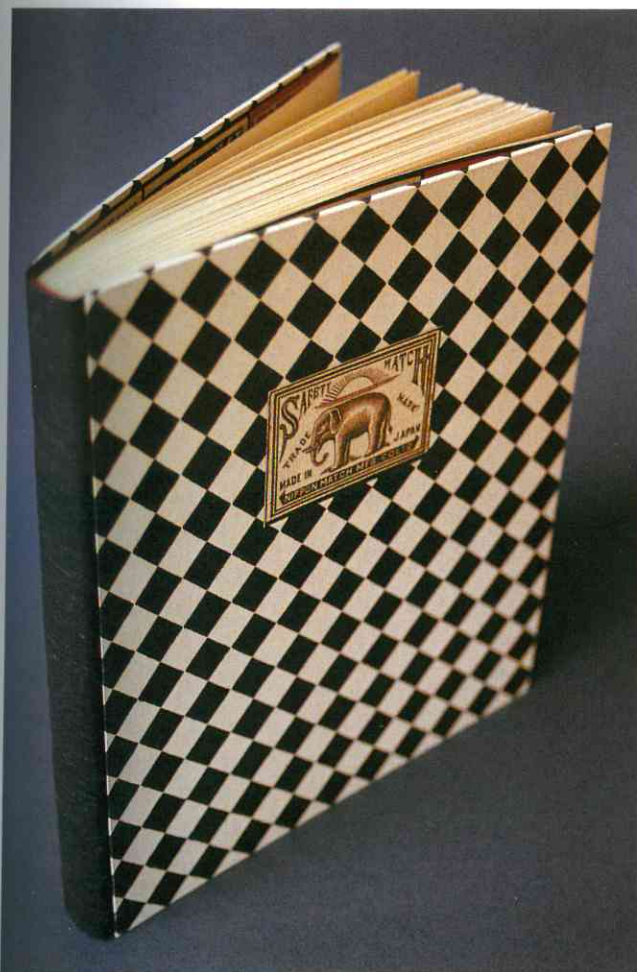


Eileen Wallace



In her refined version of the simplified binding, Eileen Wallace presents a versatile structure that works well with a variety of cover materials—from paper to metal. The technique allows the cover boards to be prepared separately from the spine, giving the artist more freedom to explore decorative cover applications such as tooling and the use of onlays.

Inside of back cover



Matched, 2003. 7 x 8 x $\frac{5}{8}$ inches (17.5 x 20 x 1.6 cm).
Leather, paper, board,
printed paper of vintage
matchbox labels from
artist's collection; simpli-
fied binding. Photo by the artist.



