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Fuller Craft Museum, New England's home for contemporary craft

Museum Hours: Tuesday – Sunday 10:00 am – 5:00 pm, Thursday 5:00 pm – 9:00 pm

FULLER CRAFT MUSEUM PRESENTS:

***Metamorphosis: The Art of Altered Books***

July 30 – November 6, 2016

Reception: Sunday, September 11, 2016, 2:00 – 5:00 pm

This is a joint reception celebrating the openings of two other exhibitions:

*(413): Pioneering Western Massachusetts* and *New Sole of the Old Machine: Steampunk Brockton – Reimagining the City of Shoes*

High Resolution images are found at:

<http://fullercraft.org/press/metamorphosis-the-art-of-altered-books/>

Using printed material as a point of departure, contemporary artists transform existing books and reference volumes into sculptural objects using a variety of techniques. They gouge, carve, fold, paint, shred, pierce, tear, stamp, collage, gold-leaf, burn, glue, cut, and staple. The creative alterations shine with visual appeal and challenge our long-held perceptions about books. Artists featured in this exhibition: Long-Bin Chen, Andrew Hayes, Jacqueline Rush Lee, Jeremy May, and Wendy Wahl.

Since the 3rd millennium B.C., humans have transcribed language to chronicle histories, disseminate information, share philosophies, proclaim doctrines, and capture inspired tales, both large and small. As a result, the written word—composed on tablets, scrolls, books, and digital devices—has influenced cultural evolution across the globe and continues to do so today. In addition to serving as repositories of information, books have inspired the altered books genre (a parallel practice to artists' books).

As the relatively obscure field attracts more and more professional makers, it bears noting that we all have engaged in book-altering to some degree. Who among us hasn't highlighted sections, dog-eared pages, underlined passages, or jotted down notes in the columns? It is a way of personalizing what we read, facilitating literary absorption, and leaving traces of our engagement with texts that resonate. In addition to the intellectual and emotional connections, these objects offer a multitude of sensory experiences. We feel the heft of the object and the texture of the paper. We smell the pages and hear them being turned. We read the words with

our eyes or our fingertips glide across the braille. This holistic relationship with the printed word drives artists to give books new life, reincarnating them as sculptural objects.

Some of the earliest writings were considered altered books, due in part to the laborious process required. For example, Greek scrolls were often resurfaced for multiple uses, causing the prior texts to bleed through the resurfaced piece of parchment, thus rendering it a “palimpsest.” But it was during the Victorian era that altered books became part of popular culture, as socialites compiled albums of images excised from catalogues or purchased as “scraps”—sheets of pictures intended to be cut up or placed in albums.

The mid-1960s were also pivotal to the altered books chronology. In 1966, British artist Tom Phillips transformed W. H. Mallock’s work “A Human Document” into his own creation entitled *A Humament: A Treated Victorian Novel*. By painting over the original text with gouache, Phillips revealed a stream of text that, supported by his added images, offered a fresh narrative, thus transforming Mallock’s conservative work into an irreverent tale of sex, misery, and bawdy dark humor. Phillips continues to alter his opus to this day, even sharing its ongoing metamorphosis via his website and a Humament app.

Today the field of altered books is positioned within a complex cultural landscape. As information is increasingly digitized, the threat of extinction for printed media looms. Are books becoming a thing of the past? Already we have witnessed encyclopedias, dictionaries, and thesauruses become relics of reference. As more and more readers opt to download their news, magazines, and novels onto electronic devices, the threat of obsolescence is real. And one that is not likely to wane.

The five individuals featured in *Metamorphosis: The Art of Altered Books* raise questions about this cultural evolution and the shifting ways in which we choose to receive information. Calling upon a range of techniques and inspirations, they defy our expectations with remarkable diversity in scale, color, subject matter, and media treatment. For some, the work is closely tied to the content of the source publications. For others, the book is simply raw material used to investigate formal concerns or to develop new narratives with no correlation between the author’s subject matter and the final creative output. Some sculptures visibly display the original text and images, while others obscure the text to the point of illegibility. In all cases, the creations stand as pathways to discover the expressive potential of these commonplace objects.

## About the Artists

**Long-Bin Chen**, a New York artist, carves outdated reference material—phone books, dictionaries, magazines—into figurative sculptures. Self-taught in wood carving, Chen uses carpenters’ tools to recontextualize his remarkable forms, including chainsaws, drills, band saws, sanders, nail guns, and scissors. This process yields remarkable work that at first glance appears to be made out of stone, rather than soft, fragile pages.

