

Illumination and Sculptural Invention in Maine

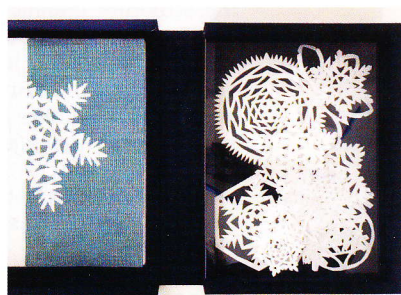
The Kate Cheney Chappell '83 Center for Book Arts at the University of Southern Maine is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. In its first decade, the center has established itself as the preeminent showcase for Maine's book arts community. Director Rebecca Goodale, an innovative maker of books herself, likes to mix it up. You might find Dutch-American writer Janwillem van de Wetering's books and artwork on display or a show of artists responding to the plight of migrants on the Greek island of Lesbos.

The current show, *Contemporary Illuminated Manuscripts: The Work of Nancy Ruth Leavitt*, highlights the art of a master of hand-lettered books. Leavitt, who lives in Stillwater, ME, is known for her calligraphic lettering and inventive illuminations. The exhibition includes 30 books and broadsides, along with 15 folders of studies for various book works and an assortment of craft tools.

Leavitt works with a range of literature, revisiting and reimagining classics such as Clement Moore's *The Night Before Christmas* and Celia Thaxter's *An Island Garden*, but also produces original work. For *Plant Corridors* (2014), she wrote and illustrated, in watercolor and gouache, a study of plant life found along northern Maine Interstate 95, drawing on the research of botanists, weed ecologists and the Maine DOT.

Some of Leavitt's designs relate to current events. In 2012, after a general call was made to send 20 snowflakes to Sandy Hook Elementary to welcome students back to school and honor the 20 children who were murdered there, Leavitt set out to cut a snowflake for every gun violence victim in the U.S. She has been unable to keep up with the numbers despite having cut thousands of snowflakes. Several pieces in the show, including *Hope* (2018) based on a poem by Emily Dickinson, incorporate her cut-out snowflake designs.

Across town, the 17 artists in *ON BOOKS:*



Clockwise, from top left: Nancy Ruth Leavitt, *Slime Molds Have Eleven Sexes*, 2018, 10¼ x 15" with an 18 x 12" portfolio of 11 pulp paper paintings labeled with slime mold vocabulary. Poem by Margaret Price. Courtesy of the artist. Nancy Ruth Leavitt, *On the Formation of Snow*, 2018, unique book in a series of two, 12 x 9", 20 pages. Courtesy of the artist. Duncan Hewitt, *Swan*, 2017, carved and painted wood (four pieces), dimensions variable, approx. 2 x 2 x 2". Courtesy of the artist. Lin Lisberger, *White Owl Flies Into and Out of the Field*, 2018, painted poplar, chestnut, bones, 4 x 27 x 28". Photo: Luc Demers.

Figue Rampant (2018) is an accordion book featuring hand-colored drypoints of 40 figs. Goodale developed the piece from drawings made of a vine creeping over a castle wall in France. "It was so beautiful," she recalls, "and as I drew, the ripe figs were

tumbling to the ground."

Sculpture at the Portland Public Library approach the book as an invitation and inspiration to create sculpture. The 30 or so pieces include altered books, sculptural responses to books or literary experiences and pieces that employ language, words and other book elements.

Three 2018 sculptures by Lin Lisberger, who curated the exhibition, came from reading, respectively, an Ursula Hegi novel and poems by W.S. Merwin and Mary Oliver. The latter poet's *White Owl Flies Into and Out of the Field*, with its image of a "Buddha with wings" preying on an animal in the snow led to a resonant construction of painted poplar, chestnut and small animal bones.

Sculptor Duncan Hewitt likewise drew from poetry. His *Falling Awake* (2018) takes its title from British poet Alice Oswald's 2016 collection. The sculpture, made of carved wood that has been painted, consists of three versions of the book, one of them open and each with its own bookmark. As part of the exhibition, Hewitt will present a performance/reading of Oswald's poem *Swan* on March 14 at 5:30 p.m.

Lesley Dill created the skinny 32-inch-tall *Black Long-Legged Crane Puppet with White Letters* (2013) out of thread, fabric and wood. Along the length of it runs a line from a Tom Sleigh poem: "Then a moment happens like watching an icicle turn into a sword hanging above your head."

The aforementioned Rebecca Goodale's *La*

From Béatrice Coron's *Fashion Statement* (2010), a black "word robe" made from Tyvek, to Dolph Smith's *The Fire Pole* (2011), a "text block" made from wood and mica, the inventiveness in this show is remarkable. These are books as you've never seen them before, transformed and revered.

Carl Little's most recent book is *Paintings of Portland* (Downeast Books) co-authored with his brother, David Little.

Contemporary Illuminated Manuscripts: The Work of Nancy Ruth Leavitt

Kate Cheney Chappell '83
Center for Book Arts
USM Portland, ME
usm.maine.edu/bookarts
Through April 30, 2019

ON BOOKS: Sculpture

Lewis Gallery, Portland Public Library
Portland, ME
portlandlibrary.com/locations/main-branch/lewis-gallery
Through March 23, 2019