
The Angel Is My Watermark

The Angel is My Watermark

*Henry Miller's novels were banned in the United States for their sexual content, but he wrote a story about an angel in Paris in the late 1920's. It was published in 1936 after his emigration to the United States. It is a story about the creation of a piece of art.*

I do a water color. It comes over you like that: you feel like a water color and you do one.

Wherever the hand falls I do something, following the insinuating deviations of the line.

The illustration in front of me, done by an inmate of Charenton, has a very fine quality about it. I see a boy and a girl kneeling close together and in their hands they are holding a huge lock. Instead of a penis and vagina the artist has endowed them with keys, very big keys which interpenetrate. There is also a big key in the lock. They look happy and a little absent-minded — I am very eager to start in. Just the same, I'm at a loss of ideas. But then I'm a little ashamed of myself— to copy the work of a lunatic is the worst form of plagiarism.

Have you ever sat in a railway station and watched people killing time? Do they not sit like crest-fallen angels with their broken arches and their fallen stomachs? Those eternal minutes in which they are condemned to be alone with themselves—does it not put umbrella ribs in their wings?

There's a pamphlet at my elbow,
about three inches square –
It's called Art and Madness.
In the insane asylum they
paint their fool heads off.
They paint the chairs, the
walls, the tables, the bedsteads –
an amazing productivity.
If we rolled up our sleeves
and went to work the way
these idiots do what might
we not accomplish in a lifetime!

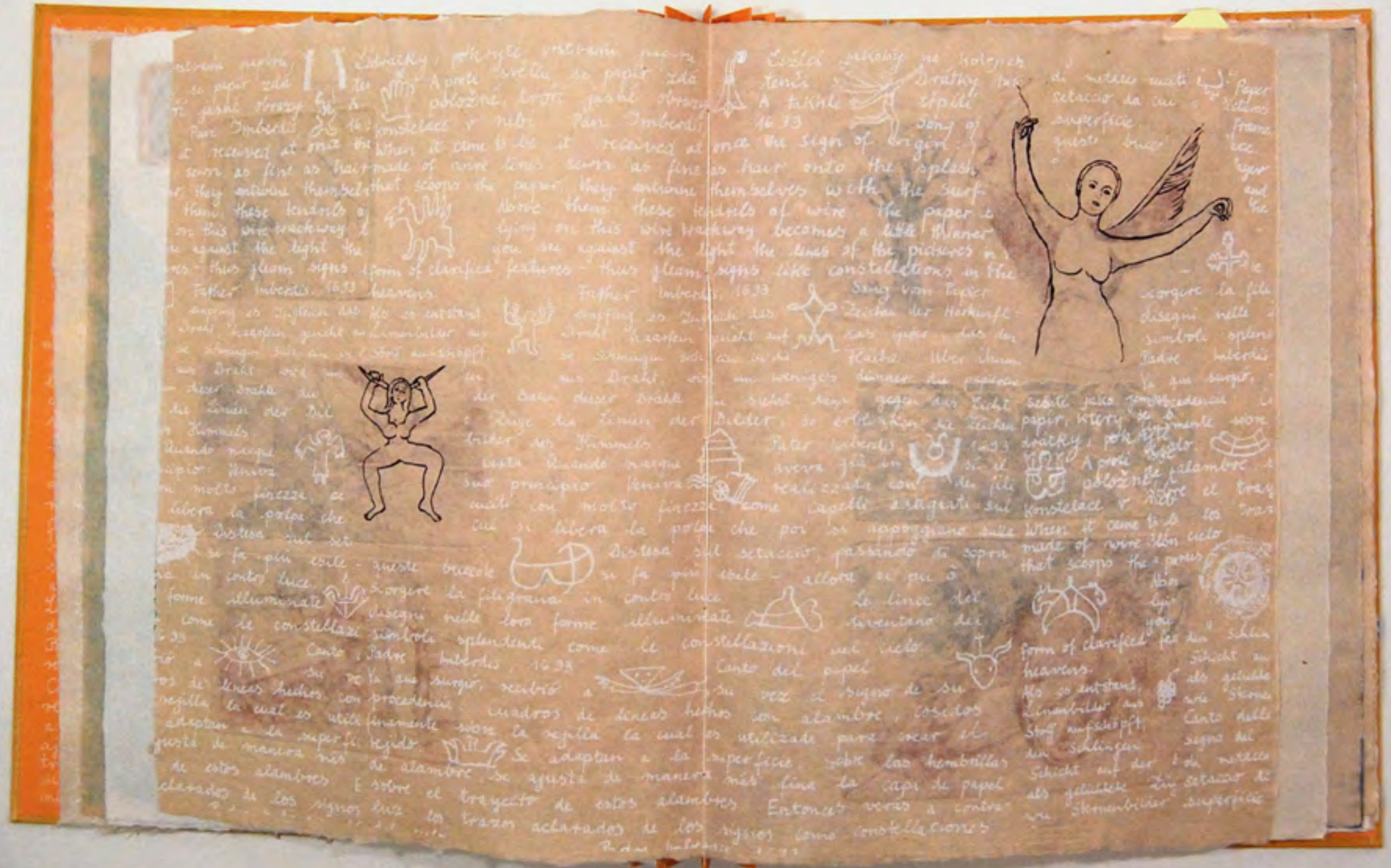
It began in a peculiar way, this water color mania. Through hunger, I might say. That and the extreme cold. For weeks I have been hanging out with my friend Joe in poolrooms and comfort stations, wherever there was animal heat and no expense. On our way — we noticed a reproduction of Turner's in the window of a department store. That's exactly the way in which it all began. One of the most active, one of the most enjoyable periods of my barren life.

