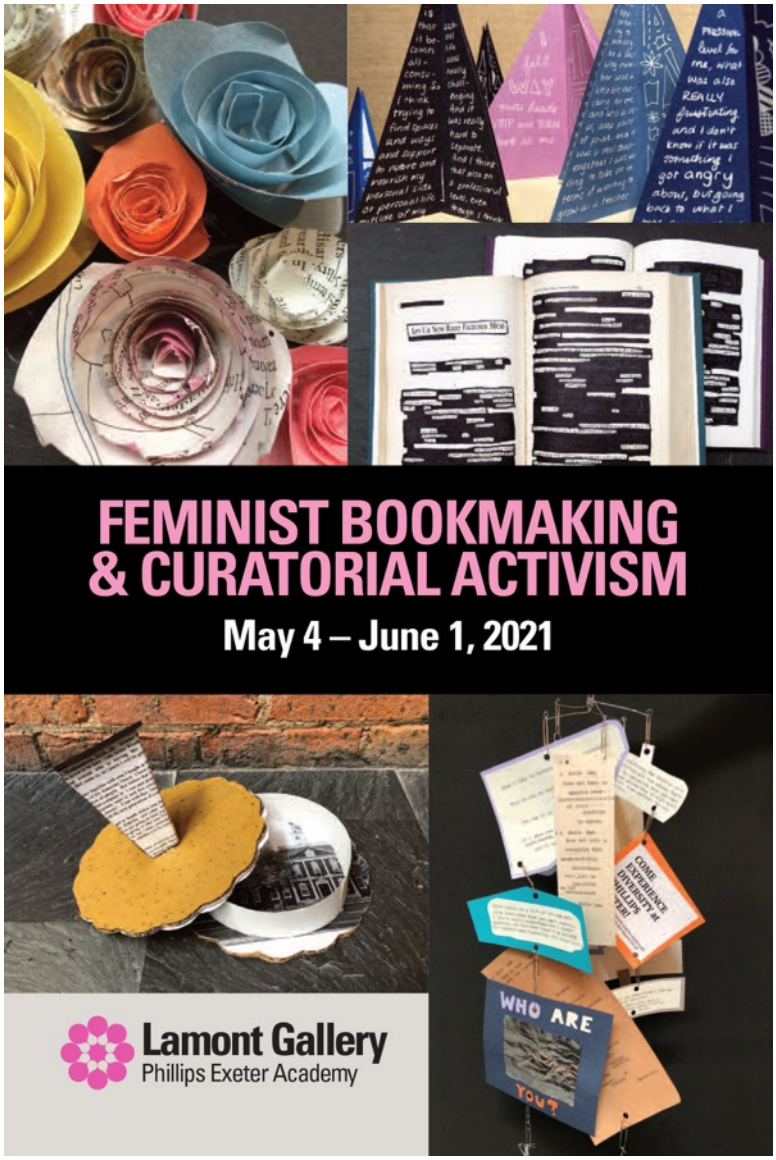
FEMINIST BOOKMAKING & CURATORIAL ACTIVISM
May 4 – June 1, 2021



Feminist Bookmaking & Curatorial Activism showcases the artist books made by students in "Bookmaking as Feminist Archival Practice: Reinscribing Histories" taught by English Instructor Mercy Carbonell. Students worked from the lenses of critical bookmaking, feminist practice/theory, curatorial activism, personal reflection and the essential need for coalition-creations as a possibility for transformative justice within the socio-cultural dynamics of white supremacy. Within this 50th anniversary of coeducation at Phillips Exeter Academy & within the spirit of legitimizing/unsilencing truth, the artists created unique, sculptural, dynamic "books" inspired by interviews with BIPOC womxn/women, queer & white womxn/women trailblazers within the alumni body & current community. These books are joined by works created by students in the Activism in Art club who created original works exploring these same themes of gender, feminism, race and inclusion.

