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Exhibition of Artists' Books, Old and New, Highlights Nature

“OF GREEN LEAF, BIRD, AND FLOWER”: ARTISTS’ BOOKS AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Yale Center for British Art: May 15–August 10, 2014

NEW HAVEN— This spring, the Yale Center for British Art presents “*Of Green Leaf, Bird, and Flower*”: Artists’ Books and the Natural World, an exhibition examining the intersections of artistic and scientific interest in natural history and the natural world from the sixteenth century to the present. On view from May 15 through August 10, 2014, the exhibition explores depictions of Britain’s countryside and its native plant and animal life through more than two hundred objects drawn primarily from the Center’s collections, ranging from centuries-old manuscripts to contemporary artists’ books.



The exhibition highlights the scientific pursuits in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that resulted in the collecting and cataloging of the natural world. Also explored are the aesthetically oriented activities of self-taught naturalists during the Victorian era, particularly those of women who collected and drew specimens of butterflies, ferns, grasses, feathers, seaweed, and shells, and assembled them into albums and commonplace books. Examples of twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists’ books, including those of **Eileen Hogan**, **Mandy Bonnell**, **Tracey Bush**, **John Dilnot**, **Sarah Morpeth**, and **Helen Douglas**, broaden the vision of the natural world to incorporate its interaction with consumer culture and with modern technologies. Work by contemporary artists in the exhibition reveal a shared inspiration to record, interpret, and celebrate nature as in the work of their predecessors.



“*Of Green Leaf, Bird, and Flower*” features traditional bound books, drawings, and prints, as well as a range of more experimental media incorporating cut paper, wood, stone, natural specimens, sound, video, and interactive multimedia. A number of key historic works will be on loan from other Yale collections, including the Yale University Art Gallery and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Examples of early microscopes used by natural historians will also be on view, on loan from the Lentz Collection at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History.



James Bolton, one of twenty drawings depicting specimens from the natural history cabinet of Anna Blackburne, ca. 1768, watercolor and gouache over graphite on parchment, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, in honor of Jane and Richard C. Levin, President of Yale University (1993-2013); Sarah Morpeth, *Crow Landscape*, 2008, cut paper, wire, and acrylic ink, Yale Center for British Art, Friends of British Art Fund; Tracey Bush, *British Butterflies: Museum Box, no. 1*, 2004, cut paper, mounted with specimen pins, in glass-topped cardboard box, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund

OPENING LECTURE

The celebrated English painter and book artist Eileen Hogan will deliver the keynote opening lecture focusing on her artistic response to Little Sparta, the garden created by Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay and featured in the exhibition. The lecture will take place at the Yale Center for British Art on Wednesday, May 14, at 5:30 pm.



CREDITS

“Of Green Leaf, Bird, and Flower”: Artists’ Books and the Natural World has been organized by the Center and curated by Elisabeth Fairman, Senior Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts.

PUBLICATION

The Yale Center for British Art, in association with Yale University Press, has produced an illustrated publication, *“Of Green Leaf, Bird, and Flower”*: Artists’ Books and the Natural World, to accompany the exhibition. Designed by Miko McGinty to evoke an early naturalist’s field guide book, it contains an introduction written by Elisabeth Fairman, with further essays that explore key themes of the exhibition by Robert McCracken Peck, Curator of Art and Senior Fellow at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, on scientific practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; Dr. Molly Duggins, Lecturer, Department of Art History and Theory, National Art School, Sydney, Australia, on the aesthetically oriented activities of the self-taught naturalist; and the Scottish poet and collector David Burnett, on the importance of wood engraving in twentieth-century artists’ books. The publication will be available for purchase in the Yale Center for British Art Museum Shop. For further information, please contact the Museum Shop at +1 203 432 2828, or email ycba.shop@yale.edu.



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