The pages of the text block

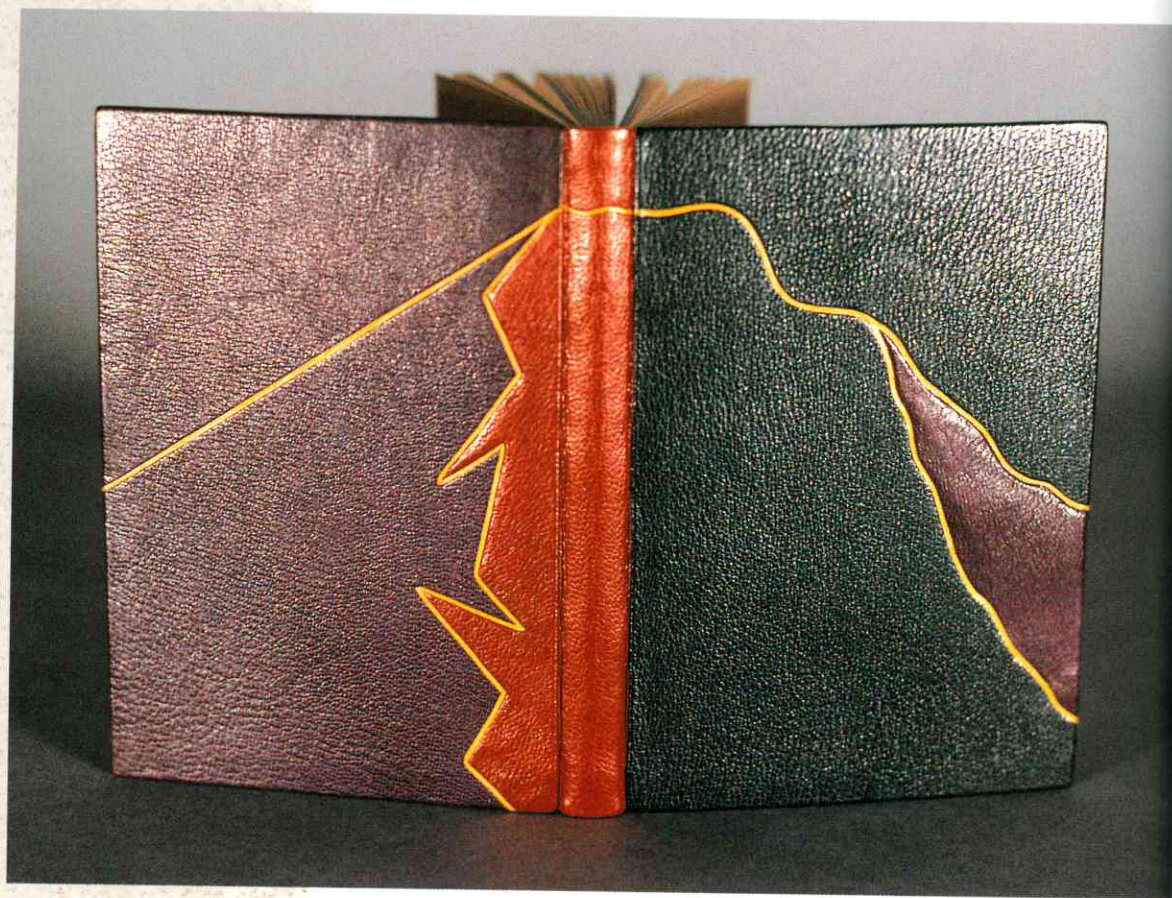


Inside of back cover

The Elegance of Simplicity

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, by Robert Louis Stevenson, 1994. Wood engravings by Barry Moser. 4½ x 6½ inches (11.3 x 16.3 cm). University of Nebraska Press, Pennyroyal Press edition. Leather, board, gilded graphite edges, paper; full-leather simplified binding with onlays.

Photo by Robert Chiarito.



By a string of seemingly unrelated events, I've ended up making books. When I look back I can see how it happened. I like order and have for as long as I can remember. Childhood photographs show my dolls sleeping in a perfect line and knickknacks arranged precisely on my shelves. But I also know I have a high tolerance for disorder.

I tend to clean my workspace before beginning a job, but by the end of the day I am working on about one-quarter of my table as the rest is completely cluttered. A friend once told me that he liked coming to my house because you could never be sure if it would be perfectly neat or look as if a tornado came through. It seems to be one extreme or the other.

In college, my mother gave me a copy of *The Robber Bridegroom* by Eudora Welty, which led me to pay much more attention to the details of books. This particular book was the offset version of The Pennyroyal Press edition designed and illustrated by Barry Moser.

I am not sure what I noticed first, but I know it was the first time I remember looking at a book and thinking "This is a beautiful book."

I've always been interested in art, but I don't draw or paint. It wasn't until graduate school that I realized that this lack of skill didn't mean I couldn't have a creative life. My journey to actually making books began with research on where to go for a Masters in Library Service. I intended to make a career of doing research and, fortunately, I landed at the University of Alabama School of Library and Information Studies that also houses the M.F.A. in the Book Arts Program. I remember thinking, "That sounds like what I want to do, but I can't draw, I'm not an artist, I can't get in."

I thought I'd go for my library degree and perhaps take a few classes to see what the book program was all about. I wasn't on campus a month before I applied to the program. I had long appreciated fine paper, printing, and bookbinding, but honestly, it never

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occurred to me that I could actually make a book. I'd never been exposed to fine press books and I just didn't know it was an option. I found I fit right in to the traditional craft-based program. I have patience for tedious detail, but I can also envision a completed project as a whole.

