**Alexandria Eberly FURSCA End of Summer Report, July 2021**

**Introduction**

The aim of my FURSCA project this summer was to create a series of seven completely unique artist books, inspired by the exploration of the role of historic influences on contemporary artists and subject matter. I used three Vandercook letterpresses, located in the Albion College Print Shop, to create several of my books, utilized my knowledge of ceramics to create a sculptural piece, and learned new skills in printmaking. I set up my FURSCA schedule so that, during the first two weeks of the program, I would be doing independent research in the Albion College Archives and Special Collections, and during the final eight weeks of the program, I would tackle six unique exploration prompts, roughly one a week. These prompts evolved as the weeks went by, changing to further push me outside of my normal realm of artistic creation. The prompts are as follows: difficult binding, circular, light and transparency, texture, sentimentality, and wood.

My goal was to create books that pushed the boundaries of conventional materials and allowed for me to challenge both my creative thinking and technical skills. As the summer went on, I pushed myself to create books that were not strictly made out of paper and printed text. This led to me focusing on found object art, sculptural books, and the creation of much more technically difficult and large pieces than I had completed previously.

**Results and Summary**

In this section, I will break down the seven books I have successfully completed this summer. I am very proud to have reached this goal! Please note that Book 4, the ceramic sculpture, is incomplete and needs to be fired in a large gas kiln once the school year begins. Additionally, Book 7, the one with copper plate etchings, still needs to be printed on the large wheel press in the Print Shop, which will be completed the week after FURSCA ends.

*Book 1. Exploration goal: difficult binding.*

My first book was inspired by an elegy that I wrote in an Honors Poetry class last semester. The exploration goal for this book was “difficult binding” which I certainly think I accomplished! This book was constructed out of very long strips of paper and bound together with screws, completely held together by the tension contained in the threads that wrap around the piece and are connected to the screws at specific points.. This book cannot be opened and it rests as a sculptural object on a tabletop. This forces the viewer to find a new way of engaging with the piece, as opposed to flipping through a conventional book, in order to perceive the information contained inside. Each page is letterpress printed with a line from the elegy, which honors the crumbling spires of the Dexter Mausoleum in Spring Grove Cemetery in my home city of Cincinnati, Ohio. The dark colors of each page physically represent the decay and age of this decades old structure, and the concealment of the written poem mirrors the concealment of human remains within the actual mausoleum.

*Book 2. Exploration goal: circular.*

The next book that I completed was once again paper-based, with all of the text printed on the letterpress. The exploration goal for this book was “circular,” and I sort of pushed the meaning of the word circular in this one! The shape of this book is a mobius strip. A mobius strip is a mathematical shape in which the front surface of a strip is connected to the back of the same strip. This strip, in theory, is able to be infinitely split in two, doubling the amount of strips each time it is split. In this book, I completed a series of three editions that are exactly the same. One edition will remain whole, while the other two are in states of deconstruction, with one the the three editions being already cut into the largest amount of strips possible! The text of the poem is a Persian form of poetry called a ghazal. I wrote this ghazal last semester as well. The physical structure of this book mirrors the concept behind the Persian poetic form. A ghazal is composed of couplets that can be rearranged to still form a coherent poem, just as this book can be split and rearranged to still form a whole piece.

*Book 3. Exploration goal: light and transparency.*

The next book I created was not based on paper, this time. It is a book created out of a type of thin plastic sheeting called Mylar. The exploration goal for this piece was “light and transparency,” and I was amazed at how much this material actually mimicked a pool of water when set flat against a tabletop! This similarity is what prompted me to cut each piece of Mylar to resemble an organically formed puddle. This piece is set up on the floor, and is presented as stanzas of an originally-written poem printed into the surface of the Mylar sheets, with one stanza on each puddle. It’s amazing how the text created the illusion of surface tension. On these faux puddles! This book was also printed on the letterpress using a technique called blind embossing, in which no ink is used on the rollers of the press. This piece forces viewers to engage with it very closely in order to have the type revealed to them, and in order to read the lines of tiny text, one must get down on the floor and gaze at the puddle at a specific angle.

*Book 4. Exploration goal: texture.*

My next book was created based on the exploration goal of “texture,” and is once again not at all created out of paper. This is one of my in-progress pieces. I created this piece out of RO-14 Mid-range light stoneware from Rovin Ceramics. This white clay body is currently in a leather hard state and is too fragile to transport. I wanted to create this piece as a sculptural object that needed to be interacted with by multiple people. Once fired to a bisque state in a large gas kiln, this piece will become stronger and able to be picked up. The goal of this piece is that it needs to be picked up in order to see through the carved holes, but it will be too long and heavy for just one person to pick up. Two people need to stand shoulder to shoulder and collaborate in order to tactically interact with this piece, and lift it up to eye level to see light shining through the carved holes in the surface of the clay cylinder. This piece was slab-formed, as throwing an object this long proved to be a challenge of my throwing abilities!

*Book 5. Exploration goal: sentimentality.*

My next book really pushed the concept of what a book even is! The exploration goal of “sentimentality” prompted me to think about my childhood and the shared experience of cooking with my mom. I used a copper tea kettle as the base for this sculptural piece, with illustrations and a poem about cooking as a child etched into the surface. I love how this object, from a distance, seems almost out of place amongst my books that are paper-based, and I want this piece to make viewers question what exactly can count as a book.

I used a printmaking process of copper etching,to complete this piece. In this process, a pure copper object, such as the tea kettle, is covered with a thick, black substance called ground. This ground is composed of turpentine and asphaltum, and dries hard. Once dry, this ground is gently drawn into using a sharp stylus. After drawing, the copper piece is then submerged in a solution of ferric chloride for 20-35 minutes. The acid etches into the copper that is visible in the drawn lines, and after it has soaked for the accurate amount of time, the piece is removed from the solution bath and washed clean under running water. After washing, all remaining ground is removed from the copper with a greasy solvent, and then the grease is removed with denatured alcohol. This is the final step in the process of creating the etched kettle!

*Book 6. Exploration goal: wood*

The next two books are the most technically complex ones I have created so far. These final two books were prompted by the exploration goal “wood,” and are presented as a diptych, which means a series of two interconnected or related objects. The first book in this pair is a found piece of very large wood, which I sanded and stained in order to reveal the natural grain of the wood. A singular tiny scroll is placed within the plank of wood, which will be printed with the title of this piece. It will be presented in a gallery setting leaning against a wall, emphasizing the found nature of the object.

*Book 7. Exploration goal: wood*

Presented directly in conjunction with this plank is a series of printed copper etchings that simulate the pattern of swirls and wood grain that were visible to my eye. These plates have yet to be printed on the large wheel press, but all of the copper plates are ready to be printed later this week. Once printed onto individual sheets of fine paper, these 22 completely unique prints will be contained in an accordion-fold book structure that, when completely stretched out, will mirror the size of the original plank of wood.

**Conclusion**

This summer has been an amazing opportunity to focus, undistracted, on my art. During the month between the end of FURSCA and the start of the upcoming school year, I will be applying to juried exhibitions with this portfolio of work. This is comparable to having research in a different field published to an academic journal. I will expand on my passion for both ceramics and book arts next year during my final year at Albion, and will be using my work to apply to Master of Fine Arts programs as well as Artist Residencies. I will present all of this work in the Elkin Isaac Research Symposium, and, once school starts, I hope to display my work in glass cases in the Albion College Stockwell-Mudd Library for fellow students to see up close. This opportunity to create artwork has expanded my professional and academic knowledge, as well as increasing my chances of attending a competitive MFA program!

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