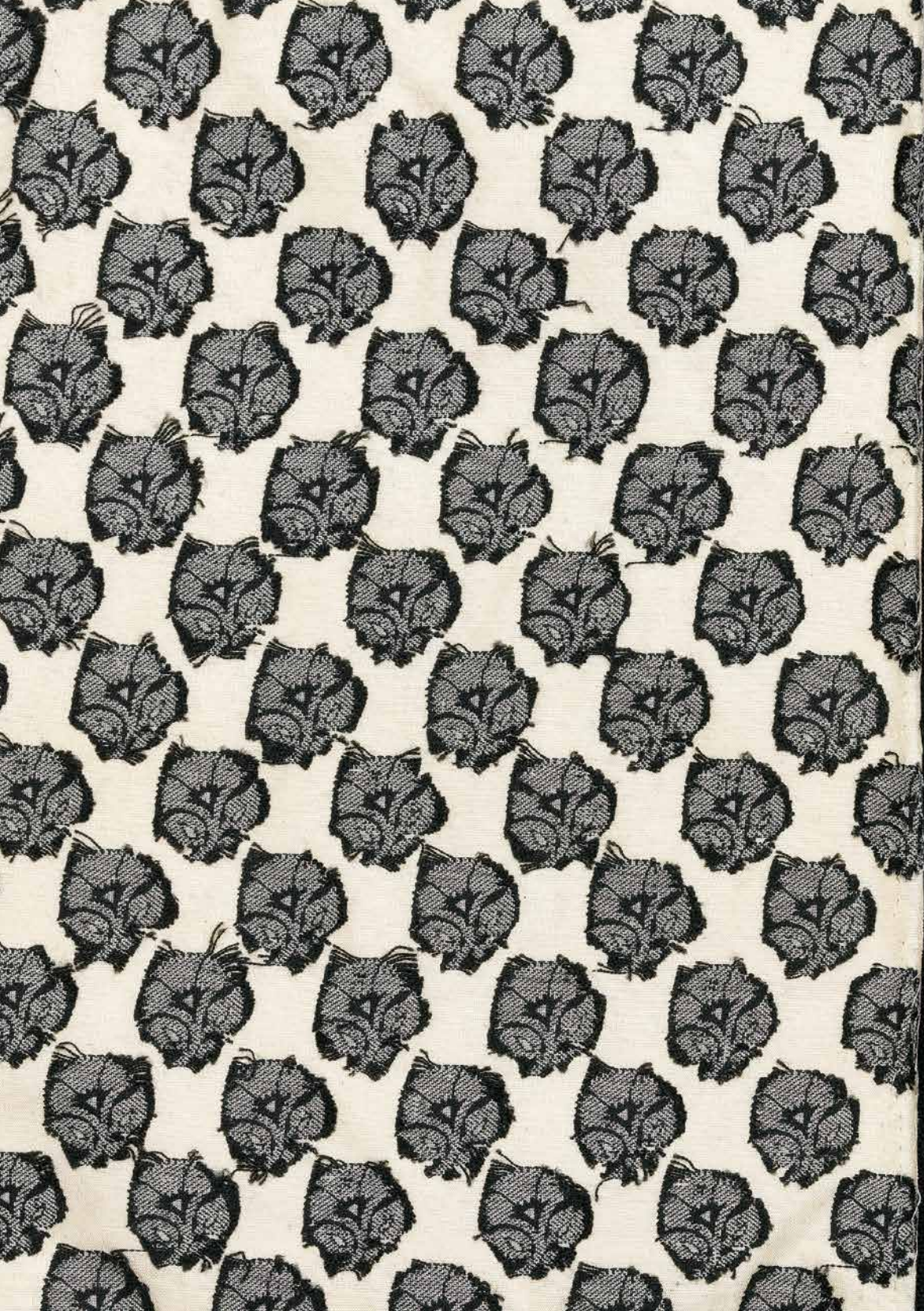


-Libros de artista de Dianna Frid-

MATERIAS,

MATTER AND SUBJECT MATTER

Diálogo con el acervo de la Biblioteca Francisco de Burgoa



TO ANNOTATE THROUGH TOUCH

*A conversation between Dianna Frid and Claudine Isé
Chicago, april 2015*



- C:** We are meeting today in your studio in Chicago to discuss your forthcoming artist's books exhibition at the Biblioteca Francisco de Burgoa in Oaxaca. You are in the midst of laying out the pages of one of your books and you have tacked these to the wall. I can see right away that you use images of marble statues and focus on the parts of the sculptures that have been carved to represent cloth. Tell me about what those images are and why they are here.
- D:** You are referring to the artist's book *Apuntes (Notations)*. The long answer to that question has a lot to do with how I approached the whole project at the Burgoa— that is,

