



**17 October —  
1 November 2014**

# **Janus Press:**

**The New Zealand  
Connection**

*Janus Press: The New Zealand Connection* celebrates the associations between Janus Press and Claire Van Vliet with a number of New Zealand artists, writers and makers. Janus Press works are sought world-wide and founder, Claire Van Vliet, is recognised as having a profound effect globally on contemporary book arts. The exhibition is staged to coincide with the 2014 international conference *Inside Outside – a Case for The Book* by the Association of Book Crafts New Zealand.

On the 23rd of July 2014, Objectspace intern Kate Shapiro met for the first time with Auckland bookmakers Elizabeth Steiner and Beth Serjeant to hear about their collection of Janus Press books and the various associations that Janus Press and its founder; artist, illustrator and typographer Claire Van Vliet, have with New Zealand.

# Janus Press: **The New Zealand Connection**

Established in 1955 in Vermont by Claire Van Vliet (b. Canada, 1933), the Janus Press is the oldest private publishing press specialising in handmade books currently operating in the United States. The press has published and co-published over ninety handmade and hand printed books, more than a dozen broadsides (posters), several pamphlets, and numerous ephemeral pieces that are much acclaimed internationally throughout the book arts community. Typically Janus Press books are appreciated for not only the originality of their contents, but also the attention given to design, binding, typography, use of handmade papers, and printing, resulting in the creation of an entirely unique work of art. Claire named her press after Janus, the ancient Roman god of the rising and setting sun whose ability to simultaneously look forward and backward signified balance during the Renaissance. For Claire, Janus represents books that stand in tradition but are also highly experimental.

*Janus Press: The New Zealand Connection* focuses on the connections that the world renowned Janus Press and its founder Claire Van Vliet, have with New Zealand. According to Elizabeth Steiner, the influence of the Janus Press has been felt in New



*Woven and Interlocking  
Book Structures. 2002*

**"I want the physicality of the book to create a physical message through the hands and the eyes that makes the reader more susceptible to the text."**

**Claire Van Vliet**

Zealand since Claire's first visit to New Zealand for the first Book Arts Symposium in 1993. Claire enjoys working collaboratively and a number of creative projects have grown out of the New Zealand association with Janus Press involving New Zealanders; Elizabeth Steiner, Beth Serjeant, Alan Loney, Judith Haswell, Keri Hulme, and William Cumming.

Elizabeth Steiner has been making artist books since 1992 and is the founder of the Steiner Press in Auckland. With precise attention to detail and a well-honed sense of colour and composition, Elizabeth has crafted a beautiful series of books over the years she has been practicing the craft. Beth Serjeant is an artist who has extended her interest in printmaking to the integration of text and visual imagery and to the collaboration of these concepts and processes within the book format. Elizabeth and Beth first met each other while attending etching classes at the Auckland Society of Arts. Both women had been engaged in creative practices for much of their lives. Beth had been exposed to word and image while working in advertising. Meanwhile, Elizabeth had learnt many different craft and book binding techniques while training as an occupational therapist, and had been practicing etching and making paper for a number of years. Beth's interest in book arts began when she was introduced to Ross Fraser who, with Peter Webb, established *Art New Zealand*. He showed her a book of etchings that he and Peter Webb had produced, and Beth was inspired to create a book of her own. Having worked with word and image before, Beth felt confident that she could translate these skills into the art of book making. This resulted in *The Visionary*.

### **Discovery and Awareness**

Beth's book *The Visionary* took her to Wellington for the 1989 Bank of New Zealand Art Awards. While she was there, she visited the Alexander Turnbull Library and met librarian Moira Long (since deceased). Having seen Beth's book work, Moira informed her of the first American National Conference of the Book Arts in New York and encouraged her to make contact with Claire, who was to be attending the conference. Beth wrote to Claire, who replied. In 1990 Beth attended the conference and met Claire for the first time. She showed Claire her work, *The Visionary*, and discovered that Claire had a special interest in lithography. While in New York, Beth invited Claire to lead the first New Zealand Book Arts Symposium that was to take place in Auckland in 1993. Impressed by Beth's skill exhibited in *The Visionary* and keen to encourage the book arts in New Zealand, she responded eagerly saying "wow, when?!" Beth exchanged *The Visionary* for a Janus Press publication which marked the beginning of the exchange of books between the women.

Elizabeth first encountered artist books and altered books (an alteration of an existing book achieved by making new folds or cuts) when she was on holiday in the United States. While in New York she visited a book exhibition at the American Craft Museum and was charmed by the intricate book works on display. She later learned that exhibitor and founder of Janus Press, Claire Van Vliet, was to be holding workshops at the Book Arts Symposium in 1993 in Auckland, and was very keen to be involved. The Symposium was intended for teachers of the craft, however, as luck would have it, a spare place became available and Elizabeth was quick to accept it. Since the initial connection was made with the Janus Press and Claire in particular, Elizabeth and Beth have maintained an ongoing relationship that has lasted over twenty years.