In the upper left hand corner I draw an angel. It is an object of an original nature, a purely gracious invention, and highly symbolic.

I uncork a bottle. The wine ought to make me a little drowsy. My head is extraordinarily light.

At the bottom of everything there's some animal: that's our deepest obsession. When I see human beings squirming up toward the light like wilted sunflowers, I say to myself: "Squirm you bastards, and pretend all you like, but at the bottom, you're a turtle or a guinea pig."

If you want to see angels
you must go to Grand
Central Depot, or the
Gare St. Lazare.
Especially the
Gare St. Lazare -
*Salle des Pas Perdus.*



Padre Imberdis 1693

it received at once the sign of origin
seen as fine as hair made of wire lines seen as fine as hair onto the splash
that scoops the paper they entwine themselves with the surf
above them these kernels of wire the paper
lying on this wire walkway becomes a little thinner
you see against the light the lines of the pictures
forms of clarified features - thus gleam signs like constellations in the
heavens.

Pater Imberdis, 1693

Song vom Papier
Zeichen der Herkunft
sie sammeln sich auf den
Reifen. Wer ihnen
auf der Bahn, wird um weniger dünner das papier
der dann dieser Drahte
Siehst Du Linien der Bilder, so erhältst Du Zeichen
Leiter des Himmels.

Pater Imberdis 1693

Canto del papel
su vez el signo de su
Cuadros de líneas hechos con alambre, cosidos
finamente sobre la rejilla la cual es utilizada para crear el
rejido. Se adaptan a la superficie sobre las hendiduras
de alambre se ajusta de manera más fina la capa de papel
sobre el trayecto de estos alambres. Entonces veras a contra
luz los trazos achatados de los signos como constelaciones

Padre Imberdis 1693

Canto del papel
segno del
di metallo
setaccio di
superficie
sembrano
sono
e
sorgere la fila
disegni nelle
simboli splen
Padre Imberdis
la sua sorgit,
scritti
papier, wtedy
doatky, pokryte
A proti světlu
položené, tvoří
konstelace v nebi
When it came to be
made of wire thin
that scoops the paper
you
form of clarified features
heavens.
Als es entstand,
Linienbilder aus
Stoff aufschöpft,
Schicht auf der
als gelöste
Kernen
Canto delle
segno del
di metallo
setaccio di
superficie

It is a sad angel with a fallen stomach,
and the wings are supported by umbrella ribs.

