



Duration

00:44:32

Reference

OH17

Subjects

Bookbinding / Material Conservation

Recording date

1 July 2015

Recording location

Interviewee's home, Argyll, Scotland

Interviewee

Shannon, Faith (FS – speaker, female)

Interviewer

Lin, Gloria (GL – speaker, female)

Synopsis

In this 2015 First Decade interview, the designer bookbinder Faith Shannon (b. 1938) describes the intricacies of bookbinding, providing an interesting insight into the thought process and technical procedures behind a work such as *Through the Looking Glass*, held in the Crafts Council Collection (1973; B5). Playfully describing bookbinding as a 'control freak of a craft', Shannon talks to Gloria Lin about the challenges of creating art for other people's literature, working around the story of the book, its function (it is meant to be read) and the material composition. She highlights the difficulties of material conservation, reflects on her past works and early determination in reviving the craft, and comments on the current 'anachronistic' state of bookbinding.

Recording

00:00 FS begins by talking about the 'craftsman'/'craftswoman' terminology debate.

06:03 FS describes her current work and talks about being '**obsessed (not obsessed – that's the wrong word [...] maybe I am!)**' with '**geology, stones, the make-up of the world and all the textural qualities and visual-textural qualities**' that influence her work, in the sense that she wants to capture the 'essence' of nature. She discusses poet George Mackay Brown and visiting Orkney.

10:58 FS describes the thought process behind her bookbinding and the technical process of combining her art with other people's literature. She highlights her *Alice in*



Wonderland pieces in the Crafts Council Collection (B5, B33): 'Because the illustrations [in *Alice in Wonderland*] are [already] so strong, I had to build on that and make them part of the "feely" child book but taking imagery from original drawings [...] so you want somebody to pick the book up and get a sense of "Oh that's quite interesting, let's explore it further" until you get to what it was that set you off on the train of thought.'

14:10 FS comments that: '[Bookbinding is] a control freak of a craft! [Laughs] You're dealing with other people's things!'

14:57 GL asks about the technical process of making the *Alice in Wonderland* books. FS reflects on the process in detail: 'It was the whole joy of trying to remember what it might be like going down that hole and to find out which part of the book you wanted to capture and lead you into the book [...] it was a balancing act of not making it too heavy physically [...] and again not being too – being very neat with it – and not being too cheesy [laughs].'

17:21 FS talks about the difficulties of material conservation in bookbinding, taking into account warping, discolouration and handling.

20:07 FS discusses her design for Raymond Briggs's *The Snowman*. She was concerned about people handling the white velvet book during a travelling exhibition.

26:35 FS recalls what initially drew her to bookbinding, stating that her art teacher at school had encouraged her to go to art school. FS highlights that she was mentored by Edgar Mansfield (a New Zealand craftsman credited with the revival of British bookbinding as a craft). She talks about developing painterly skills and applying open-mindedness to both painting and bookbinding.

31:48 FS reflects on changes in her craft between the 70s and now: 'not quite understanding how to relate at that point in some ways, what the book was about'.

35:21 FS talks about wanting to open up bookbinding and encourage people to get design training. She feels that bookbinding has become 'anachronistic'.

43:34 FS finishes by referring to designer bookbinding as a 'very intriguing form of a craft-art/art-craft, and there is this – you can't really divide the two because it's the craftsmanship that helps you to get [the art]'.