

Bookmaking Workshop Part I: Stitching Signatures

Art and Religious Practice / Winter Quarter 2008

(from *Cover to Cover* by Shereen LaPlantz, Lark Books, 1995)

Materials

10 sheets standard photocopy paper (8 ½ x 11 inches), cut in half: 8 ½ x 5 ½ inches for 20 half-sheets

Linen bookbinding thread

Bookbinding needle

Beeswax

Folding bone

pencil

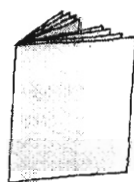


Figure 1

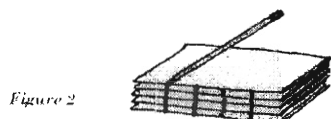


Figure 2

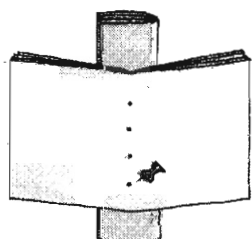


Figure 3

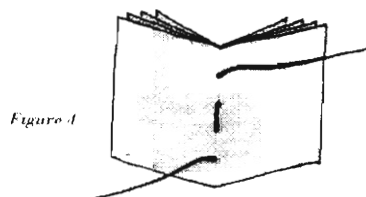


Figure 4

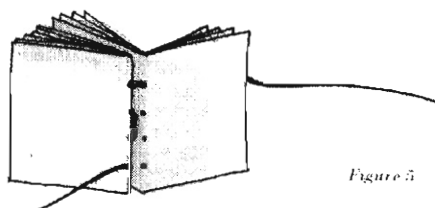


Figure 5

Process

(1) Fold each half sheet of paper into a folio using a folding bone. Nest each of them into 5 signatures of 4 folios. (fig. 1)

(2) Stack the signatures on top of each other, lining up the folded edges neatly. With a pencil, mark four *very straight* lines evenly spaced across the spine (fig. 2). These lines indicate where the sewing holes will be pierced. *(It's very important to keep the signatures in order, if your pencil lines aren't perfectly straight and the signatures change position, the holes won't line up and the final text will be skewed)*

(3) Open the first signature and lay it, marks facing up, on a self-healing cutting mat, or on a folded clean rag. Pierce holes through the crease at each pencil mark (fig. 3). Repeat this process for each signature (keep the signatures in order).

(4) Wax a length of the thread (if yours is unwaxed) of about 30 inches. Thread the needle and begin sewing, starting at the top signature. Starting at the bottom hole, sew a running stitch up the spine (fig. 4) avoid repiercing new holes with the needle; be sure to thread the needle carefully through the existing holes. Leave about 2 inches of tail hanging from the first hole.

(5) Place the second signature next to the first, and sew into the top hole, joining the two signatures together (fig. 5), then exit the second hole (fig. 6).

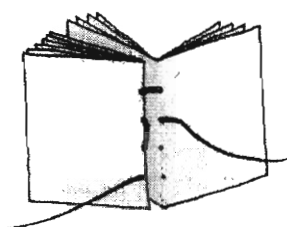


Figure 6

(6) Join the two signatures by sewing into the adjacent hole, *in the previous signature* (fig. 7). Then sew down and out the next available hole in the first signature (fig. 8). **Throughout the sewing process, check the tension of the thread. It must be loose enough to allow the signatures to open without tearing, but tight enough to eliminate large gaps between signatures.**

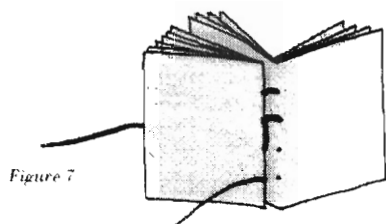


Figure 7

(7) Now join everything together by sewing back into the new signature (fig. 9).

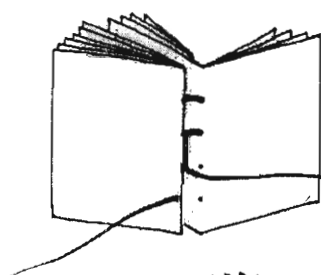


Figure 8

(8) When you sew out the bottom hole, you will have two ends available (fig. 10). Tie them together in a square knot, but don't trim tails yet.

