



# ROCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY'S ART OF THE BOOK

ABOVE: **Ambling**  
Anita Gangi Balkun  
West Hartford, Connecticut

2019, Best of Show  
watercolor paper, eco-printed images, wax, thread,  
original poem (self-authored) stamped into the leather  
scrap adorning the 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  
(rust, 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)  
[abalkunart.com](http://abalkunart.com) | [@anitabalkun](https://twitter.com/anitabalkun)

**D**o 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 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2011, a juried exhibit, *Art of the Book*, was held showcasing creativity in Artist Books and Altered Books. A decade later, what began with works largely by local Upstate New York artisans today attracts national and international participation. In 2021, honoring the show's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a third category has been added: Paper Sculpture. *Art of the Book 2021* runs July 9–October 15, 2021 at RPL's Central Library, downtown and online.

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

“Books can be many things, from simple blocks of text bound together, to lushly illustrated stories, to handsomely bound and printed volumes,” said Uttaro. “They can be well-thumbed paperbacks, dog-eared, much-loved hardcovers, or delivered wirelessly to an eight-inch screen. Books can be read

BY JANET MENDELSON



ARTIST BOOK A work of art realized in the form of a book, often published in small editions, sometimes one-of-a-kind.

ALTERED BOOK Any book, old or new, that has been recycled by creative means into a work of art.

PAPER SCULPTURE Artwork created as sculpture using paper in some form as the predominant medium: three-dimensional, either freestanding or bas relief, functional or nonfunctional

— Rochester Public Library

and savored 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 Clar, Graphics Division Supervisor, and Alicia Gunther, 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 Chekow Lusignan, director of Marketing and Program Development for the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library, the 501c3 charity that presents programs and provides supplemental financial support.

Judging is done blind. This year, the jurors for Artist Books and Altered Books are Rachael Gootnick and Diane L. Bond. Gootnick is a craftswoman whose book binding company, Just Terrific, in Rochester, specializes in miniature books, antique book restorations, and book art. Bond is an arts educator and Roycroft Renaissance Master Artisan in book arts. She is a past winner of *Art of the Book* Best of Show, and Artist Books first- and second-place awards.

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



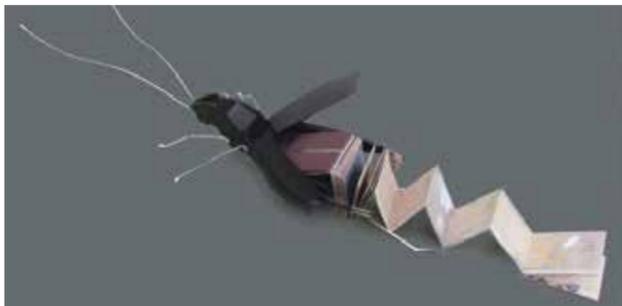
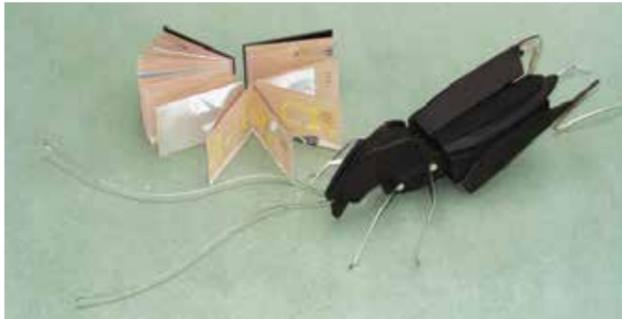
TOP and ABOVE:  
**Musical Paper: Singing Paper String**  
Aliza Thomas  
Den Haag, Netherlands

2019, Honorable Mention Artists Books  
decorated handmade paper; painting, drawing, sewing;  
43 x 15 cm (closed); 43 x 70 cm (open) [@thomas.aliza](https://twitter.com/thomas.aliza)



LEFT and BELOW:  
**Let Down Your Hair**  
 Ariel Rudolph Harwick  
 Spencerport, New York

2019, 1<sup>st</sup> 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.  
[arielrudolphharwick.com](http://arielrudolphharwick.com) | [@arielrudolphharwick](https://twitter.com/arielrudolphharwick)



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. (box);  
 accordion book with a detachable spine extends 120 in.  
[anneclaudecotty.com](http://anneclaudecotty.com) | [@anneclaudecotty](https://twitter.com/anneclaudecotty)

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

“The biggest hurdle is having artists know how to submit well-lit, 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 artist 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 that 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 Lusignan. “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*, 1<sup>st</sup> Place Altered Book (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*, 1<sup>st</sup> Place Altered Book (2018), is a sculpture of mixed-media found objects by Jessica Orphardt who used wire, metal, wood, bone, and paper from a book.

*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, whereas Paper Sculpture is more aligned with the fine arts. “Designating that as a third category allows the juror 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 armature 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.