When I say that we littered the floor with paintings I am not exaggerating.
As fast as they dried we hung them up - and the next day we took them down and hung up another collection. We painted on the backs of old ones, we washed them off, we scraped them with a knife. We laid the paintings in the bathtub and let them soak for hours, and then with a loaded brush we approached these dripping omelettes and we let fly at them. Turner started all this - and the severe winter of 1927-'28.

The picture actually smells of pigment. And when it is completely ruined I sit there with a vacant enjoyment and twiddle my thumbs. And then suddenly I get a real inspiration. I take it to the sink and after soaking it well I scrub it with the nail brush. I scrub and scrub and then I hold the picture upside down, letting the colors coagulate. Then gingerly, very gingerly, I flatten it out on my desk. It's a masterpiece.

Every birth is miraculous—and inspired. What appears now before my eyes is the result of innumerable mistakes, withdrawals, erasures, hesitations; it is also the result of certitude.

I'm on the second bottle and the tablecloth is covered with notes

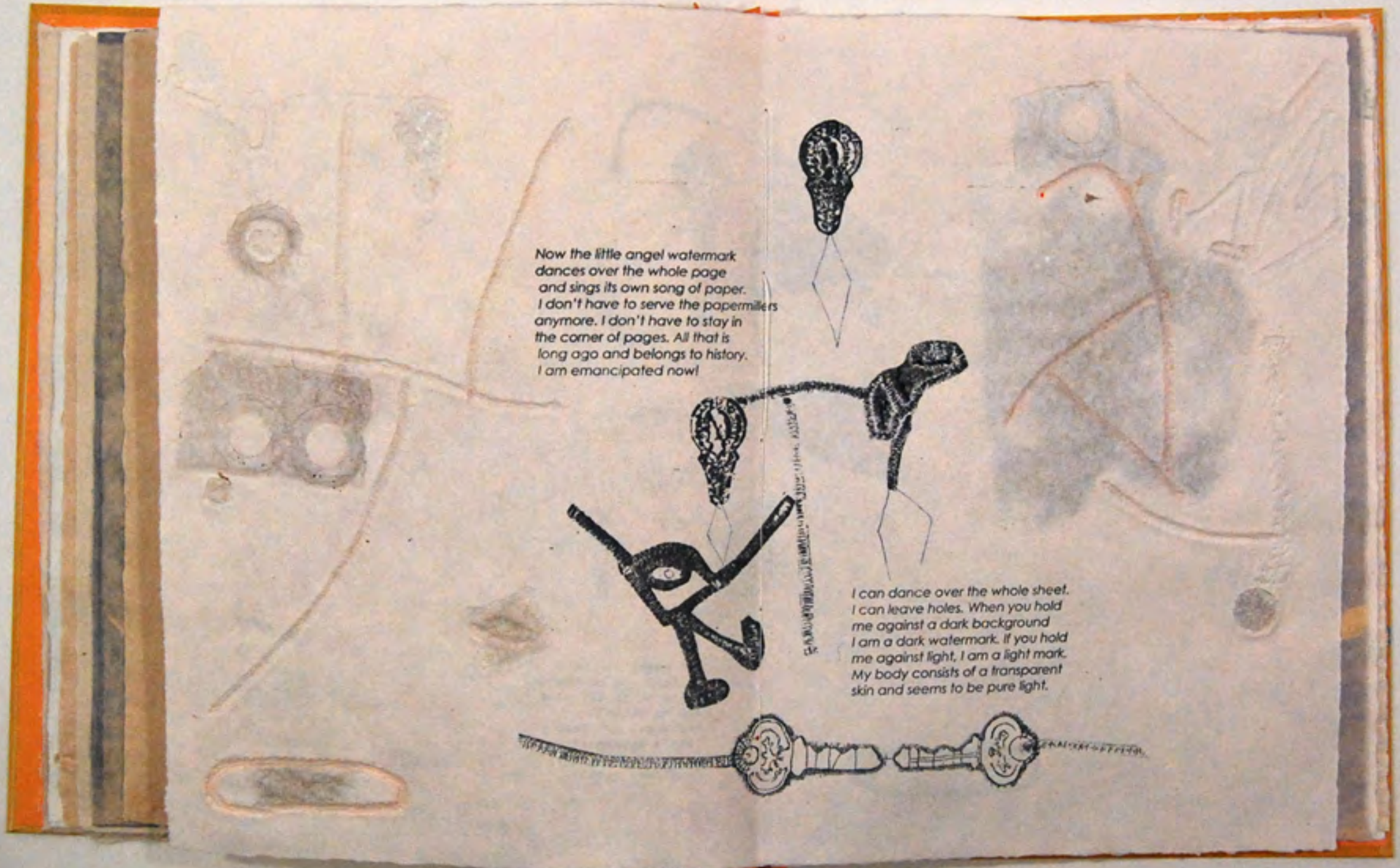
Angel of Victory

Angel of Liberty,
Nike of Samothrace
in the Louvre in Paris

I could scrub the
mythology out of
the horse's mane –
but the angel
I can't scrub out.
The angel is my watermark.

Angel of William Blake

The angel is there
to lead you to Heaven,
where it is all plus
and no minus.
The angel is there
like a watermark,
a guarantee of your
faultless vision.


Now the little angel watermark
dances over the whole page
and sings its own song of paper.
I don't have to serve the papermillers
anymore. I don't have to stay in
the corner of pages. All that is
long ago and belongs to history.
I am emancipated now!
I can dance over the whole sheet.
I can leave holes. When you hold
me against a dark background
I am a dark watermark. If you hold
me against light, I am a light mark.
My body consists of a transparent
skin and seems to be pure light.

I jumped off all the wires and
threads which tried to hold me
