Fertile Ground

A collaboration with MICA Book Arts and the Decker Library

ARTISTS RESPOND TO A COLLECTIVE GEOGRAPHY

JANUARY 20–MARCH 12, 2017
PINKARD GALLERY, MICA
An Invitation
from the
Decker Library

Artists’ books, posters, zines, literary exemplars, facsimiles, visual portfolios, ephemera, and multiples—inspiration is found in each of these formats for its ability to upend what is anticipated by those expecting a simpler text. Sadly, because of their special formats, these items tend to be physically inaccessible in libraries, but instead are held captive in the darkness of a locked storage room ominously called “The Cage.” Yet these items, which librarians call Special Collections, are our most treasured materials! We delicately balance preserving them for future generations with wanting them to be held by as many people as possible.

We eagerly invite you to Decker Library to hold our special and rare materials. They are of no use to the world if they are never held, examined, and admired for what they are. There is a tacit assumption that libraries are for academic research only—not true! Art creates knowledge and meaning, and new research is created from art. To the extent that their work naturally entails research, the artists and designers of our community need to feel comfortable reaching out to engage the materials here at Decker, in all formats.

In the last twelve years, Decker Library has pursued a goal to provide visual, physical, and catalog access to these collections: from the web-based Book Arts Catalog with photographs of every item along with selected MICA Archives and recent Masters theses, to improved searching capabilities in our online catalog, to the library’s Tumblr and other visual social media platforms, to the in-library exhibits which feature library collections along with community-made work, and to our increasingly frequent hosting of class visits to use collections in the library and pop-up installations adjacent to studios on MICA’s campus.
MICA’s Book Arts curriculum has a natural affinity with the library’s Special Collections, making regular use of the teaching collection of artists’ books. So, in conversation with the program in Spring 2016, Decker Library invited students to create an artist book based on materials from the library’s collections. This exhibition, *Fertile Ground: Artists Respond to a Collective Geography*, results from that collaboration.

Involved were faculty partners, whose courses exemplify the diversity of MICA’s Book Arts curriculum:

—Isabel Lederman’s course Artists’ Books: Visual Poetry and Artists’ Publications in Printmaking reflects the book arts’ intersection with literature and humanities.

—Gail Deery’s course History of Paper Structure in Printmaking explores an aspect of papermaking—watermarks—in depth, where several students made independent projects. Many employed digital technologies such as Rhino 3-D modeling and laser etching to realize their projects.

—Stephanie Garmey’s course Mixed Media Book in General Fine Arts produces unique pieces focused on concept, design, integrating hand-craft and digital technologies.

The students were challenged to select and respond to something from the library collections, and to create a book art project that made sense in terms of their artistic practice and the requirements of the particular course in which they were enrolled, and to compose an artist statement about their work. All had the opportunity to have their work curated into an exhibition in MICA’s Pinkard Gallery by visiting curator Cynthia Nourse Thompson from the University of the Arts.

Similar collaborations involving artists and libraries inspired our initiative. In 2001–2002, Johns Hopkins University’s Evergreen House invited artists to make artists’ books based on items from the Garrett Library, resulting in the exhibit *Kings, Hummingbirds & Monsters: Artist’s Books at Evergreen*. In 2008–2009, New York Public Library produced the Design By the Book video series, where New York Public Library special collections were used by artists, facilitated by NYPL librarian Jessica Pigza, while Grace Bonney of Design*Sponge spoke with the artists about their creative process and how they integrated library sources into their work. In 2015, The Institute of Contemporary Art Baltimore and the George Peabody Library supported Lu Zhang ’04 as artist-in-residence to explore that library’s collection and make a responsive body of work, the impressive series topo(log) typo(log).

This exhibition serves as yet another way to make our community aware of the treasures we hold in Decker Library. Moreover, this exhibition advances our goals in illustrating the research involved in artmaking, how art can create new knowledge and research, and the deep wells of inspiration held in The Cage. Please know that these founts of inspiration are here for you, too: just ask!—and that we’re always ready to help on an individual level or to facilitate an immersive group project.

