

A BOOK OF ONE'S OWN

own paper, she found that she produced more than she could use and set out to find another way to incorporate it into her art.

"It just seems sort of a natural progression from papermaking to bookbinding," explains Hofacker, commenting on a common avenue for the artist travelling toward bookbinding.

Susan Hensel

A fellow traveller along that same road, Susan Hensel has been an artist and writer for what seems, she says, all of her life. For twenty years, she worked in porcelain, creating both functional and decorative pieces. During

"When an artist changes her output to handmade paper, books are rarely far behind," explains Hensel. "Almost every person I know who works with handmade paper tries at least a few books."

When clay left her studio and paper moved in, rubber stamps came, too; and Hensel currently incorporates stamping into about 25 percent of her books. She'd use more, she says, but the copyright restrictions hinder their use in books she makes for sale. Since her books have been exhibited throughout her home state of Michigan and as far away as California and New York, she has gained an audience eager to purchase what she makes.

"I have always considered my stamp

Hensel uses these tools the old-fashioned way, masking a lot and adding little, if any, color. She prefers fine printer's cuts or images made to look like engravings. She employs these as "expressions of conscience" that illustrate her narratives, which she calls "Cautionary Tales."

One of these tales is *Bless the Watchman*. Bound in supple black leather and completely stamped throughout, this pictorial narrative-without-text is one Hensel created in response to Desert Storm (see page 103).

"Part of my function as an artist and as a human being is to say, 'Hey, folks, watch what's going on here,'" she explains. "I feel it's my moral duty to point out what I see as wrong."

Some of these books, like *Bless the Watchman*, she felt absolutely compelled to do. Others are less serious, but no less impressive. Her series of stamped wedge-shaped accordion books is one example. She calls these her "Pie in the Sky" books.

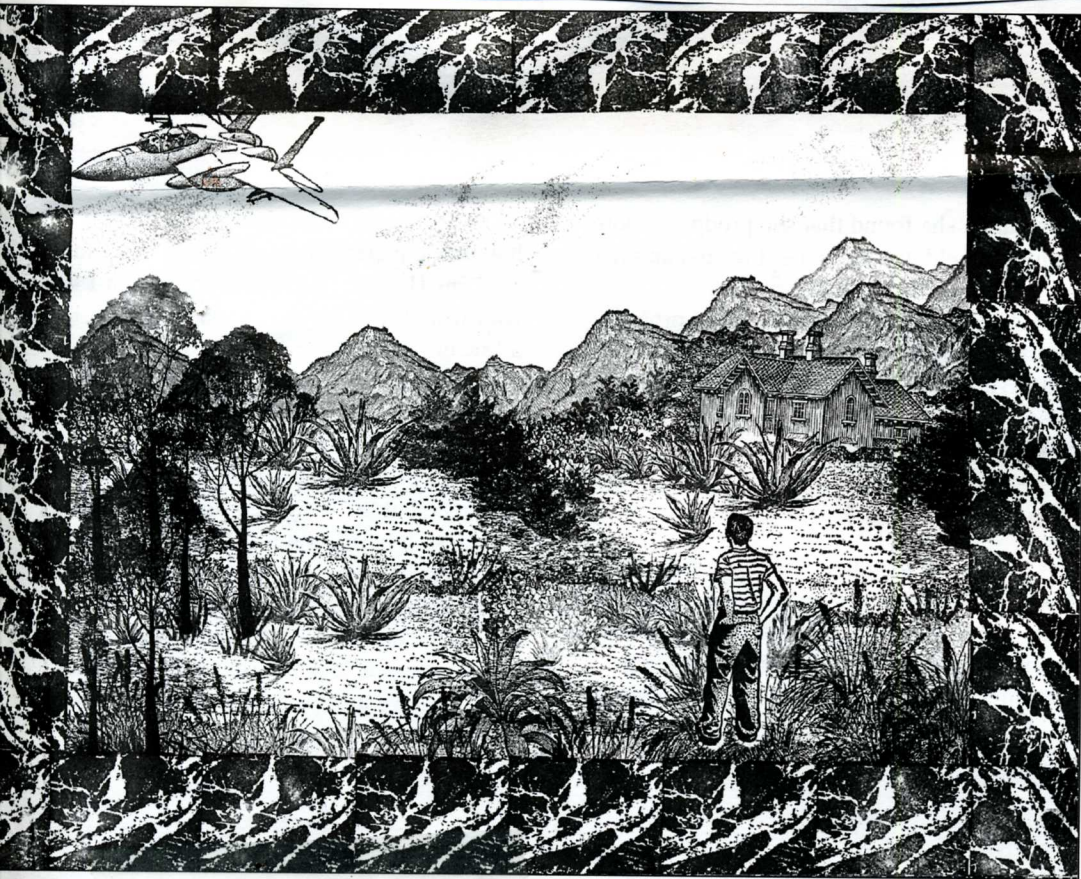
"As a book artist," Hensel says, "I'm concerned with communicating intimately with the viewer. It's important to me that the viewer be able to hold and read and receive through many senses the messages of my books."

Hensel has discovered that bookbinding utilizes skills other than stamping, allowing her to "paint, draw, print, collage, make the paper, sew, glue, cut, paste, build boxes and stands, write and collect all kinds of weird trash that might be useful someday."

The studio where Hensel creates these marvels is a necessity, "an environment conducive to creativity." She believes it's imperative to have everything on hand and within reach.

"I have a computer and printer, lots of reference materials, a copy machine, good music and talk radio, and all kinds of trash: collections of old text, collections of postcards, trading cards, postage, stickers, feathers, clip art, old photos, beads, all kinds of threads, cloth, many choices of paper, adhesives, all kinds of paints and pencils and pens, every color available of Brush Boxes and Cat's Eye ink pads." She says that if she had to go out and shop for something she needed, she'd never get anything made.

In her studio, Hensel listens to music and her inner voice, and if that voice is silent, she says, "I find that playing with rubber stamps will awaken it." Once awakened, that voice leads her to make books.



Susan Hensel, from *Bless the Watchmen*, 9 by 11^{3/4} inches.

those years she found herself approaching papermaking with greater and greater interest. Ten years later, she says the only clay left in her studio are the forgotten scraps the dog finds under the potter's wheel. And for Hensel, as for Hofacker, making paper led, inevitably, to bookbinding.

work to be just as serious as my non-stamp work, but the copyright situation has required that I treat it more like a hobby," Hensel says. "I am, however, in the process of converting my rubber stamp collection over to stamp companies that allow artists to use their stamps as tools."