
1993  
100 mm  
Edition: 16/30

9.



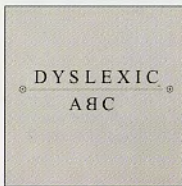
**Giulio Tambellini**  
*Pig's Ear Merger*  
2000  
315 mm  
Edition: 1/10

4.



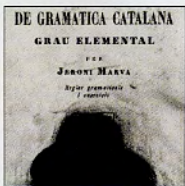
**Cheryl Gage**  
*A Dedication to the History of Medusa*  
2005  
158 mm  
Edition: unique

10.



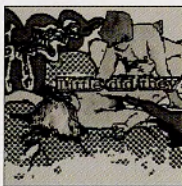
**Ian Marley**  
*Dyslexic ABC*  
2005  
276 mm oblong  
Edition: 1/20

5.



**William Kentridge**  
*Macba Flipbook*  
1999  
165 mm  
Edition: 82/100 signed of 1000  
Publisher: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

11.



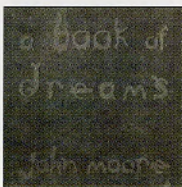
**Giulio Tambellini**  
*Nice Game Nasty Stuffing*  
1995  
100 mm, oblong  
Edition: unique

6.



**William Kentridge**  
*Cyclopedia of Drawing*  
2004  
210 mm  
Edition: 6/100  
Publisher: Ecole d'art de l'agglomeration d'Annecy

12.



**John Moore**  
*A Book of Dreams*  
2005  
390 mm  
Edition: 1/12

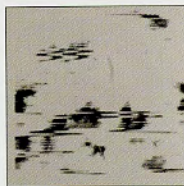


13.



**Abrie Fourie**  
*Giant Protea*  
 1996  
 148 mm oblong  
 Edition: 1/30

14.



**Donna Kukama**  
*Hair*  
 2003  
 162 mm  
 Edition: 1/3

15.



**Chris Diedericks**  
*Residue*  
 2003  
 122 mm  
 Edition: 2/10

16.



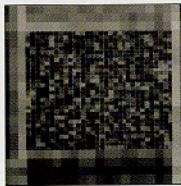
**Chris Diedericks**  
*Bitter Love*  
 2002/3  
 220 mm oblong  
 Edition: 2/7

17.



**Giulio Tambellini**  
*Breaking Doll*  
 2000  
 210 mm  
 Edition: 1/3

**Part  
 Two  
 18.**



**Kim Lieberman**  
*Amazon.com*  
 2001 5761  
 digital animation  
 size variable

19.



**Kim Lieberman**  
*Human Current (Circle)*  
 2006 5766  
 postage stamp paper; oil paint, pencil  
 735 x 1 095 mm  
 and digital animation sequel  
 projected to 735 x 1 095 mm  
 in collaboration with Mitch Said

20.



**Giulio Tambellini**  
*MWS 1-4-7*  
 2006  
 digital prints, video tape and card box  
 1 470 x 1 470 mm x variable depth

21.



**André Venter**  
*'I-Ching for the African Renaissance'*  
 2006  
 digital prints and digital animation  
 size variable

22.



**Marc Edwards**  
*Authentic – not authentic, self practice*  
 from 11/04/05 to 12/05/06.  
 2006  
 wall-mounted double screen DVD and  
 digital prints  
 590 x 590 mm

23.



**Paul Emmanuel**  
*The Last Men Project (Grahamstown)*  
 2006  
 digital program, touch-screen monitor  
 on pedestal  
 size variable





