

# PRESSING ON

## Homage to Hannah More

Artist's Books by  
CAROLE KUNSTADT



An Exhibition in the Vassar College Art Library  
October 23 - December 15, 2023



## Introduction

Artists' books are works which by their nature stand out from the population of ordinary books in a break from the world of our daily use of things as objects. This is true of all tools, which only claim our direct attention when they are broken or otherwise unusable. Printed books are an exemplary case of this equipmental principle of transparency. All ordinary books are most successful when they and their texts become invisible to us in the act of reading: they transport our attention elsewhere.

In her series of artist's books, *PRESSING ON: Homage to Hannah More*, the artist Carole Kunstadt presses upon our attention a single book. This is a religious tract published by the English writer, reformer, and educator Hannah More, printed in London in 1791 and entitled *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World, by One of the Laity*. Kunstadt alters this book by disassembling it and interleaving its text, so to speak, with a series of other tools removed from their context of usability. In this case this is the household hand tool historically familiar to housekeepers and servants throughout Western culture until the early twentieth century: the now-antique sad iron. Adding bits of paper, lace, lambs wool, fur, tacks, and linen thread, some of these materials scorched and some

not, Kunstadt mediates between the worlds of clothing and fabric that are the irons' domain and the world of textual materials out of which physical books are constituted. Hannah More's book, these materials, and the irons collectively constitute works of art. As such they transport us from the ordinary flow of our relationship to our objects to an extraordinary space where these *book-irons*, as things, reveal worlds, historic and present, in a happening of truth in which our ordinary objectification of these things is cast into relief. We see irons and books anew as things in a universe of fellow things with which we share a world. These new beings seem to have their own agency, to form assemblies, to take on personalities, to call to us, to have something to tell us about themselves and the histories they bring to share with us. In the illuminating circle of the truth of the work of art, they have leapt from being *objects* to being *things*, which helps us to recognize what is assumed, as well as what is lost, in the act of using equipment. What is at risk, they seem to tell us, in turning things to our use, is our own objectification and invisibility.

Hannah More's own important historical contribution to our world happens to be very much about the question of the complete objectification of human beings when they are robbed of their status as free beings and made invisible as human tools. A gifted writer from a young age, More's talent led initially to her success as a poet and playwright, and her popular feminist tragedy *Percy* brought her fame and fortune as well as an appreciative and sympathetic national audience. As she grew to be an outspoken public intellectual, More extended her influence in mid-life by writing political tracts and literary works to promote the abolition of slavery. She also devoted herself to shoring up Britain's fragile parliamentary democracy in the period of the American and French revolutions by establishing schools, many through More's own philanthropy, which educated thousands of poor and working children in England, including young women.

Although this copy of her book has been dismembered for the purposes of creating this series, one effect of *Pressing On*, particularly in the context of our library, is to urge us to re-member and pay homage to Hannah More by allowing the threads of her text to draw us into the library stacks to connect ourselves to her writings and to histories of the society that nurtured them. We might also take into consideration Carole Kunstadt's choice of words for the work's title, *Pressing On*, which reminds us that the struggle between freedom and servitude, presence and invisibility, whether individual or collective, requires our continued attention and application.

Thomas Hill

**PRESSING ON: Homage to Hannah More** - utilizes pages from *An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World, by One of the Laity*, London, 1791 by Hannah More, combined with antique sad irons.

Shelf - Identification List:  
(clockwise/left to right)

**1.**

No. 68 - scorched lace and paper, 3.5 x 2.25 x 2.75 in. 2018;  
No. 46 - scorched linen thread, paper, 5.25 x 3.75 x 18 in. 2018;  
No. 5 - scorched linen thread, paper, 4 x 3 x 8 in. 2017.



**2.**

No. 84 - scorched linen thread and paper, 9 x 7.5 x 5 in. 2018;  
No. 54 - scorched lace and paper, 6 x 4 x 5 in. 2018;  
No. 86 - scorched doily and paper, 8 x 8 x 7 in. 2018.





### 3.

- No. 22 - scorched lace and paper, 3.5 x 1.75 x 1 in. 2017;  
No. 12 - scorched lace, sandpaper, paper, 5.5 x 3.5 x 4.5 in. 2017;  
No. 89 - scorched doily and paper, 6.5 x 5.5 x 5.5 in. 2018;  
No. 10 - scorched lace, paper, 3.5 x 2.25 x 2.5 in. 2017.



### 4.

- No. 95 - scorched sandpaper and paper, 3.5 x 2.25 x 2.75 in 2018;  
No. 66 - scorched paper, steel cut tacks, 4.5 x 2.75 x 4.25 in. 2018;  
No. 27 - scorched paper, steel cut tacks, 2.75 x 1.75 x 2.25 in. 2017;  
No. 53 - steel cut tacks, scorched paper, 1.75 x 1.325 x 1.75 in. 2018.