DECKER LIBRARY
KATHERINE COWAN  Senior Reference Librarian
HEATHER SLANIA  Library Director
KELLY SWICKARD  Catalog Librarian and Liaison to Book Arts
MICA BOOK ARTS CONCENTRATION

The Book Arts Concentration at MICA is an interdisciplinary framework allowing students to study the complexities of the book as a material object and conveyor of artistic meaning. The concentration complements and shares courses from many departments, providing a unique opportunity to select a course of study within the context of book studies, recognizing students in all majors who complete a total of 15 credits as prescribed by the concentration guidelines. Students declare the concentration typically in their sophomore year, working with their MICA advisor and Gail Deery, Director of the Book Arts Concentration on course selections, and then follow up with the Chair of their department. MICA graduates with the book concentration can seek advanced degrees in library science, conservation, museum studies, or digital publication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We began this project in response to Book Arts Baltimore, an informal collective of area cultural and educational institutions celebrating the book arts in 2015–2017. It made sense for us to engage MICA Book Arts faculty and students and we thank them first and foremost. Our faculty partners brought unique approaches to the project. Gail Deery recruited our remarkable exhibition curator—Cynthia Nourse Thompson ’92—who added creative dimensions to the exhibition, enhancing the experience for all involved.

This exhibit could not have happened without the support of Academic Services Dean Cynthia Barth, who greenlighted the project as one of MICA’s contributions to Book Arts Baltimore. Decker Library Director Heather Slania supported the ongoing efforts of multiple staff members to bring the the exhibit to fruition. We especially thank Arthur Soontornsaratool from the library’s Digital Initiatives Unit for his sensitive photography of the student projects and library sources. Campus partners have provided gracious and sensible collaboration: Exhibitions (Director Gerald Ross and Maya Fell ’17), Graphic Design (Faculty Brockett Horne and Vijay Masharani ’17), and the Art Tech Center (John Paul).

Fertile Ground: Artists Respond to a Collective Geography is partially funded by the Gladys Brooks Foundation.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

PROJECT COORDINATORS
Kathy Cowan and Kelly Swickard

FACULTY
Gail Deery, Isabel Lederman, and Stephanie Garmey

EXHIBIT CURATOR
Cynthia Nourse Thompson, Associate Professor and Director, MFA Book Arts + Printmaking, University of the Arts

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Maya Fell and Gerald Ross

PHOTOGRAPHY
Arthur Soontornsaratool

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Vijay Masharani and Brockett Horne

CATALOG PRODUCTION
John Paul

IMAGE IDENTIFICATION
COVER: The Houses of Whitaker Avenue, 1911 by George Wylesol;
PAGE 2, 34: The Grammar of Ornament by Owen Jones, Decker Library;
PAGE 3: L’Ornement Polychrome by M.A. Racinet, Decker Library;
PAGE 4: Students in MICA’s Book Arts program.
Fertile Ground
Artists Respond to a Collective Geography

CYNTHIA NOURSE THOMPSON
Curator

Dasom Kim
View of Hillsmere Shores
There is an eternal landscape, a geography of the soul; we search for its outlines all our lives.

Irish-born British writer
Josephine Hart (1942–2011)

The landscape of printmaking and book arts is ever expanding: technology and formation, language and voice, and audience and arena. A respect for the historical lineage and an understanding of both disciplines serve as the foundation for this panoramic survey of works that challenge the common assumptions of the book.

Fertile Ground: Artists Respond to a Collective Geography explores the diversity of the book arts. Within this exhibition, students reflect and respond to individual works selected from the collection housed within the Decker Library of the Maryland Institute College of Art. The foundation of this project undertaken by students in the divisions of general fine arts, printmaking, and book arts was to create a responsive work in dialogue with their own artistic voices, challenging them to interpret the intended content beyond the selected artists’ realizations.

Dialogues of various levels and intents have been curated throughout the gallery to highlight their diversity. This diversity is further expanded upon in each artist’s use of scale, materiality, and process. Such elements as these illustrate practices currently relevant in the field of contemporary book arts and focus on the integration of the numerous disciplines and techniques of book arts with those of design arts: form, structure, and content; pure typography; printing; bookbinding; and the multiple. Additionally, contemporary applications to newly aligned disciplines—such as two-and three-dimensional experimental design—are revealed in works integrating and revealing the premise of landscape.