in a meandering and open way. At the Burgoa, many of the pre- and early modern books that attracted me are on philosophical and scientific subjects. These are often books that deal with the classification and order of things. Some are historical, others are didactic, and others are speculative travelogues through the cosmos or into the center of the Earth. Most of them are in Latin, which I don't read, and several of them are lavishly and imaginatively illustrated. There was one book in particular that had no printed illustrations but was riddled with notations and all kinds of scribbles made by an anonymous reader who lived at least a hundred years ago. The book itself, written in Latin by John Versor (Johannes Versoris) in the 15th century, is a lengthy commentary on Aristotle's work¹. The notations, not only at the margins of the pages but all over, were so rich and unrelenting that the

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Chicago
2015



¹ John Versor (Juan Versorio) died circa 1485. He was a French Dominican and the rector of the Sorbonne in 1458. Aristotle lived between 384 - 322 BCE.

actual printed words and the superimposed manuscript became woven onto each other. I found these notations enormously compelling because they embody the urgency I sometimes feel to respond to a book, to argue and wrestle with it and, through it, to have a conversation with its author. Versor's commentary is completely steeped in classical philosophy. When I went to college in the 1980s there was an anticlassical atmosphere at the progressive school I attended. I certainly endorse the need for overlooked cultural realities to make their way, finally, to the center of the canon, but I now see that a lot of subjects were dismissed as hegemonic without being given, at the very least, a critical exploration. So, I didn't really have the kind of education that would allow me to respond to or even argue with classical texts with any specificity. The same would apply to classical antiquities. For instance, at the Art Institute of Chicago, which is an encyclopedic museum in the city where I live, very often pre-modern works are placed in hallways or passageways. This perhaps is indicative of how we relate to these objects today, as things to be passed on our way to the main event. One day, I started to pay attention to the Greek and Roman sculptures on the way to the cafeteria. And I began to notice how the garments and the hairstyles—the fibers—were represented in stone. Now, getting back to Versor's book on Aristotle and to the urgent scribbles someone wrote on it: in this book, you notice right away, in those handwritten words and diagrams, how the reader's agreements and quarrels with the author are palpable; you see the "yeses" and "no's" and the little doodles of pointing fingers and heads, and you know that the reader is arguing in the present tense with something Aristotle said at least eighteen hundred years before. In seeing this,

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I felt an urge to have a subsequent conversation with this layered book.

A few months after I came back from doing research at the Burgoa I took photographs of the cloth and coiffures in Greek and Roman sculptures that I saw here in Chicago and in Rome. The process of how I arrived at the idea is more complicated than this, but let's just say that for the artist's book I chose to "annotate" these photos, which have been transferred onto cloth, with stitched diagrams that I found in various books on textiles. I was particularly drawn to Anni Albers' book *On Weaving*². The book has simple and explicit diagrams of how cloth is constructed thread by thread. Given that stitching itself is a process of going in and out of cloth, in a very visceral way my attraction to working this way is based on a non-verbal desire **to annotate through touch**: to build, to take apart,

² Anni Albers, *On Weaving*. Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1965.

to tear, to pierce... These actions performed on cloth can sound violent but they are also very tender. In any case, this is why the images of the classical sculpture came to be part of this project.

- C: To touch, to pierce, to tear, to get inside of it, to get into the matter of it. I see that this project is also doing to the books what you do to the cloth, metaphorically at least. And you are talking about textiles in relation to bibliophilia. In the past you have described yourself as a bibliophile or at least this particular project is bibliophilic in nature. So this makes me think about what it means to be a bibliophile, to be crazed by books. And although you are not reading every text you explored, the idea of the text



Estructura del Texto
(detalle / detail)
2015

incites a sort of lust, a desire. Can you talk more about how you see the book in light of the bibliophilic aspects of this project?

D: Although I looked at specific texts in a specific library, this is a project where the form of the book, the matter of the book is at the center. At the beginning of the work I was stuck because I thought that I had to respond, one by one, to each specific book that I investigated with a corresponding artist's book of my own. While I had limited access to the Latin content of the books I was fully aware of their particular physicality. This physicality became one more criterion of how I would approach the project. For example, there were many cavities and holes where larvae and termites had burrowed into the more damaged books I studied. In those cases, the matter of the book itself had compelled these very insects to burrow and to nest in them. And the decay that resulted from their burrowing provoked me as well.

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2015



C: I understand that *materia* in Spanish means both subject matter and material.

D: Not material, but more like the matter of substance. You become conscious that there is a lot of matter that goes into presenting subject matter.

