One thing I wrote about definitions which is not generally available in this country is the introduction to the catalog of the Book Arts in the USA exhibit. Although widely available in Africa and South America, in English, French, Spanish and Portugese, by law the catalog can't be distributed in the USA. It is intended as an introductory text for the uninitiated, so it might be too basic for your list, but I thought some of it might be pertinent to your discussion.

A single copy of a book is a curious thing. Even when part of a large edition, it is rarely considered disposal. People have books on their shelves that they haven't looked at in years, yet they don't throw them out or even give them away. A passing glance at the shelf gives a reassuring feeling, a reminder of the knowledge one has absorbed. They are old friends, these volumes, and just seeing them reminds us not only of their stories or facts, but of the time we spent with them.

The oldest books we have in the shape we are familiar with – folded pages sewn through the fold – are Coptic manuscripts from Ethiopia and Egypt. They date from about the years 100 - 400. This change in form from the scrolls previously used required a change in the technology of parchment production. The folded page was written on both sides, where the scroll used only one side of the skin. The relationship between the structure of the book and the development of its materials continues to evolve.

In this exhibit you will see how 51 contemporary Americans are changing the form and materials of the book to suit their personal vision. We call this work "Book Arts." In "Book Arts," the container works with the content. The materials are tactile and often relate to the metaphor of the text. In some cases there is no written text. The book is then a purely visual, totemic or iconographic work, in which the image, structure and materials are the content. The physical presence of a book, its feeling and smell, its weight, the process of moving through its pages or unfolding it speak to our deepest inner sensibilities. The very form speaks of knowledge preserved and communicated. It represents our ability to build on complex ideas which survive millenia beyond the cultures which created them.

Reading a visual book is not altogether different from reading one with text. We bring to it our literacy – not one of language and words, but of images we have seen and digested. These can
be specific to a subculture or of almost universal familiarity. We often think of publishing as making many copies of a book. Some of the books in this exhibit are part of an edition, though the edition may be only five copies or 500, but there are also many unique bookworks. The exhibition is the act of publication. As this exhibit circulates, thousands of people will be exposed to these books, and thousands more will see this catalog.

Unfortunately you can't have the pleasure of holding these books and turning their pages, and you do miss out on an important part of the work because of that. But many of them read well through their plastic cases and give you their message instantly. Here you can "read" 51 books in less than an hour!

BOOK ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY
This is the era of satellite communication, bubble memory, and laser videodiscs, but we are not engaged in a countertechnological enterprise. What draws so many people to use "obsolete" tools and processes to communicate? What makes these individuals build on a tradition of thousands of years of handcrafted books rather than explore mass communications through modern technology?

To start with: much of their work is on the frontier of new technology. Certainly it is not electronic. But modern adhesives, inks and papers developed from research in conservation laboratories during the last 20 years have radically altered the chemical composition of the materials available to today's artists. The works you see in this exhibit are chemically different from their predecessors. Scientists observed that the paper in 15th Century books looked fresh and new, while paper from the 1880's was brittle and crumbling. When the reasons for the rapid decay of 19th and 20th Century books were discovered, such as the acidic nature of wood-pulp paper, we were able to develop deacidified paper and paperboard impregnated with chemical buffers which neutralize the effects of air pollution. Many of the artists represented here use these modern materials. The work of others requires papers traditionally made of rags or cotton fibers, and some papers are hand made as both the content and structure of the book.

ARTISTS' BOOKS
Many artists use commercial printing and photocopy technology to produce editions of their texts and images inexpensively, to make them available to a larger public. These Artists' Books are primarily works of visual literature, in which the materials and form of the book are not the subject, but are primarily the vehicle or medium for images and ideas. Sharon Gilbert's Poison America, printed on a photocopy machine, shows how a readily available process can be used to communicate very directly. Leonard Seastone, on the other hand, uses flatbed lithography technology in Good Movies, and Ann Fessler's Water Safety is offset printed. These three artists also use "found" or existing texts or images as a basis for their work. Betsy Davids composed Dreaming Aloud on a computer and incorporated scanned video images.
The changing form of the book and its use as a medium of unique visual expression is a phenomenon which has developed in America during the last twenty years. We take the means of production in our hands; it gives us the power and freedom to communicate our ideas. We are not dependent on approval by a publisher. It doesn't require a lot of capital. The scale is human. Our medium doesn't need batteries. It produces no radiation and is portable.

