

SYLVIA MARCHANT DESCRIBES SOME  
OF THE BEAUTIFUL BINDINGS AND  
ARTISTS' BOOKS IN THE NATIONAL  
LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA'S POSSESSION



# Spellbound

## BY WORKS OF ART IN BOOK FORM

FINE BINDINGS COME IN ALL SHAPES and sizes, from ancient to modern, from all over the world, and the National Library of Australia has some significant specimens in its collection. Differing from the usually available commercial bindings, the special categories, utilising the skills of a hand bookbinder, include decorative and art or designer bindings, popular in old and new publications and sometimes the main feature of a book.

Designer bindings are those where a book of choice is decorated in an elaborate way with fine quality material and artistic designs or illustrations. Some of them are quite spectacular, such as the Library's 1976 edition of *The Song of Songs* (also known as the *Song of Solomon*). This is from a limited edition of 206 signed and numbered copies, typeset and printed by hand and produced by the Whittington Press in Gloucestershire. The

Library's copy is a special one of six, hand-bound by Arthur W. Johnson, author of *The Names and Hudson Manual of Book Binding* (c.1978). The binding is a spectacular dark red or burgundy in full morocco, with an inlaid sun pattern of four golden circles on the front and one on the back. The artistry continues inside where the pages of mould-made paper have scraps of flowers and leaves embedded in them. Intricately marbled endpapers provide a complementary finish.

Fore-edge painting is included in the category of designer bindings and is a much admired, though not commonly found, technique. Fore-edge painting is where a design or picture is applied to the very edges of the pages of a book. With the book closed, the painting is not seen until the leaves are fanned out again. A layer of gold leaf can be applied over the painted edge when the book is closed, to protect the edge and further hide

OPPOSITE  
The beautiful gauffering on  
*The Bible, That Is, the Holy  
Scriptures Contained in the  
Olde and New Testament ...*  
(Geneva: 1599; London:  
Deputies of Christopher  
Barker, 1599)  
Rare Books Collection  
RB 220.52 BIB

ABOVE  
The spectacular inlaid  
cover by Arthur Johnson  
of *The Song of Songs*  
(translated by Keith Bosley;  
Gloucestershire, United  
Kingdom: Whittington Press,  
1976)  
Rare Books Collection  
RB1 223.9 B582



ABOVE  
The pages of Keith Bosley's translation of *The Song of Songs* are embedded with flowers and leaves  
Rare Books Collection  
RB1 223.9 B582

BELOW  
C.B. Currie (d.1940), after Nicholas Chevalier (1828–1902)  
*The Old and New Home Stations, Victoria*  
fore-edge painting; 19.0 x 3.0 cm reproduced on *The Three Colonies of Australia: New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia: Their Pastures, Copper Mines, & Gold Fields* by Sidney Samuel (Auburn, NY: Derby and Miller, 1854)  
Rare Books Collection  
FER F15681

any trace of the painting. This meticulous and painstaking process creates an artistic treasure which is beguilingly attractive because it is so unexpected.

The Library holds a fine example of such a treasure in a copy of Sidney Samuel's *Three Colonies of Australia: New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia: Their Pastures, Copper Mines, & Gold Fields* (1859). The fore-edge painting on the Library's copy was executed by an English miniaturist, Miss C.B. Currie (d.1940), for Henry Sotheran Limited, an antiquarian bookseller in London; her signature appears on the painting under the gilt edge. The binding of red morocco with gold-tooling is by Riviere & Son, one of the most notable and prolific bookbinders in London's West End from about 1840 to 1939. The painting is a copy of Nicholas Chevalier's watercolour *The Old and New Home Stations* (1870), which is held by the Library.

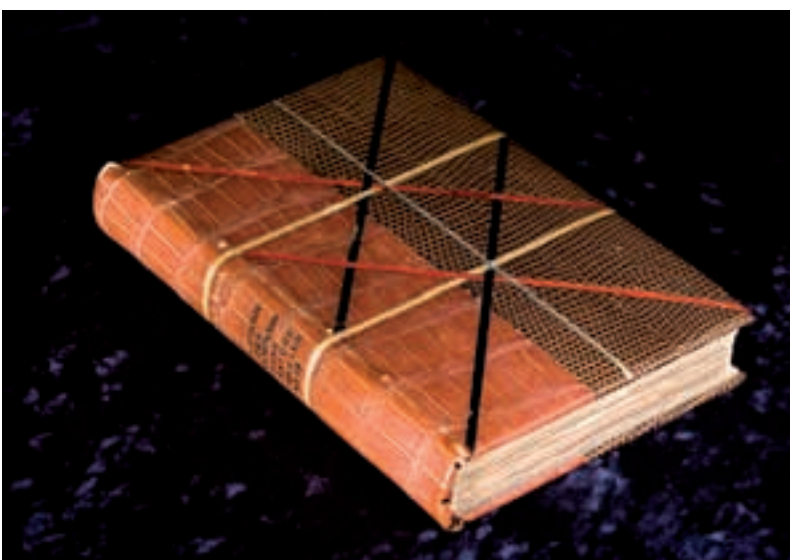
Other notable designer bindings in the Library's collection include an edition of a Swedish work, *Ar Blas: Dikter, tuschteckningar och omslagsbild av Roger Fjellstrom (Ar Blas: Poems, Ink Drawings and Cover Art by Roger Fjellstrom)*. Published in 1986 by Stockholms

