

ETC PRESS: TWO DECADES OF TRANSATLANTIC COLLABORATION

Cynthia Lollis and Daniela Deeg

ABSTRACT

ETC Press is an international collaboration between two women: Daniela Deeg (Germany) and Cynthia Lollis (USA). We make prints and artists' books, often travelling together to gather images and absorb the character of countries other than our own, where we are outsiders together. Our books combine text with drawings and photographs made from our travels to places like Venice, Rome, New York, Copenhagen, Vienna, and London. We have also created pieces comparing our two countries, languages, and backgrounds. Our paper will recount a variety of themes, challenges, and methods of production that we have embraced while working together for two decades as ETC Press.

FIRST START

We met as students in the USA at the University of Georgia (UGA). Our first collaboration was motivated by an international competition celebrating Johannes Gutenberg. We learned about the competition when two engaging German artists visited our book arts class with Professor Rick Johnson. Ulrike Stoltz and Uta Schneider showed us their collaborative work, both as a duo and with their group, Unica T. We met them again at the University of Alabama at the "Book Arts 2000 and Beyond" conference. Stoltz was distributing a call for the "Love Letter to Gutenberg" student competition that she was organising. Inspired by Jo Anne Paschall and Nexus Press's 1996 *Cultural Olympiad* books, the competition aimed to publish artists' books representing different parts of the world. Excited by the theme, we parted for the summer with a plan to take photographs while visiting the Gutenberg Bibles closest to us, in the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz, and the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. That fall, we designed a double-sided accordion book using our photographs housed in a large-scale carton envelope. We mailed off our entry and hoped for the best.

We were thrilled when our book was selected. 15.Juni 1999/July 27, 1999: *Love Letter to Gutenberg* would be one of three books published during the "Gutenberg-Jahr 2000" in Mainz. Over two visits, our one-of-a-kind entry was transformed into an edition of 500 letterpress and offset printed books. We received all manner of support from many people in Mainz, from staff at the Gutenberg Projektbüro to the Fachhochschule Mainz. We enjoyed the warm comradery of book artists from other countries and found inspiring mentors in Stoltz and Schneider.



Figure 1

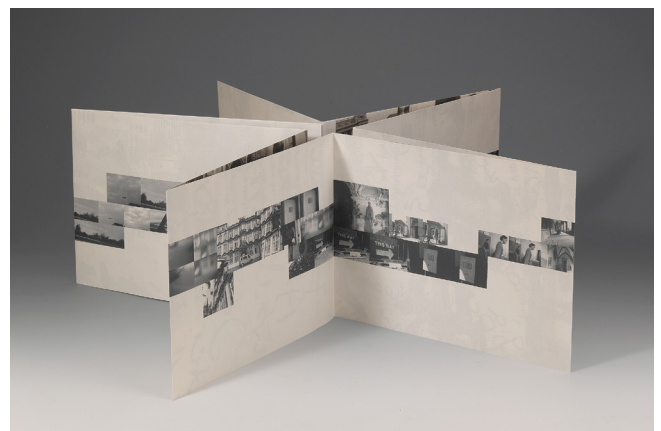


Figure 2

Figure Titles and information

Figure 1: Seen from Here / von hier aus gesehen, print (edition: 16): screenprint, 18 x 14 inches, 2005
 Figure 2: 15.Juni 1999 / July 27, 1999: *Love Letter to Gutenberg*, artists' book (edition: 500): offset lithography and letterpress, 40.5 x 28.5 x 1 cm, 2000

Their collaboration would spark ETC Press, although we did not know it at the time.

A few pivotal events took place before we became ETC Press. We attended an international symposium hosted by UGA in Cortona, Italy, in 2001. That led to an invitation to participate in the international collaboration, "Flying Carpet", showing artwork by 165 women from 24 countries (exhibited at the National Museum in Poznań during Impact 4). For this print, we drew, painted, sewed, and digitally worked together with an ocean between us, facilitated through many emails. Next were two residencies at the Women's Studio Workshop in Rosendale, NY. Daniela went on her own to produce *The Book of Warnings* (2001). Cynthia went the following year to make *Saints Days* (2002) with Annette Gates. These were fulfilling experiences that steered us into an ongoing collaboration.

