

Claire Van Vliet (b. 1933)

“When you work by hand you have the luxury of time that allows the materials to tell you what they want to be...I search for the right action, for the yes.” –CLAIRE VAN VLIET, 2006

Born in Ottawa, Canada, Claire Van Vliet spent her early childhood in England, where her father served in the Air Force. While living in England she had a nanny who took her long walks every day “even if the weather was bad...so I was in the landscape a lot. I suspect that those walks were very formative experiences that left me with a life long love of nature.”

She lost both parents before she reached the age fourteen and lived with an aunt in San Diego, California. She graduated from high school at fifteen, attended San Diego State College, and received an M.F.A. from Claremont Graduate University in 1954.

In 1955, Van Vliet began Janus Press, where her work straddled traditional book making and the production of innovative book formats and structures. She has worked as artist, typographer, printer, binder, and publisher. To date, she has published more than one hundred limited-edition artists' books.

Van Vliet says three interconnecting elements drive her work—text, imagery, and materials. Her work is often inspired by music and the written word; she enjoys “orchestrating all the parts of the book—type, imagery, materials, format, and structure—in the service of the text.” She often works with other writers, artists, printers, and binders, finding that the collaborative nature of bookmaking pushes her work and expands her ideas. The bindings she creates for her books are varied, including traditional codex, accordion fold, stitched, woven, and other inventive forms that spring from and enhance the meaning of the book.

While perhaps best known for her books, she is recognized for her work in a wide variety of media, including drawing, watercolor, pulp painting, woodcuts, etchings, and other printing methods, techniques she incorporates into her book works as well.

In 1989, after thirty-five years of work, she was awarded a fellowship from the MacArthur Foundation.

Selected Bibliography

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