

University for the Creative Arts  
Research Project Portfolios

# Yappo

By Iro Tsavala



# Project Details

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Name of Researcher:	Iro Tsavala
Co-researcher:	Henry Martin (writer)
Name of Output:	<i>Yappo</i>
UCARO link/s:	<a href="https://research.uca.ac.uk/5318/">https://research.uca.ac.uk/5318/</a>
Output Type:	L – Artefact; artist’s book disseminated through publication and exhibitions
Year and mode of dissemination:	<p>ART BOOK Tsavala, Iro, and Henry Martin (2017) <i>Yappo</i>. London: Company Cod. ISBN: 9781999725006</p> <p>EXHIBITIONS <i>‘Yappo’, Said the Man</i>, The Poetry Cafe - Poetry Society, London, UK, 23 October - 9 December 2017 Dromineer Literary Festival, Ireland, 4 - 7 October 2018</p>
Key Words:	Illustration, collaboration, narrative development, narrative structure, research on location
External Funding:	<p>Tipperary Artists Award 2017: €500</p> <p>In-kind support: space provided by The Poetry Society for <i>Yappo</i> book launch and exhibition</p>

# Synopsis

*Yappo* is a research output created by the illustrator and researcher Iro Tsavala in collaboration with author Henry Martin. The research comprises an illustrated book and two exhibitions.

*Yappo* tells the story of a nameless, mostly silent man, who protects a small plant as he walks through the wilderness. During his travels, he meets a milliner, a butcher, a dog and a mermaid, each of whom requests a leaf from his plant. The man refuses to comply, muttering 'Yappo'. The book rejects easy categorization, causing the reader to question whether it is a novel, a picture book, both, or neither.

In both the book and exhibitions, Tsavala used the journey through landscape to suggest mood and emotion, allowing for different interpretations of text and images by each reader. The exhibitions, at the Poetry Society and Dromineer Literary Festival, combined framed images with an installation of sculptures. These were objects collected during Tsavala's

research/drawing walks in the Scottish Highlands and provided the viewer with an insight into the developmental stages of the project, in addition to creating a more immersive experience of the story's world.

As discussed in a peer-reviewed journal article, 'Book journey: an illustrator and a writer discuss their collaboration', Tsavala and Martin investigate the parallel development of text and images as a new method of constructing narrative, reflecting on the research. This method entails the deconstruction of a direct message, presenting a poetic and open-ended storyline that allows for the reader's input into the meaning of the work.

The supporting portfolio includes evidence of the research aims, context and processes which led to new insights. It is illustrated throughout with images featured in the book and exhibitions. The portfolio also includes a PDF of the book. The journal article is appended for context, reflecting on the research process.









*Illustration from Yappo*



*Illustration from Yappo*

# Research Questions and Aims

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## Research questions:

Can an artist and a writer jointly develop a narrative where image and text mutually evolve?

Can this process result in a narrative that is both coherent and maintains the voices of the individuals?

If so, what benefits would there be for the individual practices and artforms?

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## Research aims:

To explore how a writer and an artist can jointly develop content, a process that challenges the illustration discipline that remains at the mercy of trends, editorial themes, and methods that very often restrict creativity.

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# Context

As an author-illustrator Tsavala works with text, both her own and other authors', with the aim of making words and images interact with each other in playful ways. Her work is influenced by contemporary thinking around illustration research, such as John Vernon Lord's discussion of the requirement of an illustrator to honour the text without the need to 'reinforce a viewer's expectation of the text' (Lord in Braund, 2012). According to this school of thought, the role of the image does not need to be functional or subservient to the narrative. Steve Braund (2012) has also drawn attention to the role of the 'authorial illustrator', a classification that is employed as a means of exploring and discussing 'areas where the illustrator creates, originates or personally influences the content of the communication'. With the collaborative project *Yappo*, Tsavala attempted to create images that exist poetically and independently alongside author Henry Martin's text.

*Yappo* considers not only the role of illustrator and author, but also the role of the reader. In his essay 'The book as symbolic object' Regis Debray (1995) considers the reader 'a second writer and active partner. He can enter into the landscape of meaning and modify his architecture as he wishes. Once monologue, the text becomes dialogue'. In *Yappo*, Tsavala and Martin attempt to establish a dialogue with the reader by creating a balance between textual ambiguity and visual clues and *vice versa*.

