ROCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY’S ART OF THE BOOK

BY JANET MENDELSON

Above: Ambling
Artha Gangi Ballun
West Hartford, Connecticut

2019, Beet of Show

watercolor paper, eco-printed images, wax, thread,
original poem (self-authored) stamped into the leather
cover, accordion book assembled from eco-printed pages
embellished with a collection of
found feathers hand-stitched to the paper, eco-printing
native leaves were collected and printed on the papers
using heat and pressure to extract the dye images
(just, copper, or salt added to the dye bath affects the
print outcome hence the color variations), papers were
then coated in wax, hand stitched, and assembled with
grommets and cord; 9.5 x 9 x 1 in. (closed)

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ART OF THE BOOK & PAPER
July 9-October 30, 2021, Rochester Public Library,
115 South Ave, Rochester NY
rocplibrary.org/artofthebook | exhibited@libraryweb.org

D

e librarians cringe when books are used as
raw material for making art? Not at the
Rochester, New York, Public Library. To
celebrate the library’s 100th anniversary
in 2011, a juried exhibit, Art of the Book, was held
showcasing creativity in Artist Books and Alternate Books. A
decade later, what began with works largely by local Upstate
New York artists today attracts national and international
participation. In 2021, honoring the show’s 10th anniversary,
a third category has been added: Paper Sculpture. Art of the
Book 2022 runs July 9-October 15, 2021, at RPL’s Central
Library, downtown and online.

Patricia Utzner, Director of RPL and the Monroe County
Library System (MCLS), initiated the idea for the
competition. In the inaugural program, Utzner described what
they received as “breath-taking, mind-bending works of art.”

“Books can be many things, from simple blocks of text
bound together, to lushly illustrated stories, to hand演练ely
bound and printed volumes,” said Utzner. “They can be well-
thumbed paperbacks, dog-eared, moth- loophed hardcovers,
or delivered wholesale to an eight-inch screen. Books can be read
and revered alone and in silence, or they can be cherished and
read aloud. In all their forms, books are magical things, and the
Art of the Book is intended to showcase all that magic.”

Corinne Clur, Graphics Division Supervisor, and Alicia
Gurrath, MCLS librarian and social media coordinator,
RPL Central Library, manage the details. Before this year’s
March 1 entry deadline, we spoke over Zoom. Joining us
was Susan Chertow Lovrigon, director of Marketing and
Program Development for the Friends & Foundation of the
Rochester Public Library, the 501(c)3 charity that presents
programs and provides supplemental financial support.

Judging is done blind. This year, the jurors for Artist Books
and Alternate Books are Rachel Goettick and Diane L.
Bond. Goettick is a craftsman whose book binding
company, Just Terelle, in Rochester, specializes in miniature
books, antique book restaurations, and book art. Bond is an
arts educator and Royalton Renaissance Master Artist in
book arts. She is a past winner of Art of the Book Best of
Shows, and Artist Books first- and second-what awards.

For Paper Sculpture, the judge is Dr. Gerald Mose, a Buffalo-
based artist, independent curator, art collector, and arts writer

and publisher and contributor to the book.

TOP and ABOVE:
Musical Paper: Singing Paper String
Aline Thomas
Den Haag, Netherlands
2019, Honorable Mention Artista Books
decorated handmade paper; painting, drawing, sewing;
43 x 15 cm (closed); 43 x 70 cm (open) @alinetomas
LEFT and BELOW:
Let Down Your Hair
Ariel Rudolph Harwick
Spencerport, New York
2019, 1st Place Altered Books
paper, metal crook for hanging, an 18-foot-long cascade of soft paper, secured by a bow; sculptural edition of Rapunzel, 8 x 216 in.
arilerudolphharwick.com | @arilerudolphharwick

who teaches in the Art and Design Department at the University of Buffalo, State University of New York. This year awards totaling $500 are offered for Best of Show, 1st Place Artist Books, 1st Place Altered Books, and 1st Place Paper Sculpture.

"The biggest hurdle is having artists know how to submit well-liked, clear images," said Gootnick, a fourth-time judge.

"To get a professional shot of a 3D object is not easy. The most important thing is the story they tell. I look for a piece that expresses some type of theme or emotion and how they interpret the story. It helps if they have an article statement, and we can see that the image expresses what they’re trying to show." Some artists struggle with the definitions of Artist Book vs. Altered Book and submit for the wrong category, she said. The judges take into consideration and will switch an entry’s category to evaluate it fairly.

