

“The Whole World For Your Children”: Artists’ Reinterpretations of the 1934 Britannica Junior



danforthART
MUSEUM \ SCHOOL

October 14, 2015—February 28, 2016



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The first edition of the *Britannica Junior* was published in 1934, in response to a growing interest for encyclopedias designed specifically with children in mind. Often heavily illustrated, encyclopedias intended for younger audiences sought to teach through both text and image. *Britannica Junior* was not the first of its kind, for a number of popular children's encyclopedias were published earlier in the twentieth century, but it was a welcome addition to the genre. New editions of ever-expanding volumes of *Britannica Junior* designed and written specifically for elementary-school children were published until 1983.

The title of the exhibition, "The Whole World For Your Children," comes from an advertisement for the 1934 *Britannica Junior*, which assured parents that a purchase of these books was a sound investment in their child's future. From animals to vegetables, poetry to history, the *Britannica Junior* promised to bring the whole world into your home. Now, the artists in this exhibition extend the encyclopedia's reach once more to provide a contemporary, creative interpretation of the knowledge bound within its pages.

We are pleased to have these reinterpretations of the 1934 *Britannica Junior* on view, as each work offers a nuanced view of the book as art, visually and intellectually. These works push the *Britannica Junior* beyond its original intent and invite the viewer to consider it as both a transmitter of information and an art object.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Exhibiting artist Carol Blackwell discussed the origins of this project and the artists she invited to take part. Blackwell came into possession of the 1934 twelve volume series of the *Britannica Junior* by accident, and says:

"A friend was disposing of them when I rescued them from permanently disappearing. Then having to decide what their final destiny might be, I chose to distribute each volume, randomly, to fellow book artists with no specific directions other than to look keenly at the contents, then transform the volume into whatever form it suggested. And thus was born this series.

The result of this open-ended direction that has intrigued me most is the difference each artist saw as her connectedness, or lack thereof, to the 1934 encyclopedia. While these differences translate as visual, the backstory seems to me based on something else that is not necessarily visual. Why, I wonder, did one artist make a very personal visual response with letters from her mother, while another artist drew or painted ever page of her volume, and two artists reshaped each page into a completely different form? All artists began with the same "prompt," a similar volume of the same encyclopedia. The transformations puzzle me, mystify me, and this is what draws me into the heart of this exhibition."

Blackwell's apt statement is what should draw viewers in as well, for each of these works asks us to think about the role of the book as object and as source of knowledge, as well as the many ways we can reinterpret it.