on the screens. I left the cold water,
the damp cloth, the heavy blotters,
the cold drafty stream of the ventilator,
and now all that is behind me.
Now I feel free and I dance!

Beneath the hat I put a face—carelessly,
because my ideas are large and sweeping.

*I sew on Hooks and Eyes, Buckles, Safety Pins, Strings, Snap Clasps, D-Rings, Fasteners, Buttons, Threads, Lace, Finery, Tassels, Computer Chips, Flyswatters, Grids, Mesh, Cords, Yarn, Embroidery and so on.*
*I sew the materials into my screens that lie on top of the mould that I use to make the paper. After pressing and drying the sheets, there is an impression left by these everyday items. These are the watermarks.*

Song of Paper
When it came to be, it received at once the sign of origin:
Pictures made of wire lines, sewn as fine as hair onto the splash frame,
that scoops the paper, they entwine themselves with the surface.
Above them, these tendrils of wire, the paper layer lying on this wire trackway
becomes a little thinner and you see against the light
the lines of the pictures in the form of clarified features –
thus gleam signs like constellations in the heavens.
Father Imberdis, 1693

Sang vom Papier
Da es entstand, empfing es zugleich das Zeichen der Herkunft:
Linienbilder aus Draht, haarfein genäht auf das Gitter,
das den Stoff aufschöpft, sie schmiegen sich ein in die Fläche.
Über ihnen, den Schlingen aus Draht, wird um weniges dünner
die papierene Schicht auf der Bahn dieser Drähte, du siehst dann
gegen das Licht als gelichtete Züge die Linien der Bilder;
so erblinken die Zeichen wie Sternenbilder des Himmels.
Pater Imberdis, 1693

Canto del papel
Ya que surgió, recibió a su vez el signo de su procedencia:
Cuadros de lineas hechos con alambre, cosidos finamente sobre la rejilla la cual es
utilizada para crear el tejido. Se adaptan a la superficie.
Sobre las hembrillas de alambre, se ajusta de manera más fina
la capa de papel sobre el trayecto de estos alambres. Entonces verás
a contraluz los trazos aclarados de las lineas de estos cuadros.
De esta manera se divisan los signos como constelaciones del cielo.
Padre Imberdis, 1693