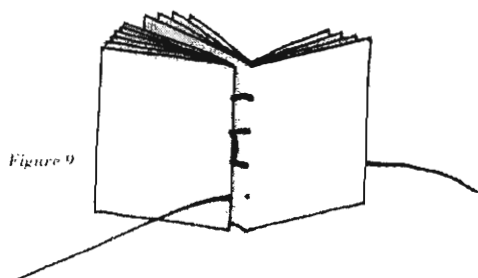


Figure 9

(9) Place the third signature next to the two already sewn and join it by sewing into the bottom hole (fig. 11).

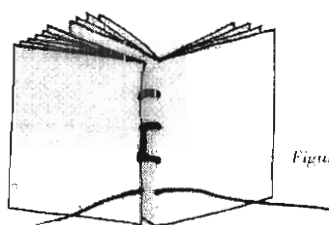


Figure 10

(10) Sew up to the next hole (fig. 12). Again, sew into the previous signature at the adjacent hold (fig. 13).

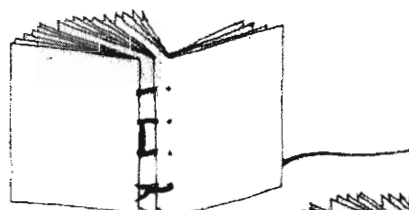


Fig. 11

(11) Continue joining the signatures by sewing up to the next hold and back into the new signature. Finally sew out of the top hole (fig. 14).

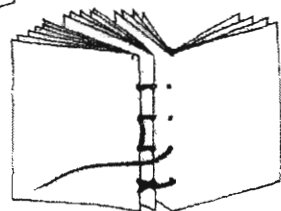


Fig. 12

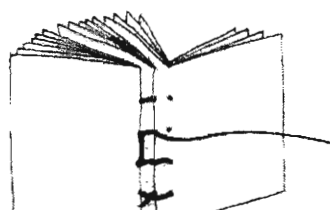


Fig. 13

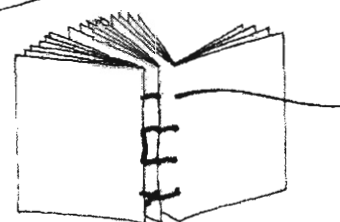


Fig. 14

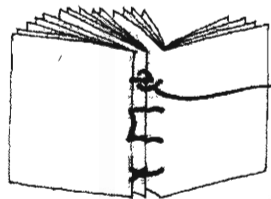


Fig. 17



Fig. 18

(12) The third signature is not finished exactly like the previous two. Secure the third signature to the second by sewing back under the previous top stitch using a 'kettle stitch' (figs. 17 & 18).

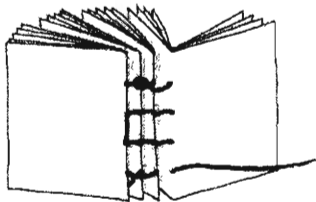


Fig. 19

(13) Add the next signature repeating the process you've used thus far. Sew down, then into the previous signature. Sew back into the new signature and out at the bottom (fig. 19). Join the signatures at the tail with a kettle stitch (figs. 22 & 23).

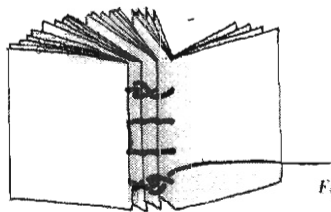


Fig. 22



Fig. 23

(14) Add the fifth signature and repeat the sewing process. Tie off the end at the top with a couple of half-hitch knots (fig. 24). Trim the ends of both knots, but don't cut too closely to the knots (or the knots may come loose).

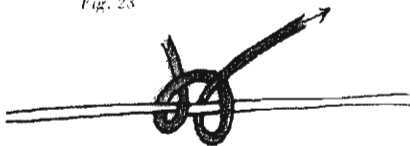


Fig. 24

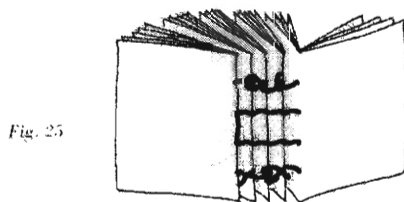


Fig. 25

Fig. 25 completed signature

Assignment: Sew three sample codices. The first (outlined above using standard photocopy paper) will result in a codex that is 5 ½ x 4 ¼ inches. The remaining two books may be in dimensions of your choosing. Continue to use 5 signatures of 4 folios in each sample. The final sample book should incorporate a good printmaking paper (Rives medium or heavy weight, Arches, Hannemuhle) in the pages. We'll bind these sample codices in the second workshop.