Encountering Books

Art Book Fairs of the World, Distribution and Communication

Singapore Art Book Fair

Bangkok Art Book Fair

Bergen Art Book Fair

Vancouver Art Book Fair

FOCAL POINT
The State of Fairs from Boston to San Francisco

Text by Christopher Sieboda and Kathleen Sieboda

When exhibiting at an art book fair, it's common for visitors to ask about how we started. When we share our story, we often turn to a metaphor we love: art book fairs as hives of activity, as pollinators for other events, and as sites for inspiration and invigoration.

These ideas relate to our personal experience and map to phenomena we've observed over the past ten years. Draw Down, our publishing imprint and curated bookshop, started as a direct response to our first visit to the NY Art Book Fair (NYABF) in 2012. The visitor experience was formative for us. MoMA PS1, the satellite outpost of the Museum of Modern Art in New York is a sprawling renovated public school building. Its long hallways, institutional decor, and maze of rooms were packed with everything we adored: books and zines, printed ephemera, photography and posters, incredible graphic design from the future and the past. We recognized and heard around us book people: a crowd who loved bindings and the smell of ink, who paid attention to paper and production details, who loved the idea of books as art, multiples, and expression through printed matter.

We instantly became interested in joining and participating in this incredible community of makers and publishers, designers, and artists. We aimed to participate in NYABF as exhibitors instead of visitors. That goal prompted us to start a publishing outfit, Draw Down. Exhibiting at art book fairs was one of our goals from the very beginning.

Although we were based in the United States, the first book fair we participated in was the 1 Never Read, Art Book Fair Basel in Switzerland in 2013. That event, held concurrent with Art Basel, became our entry into the unofficial DIY community of art book fair exhibitors. The following year we exhibited at the NY Art Book Fair. Launched in 2005, the NYABF has grown with leaps and bounds; attendance has tripled and then doubled again, expanding as the fair’s reputation grew through word of mouth and positive press. The last fair held in person, in 2019, attracted 40,000 visitors and brought together hundreds of exhibitors from around the globe. Applications number in the hundreds and the chance to exhibit is coveted.

Book fairs bring together people who love making and thinking about artist books—designers, artists, writers, and friends. The inclusive nature of NYABF and LA Art Book Fair (LAA) brings together a spectrum of publishing—from simple zines to fine art editions, photo books to antiquarian materials—resulting in something for everyone. No matter how esoteric or obscure your area of interest, the sheer number of exhibitors means that each visitor has the potential to recognize themselves in a publication, to suddenly feel a spark of recognition or connection.

The regular schedule of the fairs is also part of their appeal for publishers. The fairs become self-imposed deadlines for projects, as they're the perfect opportunity (or excuse) to launch new work, plan related events, and generally celebrate a growing catalog of publications. And one phenomenon we've loved observing is how the big fairs—the coastal mainstays in New York City and LA—have prompted smaller regional and local fairs to pop up. In the same way we visited the fair and were inspired, other visitors realize that they can export the experience to their community or school. These events, in turn, create models that can inspire and be replicated, continuing a trend where the cultural experience of artist book fairs—social interaction structured around creative work, fairgoers speaking directly with the people involved in a book's making—are reproduced at different scales, each time with a new flavor.

We're not immune from the impulse to replicate the kind of magic that the big American book fairs create. In 2015, Christopher was working as the Director of Graphic Design at the Yale University Art Gallery and, with several Yale graduate students, pitched a new idea: the museum would hold a one-day art book fair close to the winter holiday break, with the idea being that students from different regional universities and colleges could participate, along with artists and publishers from New York, Providence, Boston, and points in between. This fair was developed to focus specifically on graphic design and to be inclusive to a range of artists and bookmakers from different generations. Dubbed the Odds and Ends Art Book Fair, the one-time event was so successful that it became an annual gathering, introducing more people to the excitement of perusing tables and speaking to makers, designers, and publishers. Over the years, the book fair evolved to include programming, an exhibition space for books produced by students and faculty in the Yale School of Art, and an opportunity to showcase experimental work. The fair became a meeting place, building bridges between different design programs: RISD, Yale, Boston University, the University of Connecticut, and SVA in New York City.

