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Fig. 1. Heléne van Aswegen  
[www.bookoffriends.com](http://www.bookoffriends.com) (2011).  
Bound used coffee filters.  
Dimensions variable.

**This edition's focus** upon the book-maker's materials and their implications for content delivery is a poignant yet relevant one for South African book-artists. I write this as the South African Rand (ZAR) plummets to all-time lows against major world currencies' making the importation of already extremely expensive materials such as bookcloth, leather, marbled papers as well as fine and handmade papers upon which to print, beyond the reach of most South African book-artists and binders. Such a scenario, in varied iterations however, has been ongoing for the diverse local art and design communities for many decades. Imported art materials are unavailable to secondary school art teachers and thus finding and using alternative, cheaper and up-scalable materials (repurposed, offcut, discarded and 'found') has become the order of the day. At the tertiary level where Departments of Fine Art no longer offer students materials as part of their fees, a similar need for smart material choices becomes a weekly occurrence. And thus, in the small but resilient South African book-arts community, an equal degree of resourcefulness is noted. Limited resources and a paucity of fine and expensive materials bring out the best of alternative book-making practices which I will discuss in depth later. First, however, it seems appropriate to contextualize this alternative practice from within the traditions of best practice which have been present in South Africa for many decades in the work of master bookbinders Arthur Wadman, Johann Maree and Peter Carstens.

For Wadman, Stellenbosch University's master bookbinder and restorer, one of the highlights of his career was rebinding Samuel Daniell's *African Scenery and Animals (1804-1805)*, viewed by many as the single most highly prized Africana book (Seyffert 2009:4). Wadman was also responsible, before his death in 2009, for binding book-artist Keith Dietrich's early books as well as training current bookbinder Heléne van Aswegen, one of a handful of traditionally trained contemporary bookbinders in South Africa.

Johann Maree, trained at the Swiss Centro del Bel Libro and at the Austrian National Library, and worked at the University of Cape Town Libraries as Head of the Department of Paper and Book Conservation for twenty-eight years, before retiring in 2008. Maree influenced the bindings of Cape Town book-artists Pippa Skotnes and Malcolm Payne, and was responsible for the binding of one of South Africa's finest examples of the contemporary book-arts, Patrick Cullinan and Judith Mason's *Selected Poems 1961-1991* in 1992.

Perhaps the most celebrated South African master bookbinder was Peter Carstens who bound some of the country's more important books by artists such as Cecil Skotnes and Stephen Gray's *Man's Gold* (1979); Skotnes and Herman Charles Bosman's *The Rooinek* (1981) – both printed by master printer Egon Guenther, and Nadine Gordimer's *The Ultimate Safari* (2001) which is illustrated

