

Deidre and the Sons of Usna

Bound by the Internationally Acclaimed Contemporary Bookbinder
Tom McEwan



In April 2023, I purchased a fine binding by Tom McEwan, the designer bookbinder, engraver and toolmaker based in West Kilbride, Scotland. He described this purchase and binding on Instagram (April 18, 2023) using portions of its write-up from the Maggs/Designer Bookbinders exhibition catalogue:

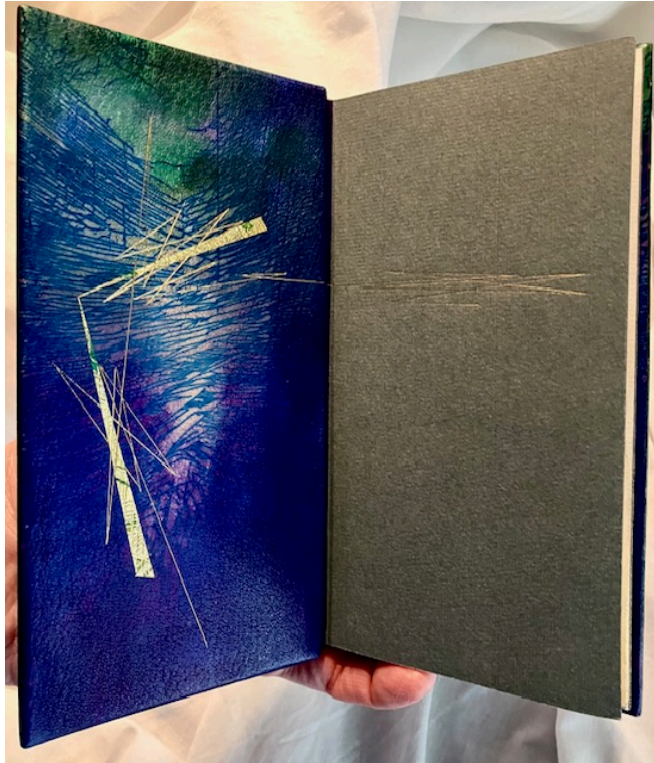
Honoured and delighted that my design binding of Fiona Macleod's (William Sharp) *Deidre and the Sons of Usna* was recently acquired by Philip Bishop for the 'Bishop Collection'. Philip is a researcher and leading authority on the publisher Thomas Bird Mosher and his collection contains fine bindings and printed ephemera related to Mosher.

Mosher books have attracted the attention of many fine and design bookbinders including: Micheline de Bellefroid, Sybil Pye, Roger Powell, Sarah Prideaux, Sangorski & Sutcliffe, Zaehnsdorf, Otto Zahn, and many others.

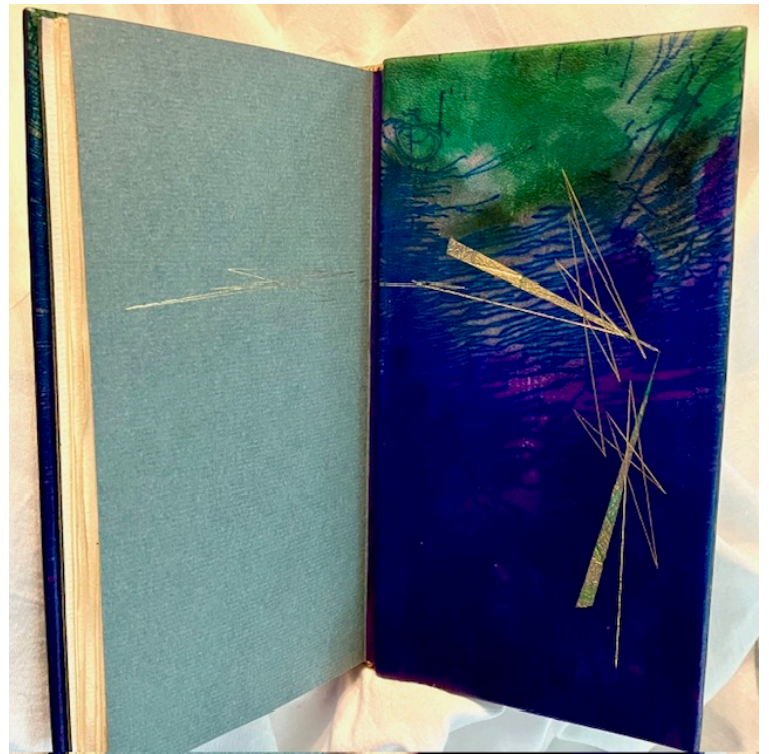
Details of *Deidre* are: Published by T. B. Mosher, 1903, Portland, Maine. Unnumbered Limited edition of 925. 185 x 103 x 19mm.