### 5.

- No. 35 - linen thread, paper, 2.5 x 1.75 x 2.5 in. 2018;  
No. 33 - linen thread, paper, 6.5 x 4 x 4.5 in. 2018;  
No. 97 - linen thread and paper, 2.25 x 1.5 x 1.75 in. 2019;  
No. 105 - linen thread, paper, 3 x 2 x 4.75 in. 2019.



## 6.

No. 24 - scorched textile, linen thread and paper, 5.5 x 3.5 x 4.5 in. 2017;

No. No. 21 - scorched cotton, linen thread and paper, 6.5 x 4 x 5.5 in. 2017;

No. 30 - textile, scorched thread and paper, 5.5 x 3.75 x 4.5 in. 2018.



## 7.

No. 8 - scorched linen thread and paper, 6 x 3.75 x 10 in. 2017;

No. 1 - linen thread, sandpaper, paper; 6.5 x 3.5 x 3.5 in, 2017;

No. 92 - scorched linen thread and paper, 7 x 6.5 x 4.5 in. 2018.



## 8.

No. 63 - re-purposed fox fur, scorched paper, 9 x 6 x 7.5 in. 2018;

No. 117 - scorched paper, re-purposed grey mink, 6 x 3.75 x 5 in. 2022;

No. 119 - scorched paper, re-purposed raccoon fur, 7 x 6 x 6.5 in. 2022.



## 9.

No. 83 - scorched paper, 3.25 x 2 x 2 in. 2018;

No. 88 - scorched linen thread and paper, 6.5 x 4.25 x 4.5 in. 2018;

No. 107 - scorched paper, 2.5 x 1.625 x 1.625 in. 2019;

No. 98 - scorched linen thread and paper, 5.5 x 4 x 2.25 in. 2019.



## 10.

No. 94 - re-purposed raccoon fur, scorched paper, 4 x 3.5 x 2.75 in. 2018;

No. 115 - scorched paper, re-purposed raccoon fur, 5.25 x 4.5 x 6 in. 2022;

No. 114 - scorched paper, re-purposed raccoon fur, 3 x 4 x 4 in. 2021.





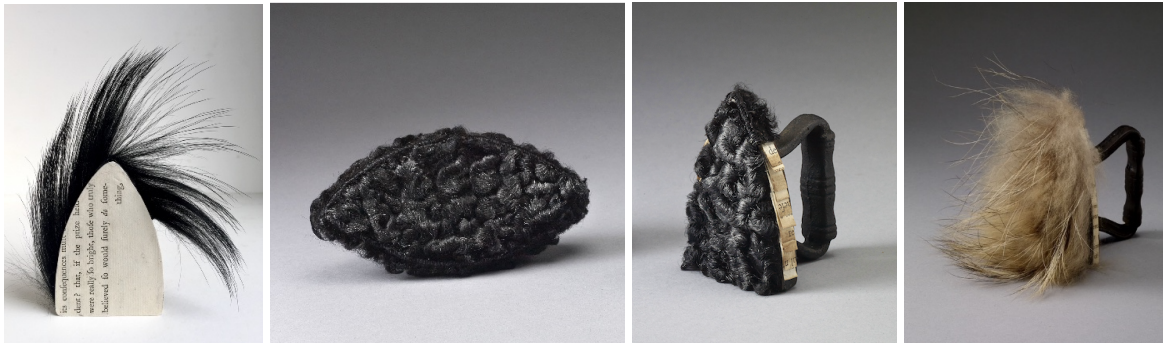
## 11.

No. 102 - re-purposed fur, paper, 5 x 4 x 2.5 in. 2019;

No. 56 - re-purposed lambs wool, scorched paper, 4.5 x 2.25 x 1.5 in. 2018;

No. 62 - lambs wool, scorched paper, 2.75 x 1.75 x 2 in. 2018;

No. 60 - re-purposed fox fur, scorched paper, 6 x 5.5 x 5.5 in. 2018.



## 12.

No. 87 - scorched doily and paper, 3.5 x 2.5 x 2.5 in. 2018;

No. 16 - lace, scorched paper, 5.5 x 3.5 x 4.5 in. 2017;

No. 72 - scorched lace and paper, 2.125 x 1.625 x 1.5 in. 2018;

No. 73 - scorched lace and paper, 5.25 x 3.5 x 4.75 in. 2018;

No. 103 - scorched tatting lace and paper, 3.75 x 4 x 3.75 in. 2019.











Frances Reynolds. *Hannah More* (1745-1833), oil on canvas c. 1870. Bristol Museum Art Gallery