Senior Project Artist Book

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Abstract

This paper explains the process of ideation, topics of research, hand building, woodworking, and production, as well as a summary of my project.

My senior project involved the creation of an artist book. My artist book consisted of six maps (roughly 10.5” X 10.5”), two trays of individual words (roughly 520 words in total), six dowels, one string of twine, and a box which holds all elements of the project.
## Table of Contents

*Chapter 1: Introduction*  
- Objective of the Study 4  
- Statement of the Problem 5  
- Limitations of the Study 5  
- Glossary of Terms 6  

*Chapter 2: Review of Research* 8  

*Chapter 3: Procedures and Results* 11  

*Chapter 4: Summary and Recommendation* 16  

*Bibliography* 18  

*Extra Photos* 19
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background:

My background for my senior project started long before I chose graphic design as a major. As a child, I loved building. It did not matter what the material was, Legos, blocks, sand castles, paper airplanes, I loved sitting down and creating something three-dimensional. The act of building and the process involved with solving three-dimensional problems was challenging and exciting. Over time, this learning, building, and creative process translated well into other forms of art by helping me understand basic principles such as form and depth. The principles learned early on are apparent in my design approach and understanding and were a major influence on the type of senior project I chose.

Choosing the topic for my senior project was also a reaction to the type of graphic design that I have been doing for the past three years at Cal Poly. Mainly composed on the computer, my graphic design has been fairly commercial and focused around a client or event. I have been taught to use the foundation learned in classes about color and form to design posters, packages, business and wayfinding systems based on the vision of a client. Although it is important for a graphic designer who wishes to work in the industry to posses the skills necessary to complete such projects, I think it is also necessary to explore one’s own creativity and process in order to advance one’s own understanding of design.

Objective of the Study:

Over the past three years I have encountered two problems with graphic design: the lack of interaction in print projects and the digitally dominant aspect
of the design process (especially in the research and production stages). Although new technologies have streamlined the design process and have enhanced the definition of graphic design, I feel that this digital approach has left a deficit in my holistic approach to design—especially regarding elements of craft and three-dimensional design. In addition to my two problems with graphic design as an art form, I also feel as though I have not had a chance to explore design on a personal level. Since so much of graphic design directly relates to commercial use and often depends on the client’s design senses, I feel the need to explore personal ideas and creativity.

Statement of the Problem:

The problem for my senior project has to do with exploring different meaningful environments and locations to individuals, and chronicling this exploration using a book as a medium. The problem focuses on the viewer experimenting or interacting within the book itself, and my effectively designing and communicating ideas without relying on a computerized interaction.

Limitations of the Study:

Major limitations on my senior project included time and book size and format. Due to the fact that the senior project was compressed to only 10 weeks, I was unable to re-visit all the locations highlighted in my project, these being actual locations such as the city of Westlake Village, San Luis Obispo, Mojave, and Big Sur as well as Sequoia National Park and Yosemite National Park. I was also unable to adequately research more locations in order to add them to the maps already
provided.

Book size and format was also a major limitation. Since the format of my book involves sheets of card stock mounted on wood and then encased in a wood box, the resulting weight makes for a cumbersome project, quickly making the transportation of my project difficult.

**Glossary of Terms:**

*artist book:* Works of art realized in the form of a book. They are often published in small editions, though sometimes they are produced as one-of-a-kind objects referred to as “uniques.” Artists’ books have employed a wide range of forms, including scrolls, fold-outs, concertinas or loose items contained in a box as well as bound printed sheet. Artists’ books are books or book-like objects over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself.

*environmental graphic design:* A design profession embracing many design disciplines including graphic design, architecture, industrial design and landscape architecture. Practitioners in this field are concerned with the visual aspects of wayfinding, communicating identity and brands, information design, and shaping a sense of place.

*h holistic design:* A comprehensive and highly-integrated approach toward the making of design; the idea that all elements of a design are connected on multiple levels and each level reinforces the next.

*interactive design:* Design that allows for some type of interaction between the
viewer and the design. This can relate to but is not limited to: computers, books, touch-screens etc.

**minimalism:** Describes movements in various forms of art and design, especially visual art and music, where the work is stripped down to its most fundamental features and core self expression; A minimalist painting, for example, will typically use a limited number of colors, and have a simple geometric design. Minimalist sculpture on the other hand is greatly focused on the materials used.

