

PhD Thesis title:

The Artist's Book: Making as embodied knowledge of practice and the self

Abstract

The initial research question for this practice-based doctoral research project was to ask, "Is it possible to develop a more confident, self-conscious creative voice able to articulate one's identity more clearly through the making of handmade artefacts?"; this thesis applies the methodologies of autoethnography and pedagogy to consider an answer. My original contribution to knowledge through this enquiry is the identification of the ways in which the exploration of identity through autoethnographic, creative and pedagogic methods encourages an expanded field of self-knowledge, self-confidence and sense of creative self.

This autoethnographic study focuses on the analysis of my experiences as a working class girl growing up in an upper middle class suburb of Boston, Massachusetts in the United States. Diagnosed with a spine deformity at the age of ten, I utilise autoethnographic theory, methods and analysis in this thesis to gain knowledge of myself and the culture I grew up in to understand the possible reasons for my sense of shame and rejection, and my subsequent development of a fragile identity. This thesis evidences that the study of one's culture and its signifying practices develops knowledge of the self, that they are necessarily intertwined.

Central to this study has been my development of embodied, theoretical and material knowledge through learning the craft-based skill of hand bookbinding, and my emergent confidence to encase my visual practice in handbound artist's

books. The visual element of this practice-based PhD is a series of handmade artist's books which contain collaged digital photographs of walks I took in my home town. This thesis evidences that through learning these skills I have developed greater self-knowledge as an artist/designer/maker. This approach has been successfully translated to the teaching of bookbinding skills through workshops influenced by Wenger's (1998) theory of 'communities of practice' in a collaborative learning setting. This thesis reports that participating students' perceptions of themselves have changed through their development of the skills and knowledge involved in encasing their individual creative work into handbound artist's books.

Through the critical analysis of empirical and practice-based methods engaged in during this study, I argue that the artist's book, as performative autoethnographic practice, evidences embodied knowledge of one's identity and creativity by encasing the self within the book.