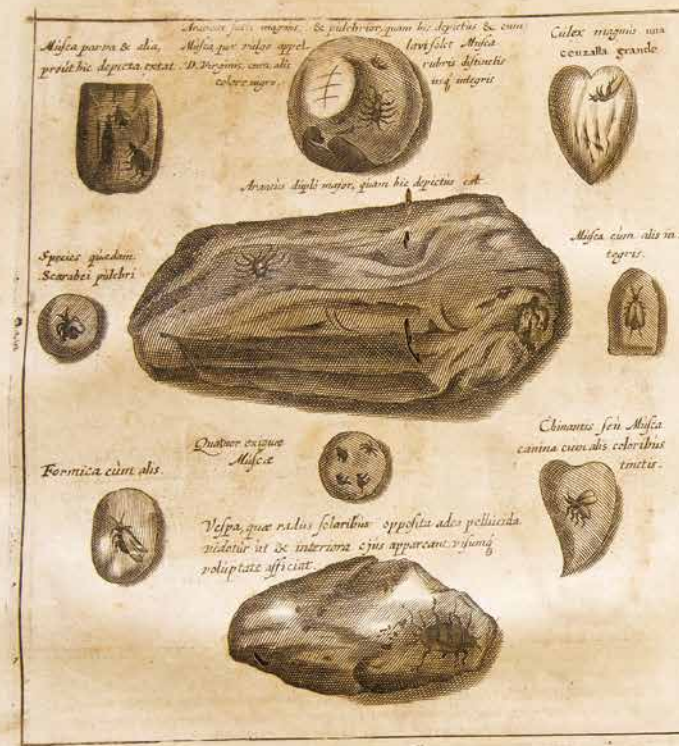
C: In talking about this I think not just of matter but also of the structure of at least one of your artist's books, *Ranuras* (*Furrows* or *Cracks*). The book is an accordion: a folded structure with images on both sides of its sides. The experience of moving through the pages doesn't allow you to see both sides concurrently. Could talk about this inability to see everything at once?

D: We know this is true for much of self-standing sculpture; it is true with coins, with vinyl records, and other two-sided objects. Like these, *Ranuras* is a book that has an A side and a B side, a head and a tail, and, as you say, it cannot be experienced all at once. This experience requires that you conjure the memory of how you saw one face, if you will, to know that the sewing you saw on it is simultaneously present on the opposite face. This is what happens with *Ranuras*, and it is what happens when you stitch into cloth. The thread passes through both sides and back.

C: So the library is also a structure where you cannot see its holdings by browsing, the way you would at a bookstore. You have to request the books you want to see and these are brought out to you after you study the database. Tell me about the library itself, the books that you found there, and locating your work in it.

MUNDI SUBTERRANEI

señ. III. *Excellentissimus & expertissimus H. Manfredus Septalius, hæc mirabilia Nature ex Museo suo deprompta, & quam exactissimè delineata, in secunda editione Mundi Subterranei poni, & loco opportuno inferi voluit.*



K. *Locusta perfectissima.*
D. *Alia locusta, quæ potius similis apparet gryllo alato.*
R. *Pulcherrimum fructum succini, cuius generis etiam sunt K & D. apparet ambræ flavæ dicta, in ea sunt duæ parvæ rane, quarum altera alterâ major est, ut hic depicte videntur, cum gutta mobilis aquæ, ad lit.N.*
M. *Enydrus Plinii: estque Gagate sardonici subcandicans (quem Terzagus vocat leuchagaten) & transparent. Clarissime apparet cum aqua medium aqua (mensuræ dimidii cochlearis) repletum, cuius elegans motus & undulatio gagate motu videtur: & sique lapis rariſſimus, cui similem alium in Italia non vidi.*
N. *Fructum crystalli caræ perfectissima, in qua est guttula aquæ, quæ ex una parte in aliam movetur, quæque circumvolat crystallo deberet descendere, cum omne grav descendat. & tamen ipsa cum omnibus aliis gentis ascendit. Quidam opinantur cum esse aerem: sed hoc falsissimum est, quia crystallo rupta, verâ effunditur aqua. Abbiex mensis amici quidam mecum cum incuberet excavandæ magnæ crystalli ex unâ parte in usum horologii condendi.*

D: Even though they have some modern items, the library is mainly a repository of antiquarian books. Most of these are the deaccessioned holdings from the various convents of the Dominican Order that were present all throughout the state of Oaxaca. There are around thirty thousand books at the Burgoa, but most of them were not compelling for this project: not only are they in Latin, but they are also primarily liturgical. Nevertheless, out of the thirty thousand books I was able to find or detect the ones that brought something into focus. I already described John Versor's book. The object itself was remarkable not because of the book itself, but because of the interventions of an anonymous reader who furiously inscribed it.

