

Joanna Ambroz
Come,
I will show you
my knives
Abstract



The method of making
a reflective book,
allowing personal experiences
to be worked through.

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Abstract of doctoral dissertation concept

1. Problematic aspects

The confluence of events related to my mother's cancer and death, the COVID-19 epidemic, and the many changes that took place during the creation of my dissertation called into question the process and reasons for my creation. The dissertation became a testament to transforming and researching my place in the world, art and, design.

The dissertation consists of practical work – the book *Come, I will show you my knives* – and theoretical work that addresses the creation of books by artistic individuals in response to personal difficult experiences and traumas. The theoretical part of the dissertation discusses the stages of the practical work: the intuitive activities in relation to the text and image, and the subsequent conscious layer, i.e., the sorting of the created content up to the design of the publication. The practical work is an attempt to show the creative method I use in my artistic practice. I argue that the combination of the two different areas (intuitive and conscious) makes it possible to work through personal problems and present them in a legible way, combining the characteristics of an autonomous artwork and a design activity, which I refer to as a reflective book for my own purposes.

The basis of the thesis was an artistic experiment. During the creation of the dissertation, I did not focus on obtaining a specific result but rather observed and recorded the research process.



2. Practical part

The practical part of the dissertation is the book *Come, I will show you my knives* consists of the author's text, images of fourteen acrylic paintings on canvas and graphic design. The book is narrated on several levels. The text printed in black is a record of an account of my mother's cancer journey. The text in blue and the paintings deal with the anxiety associated with the events experienced. Knives, the cellar, and the color blue are important symbols in the book.

Formal features of the publication:

hardback book block with Geltex textured paper veneer printed in blue and black, and a wrapper of the same shade. The format of the book is elongated. The paper in the book is Amber Graphic 150g cold white.

Painting:

14 acrylic paintings on canvas of various sizes.

3. Theoretical part

The dissertation is divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, I focus on the issue of books created by artistic individuals. I address the problematic nomenclature and present the phenomenon of self-publishing on the Polish publishing market after 2011. I pay special attention to picture books as a commercial form of books made by artistic individuals. I have chosen examples of eight books to illustrate the phenomenon. The publications have been selected according to the key: the author is responsible for both the text and the visual aspect and the content touches on personal, taboo, emotional, and relationship topics. Included are self-published books and those published by commercial publishers. In the last part of the first chapter, I present seven of my authored books dealing with taboo topics, which I completed between 2011 and 2018.



I devote the second chapter of the thesis to further theoretical considerations. This time my reflections concern a particular type of publication – the reflective book – and the methods of working on it. I explain my own motivations behind choosing a book as a way of communicating a problem, relating them to research in psychology. I discuss the importance of problem specification for the creative process. I also address the issue of intuitive action, which I understand as a free exploration of visual expression and technique. I pay attention to the formation of new associations that result from encounters with specialist literature on a given topic. I enrich my reflections on the topic of reflective book work with the Jungian notion of, *Active Imagination*.

In this chapter I also describe the method of working on the book. I discuss analysing previously obtained results of intuitive activities and organising them through graphic design, taking notes and sorting them critically, as well as ways of reading symbols. In the final subsections, I focus on the design of the book – the conscious choice of a readable structure to help the reader navigate through the content and understand its essence and on bookbinding and its relevance in book design.

Chapter three is a discussion of the work on the book *Come, I will show you my knives*. In it, I outline the reasons behind my decision to share my personal experiences and the story of my mother's cancer. I also describe the subsequent stages of working on the publication and explain the symbolism in the book. I describe experiencing anxiety and bereavement as waking up in a dark and damp basement, a metaphor for the space in which I unconsciously collect and store emotions related to my mother's illness and death. The knives that appear in the book symbolise painful thoughts and the violent severance from maternal love, wisdom and security. At the same time, they are



allegories of pain resulting from the casual words of loved ones. I devote a separate section to the symbolism of the colour blue, referring to Johannes Itten's perception of colour in the context of the personality of the painter. I also discuss the ways in which I use colour and composition in my dissertation work. The final section is dedicated to reflection, understood as a process of thinking deeply about a strong experience, enabling a better understanding of it.

Books created by artistic individuals act as transmitters of personal messages, ideas and emotions. They are not only a carrier of content and an expression of artistic visions, but also a diary that archives moods and emotions. The creation of such books makes it possible to combine art with functionality, making them artistic works that are also utilitarian objects. Working on a book allows the creators to understand their own emotional state, express feelings and process difficult experiences. Through the active use of imagination and creative action, the artist can get closer to their fears and try to understand them. Book-making also provides a metaphorical representation of traumatic experiences, allowing them to be processed and accepted, and the whole process has a therapeutic function, promoting healing and a return to stability in everyday life.

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