As taken from the original exhibition catalogue:

"Sewn on hemp cords using original sewing stations. Natural goatskin, hand-dyed following an application of silk-screened paste resist with multiple inlays of gold-tooled goatskin using freehand technique on leaf and foil. All edges decorated before sewing using gold leaf and tooled textures over an initial layer of acrylic inks. Endbands are gilded leather over core to match the edge decoration. Doublures are of hand-dyed goatskin on a *craquelé* base with inlays and hand-tooled line work."

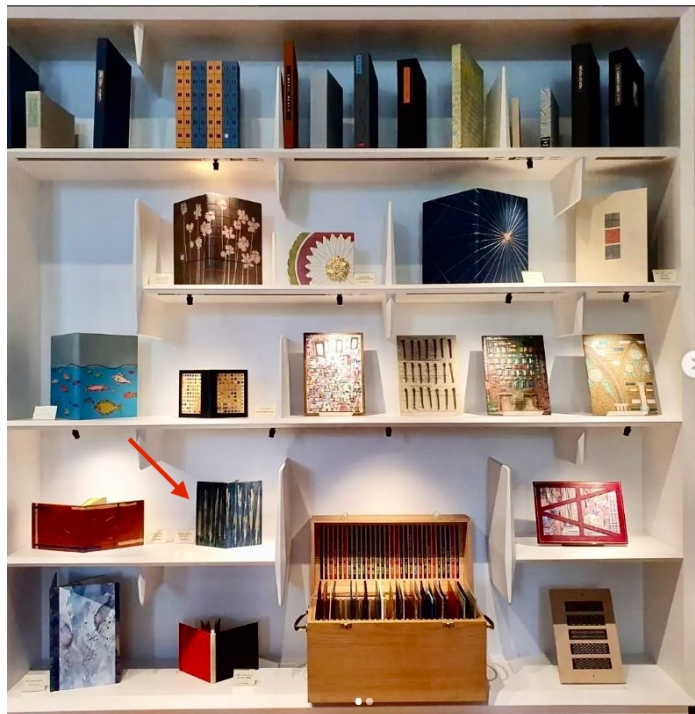


Front doublure



Back doublure

McEwan reported the final finishing of this binding was on October 22, 2020 and posted a number of video clips leading to its completion to demonstrate the techniques he used for the doublures, and to make the decorated cloth covered case with leather inlaid and gold-blocked title label and gold-tooling.



The binding was displayed at the Maggs' exhibition entitled "The Book Beautiful" which ran from October 4-25 in 2021. The Designer Bookbinders, in collaboration with Maggs Bros. Ltd held this exhibition of hand-crafted bindings from Fellows and Licentiates of Designer Bookbinders as part of the London Craft Week 2021. The image to the left shows the many fine bindings on display during the exhibition (see red arrow pointing to McEwan's *Deidre* on its exhibition shelf, lower left).

McEwan certainly immersed himself in Mosher studies during this period of time. I only found out a little later on that he was actually putting together a bookmaking workshop based on his careful examination of a

deconstructed Mosher Press publication. The workshop attendees constructed books in Mosher's style. Before the workshop, he was reading up on Mosher. He got ahold of a copy of my bibliography and sat right down to examine its contents. I don't think I've ever encountered such in my lifetime of researching and publishing on Mosher, but right there in front of me was a December 17, 2020 Instagram picture of Tom comfortably immersing himself in all things Mosher. I found that so delightful.