View the exhibition photos.

More information about the exhibition is on the Lamont Gallery website.

Participating Artists: *Bookmaking as Feminist Archival Practice Artists*: CarlyMae Buckner '21, Violet Goldstone '21, Sarah Huang '21, Siona Jain '22, Emily Kang '21, Hannah Lee '21, Charlotte Lisa '21, Helena Mandeville '21, Nahla Owens '21, Keara Polovick '21, Annie Shin '21, Meredith Thomas '21 & Sophie Turner '21. *Activism in Art Artists*: Vedika Amin '24, Eleanor Bolker '22, Kaylee Chen '23, Ailla Crossman '21, Daniel Cui '21, Frankie Getman '21, Tina Huang '22, Sabrina Kearney '22, Alysha Lai '23, Hannah Rubin '23, Danielle Sung '22, Leandra Sze '22, Hansi Zhu '22 & Sophie Zhu '24

CarlyMae Buckner ‘21
(lifelong learning &) Apples

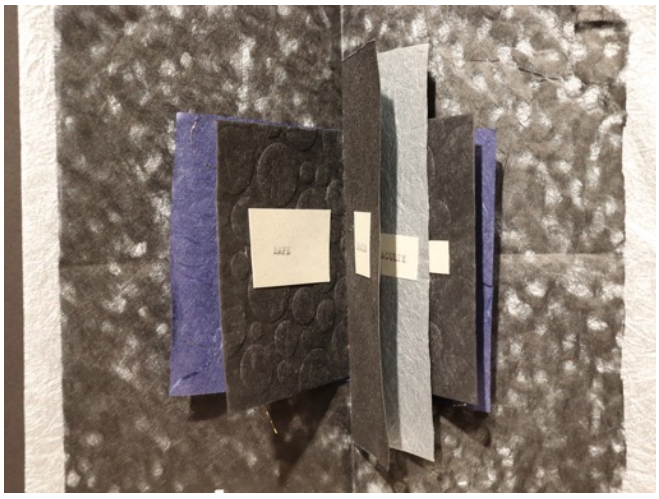
Inspired by an interview with Jinny St. Goar ‘72
March 3, 2021

Jinny, a white woman, was in 1st class of cis-girl boarders & played on the boys’ tennis team. She lives in Hudson Valley, NY. Businesswoman~turned~Applefarmer

CarlyMae Buckner ‘21 & Annie Shin ‘21
Untitled

Inspired by an interview with Toyin Augustus
February 21, 2021

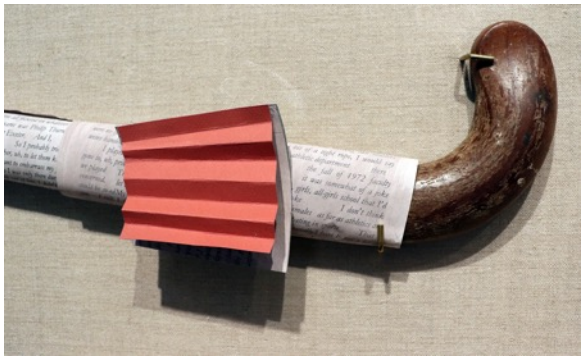
Toyin is the only Black Woman in the Physical Education Department. Nigerian-American cishet woman~single mother~ educator~ advocate~ athlete~ graduate student



CarlyMae Buckner ’21, Charlotte Lisa ’21, & Mercy Carbonell
“Us against the Athletic Department”