As is the way with successful fairs that attract a motivated and engaged audience, Odds and Ends encouraged other fairs to launch. In 2017, librarians and faculty at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) began a fair of their own: Unbound RISD Art Book Fair. This now annual event, which will have its sixth iteration in April 2022, was started to inspire dialogue around cultural publishing in Providence, Rhode Island, and bring together experienced fair exhibitors and newcomers. Other local artist book fairs also began popping up in our area, creating opportunities for publishers, new experiences for locals, and a busy fair circuit: the New England Art Book Fair (NEABF) in Portland, Maine launched in 2016; the Northampton Print & Book Fair in Massachusetts ran from 2015 through 2020, and the Boston Art Book Fair launched in 2017. It seemed like no North American metropolitan area could call itself an arts hub without an artist book fair: Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Philadelphia, Seattle, Cleveland, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Chicago all sprouted art book fairs.

In our estimation, the local, community-based, and smaller regional fairs are a perfect companion to larger events in the bigger cities. They create spaces where people can experiment and have a fair experience with less economic outlay than might be required at a big event. In some ways, the smaller fairs act as a gateway or bridge—helping people refine their presentation and understand the ins and outs of exhibiting their work. Small fairs can map to local interests, taking on idiosyncratic qualities that help make the event unique and memorable. And one of the
fantastic things about the artist book community in the United States is that fair organizers are open to sharing best practices, resources, and information. Many fairs are organized by people who’ve participated as an exhibitor at other events, meaning that this insider experience feeds into their vision and values for the fairs they create.

We spoke to three American fair organizers about their experiences. When we asked Andrew Scripter, one of the co-founders of the NEABF and a member of Wing Press, about starting NEABF, he said, “I wanted to start a small fair to cater to our little neck of the woods and bring together projects and publications that we found exciting at the time. The art community in the northeast can sometimes feel like it’s in a little bubble. We found it important to bring publishers and artists from outside of the area to Maine to hopefully infuse some new influences into the community.” What was the thing that attracted him to book fairs? “Attending fairs is one of my favorite ways to zap my system with creative adrenaline. Every time I attend or vend one, I walk away with 1,000 ideas for new projects or a little fire under my ass to make stuff.”

We reached out to David Kasparzak, co-founder of San Francisco’s Colpa Press and the San Francisco Art Book Fair (SFABF), which began in 2016. It was Kasparzak’s experience at other national and international book fairs that led to a homegrown effort: “As long-time exhibitors of many book fairs, both nationally and internationally, we’ve spent a lot of time sitting behind tables and experiencing what has worked and what could use improvement. With the SFABF, we tried to address some of these simple details that made for a more comfortable fair for the exhibitors and visitors—things like handing out water, providing exhibitors with enough space around their tables, trying to keep the temperature comfortable, etc. More importantly, we try to focus on the unique publishing, art, and underground community that has been active in the Bay Area for several decades and hope that these communities continue with outlets like the SFABF...”

Randi Hopkins, the co-founder of the Boston Art Book Fair, spoke about the flexible idea of what an art book fair could feature: “We define ‘art books’ loosely—basically focusing on innovation in visually exciting, inexpensive multiples; that is, on projects and objects that present interesting visuals in accessible forms.” The opportunity to launch a fair in a historic city like Boston meant that fair could embrace all aspects of Boston’s personality as a cosmopolitan hub, from its Witch scene to its status as an incubator for tech and biotech advancement. Randi notes that “bigger organizations like the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum have gotten a kick out of sharing table space with some of our most scrappy zine producers, for example—and it energizes everyone. I meet people all over the place who have attended and fallen in love with the Boston Art Book Fair. This sounds so gushy but really just creates such a creative vibe and makes everyone feel like they belong, that they make a valuable contribution.”

We asked Andrew, David, and Randi about their experience with art book fairs since the start of the COVID pandemic. While some fairs—Printed Matter, the Vancouver Art Book Fair, the Brooklyn Art Book Fair—pivoted to offer online versions, many fairs have simply gone dormant. Andrew commented that the logistics seemed more complicated, while David said that an online version, “wasn’t necessarily an accurate representation of the SFABF, and that the organizers “didn’t have the resources to put on an online fair that [they] felt would be successful enough.”

David mentioned something we’ve been wrestling with: “It’s been a tough past two years for the art book fair community without us being able to gather for these fairs. Not only is it important for small presses and artists to be able to connect directly with their audience and peers, but as publishers ourselves, these fairs are where we form relationships with booksellers, stores, and small press distributors.”

We’re very much looking forward to returning to fairs once they pick up again, but we’re equally curious about the impact of a two-year slowdown. This February, in lieu of a book fair (which still seems difficult to hold with current health precautions), Christopher has organized Multiple Formats, an art book symposium at Boston University where we currently teach. The event brings together local, regional, and international publishers, artists, designers, librarians, and collectors for a hybrid event that is meant to be a soft launch for a new art book fair at the University. Draw Down has just applied for our first in-person book fair in two years, the Unbound 2022 fair at RISD. The Boston Art Book Fair plans to return to in-person events in fall 2022, and we’ve heard that Printed Matter hopes to return to an in-person event this fall, but dates have yet to be announced.