In the development of my book career, I've come back to the things that first attracted me to books. I'm interested in how we communicate, how we mark time and record events. I'm interested in the graphic representation of these through alphabetic, symbolic, and logographic writing systems. Early illuminated manuscripts with Islamic patterns and Celtic interlocking designs were an initial fascination, but I was quickly enamored with simpler and bolder forms of writing. The Ogham writing system of the ancient Celts is a series of lines and dashes similar to hatch marks and is one of my favorite methods of record keeping. Cuneiform, the Etruscan alphabet, and early Ethiopian script are all writing systems that I find visually intriguing.

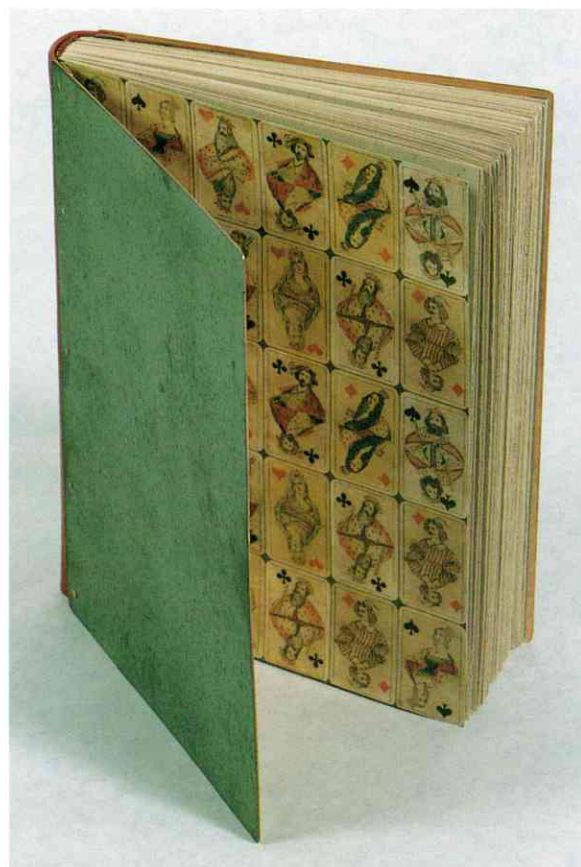
It's not the actual language nor the words that are attractive to me, but rather the construction and organization of the written symbols that create pattern and give rhythm to the page—the act of putting random marks on a page that somehow come together in recognizable forms. While I may have first noticed it with letters and words, the idea of pattern and rhythm is present in all of my work. As I take a critical look at my own work and also evaluate the things that appeal to me, I find myself visually interested in an imposed order on chaos, and it's this combination of elements that I find most exciting. I see it in the way a diamond-patterned fence creates a grid over a wall of peeling paint or the way rows of crops flash by in a flurry of lines as you drive by a field.

But even beyond something recognizable, I've always been interested in marks that create pattern or texture and that's what interests me the most—especially when it has a sense of history or unintentional beauty. I see it in rust on a cotton combine or peeling paint layers on a building. And I see it in color—the color of freshly plowed Mississippi Delta dirt and the spring green of leaves on a Ginkgo tree. I finally realized that this is enough for me. I don't have to be able to render a perfect portrait in order to be an artist or