Kemigrafiska Anstalt AB and bound by Marlis Egli, it is one of a limited edition of 750 and is signed by Fjellstrom. The striking, modern, oil-marbled paper-case binding has a leather head and tail trim, a pigment-tooled title, leather headbands and an unusual abstract design on the cover. This book was exhibited in the Canberra Craft Bookbinders Guild exhibition of contemporary bindings held in the Library between December 1989 and February 1990.

As well as creating special editions, hand binders are in demand for the repair and conservation of rare historical works. The Library carries out this task where necessary in its own bookbinding and conservation department. The Library's First Folio copy of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1623) is enhanced and protected by a beautiful binding carried out to preserve a treasured work in keeping with its significance. This volume exhibits a handsome modern binding of red morocco with gold tooling and colourfully marbled endpapers. Bound by Sangorski and Sutcliffe, one of the oldest bookbinding companies in England, this First Folio copy bears a fine example of its work. The firm's name is stamped in gold on the lower turn-in on the front cover. Sangorski and Sutcliffe is particularly noted for the jewelled bindings the company produced in its early years. Apparently, such elaborate bindings are becoming very popular and are sought after in America, where famous practitioners will design one for you—at a price.

Sangorski and Sutcliffe also bound the Library's copy of *The Beatitudes*, which is number 31 of a limited edition of 65 copies designed and printed for Edward Burrett for private circulation in 1984. It is another fine example of a modern art binding, where the binding is at least as important as the book. A small book (21 centimetres in height) and attractively bound in purple leather, it is embellished with a gold-blocked motif





showing a bird surmounting the letter 'B'. Printed on handmade paper, it has a pictorial colophon (an inscription or device at the end of a book which historically contained the title), the printer's name, date and place of printing. This information is now usually given on the title page, but many limited editions still include a colophon at the back of the book to give extra details about the work. As in the work by Shakespeare, the name 'Sangorski & Sutcliffe' is stamped on the lower turn-in on the front board.

Rose Adler (1890–1959) was a Parisian bookbinder whose work is much admired. She interpreted the later phase of Art Deco by combining calf and goatskin with more unusual materials, such as crocodile, lizard or snake skins, and inset gemstones, taking modern bookbinding to a new level. A fine example of her imaginative, decorative work is part of the Library's collection in the book *Esthétique des proportions dans la nature et dans les arts* (*The Aesthetics of Proportion in Nature and Art*) (1927) by Matila Costiescu Ghyka (1881–1965). About 21 centimetres tall, the book is attractively half-bound with horizontal and vertical bands of snakeskin, with silver-edged pages and distinctively marbled endpapers in a vertical design. Adler's signature appears on the lower front board turn-in.

The Library's collection of designer bindings is further enriched by two beautiful copies of *The Garden of the Night* (1979), translated by Iftikhar A'zmi. These are from a limited edition of 240 copies of a book of 26 Sufi poems, translated from Persian, Urdu and Arabic, and illustrated by Richard Kennedy. One of the Library's copies is number vi of 35

copies, full bound in blue Nigerian goatskin by Weatherby Woolnough, enhanced by a gold-tooled copy of the illustration *Rumi* and finished with handsome Whittington marbled endpapers. A loosely inserted etching by Kennedy is a further delight. The second copy, number i of five special copies, is elaborately crafted by London book designers Paul Collet and David Sellars, to a design by Kennedy. Pages of handmade paper are bound in black, brown and ochre leather, with a simple but stylish design of a woman's profile on the front cover. This copy has a set of three loosely inserted Kennedy etchings.