Installation image featuring *Tumbling Blocks* (1996) in foreground and *King Lear* (1986) in the background.

### Collaborations and Associations

According to Elizabeth Steiner, the influence of the Janus Press has been felt in New Zealand, since Claire's visit to the first Book Symposium in 1993. During the Symposium, Claire introduced New Zealand book makers to alternative book structures and non-adhesive bindings and the total design of the book and its content. The Symposium concluded with the making of a collaborative work called *Connections*, in which each participant created a page. A number of creative projects have grown out of the New Zealand association with Janus Press. New Zealand letterpress printer and poet Alan Loney has worked with Claire at her studio in Vermont. His poem features in the Janus Press publication, *Rise Governors Bay*. Another New Zealand book artist and participant at the 1993 Book Arts Symposium, William Cumming, has also visited Claire and worked with her. During one of Elizabeth's stays with Claire in Vermont, they co-authored *Woven and Interlocking Book Structures from the Janus, Steiner and Gefn Presses*, which is a teaching manual comprising of instructions and diagrams of different binding structures. Accompanying the manual are twelve 4×5 inch models, made using the binding structures described in the text. They were made to solve a problem: how best to serve the text. These directions and resulting models are the structure principles put forward in their simplest form. The structures presented in this book have inspired other people engaged in the book arts, both in New Zealand and internationally.



*Aunt Sallie's Lament* altered.2004



Installation image featuring  
*Greed* (2013)

Janus Press is also collaborating with New Zealand writer Keri Hulme. Keri Hulme gained international recognition when her novel *The Bone People* won The Booker Prize in 1985. Claire is working with Hulme to make a book using text provided by her. Most recently, the Janus Press made a book using text written by Auckland poet Judith Haswell. In the last few months the book was completed by the Janus Press and the very first copies will be exhibited for the first time at *Janus Press: The New Zealand Connection*. Judith Haswell has worked with Claire before, providing content that inspires the design of a totally unique creation. This is another work that demonstrates the ongoing connections between New Zealand practitioners and Janus Press. Also included in the exhibition, is a poster printed by Claire of Muriwai Beach. This poster was inspired by one of her three visits to New Zealand and reflects her fondness for not only New Zealanders, but for the land of our country.

#### **Exchange of works**

The collection of Janus Press publications acquired by Elizabeth and Beth individually, has partly developed from an exchange of books over a number of years. While the women have bought some books, much of their collection has grown from exchanges, and Elizabeth has gifted Claire one of everything she has made. The following books have been gifted from Claire to Elizabeth Steiner; *Greed*, *Paper Making at Hayle Mill*, *Waste Incant*, *The Circus of Doctor Lao*, *King Lear*, *April* (from

*Four Seasons, Four Months), and Tumbling Blocks.* Sharing of technical knowledge has taken place that reflects the collaborative nature of the connection between the Janus Press and New Zealand. Janus Press has adopted the binding structure designed by Elizabeth called *gioia*. The idea for this binding occurred to Elizabeth while spending time with her mother when she was in hospital at age ninety. She had an existing text by Judith Haswell, and was considering the possibilities of a non-adhesive binding structure. She had been exposed to American book maker Keith Smith who was experimenting with how to bind single pages using sewing thread, and thought she could bind a book using strips of paper, like ribbon. Elizabeth named the resulting structure *gioia* after her mother. The *gioia* binding is employed in *The ABC of Bugs and Plants*, and *Bone Song*, which are on display in the exhibition. Janus Press has since incorporated this kind of binding into a number of works, enabling them to bind the book together by weaving strips of paper through one another.

### **Exhibition and Conference**

*Janus Press: The New Zealand Connection* is being staged on the occasion of the first international conference hosted by the Association of Book Crafts New Zealand. The exhibition is an opportunity to tell the little known story of the significant involvement of New Zealanders with the internationally renowned Janus Press. Visitors will be able to view a collection of over twenty of these special books, which are held by Auckland book makers Elizabeth Steiner and Beth Serjeant, whose friendship with Claire Van Vliet spans more than twenty years. There will also be the opportunity to handle a few of these books, in order to study the design and structure more closely, as well as understand the special story that connects New Zealand with the Janus Press.

*Inside Outside, A Case for the Book* conference will be held at the City Campus of Auckland University of Technology from Friday 24th to Sunday 26th October 2014. The conference will provide a platform for discussion and interchange on all aspects of book production, the bindings and contents of both traditional and innovative structures. It will be attended by book makers and binders, librarians, conservators, teachers, collectors, writers, publishers, and members of The Association of Book Crafts. It will include a trade fair where book industry traders can network with professional and amateur bookbinders, craft printers, calligraphers, librarians and specialists in other related fields. Offshore guests including publisher Julie Chen from the United States, and book binder Dominic Riley from the United Kingdom are part of an exciting programme of events and presenters from the international and local book arts community which will span conservation, design, illustration, collection and making.