Chen’s bust series sparks connections between Eastern and Western cultures. In particular, Chen’s Buddhas represent the heads of ancient statues that were looted from Asia and sold to Western museums and collectors. By carving the symbolic busts from phone books listing thousands of residents, Chen amasses symbolic armies of protectors in the art objects.

**Andrew Hayes** uses the strong aesthetic marriage of book pages and forged steel to address the formal possibilities of the material. Using mostly discarded or donated books sourced near his home in North Carolina, Hayes pays no heed to literary content, choosing to focus solely on formal concerns of scale, color, form, mass, and malleability. Once the pages are removed from

the binding, the intrinsic form emerges. He then cold-forms the steel to further develop the overall structure and hold the pages in place. Through these passages, Hayes composes a graceful yet powerful interplay of hard and soft, movement and rigidity, permanence and ephemerality.

Hawaiian artist **Jacqueline Rush Lee** defies our expectations of what books can and should be with her fecund meditations on nature and permanence. With a deft hand, Lee explores the material possibilities, drawing parallels between the life cycles of books and those of humans through forms found in nature—a blossoming flower, an anatomical cross section, a decaying tree stump. To preserve the sculptures, Lee kiln-fires them at high temperatures to achieve a petrified state, thus infusing one final narrative, one last gesture to honor the object and give it a lasting lease on life.

Jewelry maker **Jeremy May** mines the narrative content and physical material of books to create body adornments rife with meaning. May's rings, bracelets, earrings, necklaces, and brooches are designed to visually reflect the meaning of the books through formal elements of color, form, proportion, and format.

London-based May begins his process by reading each book he intends to transform. It is his way of honoring the original work before carving into the text. Once he's decided on the form that will best embody the subject matter, he cuts the shape into the book, one page at a time. The resulting page stacks are laminated with additional recycled colored paper before being polished to a high shine. As a lovely accompaniment, the excavated space in the original book serves as a safe resting place for each piece when not being worn.

Books offer endless creative possibilities, many of which are central to **Wendy Wahl's** practice. Based in Rhode Island, Wahl works with thousands of key pages from discarded volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica, the World Book, and the Columbia Dictionary, refashioning them into crossroads of nature and culture. She probes the lasting and unbreakable relationship between our species and the written word, whether it be reading, writing, or publishing. By working with the cultural artifacts that fuel her practice, Wahl both honors and elevates the printed text and its physicality.

Fuller Craft Museum is honored to present the works of these talented artists. We are fortunate to bring them together at exciting junctures in their careers and during this critical point in altered books evolution. As our ingestion of the printed word continues to shift, the future of the genre will remain firmly on our radar.

#### **Current Exhibitions at Fuller Craft**

*Metamorphosis: The Art of Altered Books*

July 30 – November 6, 2016

*2016 Biennial Members Exhibition*

June 25 – September 18, 2016

*The Faces of Politics: In/Tolerance*

April 16 – August 21, 2016

*Paper and Blade: Modern Paper Cutting*

February 20 – July 31, 2016

#### **Coming Soon to Fuller Craft**

*(413): Pioneering Western Massachusetts*  
August 20, 2016 – November 27, 2016

*New Sole of the Old Machine: Steampunk Brockton – Reimagining the City of Shoes*  
September 10, 2016 – January 1, 2017

*Uncommon Exposures*  
October 1, 2016 – January 22, 2017

*John Bisbee: Material Obsession*  
December 17, 2016 – May 14, 2017

*Bartrams Boxes Remix*  
January 21, 2017 – April 16, 2017

*Playa Made: Jewelry of Burning Man*  
February 1, 2016 – June 4, 2017

About Fuller Craft Museum Fuller Craft Museum, New England's only museum of contemporary craft, is dedicated to the objects, ideas, and insight that inspire both patrons and artists to explore life through the art of contemporary craft. Fuller Craft Museum is located at 455 Oak St. in Brockton, MA. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10:00 am – 5:00 pm, with free admission for all Thursdays from 5:00 – 9:00 pm. Admission is \$8 adults, \$5 seniors and students, free for members and children 12 and under. For more information on Fuller Craft exhibitions and events please visit [www.fullercraft.org](http://www.fullercraft.org) (<http://www.fullercraft.org/>) or call 508.588.6000. Fuller Craft Museum, New England's home for contemporary craft.