A significant example of medieval binding is the volume of *D. Dionysii Carthusiani minorum operum minorum tomus primus* (1532) by Denis le Chartreux, the contents of which comment on the works of the Catholic theologian and mystic, D. Dionysii Carthusiani (1402–1471), also known as 'Denis the Carthusian'. Not an artist's book or beautiful in its binding, its importance lies in the way it demonstrates a period from the fifteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, when books were sometimes chained to reading desks, pulpits and pews to prevent them from being stolen. Chains were used, it has been said, because 'The thievish disposition of some that enter into libraries to learn no good there, hath made it necessary to secure the innocent books'. This practice is evident in the book's binding, where a cut-out inside the back cover shows where the plate for the chain was attached. It was also fitted with metal clasps to hold the book closed, to avoid warping. The book is heavy, large (32 centimetres tall) and bound in stamped pigskin with what appears to have been gold tooling. The date

ABOVE LEFT  
Rose Adler's snakeskin binding on *Esthétique des proportions dans la nature et dans les arts* by Matila Ghyka (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1927) Rare Books Collection RB MOD 1490

ABOVE RIGHT  
The inside cover of *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare (London: Isaac Iaggard and Ed. Blount, 1623) shows the bookbinder's name Rare Books Collection RBRS 11

BELOW  
*The Bible, That Is, the Holy Scriptures Contained in the Olde and Newe Testament ...*  
(Geneva: 1599; London: Deputies of Christopher Barker, 1599)  
Rare Books Collection  
RB 220.52 BIB

OPPOSITE TOP  
Philippa Webb's *Frog—Between the Covers* (New Farm, Qld: Philippa Webb, 2007) is a magnificent artwork featuring frog stencils and toggles  
Rare Books Collection  
SRq 708.2 W367

OPPOSITE BELOW  
The beautiful cover of *Harvesting Colour* by Ann Muir (Oldham, United Kingdom: Incline Press, 2000) features exquisite marbling  
Rare Books Collection  
RBq MOD 457  
Courtesy Incline Press ([www.inclinepress.com](http://www.inclinepress.com)) and Ann Muir Marbling Limited ([www.ammrblng.com](http://www.ammrblng.com))

of the work appears on the spine and the title is set within a woodcut border. This is a rare historical treasure.

The delicate and decorative art of gauffering (also 'goffering') is found in another antiquarian book in the Library's collection, an English Bible printed in Geneva in 1599 and in London by the deputies of Christopher Barker in 1599. The full title is:

*e Bible, at Is, the Holy Scriptures contained in the Olde and Newe Testament, Translated According to the Ebrew and Greeke, and Conferred with the Best Translations in Diuers Languages. With Most Profitable Annotations vpon All the Hard Places, and Other things of Great Importance.*

All the edges of the text block of this Bible are gauffered. In this process the edges are first gilded and then a repeating indented pattern is pressed into them using a metal tool, normally *pointille* (made up of small dots), rather than solid lines. The technique was especially associated with German bookbinding of the sixteenth century and became popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century when it was used on elaborately bound devotional and other books. The effect is very beautiful. This volume is bound in black leather with a pattern of ungolded tooling on the covers

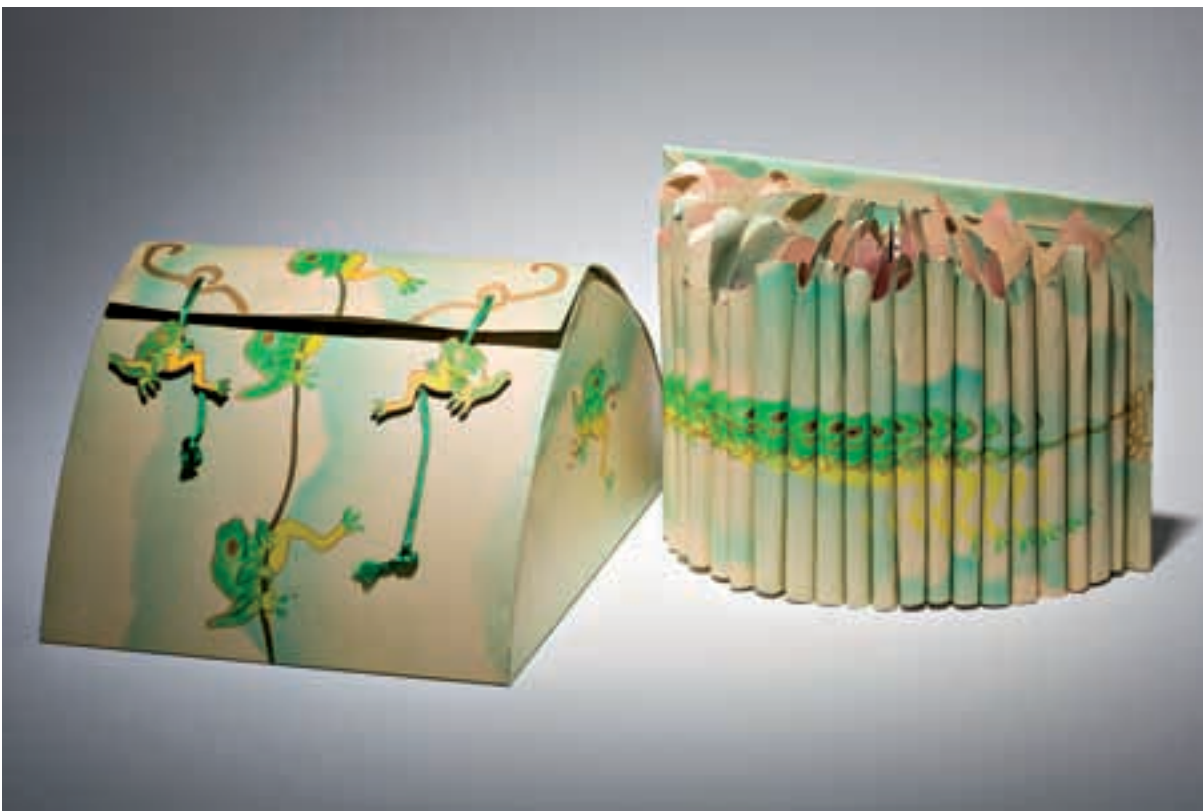
and the inside of the boards is covered with marbled paper.