Lola Balzell

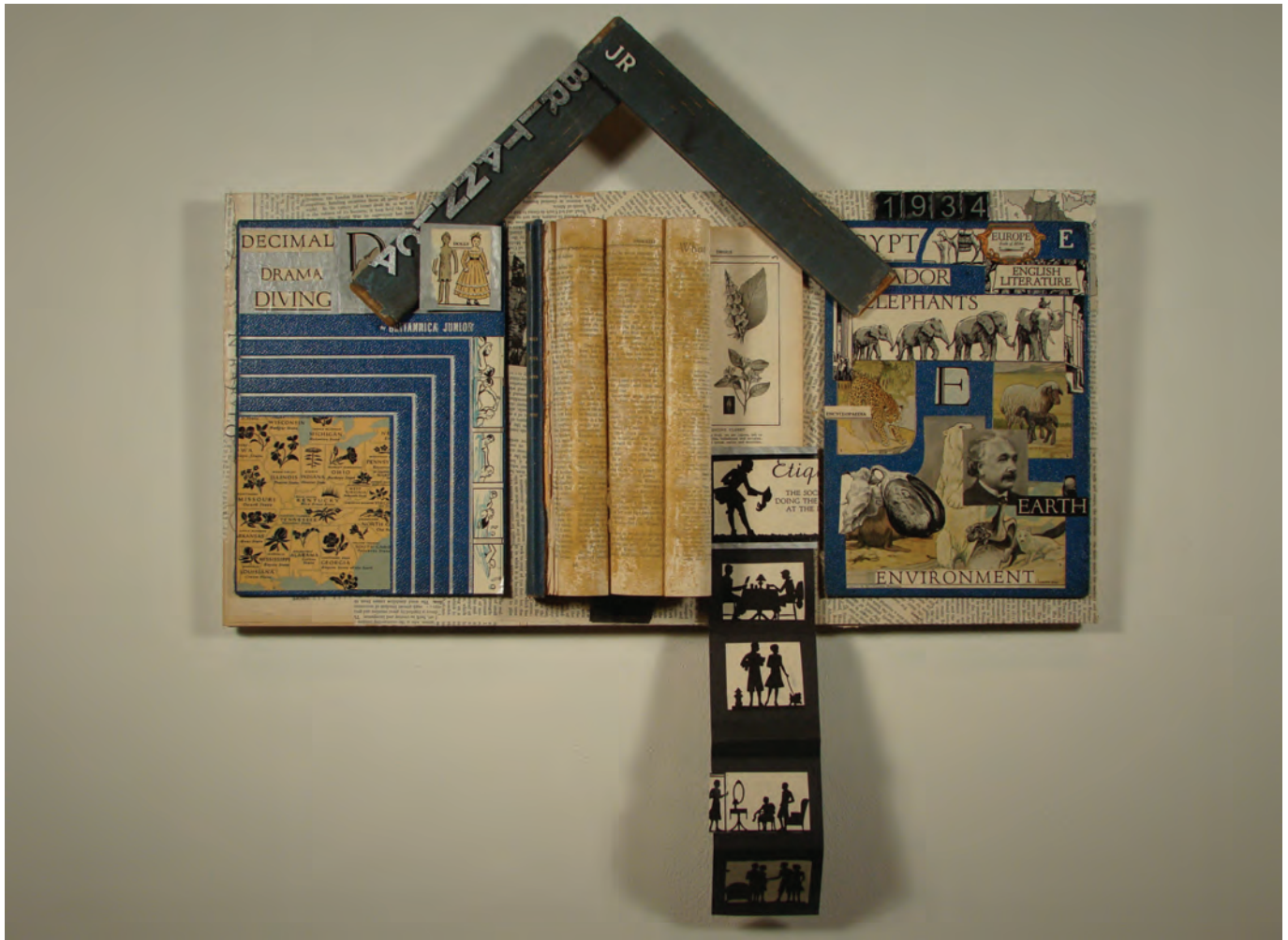
Dear Mom, 2015

Old envelopes and letters, thread, photograph, wax, and encyclopedia

10 x 15 x 6 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: As I paged through my L/M encyclopedia, I was immediately attracted to the chapter on "Letter Writing". My mother and I were estranged from the time I was 10 years old, and she died in an accident when I was 20. At the urging of a very wise older friend, I contacted my mother a few years before her death. The letters and envelopes in this piece are all that I have of hers. The letters carry her love, her words, and are expressed through her handwriting. There is something so intimate about handwriting as well as letter writing, both are lost arts. Through this piece, I hope to connect not only myself but other viewers with the mystery and beauty of the hand and heart.



Carol Blackwell

Bookhouse, 2013-2014

Wood, paper, sand, encyclopedia

17 x 24 x 2 ½ inches

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: Conceptually, I always think of a book as the house I live in, probably because as a child we had a volume of large red books called “The Bookhouse,” each volume of which I read over and over again until they were outgrown, then my children read them. The transformation of my 1934 volume, a throwback to my thirties generation, is in the shape of a house and includes the alphabet letters D, E, F with the wonderful black and white depictions of animal, vegetable, and mineral, collaged and hanging off the bottom of the house.



Tama Drasher

Untitled, 2015

Wood blocks, found objects, encyclopedia (stand included)

11 ³/₄ x 15 x 3 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: Because this was a children's encyclopedia I used old wooden building blocks as a base to collage images and information taken from the book. This mirrors the way an encyclopedia takes vast amounts of information on many subjects and condenses it into manageable amounts. It was challenging using color, shapes, text, and found objects, such as the key and B stamps to express both the function and the playfulness of the original children's book.



Ann Forbush

Teacher's Guide, 2015

Twine, metal, keys, encyclopedia

14 x 8 x 1 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: This volume is different from the others in the set of encyclopedias. Most of the books focus on one letter of the alphabet. "Volume A" has information about subjects like apples and astronauts. This guidebook presents ideas for classroom teachers on how to expand lesson plans on particular topics. I see the locks and keys as symbols for how this volume helps to open new perspectives. It helps to open and unravel the mysteries contained in the set.