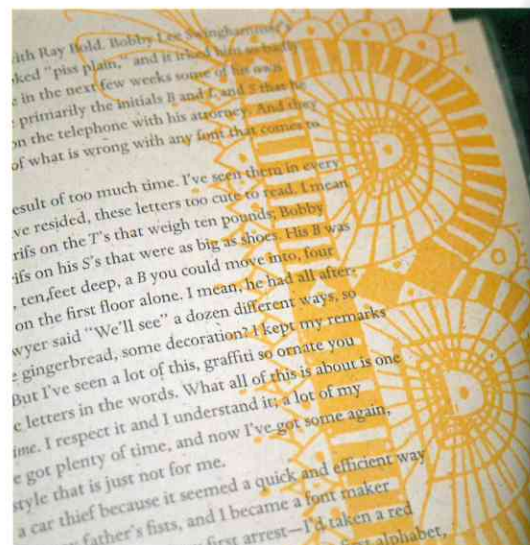
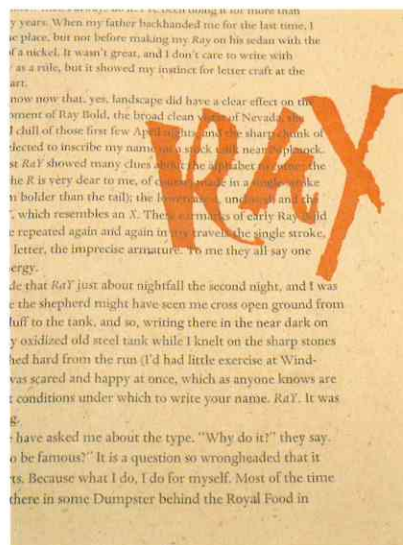
craftsman. More importantly, I've learned that I don't want to be able to do this.

By necessity, bookbinding and printing are very precise crafts. To me, a book is a sequence of detailed steps that build upon each other to create the “big picture.” It's my goal to combine these details to make books that are cohesive in design and decoration. This doesn't mean that the content or decoration need be rigid but the actual processes demand precision in order to be done well. At one point I thought I'd made a big mistake since there are some steps in bookbinding that I don't find terribly exciting—folding signatures and tearing paper for editions, for instance. But I make it through these steps because it's the process as a whole that I find enjoyable. For me, it's the process of making a book work physically.

There's a constant struggle in me between the idea of content and structure. When I was first learning, I spent a lot of time on structure. I didn't experiment with content or decoration until I knew that my structure was right in that the book opened and closed properly, that my joint spaces were correct, etc. I never want decoration or embellishment to



Untitled, 1997. 5½ x 7 inches (13.8 x 17.5 cm). Recycled copper roofing, rivets, leather, paper; simplified binding (modified). Photo by Steve Yusko.



A Note on the Type, by Ron Carlson, 1996. Calligraphy by Glenn Epstein 7¼ x 9½ x ¾ inches (18 x 23.8 x .95 cm). Mile Wide Press, printed by Eileen Wallace. Recycled metal roofing, leather, paper, wax; letterpress printing from lead type and magnesium engravings; simplified binding with lettering scratched into the cover. Photo by Robert Chiarito.

compensate for any shortcomings in structure. When I teach bookbinding, I try to pass along this strategy to students. I also tell them that they can choose not to follow my guidelines as long as they're making an informed decision. While I think you should experiment with materials, you should do so in a way that manages to create a cohesive structure where the materials make sense with the content or intent of the structure.