Canto della carta
Quando nacque aveva già in sé il segno del suo principio:
Veniva realizzata con dei fili di metallo cuciti con molta finezza, come capelli
adagiati sul setaccio da cui si libera la polpa che poi si appoggiano sulla superficie.
Distesa sul setaccio, passando di sopra queste buccole si fa più esile –
allora si pu ò scorgere la filigrana in contro luce.
Le linee dei disegni nelle loro forme illuminate
diventano dei simboli splendenti come le costellazioni nel cielo.
Padre Imberdis, 1693

Chant du Papier
Lorsque le papier naquit, il reçut en même temps le signe de son origine:
Celle-ci était faite avec des fils de métal cousus aussi finement
que des cheveux jetés sur le tamis qui fait sortir la pulpe pour s'unir à la surface.
Le papier couché sur le tamis par dessus ces boucles devient alors plus mince
et on peut apercoir le »filigrane« à contrejour.
Les lignes de ses signatures dans leurs formes éclairées
deviennent des symbols lumineux comme les constellations du ciel.
Père Imberdis, 1693

Píseň Papírů
Když se to objevilo, ihned bylo jasné odkuď to přišlo:
Obrázky vytvořené z tenkých drátků, sešité jako jemné vlásky na papírové zástěně,
Zástěna vybírá ten papír, který se sleží s povrchem.
A nad tím jsou zamotané drátky, pokryté vrstvami papírů,
Ležící jakoby na kolejích. A proti světlu se papír zdá tenčí.
Drátky tak položné, tvoří jasné obrazy
A takhle třpítí jako konstelace v nebi.
Pán Imberdis, 1693

Papyrus sive ars conficiendae papyri / Jean Imberdis, 1693
Claramonti apud Damianum / Boujon. German translation by
Wilhelm Niemeyer, published by Armin Renker, Hamburg, 1944/45
Le papier ou l'art de fabriquer le papier / Jean Imberdis,
traduit par Augustin Blanchet, Paris, Béranger, 1899
New translations based on the German: English by John Toal, French by
Annick Neupel, Spanish by Astrid Usandizaga-Wellner, Italian by
Catharina Sonn-Kaaren, Czech by Tatana Kellner

When I paint in this bright liquid yellow,
this yellow which is to me the finest of all
yellows (even yellower than the mouth of the
Yangtsze Kiang), I am radiant, radiant.

Píseň Papíru
Když se to d
Obrázky vyt
Zástěna vyb
A nad tím js
Ležící jakoby
Drátky tak p
A takhle třpé
Pán Imberdis

