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Art out of Crisis

By Margaret Nilsson

From a chair in the Frankel television room, Margaret E. Davis '89 watched coverage of the events unfolding in Tiananmen Square in May 1989. Ten years later, she has put together a beautiful and affecting artist's book, *Beijing Heart: A Tiananmen Story*, to mark the anniversary of the student movement and the subsequent crackdown by the People's Liberation Army. She doesn't want people to forget what happened there.

A month-long residency at MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire — the oldest and largest artists' colony in the United States — enabled her to complete the book. (An artist's book is defined by Kitty Maryatt of the Scripps College Press as a three-dimensional, complex object that uses the book as a medium for the exploration of an artist's ideas.) As she worked in her live-in studio in the colony this past February, MacDowell's staff brought her lunch—a basket of food left in the snow at her doorstep—and plenty of firewood.

Beijing Heart was written by Larry Hanbrook, a friend of Margaret who camped out with the student protesters in Tiananmen Square the week before the crackdown. Margaret edited, designed, and bound 100 copies of the book.

Last year, she returned to China (where she had studied Chinese bookbinding in 1996 as a Durfee fellow) to take photos for the book. *Beijing Heart* is hand-bound in traditional Chinese style with silk thread and a dark blue paper cover. It is illustrated with three of Margaret's photographs that she hand-printed in an experimental image-transfer process.

At Scripps, Margaret was a joint philosophy and English major; a studio arts minor. "The emphasis Scripps has in writing and humanities in general was perfect for someone like me who has so many interests . . . I didn't have to limit myself to just one thing, and I had to do a lot of writing," she says. Her studio arts minor, and particularly her work with Kitty Maryatt at the Scripps College Press, was her introduction to what has become a passion for her — book arts.

Margaret received further instruction in bookmaking at Artists Book Works, a bookmaking cooperative in Chicago. She has worked as a journalist and editor for *Outside* magazine, the *Chicago Reader*, and for a popular English-language newspaper in China, *Beijing Scene*, that was ultimately shut down by the government.

Currently a legal editor, Margaret also designs and produces limited-edition address books and perpetual calendars. She gives presentations about the origins and living traditions of Chinese books.

Art accompanying story in printed magazine: Margaret E. Davis '89 and her collaborator, writer Larry Hanbrook, with copies of Beijing Heart.

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