

Thinking Inside the Box:

Simple Solutions for Fitting Nontraditional Book Formats Upright on Library Shelves

Thomas J. Watson Library is The Metropolitan Museum of Art's main research library and one of the world's most comprehensive art libraries. Its holdings reflect the nature of the museum's global and encyclopedic collection, with books ranging in date from the late fifteenth century to current scholarship. Last year the Library added more than twenty thousand titles in sixty-seven languages.

The artists' publications study collection, international in scope, includes artists' books, zines, bookworks, artist magazines, pamphlets, artists' files, reference books, dealer catalogs, pricelists, journals, and all forms of artists' publishing.

A key focus of the **Sherman Fairchild Center for Book Conservation** is ensuring these

materials are accessible to patrons with minimal intervention from staff. **Greater numbers of books with nontraditional formats on our shelves require** streamlining the design of special housing for objects of unusual size, shape, and materials, while keeping in mind **shelf space, upright storage, ease of use, ease of production, sustainability of materials, and the use of stable materials and adhesives.**

We purchase standard and custom enclosures for all special collections that require housing and make protective covers and inserts to support small or unusual formats. Approximately **2,000 new acquisitions** come through the lab every year. Time spent and ease of use are a priority to be able to process this amount of material. Here we present some solutions we've designed in our lab.

4-flap Insert for Small Books Thinner Than 1"

Problem: This book, a small embroidered binding covered with fragile white satin, *Le Nouvel Almanach Sans Titre: Mais Très-galant, et Chantant* 1776, is only 3.5" tall, 2.5" wide, and .375" thick. Watson stores all of its special collections upright, with a few exceptions, so there is no separate storage area for small or miniature items. Because it will be shelved in call number order rather than with similarly sized books, it requires a larger housing so it won't get lost, and larger adjacent books won't tip or warp.

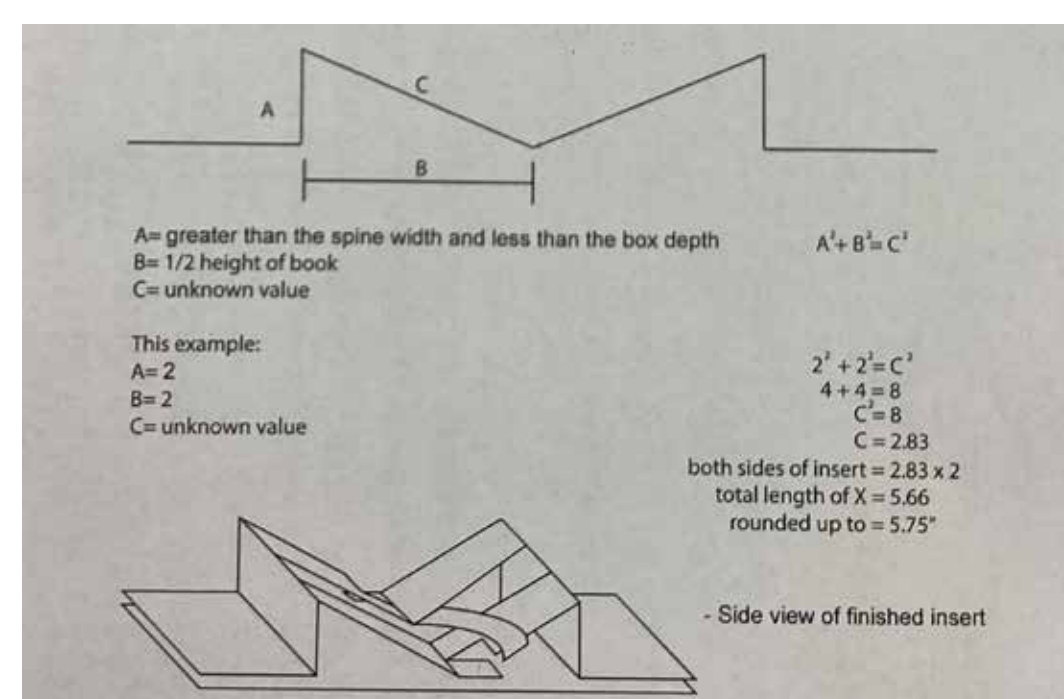
Solution: A standard sized 4-flap enclosure with a custom .20 bristol insert. Since the book is under 1" thick, it can be stored in a 4-flap-style housing. We generally use a 6" x 8" 4-flap with an insert to hold the book in the center. Kyle Olmon, a paper engineer and former intern at the Sherman Fairchild Book Conservation Lab, was tasked with designing an insert that could be produced in a few minutes using common lab materials. The "Kyle Insert" uses 1 piece of .20 bristol board to fill the space, and allows the bottom edge of the book to sit on a flat surface.

