

# The book club

The V&A exhibition 'Blood on Paper: the Art of the Book' brings together modern books as artworks by 38 artists, from Kiefer to Caro and Baselitz to Bourgeois. **Jessica Lack** asked curators Elena Foster and Rowan Watson and artist Anish Kapoor about the growing fascination of the *livre d'artiste*



In an age of digital downloads, podcasts and online rolling news, our experience of many media is constantly changing. Where once a music fan might have shelves heaving with vinyl, now an MP3 player or virtual repository is all that is needed. Surprisingly, books have proved particularly resistant to this electronic onslaught. Encyclopedias and dictionaries may have made the online transition, but most books remain firmly on the printed page. Indeed, experts spend a great deal of time preserving manuscripts long after their intellectual content is outdated, or safely reproduced thousands of times, in order to maintain the intuitive connection with the past and the handiwork of the creator.

So what is it about the physicality of a book that has come to symbolise such a personal, intimate relationship with culture? Perhaps it is the same intangible quality that has captured the imagination of artists in the creation of artists' books for more than a century. A new exhibition at the V&A of artists' books, 'Blood on Paper', explores why such objects should matter, even if they are not necessarily unique. Curated by the V&A's Rowan Watson and Elena Ochoa Foster, director of Ivory

Press, a company that publishes artists' books, it features 38 examples made over the past 70 years.

"The show starts at the Second World War," says Watson. "There have been various surveys and exhibitions over the years dedicated to artists' books, but this one is predominantly about contemporary and recent works." The tradition of the artist's book was already firmly established. Writer/artist collaborations had begun in Victorian times, with radical interpretations leading the way, such as Manet's devilish designs for Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* in 1875. Since then artist/writer duos have been a regular fixture: Pablo Picasso hooked up with Guillaume Apollinaire, André Gide with Maurice Denis and Roy Lichtenstein with Allen Ginsberg. Revolution followed radicalism in the form of complete rethinks of the book by the Dadaists, Surrealists and Bauhaus Modernists. Marcel Duchamp, for example, used the artist's book to rail against the cult of the original in art. He made boxes, known as *Boîtes-en-valise*, which contained miniature reproductions of his most famous works. 'Blood on Paper' includes examples by many of these artists, but those by

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