

## **My journey with artists' books...**

I have been engaged in making artists' books for nearly two decades now. In the initial years when I was creating these books I had no idea I was creating something called as "Artists' books". I was creating them instinctively. Much later, in 2001, when I went to study handmade papermaking in Glasgow School of Art, and during my visits to Europe and North America I started seeing many such art works and connected my practice with the existing genre of artists' books. This realization opened up a new vista for me. And I started my exploration with a lot more understanding and energy. I started getting in touch with artists' book creators, communities and later started showing in many exhibitions of artists' books.

Some of the first books I did were really an extension of my paintings which had two divisions in them to simulate an open book or to suggest two sides of an open magazine. All along, I have not created artists' books exclusively, but they are located within my larger practice where I do painting, sculpture, installation and photography. Artists' books have become an added dimension to this exploration.

Many of my paintings had text along with visuals in them; texts which would alter the meaning of the visuals. Similar approach has continued in my artists' books as well. Most of them have visual elements as well as text which reiterates, alters or juxtaposes the content. The fact that I read a lot and write essays on art and poetry has kept me close to books. It is no surprise that this attraction has flowed into my book making as well. So, creating artists' books seems like a natural progression.

Books for me are a repository of information, feelings, ideas and knowledge. They also have a material presence; they can be seen as memorials of history and memory keepers. All these qualities are combined in various ways in my books. Each book becomes and an exploration of an idea. When it is completed the book becomes a tangible carrier of those intangible ideas.

I like the intimate size of the book. Though small in size my books are highly conceptual and packed with ideas. They are rarely descriptive. I like the fact that one can add a sense of time when it is a full book thus developing a narrative unfolding in time. My early books were like journals, with a bit of scribbling, mapping the flow of my thoughts. Sometimes an idea from one book flows into another book and gets transformed. This has happened in 'Random destiny', 'Book of Destiny' series of works. I have done a few photo books as well.

Handmade papermaking and bookmaking have remained my twin interests. Most of my artists' books except photo books, are created using handmade papers made by me. Either they are sheets bound together or cast in the shape of a book. I have used a variety of plant fiber papers like banana, daphne, hanji and cotton for these works.

In my books, images and text are sometimes drawn; many a times a relief image is created in clay and later converted into pulp, casting from a prepared mould and occasionally transferred from photocopy. In some of my books like 'Banana and the sword' I have tried to reinterpret the palm leaf manuscripts format from ancient India. In other works like 'This is the way the world ends' I have adopted

the accordion format along with a few unconventional approaches to bookmaking, but most of my artists' books retain the form of a book.

The story is just starting and I hope to explore artists' books more in the days to come. One can say I'm 'booked' for life.

**Ravikumar Kashi**

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