Papyrus
Claramo
Wilhelm
Le papie
traduit p
New tra
Annick M
Catharin

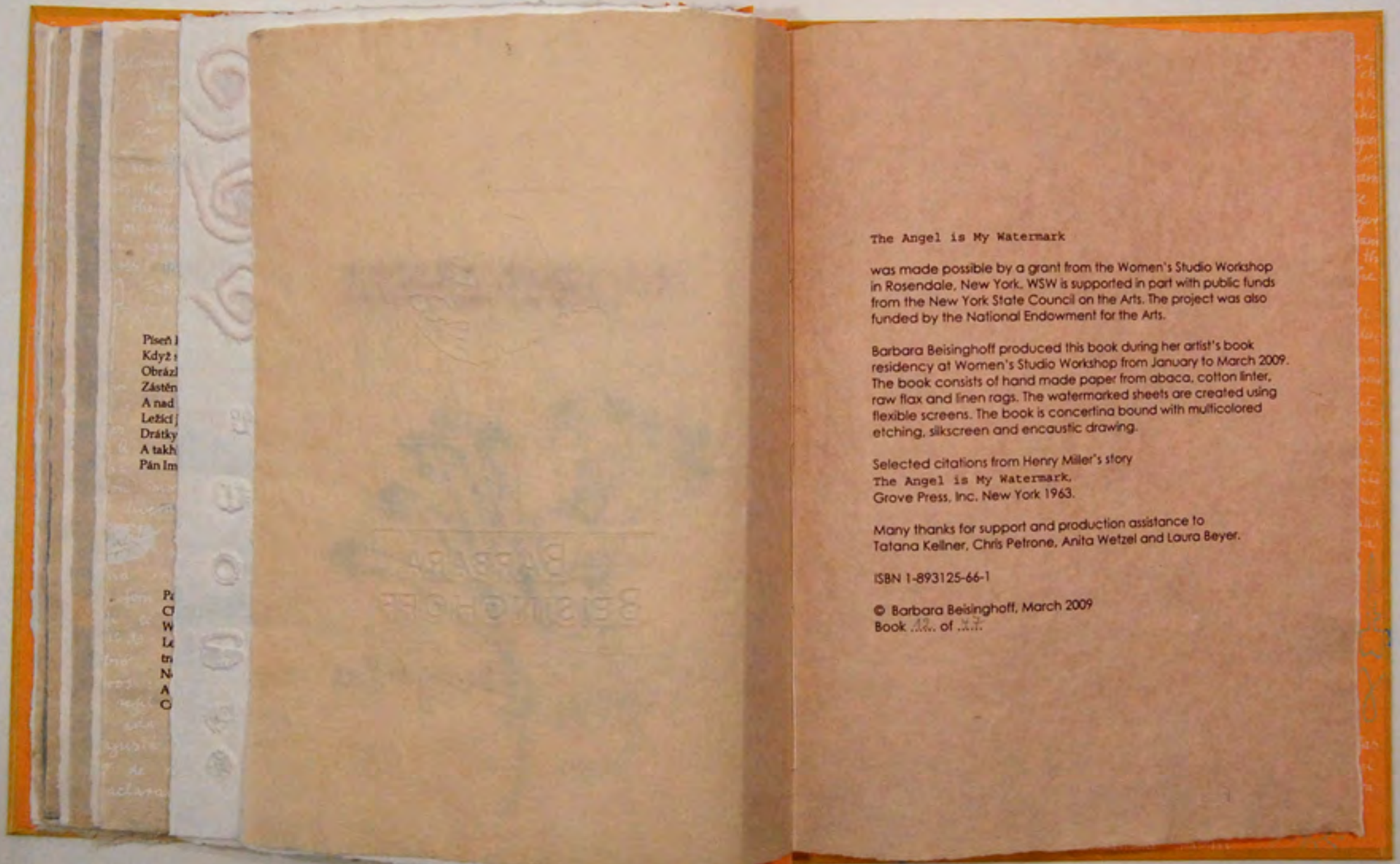
*Can you hear the Song of Paper when you turn the pages? The watermarked sheets, the leaves with etchings, and the plain papers all have different sounds because of their various bodies, but they all make crinkling, crackling, rustling, fluttering sounds.*

*And when you look at the surface of the watermarked sheets, can you imagine the tracks in the snow surrounding the Women's Studio Workshop in January and February 2009. You can see the traces of snow shoes, the skies and poles, the squirrels and pine cones rolling downhill, and the imprints of people who had drawn into the snow or had laid down in the snow and formed angels' wings with their arms and hands.*
*The edges of the sheets are like wings, angels' wings, curved and strong and not flat at all.*

The angel is there to drop sprigs of parsley in your omelette, to put a shamrock in your buttonhole. The angel is my watermark.

BARBARA BEISINGHOFF

Beisinghoff 09



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Barbara Beisinghoff produced this book during her artist's book residency at Women's Studio Workshop from January to March 2009. The book consists of hand made paper from abaca, cotton linter, raw flax and linen rags. The watermarked sheets are created using flexible screens. The book is concertina bound with multicolored etching, silkscreen and encaustic drawing.

