

FULL FLOW by Alan Isaac

Its timing can be fairly exactly stated, very close to 6.00p.m, its position, it would be invidious to say – as this was no competition – but the appearance of it held some significance. 'It' was the first small red disc, indicating a sale, and coming moments after the official opening of the private view presaged another successful exhibition/sale of designed bindings at the Flow Gallery at Notting Hill, West London.

The space was well suited to the display – spare, light, with white walls and perimeter shelving and tables of varying height – very quickly filled with a varied gathering – binders, both established and emerging with their supporters, naturally, some notable collectors, but also a high proportion of young people- and a surprising mother with toddlers and a buggy! The setting of books largely on open shelves was a courageous statement of intent and one helpful and enticing to all ages.

As for the works themselves – the number on offer and the diversity of creative energy could only be admired. Although the occasion was not ideally suited to close examination of the books as it proved to be a very popular attraction, it was a compelling opportunity to talk, with small groups spilling out on to the pavement outside.

A range of styles and techniques were on show – from the sculptured artefacts incorporating animal forms to the more conventional leather with onlays and the traditional use of vellum. The promotional flyers depicted what was for me a very successful binding by Kate Holland, 'A Book of Mediterranean Food'. Bound in hand dyed turquoise alum-tawed goatskin, with concentric circles of gold dots, and on-laid leather spots of yellow to orange radiating out across the spine on to the boards – which combined a simplicity and grace with an assurance of execution. However, if one had had a jacket with poachers' pockets and a conscience to match, one would undoubtedly have headed home with Stuart Brockman's two Doves volumes, Press and Bindery, with watercolour



paintings of the Thames side locale, covered in transparent velum – a bright up-lifting binding, supremely rendered. But the red dots appeared again – quite understandably. The work of Lester Capon and Derek Hood, both in the throng, drew understandable attention. There was a small work, written, illustrated and bound by Philip Smith, with sculptured figures covered by onlays and maril, undoubtedly a rarity, which was on offer at an eye-smarting £4,115.

Anecdotal accounts indicate that quite apart from an entertaining and enlightening evening the show was a financial triumph for both binders and gallery. I understand that some collectors bought in large numbers. Despite the promoters message that books were available for as little as £50 there was in fact very little under four figures. For perspective, it would be interesting to know the ratio of sales to buyers and to be able to chart some evidence of, resurgence in collecting extending beyond that of the seriously wealthy. For the 40 or so binders represented, and others who will have taken inspiration from them, shows of this kind can only be welcomed and those concerned in hosting and organising them applauded. This looks certain to warrant a fixture in the binding calendar.

COVERED Beauty and Art in Contemporary Bookbinding 17-26 May 2007. Flow 1-5 Needham Road, London. Although the exhibition has now closed some images of the books shown can still be seen on the gallery web site at www.flowgallery.co.uk

