

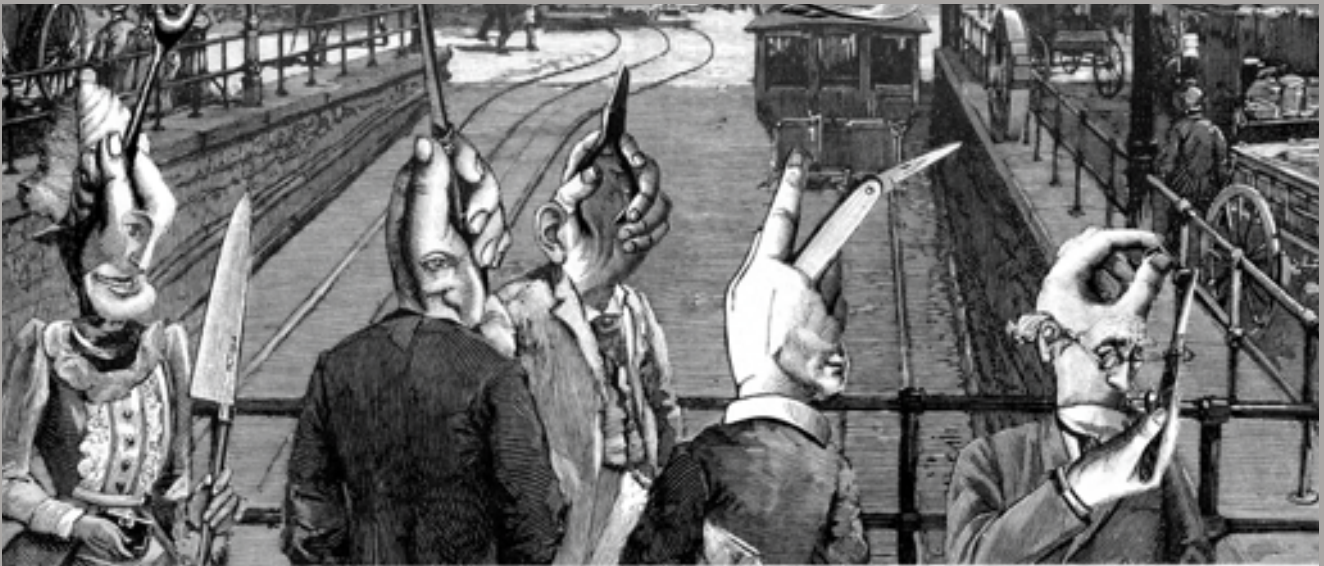


THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
Edinburgh College of Art

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## UOA D32

ART AND DESIGN:  
HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE



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### RESEARCHER

Alan Mason

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### OUTPUT TITLE

*The Magazine*

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### OUTPUT TYPE

Artefact: Illustrated Book

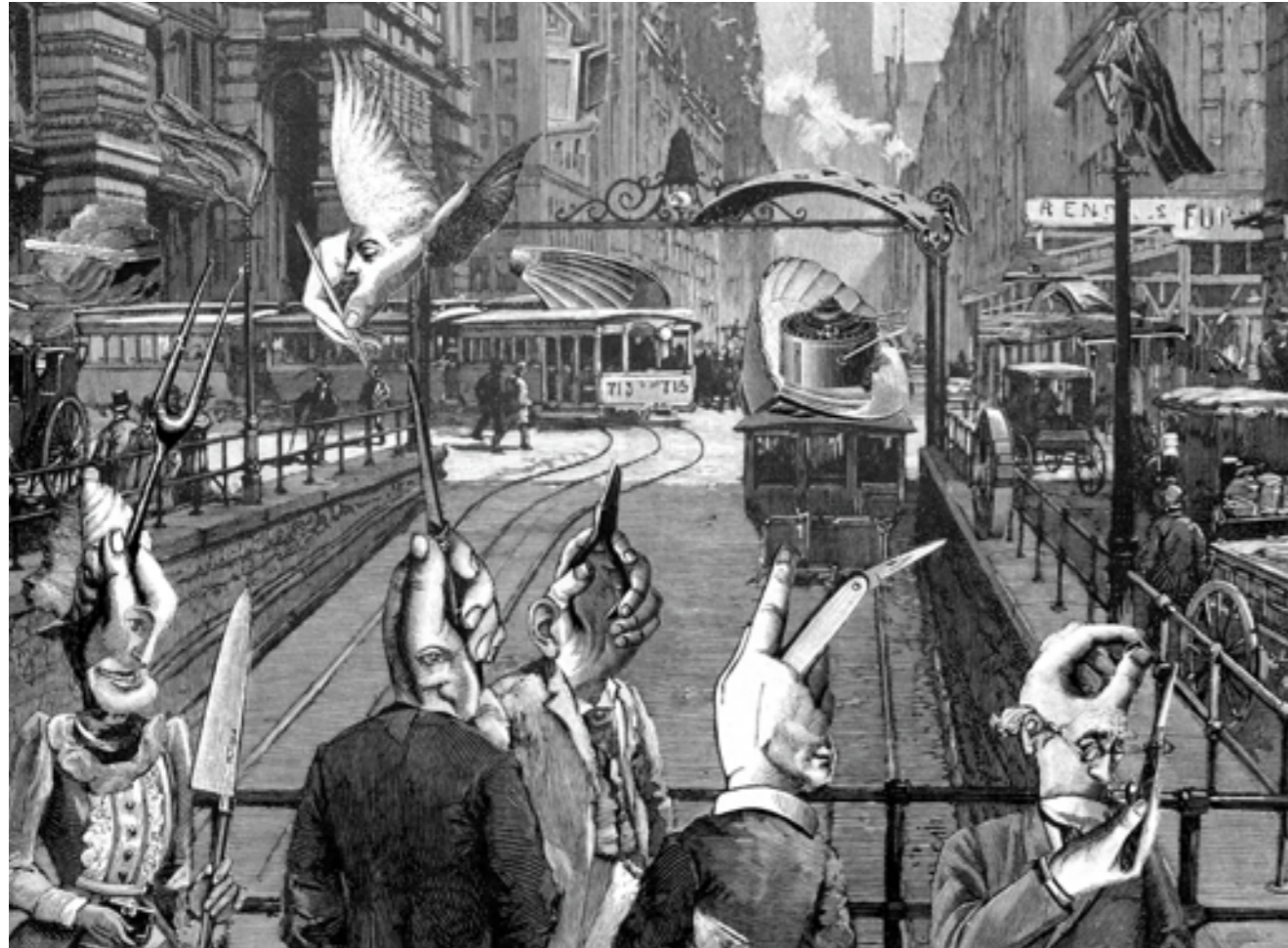
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### DATE

2014 – ongoing

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FIG. 1  
Alan Mason, plate from *The Magazine*, 220 x 160mm. Collage.  
Photo Alan Mason.



<https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/the-magazine-february>  
<https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/the-magazine-march>

## 01 / STATEMENT

*The Magazine* is an experimental novel conceived as a series of 13 books, written and illustrated by Mason and produced over a decade.

The novel was commissioned by the independent publishers, The Caserom Press (University of Lincoln.) To date, three books have been published. (January, Autumn 2013, February, Summer 2015 and March, Spring 2019).

*The Magazine* takes its inspiration from Victorian illustrated compendia. It employs the inherent multiplicity of the compendium form to explore ideas of authorship, narrative and relations between text and image.



## 02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS



FIG. 2  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
January 2013. Print version.  
Photo Alan Mason.

Mason's research deploys an outdated visual lexicon and mode of production to invite new experiences for reading, and to prompt critical reflection on the contemporary value and potential of the artist's book.

Hundreds of texts written in different styles and genres (such as the editorial, the novel, the poem, the letter and 'questions to the editor') and all archaic in tone, are paralleled by a body of images which do not directly represent the text, but relate to it obliquely.

A continuous narrative thread connecting these various registers is the story of the group of fictional group of editors and authors writing the book – the challenges they face, and their generally failing attempts to resolve them.

What emerges is a hybrid conceptual space that confronts our assumptions of storytelling, the form of the novel and the act of reading. Made through montage and collage of found images and pen and ink drawing, the images are assemblages of ideas that produce tangents to the textual narratives and enhance a sense of dislocation.

Conceived as a monthly publication that is, unusually, spread over a decade, the novel challenges assumptions of the time of narrative and artistic production more broadly. This extremization of the temporality of reading is heightened through the anachronistic reuse of outdated modes of imagery and the book-form.

A further strand of the research concerns the nature of production and distribution within publishing practice and what it might mean to resist the generally high-speed production cycles of contemporary publishing. A short film produced in collaboration with animator Ania Leszczynska (see Appendix, page 22) was used as part of the promotional material for the series.





