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## Where Book Art and Technology Mingle

Peter D. Verheyen  
*Syracuse University*

Richard Minsky

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BASBANES & GODINE: BOSTON BOOKMEN

# FineBooks & COLLECTIONS

## Mark Twain

*His Famous  
Last Words*

**MINING  
THE PAST:**  
Preserving  
An Immense  
Archive

Meet the  
2010 National  
**Collegiate  
Book-Collecting  
Champions**

**Gift  
Ideas**  
*for the Holidays*

# Autumn 2010

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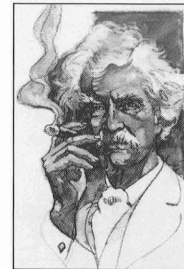
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Round two of the Arcana sale.

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Artist Bill Vann's portrait of Mark Twain, executed in gouache on gessoed panel. [billvannart.com](http://billvannart.com)

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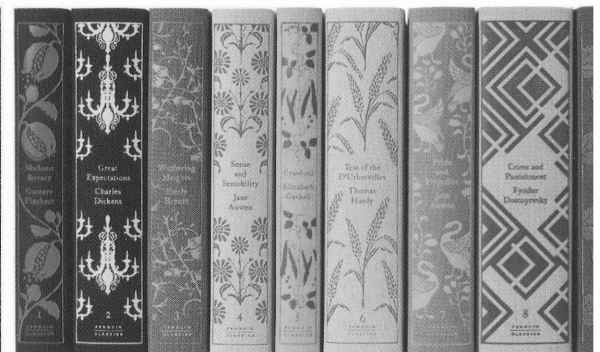
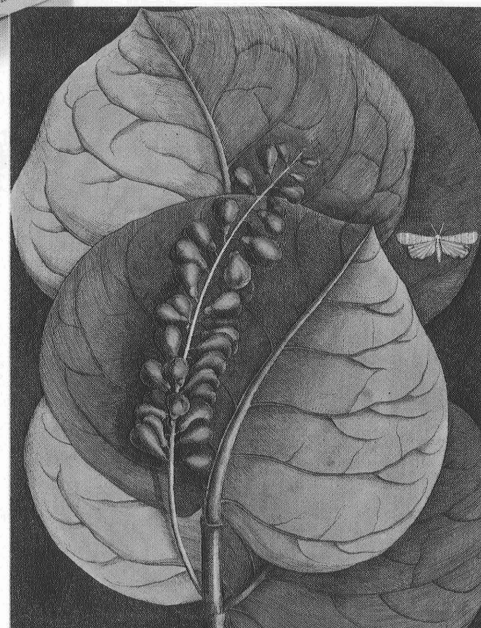
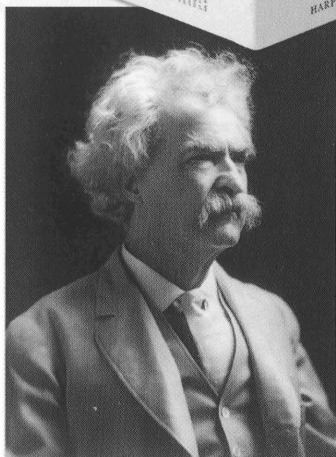
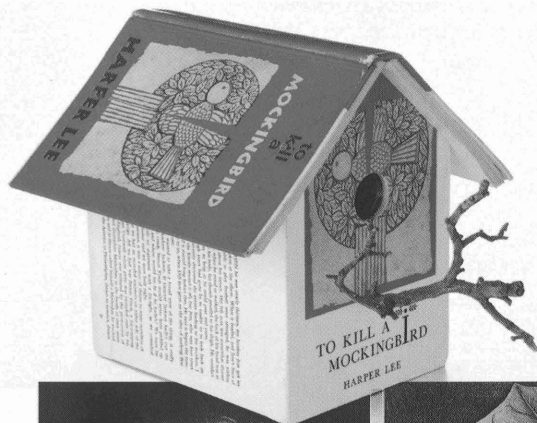
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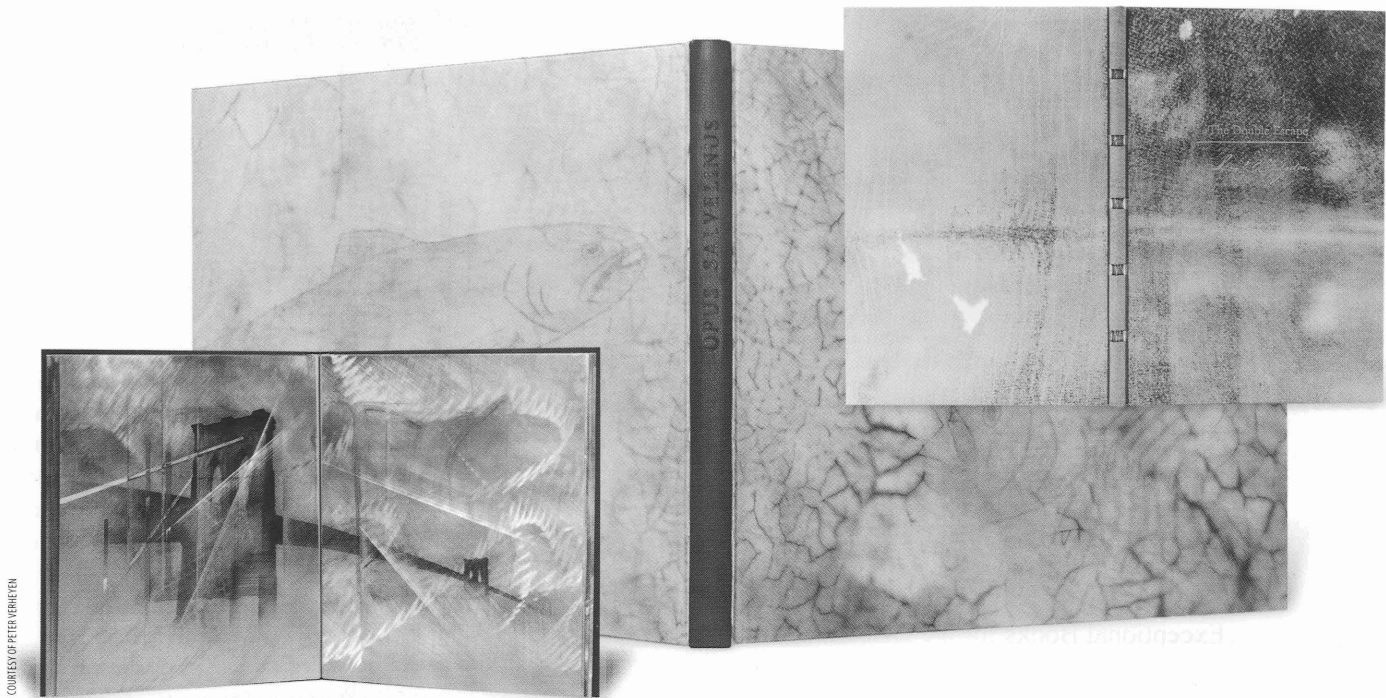