The research thus builds upon the ways in which poets and artists have sought to develop joint forms of expression in the past and considers how the construction of meaning can be dependent on interpretation and individual experience. Such an approach is articulated within the opening pages of *Ralentir Travaux*, as André Breton (1990) introduces his collection of collaborative poetry with René Char and Paul Éluard with the following: 'Everybody has seen a table but when we say

table the trouble is that right now this table is for M. Breton a café table (because he drinks), for M. Char a gambling table (because he does not gamble), for M. Éluard an operating table (because this morning he passed by the Place de l'Opéra). If any one of these gentlemen says table, you see what comes of it'.

This approach to the active role of the reader has also been enacted within Leanne Shapton's (2009) *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris*. Telling a love story through an invented auction catalogue, Shapton invites the reader to piece together and interpret the fragments of narrative that accompany each object, offering clues on the progress of a failing relationship. The desire to allow the reader/viewer a creative role is one of the defining concepts of *Yappo*'s collaborative process and of the final product and exhibition. *Yappo* – both in terms of image and text – would mean something different to each reader, who brings their own sensibility, memories and visual lexicon to the experience.

## REFERENCES

- Braund, S., Morgan, C. and Osmond, M. eds. (2012) *The Authorial Illustrator: 10 Years of the Falmouth Illustration Forum*. Atlantic Press.
- Breton, A., René Char and Paul Éluard (1930; 1990) *Ralentir Travaux: Slow Under Construction*. Cambridge, MA: Exact Change Press.
- Debray R. (1995) 'Dematerialization and Desecration — The Book as a Symbolic Object'. *Le Débat* 86 (4), pp. 14-21. DOI: 10.3917/deba.086.0014.
- Shapton, L. (2009) *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris*. London: Bloomsbury.

# Research Methods and Process

The collaboration began when writer Henry Martin gave Tsavala a draft poem called *Yappo*. Through a series of exchange exercises each then altered the narrative's direction through their medium; Martin responded in writing to Tsavala's visuals and Tsavala responded with imagery. The process continued until the artists were ready to edit the collected material jointly. Surrendering authorial control was a departure for each of the artists but Martin and Tsavala wanted to establish their 'narrative' through mutual influence. This meant that both words and images were equal in narrative importance, with the further implication that this would invite an alternative reading experience between text and image.

The initial text prompted Tsavala to create work on location in the Scottish Highlands as the landscape resonates with the tone the text creates. The objective was to retain a strong tactile quality. Tsavala conducted preliminary visual research in different Scottish Highlands locations and further developed the collected material through printmaking and drawing techniques. Tsavala used walking and the idea of the journey to gather visual references, building upon a tradition of artists who have woven the act of walking into the creative process, such as the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō. For Tsavala, these walks provided a metaphorical way of communicating the ideas of adventure, isolation and silence that are discussed in the narrative.

*Yappo* unfolds in a land somewhere between the real and the fantastic, so despite the influence of Scotland on the work, Tsavala's aim was not to create imagery descriptive only of the Highlands. Instead, she wanted to work with the unique elements of the landscape to create metaphors, placing the man's character in a plausible yet otherworldly land. In this,

Tsavala creates a cinematic experience, giving or withholding visual information.

The resulting images in *Yappo* are largely devoid of people, yet there are hints of human presence through human-made structures and technology: an aeroplane, telephone poles, a washing line, etc. These images suggest a distance from society but not complete disengagement, creating a welcome visual dialogue between the imaginary and the real which is echoed in the text. The images also feature monoprints and frottage, direct and physical mark-making: an attempt to reference the experience of a) the journey, b) observing and walking the land, and c) leaving physical traces behind.

The two artists tested ways to juxtapose these images and the text, creating a dialogue with each other and with the reader. In this way, it was possible to create innovative storytelling combinations, where words can say one thing and images purposefully hint at another. They also experimented with the pages' rhythm and pace to not only explore the theme of pilgrimage but to create a sense of either distance or closeness for the reader depending on their interpretation.

Although Tsavala and Martin surrendered authorial control of meaning, they formally controlled the design and production which has an impact on the reading experience. For example, the book's size, how tactile and thin the paper is, how much text goes on each page, and how much reading time each spread commands, are ways that a reader's experience can be subtly manipulated. The book can appear deceptively simple but presents exciting possibilities when the reader assumes a more active role. *Yappo* is an interactive object where the reader's sensibility and handling dictate part of the experience.