**package design:** The design and fabrication of packages for products.

**screen printing:** A printing technique that uses a woven mesh to support an ink-blocking stencil. The attached stencil forms open areas of mesh that transfer ink as a sharp-edged image onto a substrate. A roller or squeegee is moved across the screen stencil, forcing or pumping ink past the threads of the woven mesh in the open areas.

**topographic maps:** A type of map characterized by large-scale detail and quantitative representation of relief, usually using contour lines in modern mapping, but historically using a variety of methods. Traditional definitions require a topographic map to show both natural and man-made features.
Chapter 2: Research

I began the research for my senior project within areas of graphic design that I felt a particular affinity towards. These areas include package design, interactive design, and environmental graphic design. Although each very different, the common trait that connects them all include the following three things: holistic, tangible design, interactive elements, and a focus on materials. It was through these three traits that I sought to develop my senior project.

My first instinct was to look at various examples of design with similar context or traits related to package design, interactive design, and environmental graphic design. The examples that caught my attention included: Jim Denevan

Figure I

Figure II

Figure III

Figure IV
(Figure I), Andy Goldsworthy (Figure II), the GreenPix Zero Energy Media Wall (Figure III), and Vertical Garden by Patrick Blanc (Figure IV). Each used design principles (such as line, shape, and form) in a simple way to communicate larger ideas and design aesthetics. Denevan, Goldsworthy, and Blanc especially interested me due to the fact that they used nature as the material and site specific environments into which to work and display their projects. Through seeing nature and natural elements as a medium of design, I became very interested in working with nature in my own project.

The idea of nature was a very logical step in the evolution of my senior project because I began to weave nature into my previously stated goals for my senior project. The idea of using natural elements such as leaves, stones, wood, bark, hemp twine, organic papers all made sense to me and could be an interesting way to add personal as well as creative touches to my project.

Nature related to the idea of holistic design as well. The principle of having similar elements run through every aspect of a design could be addressed quite nicely, when the natural materials were coupled with the overall natural theme/concept of the project.

Nature also fulfilled my dream for an interactive project due to the innate and interactive qualities within it. I wanted to replicate the interaction that people have when outdoors with nature, those largely revolving around the five senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste. My goal wasn’t to have the same literal interaction with nature but to recall memories via certain interactive elements of my book, for example, picking up type blocks and feeling the different textures of the paper might recall feeling tree bark or the running water in a stream. Since the
book interaction idea paired nicely with the concept of nature, my next task was to make it happen.

Initial ideation proved frustrating and yielded no good results (reference pages 20 and 21 for additional sketches). Figure V, VI, and VII show multiple ideas from minimalist sculpture, to leaf drawing, to boxes filled with grass, and a project I like to call “Greenfitti.” Although my ideas seemed to be all over the place, they were all loosely connected and all very important to my process. Each of these ideas examined a new way to incorporate nature into my design goals. For example, figure VIII started as an idea for a sculpture focusing on raw materials, especially wood, and eventually changed and evolved into my final senior project, an artist book.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Results

Using the knowledge gained from researching minimalism in sculpture and my interests in wood, I began to search for ways to highlight different types of wood and its varying properties. This led to an idea of a wooden book, showing wood “personalities” such as grain pattern, structure, texture, and color through a series of large photographs. Although a great way to highlight the different properties of wood, this idea strayed too far from crafting and a hands-on approach to design. In addition, I was unsure of a way to connect a story or narrative to a wood portrait series.

As seen in the previous chapter, I had brainstormed many different themes. It was at this point, while going back over what I had already written, that the idea of environment became obviously clear. Taking the concept of environment, coupled with the material of wood, and portrayed through cut paper topographic maps (which I had been researching simultaneously (Figure VIII)), I had the opportunity to combine nature and materials in a holistic approach.

This holistic approach centered on people's interaction with natural environments and how people can be affected by those different places. In order to make my “book” a personal exploration into creative design and natural environments, I chose six places that had a special meaning to me.