At the very beginning of this project I truly did not know how to proceed because everything about it—the space, the nature of the work, their provenance—overwhelmed me. Later, when I returned to Chicago, I realized two things. One, that my project could not address every single thing that I thought was interesting about each book I saw while I was doing my research. And two, that I could conflate or mash up many of the books I examined, because they had all merged in my memory. Take, for example, the artist's book *Esta Mina (This Mine)*. The book has mineral rocks that are wedged in holes that I carved, for lack of a better word, into the pages, which, by the way, are made of canvas. When I first had the idea for this work, I thought it was in response to Athanasius Kircher's *Mundus Subterraneus (The Subterranean World)*³. The book itself is an extravagant speculation on what might exist at the center of our planet. It is also one of

Opuesta / *Opposite*
Athanasius Kircher
Mundi Subterranei
tomus II
1678

³ Athanasius Kircher (b. 1602 - d 1680). *Mundus Subterraneus* was published in 1665.

the books in the collection that has been most damaged by termites and other insects. Insects dug into the center of this book that is about an imaginary digging into the subterranean “worlds” at the core of our planet. Truth is stranger than fiction, no doubt. So at first I thought that I had conceived *Esta Mina* in conversation with Kircher’s work. Later I understood that it was a mash-up that also incorporated Aldrovandi’s compendium on minerals⁴. In *Esta Mina* each page is a layer and as a reader you are digging deeper into the book as you turn the pages. In going inside, into the book, you are mining it. At the same time, like the Aldrovandi, *Esta Mina* organizes and holds an idiosyncratic casual collection rocks. After having studied both the Aldrovandi and the Kircher I digested the two sources and merged them. This realization helped me move on to making the next books, without the anxiety I initially felt about having to be true to something.

- C: It is remarkable how similar your process is to those little worms that eat the book and leave holes through the pages... They are digging into the books. Isn’t there also another, cosmic meaning to the expression ‘wormhole’?⁵
- D: Yes! I did occur to me that there is something of the cosmic tunnel in the larvae passages. Worms carve these channels from one part of the inside of the book all the

⁴ Ulisse Aldrovandi (b. 1522 - d. 1605) was an Italian naturalist. His book *Musaeum metallicum in libros IV distributum Bartholomaeus Ambrosinus* was published in 1648.

⁵ Wikipedia describes a wormhole as, “a hypothetical topological feature that would fundamentally be a shortcut through spacetime. A wormhole is much like a tunnel with two ends, each in separate points in spacetime”. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wormhole>.



Opuesta / Opposite
Athanasius Kircher
Mundus subterraneus
1678

way through into another. It is not exactly like skipping pages because it all happens from within the book. Now that I think about it, maybe wormholes in the cosmic sense are called wormholes based on the passageways found in infested books. In my research on animal infestations that affect books I found out about a well-known 19th century book by William Blades⁶ called *Enemies of Books* in which he lists all the human and nonhuman perils that make books vulnerable: fire, water, dust, heat, children (!), hate, bigotry and, of course, the bookworm. It is curious that humans who love books are also described as bookworms. So rather than being an enemy of books, the nonhuman bookworm is just as much a loving consumer of books, a bibliophile, as his human counterpart.

⁶ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Enemies_of_Books. A transcription of Blade’s *enemies of Books* was published by IndyPublish.com (ISBN 1-4043-5011-X).

C: We keep coming back to bibliophilia... All of us who buy books even if we don't read them have a little bit of the bibliophiliac in us. We want to amass a collection that we might never read. And yet, there is a difference between the domestic shelf of the bibliophile and the shelves at the Biblioteca Burgoa—which is not a huge library—where no one individual could possibly have read all of those volumes. With all those books in mind, I am interested in the possibility that you might have been anxious about not having detected the *one* book that would somehow open up the entire library and its significance to you; that you may have missed the most revealing text. It makes perfect sense, then, that you entered into this project in a very open ended way because at the outset you did not know what you would find and how you would transform it.

D: Are you saying that there might have been a book at the Burgoa that is the wormhole into the entire library? Sometimes the whole library feels like a wormhole into another era. Into another set of values that do and also do not intersect with those of the present, of today.

Denis Diderot
Encyclopédie, ou
dictionnaire raisonné
des sciences, des arts et
des métiers, Recueil des
planches, T. II
1780



C: Yes! When was the first time you visited the Burgoa? How did an artist's book project come about in this particular site?