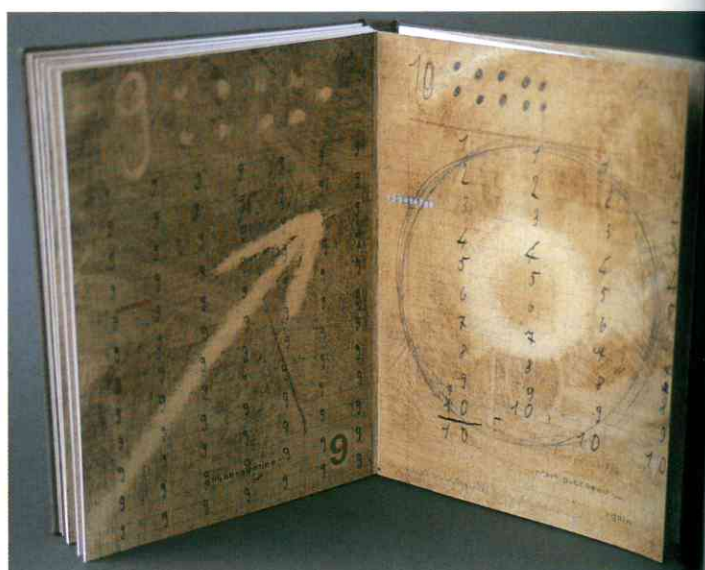
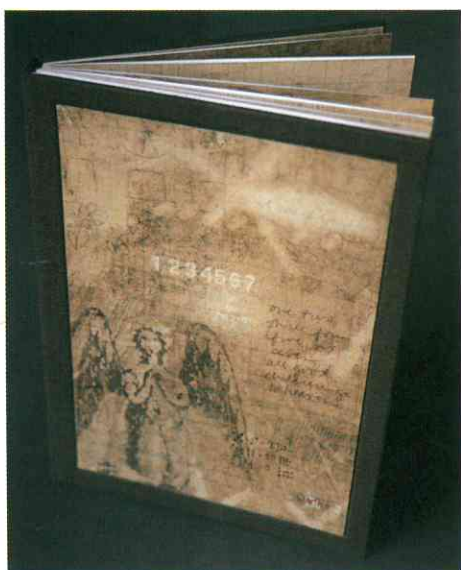
I like the challenge of making a book open well, but I also like to push the limits of flexibility and usability. In general, I like sewing structures that are mechanical, relying on paper, thread, and sometimes supports to do the work. I don't mind seeing how it's held together. At the same time, there's a side of me

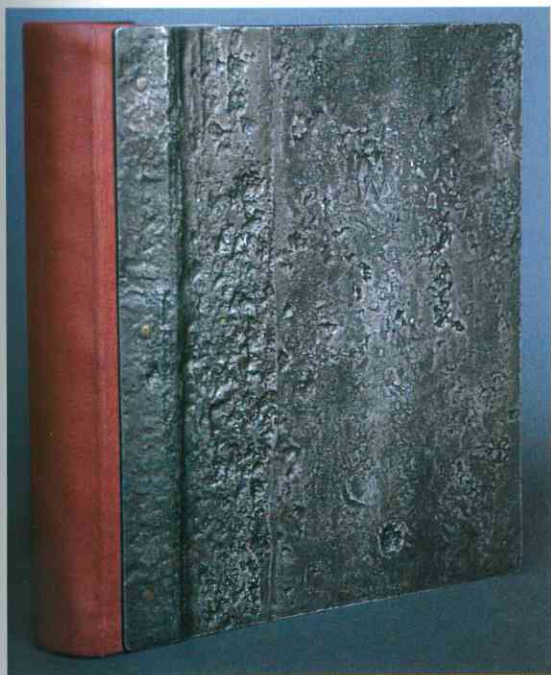
that craves elegance and simplicity and a little bit of mystery. This is why the simplified-style binding is a perfect blend of my particular binding interests.

I first experienced the Simplified structure in graduate school after my professor learned of the technique from the innovator of the binding, Sün Evrard. In reality, there's not anything simple about the Simplified except that it's less involved than most French fine-binding techniques. Over the years, I have returned to this structure many times and I have refined it even further to fit my particular needs.

When I was planning the binding for the book *A Note on the Type*, I had the good luck of stumbling upon many sheets of old tin roofing material that had been painted red and were now rusty and showing signs of

Count Me If You Can, 2002. 5½ x 6½ x ½ inches (13.8 x 16.3 x 1.3 cm). Cloth, board; monoprnt; handwriting; found images on paper; accordion binding. Photo by the artist.





wear. It was a perfect cover material for this quirky story about a car thief who has a history of scratching his name, Ray, in most any metal surface he can find.

