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Artists' Books and the Medical Humanities

An interdisciplinary symposium accompanied by *Prescriptions*:
an exhibition of artists' books by Martha A. Hall and other artists

Thursday 21 April 2016, Cathedral Lodge, Canterbury

This symposium, co-organised by the University of Kent's School of English and the University of New England's Maine Women Writers Collection, will explore connections between artists' books, health/illness and medicine. It will also launch *Prescriptions*, an exhibition of book art by Martha A. Hall, on loan from the University of New England, which will run until the 14th of August in the Beaney House of Art & Knowledge. [Martha Hall's books](#), created from 1998 until her death in 2003, engage with several ongoing issues in the field of the medical humanities, including illness narratives, representations of women's bodies and patient-doctor relationships. These themes find unique expression through the medium's intimacy, immediacy and complexity that not only challenges the conventional book form but also offers a palpable experience of the patient's world. *Prescriptions* will include a supporting show of artists' books by national and international artists responding to themes of art and wellbeing that is curated by Dr Stella Bolaki (University of Kent) and Egidija Čiricaitė (artist).

A full programme can be found below. Registration fee is £15 and includes coffee/tea, lunch and a drinks reception. Participants will also have the chance to attend a special preview of the *Prescriptions* exhibition in the Beaney House of Art & Knowledge.

As the venue capacity is limited, please book a place online [here](#) by April 7, 2016.

For any queries, contact Dr Stella Bolaki, S.Bolaki@kent.ac.uk

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Symposium Programme

(All keynotes and panels in The Dean John Simpson Room, [Cathedral Lodge](#))

9:00-9:30 Registration (and coffee/tea outside The Dean John Simpson Room)

9:45-10:00 Welcome and introduction

Stella Bolaki, Senior Lecturer in American Literature, School of English, University of Kent

10:00-11:00 Panel 1: Anatomies of the book

Egidija Čiricaitė, Artist

Amanda Couch, Artist and Senior Lecturer, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham

11-11:30 Coffee break (outside the Dean John Simpson Room)

11:30-12:30 Keynote 1: Artists' 'books' as medical texts: Medical students learning to think with metaphors in order to change the clinical landscape

Alan Bleakley, Emeritus Professor in Medical Education and Medical Humanities, University of Plymouth Peninsula School of Medicine and President of the Association for Medical Humanities

12:30-1:30 Lunch (The Refectory Restaurant)

1:30-2:00 Poetry reading & presentation: 'I am book'

Clare Best, Writer, Independent Scholar and Associate Lecturer, Open University

2:00-3:00 Keynote 2: Making art, making space for social change: Reflections on women's health activism in the 21st century

Susan E. Bell, Department Head and Professor of Sociology, Drexel University, USA.

3:00-3:30 Coffee break

3:30-4:00 Documentary screening: *Martha Hall, I Make Books* (AV Theatre)

4:00-5:00 Panel 2: 'I make books so I won't die': Artists' books in the archives and classroom

Jennifer S. Tuttle, Dorothy M. Healy Professor of Literature and Health and Director of the Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England.

Cathleen Miller, Curator of the Maine Women Writers Collection, University of New England.

5:15-7:00 Special preview of *Prescriptions* exhibition (21 April-14 August 2016) in the [Beaney House of Art & Knowledge](#) (Drawing Room) followed by a drinks reception.

7:00 End of symposium

Speakers' Abstracts & Bios

Panel 1: Anatomies of the book

Egidija Čiricaite and Amanda Couch

Anatomies of the Book will discuss how artists use the artist's book to make connections between the idea and form of the book and the human body and mind.

Egidija Čiricaite will introduce the *Prescriptions* exhibition of artists' books (Beaney, 21 April-14 August 2016). In particular, she will survey the range of works that have been submitted for the supporting show, and the practices that they reveal. The talk will examine metaphorical and more literal creative investigations into physicality of human anatomy, as well as mental and spiritual realities of illness. It will consider how materials, structure, methods of production and visual content contribute to create new meanings in the space between artists' books and medicine.