Inspired by an interview with Joan Thurneyssen Gambro ‘72
February 25, 2021

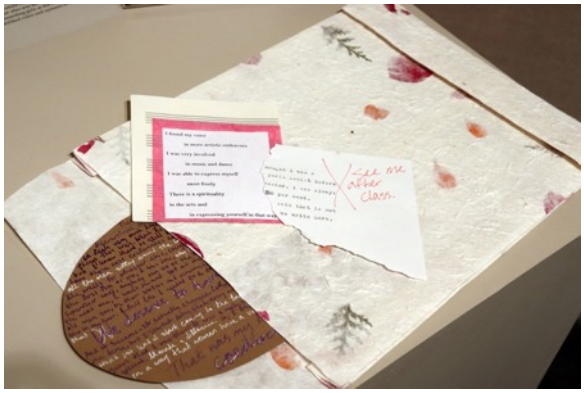
Joan, a white woman, came to the Academy alongside her father, French instructor Philip Thurneyssen, to become one of the first forty female day-students.
She lives in Summit, NJ. A field hockey player, she found upon arriving “it was us against the athletic department.”



CarlyMae Buckner ’21 & Sophie Turer ’21
Growth in Bloom

Inspired by an interview with Dr. Lindsey Overstreet ‘02
March 1, 2021

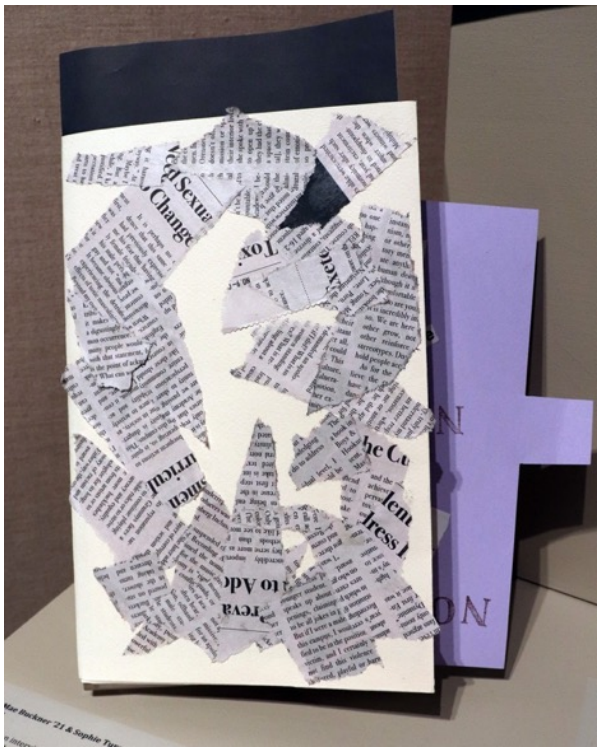
Lindsey, a white woman, came to the Academy as a new upper from a small town in Northeast Texas. She works as an adolescent psychologist in Katy, TX.
Dancer~Singer~~Advocate for the arts



CarlyMae Buckner ’21 & Sophie Turer ’21
Untitled

Inspired by interview with Aerin Scales ‘18
March 11, 2021

Aerin, a white trans man, transitioned his lower year.
He is passionate about writing creative fiction and will graduate from UNC this Spring.



Violet Goldstone '21 & Hannah Lee '21
dancing through …

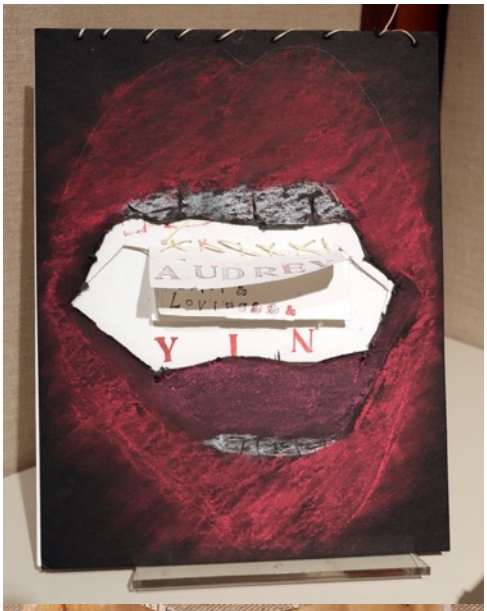
Inspired by an interview with Anne Chen '22
March 5th, 2021

Anne is a Dancer, an Asian-American woman, and an Activist in and outside of campus. We interviewed Anne because we wanted to know more about how the intersectionality of her identity has affected her time here, at Exeter.