**For further information regarding the  
Association of the Book Crafts Conference visit:  
<http://abc-nz.org/>**

**The Association of Book Crafts Facebook page:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/NewZealandABC>  
and tweet using the hashtag #abc2014nz.

**Kate Shapiro, 8 October 2014**



*The Gospel of Mary.* 2006



*IT WAS LIKE THAT* (detail). 2014

## New Zealand Collaborations and Connections

The founder of Janus Press Claire Van Vliet enjoys working collaboratively and has worked with a number of New Zealand book artists, printers and writers including; Alan Loney, Judith Haswell, Keri Hulme, William Cumming, Beth Serjeant and Elizabeth Steiner. Claire's first New Zealand visit was to lead the inaugural Book Arts Symposium in 1993. In 2014 Janus Press has collaborated once again with Auckland poet Judith Haswell.

### **Connections (1993)**

A collaborative work composed by participants at the Auckland 1993 Book Arts Symposium, in which each participant created a page.

### **RISE Governors Bay Sept/Nov 2000 (2003)**

Features text by New Zealand letterpress printer and poet Alan Loney who has worked with Claire in her studio.

### **Woven and Interlocking Book Structures from the Janus, Steiner and Gefn Presses (2002)**

Was co-authored with Aucklander Elizabeth Steiner during a stay with Claire in Vermont. It is a teaching manual comprising instructions for different binding structures and includes twelve individual models made using the binding structures described in the text.

### **IT WAS LIKE THAT (2014)**

Features text by Auckland poet Judith Haswell. This very recent publication is being exhibited for the first time in New Zealand.

## Collected works

The works in this group are a selection of the Janus Press publications collected by Aucklanders Beth Serjeant and Elizabeth Steiner. They have been the principal facilitators of the ongoing relationships between New Zealanders and Janus Press. As book artists they relish the innovation and thoughtfulness of Janus Press publications.

### **Batterers (1996)**

Presents an unfolding paper pulp landscape to illustrate the story of a man dressing the wounds of a woman he has beaten. The totality of the elements — text accompanied by two very different paper structures — as well as the overall outer housing, present a terrifying saga.

### **Beauty In Use (1997)**

### **Praise Basted In: A Friendship Quilt for Aunt Sallie (1995)**

*Praise Basted In* and *Beauty In Use* are quilt books and the most traditionally 'feminine' of all the Janus Press books. The essential subject is community support and community activity. They are soft in 'feel' and in colour in terms of the patterned fabrics and papers employed throughout.



### **The Gospel of Mary (2006)**

Employs a further development of the woven-strip binding apparent in *RISE Governors Bay*.

### **Night Street (1993)**

### **Dido and Aneas (1989)**

## Gifted Works

The collections of Janus Press publications owned by Auckland book artists Beth Serjeant and Elizabeth Steiner have developed from their respect for and collaborations and friendship with Janus Press founder Claire Van Vliet. Upon meeting Claire in the U.S.A in 1990 Beth exchanged her book *The Visionary* for a Janus Press publication which marked the beginning of gift exchanges between Beth and Elizabeth, and Claire. The works in this group were all presented by Claire to her Auckland friends.

- Four Months, Four Seasons: October and April (2010)**
- Greed (2013)**
- King Lear (1986)**
- Paper Making at Hayle Mill (2008)**
- The Circus of Doctor Lao (1984)**
- Tumbling Blocks (1996)**
- Waste Incant (2007)**

## Posters

Printed by Janus Press. The poster of Muriwai Beach was inspired by one of Claire's three visits to New Zealand and reflects her fondness for not only the people, but for the land of our country.

- From Finland (1997)**
- Muriwai Beach**
- Muriwai Salad**
- Bob Lowry's Books**

## Techniques

These books demonstrate the variety of techniques used by the Janus Press.

### Aunt Sallies Lament, commercial (2002) and altered (2004)

In her usual 'waste-not, want-not' way, Claire Van Vliet altered a commercial publication *Aunt Sallies Lament* and in so doing converted it to a Janus Press publication. Maintaining the shapes of some of the commercially printed pages she also cut out shapes enabling other pages to become visible. She added elements including patterned papers, using collage and weaving techniques, to create a colourful and complicated format in contrast to the spare and delicate original *Aunt Sallies Lament*.

### ABC of Bugs and Plants in a Northern Garden Season (2012) Bone Songs (1992)

*The ABC of Bugs and Plants in a Northern Season* and *Bone Songs* employ the binding structure designed by Elizabeth Steiner called *Gioia*. The structure, named *Gioia* after Elizabeth's mother, allows the book to be bound together by weaving strips of paper through one another, like ribbon. Janus Press has since employed this non-adhesive binding for a number of works.

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intern Kate Shapiro.