

Illustrated Book Project Proposal

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Theme/Context

My goal for this project is to create a body of work which together with the physical and symbolical forms of a book create the overall narrative. The book is not only the vehicle to display the work inside but is just as important to the narrative as its contents. One can only work with the other.

For centuries books have been a symbol of education, knowledge and intellect. This can be seen in art throughout the ages, from portrait painting during the Renaissance, to logo designs in the modern day.

Simone, painted by Georges D’Espagnat in 1907, shows a woman sitting in a garden reading a book. Education, as well as art, at this time was only available to the elite so including books within art spoke of wealth and education. ‘Portraits of ladies with books have a noticeable elegance that is afforded by culture, and the huge importance society attaches to knowledge. Only a minority of woman received an education, yet there are many portraits of women with books. Books were uncommon and were used as signs of distinction’.



(Figure 1, Simone 1907)

– *Woman and Books. A Reflection through Western Painting* (no date) Museo Thyssen.

Books also symbolise protection. The earliest books ever printed were books of sacred text. The Diamond Sutra 868 CE, and the Gutenberg Bible 1455, were two of the first sacred texts to be printed. This was not only for humanity to acquire the knowledge, but it was a way of preserving the text. Keeping it safe. Keeping it alive.

William Henry Fox Talbot the pioneer photographer also used a book for protection. His earliest photographs were put inside a book named The Bertoloni Album (Album di Disegni Fotogenici), which currently lives at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The images were put into the album to physically protect the images from light. During this time there wasn't a fixer which worked permanently so the images would start deteriorating with the presence of light. 'Talbot's early photogenic drawings are so ephemeral that, despite their exceptional beauty, they can never be exhibited or exposed to light without risk of change. Even his far more stable calotypes fixed with hypo were inconsistent in their permanence, many deteriorating in quick order; a reviewer of the 1862 International Exhibition described some photographs as "fading before the eyes of the nations assembled."' -M.Daniel 2004

Taking on these symbolic themes of A Book, I want to create a piece of work focusing on creation (art), education, and protection. In recent times within the state educational system, Art as a GCSE, has seen an enrolment decline of around 40% since 2010. One of the reasons for this decline is the lack of funding available for the arts. According to The Guardian - 'private schools have invested substantial resources in art and music provision, according to research from Warwick University. This depressing trend is part of a wider and self-reinforcing pattern. As fewer state students have the opportunity to engage with arts or music, fewer go on to study these subjects at A-level or university. The risk is that arts subjects will be restricted to a privileged few, shrinking the cultural horizons of everyone but the elite.'

I want my work to highlight the importance of Art within the educational system whilst using the theme of the book to convey the message of protecting the rights for art education to all children.

I want to achieve this by producing a set of images of different parts of the body not only to communicate the importance art has on our wellbeing but to express how art is a huge part of who we are, from the way we look at the world through our eyes to the way we recreate our world from our fingertips. The images will have the ability to unfold out of its protective case (the book cover) and be rearranged and/or moveable so one can partake in the way the images are perceived, it is a piece that the observer can become fully engaged with. They become the creator over the layout.

Influence

Sarah Grounds is a photographer who I am currently inspired by. Her on-going project 'The Links Project' is a collection of images, installations and performances that touch upon subjects of freedom and connection.

Here is an image taken from one of Sarahs installations. The installation consisted of images of different things including images of her body parts, flower heads, birds and objects. These images were encased within wire spheres and hung like columns from the ceiling.

What inspires me about this body of work is Sarahs combined use of image and object. She cleverly blends photography with objects to create a narrative. Here she has used a continuous line of thin wire to create little cages around each image, which gives each image its own frame, its own moment to speak. The wire then connects one cage to the next cage communicating this link one image has to the next.



(figure 2, The Links Project)

‘Incorporating installation, still image and performance, this transdisciplinary practice challenges and celebrates the links we have with everything and everyone around us.’ - Sarah Grounds

It is this combined use of photography, object and performance that I want to incorporate into my own work. I envision my book project to act not only as a book, a vehicle to showcase my images, but as a piece of art, as a performance where one must take part in the infolding and piecing together of the images.

I also find Sarahs use of nude self-portraits and images of body parts inspiring and relative to my work. The nude has many symbolic meanings including rebellion, creativity and wellbeing. Within my work the images of body parts will represent not only creativity, individuality but also collectivism. Just as in Sarahs work the nude and the body parts simply represent being human.

Book Form

Holy Bible is a photobook created by artists Oliver Chanarin and Adam Broomberg in 2013. It consists of photographs, found and collected within the Archive of Modern Conflict (AMC), printed directly on top of the text within a King James Bible. On each page a line within the text is underlined. This text is loosely related with the accompanying photograph.

Holy Bible is about catastrophes, conflict, punishment, and the growth of modern government. ‘By allowing elements of the original text to guide their image selection, the artists explore the themes of authorship, and the unspoken criteria used to determine acceptable evidence of conflict.’ - Mackbook



(Figure 3, Holy Bible 2013)

The physical layout and form of this photobook is the key component. The use of the Bible combined with the photograph creates the overall narrative. The book is as important to the concept as are the photographs. It isn't just a vehicle for the artists to showcase their work. Paring the text and the photographs outside of the Bible wouldn't work the same. Not only would it lose its shock value, but it would also lose its voice. I want to take this idea of using the book as part of the narrative, combining photography and object to convey my message.

The Map, a photobook created by Kikuji Kawada in 1965 is an exploration of trauma of World War 2. It features abstract images of stains burnt into the walls of Hiroshima's A-

Bomb Dome as well as images relating to the American Occupation.



Some of the images within this book are printed in landscape placed across 4 pages which fold out giving this idea of a map. The book uses these fold outs to create

(Figure 4, The Map 1965)

more than just a simple viewing experience but also a kind of performance.

Where the Holy Bible has its immediate shock value due to the highly graphic and disturbing image, as well as the vandalization of one of the worlds most important books, The Map, which also includes themes of war and tragedy, communicates its narrative abstractly. Both books use the idea of a photobook differently. One, (Holy Bible) uses the book as a huge part of the initial project, the project would cease to exist without the Bible, without the book. Whereas the other uses the book in a way that makes the viewing of the project more interesting. Kawada uses layout and form to create something that works well with the images to create his final piece.

Keeping these influences in mind and thinking about the symbolic meanings to the themes, forms, layout and materials I will be experimenting with. I hope to be able to produce a photobook that will communicate my narrative successfully.

References

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Figures

Figure 1. Simone c1907 (no date) *Reproduction Gallery*. Available at: <https://www.reproduction-gallery.com/oil-painting/1634617742/simone-c1907-by-georges-d-espagnat/> (Accessed: 09 February 2025).

Figure 2. Holy Bible (no date) *Archive of Modern Conflict*. Available at: <https://archiveofmodernconflict.com/holy-bible/> (Accessed: 06 February 2025).

Figure 3. Grounds, S. (no date) *The Links Project, Sarah Grounds*. Available at: <https://www.sarahgrounds.com/links> (Accessed: 2025).

Figure 4. The Map (2023) *Associazione Nazionale Case D'Aste*. Available at: <https://www.anca-aste.it/it/asta-1639/the-map.asp> (Accessed: 2025).

