

PREFACE

THE ARTISTS' BOOKS OF SUELLEN GLASHAUSSER

BY MICHAEL JOSEPH, GUEST EDITOR

"The Artists' Books of Suellen Glashausser," which forms this issue of *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries*, will explore one of the most extraordinary of the New Jersey Book Arts Collections, the one-of-a-kind artists' books created by Suellen Glashausser, during the last decades of the twentieth century, between 1980 and 2000. It attempts to shed light upon these highly idiosyncratic, nontraditional bookworks with reference to historical, biographical and sociocultural contexts, and to bring readers, some of whom may be unfamiliar with artists' books, into close proximity with the extraordinary productions of one of the field's most original virtuoso artists.

Suellen Glashausser's bookworks¹ form the largest collection of such works in the Rutgers University Libraries. Dr. Charles M. Glashausser, a Rutgers professor of physics and astronomy, and a contributor to this volume, increased the Rutgers collection dramatically with a large donation in honor of his wife, Suellen Glashausser, in 2002. In addition to this generous donation, Dr. Glashausser gave Rutgers an voluminous archive of Suellen's papers, including notes, journals, correspondence, paper models, books, scrap materials, and slides, which have been indispensable to our work and should be of great value to scholars for years to come.

The contributors to "The Artists' Books of Suellen Glashausser," tend neither to be scholars nor librarians, but fellow artists whose reminiscences of decades' long friendships with Suellen Glashausser provide up close and personal insight into her working methods, her quicksilver personality, and her famously eccentric choices of materials and technique. Some of their artworks have also been

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reproduced here, as well, to help foreground thematic, technical, and methodological affinities that not only help to open out our understanding of the social hub in which Glashausser's works were conceived, but suggest ways in which her ideas and inspiration continue to shape the present. As a highly original and influential visual artist, Suellen Glashausser's twenty-year engagement with aesthetic issues that intersect a discourse on the form, materiality, and cultural authority of the book can provide scholars and historians from many disciplines with a unique glimpse into the life, or rather, the lives of the book at an extraordinarily rich and volatile moment in its long history, which might or might not prove to have been its final days.

"The Artists' Books of Suellen Glashausser" consists at its core of revised transcriptions of talks given at the opening of Suellen Glashausser and Her Circles, in 2007. Circles, which I was privileged to co-curate with Karen Guancione and Pamela Scheinman, two of the artists represented in this journal, showcased many of Glashausser's books beside works by twenty-one other artists who inhabited the creative communities in which Glashausser's energies and sensibility developed and remain alive today—communities that reach westward from New Jersey to Colorado and San Francisco, and eastward across the Atlantic to France and Switzerland. It was Circles' guiding principle of locating Suellen's art within a matrix of affinities that provided the inspiration for this journal issue.

Section One: Artists' Riffs

Artists' Riffs draws on presentations made at the opening of Suellen Glashausser and Her Circles.

Judith Krall-Russo, a Highland Park neighbor and co-participant in a local women artists' group, discusses her artistic debt to Suellen Glashausser and the sometimes-exacting nature of their friendship. Like Krall-Russo, **Debra Rapoport**, a New

York based artist who first met Glashausser in the Bay Area in 1967, attends to her relationship with Glashausser as mediated by their interest in food, in gleaning pieces of “everyday life” and art—“assembling, building, and collecting.” In a brief, affectionate tribute, the late fiber artist, **Lore Lindenfeld**, pays homage to *It Is Our Pleasure to Serve You*, one of Glashausser’s best-known works, which I consider critically in a later essay in this volume. Another of Glashausser’s more canonical works, *Topaz Man*, forms the main topic in an essay by **Debra Weier**, a painter and book artist. **Karen Guancione**, a book artist/installation artist, whimsically reflects on moments of surprised recognition that have occurred for her after Glashausser’s death, which were facilitated in part by a gift of workshop scraps given her by Charles Glashausser. *Artists’ Riffs* concludes with an extended treatment of Glashausser’s artists’ books in “What if . . . ?” by **Pamela Scheinman**, artist, writer, scholar, and instructor at Montclair State University. Drawing on the Rutgers Glashausser archive, Scheinman traces echoes in theme, material, and technique between Glashausser’s artists’ books and her paintings, sculptures, and installations. Having started from the assumption that artists’ books were merely incidental and marginal to Glashausser’s more conspicuous output as sculptor, painter, and fabric artist, Scheinman comes round to the conclusion that they were crucial to her art and remain crucial as the gateway to understanding it. “All explorations must constantly return to her books.”

Section Two: Catalog

Section two returns to Suellen Glashausser’s books in the form of a complete catalog of her collection in The Rutgers University Libraries, organized by Debra Schiff. Readers of the online version of “The Artists’ Books of Suellen Glashausser” will have access to digital photographs of the collection linked from the catalog.

Section Three: Contexts

“The Artists’ Books of Suellen Glashausser” concludes with two longer discursive texts. An edited transcription of an interview with Dr. Charles Glashausser by Pamela Scheinman, which is an outgrowth of Scheinman’s extraordinary video-interviewing project, contains many valuable insights into Glashausser’s preferences as an artist, her methodology, and her awakening interest in artists’ books. Not to be excluded from the fun, I have added my own essay, “Some Sixties Influences on Suellen’s Artists’ Books,” in which I speculate about the broad influence of artist movements of the nineteen sixties—specifically pop art and conceptual art.

The contributors and I take great pleasure in introducing the artists’ books of Suellen Glashausser to a wider community via *The Journal of The Rutgers University Libraries* and we would like to dedicate this issue to our dear friend, Lore Lindenfeld, in admiration and gratitude. We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of another departed colleague, Barbara Valenta, a co-curator of Suellen Glashausser and the Book: Enduring Delight. The intuitive and affectionate insights of these extraordinary, talented artists continue to guide our efforts to understand the artistic vision of one of the most original and under-studied of twentieth-century book artists, Suellen Glashausser.

Notes

1. The question of how to define artists’ books is a vexed one, and, for the purposes of this journal, irrelevant, since we are defining artists’ books here empirically to be those works of art Suellen Glashausser thought of as artists’ books, that is, works of art that assume or evoke some sense of the form or function of a book. I use the terms artists’ book and bookwork interchangeably, while other contributors often use the term, book. It’s probably best to think of these “books” as you would think of landscape paintings as “landscapes.”