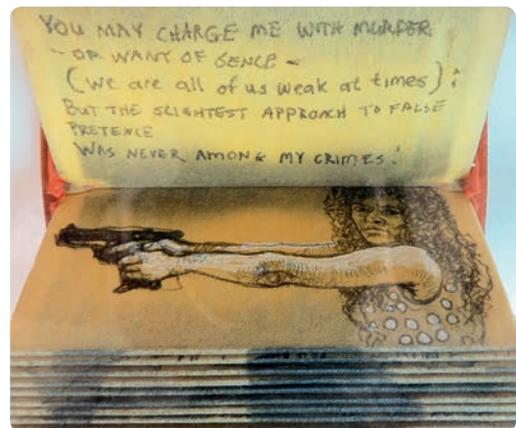
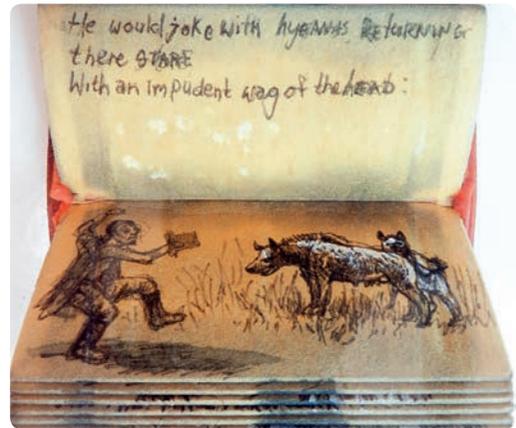
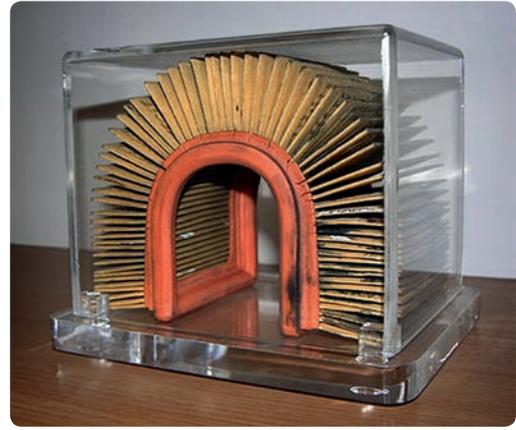
with original hand-printed lithographs by Aletah Masuku, Alsetah Manthosi, and Dorah Ngomane. The latter book, as well as the influences of Wadman and Maree, is currently on exhibition at the National Museum of African Art and the Smithsonian Libraries, Washington DC exhibition 'Artists' Books and Africa', which will continue until September 2016. Contemporary designer and bookbinder Lunetta Bartz was apprenticed to Carstens for six years and continued the bindery after his death.

Out of this classical training and its influences, however, has come a spirit of experimentation, recycling and up-scaling which characterizes the current local book-making and binding scene, where financial imperatives and restrictions look over the shoulders of our current makers. Van Aswegen, Mason and Bartz all constitute important nodes of experimental activity in contemporary book-making. Each demonstrates a capacity for upscaling, recycling, re-invigorating the found object and injecting a spirit of new material possibilities in the service of their craft. I will briefly discuss selected examples by these three book-artists/binders, interspersed with the work of two other artists, Diane Victor and Kai Lossgott, whose selected works provide different takes on material recycling and the implications for content delivery in their bookwork.

Van Aswegen is a master bookbinder whose own work inserts itself into a peculiarly South African book-maker's dilemma: the space beyond traditional fine craftsmanship in which the need to replace conventional materials with locally sourced ones – which are often found, discarded, left-over from other jobs or up-scaled – is paramount, but without jettisoning quality and craftsmanship. An example is [www.bookoffriends.com](http://www.bookoffriends.com) (2011) an open-bound artist's book constructed out of used coffee filters [Fig. 1]. The book's structure realizes an object which lies open, revealing both its nature and its materiality, a materiality which, whilst also activating the olfactory senses of the viewer "... is a direct comment on computer social networks (such as Facebook) that in a sense dematerializes our relations with one another. Drinking coffee with friends is a simple attempt to regain a physical interaction with people" (van Aswegen 2012:71).

In the case of [www.bookoffriends.com](http://www.bookoffriends.com) the artist has forged a multi-sensorial relationship between the maker, object, and viewer which might, especially for coffee drinkers, evoke a set of personal experiences which conventional images and texts would be unable to achieve.

Diane Victor has recycled a GUD air filter from her Volkswagen Fox motor vehicle as an already bound structure for her book *The Hunting of the Snark (An Agony in 8 Fits)* (2010) [Figs. 2a, b, c, d]. She embellished the leaves' fore-edges with inked silhouette images of sharks and each page with ink, Tipp-Ex, felt tip pens, pencil, ballpoint pen illustrations, and texts. The original poem (1874–1876) by Lewis Carroll is considered an example of nonsense poetry, but, more importantly, also Carroll's musings on illness, particularly tuberculosis, and death (Cohen 1995:403). Thus the seemingly



Figs 2a, b, c & d. Diane Victor: *The Hunting of the Snark*, 2010. Recycled GUD VW Fox air filter and mixed media.

nonsensical substrate, the air filter, upon which Victor has embellished her version of events, becomes a most appropriate material with which to parody the breathless foibles of mankind. The fore-edge images are a warning not to enter the book's pages without care and trepidation and the tiny imagery, typical of Victor's dark vision of humanity, might require the reader to 'come up for air' occasionally through both the grime of the air filter's material body and the unrelenting satire of the illustrations.