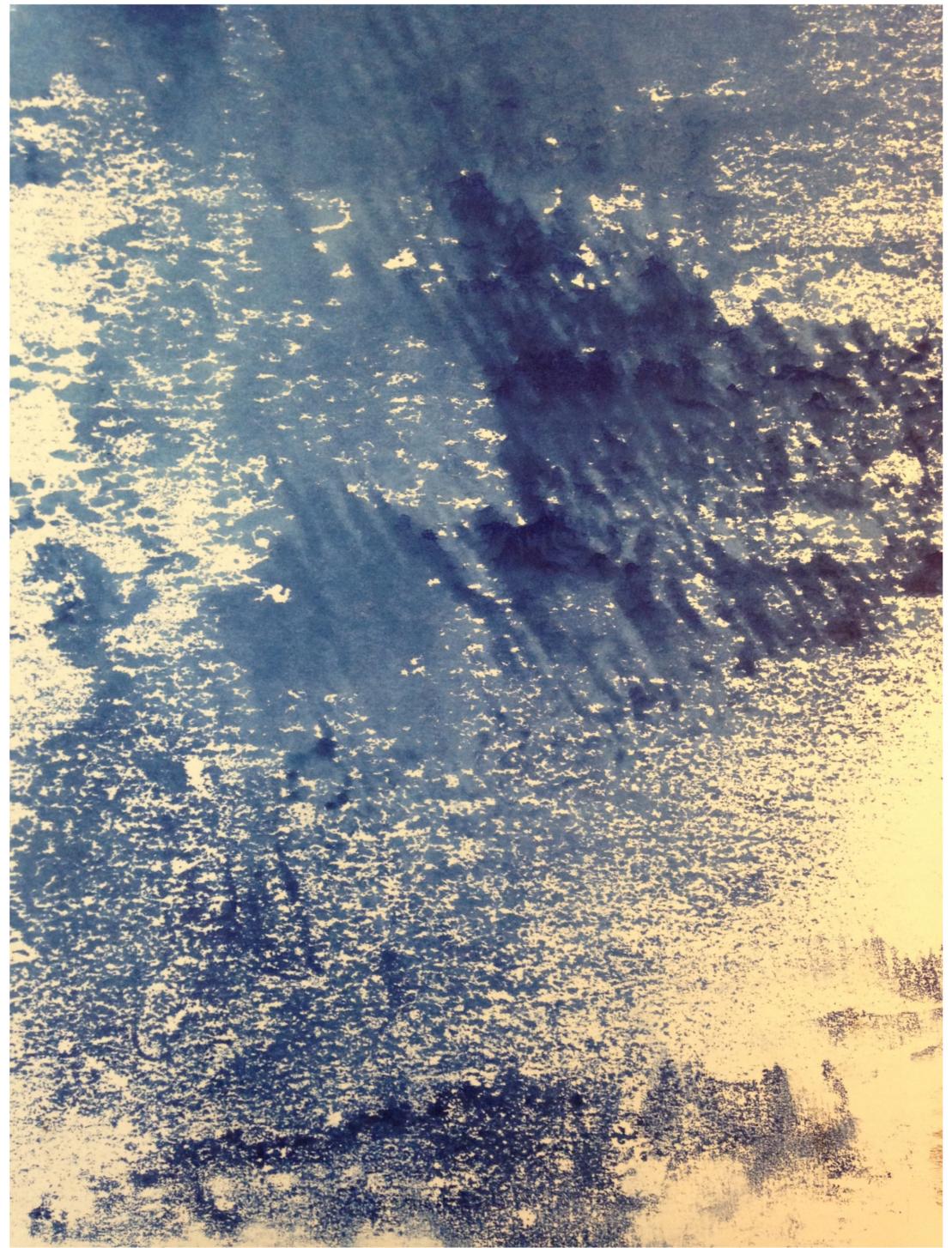
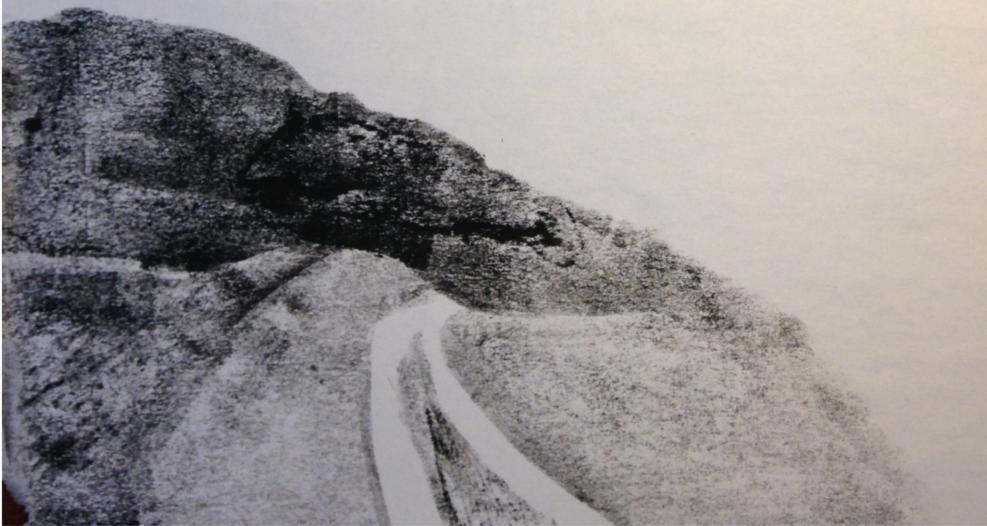
*Yappo development: artist's photographs*



