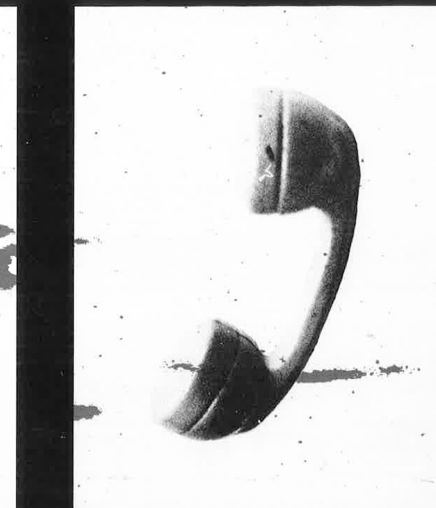
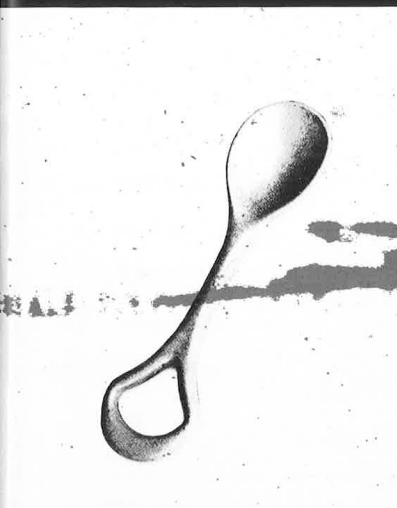
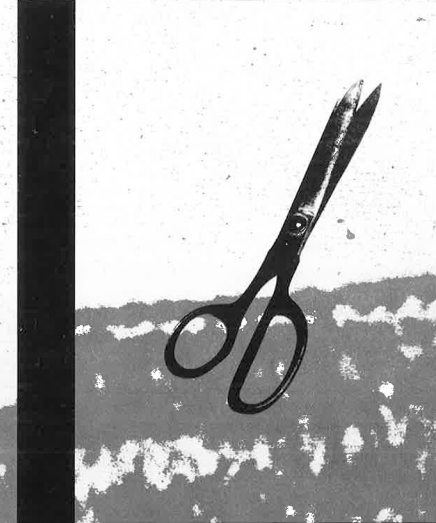


COMPLETING THE CIRCLE: ARTISTS' BOOKS ON THE ENVIRONMENT



MINNESOTA CENTER FOR BOOK ARTS

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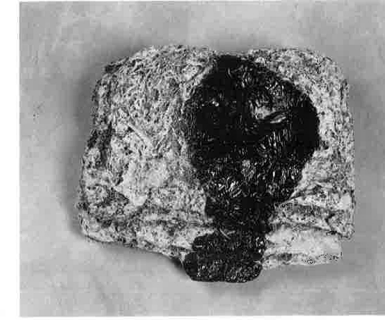


Figure 11. Douglas Beube. *Tar Spill*, 1987.

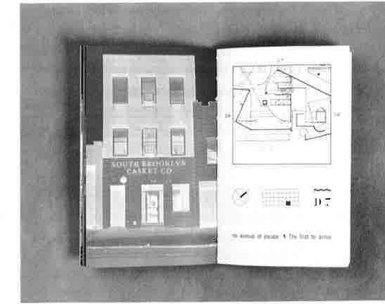


Figure 12. Mojdeh Baratloo, Clifton J. Balch.  
*ANGST: Cartography*, 1989.