Violet Goldstone ‘21
have you heard about Audrey?

Inspired by an interview with Audrey Yin ‘21

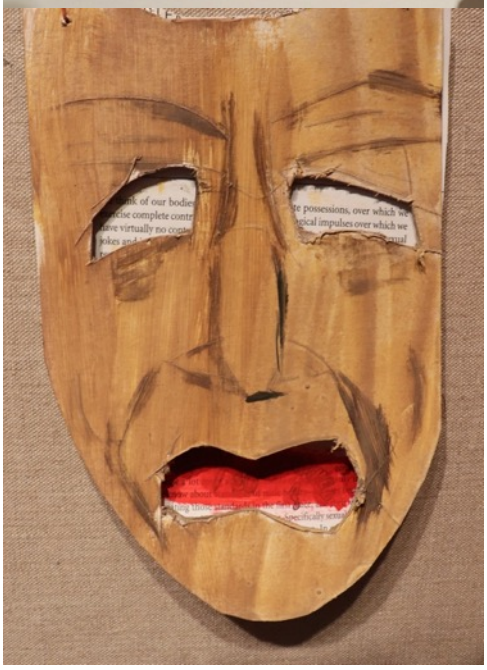
Audrey Yin is a Singer, Songwriter, Activist, and Loving Person. I chose to interview Audrey because I wanted to learn more about how she has channeled her trials & triumphs at Exeter through artistic expression. Her newest song addressing her experience with Love, called love bug, is coming out on all listening platforms March 1st.



Violet Goldstone '21
My Furious Misses

Inspired by an interview w/Davis Leonard '14
March 17, 2021

Davis, a white woman, started the Why So Gendered? Campaign at Exeter in the fall of 2013, a movement that led to gender-inclusive bathrooms and all gender dorms on campus. A Theatre Major at Stanford University, Davis wrote, directed and acted in her Senior Thesis, *LuLu*, a play. Davis went on to campaign for Presidential Candidate Elizabeth Warren. Davis is now a Digital Organizing Director at Jon Ossoff for Senate.



Sarah Huang ‘21
Darby’s Bouquet

Inspired by an interview with Darby Aono ‘13
3:00pm PST, January 27, 2021

Darby identifies as a Black Japanese gay woman and came to PEA from Marin, California. She is currently in law school at UC Berkeley and works on death penalty appeals and parole preparation for folks who have been sentenced to life imprisonment.

Sarah Huang ’21
COMPOSITION NOTEBOOK

Inspired by an interview with Monique Hassel ’10
12:00pm PST, January 28, 2021

Monique teaches mathematics and computer science to middle school students at Epiphany School in Boston. During our conversation, she shared many poignant moments from her time at Exeter and some of her experiences navigating elite educational institutions (PEA and Harvard) as a Black woman that is not from a highly privileged or wealthy community.

Sarah Huang ’21
Arboretum

Inspired by an interview with Joanna Ro
3:00pm PST, January 29 and February 5, 2021

Joanna teaches humanities in San Francisco and was an instructor in English at Exeter from 2007 to 2013. On campus, she also coached girls’ volleyball and lived in Dunbar Hall.

Sarah Huang ’21
“The Duality of Tradition”

Inspired by Interview with Huey Hewitt ’15
12:30pm PST, January 29, 2021

The best person to describe Huey Hewitt is himself: “Communist, Anarchist, Abolitionist, Socialist, Black, Trans, a Man, Freedom Fighter, Thinker, Intellectual, and Organizer.”