While we’re excited to think about reconnecting with our community of book people, we’re also grateful to have been able to participate (remotely) in more international fairs than we thought possible during the pandemic: in Iraq, Spain, the United Kingdom, and China. And it’s been exciting to see more international participation across the board, as technology offers the opportunity to overcome distance.

Draw Down has been delighted to have participated in the surge of creativity linked to artist book fairs in the 21st century; we hope that the growth that we observed before COVID–19—the generative events that allowed new voices to emerge, the fairs popping up in unexpected places—will begin to occur once more. Earlier we mentioned dormancy, the state of being temporarily inactive. If art book fairs in the US have been dormant, we suspect that they have been building up energy and that this fallow period will lead to a future flowering of projects once conditions become favorable again.

Draw Down
An independent publishing project based in the United States. Run by Kathleen and Christopher Sieboda since launching in 2019, Draw Down produces books, zines, and posters focused on graphic design, typography, illustration, photography, art, and architecture, while also selling a curated collection of books, zines, and posters.
https://draw-down.com

Draw Downのふたりが立ち上げたイリノイ大学でのOdds and Endsの様子。ボストン・アート・ブック・フェアではクリスパートナーが担当している。
A scene from Odds and Ends at Yale University, which they founded.
Christopher is in charge of the graphics for the posters and staff certificates.
2005年、ニューヨークのアーティストブック専門店Printed Matterが立ち上げたNY Art Book Fairは大きな反響を呼び、フェアに出展あるいは来場した人々がそれぞれの観点にアートブックのノウハウをもたらすことで、現在の世界同時多発的なブックフェアブームの一つと考えられる。本稿では、主に2000年代から2010年代にかけてのブックフェアの現状を紹介し、発展するブックフェアの特性について考察する。

ブックフェアはその限定性から出版物の創作活動を促進し、新しい出版活動を促進するものである。ブックフェアはその一例として、NYABF（以下、NYABF）はあらゆる作品を受け入れるため、シンプルなZINEからアート作品、写真集、アンテカーブなど、多種多様な出版物が並び、どんな好みの人でも楽しめる。趣味の分野がどれほど複雑でも、ブックフェアはその中に含まれる出版物の中から選ぶことができる。

ブックフェアが定期的に開催されるという点で、出版業の新たな可能性を示すものである。新しい出版物を創り始め、新たな出版業を計画し、出版業を新しい形へと変革するには、ブックフェアはその一例として、NYABFはその一つである。

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アがいくつか生まれて、出版物の制作者たちは新しい機会を、地域の
人々に新しい体験を提供し、とても興味深いです。例を挙げると、メイ
ンストリートのNew England Art Book Fair (NEABF) が2016年に
開始。マサチューセッツ州でNorthampton Print & Book Fairが2015
年から2020年まで開催。Boston Book Fairが2017年に開始してい
ます。まるで、北米の大都市はアートブックフェアがなければアートの街と
名乗らなかったように、バーカンバー、トロント、モントリオール、パリ
ヌフリア、シティオール、クリーブランド、ボルチモア、ワシントンDC、シカゴなど、
どの大都市にもアートブックフェアが誕生している。

わたしたちが見たところ、地方の規模はブックフェアは大都市の大規
模なブックフェアに欠かすことのないようだ。規模はブックフェアで、
大規模なブックフェアは少ないコストで試しに出展してみたり、出展経
験を積むことができる。ある意味、大規模なイベントへの入場運営を楽しみと
して、展覧会や展示品展示のノウハウを学ぶことができる場所だと言え
る。規模はブックフェアなら、地域の人々の興味や趣味に合わせて印
象的に個性的なイベントを同開できる。そして、アメリカのアートブック
フェアの特徴であるのは、ブックフェアの主催者が開催のコミットメー
スを、情報を伝えし共に共有してくることだ。ブックフェアの開催者は、
他のブックフェアは出展として参加している場合が多く、参事者とし
ての経験がブックフェアのヴィジョンや価値観に反映されている。