*Yappo development: artist's photographs*



*Yappo development: artist's photographs and drawings*



*Yappo development: artist's photographs and drawings*

# Research Contribution, Dissemination and Recognition

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## Research contribution and insights:

Through *Yappo*, the authors establish a dialogue with the reader by surrendering authorial control of meaning but formally controlling the design and production as an essential part of the reading experience. The reader is invited to pay attention to the pauses, quiet moments, and the things that are left unsaid, to contemplate, speculate, and delve into the book's philosophy.

The research is thus a new entry in a field which rarely breaks from established and restricted methods of creativity. In particular, the combination of the collaborative process with the ambiguous narrative and illustration mark a development in illustration research surrounding the role of the reader.

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## Dissemination details:

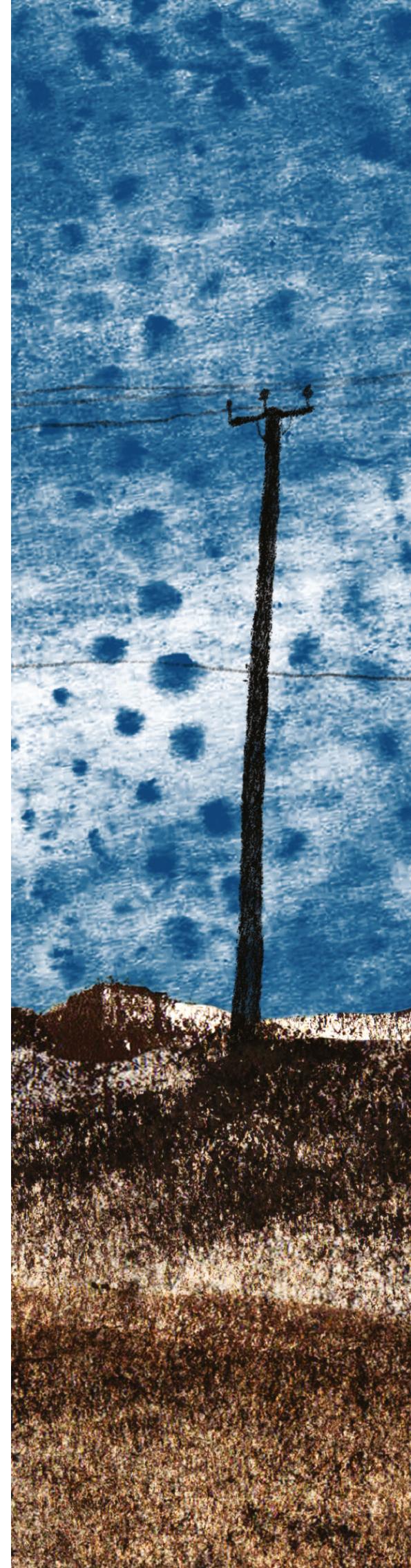
**BOOK**  
Limited edition, 300 copies

### EXHIBITIONS

*'Yappo', Said the Man*, The Poetry Society, Covent Garden, London

The venue supports visual arts, poetry, readings & critical discussions and is supported by the Arts Council England. Sixty guests attended the private view. The exhibition was attended by approximately 30 - 40 visitors per day over six weeks.

*Yappo* exhibition at Dromineer Literary Festival 2018. This Festival has brings together writers and readers, nurturing and celebrating creative expression. Approximately 200 people had access to the exhibition over the weekend. 1,500 brochures and 40 posters were printed and distributed, featuring the artwork.



