About San Francisco Center for the Book

San Francisco Center for the Book (SFCB) is a non-profit arts organization that facilitates workshops, exhibitions and public events with regards to both traditional and experimental book arts. They offer a wide range of opportunities for the public to engage in book arts skills, such as letterpress printing, bookbinding, calligraphy, and many more. They work to promote community access to all of their programs by offering workshops for all ages and abilities; in addition, SFCB organizes artist-in-residencies, musicians-in-residencies, internships and volunteer opportunities.

Website Assessment

Being a novice bookbinder and arts enthusiast myself, I know that it takes a great deal of creativity and innovation to be a book artist. Everything about book arts is about thinking outside the box – ripping apart pages, redesigning elements, and animating the inanimate.

I say all of this because I was disappointed by the overall website design. I was hoping for creative pop-up buttons, vivid images, and elegant color palettes. I wanted to participate in the experience – I wanted to feel like I could visually connect to their mission and their work. Instead, I ended up feeling bored by text. Indeed, the homepage
is comprised solely of text – this should be the most compelling, engaging part of the website.

For the purpose of function, however, I felt like SFCB’s website worked. The website clearly outlined its mission, workshops, exhibitions (past, present, and future) and community opportunities. Drop down menus led to additional links. Social media links were available in the top-right corner, away from other information and avoiding clutter. If you needed to know what kind of workshops were offered and when, this information was easy to find. And if you wanted to add any events to your iCalendar, there was a link that allowed you to do so – I found this to be very user-friendly.

In regards to content, there was a lot of text on particular pages, either in workshop listing format, or in lengthy descriptions. Content was thorough and clear, but dry.

Overall, the website had a very simple feel to it – from its sans serif text to limited use of color and compelling (but very few) photographs. It was clean, organizationally speaking, but lacking in character.

**Prescription for Improvement**

The main suggestion I have to improve SFCB’s website would be to increase (and make better use of) the visuals. This could be achieved by an application such as Cooliris, or even just by allocating more space in the website layout for permanent photographs. I would also suggest adding thumbnail images of the artwork that corresponded to the workshop listing – or, when you click on the workshop listing and it opens up to a separate page, the images would be there on the page.
The existing images on the current website are quite large and take up almost the whole reading space – many times, I had to scroll down to get to the text. I would like to see smaller images that partnered and supported the text better, ideally side-by-side.

When I think of this organization, what comes to mind is just a place with equipment, not a community of people making art. There are pages for staff, artists, interns, and volunteers, but again, no pictures, only text. I would like to see the face of this organization come alive – if this is truly an organization focused on the book, it needs to be written and designed by an imaginative author, not composed and published anonymously.