As guest curator, I sought to reconsider the definition of terrain through the lens of a book artist surveying and excavating a collection in order to craft, as would a cartographer or anthropologist, a panorama of artistic form and nomenclature. Thus, a visual etymology of environments is assembled amid numerous and diverse works within the Pinkard Gallery at Maryland Institute College of Art.
cemetery stillness, hallowed
ground
consecrated by generations.

even now,
lightless ovens
await offerings.
ground to ash.
Works in this exhibition are found to be connected by this common theme of landscape—from those which depict a literal terrain such as Angel Bilotta’s *They Shouldn’t Teach Swimming Lessons in a Pool Full of Stingrays*, or Dasom Kim’s sculptural beauty *View Of Hillsmere Shores*; to those which deal with memory, direction, and loss as in Margaret Anne Hines’ *Losing* and Amber Rhein’s *A Personal Field Guide to my Childhood Backyard*; and those which use the body or clothing as geography as in Marina Constantine’s *Subclass of Stitches* and LaNia Sproles’ *Morphosis*. Moreover, the artists in their own unique voices questions the manner in which geography is considered—as peripheral, metaphorical, and physical while also charting a landscape unique in the topography of material and form which independently and collectively synthesizes the library’s collection as a visual platform. Thus, a cultivated cross-discipline body of innovative work is highlighted from the perspective of topography as physical [actual literal landscape, nature], as corporeal [the body/memory as landscape], and typographic [text, language, and typography as landscape]. Striking are works which powerfully employ mixed media and printmaking techniques in collaboration with poetry as in *S. Tomé and C. Verde* by Jessica Bastidas.

"Evident in these artists’ vision is the careful consideration of the outer limits of materiality and process, as well as the capability of language to serve as both substance and form where the concrete and the fluid are continually questioned."

The artist states, “*S. Tomé and C. Verde* both focus on two distinctly unique geographies as well as the manner in which immersion, and then removal from an area, affects the psychology of place. The natural environment encompasses both constructed environments and physical social interactions. While processes of re-envisioning constantly remove memory further from its original context, the attempt to recall, restore, and through extension redesign these environments forms a complex system of wayfinding.”
More impactful are works that explore the body, in this second theme, the corporeal, as an external, physical boundary with which to question our internal mapping. Of particular note is *A Suicidal Ideation Alphabet* by M. McCallum Dickens. Within the smooth, skin-like surface of the pages, a painful, personally lived geography is reproduced and recorded through the use of positive and negative space. Dickens demonstrates how for many individuals the exterior topography upon their frame is replaced with scars, wounds, and histories, deftly illustrated by the process of laser engraved text. This plotting of mark making, phonetics, and outer boundaries pursues a relationship between the human body—and the flesh and blood that comprise a malleable armature. The artist creates associations between the physical and the intangible, and beckons the viewer to consider how anxiety and pain are recorded on and within the body, while quietly revealing an adjacent relationship of the corporeal to the psychological. Injuring the pages, the repetitive action of laser scoring the surface additionally emerges as a physical extension of the body and becomes a powerful reflection on mortality, loss, and the ephemeral.
In a world where engagement of language and the physical book is continuously displaced with new forms of media, evident in these artist’s vision is the careful consideration of the outer limits of materiality and process, as well as the capability of language to serve as both substance and form where the concrete and the fluid are continually questioned. As artist and MICA alumna Lesley Dill once stated, “We are animals of words…. If you were to cut us open anywhere, what would come out would not be just blood and organs, but also language.”

LaNia Sproles
Morphosis

the work is... “from the perspective of topography as physical [actual literal landscape, nature], as corporeal [the body/memory as landscape], and typographic [text, language, and typography as landscape].”
Sharp Clawed paws
and outstretched

mome
recl
the s
d

Benn Krause
Deep Snow
Featured Artists
The sensation of pieced fragments is mirrored in the accompanying poetry that employs specific yet truncated descriptions of particular moments of experience. The reader is encouraged to reorder these fragments, echoing the manner in which memories surface, shuffle, and submerge. By contrast, the imagery veers from the specific nature of any particular landform and location and instead relies on color and movement to evoke the quality of that geography’s imprinted memory.
Everywhere I have lived in my life I have been surrounded by large bodies of water: from the lake in the backyard of my childhood home to the ocean and the bay on either side of our house during Summers at the beach. It was inevitable that I would have some kind of natural relationship with these bodies of water; however, it may not be expected that this relationship is one full of fear and panic. ... Due to the unwillingness to interact with water in the traditional way, I found myself photographing these bodies of water from a safe distance where I could remain in complete control and safe on dry land.
Subclass of Stitches

MARINA CONSTANTINE
This work is a commentary on the demonization of feminine fiber work and domestic craft by the art community and by the patriarchy. This work is a tribute to all women who crafted and laid the founding techniques of fiber artistry.

