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Book Sculptures Explore Our Past & Future

BY **Brian Slattery** | NOV 13, 2014 8:31 AM
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BRIAN SLATTERY PHOTOS

Detail of Bonnie O'Connell, "I Assist at an Explosion," 2009.

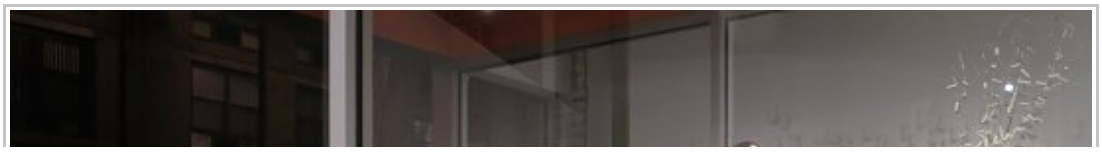
Artspace was packed last Friday night for the opening of CT (un)Bound, a exhibition of works that put together pieces from the Yale University Art Gallery's Allan Chasanoff Book Art Collection with eight new commissions. The result was a show that combined aesthetic playfulness and keen social observation.

As the notes explained, the YUAG collection “re-envisions the book as sculpture,” and the new commissions had the assignment to follow suit, taking “the state of Connecticut as a starting point.”

But even the most personal pieces reached back into history. Kwang-Young Chun used book art to explore his own identity; he found answers to the questions of who he was and where he was from “in my ancestors and their lives, and old books are the medium for me to explore these lives.” Before I knew that about the piece, I was already drawn in by the depth of view in Chun’s piece, which was, in a literal sense, profound.

Kwang-Young Chun, “Aggregation 06-AU047.”

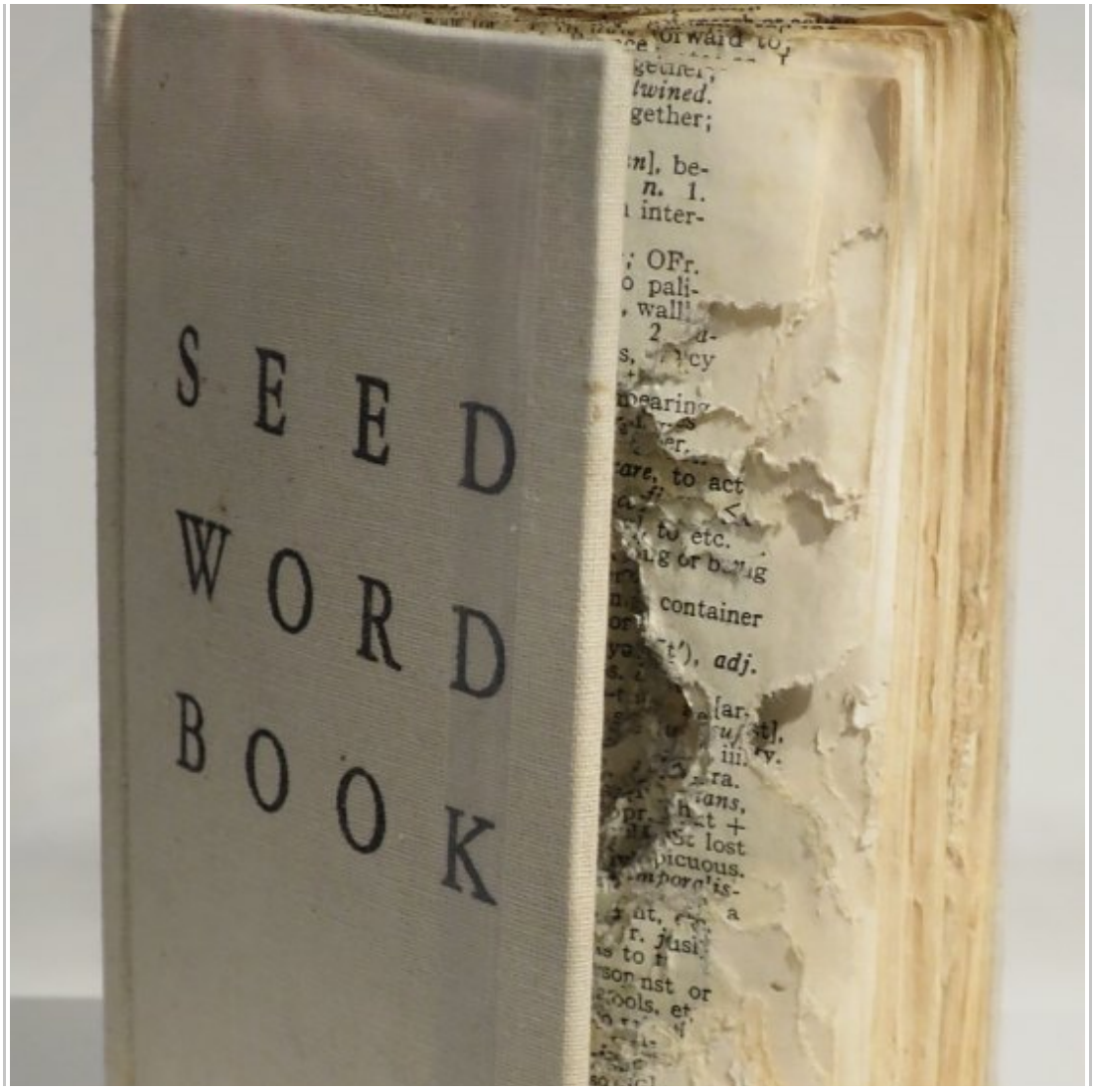
Regan Avery’s family has been in Connecticut since the 1600s, and Avery likewise exploded the book to explore family history. A historian in the family printed a book called *The Groton Avery Clan* a century ago. Regan Avery made a copy and took it apart to show both the family’s longevity and how much has been forgotten. “Most of the lives tracked in *The Groton Avery Clan* have been condensed to the barest facts: name, year of birth, year of marriage, offspring, year of death. What happened between those dates is lost forever.”