surface ripe with life. Along one edge is handwritten: "fear of rain."  
Confronting the fear of nuclear annihilation impelled Anne Gaudin, Cheri Gaulke and Sue Maberry, to create *Sisters Of Survival's Memento Mori* (fig. 21). The letterpress-printed book represents their version of an illuminated manuscript, a memento mori for the nuclear age. They quote from Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* (1982) and Joanna Macy's *Evolutionary Blues*, as well as William Lynch and John Mack. The texts balance each other in tone and content. The right-hand text, illustrated by inset color photographs and photo-engraved marginalia, articulates the pervasive ennui which arises from fears of nuclear power: "The spectre of extinction hovers over our world / And shapes our lives with its invisible yet terrible pressure / It now accompanies us through life, from birth to death..." Color photographs depict the three Sisters' allegorical journey through the spare environment of the Joshua Tree National Monument in California. They are clad in colorful garb resembling nuns' habits and accompanied by a skeletal figure. Text on the left by Joanna Macy counsels: "We must seek to embrace the terror and experience its validity, for the immediacy of nuclear death is real...Only when we can honestly contemplate this horror can we begin to do something about it." After journeying with Death, the Sisters return to activism, their memento mori a symbolic, external record of internal change.

EARTH

"Walking, I am listening to a deeper way. Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands."

Linda Hogan, in *Sisters of the Earth: Women's Prose and Poetry About Nature*, ed. Lorraine Anderson, p. 12; reprinted from *PARABOLA, The Magazine of Myth and Tradition*, Vol. XV, No. 2 (Summer 1990).

Our most immediate visualization of the planet is the earth itself, the ground, our grounding—literally, where we live. Hogan has us stop and listen to the wisdom of our ancestors, the "love of thousands" no doubt emanating from the whole of life including species and elements. She counsels us to walk, watch and listen in order to hear of a "deeper way" of living on the planet. Through their books, artists direct us toward a deeper

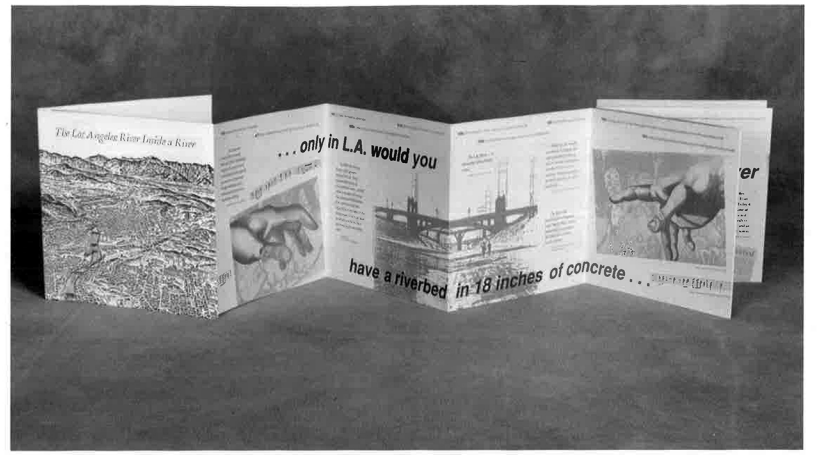


Figure 13. Cheri Gaulke. *The Los Angeles: River Inside a River*, 1991.

way of thinking about our relationship to the earth. They watch in their travels, and propose a new way of looking at the environment which is unencumbered by romanticism or denial. They listen and share stories of change and loss in rural America. Overall, they challenge longstanding cultural preconceptions based on the right of property ownership. They feel that the concept of controlling the earth, upon which we ultimately depend, feeds today's societal angst and dislocation. In photographs and text *Oostamera* (fig. 22) records Martin Emanuel's journey across America in his truck. His itinerary is not prescribed by a travel brochure; he searches for a diminishing sacred connection to the earth. "The ancient Greeks held the forest in high regard. They believed that the entire forest was imbued with special, sacred qualities. Conversely, the early American settlers regarded the wilderness with dread, something to be conquered." Usurpation of the sacred takes many forms, for example, "Rock Eagle is a large effigy made of loose stones. It has been encircled with fencing to prevent people from stealing the stones." Emanuel occasionally hints at what

has been lost. A hummingbird hovers next to the statement, "Oostamera is the sound of hummingbird wings." Modern society's experience of land does not value the time or silence in which to hear a hummingbird's wings. Have we lost that ability? Is it too late to change how we think about the land? *Oostamera* ends with the words, "Sometimes I look back," next to a shot of a rear view mirror showing a silo framed by open land. The melancholy message reflects lost chances, but may also suggest that any effort toward change must begin by embracing what has been left behind. Karen Wirth's *Continental Drifting* (fig. 23) was also inspired by a cross-country journey, but one whose ultimate destination changed from geographic to political. Wirth's journal entries are handwritten as borders along the book's length. Her entries define and explain her personal pilgrimage as a tourist in the national parks. Searching for writings by early pioneers, Wirth discovers that the male viewpoint of the wilderness dominates a tourist's experience. Caught in the Manifest Destiny fever, the men's accounts fill the shelves of the tourists