FIG. 3  
 Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
 189 x 240mm. Cover, January 2013.  
 Photo Alan Mason.

FIG. 4  
 Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
 189 x 240mm. Cover, February  
 2015. Photo Alan Mason.



FIG. 5  
 Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
 157 x 240mm. Cover, March 2019.  
 Photo Alan Mason.





FIG. 6

Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
162 x 197mm. Collage illustration,  
March 2019. Photo Alan Mason.



## 03 / ORIGINALITY

Serialising novels is an unusual project today and serialising novels over such a protracted time period is unheard of. The unique contribution of Mason's work is the extremity of its duration of production: by extending this period to over a decade it poses important questions about the way we value artistic production.

The research questions our preconceptions about the experience of narrative, as well as the limits and potentials of the contemporary artist's book. It also poses important questions about the notion of artistic failure and the role of production time in this.

Mason conceives of serialism not just as repetition but as segmentation. Each part of the novel is conceived as stand-alone. New meanings and aesthetic relations emerge through their accumulation. The interrelations between the different editions is key to this flux and layering of meaning, and the interrogation of whole and part. By conflating sources and modalities of production (serial publications from Victorian literature to work by modernists such as Joyce, early 20th century Surrealist collage, contemporary cinema), Mason constructs an aesthetic space that crosses traditional categories and genres and invites new registers of experience. Invested as a flexible template able to accommodate numerous parallel narratives, the Victorian illustrated compendium is expanded through new media.

The text in the novel is attributed to an imaginary team of editors and writers. A metanarrative emerges as the team reflects on the process of editing and writing. This element of reflexivity generates an open and unfinished quality that evolves over the period of publishing and engages the reader in a continuous duration beyond the circumscribed limits of each single issue. The reader is invited to reflect on the conditions of making the work, including the failing processes that are frustrating its progression and completion. This is a novel approach in a field that remains strongly connected to definable authorship and the recognizable voice of the author.

In its form and distribution, *The Magazine* challenges norms of commercial art and design publishing – namely those biased towards large-scale, high-volume and rapid production. Instead, it takes an extended form that is unusual in contemporary publishing, and which invites an experience of reading that is gradual and cumulative and deeply engaged with the conditions of artistic production.



FIG. 7  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
109 x 173mm. Collage, pen & ink,  
March 2019. Photo Alan Mason.



FIG. 8  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
93 x 147mm. Collage, pen & ink,  
March 2019. Photo Alan Mason.





FIG. 9  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
72 x 134mm. Collage, pen & ink,  
2015. Photo Alan Mason.