Sarah Huang ’21

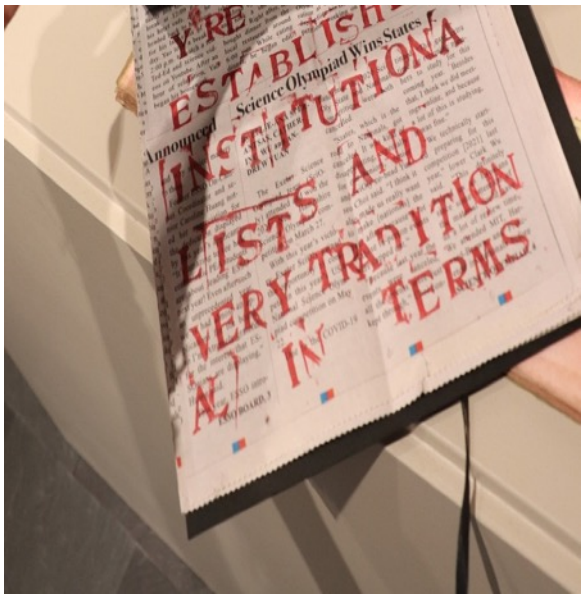
Rev’s Journal

Inspired by an interview with Heidi Heath
4:00pm EST, February 18, 2021

“I am the Reverend Heidi Carrington Heath.” Heidi identifies as queer and a femme and is an ordained Christian minister. She served as Interim Chaplain and Director of Religious and Spiritual Life at PEA from 2016-2020.

Siona Jain ‘22

Unsilencing



Inspired by an interview with Zoha Qamar ‘15
March 10, 2021

Zoha, a South Asian Pakistani woman, founded Baraka, a discussion group about Islam, & was an Opinions Editor for *The Exonian*. She lives in New York, NY. *New York Times* Senior Analyst Throughout her time at Exeter, Zoha started and sustained discussions on Islam and the Middle East. She spoke truths, especially surrounding sexual assault, that the Academy and many of its student organizations avoided. Here, her words are stamped over a newspaper that often silenced her words and that of those around her.

Siona Jain ‘22
Flora

Inspired by an interview with Jane Campbell ‘72
February 18th, 2021

Jane, a white cishet woman, was among the 1st classes of cis-girl-boarders. She enjoyed painting and reading, and she often organized services for Exeter’s Jewish community. Landscape Painter. Despite the natural difficulties that came with being one of the first few girls. On campus, Jane found her love of Exeter through books, through nature, And through her lasting, meaningful relationships.

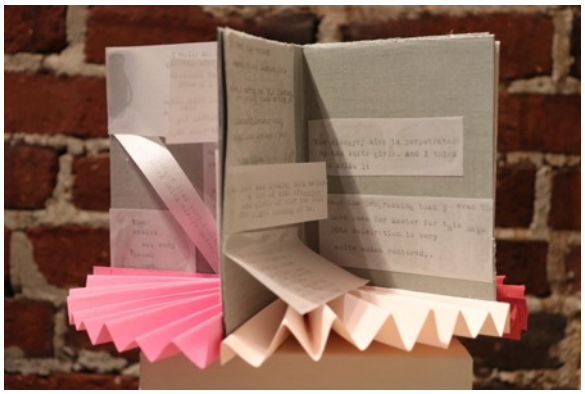
Siona Jain ‘22
Frameworks

Inspired by an interview with Charly Evon Simpson ‘04
February 7th, 2021

Charly, a Black woman, lead DRAMAT, Exeter’s Drama Club, & enjoyed her time in Dunbar Hall.
Playwright
“And, sure, you can admit women, sure, you can admit people of color. But if you still, you know, if you don't change anything about your framework, and you just placed me in that space, doesn't mean it's gonna change. If anything, it forces me to change, right? It forces me to conform to that. It forces you all to conform to that.”

