

# Art People Grace Glueck

## When Is a Book Not a Book?

**B**OWING A VIOLIN with a built-in speaker while wearing ice skates embedded in blocks of ice, Laurie Anderson gave several outdoor "concerts" in Genoa, Italy, in 1975. "Between songs I talked to passers-by about the parallels between skates and violin-playing: balance; blades over a surface, simultaneity," she writes in her just-published "Notebook," which records several such excursions on the violin.

Her small, pamphlet-size journal is one of the thousands of "bookworks," or booklike works, produced by artists over the last 20 years, 189 of which are on view in a new show at the Museum of Modern Art. (All are from the museum's growing collection.) Not meant for the coffee table, these "throwaway" books are irreverent, informal and often even readable. "A new and innovative genre," as the museum likes to say, conceived and designed entirely by the artists themselves, the books are for the most part byproducts of primary work. They are likely to be published by their authors or by tiny houses (Trespass Press, Cookie Press, Sweet Betty's Press) in editions ranging up to 2,000 copies. You can buy them at prices from 25 cents to, say, \$25.

Delving into bookwork history, the Modern points out that the cheap, mass-produced artist's book began to burgeon in the 1960's, thanks largely to a new concern with the play between art and media and the proliferation of inexpensive duplicating methods. One early-and-often bookworker was the European conceptual artist Dieter Rot, who started turning out his iconoclasm in 1957. (The fat volume five of his collected works, on view at the museum, consists entirely of cut-up pages from Icelandic newspapers and sells for a stiff \$21.50.)

Later on, the California pop star Ed Ruscha, one of the funniest, fastest bookworkers ever, began producing photographic essays such as "Thirty-four Parking Lots in Los Angeles" (1967). Also in the 1960's, the far-out Fluxus art movement in New York gave birth to the Something Else Press, led by Dick Higgins (known for his happenings), which published books and manifestoes by himself, Mr. Rot, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Alison Knowles and others.

"Every artist should have a cheap line," the California conceptualist John Baldessari commented recently in *Art-Rite*, a minuscule, sporadically published magazine that devoted a recent issue to artists' books. "It keeps art ordinary and away from being overblown." He's contributed five of his satirical thrusts at art and art history to the Museum of Modern Art show.

Today, bookworks, which once erratically if at all found their way to a collectors' market, have a network of publishers: art bookstores, like Jaap Rietman, 167 Spring Street, and Wittenborn Books Inc., 1018 Madison Avenue, near 77th Street, and a couple of artist-run outfits that not only sell, but also publish them—Printed Matter, 105 Hudson

ny, will have a section on artists' books), but bookworks now even have their own Library of Congress, so to speak—the new Franklin Furnace Archive, headed by Martha Wilson, whose aim is to "collect, catalogue and preserve artist-produced books."

Ulises Carrion, an Amsterdam underground bookseller, lamented in *Art-Rite*: "Nowadays the only trouble with artists' books is that they have gained the attention of museums and collectors. The sabbath dance of the signed/numbered limited first edition has begun."

The video screen and the hand loom don't really seem meant for each other, but Beryl Korot has managed to bring them together. "Text and Commentary," her new show at Leo Castelli (420 West Broadway), explores the relationship between the loom as "an ancient programming tool" and the programming of video works for multiple screens, and if you can't quite see the connection yet, have patience. Miss Korot may convince you.

Her half-hour, five-screen production focuses exclusively on the weaving process—the loom as her hands manipulate it, the fibers of linen and wool and the patterns she makes as she weaves them into elegant hangings (the five she's produced on screen are used as a sort of entrance curtain to the actual exhibition).

As her hands and feet work the loom, following a weaving "score," a complex structure is woven on the television screen, in which first the process, then the fabric patterns are surveyed in rhythmic, constantly shifting relationships of image and scale. "There's a basic structure to video pieces as there is to cloth," says Miss Korot. "The way cloth is composed is the way I work with multichannel TV. The thing that attracted me to the loom was its sophistication as a programming tool—it programs patterns through the placement of threads, in a numerical order that determines pattern possibilities. It's like the first computer on earth."

Now 32, Miss Korot started out as a poet, then found herself "surrounded by a lot of people working in video. I stopped writing—I felt I could better express things visually." In 1970 she was a founder of *Radical Software*, a video journal, and served as its editor until 1974; last year, with the video artist Ira Schneider, she edited and compiled "Video Art," a useful survey of the current field (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$19.95).

Her first "feature" production was "Dachau 1974," a study of the German concentration camp also "scored" with a weaving structure. "I'd thought of it as a single-channel production, but the film I'd shot in Germany was so deadpan it was boring. How was I to bring life to those images? I thought, why not use a four-thread pattern that I used on the loom? It was the weaving structure that gave life to it and gave me a clue as to how to work with multiple channels."

Miss Korot's productions, for which she does elaborate schematic drawings, are apt to take rather longer than most, what with the drawing, the weaving and so forth. Making "Text and Commentary," she wove and taped simultaneously, "and I felt that what I wove was the image that people might be watching—that I was almost weaving the surface of the screen."

As she talks, her eyes light up. "I've just bought a magnificent new loom that has many more complications." So we can look for multimultichannel from Miss Korot.

Street, and the Collation Center, 25 Park Place. Fluxus works and others produced from 1952 through 1970 are sold by Backworks, 488 Greenwich Street, and Christopher Stephens, 179 Madison Avenue, near 36th Street.

But old-timers look with regret on the institutionalization of the genre. Not only are there sales outlets and museum shows (add to the Modern's presentation the fact that Documenta, the giant international art quadrennial opening in June at Kassel, West Germa-

●  
Walter H. Annenberg, who this week withdrew his \$40 million proposal to build a fine arts communications center at the Metropolitan Museum of Art because of local opposition to the project, suggested the other day that his politics might have something to do with the protests.

"A friend told me that if I'd supported McGovern rather than Nixon, it might not have happened," he said. "I must say it gave me quite a howl."