Ania Gilmore and Annie Zeybekoglu

Learning Curve, c. 2013

Flexible accordion spine book: encyclopedia pages and covers, canvas, Stonehenge Kraft paper, waxed binding string, and image transfer

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 96 inches (extended)

Courtesy of the Artists

ARTIST STATEMENT: Made from Volumes A and Z of the Encyclopedia, *Learning Curve* was designed by taking the first and last volumes of the Encyclopedia apart and rebinding the pages in a long flexible binding to suggest the extended journey one takes in acquiring knowledge. The "spirit" of the Encyclopedia is also extended as one follows the curves from beginning to end.



Gail Hansen

Letter C, 2014

Monoprints, commercial papers, encyclopedia

10 x 7 ½ x 2 ½ inches (closed); 10 x 12 x 6 inches (open)

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: I had an encyclopedia, a knowledge book, which was very old. The Constellations and the Cosmos have captured imaginations for thousands of years. I was able to incorporate my own art to show these ancient connections while transforming the Letter C.



Ronni Komarow

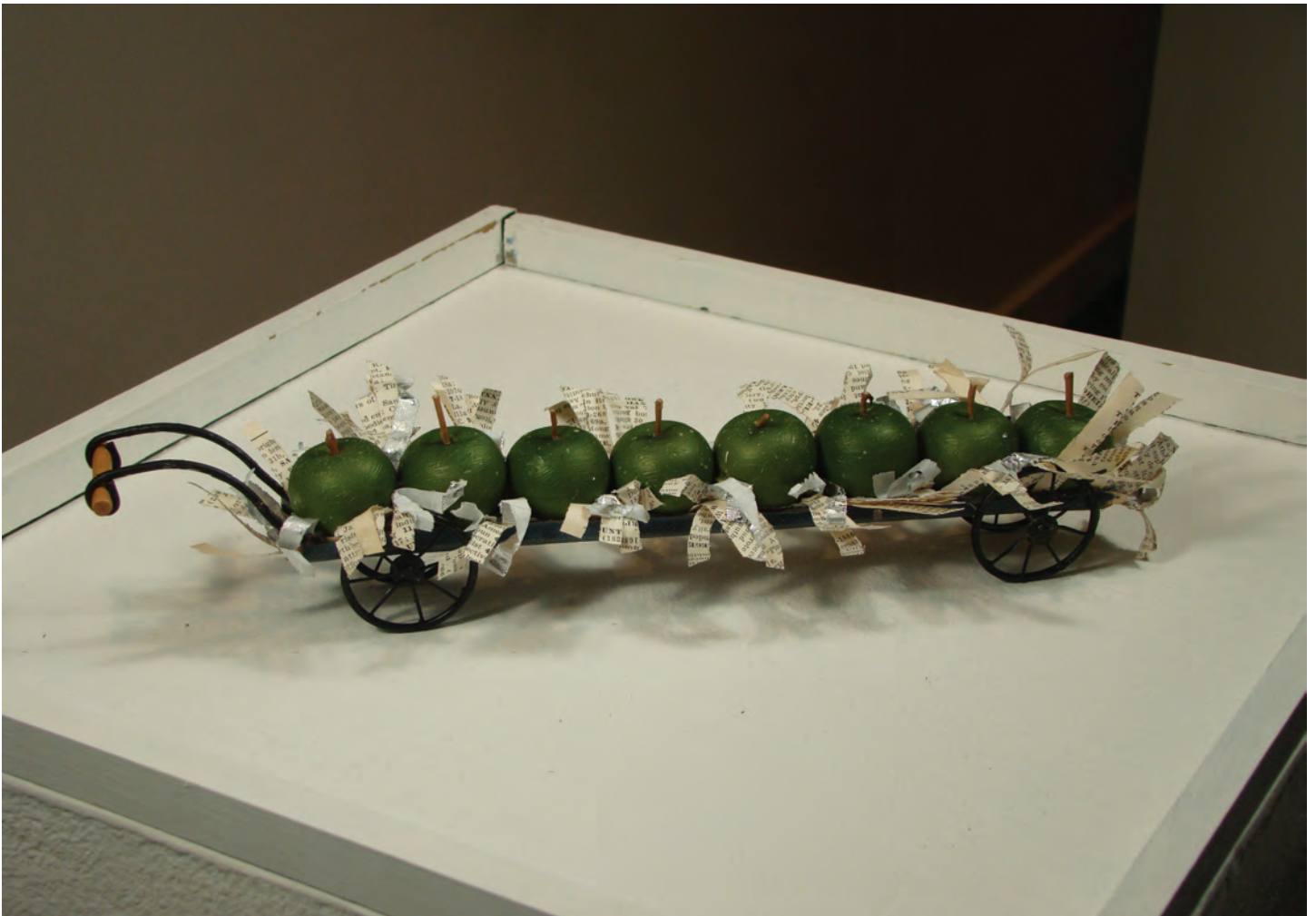
Untitled, n.d.

