

## **The Book Arts Guild of Vermont**

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Published in The Vermont Art Guide, 2016

*GUILD, a definition: a medieval association of craftsmen or merchants, often having considerable power*

*\* an association of people for mutual aid or the pursuit of a common goal.*

What's in a name? For Nancy Stone, co-founder/book artist of the member driven Book Arts Guild of Vermont and Jill Airlock, current co-chair and program/events chair, the "Guild" moniker is significant. "Guilds" have roots in a richly historical medieval past, a time when handmade books reached an apex of cultural importance. In addition, the idea that members provide "mutual aid" for the "common goal" of helping each artist/craftsperson become the best they can be, defines the modus operandi of this group of Vermont artists since it's founding in 2005.

Given Vermont's rich history of craftsmanship - pottery, metalwork, woodworking, printing, binding, quilting, etc., it is not a mystery that book arts have found a receptive home here. The conceptual idea of a book, as well as the making of a physical object that is or represents a book, engages a complex knowledge base and requires a diverse set of skills. In recognition of that fact, the Book Arts Guild (B.A.G.) is open to "artists, teachers, students, librarians, printmakers, collectors, photographers, papermakers, conservators, and calligraphers – anyone with enthusiasm for the spectrum of disciplines involved in the book arts field."

This open access and welcoming atmosphere is evident at the monthly meetings held in the Sophia Fahs Community Room in the basement of the Unitarian Universalist Society Church in Burlington. At *Book Blitz and Card Tricks*, the light-hearted November 2016 program, each member shared methods, materials and tricks of the trade. Nancy Stone and Jill Airlock are experienced, exhibiting book artists. They demonstrated folded paper and painted designs along side discoveries using pop-up and cutout forms shared by each of the other members. While this meeting focused on relatively small paper cards that could fit into an envelope and mailed, the techniques might also be scaled up and applied to larger works that are less utilitarian and more sculptural. This balancing between art and craft, the written word as literal meaning, conceptual idea, or pure form, challenges what we think of as a "book". These are the elements that each member of the Book Arts Guild wrestles with as they explore the inherent possibilities of their materials.

It is impossible to discuss book arts in Vermont without mentioning Claire Van Vliet, master printmaker, book artist, founder of Janus Press, winner of a MacArthur "genius" fellowship, the first given for an achievement in the book arts field. Operating out of a studio located in Newark, Vermont Van Vliet has published over 90 limited edition artist's books, including collaborations during her 50+year career with national and internationally known writers and artists. Although Van Vliet is not a dues paying

member she is highly respected as a teacher and mentor inspiring generations of book artists, including past and current members of the Book Arts Guild of Vermont, some who have gone on to have very visible careers of their own.

In November, the Special Collections Department of the Bailey Howe Library at UVM hosted a show and tell session with Vamp & Tramp Booksellers, the main distributors for Janus Press and many other artist/book makers. This was an opportunity for members of B.A.G. to see and touch the works of Van Vliet while learning about the achievements of the more than 400 book artists represented by Vamp & Tramp. Providing information and organizing special programs, workshops as well as exhibition opportunities are all part of the benefits of membership in B.A.G.

Nancy Stone began her art career at Alfred University where she earned a BFA in ceramics. She studied watercolor and acrylic painting in the 1960's and later went on to study book arts at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. She continued to expand her experience working with Claire Van Vliet and fellow Vermonter Linda Lembke at Saint Michael's College Book Arts Institute. Stone acknowledges the complexity of working in this medium. Issues of color and the passage of time are keys to understanding her concerns. Her painting informs the books as does recycling in a recent piece titled *Color of Dreams* where she cutup and reused old 35mm slides creating a kaleidoscope effect on the last page. The piece is meant to be shown on a light-table. While she has exhibited widely in both solo and group juried shows throughout Vermont since the 1980's it is her love of teaching art that pays the bills. In 1986, she was named the Vermont Art Educator of the year by the National Art Education Association. Most recently she has taught art to children from Palestine, Israel and Vermont in the Kids4Peace program.

Both Nina Gaby and Jill Airlock have found their membership in the Book Arts Guild to be empowering. Their work was exhibited during the 2016 Burlington Book Festival, the first time the festival has recognized the relevance of 3-dimensional art that explores "the book" as a form and an idea, rather than traditional words on printed pages between two covers.

Trained as both a ceramic artist and a psychiatric nurse, Nina Gaby initially made a living as a ceramicist working 80 hours a week turning out clay vessels. But, she switched to nursing in the hope that she could gain some artistic freedom to do the work she wanted to do, rather than making pieces to please customers. She also began writing as a bridge to help her understand some of the mental health issues she was dealing with on the job. Gaby then became interested in making hand-bound journals when she encountered Elissa Campbell's work at Blue Roof Designs studio in Montpelier. Campbell is also a member of the Book Arts Guild and teaches workshops on journal making, photo albums and guest book design using traditional bookbinding techniques with handmade papers from local artisans.

As her art has evolved, Gaby has been able to combine her written work, a series of memoir-like vignettes, with porcelain containers, each container or vessel representing a

chapter, a hybrid object bring the word into a 3-dimensional realm. Taking advantage of exhibition opportunities offered through her membership in B.A.G., has been encouraging for this multifaceted artist whose ceramic work is in the collection of the Smithsonian's American Art Museum.

Jill Airlock is one of the most active volunteer members of the Book Arts Guild. She is widely traveled, worked as a translator and lived in Japan for twelve years. But after years of living abroad, she and her husband fell in love with Vermont and settled here in 1994. She had always been interested in making things, and is influenced by Japanese culture, origami, ceramics and textiles. When she met Ellisa Campbell she was "blown away" by how much she learned about making books. They were kindred spirits, having found a connection through their practice of Buddhism as well as an affinity for traditional bookbinding techniques. Airlock says it was her involvement with the Book Arts Guild whose supportive, yet professional atmosphere enabled her to take herself seriously as an artist. She now has her own studio space at Shelburne Pond Studios where she teaches others the art and craft of the book. She's looking forward to the December meeting *Puppets on Pop-Up Stages* hosted by Vermont artist, Sarah Frechette.

Check the organization website <http://www.bookartsguildvt.com/> for future events and exhibitions.