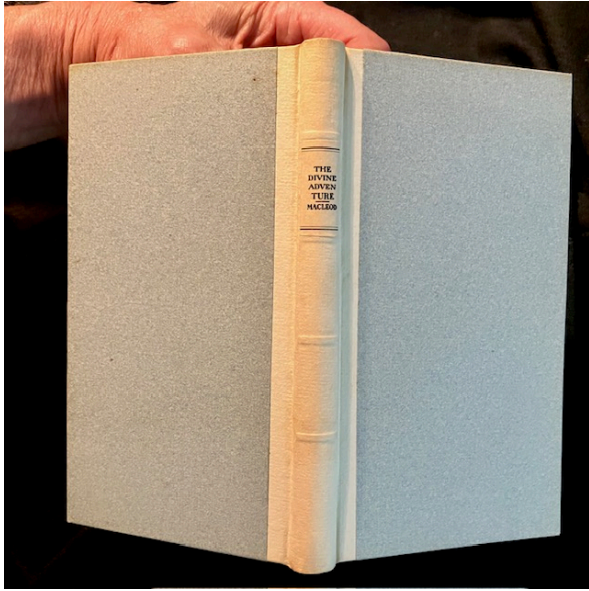


By the way, I had nothing to do with his securing a copy of my bio-bibliography on Mosher & The Mosher Books, and the decision he made to bind a copy of *Deidre and the Sons of Usna* (Mosher, 1903) was likewise entirely of his own choosing. Out of curiosity he was further inspired to dissect or deconstruct one of Mosher's books from the Old World Series to see how it was constructed, and then took to task his own recreation of the binding. This not only happened to his own satisfaction, but he even decided to create a workshop where participants crafted their own bindings in accord with the hand-binding features Tom discovered in Mosher's binding manufacture. The workshop held on July 9, 2023 was for the Society of Bookbinders North Wales & NW region. The topic: how to make a facsimile copy of a 'Mosher Old World Series' binding complete in detail with its slipcase. Below are side by side examples, first of his own recreation of a Mosher binding, and then examples of his own workshop results and those of his students.

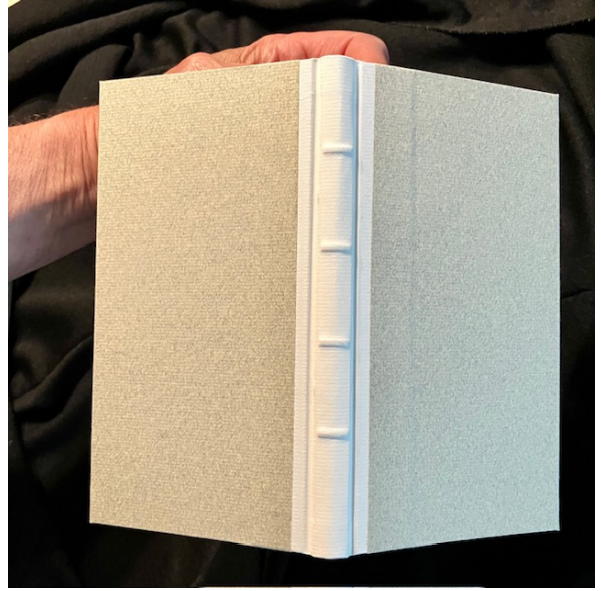
And now part of the Mosher Collection

The following two examples below were very kindly given to me by Tom and they likewise now accompany the Mosher Collection, including Tom's own colorful rendition of an 'Old World Series' binding, along with his outstanding modern binding on *Deidre*.