SECOND START

A few years after our Mainz adventure, we craved more of the artistic energy that we felt while making the Gutenberg book. Our first challenges were: where and when could we print an edition of artists' books, and more importantly, how could we fund such a project? We researched publishing grants and set about applying for them. Our first application was rejected, but we submitted another for a residency at the Frans Masereel Centrum (FMC) in Belgium. Success! The requirements for the three challenges were met. FMC had all we could wish for in a professional screenprinting studio, living/studio spaces in charming A-frame houses, and superb staff to support us. That solved the where, and the when was ideal, too. FMC scheduled groups of international printmakers for three-week time slots, allowing various incoming and outgoing artists to overlap for at least one of their three weeks. This encouraged networking, expert problem-solving, and the sharing of ideas. It was enough time to remove oneself from everyday concerns and fully focus on a project, but not so long that one's job and personal life were compromised. Furthermore, funding was less of a hardship for artists because FMC was supported by the Flemish government. In exchange for a print for their collection, and later a modest weekly fee, FMC provided housing, studio use, and support, plus printmaking materials. That first productive residency in 2004 led to seven more over the following eight summers. Moreover, it launched us as ETC Press.

The first book we printed at FMC was *Nebbia*. We had travelled that year to Venice during a cold week in January. Our goal was to visually represent a 24-hour day using poet Joseph Brodsky's prose as a guide. We were fascinated by his description of a fog so heavy and thick that one's silhouette could linger long after one's passage that created it. This imagery influenced not only our title, which means 'fog' in Italian, but also our materials. We screenprinted our photographs onto both sides of a fog-like, translucent paper that revealed and concealed images and text above and below tidelines corresponding to each hour of one day. The stab-bound book was tucked inside a hand-



Figure 3

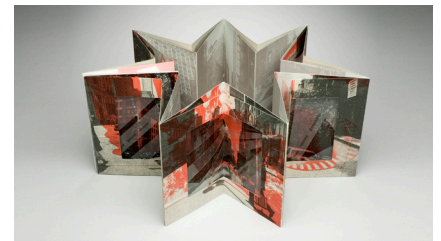


Figure 4



Figure 5

Figure 3: *Nebbia*, artists' book (edition: 24): screenprint, 22.5 x 42.5 x 2.5 cm, 2004
 Figure 4: 12:38 – 14:16, artists' book (edition: 36): screenprint, 21.5 x 16.5 x 4 cm, 2006
 Figure 5: *Tapetenwechsel / Change of Scenery*, artists' book (edition: 12): screenprint, 28.5 x 21 x 3 cm, 2008

sewn white fabric bag, which was then placed inside a greyboard box screenprinted with the title and colophon. This style of box would become characteristic of ETC Press books for years to come.

Once we completed this project, the next challenge was how to exhibit and market our book. We entered *Nebbia* into juried exhibitions and produced a promotional postcard. We mailed our card to librarians and curators and placed a few in art centres. One of these cards led to a sale to a private collector in Texas, and another found its way to Ruth R. Rogers, Special Collections Librarian at Wellesley College. Rogers purchased a copy for her collection, and included it in "Resonance and Response", an exhibition that she was curating for "ABC: The Artists' Books Conference". Our book appeared in the chapter "Place" in her catalogue.¹ The following year, she juried the book arts exhibition "Beyond Words" at Sewanee: The University of the South. In the preface for the exhibition catalogue, she wrote:

Some artists' books are inspired by the words of others, often emerging in a form that the author could never imagine. What would Joseph Brodsky think of his poem *Nebbia* as interpreted by Cynthia Lollis and Daniela Deeg. Instead of the original black text on a white page, the artists have paid visual homage to Brodsky by immersing his text in watery black and white photographs of his beloved Venice, printed on translucent paper ... Both of these books transcend the poet's words, adding dimension and surprise.²