FINE PRINTING
This is the most established field in the book arts. Its traditions go back to Gutenberg, and its goal is the beautiful printed page. The choice of typeface and the spacing of each letter is important in this work, as are the design of the page, and the size of the margins. Much of this work is printed letterpress and is concerned with the quality of the impression of the type in the paper. The choice of text is of great importance. Published in small editions, the text may be the first printing of a book of poems, a classic novel, or an experimental form combining typographic eccentricity with text and illustrations. Harry Duncan's Cummington Press, and Andrew Hoyem's Arion Press, are among these independent publishers. Many colleges and universities now teach these arts and we find Kim Merker operating the Windhover Press at the University of Iowa, Bob Tauber with the Logan Elm Press at Ohio State University, and Walter Hamady, who runs his own Perishable Press and also teaches at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

What these people have in common is the importance of the feel of the book. The reader is always aware of the physical presence and aesthetic of the page. This aspect brings the work of literature into the world of visual art. Often the cooperation of many people makes the book possible. There may be a publisher, editor, writer, illustrator, papermaker, printmaker, typesetter, printer, paper marbler and bookbinder. Some individuals go so far as to do every one of these operations themselves. The control of every aspect of production creates a unique personal vision.

BOOKBINDING
Until about 15 years ago bookbinding in America was based entirely on various European models. The traditions of the craft were preserved and disseminated by members of the Guild of Book Workers, which has been an active society for over 75 years. Recently, however, a new interest in the development of materials and structures has grown, from several distinct perspectives. Hedi Kyle develops structures based on her research in book conservation, and is a leader in folding paper structures and non-adhesive binding. Gary Frost and William Drendel are among those who develop structures based on historical models, such as ancient Ethiopian and Egyptian Coptic bindings or those of the Medieval Celts. In Fusion, Timothy Ely makes the entire book, using paints, inks, gold leaf and other substances both on the pages and the covers. Jan Sobota makes the book into a sculpture, as we see in Ruce.
Bookbinding has transcended its origins as a craft involved exclusively in the preservation of text and the decoration of covers. The sculptural and architectural qualities can be the content of the book. For Susan Share this is not enough. She creates performances using the structural aspects of compound hinging book forms.

SCULPTURAL BOOKWORKS
Are these in fact books? Stella Waitzkin uses cast acrylic resin to make solid book-like objects, like Mozambique. Karen Wirth, who is a bookbinder, also makes solid books, including the bronze Geomyth.

These sculptures use the book as a totemic or iconographic artifact. We include these in Book Arts because, although they may not have pages or work like books we usually see, they are about the very essence of what a book means to us, and communicate their message visually. Waitzkin has said, I love books, but words often get in the way of communication.

There are books which don't fit any of these categories, and that is part of the excitement of this developing field. Raymond Holbert's Daily Reminder is a diary filled with each day's thoughts and images. Edna Lazaron's Terrorism deals with a contemporary issue in a form which goes back thousands of years – the scroll in a ceramic jar.

Please note that the catalog entries cover a wide variety of objects and formats. There may be several artists who worked on different aspects of a book, particularly in the area of fine printing. There I have chosen as the artist the proprietor or director of the press which produced the work, and the press name then appears in parentheses after the name of the individual. It is this person's statement which is reproduced. The other artists who contributed to the project are identified in the listing.

It was hard selecting only 51 artists to represent "Book Arts in the USA," as there are hundreds more doing innovative work. The excellent exhibit "Artist's Bookworks in Print," curated by Anne-Catherine Fallen and Kevin Osborn, circulated in Africa five years ago, showing an entirely different group of artists. In the present collection of work I have tried to present a broad view of the varieties of work that are currently being pursued, and to include representation of the geographic distribution of this large country.