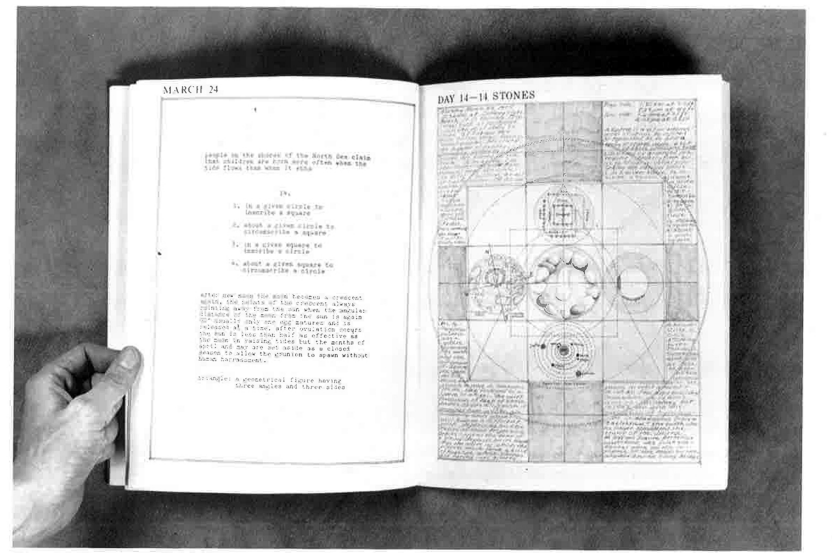


Figure 14. Mary Fish. *Twenty-Eight Days*, 1975.

shops, "...heroic tales written by men on the pioneer trails...[all of which] began with the word 'I.'" Wirth's research leads to the stories of early pioneer women, many of whose writings are now in obscure, out-of-print volumes. Strikingly unlike the men, the women's diaries are framed from the shared perspective of "we," which illustrates the care and thoughtfulness they bring to elucidating their relationship to the wilderness. Honoring their wisdom, Wirth's handwriting carries the women's voices into her map's topography, which snakes across the gridded surface in the shape of rivers, or floats above it in boxed excerpts. The women's voices listen to and move with the landscape, rather than seek to conquer it, such as Kristjana Gunnars, who observes, "It is in the grasses. Even the strange

ones communicate a certain feeling, a sense of open-mindedness about time and history." The book encourages a seamless, circular access: there is no top or bottom, front or back. Like any personal, mythic journey, we end back where we began, yet transformed by Wirth's redrawing of the attitudes which shaped the early American wilderness. Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (fig. 24) adopts matter-of-fact reportage to reveal the reality behind the Hollywood myth. Perhaps no other created "place" in America competes with the hype that surrounds Hollywood. Ruscha's witty and incisive eye considers Hollywood's Sunset Strip, a street which carries a good share of Hollywood's mythological burden. The offset-printed, accordion-fold book opens out to

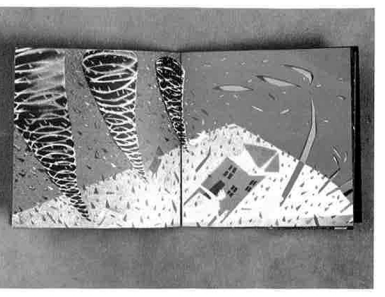


Figure 15. Janis Geiser.  
*Tornado Treaty*, 1986.