We purchase our 4-flaps from Archival Products:
<https://archival.com/products/adjustable-four-flap>

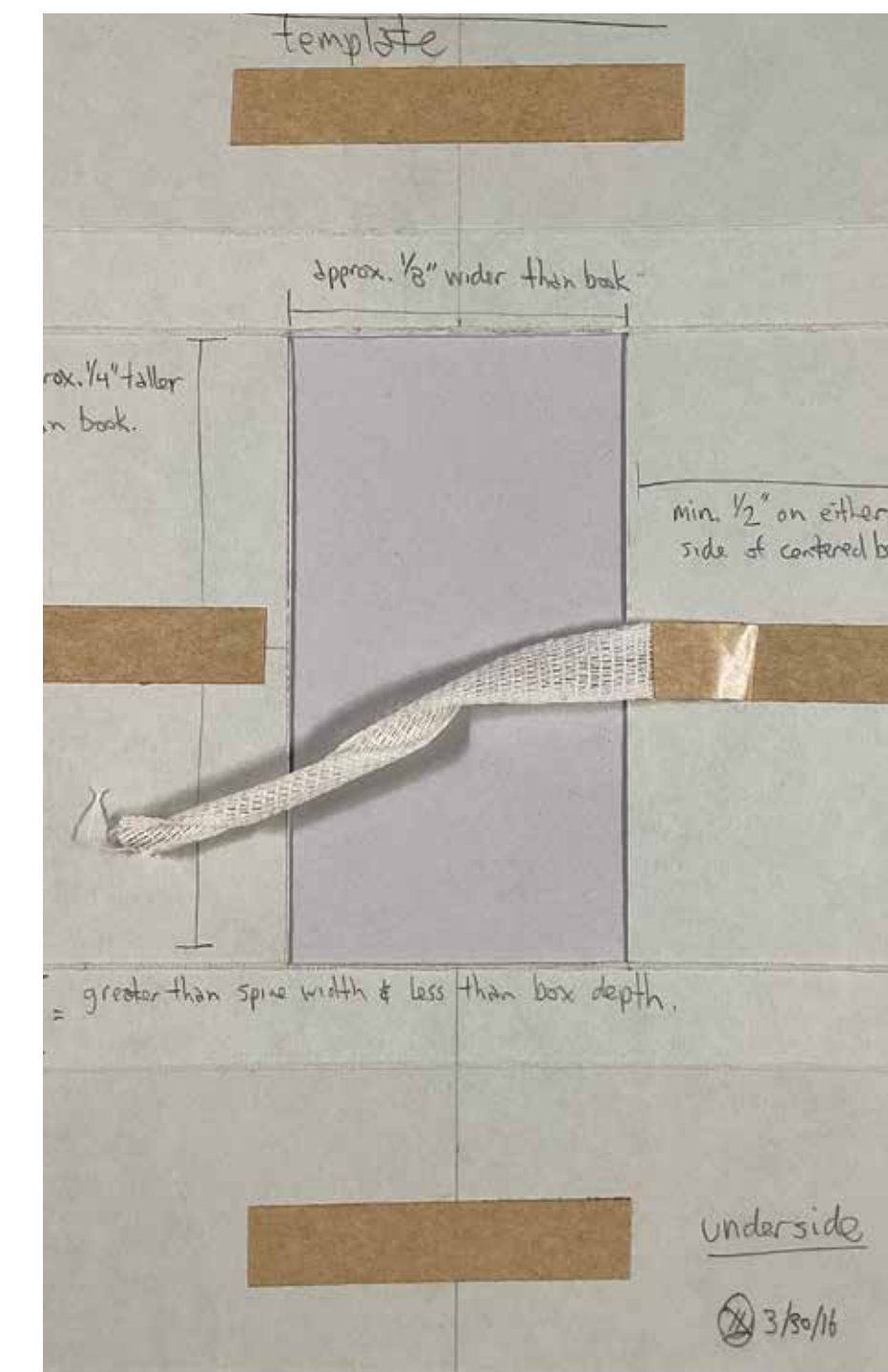


One piece of cut-and-folded .20 bristol is used to make the insert.

Materials:
4-flap enclosure
.20 bristol board
Double-sided tape
1/2" linen tape



The insert is cut using either a simple mathematical formula (above) or a simplified formula with no math involved (far right).



Other Solutions for Upright Storage



