

*WHERE FROM AND TO:
MULTIPLE BOOKWORKS, 1960 TO THE PRESENT*

The multiple bookwork grew up with the book art movement. Multiple bookworks are books produced from the drive to publish, to “make public.” They were often created in large numbers so as to reach the widest possible audience. Every major art movement since the 1960s has produced multiple bookworks. Conceptual artists appreciated the book’s sequential pagination that set their systems in motion. Activists from every movement including Feminism, gay rights, anti-racism, anti-war and environmentalism recognized the power that one book could exert, handed to a reader to be perused, absorbed, and then passed along to the next reader or mailed anywhere in the world. The multiple bookwork’s portability was matched by its affordability, key attributes in meeting an artist’s populist objectives.

Multiple bookworks appeared in increasing numbers beginning in the 1960s, fueled by a widespread desire to give voice just as a range of printing technologies became available. In addition to commandeering cylinder presses to produce relief-printed (letterpress) chapbooks, artists and writers gained access to commercial or office-based technologies to produce what is now called the multiple bookwork. As printing technologies have evolved, multiple bookwork artists have followed suit. In the 1960s, artists used the duplicating machines then present in offices, such as the mimeograph and the ditto machine. Later, artists gained access to photocopiers and then laser printers as those machines proliferated, and a few cooperatives formed to provide access to artist-run offset presses. Today’s home-based, potentially seamless input-output avenue to self-publishing began as an option in the 1980s with the rapid expansion of home computing. Desktop publishing plugged into dot-matrix, then laser, and now inkjet printers—or today’s artists may outsource printing entirely, to POD (print on demand). Although the content of the multiple bookwork is often serious, some artists employ humor and sculptural structures to engage and involve their readers.

The multiple bookworks on show here were created over a sixty-year span, and come from the library collection of Minneapolis College of Art and Design.