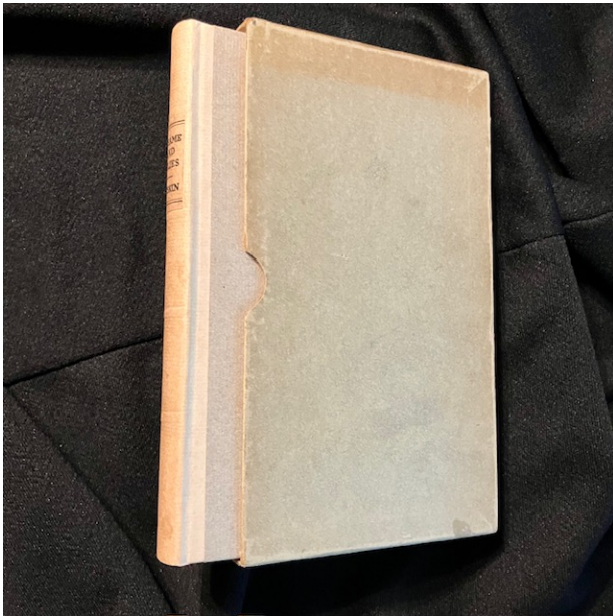
Mosher's original binding



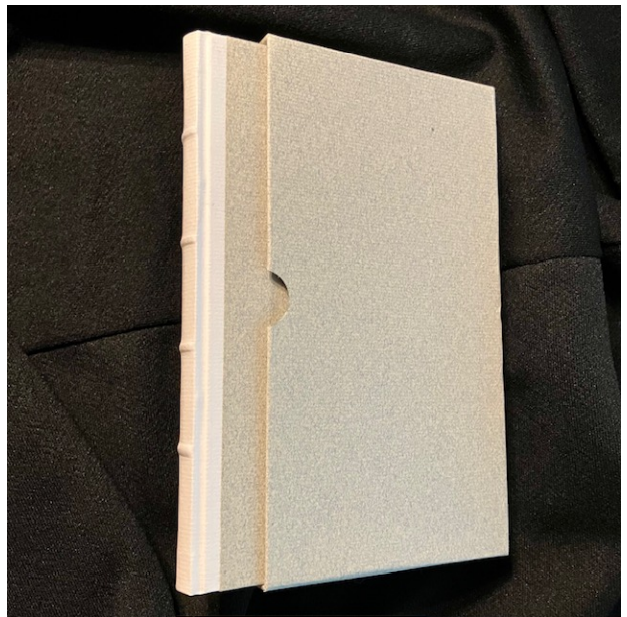
Tom's re-creation of Mosher's binding



Mosher's binding in slipcase



Re-creation of the binding & slipcase



Tom's own colorful 'Old World Series' style binding with his equally colorful slipcase created at the workshop.

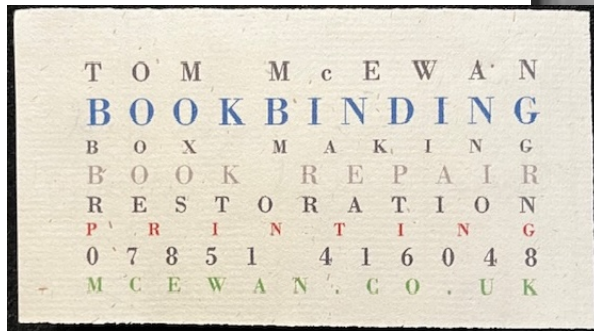


Views of Tom's workshop held on July 9, 2023 for the Society of Bookbinders and some of the student created bindings.



TOM MCEWAN'S BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

As per his on-line website:
<https://sbg.ed-co.net>



“On graduating from Glasgow School of Art with a degree in Fine Art (Sculpture) in 1980, Tom trained as a diesinker and engraver with a London-based firm before going on to set up his own diesinking business in Scotland in 1994.”

“Tom began training as a bookbinder in 2004 at the Glasgow College of Building and Printing. Thereafter, he enjoyed a string of competition successes including the student prize in the National Library of Scotland’s Soutar Competition in 2006 and the overall top prize in the same competition just one year later. There were also prize-winning bindings in the 2009, 2011 and 2013 Society of Bookbinders Competitions and in the Designer Bookbinders (DB) Competitions of 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2013.”

“His greatest successes to date are winning the DB Mansfield Medal in 2012 and 2013. He was elected Fellow of Designer Bookbinders in 2014. Tom was commissioned to bind one of the *Man Booker shortlisted books* in 2014, 2017, 2019 & 2021. In 2017 & 2022 he was a ‘Distinguished Silver Prize Winner’ at the 3rd and 4th Designer Bookbinders International Competition, an event held every 4 years... In 2023 he was commissioned to bind Paul Lynch’s winning Man Booker Prize entry, *Prophet Song*, and was awarded the Heritage Crafts -Trainer of the Year Award.”

“Examples of Tom’s work are held in private and public collections in the UK, Europe, USA and Asia. His bindings have been exhibited Internationally, including: National Library of Scotland; Edinburgh University Library; the John Rylands Library, Manchester; Liverpool Central Library; Birmingham Central Library; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Saatchi Gallery, London; St Bride Foundation, London; Maggs Brothers, London; Library of the Bauhaus University, Weimar; Bibliotheca Wittrockiana, Brussels; Imprenta Municipal, Madrid; National Library of Estonia, Tallinn; The Grolier Club, New York; Houghton Library, Harvard; Centre for British Art, Yale; Bonhams, New York; Nerima Art Museum, Tokyo; Museum of Modern Art, Shiga, Japan.”

Philip R. Bishop, February 20, 2024