

Exploring the Materiality, Artistic Practice, and Cultural Context of Contemporary Artists' Books

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ABSTRACT

The research put forward in this PhD project centres on the study of contemporary artists' books as instruments of socio-cultural commentary in the current digital age. As an artform that employs the book as its material, these works often engage with the elements of book structure under a metacritical lens. The impact of digital technologies on the production of artists' books thus prompts new analyses of this artform, as hybrid iterations emerge that combine the conventional printed book (material) with digital (immaterial) elements. Nevertheless, most of the body of literature on this artform primarily focuses on twentieth-century works that predate digital technology. Likewise, the few studies on digitally based artists' books rarely consider their artistic potential. I address this research gap by considering current artists' books that incorporate digital elements into their structure, examining how this hybrid materiality intersects with the artistic role of these works within the cultural contexts of their production.

Fundamentally, this study aims to address the question of how digitally based artists' books self-reflexively engage with their materiality, and how this impacts the ways in which they produce commentary on their socio-cultural context. To this end, I conduct a comparative analysis of three case studies — *Mixed Signals* (2023), *The Leaked Recipes Cookbook* (2022), and *Disruptions* (2024) — that self-reflexively incorporate digital or digital-adjacent mediums to produce socio-cultural commentary. The methodological approach entails a multimodal analysis of each case study, followed by a content analysis under the intersecting lens of Culture Studies, drawing on theories from ecocultures, surveillance, care ethics, and cultural resistance amidst war. Ultimately, I examine and compare the relationship between form and content within each case study, contemplating the contemporary role of the artist's book and its evolving materiality as a potential instrument of social commentary and activism.