It is in such multi-sensorial, experiential and experimental spaces that Kai Lossgott probes complex relationships between environment, the production of materials, post-consumer waste, and making. Influenced by an increasing interest in the new materialist philosophies of Thomas Morton and Jane Bennett as well as the French philosopher Bruno Latour's theories on 'homo faber' (man as maker), Lossgott engages in acts of thinking-through-making, believing that it is our responsibility as makers to be accountable and ethical within the Anthropocene: the post-Industrial Revolution period during which humanity has begun to have a significant impact on the environment. *"We have to fundamentally rethink materiality and the way in which we as subjects desire our mobility to be animated through objects. ... Territory, violence and injustice prevail in the life cycle of many raw materials, especially those attractive to capitalist greed"* states Lossgott (2015). Stressing the difference between conservation for the sake of extracting

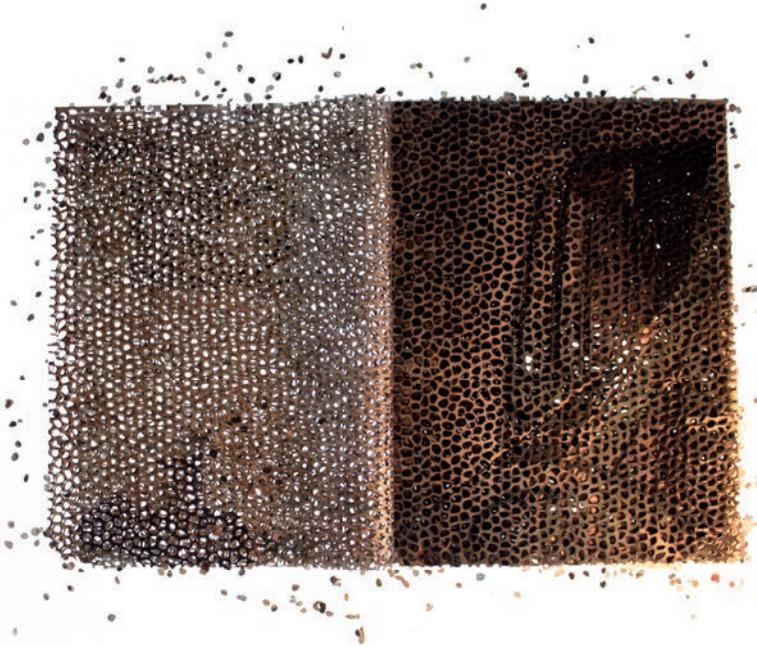
resources for human gain and conservation for reasons of intrinsic worth, he continues: *"Working with ephemeral materials, some, like plastic, designed for eternal life, is an excavation of the temporary, that which is made to fuel the production of the contemporary, but is unwanted and destined to be discarded. In photographically documenting life forms that survive in town dumps, and in archiving the materials found there in the form of book-like objects, I am anticipating the work of the archaeologists of the future."*

Lossgott acknowledges that he may not be binding, or sticking, or glueing, or making books as much as merely archiving. His *"collections of materials mimic books in their presentation ... but as their transformation would be an attempt at some sort of mimesis, the cause of the 'useless' is best served by appreciating them on their own terms, as they are, as we refuse to see them in daily life"* (Lossgott 2015).

Lossgott feels that blank pages are most articulate in bringing the question of materiality to the fore, yet after printing on post-consumer plastic, and binding using toothpaste tubes, he felt that it was all becoming another 'product' with an attractive 'package' which would not address the problems of consumer waste. The book of recycled teabags and unwashed stained papers is more interesting for him as an act of perception than anything he could print on them [Figs 3a & b].