Regan Avery, "The Groton Avery Clan," 2014.

And yet, as the movement in the piece suggested, still somehow alive, too.

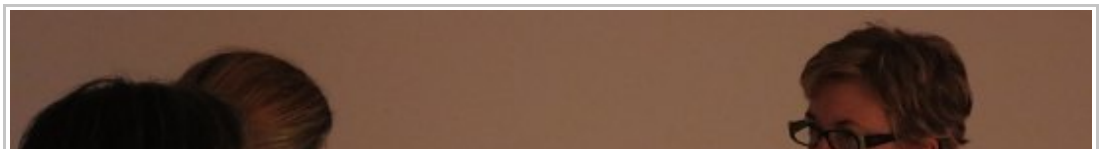
As artists from the YUAG collection imagined the books as vessels for regrowth in an abstract way…


SEED
WORD
BOOK

Joan Lyons, "SEED WORD BOOK," 1981.

Lisa Kokin, "The Idea of Nature," 2007.

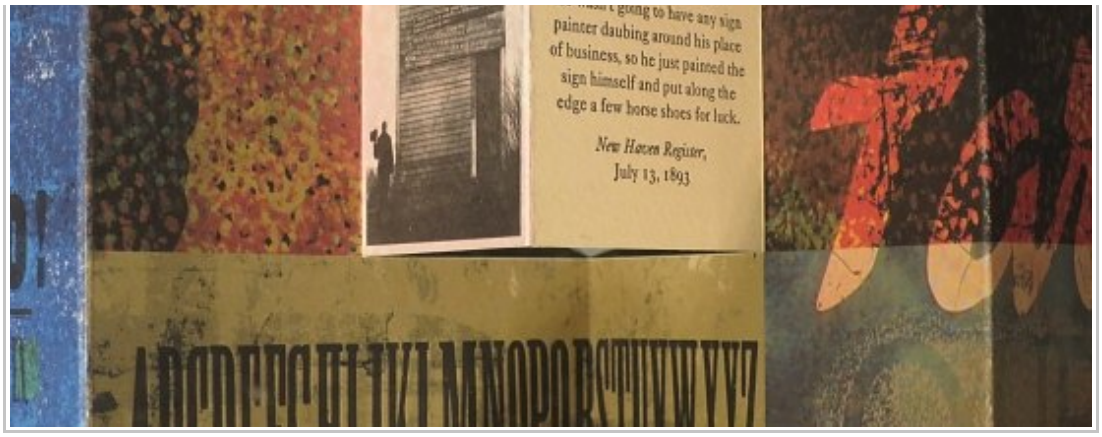
...the more recent commissions explicitly applied this theme to Connecticut's own path toward the future. Jo Yarrington, Morgan Post, and Sam Dole used their piece to examine the history of nuclear power—and nuclear waste—in the Nutmeg State.



Jo Yarrington, Morgan Post, and Sam Dole, "Containment and Spillage," 2014.

Richard Rose sought to create a "lettered portrait of New Haven" over time by putting together a book of its signage.

Richard Rose, "Reading New Haven," 2014.



And Marion Belanger used a similar accordion book to draw attention to the Naugatuck Valley, where the artist grew up. The piece drew a stark contrast between the region's heavy industrial past—during which the Naugatuck River was heavily polluted—and the collapse of that industry and subsequent return of the river's ecosystem. In collapsing centuries of history into a few minutes, it offered a thoughtful meditation on what was gained and what was lost when all those factories were built, and in turn, when they all shut down.

Marion Belanger, "River," 2014.

Taken all together, CT (un)Bound offers a vision of the state's past and future and our own place in it. And the pieces are just a lot of fun to look at. You'll have the chance to check it out yourself at Artspace until January 31, 2015.

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