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Caxton Club Announces 2021-22 Book Arts Grant Recipients

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The Caxton Club Grant Committee met on Wednesday, November 3, to select the recipients of the 2021-22 Caxton Club Grants.

Committee members Hannah Batsel, Martha Chiplis, Paul Gehl, Audrey Niffenegger, Diane Stillwell Weinberg, Jackie Vossler, and Committee Chair Eileen Madden selected the recipients of this year's grants.

Club President and Grant Committee member Jackie Vossler stated, "Since 2002 the Caxton Club has offered more than \$100,000 in grants and scholarships to the next generation of those who love the book. Last year the pandemic forced us to alter our method of selecting those winners, but we were not deterred from granting them. This year we are proud to return to our format of requesting submissions and allowing our Grants committee to select the winners."

Past Grant recipient and current Grant Committee member Hannah Batsel commented, "Caxton Club's book arts grant was the first financial support I ever received for any book project, and it immediately raised the ceiling of quality and scale for that project. What we often don't consider, however, is the domino effect that these grants have on a young artist's career. Our book arts grant makes one project possible, but that project then becomes the highlight of that artist's portfolio; that project is sent to galleries and library collections and booksellers. It is showcased in applications for residencies, teaching appointments, and future funding opportunities. Ultimately, our grant represents not just a vote of confidence and support for a single project, but also a foot in the door to the larger arts community."

The Caxton Club is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2021-22 Grants for Book Arts: Keren Alfred, University of Iowa Center for the Book; Madison Bennett, University of Iowa Center for the Book; Anna Lee Cai, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Nestor Kok, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; and Tania Luo, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Grants for Graduate Students in the Midwest with a Project in Book Arts

Keren Alfred - University of Iowa Center for the Book

Untitled

Keren Alfred is a book artist with a with an undergraduate degree from Brown University in Environmental Studies. She has incorporated botanical studies of Jamaican plants into broadsides and papermaking and received the first Black Writer's Fellowship from Hand Papermaking, Inc, and a Stanley Award in support of this work.

Alfred's thesis is "an exploration of Black joy through an Afrofuturist lens." It is an "Afrofuturist lens because of the legacy of Black people hoping and dreaming of better futures when the present is not what it should be."

Alfred states, "During my time at Iowa, I have realized that there are few artworks in my field (Book Arts) that speak about Black joy. There are some artists' books that address the hardships that come with being a Black person, but this past year and a half has shown me that focusing on Black joy is as important and is a form of resistance."

“The book will include my handmade space paper (colourful paper that evokes looking up at the stars or seeing images through a space telescope), and hand-carved imagery of adinkra symbols (symbols from the Akan people of West Africa that represent sayings or concepts).” Alfred will letterpress print and hand bind her book in an edition of fifteen.

Madison Bennett - University of Iowa Center for the Book

Glimpsing Mirrors

Madison Bennett is creating a series of five calligraphed parchment works “that explore the literal and metaphorical processes of creating palimpsests.”

This project explores and promotes the endangered craft of parchment-making. Bennett states, “For *Glimpsing Mirrors*, I will create my own palimpsests by combining historical and contemporary methods of parchment-making and calligraphy. I will prepare the parchment, write stream-of-consciousness calligraphy on the parchment, partially scrape the calligraphy away, and layer new calligraphy onto the effaced spaces.”

“The title *Glimpsing Mirrors* is an excerpted phrase from Jorge Borges’s *Library of Babel*. [...] Borge’s essay explores our impulses as humans to compulsively compile, record, and organize information. It suggests that the truth we seek externally exists within us, waiting to be revealed. Each palimpsest I create for this project will effectively become a mirror, a reflection of myself and of my thoughts during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Anna Lee Cai - School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Untitled

Anna Cai’s project grew out of her work on a documentary film. In 2020, Ms. Cai was hired to work with the Chinese Historical Society of Memphis to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first Chinese Immigrant to Memphis.