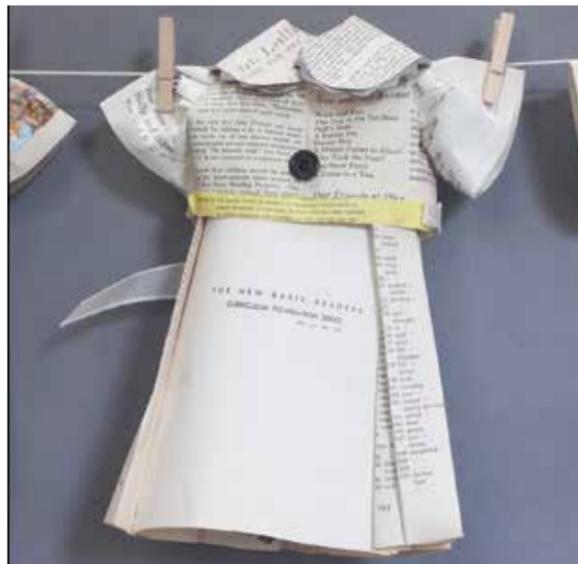
It’s about “upcycling,” reusing material intentionally, stemming from interest in ecology or the environment. Materials having a life and a history that can be brought forward. That is also the route of an Altered Book, said Mead, but it opens up the options for raw materials. “Is a tea bag paper or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

“RPL does this as 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 parity. Jurors can focus on a narrower set of criteria within the Book Arts genre.”



TOP and ABOVE:  
**Pathfinder**  
 Jessica Orphardt  
 Hamlin, New York

2018, 1<sup>st</sup> Place Altered Books  
 mixed media, found objects (wire, metal, wood, bone,  
 paper from a book); sculpture; 24 x 48 x 12 in.  
[@jessicaorphardt](https://twitter.com/jessicaorphardt)



TOP and ABOVE:  
**Learning to Read, Wearing Puff Sleeved Dress,  
 and Other Childhood Memories**  
 Nanci Nugent  
 Scottsville, New York

2019, Honorable Mention Altered Books  
 book pages, notions; 38 x 28 x 4 in.

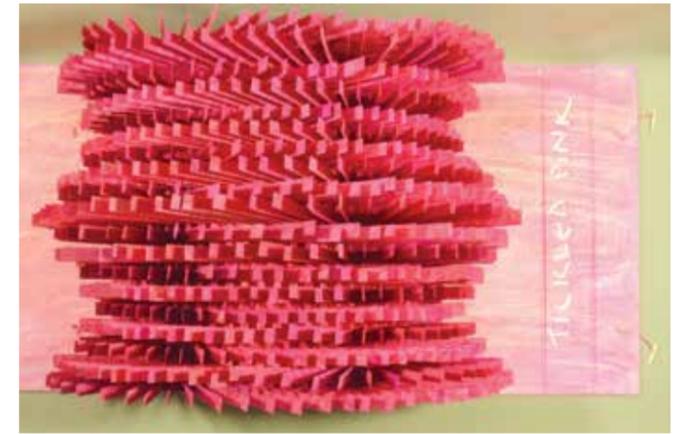
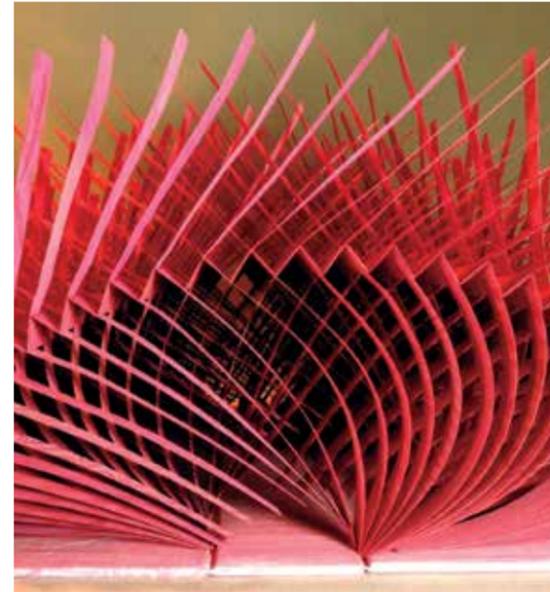
The first year, 39 winning selections were displayed in repurposed traditional card catalogs. Since then, dedicated gallery space was created during renovations at the Central Library. The Anthony Mascioli Gallery presents a full calendar of diverse exhibitions as part of the system's commitment to community engagement which includes public art.

Over the past decade, *Art of the Book's* 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 plexiglass. Many are stitched from fabric. Last year there seemed to be a lot of body parts," said Gunther. 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." Lusignan observed that self-reflection is a common thread every year.

TOP AND BELOW LEFT:  
**Tickled Pink**  
 Charlene Asato  
 Mountain View, Hawaii

2017, Artists Book  
 Canson Mi-Teintes paper, paste, acrylic, Tyvek, binder board,  
 waxed linen thread, bone clasps; double flag book;  
 15 x 11 x 2.5 in. (closed), 15 x 33 x 8 in. (open)  
 chaleidesigns.com | @charleneasato



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 Mead, considering national discord and the pandemic. "As we go through this sea change, I expect their content, message, and ideas will indicate this 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 MENDELSON, a freelance writer and author of *Maine's Museums: Art, Oddities & Artifacts* (Countryman Press), especially enjoys writing about travel and the arts. She welcomes readers' story ideas. [janetmendelsohn.com](http://janetmendelsohn.com)



ABOVE:  
**Proverbio/Proverbs**  
 Anna Embree  
 Tuscaloosa, Alabama

2019, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Artists Books  
 letterpress printed cards on Stonehenge paper;  
 5.75 x 6.75 x .25 in.  
 @annaembree