It was at this exhibition that Cynthia met Bill and Vicky Stewart of Vamp & Tramp Booksellers in Birmingham, Alabama. And a year before that, Daniela met Susanne Padberg of Galerie Druck & Buch in Tübingen, Germany (now in Vienna, Austria, since 2013). We gladly accepted their offers to represent our work. Both booksellers have been exceptionally supportive of us, and their relationships with special collection librarians are far-reaching. Because of their work, ETC Press has artwork in 56 public collections in 13 countries. Furthermore, Padberg has included our work in over a dozen exhibitions that she has curated, with themes like collaboration and time in artists' books. In 2010, Galerie Druck & Buch presented our first solo exhibition, "Twist: Artists' Books by Daniela Deeg and Cynthia Lollis". The second exhibition of ETC Press books came ten years later at Daniela's solo show at the Kunstverein Ludwigsburg. Padberg was the guest speaker for this exhibition in March 2020.

Turning this side of the business over to professionals freed us up to make work. In 2005, we printed *Relinquo*, a book with photographs taken in Rome and Ostia Antica and text by the Roman poet Ovid. This book was included in the exhibition "Under the Wings of Artemis: The Crossroads of Scholarship and Art" at the University of Washington in 2013. The curator wrote the following about our work:

The photograph of Rome depicted here, displaying many well-known landmarks, including the Coliseum and the Aqueduct, focuses the viewer on the Roman connection between memory



Figure 6



Figure 7

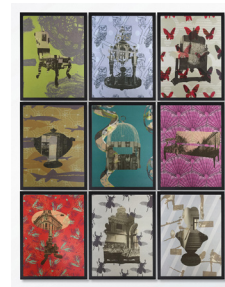


Figure 8

Figure 6: Risk.Risiko, artists' book (edition: 14): screenprint, 30 x 23.5 x 3.5 cm, 2010
 Figure 7: Ein Würfelwurf kann den Zufall nicht abschaffen / A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance, artists' book (edition: 18): screenprint, 23.5 x 35 x 2.5 cm, 2011
 Figure 8: Sammlung, 9 prints (edition: 12): screenprint and laser print, 40 x 30 cm, 2018

1. Rogers (2005, p. 34)
 2. Rogers (2006, p. 6)

and architecture. These images communicate a deep sense of place and with it, the understanding that our knowledge and memory of the places we experience – whether in actuality or in our imagination – are essential to our sense of self.³

In 2006, we made *12:38-14:16*, a star accordion documenting a walk we made in New York City with a poem by Mina Loy as our inspiration. Examining the influence of manuscripts and early prints on modern artists' books, scholar Viola Hildabrand-Schat wrote the following about our book:

In this way, the two artists approach the modern sense of time in several ways. Time is no longer something that is predetermined by the time of day or season, but something that is entirely subject to individual design. Time is measured in distances that the movement in a city dictates...Time and distance find their formal equivalent in the form of the leporello.⁴

In 2007, a Brothers Grimm fairytale led us through the Black Forest in two different seasons for our Coptic book, *Viel Glück*. We felt that we were hitting our stride, yet we started facing new challenges.

FINDING TIME, PART I

The challenge of added career commitments started to creep in. By 2005, Daniela was running her own design business in Ludwigsburg. In 2008, Cynthia was hired as a full-time professor by the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Atlanta. These jobs were more demanding and limited the time we could spend away from home. We did not have a clear plan for the photographs we had taken in Copenhagen by the time we arrived at FMC in 2008. Instead, we explored German and English idioms that had different expressions but meant the same things. We mined images from our previous travels, and we worked side-by-side making drawings from them, some drawn directly on silkscreens, and others applied photomechanically. The resulting book was *Tapetenwechsel/Change of Scenery*. Resembling a dictionary, nine unbound folios, printed front and back, were contained in a greyboard box with a hinged side. This was our first work that doubled as a book and as frameable artwork. From then on, all of our books could be transformed into works to be shown on traditional gallery walls.