Amanda Couch will introduce her practice, which engages the leperello; an embodiment of the digestive tract, emulating the bending and turning back of the intestines crammed into the body's cavity. She will explore the *Reflection on Digestion* project, the collaborative *On Innards | Publication, and Entrail Troyen* around which she will discuss ideas of ingestion, rumination and reading, and joined up handwriting, drawing, line, and the stitch. She will also explore the folded format of the medieval medical folding almanac in relation to *Huwama in the Everyday: an Almanac*, and her new work around divination.

Egidija Čiricaite is an artist with a special interest in the book as an artifact and the idea of book as an object in the context of history and culture. She holds an MA in English Linguistics and an MA in Visual Arts. She has delivered talks on book history and artists publications in galleries, libraries and universities, including Book History Research Network, V&A, Birkbeck, University of London. Her work can be found in a number of private and public collections, including Tate, Museum Meermanno in Amsterdam and Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. More information at www.egidija.com

Amanda Couch is an artist, researcher, and senior lecturer at the University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, where she teaches Fine Art and Creative Arts Education. She has recently presented at *Livres d'Artistes: The Artist's Book in Theory and Practice*, Cardiff University (2015), and *Visual Artists Today: Symposium of the Artist Identity*, Birkbeck (2015). She performed at *Art Language Location*, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, (2015), and co-curated and exhibited at *On Innards | Exhibition and Event*, Blyth Gallery, Imperial College, London (2014). She regularly exhibits her books at the London Art Book Fair and the Small Publishers' Fair with bookRoom press. More information at www.amandacouch.co.uk and <http://amandajcouch.wordpress.com>

Keynote 1: Artists' 'books' as medical texts: Medical students learning to think with metaphors in order to change the clinical landscape

Alan Bleakley

Healthcare promises to be patient-centred and team-based, but this is often rhetoric rather than reality. This is because the landscape of medicine has been shaped since the 18th century by stubborn, didactic, masculine, heroic metaphors: primarily 'medicine as war' and 'body as machine'. Medicine's dragonslaying mentality shapes authoritarian, hierarchical practices and objectifies the patient. For

patient-centredness and team-based care to flourish, the landscape of medicine must be re-shaped by a new set of metaphors: democratic, collaborative, nourishing, pacific, ecological and holistic. This metaphorical shift will only occur if policy and medical education align to promote new metaphorical frames. Aspects of policy – such as the recruitment of more women into medicine – are helping, but medical education is lagging as it fails to fully embrace the aesthetic dimensions to medical care: expertise in sensibility and sensitivity.

Medicine curricula must adopt a core and integrated medical humanities programme, working with artists and humanities scholars, to create a new metaphorical context for practice change. The legacy of Martha Hall's books provides an excellent example of a conversation between the experience of illness, art, and medical intervention – the kind of conversation that should be at the heart of a medical education. In this talk, I will show how artists and their artefacts can stimulate a new way of learning for medical students, developing a radical metaphorical context for shaping clinical practice.

Alan Bleakley is Emeritus Professor of Medical Education and Medical Humanities at the University of Plymouth Peninsula School of Medicine and President of the Association for Medical Humanities. He was instrumental in developing a core and integrated medical humanities curriculum at the Peninsula Medical School and has worked internationally with similar projects. He is widely published as an academic and poet. His most recent book is *Medical Humanities and Medical Education: How the Medical Humanities Can Shape Better Doctors* (Routledge 2015).

Poetry reading & presentation: 'I am book'

Clare Best

As well as being a writer, I have worked as a fine bookbinder, a bookseller, an editor and a Creative Writing teacher. Throughout my life, making books has provided me with metaphorical and physical structures within which to reconstruct versions of my self and body. In this presentation – illustrated with readings from my own work alongside images by the visual artists with whom I have collaborated – I will explore aspects of artistic identity, looking at links between the maker and what is made.