more than 24 feet; clearly, Ruscha doesn't want us to miss a thing. Along the upper and lower edges run black-and-white photographs of every building on both sides of the street: even numbers above, odd numbers below. Faceless storefronts, apartments and gas stations mix in a pastiche of American development. Faced with this deadpan reportage of America's "unnatural wonder," the Sunset Strip, reactions to Ruscha's book may range from uneasy boredom to a delighted chuckle. The most shocking manifestation of the city, as wasteland, is that it no longer provides shelter for millions of its residents. Brad Freeman's *Program* (fig. 25) questions uncontrolled population growth, and the resulting loss in resources and the rise in homelessness. The book's duotone montage photographs join a visual record of the Anasazi Native American civilization of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico (c. 1200 A.D.) with the contemporary civilization of Philadelphia. Freeman's apocalyptic vision is reflected in the eyes of a homeless man who stares out at us. He holds a card we cannot read and points away into the city, like a shaman directing us onward. He is surrounded by skyscrapers, traffic jams and surging crowds. The montage images shift back and forth from the city to the abandoned pueblos. Twice repeated in the book is a ticking clock, the inexorable counter: "The U.S. population is now 249,361,644. Another American every 14 seconds." Freeman seems to suggest that the "program" is a two-tiered economy, fueled by a need to own, dominate or control. Those who cannot or will not participate in the race are literally dis-owned.

The crises of waste and want which face our cities also afflict rural America. The interviews in Gaylord Schanilec's letterpress-printed *Farmers* (fig. 26) relate four farmers' struggles to maintain a lifestyle dependent on nature. They strain against the pressures by banks to borrow big, and then rush to stay ahead of foreclosure when crop prices fall. Each interview is visually prefaced by one of Schanilec's multi-colored wood engravings of a rural scene. The clarity and detail of the double-page engravings are photographic, but the six colors overlaid in printing add a luminous depth to these pastoral scenes which commemorate a vanishing way of life. Herman Schanilec, Jr. says,

"We've capitalized where we can probably hang on for another five years, but as far as being optimistic—no, I'm not at all optimistic. There isn't anything going on any place that says we're gonna get the proper percentage for a bushel of wheat. There's nothing any place saying that change is gonna happen. It just takes the fun out of it, you know. You hate to work for nothing. The bottom line is there should be enough money to pay the bills and help pay for this equipment. If you have to go to some other source and to some other endeavor, that's not right."

Taken together, interviews and images in *Farmers* provide a telling record of America's irretrievable loss of individual connection to the rural environment.

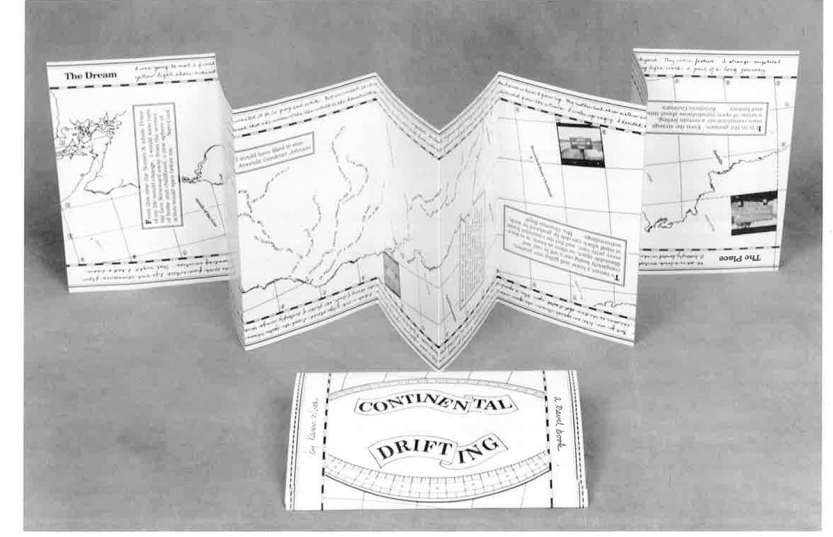


Figure 23. Karen Wirth. *Continental Drifting*, 1991.