D: I have been aware of the ex-convent of Santo Domingo, where the Burgoa collection has been housed since the late 1990s. A few years ago, Laurie Litowitz, a friend and fellow artist based in Oaxaca, brought my artist's books to the attention of María Isabel Grañén Porúa, the director of the library. Laurie suggested that I show my work in the library and I am very grateful that she planted this seed. Her initiative paved the path for a conversation that took place in November of 2013, when I met with the collections curator of the Burgoa, Penélope Orozco, and with the exhibition coordinator of the San Pablo Foundation, Edu Nieto. I told them very broadly that I wanted to explore the collection to generate new works and then show these in the context of the library. They liked the general idea and invited me almost on the spot to come back the following summer to spend time at the library and see what books I might want to explore further.

C: Prior to this invitation, had you ever requested to see books there?

D: No, no. I didn't even know that this was possible! I had visited the space where the library is housed and thought, "wow, the space is beautiful." It is located in a baroque space built in the 17th century and the renovations are very simply done so that you feel held by all the air that fills up the nave where the shelves are located. The opportunity to work on this new body of

artist's books allowed me to go into the library for the first time and scratch the surface of what it is – as a bibliophile, not as an expert. In anticipation of my visit I looked at the online database in Chicago and saw that the Burgoa has books that exist here in Chicago as well, at the Newberry Library, for instance. But the wormholes and the marginalia do not occur exactly in the same way anywhere else. I think that Penelope noticed that I was attracted to those particularities, and she started to bring out books based on the subject matter of say, the classification of plants, but also based on how the matter of the book had deteriorated. From the perspective of book conservation the condition of many of the books is a nightmare. But from my perspective I found these conditions, now controlled and contained, generative rather than tragic.

- C:** You have been making books for many years. Has the artist's book been a primary form for you, or did you come to it at a certain point in your practice?
- D:** In 1993 I returned to Vancouver after living in Oaxaca for about six months. I had finished my undergraduate studies in anthropology and sculpture, which I undertook first at Hampshire College (in Amherst, Massachusetts) and then at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Spending time in Oaxaca fortified my interest in pre-Columbian and early post-conquest codices that were made in that region and throughout Central Mexico. These codices are rich pictographic narratives that often depict the trajectory of a journey. As someone who had migrated from Mexico to Canada in her teens, I identified with the theme of movement and traversal and this is how I began to make some works.



Taller / Studio
Chicago
2015

When I returned to Vancouver I took a course in desktop publishing, a new thing at the time. It was a very basic and completely instrumental course that was entirely divorced from any kind of theoretical or historical connection to graphic design, but it became the beginning of my attempt at making books, and has turned into an ongoing area of research and interest.

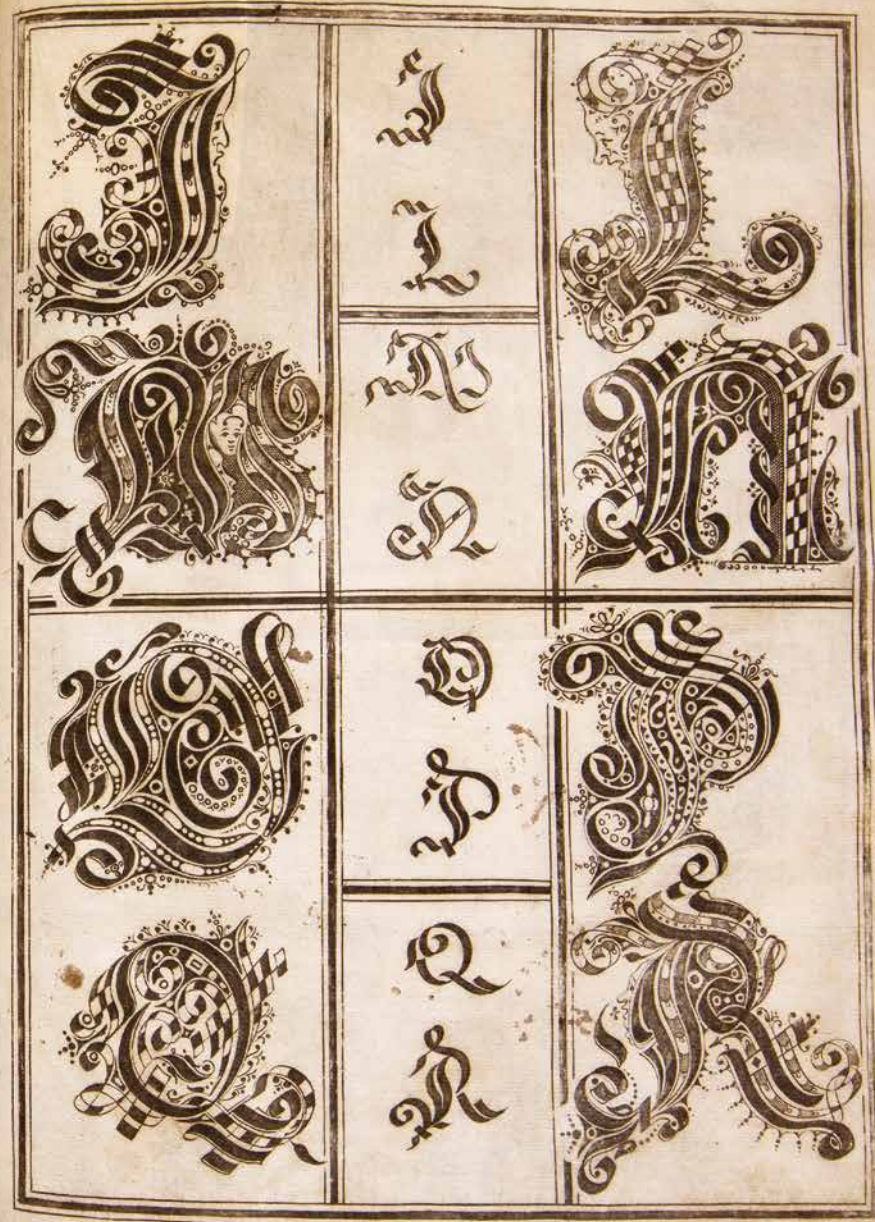
C: Has your relationship to the book as an artist changed your relationship to the book as a reader?