Siona Jain ‘22
Coeducation is Non-Binary

Inspired by Interview with María José Maldonado ‘04
February 9th, 2021



María José is a Canadian, Salvadorean, nonbinary femme who uses she/they pronouns. They found safe spaces in DRAMAT and Afro Latinx Exonian Society. Writer & Creative. María José entered Exeter as a “hypersexual” woman, and they were often criticized For their femininity when their white peers were allowed to act the same. In her interview, she Discussed the very binary view Exeter holds of the meaning of coeducation. Accordingly, her Beautiful truths are displayed in different ways.

Siona Jain '21
theatre of the transformative

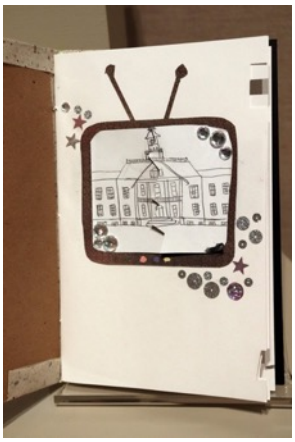
Inspired by an interview with Rachel Rhoades '04
February 2021

Rachel identifies as a white queer woman in a bi-racial marriage to the wonderful Mal Ali. Assistant Professor at Brock University in Ontario as Applied Theatre practitioner, educator, researcher, activist. Her doctoral research, "Youth Artists for Justice: Examining Participation in Social Movements and Envisioning Futures through Applied Theatre," interrogated how racialized, socioeconomically under-resourced secondary school-age youth in Toronto conceptualize their current and future roles within contemporary social movements and the larger political sphere through *Ethnodrama*. A recipient of the Ada Slaight Drama in Education Research Award through Young Peoples Theatre in Toronto, Rachel works now creating dialogues between transnational youth artist activists, Black feminist and Marxist feminist pedagogies, and collaborative applied theatre-based action research with marginalized communities. Rachel grew up in Dover, NH; she & Mal now live in Ontario.

Emily Kang ’21
learning (in)corporation

Inspired by an interview with Ellen Anderman ’73
January 26, 2021

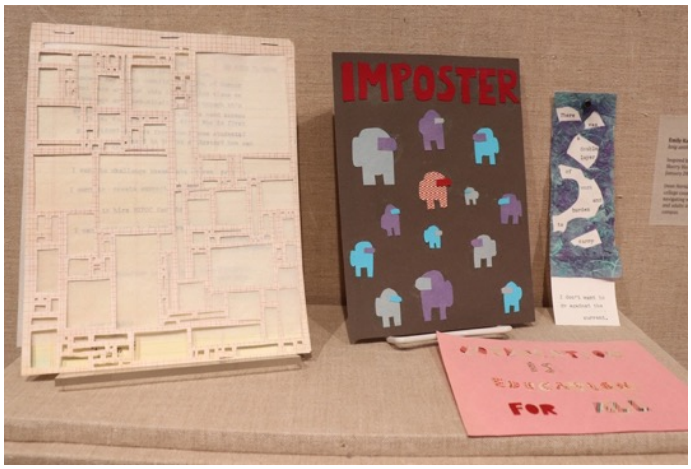
Ellen, white cis woman, a one-year senior who was part of the first group of boarding girls at the Academy.
Disliked rules and systems of the day