Top left, gifts for book lovers **PAGE 28**

Far left, Mark Twain's autobiography **PAGE 34**

Left, the Arcana collection **PAGE 58**

Above, Penguin Classics revisited **PAGE 11**



COURTESY OF PETER VERHEYEN

# Where Book Art and Technology Mingle

Peter Verheyen, conservator, bookbinder, and creator of the Books Arts Web, discusses the current state of book arts

Although he creates impeccable fine bindings that have won international awards, Peter Verheyen's huge contribution to the field of book art has little to do with making or conserving physical books. His magnum opus is the Book Arts Web ([philobiblon.com](http://philobiblon.com)), the main location on the Internet for book art information and resources, from online exhibitions to tutorials, opportunities, blogs, and reference materials.

I recently asked him about the changes that have taken place in the book arts since he took the field online in 1994.

**CENTER** Ladislav Hanka's *Opus Salvelinus* (Rarach Press, Kalamazoo, 1990). Original lithographs by Ladislav Hanka depicting the life-cycle of the trout. Sewn on 5 vellum slips; olive and turquoise endbands; vellum slips laced through cover; covered in full veiny calf vellum. Decor derived from the illustrations; underpainted charcoal and watercolors. Title in black on dark-red full-length leather label. Bound by Peter Verheyen in 1993.

**FAR LEFT** Donald Glaister, *Brooklyn Bridge: A Love Song*, 2002. Aluminum with acrylic paint, wire, aluminum tape, laminated polyester film, and sand; silkscreen printed text; quarter leather binding of Nigerian goat skin with sanded aluminum sides.

**FAR RIGHT** David Hodgdon, *The Double Escape* (Laureate Press, 2005). Bradel binding; endpapers of white Ingres; sewn using link stitch on five vellum slips; top edge in graphite and burnished; sewn silk endbands; spine covered in teal goatskin with cutouts to reveal vellum slips. Boards covered in natural deer vellum; title stamped in gold on front cover. Slipcase covered in light blue Canapetta bookcloth with vellum edging at top and bottom; gold stamped teal goatskin leather label. Bound by Peter Verheyen in 2007.



Peter D. Verheyen currently heads the preservation and conservation department at the Syracuse University Library in Syracuse, New York.