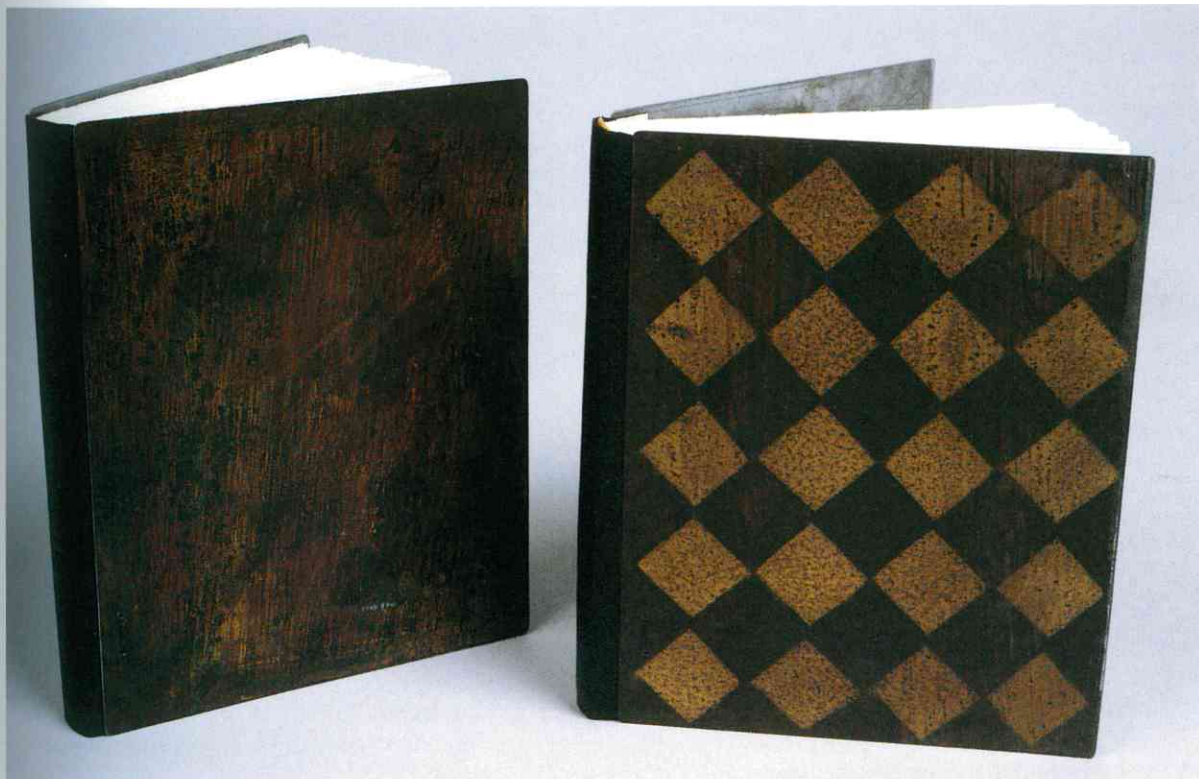
I set about trying to figure out how to use this metal on the book so it made sense and wasn't just some piece of metal stuck on a cover. After several models, I realized that a version of the simplified

binding was the answer. From this point I better understood the potential of the structure. The flexibility this structure allows is its most appealing feature. It can be full leather; it can be a combination of leather and paper, cloth and paper, leather and metal, and almost any permutation of these materials and others not listed. The beauty of it compared to a full-leather tight back, for instance, is that the cover boards are prepared separately from the spine and attached later. This means you can tool designs or apply onlays to your boards without having the covers already attached to the book.

The Simplified structure is best for slim volumes. Though the outer appearance is clean and elegant, there are many steps that go into making it appear so simple. Beveled boards, perfectly pared leather, and sanded seams are some of the steps that enhance the beauty and appeal of this structure. You can make this book as refined as the full-leather or less fancy with paper and cloth.