D: I think so. But even as I child I was drawn to typography. As a reader, I don't just look at sentences. I look at each letter, I look at the choices made by whoever designed not just the pages but also the letters themselves. He or she had a plethora of choices to make: what typeface to feature, does it have a serif or not, what size, how much space between the lines. These are basic graphic design problems. We all know that the way in which a book is designed is either detrimental or helpful to entering its content. The typesetters who produced many of the books at the Burgoa knew this expertly. They were engaged in artisanal work that still, to a degree, applies to texts designed to read on an electronic tablet. You can tell right away whether careful consideration went into designing how a text looks and therefore how it reads.

C: I want to end with a thought that lingers. Earlier on in our conversation you used the word encyclopedic when referring to the Art Institute of Chicago as a Museum. The Burgoa also has a few illustrated volumes of an early edition of Diderot's *Encyclopedie*, which I know you looked at. Most libraries are understood to be encyclopedic. The postmodern project, however, is all about rejecting the idea of the encyclopedic because, as you know, there can be no such thing as encompassing all knowledge.

D: I think that's true in that knowledge is also something that is to come, so there has to be a space in the incomplete encyclopedia for it.

Opuesta / Opposite
Lorenzo Ortiz
El maestro de escribir,
la theorica, y la practica
para aprender, y para
enseñar este utilissimo
arte, con otros dos artes
nuevos: uno para saber
formar rasgos: otro para
inventar innumerables
formas de letras
1696



- C:** Well I wonder what your thoughts are on the value of the encyclopedic today in whatever form it takes now, at this historical moment.
- D:** Well, to me it is more like an archive that has been curated based on what constitutes an institution's outlook and its values, not just its holdings. I looked in the dictionary, and the word encyclopedia comes from the Greek, transcribed as *enkyklios paideia* meaning general education. While "general" is not the same as "everything" it seems that somewhere along the way the word encyclopedia began to mean "complete education." This is where you begin to find a lot of holes and gaps in the claim—the gigantic exclusions.
- C:** By thinking, as you say, that a collection is curated you already acknowledge that there are huge gaps and holes in it. And then there is something interesting in the notion of reading those holes too—the wormholes, again. You allow for those holes to be educative in some way. As I have learned from this conversation, this seems too to be part of your process. You are not just reading what is there, but you are reading the holes, whether you are literally paying attention to the wormholes, or likewise noting that the history of what gets folded into this library has holes.
- D:** Look, It bugs me that I did not find at the Burgoa one pre-modern or early modern book on science and philosophy by a woman. Penelope mentioned that there are many books of religious content in the collection. One of them is by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz⁷ who was a ma-

⁷ Juana Inés de la Cruz (b. 1651 - d. 1695) was born in colonial Mexico. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juana_In%C3%A9s_de_la_Cruz.

yor Mexican theologian and poet, but I did not get to see it. She also mentioned that the presence of woman is there, in the background, as printers and publishers. We know that these holes are in many museums and libraries around the world, even today, when so many women are making and writing important work. I suppose that with this artist's book project, I am inserting something into the Burgoa Library's very welcoming bibliophilic holes, however temporarily. And, you know what? I can't help but think what a tremendous prospect this is.



Claudine Isé is Visiting Clinical Assistant Professor in the School of Art and Art History at the University of Illinois, Chicago. She has written extensively about contemporary art for publications including *The Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago* magazine, *Artforum.com*, *New City*, and *Art21* and has contributed monographic essays for numerous museum exhibition catalogs. Isé's previously-held positions include Blog Editor for *Art21*, Associate Curator of Exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Art, and Assistant Curator at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.