# Research Contribution, Dissemination and Recognition

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Further dissemination:

CONFERENCE

‘Yappo’ in Shaping the View: Understanding Landscape Through Illustration

A practice-based presentation/discussion between the writer Henry Martin and illustrator Iro Tsavala concerning their collaborative project *Yappo*, at that point a work-in-progress (<https://ir7shapingtheviewspeakers.wordpress.com/2016/09/06/iro-tsavala/>).

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Follow-on activities:

ARTICLES

‘Book journey: An illustrator and a writer discuss their collaboration’.

In this peer reviewed article for the Journal of Illustration, Tsavala and Martin articulate the research content and processes at length ([https://doi.org/10.1386/jill.5.1.157\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1386/jill.5.1.157_7)).

‘*Yappo*: a book about a man and a plant – interview’.

In this interview both Tsavala and Martin expand upon the collaborative processes which led to *Yappo*, and Tsavala discusses her particular methods for the illustrations. Since its launch in 2013, the Planthunter has grown an international reputation for its commitment to communicating the natural world’s importance through storytelling (<https://theplanthunter.com.au/artdesign/yappo-book-man-plant/>).

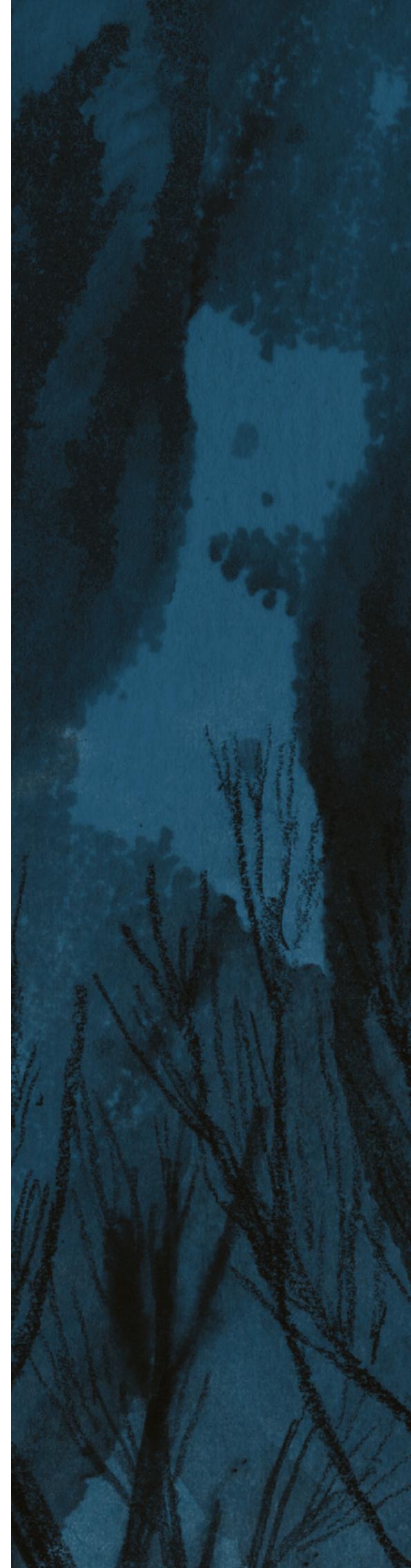
BOOK EVENT

Tsavala participated in the Bristol Artist’s Book Event in March 2019, the seventh biennial festival featuring the work of bookmakers and small presses from around the world. A selection of *Yappo* illustrations was exhibited.

PUBLICATION

Tsavala was then invited to contribute artwork for Volume 13 No 2 of the peer-reviewed *Blue Notebook*. The work submitted was the result of the research in preparation for *Yappo*.

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*Yappo book*







*'Yappo', Said the Man, exhibition at the Poetry Society. Objects collected during the research/drawing walks in the Scottish Highlands.*

Yappo artwork in Volume 13 No 2 of the peer reviewed publication the Blue Notebook.



#### REFEREES' BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Anne Bécard-Léauté is a Lecturer at the University of Saint-Etienne, France, where she teaches design and translation for the Department of English and the Visual Arts Department. She co-heads the MPhil in Artists' Books and Art Book Publishing (Master 2 Professionnel *Libron d'art / Livre d'artiste*) with Dr Laurence Tuot. It is the first course of its kind in France. In 1999 Anne obtained a PhD in Art History from the University of Cambridge and has since developed a special interest in intercultural studies and the relationship between languages and design, including editorial design. She has translated a number of design and art history books, mainly for Phaidon and Thames & Hudson. She is currently translating Stanley William Hayter's writings into French. She has also just edited the book *La traduction comme source de création*, Neuville-sur-Saône, Chemins de tr@verse, Les cahiers d'ALLhis n°5, 2018.