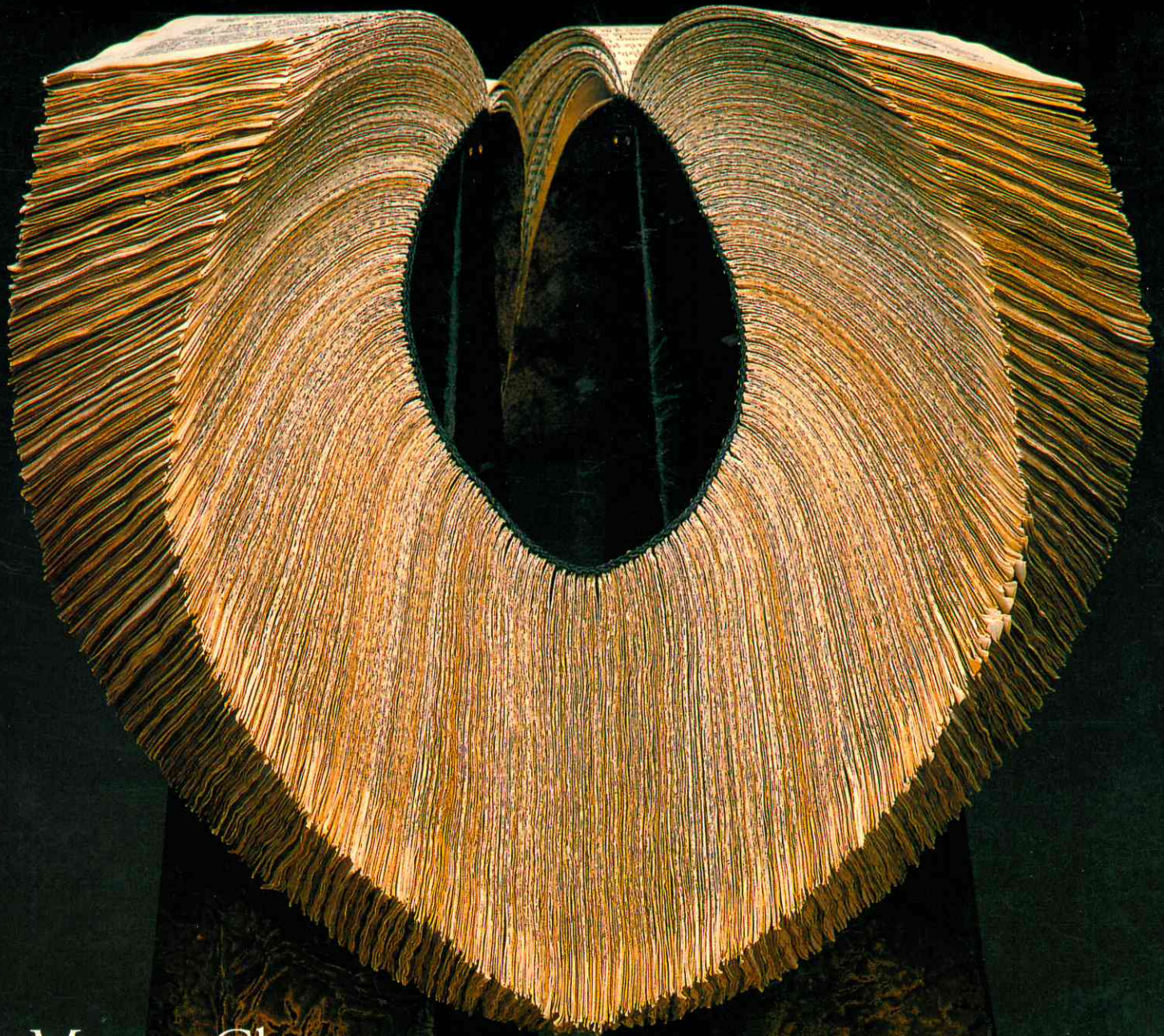
For me, the greatest appeal is the option to attach a variety of cover materials to the spine piece. The simplified binding allows me to use the techniques and materials I prefer for making the books I enjoy.

Untitled, 1998.
Collaboration with
Hoss Haley. 6½ x 7 x 1
inches (16.3 x 17.5 x
2.5 cm). Steel, leather,
paper; modified simpli-
fied/ split board. Photo
by the artist.



Untitled blank journal,
1996-1997. 5¼ x 6¼
(12.8 x 15.6 cm). Recy-
cled metal roofing,
acrylics, spray paint,
wax, leather, paper;
Simplified binding
(modified).
Photo by Robert Chiarito.

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