Figs 3a & b. Kai Lossgott, *Waste Books*: a series of experiments in re-animating industrial and post-consumer waste through manual labour (2013 - present). Recycled teabags on paper (left) and various recycled materials (right).



Figs 4a & b. Kai Lossgott, vol. 178 no. 7 (*Time*, August 2011), 2014. Laser-cut consumer waste (left) and Orifice / oracle (*Vogue* December 2010), 2012. Laser-cut magazine (below).



In his work, the symbol of the book is always accompanied by the metaphor of erasure or disappearance. In his *Creatures of Habit* series (2011–14) recycled popular magazines are laser-cut with lace-like spaces which resemble leaf veins and the structures of nature. Of this process of consuming the products of consumer culture, Lossgott (in Tully & Kopping 2012:32) states: “If I could eat plastic and convert it to compost, I would. ... I would like to take the false promise of product consumption to its logical conclusion, to the point of annihilation. ... [T]his body of work seeks to deal with the relentless quality of the mind, and humanity’s collective addiction to destroying the planet.”

Lossgott’s book-objects are open-minded speculations on the problem of making a fine, finished product, ready to once again circulate in a market of desirable objects for consumption and discardment. This would be a denial of what these objects enter into our lives to teach us and confront us with.

Judith Mason, by contrast, has produced some of the finest examples of book-art in South Africa and in which her collaboration with master printmakers and book-binders has helped to establish her work and indeed the country’s small book-arts community on the international stage.<sup>2</sup> Mason, however, also has a long history of using recycled, found, and throwaway materials in her more edgy one-of-a-kind publications. Whilst working with homeless children in Cape Town in 1993, Mason facilitated the fabrication of a series of books including *The Stroller’s Book* and *A Squatter’s Psalter*. These books contained paintings by the children in oil and enamel on sheets of builder’s plastic - often used by the children as protection against the elements - and were bound with pieces of corrugated

iron as covers with a wire spine. Mason was to revisit this aesthetic in *A Troyville Diary* in 2011 [Figs 5a & b]. In the preface to the book, Mason states: “Shocked by the number of gun shots audible from my home in Troyville, I began recording their frequency in July 2001. By the end of September I found myself aggrieved if a fusillade had not cut the night. It seemed a good time to stop making notes.”

Corrugated pieces of card enclose an illustration of a corrugated iron wall with different gun shots piercing the wall. The pages are bound into the covers of corrugated iron with three leather thongs. The two covers are joined with rusted, twisted wire. Recorded on the back of each page is the time and date of the gun shots. A pair of cotton gloves is included, one with yellow trim and the other with black trim and both bearing the title: *Troyville*.

Mason understands that her particular choices of material and the way in which her books are constructed echo the manner in which countless dwellings are constructed by homeless peoples across the edges of most South African urban areas. These materials and their joining contain the lives of their inhabitants and Mason’s books index, through the same materials and methods of binding, the complex narratives of living within or adjacent to communities whose socio-economic outlook is bleak.

Lunetta Bartz founded MAKER in 2009 as a platform to combine her various interests in art, design and furniture. Fundamental to her design principles is that

Figs 5a & b. Judith Mason,  
*A Troyville Diary*, 2011.  
 Rawhide, corrugated iron, rusted  
 wire, oiled paper, packaging tape,  
 fluted cardboard, and cotton gloves.