Maria Fusco is a Belfast-born writer based in Glasgow, working across fiction, criticism and theory, her work is translated into ten languages. Her latest books are *Give Up Art: Collected Critical Writings* (Los Angeles/Vancouver: New Documents, 2017) and *Legend of the Necessary Dreamer* (London: Vanguard Editions, 2017) which is described by Chris Kraus as "a new classic of female philosophical fiction". *Master Rock*, a repertoire for a mountain commissioned by Artangel and BBC Radio 4 has been experienced by more than two million listeners. Her solo-authored books are *With A Bao A Qu Reading When Attitudes Become Form* (New Documents, 2013), *Gonda*, 2012 and *The Mechanical Copula*, 2011 (Sternberg Press) and she is founder of *The Happy Hypocrite*, a journal for and about experimental writing. In 2009-10, she was the inaugural writer in residence at Whitechapel Gallery in London, and in 2008-9, the inaugural critic in residence at The Kadat Art Foundation in Paris. Maria is Professor of Fine Art at Northumbria University, Visiting Professor at Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach am Main, Frankfurt (2018-2021). Previously, Research Fellow at Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam (2018), Reader at University of Edinburgh and Director of Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. <http://mariafusco.net>

Susan Johanknecht is an artist and writer working under the imprint of Gefn Press. She recently completed the long-term project *Poetry of Unknown Words* with Katharine Meynell. This collaboration is a feminising response to Iliad's *La Poesie de mots inconnus* (1949) and is comprised of a series of transcriptions, using an expanded sense of authorship and relationship with others through time. In 2017 Kingsgate Projects hosted *Bookmare 2, of average sunlight*, which Johanknecht co-curated with Finlay Taylor, inviting contemporary

practitioners to respond to duration, light and environmental change. The sixteen artists' books were displayed on an integral shelf structure, offering a small library to browse. Susan Johanknecht was Subject Leader of MA Book Arts, Camberwell College of Arts from 1997-2018. <http://www.gefnpress.co.uk>

Jeff Rathermel is an artist, educator and arts administrator who lives and works in the United States. He is the Director and Curator of the Perlman Teaching Museum at Carleton College, one of the nation's leading liberal arts institutions. In addition to curatorial and educational responsibilities, Rathermel oversees Carleton's permanent and reserve art collections. Previously, he served as the Executive and Artistic Director of Minnesota Center for Book Arts. Rathermel holds Bachelors and Masters of Fine Arts degrees from the University of Minnesota where he studied printmaking, hand papermaking, digital arts and traditional binding. He has curated and organised countless book art exhibitions and his personal artwork has been shown and collected internationally. <https://apps.carleton.edu/museum/>

Dr Paulo Silveira lives in Porto Alegre, Brazil. He has degrees in Fine Art (drawing and painting) and Communications, and a PhD in Visual Arts - History, Theory and Criticism, from the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Paulo is Professor for Art History of the Instituto de Artes at UFRGS, and also a member of the Comitê Brasileiro de História da Arte, CBHA (Brazilian Committee for the History of Art). He is the author of *A página violada* (the violated page) 2001, and regularly writes articles on contemporary art and artists' books. He is a member (heading the artists' books section) of the research group Veículos da Arte - Vehicles of Art, and coordinates the Fundar, research group on the establishers of contemporary art (UFRGS-CNPq).

Ulrike Stoltz is an artist who lives and works in Germany and Italy. Her focus is on books, typography, texts, drawings, and installations. Former Professor for Typography and Book Art and Design at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig, Germany. Together with Uta Schneider, she was invited as keynote speaker for *Artists' Books Brisbane Event - ABBE 2017* at Griffith University, Queensland College of Art, Brisbane, Australia. The conference theme was *folding: books*; keynotes and contributions were published in the *Journal of Artists' Books*. A short extract of the keynote was published in *«susus» artists' publication/newspaper z.B. / zum Beispiel / zum Buch // for example / about books #13*, October 2017. The mindmap drawn for the keynote is also available as an artist's publication. Co-founder and member of Unica T ("a fictitious person making real books") for 15 years, until the group split in 2001. She has continued in artistic collaboration for almost 30 years with Uta Schneider as «susus». <http://www.boatbook.de>



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COVER IMAGES  
*Illustrations from Yappo book*