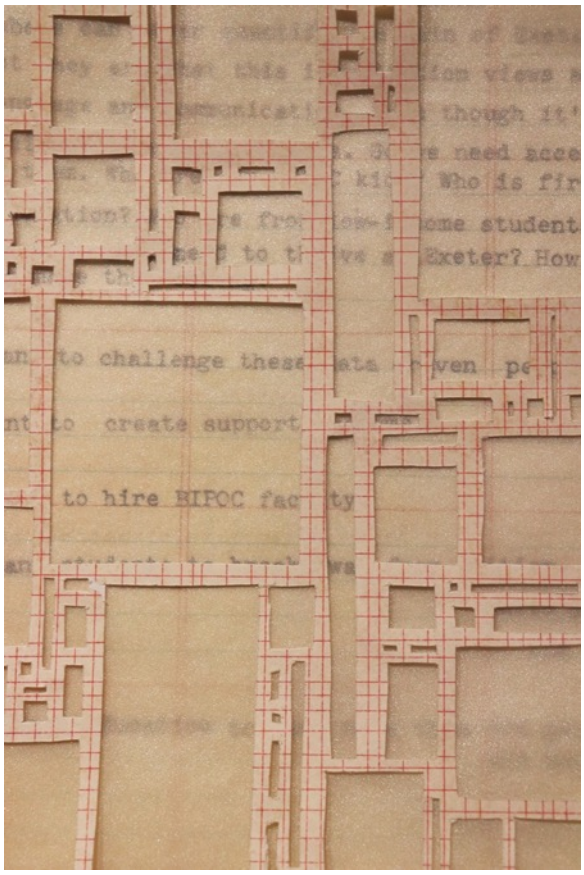


Emily Kang ’21
long until belonging

Inspired by an interview with Sherry Hernández
January 28, 2021

Dean Hernández, Filipina American college counselor turned dean who is navigating what it means for students and adults at Exeter to belong on campus.





Emily Kang ’21
unveiling every side

Inspired by interview with Julia Gray
January 29, 2021

Julia, white cis woman and one of the leaders of PATH. Finds Exeter to be both a place of magic and a place that must acknowledge the times it was far from magical.

Emily Kang ’21
mobile:identities

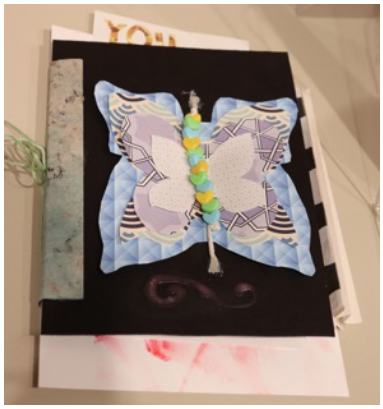
Inspired by interview with Julie Chung
February 8, 2021

Julie, an alum who doesn’t appreciate ascribed identities

Emily Kang ’21
nonfiction: when fictions reach their breaking point

Inspired by an interview with Laura Waleryszak ‘02
January 27, 2021

Laura, a queer writer, producer, and actress who has been reflecting on the illusion of meritocracy at Exeter and the greater world.



Emily Kang ’21
relation-ing

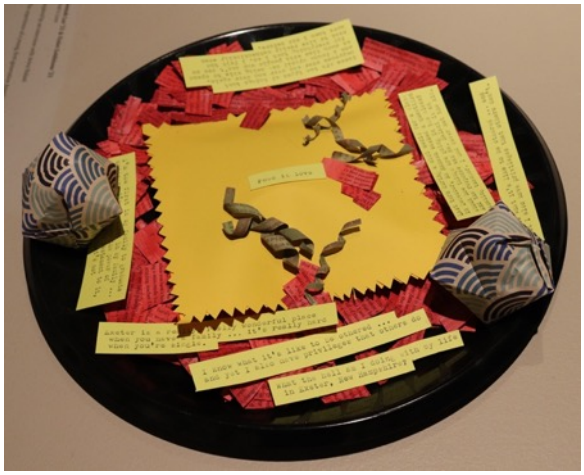
Inspired by written interview with Wei-Ling Woo ‘08
March 1, 2021

Ms. Woo, Asian international student turned current English instructor at PEA. Loved the conversations with friends and adults at Exeter that helped her understand herself and those around her

Hannah Lee ’21 and Violet Goldstone ’21
Food is Love

Inspired by an interview with Aviva Halani

The experience of a young, first-generation American math teacher at Phillips Exeter.