she is not interested in ‘the specialist’ or specialization but in the maker and in the making of things. She trained as an interior designer, and apprenticed in bookbinding under Carstens until his death. Any discussion with Bartz (2015) concerning her bookbinding projects elicits comments such as “I like doing things one is not supposed to do, like exploiting asymmetry” a principle which reveals itself in the asymmetrical placement of the binder’s leather on either side of the spine. It was Carstens’ craftsmanship which demanded scrupulous attention to detail and the exclusive use of Parisian leather and French marbled endpapers, which made him South Africa’s finest master bookbinder. Bartz’s training under these focussed and specific criteria, however, also encouraged consideration of spaces to test, open up, and chafe against. Nonetheless, Bartz is a scrupulous maker, whose design sensibilities betray a Bauhaus-like minimalism,<sup>3</sup> yet she appreciates the playful and the casual when they add meaning to her designs. Working in the financially constrained field of design in South Africa the French materials are jettisoned and the local are sourced. Bartz allows nothing to be thrown away as every offcut from one job is reused to line the boxes of another.

Bartz was responsible for producing the publications for William Kentridge and Philip Miller’s *The Refusal of Time* (2012) [Figs 6a & b]. This production includes a record, CD, libretto, and an ink drawing on folded paper, of the record upon which the score is recorded. In keeping with Miller’s sheets of music and Kentridge’s use of pre-printed textual substrates, Bartz found pieces of discarded printed material with which to line the box; produced photostatic



and scanned copies of an etching of the record with which to cover the box, and asymmetrically-cut printed material (the libretto) to accompany the other elements inside the box. The production references the seemingly disordered and haphazard clutter of materials found in the artist’s studio. In *The Refusal of Time*, Bartz has managed to upscale the materials constituting its production; finding and recycling, scanning and copying, collaging and repurposing virtually every element of the work’s material being. For Bartz, Kentridge and Miller, this seems an appropriate object to house an element of the larger project, in which visualizing the fracturing and superimposition of time, and the complexity of states of being, is tackled.

To conclude, many contemporary South African book-makers and binders have responded in innovative ways to both the post-modern invective to appropriate and the more pressing limitations of the financial constraints under which



Figs 6a & b. William Kentridge, Phillip Miller and Lunetta Bartz. *The Refusal of Time*, 2012. LP record, CD, ink drawing on printed paper and other mixed printed media in a box with red binder's paper and scanned cover image.

the country finds itself. Whether it is the reusing of coffee filters or teabags with their olfactory remnants, a used air filter, the alteration of existing printed material, appropriating the materials of the dispossessed, or the recycling and reusing of every possible remnant or left-over for a future purpose, the South African artists and bookbinders discussed here demonstrate an acute sensitivity towards the semiotic load embedded in a material. The use of particular materials and their symbolic languages become self-consciously embedded in the content of the book-objects discussed, their meanings linked as if umbilically to the artists' choices, material processes, and experiences of being a South African at this particular moment. For these book-artists at least, no making of meaning seems possible without dynamic consideration of a work's constituent materials.

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#### NOTES

1. On Wednesday 9 December 2015, the South African president fired his Minister of Finance Nhlanhla Nene replacing him with a political back-bencher. This move was met with consternation both in South Africa and internationally. Billions were wiped from the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) and the South African Rand (ZAR) plummeted to new lows against major international currencies. Four days later, the President changed his mind and recalled a previous finance minister Pravin Gordhan to the post. It is believed, in the press and on social media, that it might take up to ten years for the already under-pressure South African Emerging Economy to fully recover from these events.
2. Skoelapperheuwel, Skoelappervrou (Butterfly Hill, Butterfly Woman) with poems by Wilma Stockenström and lithographic and hand-coloured illuminations by Judith Mason, Pretoria: Ombondi Editions, was originally printed in 1988 by Bruce Attwood at the Broederstroom Press but only launched in 2010. It is currently on exhibition at the Smithsonian Library and the National Museum for African Art's 'Artists' Book in Africa Exhibition' in Washington DC, into 2016.
3. An example of this minimalism can be found in the design principles at play in MAKER's website which can be viewed at [makerstudio.co.za/about/](http://makerstudio.co.za/about/)

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography by David Paton except: Fig.1 – Heléne van Aswegen, Figs 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b – Kai Lossgott. All photos used with permission of the artists.