The next year, Cynthia had an opportunity to join forces with Stoltz in an institutional collaboration between the University of the Arts Braunschweig, where Stoltz was a professor, the Klingspor Museum in Offenbach, and SCAD. Spearheaded by Dr. Deborah Prosser, Dean of Library Services at SCAD, and with support from the Halle Foundation, this exchange began with a book arts class taught in Germany, and culminated in three exhibitions: in Braunschweig, Offenbach, and Atlanta. At the opening of the Klingspor Museum's exhibition "Exchange. Übersetzung überflüssig" we spoke about our book, *12:38-14:16*, that had been recently acquired by the museum.



Figure 9: *Sammlungen / Collections*, artists' book (edition: 15); screenprint, laser print and Risograph, 41.5 x 31.5 x 2.5 cm, 2022

Figure 10: *Sea Change / Zeitenwende*, print (edition: 26); Risograph and letterpress, 14 x 11 inches, 2020 [from the themed portfolio, "Earth / Mother" organized by Elizabeth Castaldo, to be exhibited at the SGCI conference in Puerto Rico (postponed from 2020)]

3. Dudley et al. (2013, p. 22)

4. Hildabrand-Schat (2015, p. 212)

That year, our Copenhagen photographs coalesced into the artists' book, *Enten/Eller*. Images were paired with passages from Søren Kierkegaard's book *Either/Or* to allow for three different existential readings. Our next book, *Risk.Risiko* compared some of life's risks to gambling using statistics from famous gambling towns, Las Vegas and Baden Baden. A journal entry written by Russian author Leo Tolstoy on one side of the book was in stark contrast to a Russian proverb on the reverse. Tolstoy described a gambling loss, whereas the proverb demonstrated a luckier aspect of risk. In Boston Printmakers "Biennial 2011", Jim Dine juried it for "The Boston Printmakers Prize", a purchase award for the Boston Public Library's collection. In 2020, *Risk.Risiko* was one of 20 books selected to represent "Contemporary Artists' Books" in the exquisite book, *Vielseitig/Multiple* published by the Bibliothèque nationale du Luxembourg.⁵

By 2011, we had worked together for a decade. We revisited a word list started in 2001 and images of places that we had travelled to in those years for *Ein Würfelwurf kann den Zufall nicht abschaffen/A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*. The title referenced a visually dynamic poem by Stéphane Mallarmé which was blacked out in the 1960s for a new work by Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers. Our book quoted his black bars amid our images of 10 locations. The original word list grew to 15 words, and was translated into English, German, Flemish/Dutch, and French, our two languages plus the two primary languages spoken in Belgium. The complexity of translation became a significant motif of this book. This language complexity plus the materiality of our book were addressed in two scholarly essays written by Robert Bolick⁶ and David Annwn⁷. It was a particular honour for us when this book was exhibited in "Booknesses: Artists' Books from the Jack Ginsberg Collection" at the University of Johannesburg in 2017.⁸ *Ein Würfelwurf* would be our last book printed at FMC for 10 years.

FINDING TIME, PART II

The 2010s ushered in fresh challenges, both personal and global. The purchase of a home for one, and extensive home renovation for the other, loss of parents, births of new family members, SGCI conference hosting, the realignment of jobs, board memberships, and exhibition committees for our local arts organisations, leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, meant considerable pivoting. From 2012 to 2020, we travelled to each other's cities to print and make books, working in short spurts of time. These were productive years, but sometimes they meant making print editions instead of books. In 2012, we designed the offset printed book, *Luftperspektive/Aerial View*. Here, we compared 360° views of our cities' skylines below silhouettes of native birds flying about with text from a Rainer Maria Rilke poem contained within them. This book inspired two more artworks in 2013, *Flock Movement/Schwarmverhalten* (offset and screenprint) and *DL116/DL117* (inkjet and letterpress).