Mixed media assemblage with sectioned wooden trays, shredded pages from encyclopedia volume, rhinestones, and glitter-infused spray varnish

7 x 21 x 2 inches (fully open); 7 x 18 x 7 inches (display)

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: My work is inspired by personal narrative and reminiscence; fragments of drawing, monoprint, collage, encaustic, found materials and bits of text all figure heavily as story-telling vehicles. In these particular works I reflected on my childhood and my love of reading. Books were my way of exploring the world. We did have a set of encyclopedia on the bookshelf -- bought volume-by-volume in the supermarket -- and I always enjoyed looking things up and reading about them. To this day I enjoy the adventure of discovering bits of knowledge, both through digital media and traditional bound books.



Ronni Komarow

Untitled, n.d.

Mixed media assemblage with spine and shredded pages from encyclopedia volume with wooden apples and other found objects

2 ½ x 13 x 4 inches

Courtesy of the Artist



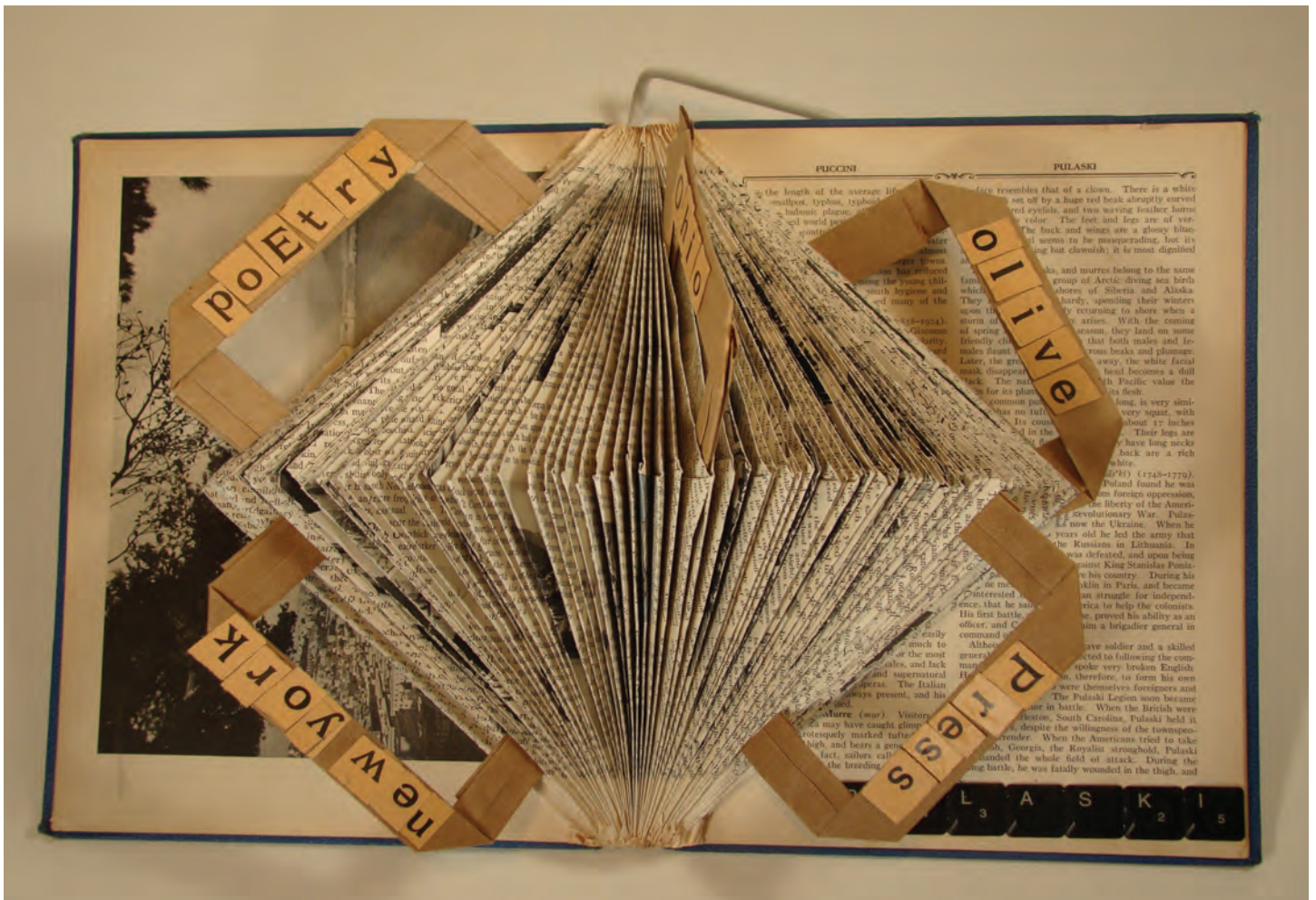
Ronni Komarow

Untitled, n.d.

Mixed media assemblage with box and pages from encyclopedia volume, small globe, rhinestones, and other found objects

7 x 7 x 8 inches

Courtesy of the Artist



Bonnie Rosenthal

Letter P, n.d.

Mixed media assemblage with encyclopedia

10 x 13 ½ x 6 ¾ inches

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: An encyclopedia is full of knowledge, hidden knowledge, full of mysteries and secrets waiting to be discovered. Opening the book, I chose to hide the secrets even further by folding each page, and then creating a way to find information more easily, with "tabs" and labels, both old fashioned and new.



Margaret Scoppa

1934, 2014

Glass bottles, ink, plexiglass, cord, mirror

14 x 20 x 7 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: As I held and examined the 1934 encyclopedia it became more cherished and beautiful to me. The information contained in it, although outdated, was beautifully crafted with extraordinary graphics. My thought process turned to preserving the past in glass bottles as time capsules.



Marcella Stasa

Aitch, Eye, Jay and Kaye, 2015

Ink, paint, objects

10 ½ x 8 x 4 inches (closed); 10 ½ x 15 ½ x 2 inches (open)

Courtesy of the Artist

ARTIST STATEMENT: I make, alter and arrange things, that can't be helped. I have no idea what else I could possibly do with myself. Having been presented with a book and an opportunity to have at it, I did.