As she interviewed members of the Chinese community, she found that “no history has been recorded of our vibrant, complicated, and often overlooked community, a community colored by scrappy immigrant resourcefulness, by the sorrow and triumphs of surviving, by the precarious navigation between the racial binary of white and Black in the South.”

In her frustration with piecing together this history, Ms. Cai came up the solution for the narrative of her artist’s book: speculative fiction. Cai describes the story of the book: “It is told from the perspective of the child of a family who opens a traditional Chinese tea shop in the 1940s in downtown Memphis. The materials in the book are ephemera collected by the child as their family. With the help of their fellow community members, they create a place that centers the slowly burgeoning Chinese population in the city of Memphis.”

She cites previous Caxton Club Grant winner Jose Resendiz as an artist whose work inspired her project. The book will be printed with letterpress and screenprinting to capture the sense of the time period and geography.

Cai states, “the book will also invite others in my community who likely have not encountered this history to imagine a personal connection to the ancestors and elders.”

Nestor Kok – School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Tell Me About Your Summer

Nestor Kok will create a “deeply personal collection of artist’s books documenting the painfully transformative experiences” of the summer of 2021. Kok frames his work with four geographic locations, each with a unique book format. The books will be printed with inkjet, risograph, and offset printing.

“These books juxtapose the veneer of happiness ... against the hidden depths of three major crises I was undergoing — a medical scare, my family’s rejection of my transgender identity, and a general sense of helplessness as I drifted across North America; unable to return to my home country due to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Book One, *New York City*, will be a pamphlet-stitched book with alternating large and small pages. “The narrative text details my inner turmoil and destructive obsession with a swollen lymph node cancer scare, in spite of the comparatively happier Polaroids paired with them.”

Book Two, *Chicago*, will be a “waterfall flip book whose pages will contain prose fragments paired with photographs,” exploring memory and the passage of time. It will be risograph-printed, “as the nature of risograph ink is also akin to memory... the more you handle them the more they erode.”

Book Three, *Texas*, starts off folded small. The reader must unfold the book into a larger sheet of paper in order to progress through the narrative. Kok says, “The book format represents my self-suppression due to the transphobia I faced from my conservative relatives in Texas and my family back home.”

In the final book *Washington*, Kok will create four risograph-printed kaleidocycle books— (a kaleidocycle is a type of origami toy). Printed on the kaleidocycles will be “kaleidoscopic views of film photographs I took while hiking and staying with my found family in Washington State.” The series of four books will be contained in a custom-made box; printed and bound in an edition of ten.

Grant for a School of the Art Institute of Chicago Undergraduate with a Project in Book Arts

Tania Luo

Drifting

Tania Luo will explore her complex experiences as an international student from East Asia; “drifting” an analogy of her life in a foreign country. “This project is not simply a story of going to a school in a foreign country, but also a story of being pushed away and growing up.”

Luo will create a letterpress printed accordion book which will open up to a poster. “This format allows the text and images to flow through the pages, keeping the narrative in chronological order ... representing the journey of drifting but also ... the uncertainty ... the reader will flip through the book page by page before opening it up.”

Luo states “I am visually expressing my emotions to create connections across the cultural barrier. There are three narratives to the story: objective, subjective, and metaphorical. The objective voice will be rational, presenting facts without comments in a sans-serif typeface. The subjective voice will be emotional and personal, using a transitional serif typeface. The two parts will be ... distinguished ... by typeface and color. The body texts are not horizontal or vertical; instead, they will have a slight angle to create a feeling of instability. The metaphorical narrative will be represented by imagery, supplemented with a few lines of text.”

Luo will print and hand bind her book in an edition of five. On why she chose letterpress as the medium for her book, she said, “Letterpress is the approach that is more intimate than digital... because I can touch the type and images with my body. Therefore, letterpress is most appropriate to represent the personal experience in this project.”

Read more here <https://caxtonclub.org/>

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