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William Anthony Fine Binder

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Review

William Anthony Fine Binder, Lawrence Yerkes ed., Iowa City: University Libraries, Univ. of Iowa, 2005.

Reviewed by Peter D. Verheyen

William “Bill” Anthony (1926–1989) was arguably one of the most influential bookbinders and conservators in the US. His impact cannot be measured by his work alone but also by his legacy as demonstrated by all those he trained, many of whom are now leaders in the field in their own right. Lawrence Yerkes’ forward and Helen Ryan’s introduction to the catalog describe not only Anthony’s life and work, but also the emotional bond they had with him and his spirit that touched so many.

Anthony began his life as a binder at the age of seventeen when he served a seven-year apprenticeship with his father in Dublin, Ireland. He later worked as a journeyman binder in London, UK, studying at the Camberwell College of Art and exhibiting with the Guild of Contemporary Bookbinders, (the precursor organization of Designer Bookbinders). He emigrated to the United States in 1964, working first at the Cuneo Press in Chicago, then partnering with Hungarian-born binder Elizabeth Kner, and finally taking over the firm upon her retirement under the name Anthony and Associates. Anthony’s last job was as conservator for the University of Iowa collections, where he continued to successfully train apprentices. The spectrum of his bookbinding work was broad, encompassing edition binding, fine binding, and conservation.

To honor Anthony, the University of Iowa Libraries held a retrospective exhibition at the University of Iowa Museum of Art, April 15–July 31, 2005, in which not only the breadth and beauty of his creative work were shown but also examples of his conservation treatments. The catalog of this exhibition depicts 41 of Anthony’s “fine bindings” which demonstrate his great technical skill and keen aesthetic sensibilities. While most of these works are executed in full leather with onlays, blind, and/or gold tooling, there are also several examples of his work in vellum. Though his background and training were English, it is clear from looking at Anthony’s work that he studied, admired, and was influenced by the work of binders throughout Europe, blending their ideas with his to develop his own timeless style. Also depicted in the exhibit catalog are examples of some of his edition bindings and conservation treatments. Whatever

style, his work was always technically and proportionately precise and polished.

The continuing relevance of skills and design exemplified by Anthony in this catalog of his work is true even as aspects of the craft are slowly fading away – those with the skills to teach at this level are retiring and no longer teaching. The time required to master the work is hard to fit into today’s world of non-linear cafeteria-style learning and weekend workshops. This learning style has replaced the rigid apprenticeship models experienced by Anthony and his students, now master craftsmen and artists in their own rights. While the book arts have changed dramatically over the past decades, away from traditional craft-based bookbinding to “artist’s books” and more alternative structures, the skills and sense of design exemplified by Anthony’s work remain as relevant as ever.

The exhibition catalog was designed by Julie Leonard and Sara T. Sauers with photography by Jill Tobin. It is a fitting tribute to Anthony and makes an exceptional addition to the reference collections of binders and bibliophiles. The catalog can be ordered online from the University of Iowa Bookstore at www.iowabook.com/wianfibi.html for \$39.95 + SH.

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