Selected citations from Henry Miller's story
The Angel is My Watermark,
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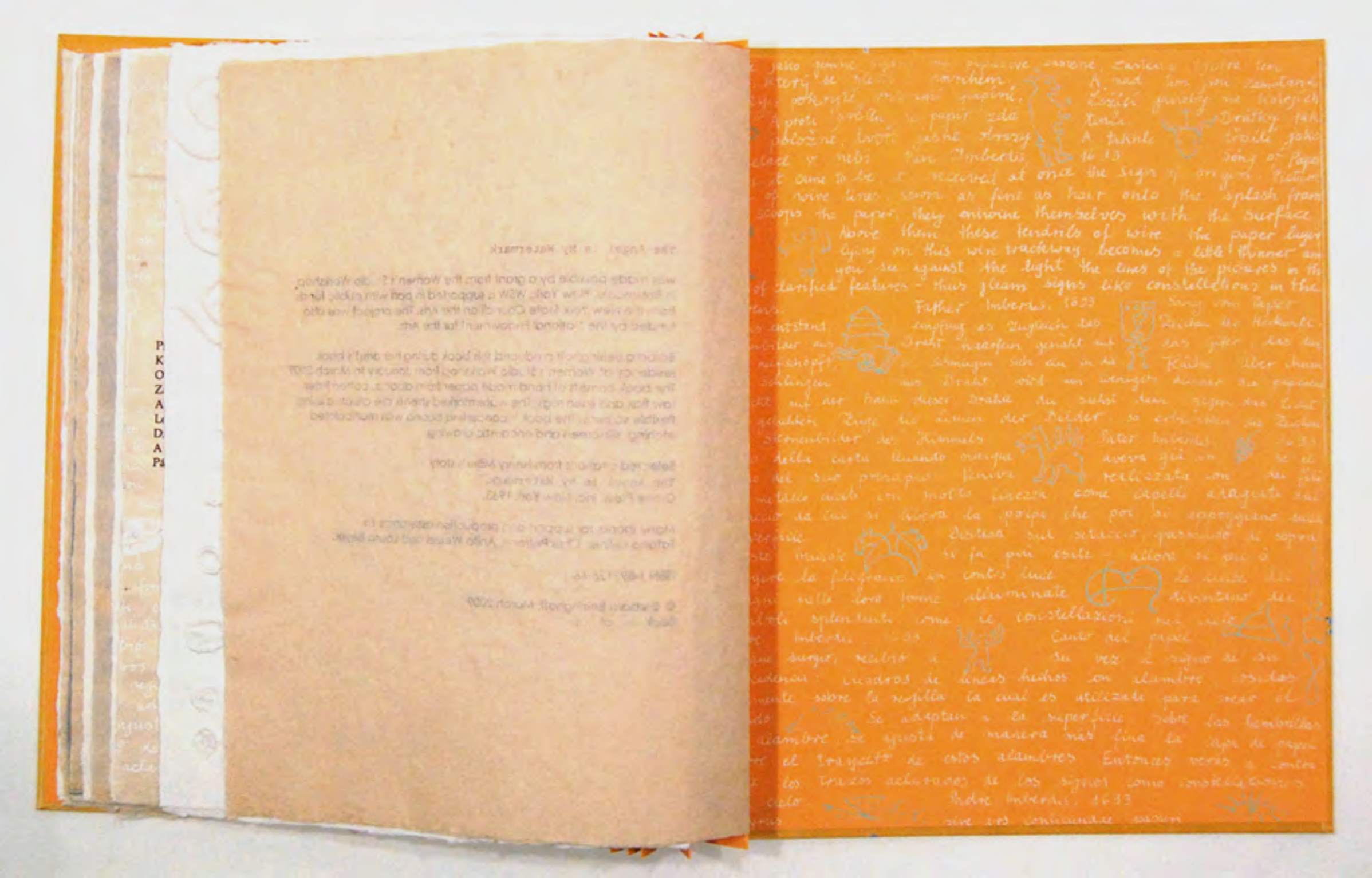
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