Evan Christopherson

In this poem I have spoken of silence as acting as wind, wind being a natural breath that should hold no sound. Instead of wind being silent, however, the wind speaks and carries that question and never leaves an answer.

To put it simply, suicidal ideation is never a “romantic” kind of mindset to be in, but rather a sad and confusing one. Explaining what is going on in your mind might sound absurd and alarming—so many people will never talk about it. But if there is ever a way to make these ideations sound less crazy, make people themselves feel less crazy, then we need to talk about it. The more it is talked about and known, the less taboo it will seem. I wanted to create a book about mental health using a collage of personal and not personal experiences concerning suicidal ideations. Representing these through the alphabet was perfect: the reader digests one letter at a time.
Losing is about the inevitability of loss. I took a computer coding book from the 1970s, cut out twenty 3.5 x 3.5-inch snippets—some with imagery, others with text. I used brightly colored paint to reimagine the diagrams of cyberspace drawn throughout the book. The poems are created by cutting words out of the book and reordering them. On reading the original book, I was astonished by the writer’s aspirations to see things differently and preserve new ideas all with using computer. Almost half a century later, I find the digital world all about loss. Things get lost in the copiousness, computers crash, jpegs degrade.
DASOM KIM
These shores serve as emblems of our given right to enjoy nature and harmony and reflect inward as part of a continuum that is infinite and unending. The coastline supports wildlife and is home to thousands of residents and an oasis for travelers such as myself.
Deep Snow

**BENN KRAUSE**

I wanted to integrate my love of fibers into the bookmaking process, melding 2-D and 3-D art through wool needle-felt work. I took my inspiration from *Polar Dance: Born of the North Wind* and its photos of how polar bear bodies move and fold, especially those of polar bear families. As a natural continuation from my textile practice, I use papercut silhouettes evocative of the shapes used within my pattern design, and explore color in an attempt to create a calming, familial atmosphere.

This book was inspired by Anatomia Botanica by Radha Pandey and by the way Pandey connected the sacred flowers of her homeland so personally. It allowed me to think about the way I connect memories of nature during my childhood. ... "A Personal Field Guide looks at three plants surrounding my home in upstate New York: Morrow’s Honeysuckle, Common Lilac, and Wood Lily. I’ve created a guide that reveals the taxonomy of the plants along with a series of poems which reveal their personal significance to my development as a child."

GEORGE WYLESOL

After exploring the books in the Library, I was drawn to catalogs that depicted certain objects plainly and simply for archival purposes: collections of flags, bottles, masks, houses, dolls. I wanted to make a book that seemed at first to be a simple collection, but had deeper emotional impact hidden in the imagery. When I found Jutaku: Japanese Houses, I knew right away that I wanted to make a book that archived the neighborhood I grew up in.

I became conscious of the patterned organization of elements in my daily life. The repetition and patterning with *Objet Trouvé* is inspired by imagery in my environment that I have photographed throughout the last month. I chose the restricted palette of four gouache tones that I feel reference the brightness and exquisite quality of the prints within my inspiration.
LANIA SPROLES

I have adopted the ideas of a change in character and identity. So I proceed to investigate what that experience has done to my own character, by illustrating these concepts through three main stages—these stages being a moment of trickery, a life-changing event, and a mundane-yet-recurring aspect of my life. All stages are distinctly different from each other, but the imagery and poetry flow together as if it were one large story.
Handmade Paper Watermarks

FARIDAH ADAM / JESSICA DE JESUS / AUBREY DUNN
ASHLEY FIELD / BRUBEY HU / ESTHER HWANG
DASOM KIM / DAN LANGSTON / IVAN NG
AIDA RAMIREZ / AMBER RHEIN / YIYUN QIN
JAMIE WALTOS / MENGyang WANG / JIEYU ZHANG

This portfolio is a collection of hand cut and digital cut watermark patterns from MICA students under the direction of Gail Deery, referenced from the 2002 portfolio published by Hand Papermaking magazine which is also a collection of watermarks created by artists and papermakers.

A watermark is an identifying image or pattern that appears in paper and is made by using various thicknesses of fiber to expose a mark and can be seen by holding the sheet of paper to the light. Watermarks vary greatly in their visibility; while some are obvious on casual inspection, others require some study.

JIEYU ZHANG  Rose Window
My watermark is inspired by Gothic rose windows, with their beautiful geometric structure and elegance.