The Nature Locations: I fabricated these locations in the form of cut paper topographic maps mounted on pieces of wood. I chose topographic maps for the aesthetic properties of the layered paper as well as fact that topographic maps map out distinctions in elevation rather than distinctions in roads or cities or land-
marks, making for a more true representation of the environment. The six locations are: Westlake Village (Figure IX), San Luis Obispo (Figure X), Big Sur (Figure XI), Sequoia National Park (Figure XII), Yosemite National Park (Figure XIII), and Mojave (Figure XIV). Each map is a nature environment that I have experienced and find a special connection to. In addition to the maps, there are also six dowels, a length of twine, and a corresponding hole in each map. Once each dowel is placed in the holes, the length of twine connects each one in order to represent my experience and journey through each environment.

*The Interactive Element:* I wanted to add an interactive element to my project. I had already explored the idea of making a book earlier, I decided to let the story be written by my book viewers. My project was about how different natural environments affect people, therefore it was necessary for the viewer to reflect and respond how each of these places might have affected him or her. I made this possible through 520 screen printed word blocks (Figure XV) that I cut from a piece of wood. I cut corresponding recessed placeholders on each map into which the
words could be placed. This way the viewer could “write” his or her own thoughts in reaction to the locations, much the way he or she would have had in the actual environment. With the addition of the interactive narrative element to the maps, my project evolved into a complete book (Figure XVI).

Fabrication: Since my book was made almost entirely by hand without the use of a computer, there were multiple stages of fabrication in order to yield the finished “book”. I began the process by selecting paper for the topographic maps. I chose
six different shades of green in a scrapbook card stock. Each shade would simplify elevation as seen in topographic maps. Each layer was traced from an existing topographic map of the specific location and was then cut to 11 inches by 11 inches. After each layer was traced and cut, all six were layered on top of one another and glued together from darkest green on bottom to white on top.

I then chose a variety of wood for use as a base for each map, the wood type blocks, and the book holder. The wood used for the maps was roughly cut on a band saw to 11 inches by 11 inches and then fine sanded to fit each map. The maps were glued on to each board using Gorilla Glue. In order to create a space to place the wood blocks into each map, I used a router to carve a hole into the board.

In order to create the wood type blocks, I created an Illustrator document laying out all 520 printed words (this was the only time a computer was used while making my senior project). The words were then printed onto a transparency film and exposed onto a screen printing screen. After it had been exposed, excess emulsion was washed off and printing ink was pulled over the screen and transferred to the wood underneath. After the ink was dry, I cut each block out on a band saw and sanded each block on a belt sander. The blocks were finished with a layer of protective enamel to preserve the ink during repeated handling.

Two trays were constructed to hold all of the words. A four-sided box was also constructed in order to hold all elements of my “book”. Both the trays containing the words and the box to hold all the parts of my “book” were stained black.

The last step was hand carving each dowel. Using fallen redwood from a recent camping trip in Big Sur, I hand carved each dowel using a knife.
Chapter 4: Summary and Recommendations

I am pleased with how the book came out because it accomplished all of the goals I had set form the beginning of the senior project. There was a focus on materials through the use of wood (in the box, in the wood type, dowels, and on the base of the maps), cut paper, and twine. There was an interactive element and interpretive narratives based on varying experiences of the viewer. And finally, there was a sense of holistic design accomplished through the theme of nature and environment in every aspect of the project. Of course, the personal connection I have is due to the locations that I chose, but I believe that design is only successful when it reaches an audience and calls them to interact with the design. I can see that happening with my project.

This was a difficult project for me to complete and one that was completed step by step. In terms of craftsmanship, it was a very tedious project. Cutting out each map six times took several hours and cutting out all 520 (roughly) word blocks took several more. Each step from gluing each map to the wooden board, to building a box, to screen printing words onto wood took significant time to set up and complete without screwing up. Although it was tedious and not without its fair share of frustrations, I loved working with my hands and interacting with the tactile qualities of the materials. Since I only used the computer for research and setting the words for the screen print, I completed most of the project by hand and was impressed with the level of craftsmanship that I was able to produce.

In the future I will continue to design in similar ways to this project. I enjoyed thinking outside the computer and I do believe that it gave me and opportu-
nity to apply design principles in creative ways that I would not have been able to if not for the high level of handcrafting in this project. I believe that I was successful in completing my project and solved all problems I had going into my senior project.
Bibliography


Additional Photos of Artist Book
I need to make a storyboard.

Environment?

Landscape

What is a map?—a graphic representation of physical or conceptual map.

Precise location

Environment

Large scale

Weather pattern of tracing paper reveal

Environment

Wealthy food

Environment

Precise location