We keep a variety of pre-printed labels, organized in a binder, and use them to instruct readers how to safely remove a large book from its housing. The artist book *Orihon*, by Tom Burtonwood, 2014 is fully 3D-printed. The plastic is fragile. A mylar drawer and wrapper were constructed to slide the book safely in and out of a foam-lined box. In this case, labels instruct the reader how to use the drawer and to use gloves to handle the plastic.



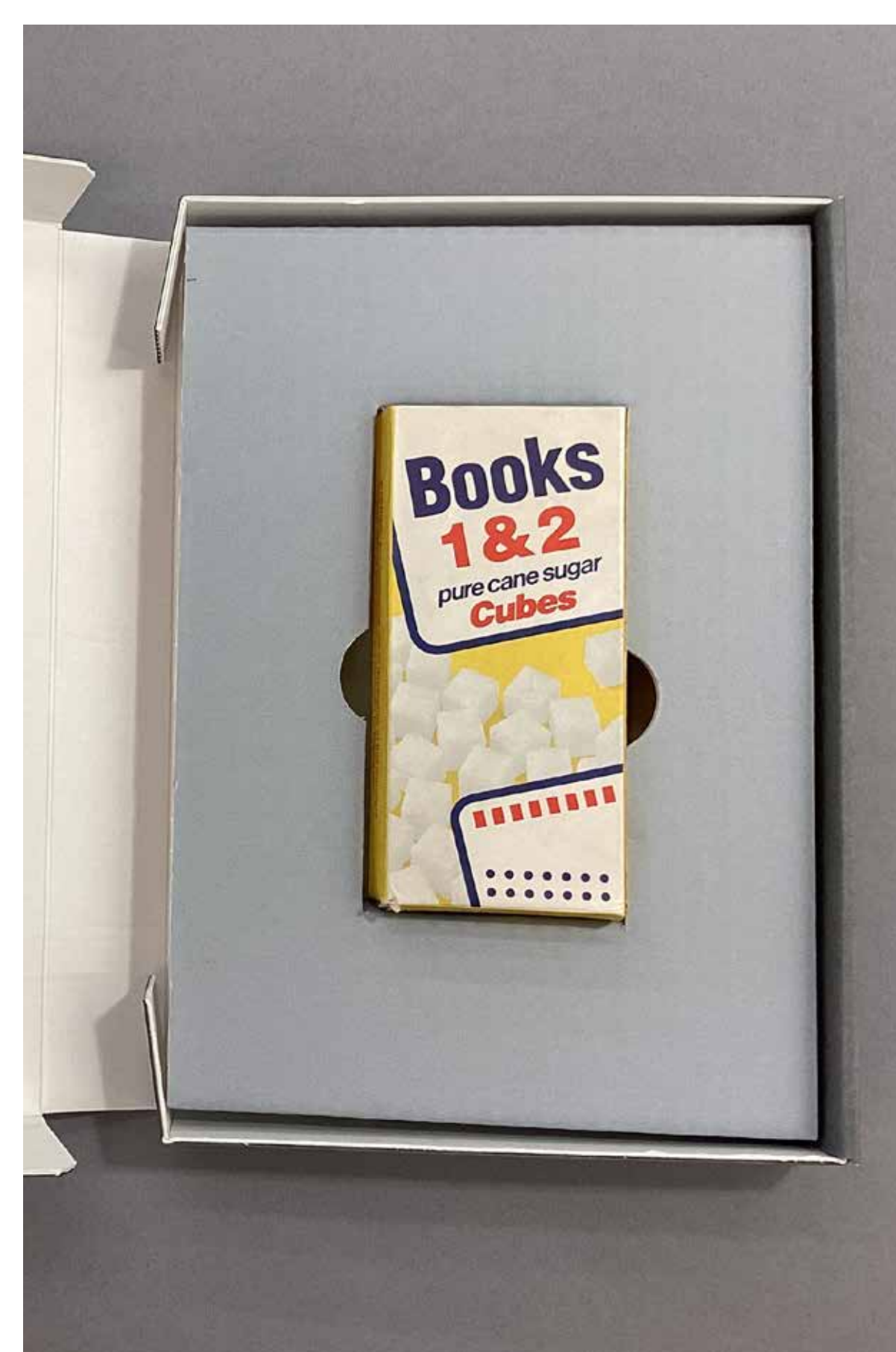
Box Insert for Small Books Thicker Than 1"