Dianna Frid es artista plástica cuya obra se ha exhibido en museos y galerías de varias partes del mundo. Su obra se encuentra en colecciones públicas que incluyen el Instituto de Arte de Chicago y el Cleveland Clinic.

Frid nació en la Ciudad de México y emigró con su familia a Canadá cuando tenía quince años. Actualmente vive en Chicago donde es Profesora Asociada en la Escuela de Arte e Historia de Arte de la Universidad de Illinois en Chicago. Además de su obra de taller, que incluye instalaciones, escultura y dibujo, en 1993, Dianna Frid comenzó a hacer libros de artista bajo el nombre *The Artery Archives*.

Para conocer más de su obra visita www.diannafrid.net

Dianna Frid is an artist whose work includes drawing, sculpture, installation and artist's books. She has exhibited nationally and internationally and her work is in public collections such as the Art Institute of Chicago and the Cleveland Clinic.

*Frid was born in Mexico City and migrated to Canada with her family when she was a teenager. She currently lives in Chicago where she is Associate Professor in the School of Art and Art History at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In addition to her studio work, Dianna Frid started to make artist's books in 1993 in Vancouver, with the name *The Artery Archives* as her imprint.*

To learn more about her work visit www.diannafrid.net

Lista de obra / *Exhibition checklist*

Libros de la Biblioteca Francisco de Burgoa

Antonio Cataño Ponce de León.
Epítome breve, y tratado único de la naturaleza, movimiento y aparición del cometa, que se empezó, a ver en esta ciudad por diciembre del año pasado de 1680,
Sevilla: Thomas Lopez de Haro, 1681.

Athanasius Kircher.
Mundus subterraneus,
Amsterdam: Janssonio-Waesbergiana, 1678.

Athanasius Kircher.
Mundi Subterranei tomus II,
Amsterdam: Janssonio-Waesbergiana, 1678.

Camille Flammarion.
Las tierras del cielo. Astronomía popular descripción astronómica, física, climatológica, y geográfica...,
París / México: Librería de Ch. Bouret, 1878.

Celedonio Nicolás de Arce y Cacho.
Conversaciones sobre la escultura: compendio historico, teorico y practico de ella para la mayor ilustracion de los jovenes dedicados á las bellas Artes de Escultura, Pintura y Arquitectura,
Pamplona: Joseph de Longas, 1786.

Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers
Recueil des planches,
Berna / Laussane: Diderot, 1780

Georgius Agricola.
De re metallica
Basilea: Ludovici Regis, 1621.

Heinrich Institoris.
Mallei maleficorum,
Lugduni: Ioannem Iacobi Iuntae, 1584.

Johannes, Versor.
Glossulae in Aristotelis philosophiae libros,
Toulouse: [Henricus Mayer], 1484.

Lorenzo Ortiz.
El maestro de escribir, la theorica, y la practica para aprender, y para enseñar este utilissimo arte, con otros dos artes nuevos: uno para saber formar rasgos: otro para inventar innumerables formas de letras,
Venecia: Paolo Baglioni, 1696.

Tomaso Maria Mamachi.
De' costumi de' primitivi cristiani libri tre
Roma: Gio Lorenzo Barbiellini, 1753.

Ulysse Aldrovandi.
Musaeum Metallicum in libros III distributum,
Bologna: Ioannis Baptistae Ferronio, 1648.

Libros de Dianna Frid

Apuntes (*Notations*)
2015
Tela, hilo, foto-transferencias sobre tela
Cloth, thread, photographic transfers on fabric

The Ascents (*Los Ascensos*)
2001
Tela, hilo, foto-transferencias sobre tela
Cloth, thread, photographic transfers on fabric

The Comets (*Los Cometas*)
2011
Tela, hilo, aluminio, pintura acrílica sobre papel
Cloth, thread, aluminum, acrylic paint on paper

Esta Mina (*This: A Mine*)
2015
Tela, hilo, aluminio, celofán, lápiz de color, nueve minerales
Cloth, thread, aluminum, cellophane, colored pencil, nine minerals

Estructura del Texto (*Structure of the Text*)
2015
Tela, hilo, aluminio
Cloth, thread, aluminum

Floyd Collins Cave Explorer
(*Floyd Collins Explorador de Cuevas*)
1998
Tela, hilo, foto-transferencia sobre tela,
Cloth, thread, photographic transfer on fabric

Fuerzas y Formas (*Forces and Forms*)
2015
Tela, hilo, imanes
Cloth, thread, magnets

