

With Daring and Precision—Making “The Ultimate Flexible Book”

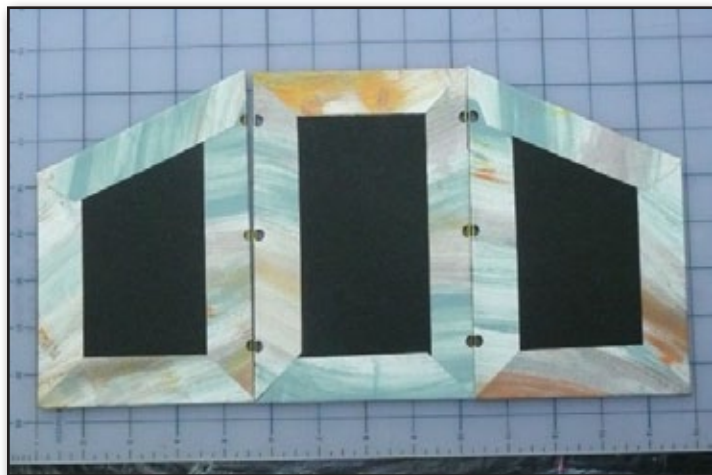
What is it about *The Ultimate Flexible Book* that enticed 14 Colleagues members to drop their exotic plans and lists of chores to spend a weekend learning this book-binding technique from Jean Formo? I suspect the versatile charms of the book, along with Jean’s lauded reputation as an instructor, provide the answer. In any case, we learned how to use new materials and methods with daring and precision. We produced concertina-style books whose typical accordion temperament became three-dimensional sculptures and a traditional codex-style book that lies completely flat. Both book structures can have content added before or after binding.

Moments of daring

Moments of daring occurred early when we made paste papers by sponging methylcellulose that was colored with liquid acrylic paints onto Arches Text Wove paper (mould-made in France of 100% cotton, pH neutral. Sheets measure 25” by 40” and are available at www.wetpaintart.com/search.asp). As the patterned paste dried, we cut four pieces of mat board (or black core board) into rectangles. These would become the covers and pages of our first concertina-style book.

Unfamiliar tools and methods

By watching Jean’s demonstrations and following her very detailed and fully illustrated handouts, we dove into the unfamiliar requirements of pounding a hollow steel punch with a rubber mallet to create half holes in the binding edges of the mat board. Our goal was to have the half holes precisely opposite each other from one page to the next.



Meridith Schifsky’s book illustrates three admirable achievements: attractive paste papers, tidy coverage of the mat board with the paste papers, and punched holes precisely opposite each other. (Photo by Lynn Ohlhorst).

We then cut rectangular—or smaller geometric-shaped—tabs from the paste papers. The tabs decorate and reinforce the punched, binding edges of each page. More importantly, the tabs hold the brass welding rod against the edge of each mat board page. Braided, black, silk suture thread

passed through our punched half holes and around the welding rods to bind one page to the next.

We also punched holes in the paste papers to match the holes in the mat board, allowing for the slim presence of the brass welding rods that create the binding so unique to this method of book binding. The welding rods were cut with needle-nose pliers or wire cutters, with the ends smoothed by a quick rubbing on medium-grit sandpaper.

A surprising supplier

We fastened our tabs in place with archival glue sticks. As the tabs dried, Jean demonstrated sewing the hinge. She uses braided black silk suture thread procured at the website: www.colbubbie.com/medical.aspx. We waxed the thread with beeswax that was supplied by Jean, as were most of the bounty of supplies used throughout the weekend. A trained and decorated military quartermaster would take second place to Jean’s skill in gathering and distributing essential supplies.

When we bound two pages together, we placed the pages side-to-side with the brass rods facing each other. By leaving a three-inch piece of thread for tying off, we worked a figure-eight pattern through two facing punched holes, with three stitches covering one rod and two stitches covering the other. Stitching at each sewing station was finished by passing the needle over all the stitches and tying a square knot with the three-inch piece of extra thread.

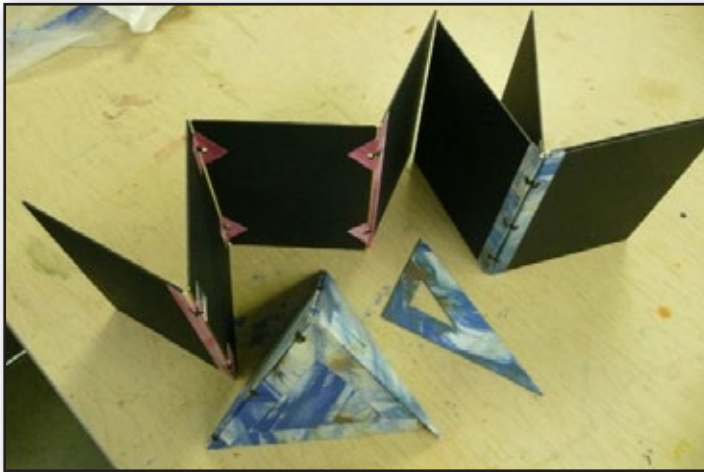


Above, Ruth McCarthy is ready to use the braided black silk suture thread to bind pages of her *Ultimate Flexible Book*. (Photo by Sue Filbin).

Finishing the pages

Portions of our paste papers were fastened to the body of the book's pages with an adhesive that consisted of 2/3 PVA (polyvinylacetate) and 1/3 methylcellulose. Jean advised that we could cover any exposed bits of mat board with colored pencil, a technique she described as "artistic deceit," much to the delight and appreciation of all of us. Our pages were now ready for calligraphy, collage, photos, and other embellishments.

After constructing the rectangular version of *The Ultimate Flexible Book*, we moved on to developing the triangular concertina version. Some daring classmates cut from the pages geometric shapes which required extra finesse when covering the page with paste papers.



Above, Christine Osman's rectangular and triangular concertina-style books. (Photo by Lynn Ohlhorst).

On Sunday, we cut mat board into four rectangular pages for creating a codex-style (traditional) book. After punching half holes in the mat board and paste-paper tabs, and adhering the tabs to the pages, Jean showed us another method for binding these pages known as the strut and chain with kettle stitch. A few days after the workshop, she emailed everyone an easier alternative version of the codex based on a column of square knots.

Tying off—stitches and the class

Years ago, Jean learned to make these wire-hinge-bound books in a three-hour workshop taught by book artist Daniel Kelm. As Jean's stunning examples illustrated, she has used the firm, mat board pages and flexible folding possibilities to make dazzling books. **Classmates will show their own dazzling books at the January Colleagues meeting.**

-Sue Filbin



Jean Formo shows an example of *The Ultimate Flexible Book*—a four-sectioned book with eight pages that Jean made as her faculty submission to an annual calligraphy conference. The book, titled *Embodiment of Dreams*, honors William Morris through calligraphed quotes and reproduced images. The pages are binder's board; the media used include walnut ink, stick ink, and colored pencils. (Photo by Sue Filbin).