In the process of developing this piece I found the importance of words to convey subtleties and hint at hidden stories. A thousand words may, in fact, be more effective than a picture.

ABOUT DANFORTH ART MUSEUM\SCHOOL

Established as a grass roots organization in 1975 by a committed group of community activists, business owners, educators, and artists, Danforth Art provides exhibitions and education programs that fulfill its mission to engage, inspire and transform the lives of children and adults. Danforth Art educates the public through its Permanent Collection of American art from the 18th century to the present day, which includes outstanding examples of work by the African-American sculptor Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller and artists from the School of Boston Expressionism, as well as through changing exhibitions of contemporary artists, studio art classes and workshops, and a variety of community outreach programs. Each year Danforth Art's Annual Juried Exhibitions demonstrate the organization's dedication to provide "a special home for artists" by showing best examples of contemporary work by emerging and established artist members.



2015 marks the 40th Anniversary of Danforth Art—forty years of art and art-making, forty years of creativity and community! We are excited to reconnect with and to celebrate our community all year long, to share with you stories from our 40-year history, and to invite you to participate more deeply in our bright future. In 1975, Hedy Landman, first director of Danforth Art, said, "To enjoy art is to enjoy something beyond the commonplace. It is to reach beyond life's everyday concerns, broaden the horizon, and refuel the spirit." Forty years later, we invite you to continue to enjoy something beyond the commonplace.

BE ENGAGED \ BE INSPIRED \ BE TRANSFORMED

Membership for Artists and Art-Lovers

Whether you are an emerging artist or an established master, a casual art student or an avid art-lover, Danforth Art offers membership benefits designed just for you!

All Danforth Art memberships include a year's worth of compelling exhibitions, discounts on studio art classes and in the shop at Danforth Art, invitations to engaging programs and exhibition openings, and more—all in a welcoming community devoted to art.

Consider these special membership categories:

► Professional Artist Membership

is designed for working artists in all stages of their professional careers—great for art school grads!

► Friend Membership

includes free admission at hundreds of museums nationwide, including some of the region's most renowned art and cultural institutions

Become a Member today at
www.danforthart.org/membership.html