MENGYANG WANG  Breeze
This is a non-scientific representation of the actual pace of a heart inspired by an electrocardiogram. The subtlety of the paper gives me a sense of life as Spring approaches.

AMBER RHEIN  Flower/Flour
American Depression-era flour bags inspire this pattern. The flower patterns were printed on bags during The Great Depression when people were making their own clothes out of usable flour sacks. It was a way to recycle the material while allowing the clothes fashioned from them to be expressive and stylish.

YIYUN QIN  Seigaiha
Seigaiha means “blue wave of the sea.” Its repetition and motif consist of concentric circles that have been overlapped to only show the top portion of each tile.
Exhibition Checklist
Jessica Bastidas ’16 ’17
*S. Tomé and C. Verde*

Faculty: Isabel Lederman

Angel Bilotta ’16
*They Shouldn’t Teach Swimming Lessons in a Pool Full of Stingrays*

Faculty: Gail Deery

Evan F. Christopherson ’18
*Silence*

Faculty: Isabel Lederman

Marina Constantine ‘18
*Subclass of Stitches*

Faculty: Stephanie Garmey
M. McCallum Dickens ’16
A Suicidal Ideation Alphabet

Faculty: Gail Deery

Maggie Fu ’18
Human & Animal

Faculty: Stephanie Garmey

Margaret Anne Hines ’16
Losing

Faculty: Isabel Lederman

Dasom Kim ’16
View Of Hillsmere Shores

Faculty: Gail Deery
So Hee (Tiffany) Kim ’18

Yves Saint Laurent

Faculty: Stephanie Garmey

Benn Krause ’18

Deep Snow

Faculty: Stephanie Garmey

Amber Rhein ’17

A Personal Field Guide to My Childhood Backyard

Faculty: Gail Deery

Katie Schweitzer ’18

Objet Trouvé

Faculty: Stephanie Garmey
LaNia Sproles ’19
*Morphosis*

Faculty: Isabel Lederman

George Wylesol ’16
*The Houses of Whitaker Avenue, 19111*

Faculty: Isabel Lederman

**Handmade Paper Watermarks**

Faridah Adam ’16: Celtic Dream
Jessica De Jesus ’16: Mau
Aubrey Dunn ’17: Japanese Hemp Leaf
Ashley Field ’16: Overlook Pattern
Danqing Guo ’16: Persian Antique Ornament
Brubey Hu ’17: Windows
Esther Hwang ’16: Flowers, Stuck
Dasom Kim ’16: El-Mandala
Dan Langston ’18: Untitled
Ivan Ng ’16: Softstone
Aida Ramirez ’17: Woodwork
Amber Rhein ’17: Flour / Flower
Yiyun Qin ’17: Seigaiha
Jamie Waltos ’15: Mandala
Mengyang Wang ’17: Breeze
Jieyu Zhang ’17: Rose Window

Faculty: Gail Deery
LEARN MORE

Follow Decker Library on tumblr: deckerlibrary.tumblr.com

Decker Library’s book arts catalog is available online via Digital Decker digitaldecker.mica.edu

To see anything in Decker Library’s Special Collections, visit the information desk on the lower level or email refer@mica.edu
Founded in 1826, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) is the oldest continuously degree-granting college of art and design in the nation. The College enrolls nearly 3,500 undergraduate, graduate, and continuing studies students from all 50 states and 57 countries in fine arts, design, electronic media, art education, liberal arts, and professional studies degree and non-credit programs. Redefining art and design education, MICA is pioneering interdisciplinary approaches to innovation, research, and community and social engagement. Alumni and programming reach around the globe, even as MICA remains a cultural cornerstone in the Baltimore/Washington region, hosting hundreds of exhibitions and events annually by students, faculty, and other established artists.

MICA’s exhibitions and public programs receive generous support from the Robert and Jane Meyerhoff Special Programs Endowment; the Amalie Rothschild ’34 Residency Program Endowment; the Rouse Company Endowment; the Richard Kalter Endowment; the Wm. O. Steinmetz ’50 Designer-in-Residence Endowment; the Rosetta, Samson, and Sadie Feldman Endowment; the Maryland State Arts Council, an agency dedicated to cultivating a vibrant cultural community where the arts thrive; and the generous contributors to MICA’s Annual Fund. Fertile Ground: Artists Respond to a Collective Geography is partially funded by the Gladys Brooks Foundation.

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