"Making Paper Sculpture, a separate category now, gives artists greater leeway, such as nontraditional construction or a piece without words," said Liguori. "It makes the show more inclusive as the nature of books changes." But the distinctions have been fuzzy for a while. Let Down Your Hair (2019), Ariel Rudolph Harwick's sculptural edition of Rapunzel, is an 8-inch x 18-foot-long cascade of soft paper imprinted with the fairy tale, secured by a bow. Pathfinder, 1st Place Altered Book (2018), is a sculpture of mixed-media found objects by Jessica Orphacee who used wire, metal, wood, bone, and paper from a book.

ABOVE TWO IMAGES: Cricket Song
Anne Claude Cotty
Briarcliff Manor, New York
2019, Honorable Mention Artists Book
ebony, sterling silver, pinhole photographs, Xerox technology, colored pencil, printed and handwritten texts, 2.5 x 16 x 3 in. (book), accordion book with a detachable spine extends 120 in.
anneclaudecotty.com | @anneclaudecotty

Cricket Song, by Anne Claude Cotty, is an insect-shaped 2.5 x 16 x 3-inch Artist Book made of ebony, sterling silver, pinhole photographs, Xerox technology, colored pencil, and printed and handwritten text. The cricket’s wings unfold to become an accordion book, with detachable spine, that extends 120 inches. The piece was awarded an Honorable Mention in 2019.

Mead noted the Book Arts field, including Artist Books and Altered Books, is very connected to printmaking, wherein Paper Sculpture is more aligned with the fine arts. "Designating that as a third category allows the jurors to delve into how the artist manipulates and utilizes the medium. It’s more about the nature of the medium they chose," said Mead. With entries yet to arrive when we spoke, he expected to see sculpture that’s predominantly paper but perhaps made from paper pulp with metal armatures to give it form. He anticipated adaptive reuse of materials by artists who make a point of not buying or consuming more than what is necessary.

It’s about "upcycling," creating material intentionally, stemming from interest in ecology or the environment. Materials having a life and a history that can be brought forward. That is also the route of an Altered Book, said Mead, but it opens up the options for raw materials. "Is it a tea bag paper or cloth?" he asked.

"RPL does this in a very informed process," said Mead. "The show has a very high level of quality. Because they have now broken it up into three subcategories, it allows the judges to have more purity. Jurors can focus on a narrower set of criteria within the Book Arts genre."
The first year, 39 winning selections were displayed in repurposed traditional card catalogs. Since then, dedicated gallery space was created during renovations to the Central Library. The Anthony Madison Gallery presents a full calendar of diverse exhibitions as part of the system’s commitment to community engagement which includes public art.

Over the past decade, Art of the Books reputation for excellence has grown. Entries have come from 27 states and nine countries including Australia, Argentina, Chile, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Lithuania, Switzerland, and four provinces in Canada. “When the judges receive the blind entries, it feels like Christmas morning,” said Gootnick. “One book was made of plastic. Many are stitched from fabric. Last year there seemed to be a lot of body parts,” said Gootner. Artists have submitted intricate puzzles and pop-ups, scrolls, star-shaped books, dioramas of scenes from classic books or their childhood favorites. Some write their own text or poetry or use letters or newspaper pages.

“Often the work interprets a significant life event,” said Clar, recalling one created from the artists’ divorce papers. “We look for the stories people portray without words,” Laszlo observed that self-reflection is a common thread every year.

The first digital projection came in last year. It didn’t win but was memorable, and the team expects to see more technology-driven works as artists pose questions about how libraries will accommodate nontraditional books in the near future. ‘Artists reflect society,’ said Minik, considering national discord and the pandemic. ‘As we go through this sea change, I expect their content, messages, and ideas will indicate the upheaval that’s consuming us now. It’s redefining our whole way of life. Will someone do something with protest signs or paper from homeless sites? I won’t be surprised.’

Based on her own experience, Gootnick expects artists have had more time to think and experiment in ways that may inspire them to dig deeper. ‘It’s been an emotional year for all of us.’

JANET MENDELSCHN, a freelance writer and author of Main’s Museums: Art, Oddities & Artifacts (Countryman Press), especially enjoys writing about travel and the arts. She welcomes readers’ story ideas, janetmendelschn@gmail.com

AFTER:

Proverbs/Proverbs
Anna Embree
Tuscaloosa, Alabama
2019, 2nd Place Artists Books
Letterpress printed cards on Stonehenge paper; 5.75 x 6.75 x .25 in.
barnaartree