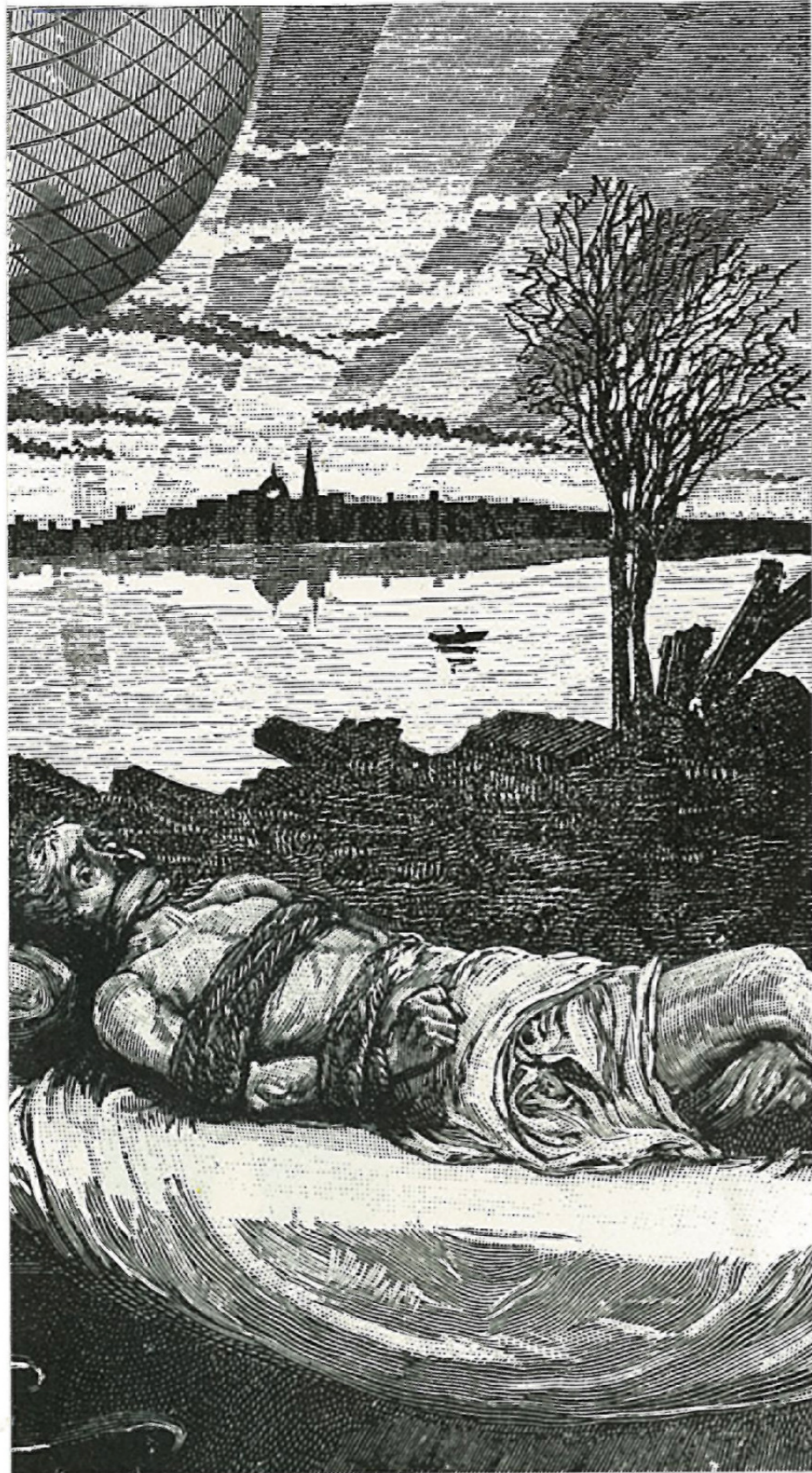


FIG. 10  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
93 x 123mm. Collage, 2015.  
Photo Alan Mason.





## 04 / RIGOUR



FIG. 11  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*, print  
versions, January 2013, February  
2015 and March 2019. Illustrations  
in progress from *The Magazine*  
April and May. Photo Alan Mason.

To make the novel, Mason researched into traditions of artist publishing, Victorian graphic novels, literature and illustrated compendia, early 20th century modernist writing, Surrealist and Dada strategies collage and montage, and seriality in cinema.

Mason wanted to create images that were difficult to date but redolent of multiple eras. As such, the images developed through a combination of experimental image-making (mainly collage, pen and ink and print) and rigorous reworking of old images. Each image consisted of many, often hundreds, of tiny pieces cut from existing Victorian illustrations, rearranged and touched up to make a new image. Often, they were made without reference to the texts, and inserted into the book at random. Sometimes they carry elements that relate to future, as yet unrealized issues, in this way disrupting the 'sealed' space-time of each edition. Not all the written narratives are illustrated. Many are unfinished and continue across issues or gesture towards future narratives.

There are two continuous and continuing stories that run through 12 of the 13 Magazines – titled 'Futility', 'Strickland' and 'Dukenfield'. There are also common threads connecting the various regular features – the Editorial, Letters page, Announcements and End Papers. The other stories, poems and articles are reflections of and commentaries on the principle stories and to the overarching theme of *The Magazine's* failure.

The protracted serial development of the work meant that image and text developed in unusual ways. The 3-year gap between each edition allowed for the emergence and insertion of new concepts and visual elements. A 13th edition is planned, which will reflect on the entirety of the project.





FIG. 12  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
artist's tools and assembly of  
collage. Photo Alan Mason.