*e English Bible in the John Rylands Library: 1525 to 1640*, a history of the historic English Bible held in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, is an example of work by another notable binder, Joseph William Zaehnsdorf (1853–1930). Printed for private circulation, it stands at 39 centimetres and is bound in brown morocco with gold tooling on the turn-ins. It was bound by Zaehnsdorf in 1899 and his signature appears at the lower turn-in of the upper front board. Zaehnsdorf was acknowledged to be the leading English bookbinder in the nineteenth century and was the author of *e Art of Bookbinding: A Practical Treatise* (1880), which was for many years the standard textbook for apprentices. The Library holds a facsimile reprint of the second edition, dated 1890.

Artists' books are another specialised category. Created solely as works of art, they are usually published in very small editions, often less than 10 copies. A recent example of an artist's book in the Library's collection is Philippa Webb's *Frog—Between the Covers* (2007), a beautiful, three-dimensional hemispherical paper creation featuring multiple stencilled images of frogs. The outer container is ornamented with nine green stencilled frogs and is augmented by two decorative frog toggles as openers. Inside the container is another semi-circle of 23 'pages', each folded over a cardboard core and arranged to form a fan-shaped outline resting on a flat base. Multiple frog images are stencilled—using the intricate *pochoir* technique—in sequence, onto airbrushed beige paper. Three more frogs are similarly stencilled on the base. The delightful effect is of a frog jumping across the fanned pages. This was to be a limited edition of three, but only the artist's proof was produced. *Frog—Between the Covers* is an amusing and decorative artwork loosely based on the shape of the book.

Another outstanding work of art in book form is Ann Muir's *Harvesting Colour: e Year in a Marbler's Workshop* (2000). This is a delight to the eye and both a stunning example of the art of marbling and an authoritative source on methods. It includes 12 samples of marbled papers to illustrate the effects that can be achieved, and the vivid and





varied patterns cause one to marvel at the skill of the artist—making the book a work of art. The Library's edition, signed by the author, is number 141 of 250 copies. Standing 29 centimetres tall by 21 centimetres wide and contained in a slipcase, it is bound in arresting marbled paper.

Marbling is a popular and effective decoration often used to beautify books, especially the endpapers. The technique is first to float water- or oil-based colours onto a special glutinous solution. These colours can then be manipulated into patterns by blowing on them directly or by using a stylus or a comb. A sheet of paper, carefully placed on the surface, captures the floating design with the result that each print produced is unique.

This is a very small sample of the wide world of bookbinding and artists' books held by the Library. There are other notable bindings in the collection, usually catalogued as rare books. An extensive range of works on all aspects of the subject is also available, ranging from instructive books, such as *James and Hudson Manual of Book Binding* by Arthur W. Johnson, mentioned earlier, *Introduction to Book Binding* (1965) by Lionel Seabrook Darley and *The British Library Guide to Bookbinding: History and Techniques* (1998) by P.J.M. Marks, to reference books explaining terms and identifying famous practitioners,

such as Geoffrey Ashall Glaister's *Glossary of the Book* (1960), Don Etherington and Mat T. Roberts' *Bookbinding and the Conservation of Books: A Dictionary of Descriptive Terminology* (1982) and Jane Greenfield's *ABC of Bookbinding* (1998).

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 SYLVIA MARCHANT is an author and historian with wide-ranging interests



of art