Clare Best's first full collection of poetry *Excisions* (Waterloo Press 2011) was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Centre Prize, 2012. Clare has presented her autobiographical project *Self-portrait without Breasts* (combining her poems with photographs by Laura Stevens) in the USA and Canada as well as across the UK and Ireland. Other poetry publications include *Treasure Ground* (HappenStance 2010), *Breastless* (Pighog 2011) and *CELL* (Frogmore Press 2015) – a folding artefact with art by Michaela Ridgway. Clare's prose memoir *The Papermaker* was runner-up for the Mslexia Memoir Competition 2015. *Springlines*, her collaborative project with the painter Mary Anne Aytoun-Ellis – exploring hidden and mysterious bodies of water – was shown at Glyndebourne in summer 2015 and there will be further exhibitions across the south of England in 2017-18. Clare is an Associate Lecturer in Creative Writing for the Open University, and last year was one of two Writers in Residence at the University of Brighton. More information at selfportraitwithoutbreasts.wordpress.com and clarebest.co.uk

Keynote 2: Making art, making space for social change: Reflections on women's health activism in the 21st century

Susan E. Bell

This talk will situate Martha A. Hall's artists' books in the context of breast cancer politics and women's health activism from the 1990s to the present. It will reflect on the role of artworks in sustaining and portraying meaning in an expressive way, opening up a shared visual and discursive space, and providing emancipatory potential.

Susan E. Bell is Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology at Drexel University. Her research specialty is the sociology of health and illness. She investigates the experience of illness, women's health, and narrative representations of the politics of cancer, medicine, and women's bodies. While always based in sociology, her research is interdisciplinary and draws upon literatures in multiple fields. During the 1980s and 1990s she authored "Birth Control," a chapter in "the bible of women's health," *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1984, 1992, 1996). In *DES Daughters: Embodied Knowledge and the Transformation of Women's Health Politics* (2009) she takes a narrative approach to understanding how illness, suffering, and uncertainty can become opportunities for producing embodied knowledge and making social change. She has published a series of papers about illness, art, suffering and social change, including "Artworks, collective experience, and claims for social justice: The case of women living with breast cancer" (with Alan Radley) (*Sociology of Health & Illness* 2007). She is the guest editor with Alan Radley of a special issue of the journal *health*, "Another Way of Knowing: Art, Disease, and Illness Experience" (2011). She is currently writing a book about outpatient care in US hospitals for refugee and immigrant patients, *Permeable Hospitals, Transnational Communities: A Global Hospital Ethnography in Maine*. Her research has been funded by the National Science Foundation, School for Advanced Research (Santa Fe, NM), National Endowment for the Humanities, and American Council of Learned Societies.

Panel 2: 'I make books so I won't die': Artists' books in the archives and classroom

Jennifer S. Tuttle and Cathleen Miller

Jennifer S. Tuttle and Cathleen Miller will discuss the use of artists' books as teaching tools in both the archives and the classroom and examine their effect on students' learning. Artists' books offer students new ways of seeing and understanding the world and of exploring the relationship between form and content. Hall's books focusing on her experience living with breast cancer are uniquely powerful as patient narratives. The intimacy of the book form draws students into relationship with the artist's narrative, suggesting that the body and the text are inseparable. Handling such books, which contain intimate pieces of a person's life experience, creates deep impact for students and is especially valuable for those planning to enter the health professions, which is the case for the majority of students at the University of New England. Hall's books not only emphasize her struggle for voice and self-determination in the medical encounter; they demand that the patient's perspective be heard. But beyond that, they invite readers into a partnership and reframe the encounter with the patient's body in ways that radically shift students' understanding of the health professions and of their own embodied experience as human beings.

Jennifer S. Tuttle is Dorothy M. Healy Professor of Literature and Health at the University of New England in Maine, where she directs the Maine Women Writers Collection. She has published three books on Charlotte Perkins Gilman and several essays on 19th-century US literature and medical discourse. She is also the editor of *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*.

Cathleen Miller serves as curator of the Maine Women Writers Collection at the University of New England in Portland, Maine. She is a practicing poet and artist whose work deals with embodiment, eco-poetics, queer sexuality and chronic illness. She is currently at work on a full length poetry manuscript.

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