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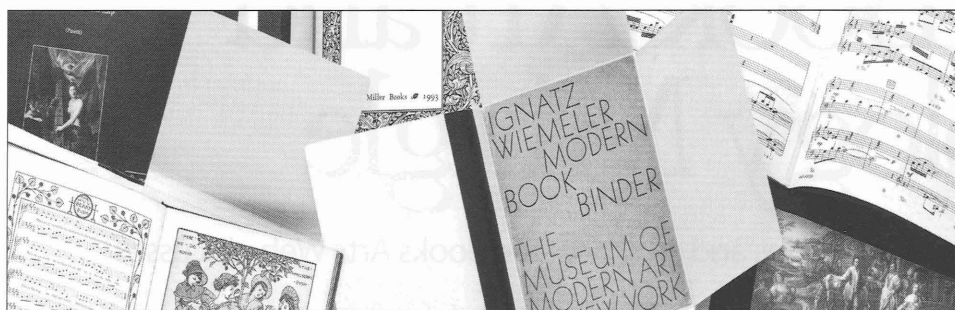
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*“The biggest thing that has changed is that the book arts have become far more accessible than ever before.”*

**RM:** You've been organizing exhibitions since the 1990s, and perhaps the most important one was the *Guild of Book Workers 100th Anniversary Exhibition*, which opened at the Grolier Club in 2006. For that you had two separate parts—a retrospective exhibition that you curated and a contemporary exhibition that you assigned to three jurors. The juried exhibition then traveled to five other venues across the United States. In what ways have the contemporary works shown in 2006 (and more recently) evolved beyond those in the retrospective?

**PV:** While many of these changes predate the *100th Anniversary Exhibition*, the “artist’s book” structures have come to play a much larger role. Hedi Kyle’s flag book is a favorite, as are accordions. Artists are also playing with very different materials for their books, such as Mylar, other plastics, and metal. Don Glaister’s *Brooklyn Bridge* from the contemporary part of the 100th comes to mind. The Guild was dominated until fairly recently (the past twenty or so years) in its history by bookbinders who looked to the traditional European structures and designs for inspiration—natural since many studied there. That changed as increasing numbers of artists with different backgrounds started making books.

Overall, what I have noticed most is that the technical/craft quality of work has been steadily improving among the “artists’ books” and that increasing numbers of traditional binders are branching out and experimenting more with the structures and materials. We’re also challenging the definition of the book more and more. There are also installations that make use of the book either as parts or as a metaphor, but are they books? In the end, it’s also interesting to see that the codex/trad-

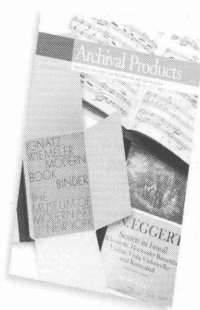


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ditional binding is still alive and well and that people are being drawn to it.

**RM:** In 1994 you started the Book\_Arts-L listserv. From the Book Arts Web home page you can download *The Bonefolder*, a book art e-journal that you have been publishing semiannually since 2004. How have the Internet resources that you created helped artists to advance in craft, concept, and knowledge of book art history?

**PV:** Largely, these resources have allowed people to exchange ideas from mundane technical tips to the more philosophical, such as the legendary "What is a book?" discussion of 1998 (available in the reference section of Book Arts Web). With a global range of participants from very diverse backgrounds, answers will always be found.

While it can be very hard to present hands-on aspects of the craft online, often with very little context, the threads generally develop in positive ways with historical background, variants, teachable moments, all being shared. In essence it has provided a virtual community that has allowed for almost real-time interaction. It was Web 2.0 before that had a name. *The Bonefolder*, with free access, has provided a balanced mix of content from the hands-on (often coupled with Bind-O-Ramas that encourage experimentation with introduced techniques), to historical and conceptual arti-



Verheyen began publishing the book art journal, *The Bonefolder*, in 2004. Shown here is volume 3, number 2, from spring 2007, featuring Melissa Jay Craig's *That's Life*, 2005.

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cles, and reviews of exhibits and books. The reach is global, with Australia second after the United States in terms of contributors. Through its Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) participation, *The Bonefolder* also appears in just about every research library's online catalog, increasing exposure. There have been over 200,000 downloads of it since 2004.

The biggest thing that has changed is that the book arts have become far more accessible than ever before. The physical Centers for Book Arts that were started are thriving and made a huge impact, but they were local/regional. Other educational venues are offering increasing numbers of workshops and classes, right up to universities at the MFA level.

But the Internet removed all geographical and to an extent financial constraints. Ideas, work, announcements, and the like are shared instantaneously as never before. This has been facilitated by the very generous nature of many in the field. Works are now exhibited and freely available to view online, whether on personal websites or through institutional exhibitions, and sites like Etsy facilitate commerce.

Newsletters have outlived their usefulness as print publications and can safely be replaced by blogs and such. Real discussions and other interactions flourish on listservs. Book\_Arts-L now has about 2,500 members who post about 400 messages a month. After sixteen years, it is still the most active list in the field. ☑

In 1985 Peter Verheyen began a formal apprenticeship in bookbinding at the Kunstbuchbinderei Dietmar Klein, Gelsenkirchen, Germany. At the next stage in his career, as a journeyman bookbinder, he took that term seriously and spent time studying conservation at the Centro del bel Libro in Ascona, Switzerland, and the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, then worked as a conservator with Bill Minter's bindery in Chicago, Yale University in New Haven, and Cornell University in Ithaca. In 1995 he got a call from the Syracuse University Library, where he was asked to establish a book conservation lab and began to digitize historical library collections.

Richard Minsky is a book artist and is the founder of the Center for Book Arts in New York City (1974).