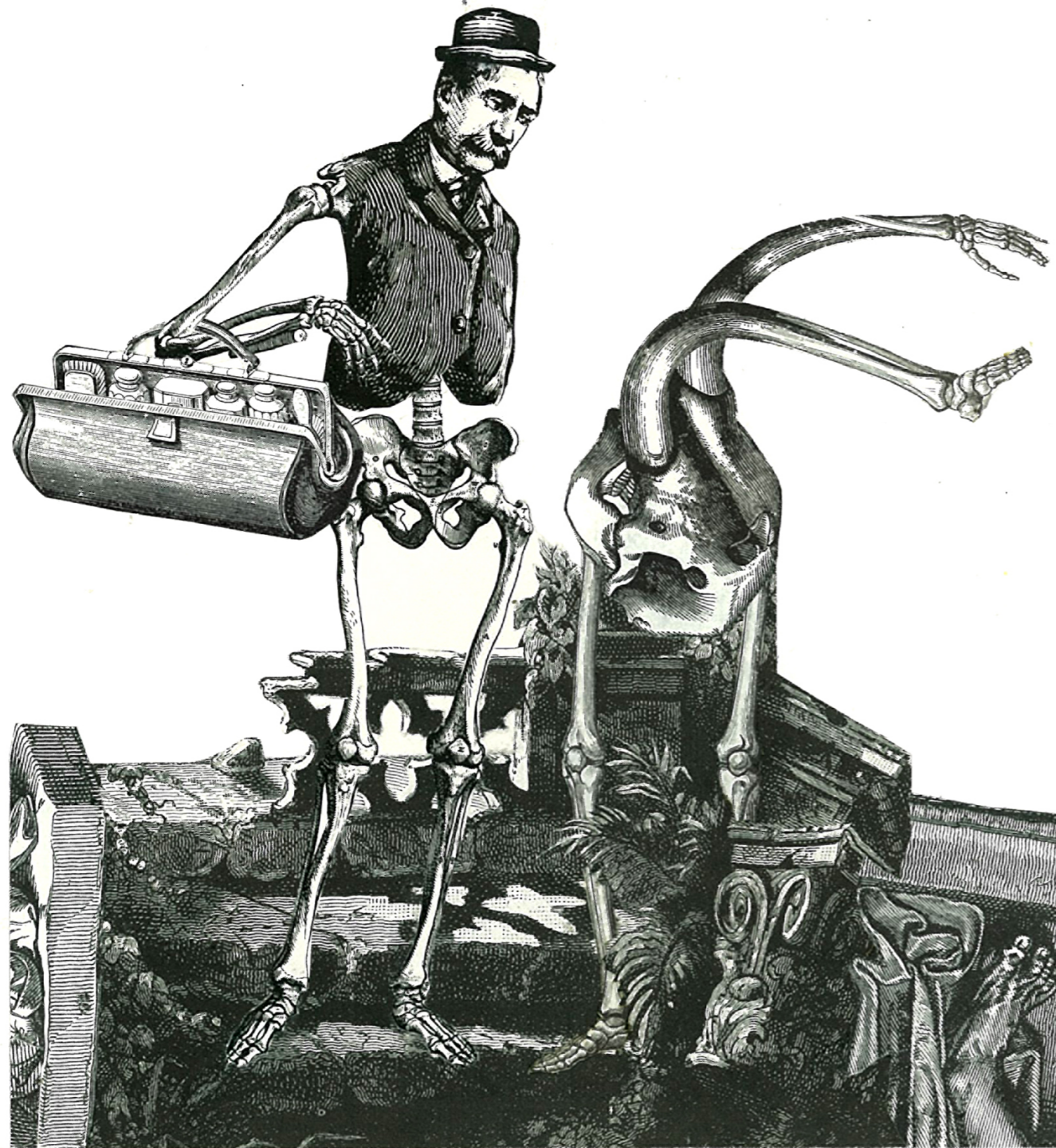


FIG. 13  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
March print version, with  
original artwork/ finished  
illustrations and illustrations  
in progress from The magazine  
April and May. Photo Alan Mason.





FIG. 14  
 Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
 135 x 151mm. Collage, 2015.  
 Photo Alan Mason.



## 05 / SIGNIFICANCE

*The Magazine* questions the assumptions of what constitutes the significance and success of works of art, testing the limits of the relation between failure and success by extremizing the duration of production.

That is, the significance of the work lies in its resistance to the usual tropes by which artistic production is considered significant, including the rapid and widespread dissemination of art. By deliberately setting rules and limits on the project, Mason circumscribes its impact, and provokes critical reflection on how we – the artworld and the wider public – judge artistic production. By inviting new ways of thinking about artist publishing formats and production duration, it points to new directions for artist book publishing.

Caseroom Press has an international distribution and the book has also reached audiences via national and international bookfairs: the Frankfurt Book Fair and The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.

The publication has also been collected by major arts institutions, including the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. Mason has given public talks about the work at events including Artists' Bookmarket, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 2018.



## 06 / APPENDIX

### Appendix

Digital version animation (extract), *The Magazine*, produced in collaboration with animator Ania Leszczynska used as part of the promotional material for the series.



FIG. 15  
Alan Mason, *The Magazine*,  
digital animation, screengrab.





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