Problem: The artist's book, *Untitled*, Rhee Jaye, 2000 is only 4" x 2 1/4" x 1 1/8". As in our other examples, this book won't be shelved in a separate area for small books. It doesn't contain sugar cubes, but has 2 separate volumes inside a illustrated box.

Solution: A standard-sized corrugated box fit with a custom E-flute corrugated 2 piece insert. The larger corrugated box makes the book amenable for upright shelf storage. The insert fills the vertical and horizontal space and can be made in about 5 minutes. The model on the right shows how the 2 pieces—a strip with a recessed opening and a small flat base sheet—fit together to support the book. The insert is secure in the box with a small amount of, or no, adhesive.

Materials:
The primary housing, a corrugated E-Flute box
1/16" E-flute blue archival corrugate or Heritage corrugate board
.20 bristol board (for a lifting tray, if needed)
3m double stick tape or 3M 3792 LM AE Clear hot-melt adhesive

We purchase our corrugated boxes from Talas:
<https://www.talasonline.com/archival-storage/custom-enclosures>



Here are 2 versions of this insert: *A Carouse!*, Dianne Weiss, 1988 (left), is housed with an insert that includes a lifting tray because 4 walls are needed around the book; *The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster*, Bi Yun Yao Yu Chun Shan Kuang Nan's book, 2022 (right), utilizes thumb access holes for a simpler structure.