5 Wallenborn and Bopp-Schumacher (2020, pp. 4-5, 180-189)

6 Bolick (2022b)

7 Annwn (2020)

8 Paton and Ginsberg (2017, p. 148)

From 2015 to 2019, we made most of our screenprints at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. The first was *Interior Landscapes/Innere Landschaften*, a suite of nine prints on sheets of wallpaper samples. No two pieces of wallpaper were exactly alike in colour or pattern for our edition of 12. This artwork featured urban greenspaces inside silhouettes of common household objects. The prints collectively represented uncertainty during changing times and depicted the tension between the domestic and external realms. Next, we screenprinted three prints for the SGCI 2017 conference in Atlanta. Two were for the “End of the Millennium” portfolio that we curated. *Charming the Animals* was our contribution to an Orpheus-themed portfolio of prints made by conference organizers. Then, we marked the 13th anniversary of our making *Nebbia* by going to Venice for a fresh look around. For *Riflettere*, we screenprinted *Venetian red silhouettes of Venetian* windows filled with different water surfaces that we encountered there. We revisited Brodsky’s prose for screenprints made in Germany. Our artists’ book was completed in Atlanta after we screenprinted text and water imagery onto translucent fabric for covers that recalled *Nebbia’s* bag enclosure.

A trip to Vienna, and the collections we saw there, inspired a suite of prints, *Sammlung* (2018) and an artists’ book, *Sammlungen/Collections* (2022). We created patterned wallpapers from pictures we took at the Natural History Museum. On top of these, we screenprinted silhouettes of objects from the Imperial Furniture Museum and filled them with photographs of places we visited, including the Sigmund Freud Museum. We planned to finish the book in 2020. But suddenly, the world changed, and we put the project on hold. When we were no longer able to travel because of COVID-19 restrictions, we turned to Risography to produce two print editions, *Sea Change/Zeitenwende* and *Festschrift for Bill* (in honour of one of our esteemed representatives, who had recently passed away). We also began work on an artists’ book using photographs we had already taken in London.

In November 2021, we were reunited at FMC for a “Collective Residency”. It was exhilarating to be back at FMC, and to be together, printing after two years apart. Wearing masks, we spent a week in the screenprinting and digital studios to complete *Sammlungen/Collections*, the book we started in 2018. Maps were screenprinted onto large sheets of translucent paper to become archive-like folders for additional *Sammlung* prints. We used their RISO machine to print papers that resembled Post-it notes with fragmented text and images. These were attached to the backs of our prints, creating intimate backstories for a selection of Freud’s female patients. Complete with a “collections manual”, *Sammlungen/Collections* was our mirror of the obsessive collections that presented themselves to us as we wandered around Vienna.

MORE TO COME

Ours is a story of a collaboration between two women artists, but our story also includes the “collaborative” spirit of many people who helped us along the way. We are grateful to our professors and mentors, our art representatives, special collections librarians, private collectors, curators, museum directors, artist residencies, printmaking studios and cooperatives, artists, authors, scholars, poets, and our families.

We have been asked before why we have made books about the places we have. Our answer is that we both like to travel and see lives different from our own. We have gone to places that have attracted us because of their landscapes, history, culture, or art. Most have been practical choices, timewise and budget-wise. There are many more places that we are still eager to go to.

South Africa or Australia, perhaps? However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that we are not limited by location to make our collaborative work. What we were quoted as saying in the book *Masters: Book Arts: Major Works* by Leading Artists rings as true today as it did two decades ago:

We challenge each other to create work that goes beyond what either of us could have imagined independently.⁹

We are up for the challenge!

