Plainly Spoken

A traveling exhibit sponsored by the Midwest Chapter of the Guild of Book Workers
Books Will Speak Plain

A Handbook for Identifying and Describing Historical Bindings

Julia Miller
In 1998, Julia Miller began the monumental task of sifting through notes and observations made during her 30 year career as an archivist and book conservator. After 8 years of additional research, she began to write. The publication that resulted, *Books Will Speak Plain*, (The Legacy Press 2010) is 500-page handbook aimed at conservators, collectors, librarians, and book lovers, for the identification and description of book structures and styles.

The Midwest Chapter of the Guild of Book Workers is delighted to showcase Miller’s book in this theme-based exhibit. Bookbinders from across the country acquired the text in folded sheets and, months later, presented them to a jury of three as a completed book. This exhibit includes a range of binding ideas: models that replicate books from an historical period; cut-aways that visually reveal their hidden structure; design bindings that interpret a concept from the text; and artists’ bindings that play with structures and materials to create something new.
The Midwest Chapter of the Guild of Book Workers is indebted to the following individuals who through determination and hard work made this exhibit possible:

Mary Uthupuru – Exhibits Coordinator
Barb Korbel – Exhibit Committee Member
Lesa Dowd – Exhibit Committee Member

Jurors:
Richard Baker
Brea Black
Linda Samson-Talleur

All exhibit photos by Travis Young, KU Libraries Digital Lab
Whitney Baker

Full leather binding using two contrasting colors of leather sewn together to mimic a former repair, top edge colored to highlight knife marks, front and back cover blind-tooled, sewn silk endbands, handmade paste paper endsheets.

Whitney Baker is Head of Conservation Services at the University of Kansas. She studied bookbinding at the University of Iowa's Center for the Book and conservation at the University of Texas at Austin and the Library of Congress. She has been a professional conservator since 1998.
Anna Embree

Half-leather case binding with marbled paper sides, false raised bands, sewn silk endbands, blind tooling, leather label.

Anna Embree is an Associate Professor for the MFA in the Book Arts Program in the School of Library and Information Studies at The University of Alabama. She has a strong interest in the physical and material aspects of book structures, has collaborated with printers and papermakers on limited edition handmade books, and has exhibited widely.
Ethan Ensign

Packed two-on sewing on partial accordion fold with double cords, Plexiglas boards with inset materials and titling, leather hinges with suede doublures, silk endbands with bead on the back, painted edges, reverse endcaps leather onlays.

Ethan Ensign has been a bookbinder and conservator for 19 years. He still can't stop dreaming about books.
Karen Hanmer

Full goatskin binding sewn on flattened cords, handsewn silk headbands, marbled endpapers with leather hinge, head sponged with acrylic inks and sprinkled with gold leaf, dust jacket bound in, blind and 24K gold foil tooling emphasizing the location of sewing supports and board attachment, turn-ins, fills, sanding of boards, and formation of corners.

Karen Hanmer’s artist’s books and design bindings intertwine cultural and personal memory, and are often playful in structure or content. She exhibits internationally, and her work is included in collections ranging from the Getty Museum and the Library of Congress to Yale University and Graceland.
Robert Hanmer

Full calf skin tight-back binding with laced-in boards, sewn on raised cords with handsewn silk endbands, marbled paper endsheets by Pam Smith, top edge colored with acrylic, Cambridge panel with goatskin onlay, label stamped in 23K gold foil.

Robert Hanmer has always liked books and now bookbinding which he's been studying for more than 10 years. Employed as a software architect he has also written two technical books.
Deborah Howe

Cut-away vellum spine with alum-tawed leather over bands, sewn on raised cords, endbands and corners based on a historical binding found in library collections, handmade cover and endsheet papers, blind-stamped title. Relief under the covering and along the spine edge reveal the simplicity of the structure beneath as on the worn cover of the found historical binding.

Deborah Howe is the Collections Conservator at Dartmouth College Library. She has taught classes at Columbia Center for Paper and Book, the Newberry Library and currently teaches bookbinding classes at the Book Arts Workshop at Dartmouth.
Scott Kellar

Modified laced-in lapped component binding using laminated paper printed with polymer plates, sewn over four tapes, edges trimmed and colored, goatskin ‘pre-pairs’ (patches) pasted, sewn, and/or laced on, ink, vinyl and acrylic paint decoration. This binding references those intriguing books that have accumulated layers of history, home repair, and minutiae that often work to obscure each other. The composite often reveals an engaging makeshift elegance, offering clues to the history of its long and varied life.