そこで、アメリカのブックフェア主催者は3人を派手に開いた。NEABFの創
始者たちが同時にWing Pressの一員であるアンドレ・スクリブナーは、
ブックフェアの立ち上げについて語る。「わたしたちがおもしろいと思う
したプロジェクトや本を集めた小さなブックフェアを、この地域のために
始めたいと考えた。アメリカ北東部のアートブックフェアは他の地域
との交流が少ない傾向がみられる。他の地域の出版業界やアーティス
ティストにメイン州にも来てもらい、刺激を与えもうものとことが重要だと気
づきました。」はなぜブックフェアにしようと思うのだろうか。「ブック
フェアへの参加は、自分に刺激を与えて創造への欲求を積極的に計画
することでとても気に入っています。見方からも売方としても、ブックフェ
アに参加したのは新しいプロジェクトのアイデアが数え切れないほどわ
いてきて、早く制作したくてたまらなくなっています。」

サンフランシスコのColpa Pressの共同創立者で、2016年に始まったSan Francisco Art Book Fair (SABF)の始創者のひとり、ディヴィッド・カ
ストンがも関与。彼との別名のブックフェアで得た経験が、地域
でのブックフェア開催につながったという。「長年にわたり国内や国外
のブックフェアに出展し、何が手ごろいか、どんな改善が必要なのか、売り
場でたっぷりと経験してきた。そこで、わたしたちのフェアでは、出展
者にも来場者にも快適に過ごしてもらえるための簡素なことに取り組みま
した。飲料水を配し、売り場のテーブルのまわりに十分なスペースを用意
する、試作品の展示を設けるといったこと。そして何よりも、イベントで
何十年も前から活動してきた出版やアート、グラフィックデザインのコミュニ
ティにスポットを当てました。こうしたコミュニティが、これから先もSABF
などで販売を続けることを願っています。」

Boston Art Book Fairの創始者のひとりであるランディ・ホプキンスは、
アートブックフェアに取り上げるものについての柔軟な考えを語られ
た。「わたしたちは「アートブック」の定義をより広めています。基本的
に、視覚的に素晴らしいと高価ではないマルチメディアのイノベーションに
焦点を当てています。つまり、興味深いジャーナルを手に入れるやすい
かたちで提供してくれるプロジェクトも求めています。」ボストンという歴史あ
る都市で開催することで、毎年町のイベントからアカデミー、バイ
オテクニックの起業者まで新しいクリエイティブなスターやまで、国際都市としてのポストが
もあらゆる側面を取り入れたブックフェアを開催することができる。「例
えば、イデア・スチュワート・ガードナー美術館のような大きな組織が、
チーフのZINEの制作者の間に出展することを楽しんでくれています。」

わたしたちはブックフェアに再開して再び参加できる日を待ち望んで
が、この2年間の滞在が与えた影響についてのみならず興味をもって
いる。今年の2月、ブックフェアの代わりとして（現在の状況下で開
催が難しいため）、現在私たちが教えているボストン大学です、グラフィ
ックがアートブックのシンポジウムMultiformat Forumsを開始しました。これは、
国内から海外の出版物の制作者たち、アーティスト、デザイナー、出版
社が集まったハイブリッドイベント（オンラインとオフラインの同開
催）で、ポストン大学が始まる新しいアートブックフェアの試験的ステー
トとなった。Draw Downは、2年ぶりのブックフェア参加となるUnbound
RISD Art Book Fair 2022に参加申し込んできたところだ。Boston Art
Book Fairは、2022年秋には再び対面イベントとしての開催を目指し
ている。Printed Matterも秋に対面イベントを再開を目指していると告
げている。こちらもまだ正式に発表されていない。

本を愛する人たちと会えるような日を待ち望む一方で、パビリオン
の最中にジム、スペンス、デイジー、マックスなど、よくかまわず多くの常連
ブックフェアに（リモートで）参加できたことは本当にありがたいことです。クリ
シションがかかる距離の問題がなくなり、どのブックフェアでも参加者が
国際色豊かだったことも嬉しかった。

わたしたちは、21世紀のアートブックフェアにつながるクリエイティ
フの高まりに参加できることは光栄に思っている。新しい意気込みがよ
うイベントの発案や、意外な場所で開催されるブックフェアなど、コ
クナ銀と同じように新たな出来事と再び始めることを願っています。あら
ど、ブックフェアが体験中、つまり休止状態であることであり、アーティ
ストアートブックフェアが休眠中だったということは、この期間中エ
ジンが蓄積されて、再び発表が良くなった時にプロジェクトが花びら
いていくのだろうと予想している。

Draw Down
アメリカを拠点とする独立系出版プロジェクト。2013年の設立以来、クリティカル・エッジ
ストリート・アーティストが連携。グラフィックデザインやインクジェット・インプリント、
アート、建築をテーマにした雑誌、ZINE、ポスターを制作している。また、都心で実施のZINE
ポスターの販売も行っている。https://drawdown.com