9. Wallace (2011, p. 258)

IMAGE GALLERY

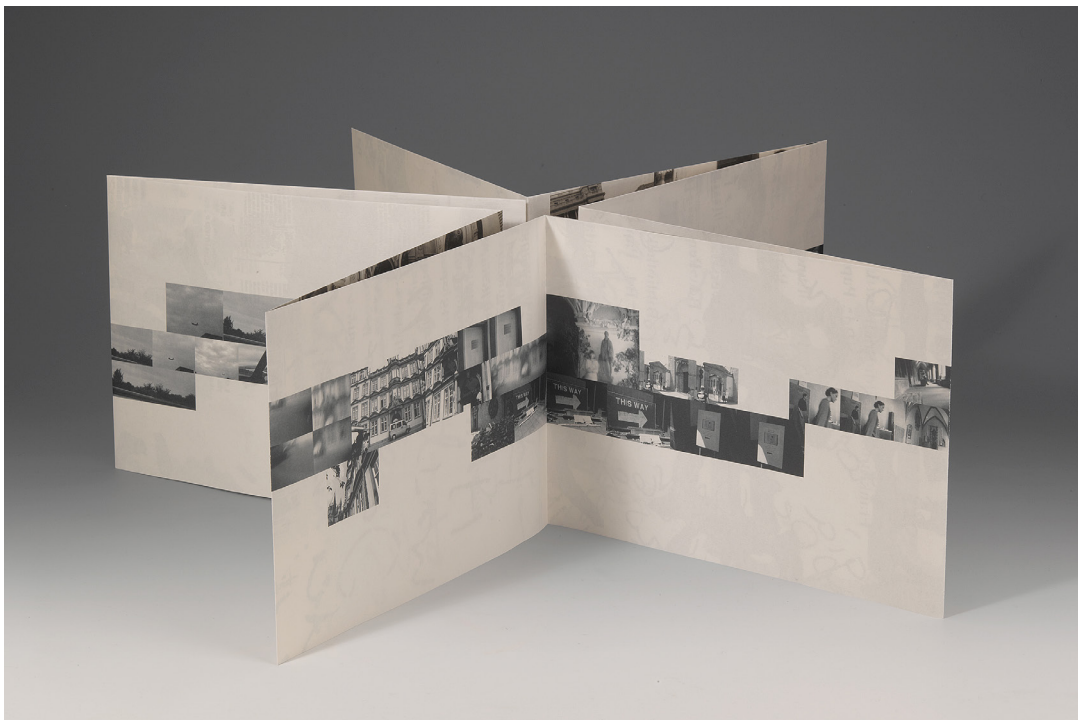


Figure 1: Seen from Here / von hier aus gesehen, print (edition: 16): screenprint, 18 x 14 inches, 2005

Figure 2: 15.Juni 1999 / July 27, 1999: Love Letter to Gutenberg, artists' book (edition: 500): offset lithography and letterpress, 40.5 x 28.5 x 1 cm, 2000