Genealogy (*Genealogía*)
2002
Tela, hilo, papel, lápiz de color, cinta adhesiva
Cloth, thread, paper, colored pencil, tape

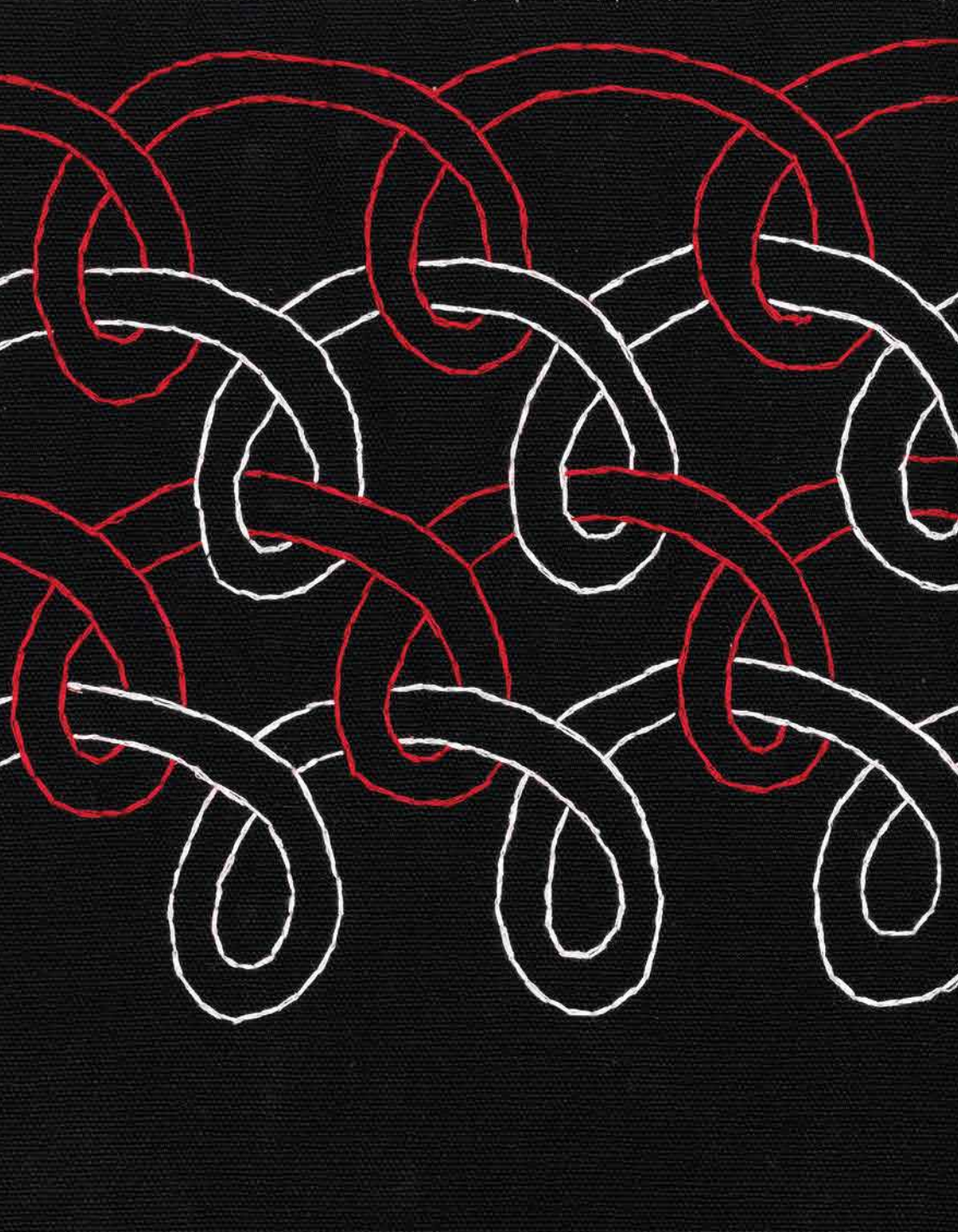
El Prisma en tus Manos
(*The Prism in Your Hands*)
2015
Litografía con chine-collée y hoja de aluminio
Lithography with chine-collée and aluminum leaf
publicada por / *published by*: Sharks Ink

Ranuras (*Furrows, Cracks*)
2015
Papel, tela, hilo, pintura
Paper, cloth, thread, paint



Acabose de imprimir este folleto
“Materias / Matter And Subject Matter”
en la biblioteca Fray Francisco de Burgoa,
en la muy insigne y gran Ciudad de Oaxaca
de Juárez, Oaxaca, en los talleres de Imágenes
Gráficas y Artísticas de Oaxaca.
Agosto año de 2015





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