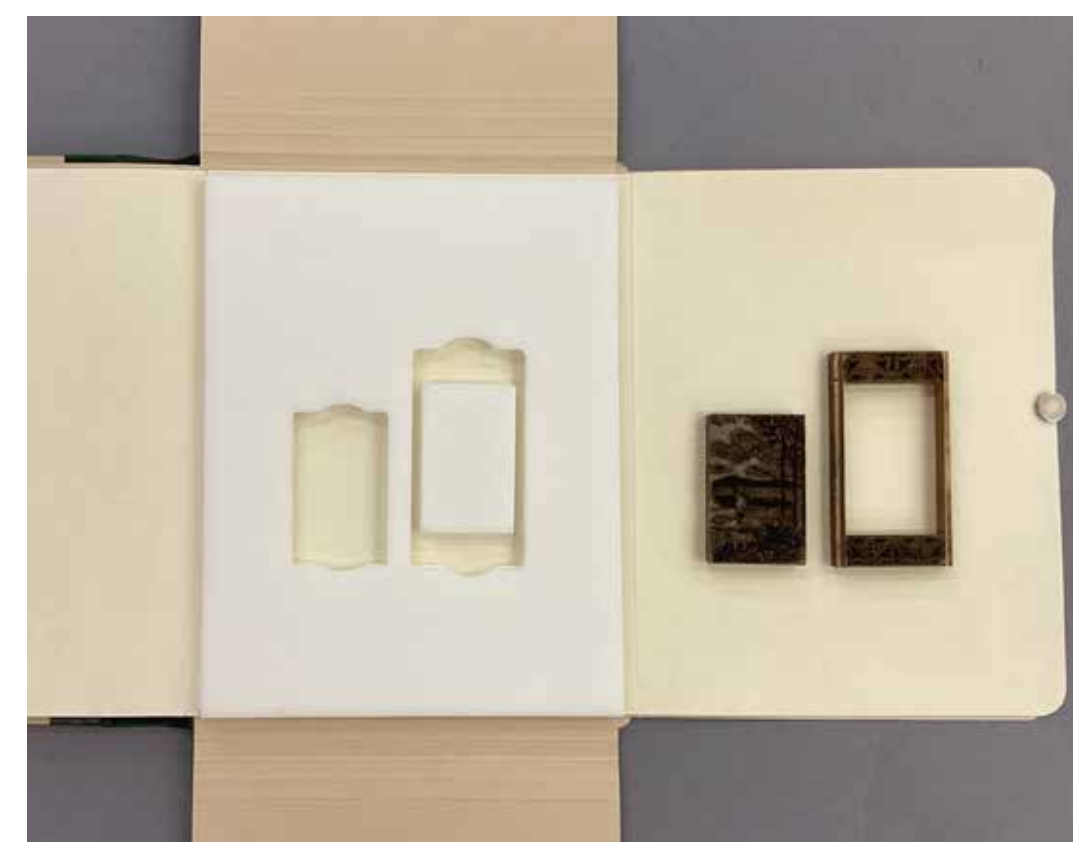
Irregularly Shaped Custom-Cut Inserts

Problem: This artist book, *And Who is There When the Dream Fizzles Out*, by Gloria Glitzer, 2022, has a plastic chain that requires support. Cutting round or irregular shapes, especially in multiples, is particularly difficult to do by hand.

Solution: The **Cricut Maker 3** is a small home-studio custom cutting machine. At 21" wide and 7" tall, it is small enough to sit on a counter. The software allows you to draw any shape to be cut out of a variety of sheet materials, including 1/8" thick Vivalak foam, corrugated E- and B-Flute, paper and fabric up to 12" wide. It can cut multiples of any shape in exactly the same size for layering into thicker supports.

The QR code below links to a video demonstration.
Cricut Maker 3: <https://cricut.com/en-us/>

Materials:
Cricut Maker 3
The primary housing: a 4-flap enclosure or E-flute corrugated box
Volara foam (1/8") or corrugated E- or B-flute
Hot-melt adhesive or double-sided tape



The Cricut cuts the insert so the negative spaces hold the object in place. It's possible to cut recesses for more than one object at a time, as in the *Art Nouveau brass stamp*, 1890 (left), or it can cut multiple inserts that are exactly the same to accommodate thicker objects, as in *Sorry Zero, Sorry Not Sorry*, Christine Sun Kim, 2019 (right).

Instructions

Follow the QR code to download detailed instructions for making the inserts and a video demonstration of how the Cricut is used to make custom cuts→



THE MET Thomas J. Watson Library



Andrijana Sajic is an Assistant Museum Librarian, Book Conservation in Watson Library's Sherman Fairchild Center for Book Conservation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and is responsible for the conservation treatment and preservation of library collections across the Museum.



Clare Manias is an Assistant Museum Librarian, Book Conservation in Watson Library's Sherman Fairchild Center for Book Conservation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Before joining The Met she worked as a book conservator for and with many institutional and private clients.

Thank You!

Ken Soehner, Mindy Dubansky, Lydia Aikenhead, Jennifer Bantz, Alan McCarthy-Behler, Scott Carlton, Phet Louvan, Kyle Olmon, Kelsey Talbot, and Aaron Salik.



The box insert used to house *The Rivers of Time Carry the Music of Life Down to the Sea*, Paul Johnson, c. 2000, utilizes a simple shelf to fill vertical space, this solution would also work for a small scroll.