Scott Kellar has been binding and restoring books for over forty years. He worked in the bindery at The Newberry Library and was Collections Conservator at Northwestern University. He is now in private practice.
Barbara Korbel

Quarter alum-tawed leather, sewn on five raised cords, sides covered in a selection of materials historically used on books: vellum, papyrus, wood, leather, linen, bookcloth, and paper, boards decorated with various sewing supports, front panel shows first lines of the text printed on paper and covered with transparent vellum, blind-stamped title.

Barbara Korbel works as the Collections and Exhibitions Conservator at the Newberry in Chicago. She has been making historical models for 15 years as a way of understanding the evolution of the craft. She teaches workshops across the country.
Jill Krase

Longstitch/bradel binding with walnut Cave Paper spine and endsheets, boards covered in blue/brown bookcloth, title gold-stamped on terracotta leather label.

Jill Krase is a bookbinder in private practice in Winona, Minnesota, where she also teaches binding workshops. She studied binding with Larry Yerkes, Priscilla Spitler, Jana Pullman, and Anna Embree at the University of Iowa Center for the Book. She has an MA in English from Illinois State University.
Anne McLain

Full leather, hand-marbled paper used as pastedowns, Ingres flyleaves, acrylic paint edge decoration with silver foil tooling, handsewn silk endbands, blind and silver foil tooling on cover.

Anne McLain is a graduate of the North Bennet Street School Bookbinding program. She works as a Book Conservation Technician at the Northeast Document Conservation Center in Andover, MA.
Jeff Nilan

Cover is made from a collage of paper and photograph fragments glued to a sheet of Japanese paper, waxed, and used to wrap the boards. In his work as a photographer and book artist, Nilan generates leftover trimmings from large paper pieces, fragments of paper weavings, and snippets of photographs, all of which were used for this binding.

Jeff Nilan received his MFA from Indiana University where he also taught for a number of years. His work is influenced by his roots and upbringing, as well as the landscape and culture of the Midwest. He is an Associate Professor of Photography at Ohio Wesleyan University.
Elaine Nishizu


Elaine Nishizu lives and works in Los Angeles, California. She has studied bookbinding at the American Academy of Bookbinding, centro del bel libro, various workshops and with Eleanore Ramsey.
Nancy Nitzberg

German case binding covered with handmade paste paper, sewn on three cords with added flyleaves at the front and back, two-color linen endbands, edges trimmed at the top and bottom, fore-edge opened, but not trimmed, overcover made with fabric designed with drawings from the text. The binding is intended to evoke a sense of history. The design and materials construct a story of the book: remnants of a blue paper wrapper present on its outer leaves as if from an earlier binding, a later German case binding, and a 19th century North American style overcover.

Nancy H. Nitzberg is a book conservator who established Book-Care in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, following a career in academic research libraries and a regional conservation center. She attended a three-year program at Columbia University, which included a one-year internship at Library of Congress Rare Book Conservation Office, and received an M.S. in Library Service and a Certificate in Library and Archives Conservation.
Tawn O'Connor

This binding is made from work clothing, honest materials stained and paint-spattered from honest work. The earbuds bring this classic work uniform – T-shirt, work shirt, denim jeans, and leather boots into the 21st century, and are a visual reference to a "speaking book." The long single-strand end doubles as a place marker.

Tawn O’Connor is a bookbinder and bookstore clerk. She is fond of repairing books of humble origin, not particularly rare or valuable, but with great meaning to their owners, such as study Bibles with decades of notes handwritten in the margins.
Todd Pattison

Full leather binding with twelve detachable miniature books in a range of historical styles.

Todd Pattison studied bookbinding with Fred Jordan in western New York State in the late 1970s and early 1980s and went on to study with Hugo Peller and Edwin Heim in Ascona, Switzerland. He holds a Masters in Library Science from the University of Alabama and is currently senior book conservator at the Northeast Document Conservation Center.
Jana Pullman

Bradel binding with black goatskin spine and fore-edges, boards covered in brown goatskin, handsewn silk endbands and marbled endpapers with leather hinge, gold and blind tooling represent historical tooling patterns: Aldine 15-16th c., semis 15th c., frame work 17th c., and Roger Payne 18th c.

Jana Pullman is a bookbinder, book conservator, and book arts instructor. She is the owner and operator of Western Slope Bindery, a fine press and book conservation business based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She teaches workshops around the country.
Roberta Woodrick

Modified girdle binding, sewn on ramie tapes with linen thread, linen endbands, Cave Paper covering material.

Roberta Woodrick is the assistant conservator for the University of Kansas Libraries in Lawrence, KS. She has a background in textile design, and an M.A. in Museum Studies with a three-year internship in conservation.