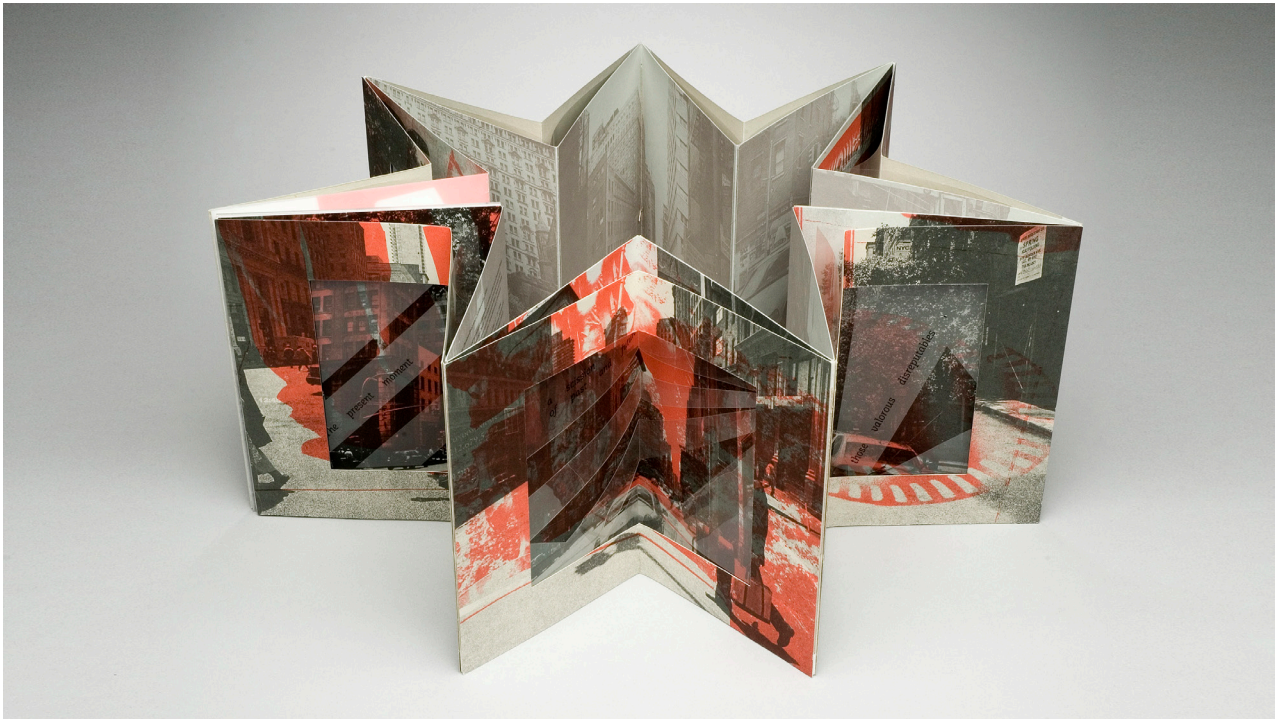


Figure 3: Nebbia, artists' book (edition: 24): screenprint, 22.5 x 42.5 x 2.5 cm, 2004

Figure 4: 12:38 - 14:16, artists' book (edition: 36): screenprint, 21.5 x 16.5 x 4 cm, 2006



Figure 5: Tapetenwechsel / Change of Scenery, artists' book (edition: 12): screenprint, 28.5 x 21 x 3 cm, 2008
Figure 6: Risk.Risiko, artists' book (edition: 14): screenprint, 30 x 23.5 x 3.5 cm, 2010



Figure 7: Ein Würfelwurf kann den Zufall nicht abschaffen / A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance, artists' book (edition: 18); screenprint, 23.5 x 35 x 2.5 cm, 2011

Figure 8: Sammlung, 9 prints (edition: 12); screenprint and laser print, 40 x 30 cm, 2018

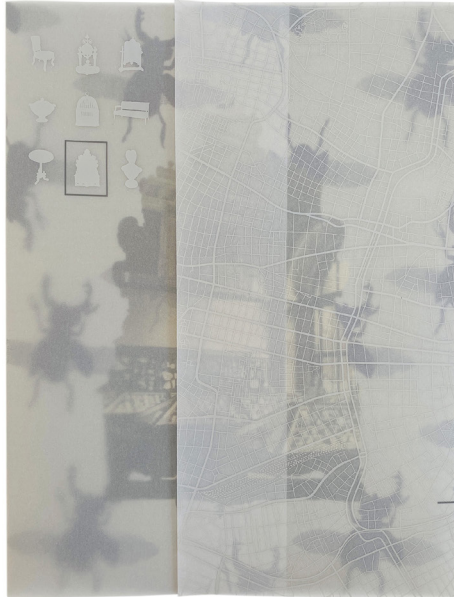


Figure 9: Sammlungen / Collections, artists' book (edition: 15): screenprint, laser print and Risograph, 41.5 x 31.5 x 2.5 cm, 2022
Figure 10: Sea Change / Zeitenwende, print (edition: 26): Risograph and letterpress, 14 x 11 inches, 2020 [from the themed portfolio, "Earth / Mother" organized by Elizabeth Castaldo, to be exhibited at the SGCI conference in Puerto Rico (postponed from 2020)]