Hannah Lee ’21
Directors Notes

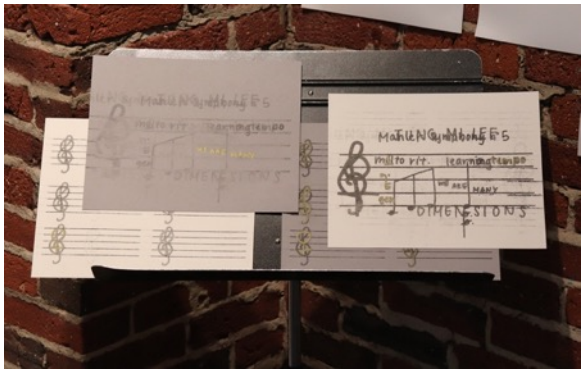
Inspired by an interview with Sarah Ream

A member of one of Exeter’s first classes to include boarding girls. A mother of two Exonians; instructor in Theater and English.

Hannah Lee ’21
Learning is Co

Inspired by interview with Jung Mi Lee

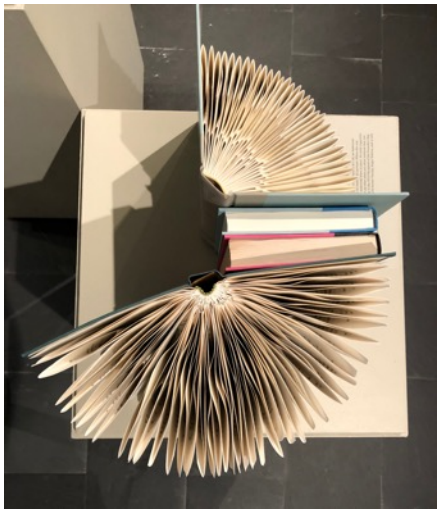
A Korean-American musician, teacher, food-lover, and Korean Society Club advisor shares her experience with overlapping and conflicting identities.



Charlotte Lisa '21
Born with Fist Raised

Inspired by an interview with Kathy Nekton, former Faculty from 1973-2008.
February 2021

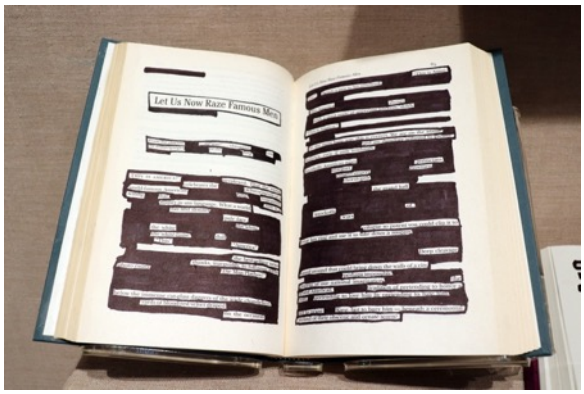
Kathy, a cishet white woman, was one of the first women faculty at PEA, an Instructor in Physical Education, Coach for Field Hockey, Swimming & Lacrosse. When she was pregnant with daughter Maikki, there was no maternity leave in place. An early supporter for LGBTQ+ visibility, Kathy said, "*What better joy than when you show someone they can be someone they don't think they can be.*" Kathy is the 2019 Recipient of the Founders Day Award. She lives in Vass, NC with her husband & former Faculty, Roger Nekton, and is still competing in Equestrian.



Charlotte Lisa '21
Chaste

Inspired by an interview with Emily Lemmerman '15
February 2021

Emily identifies as a mixed race, white & Japanese bi/queer woman. At PEA, Emily was active in Student Council, Fem Club and a pioneer with Davis Leonard '16 in the "Why So Gendered?" protest-campaign that helped pave the way for All Gender Dorms & Non-Gendered Dress Code. Emily graduated from Stanford in 2019 with a major in Sociology & worked for Bernie for President in 2019-2020. She currently lives Brooklyn, NY & is a researcher at the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, an organizer with Emergency Organizing Committee. In her run for Stu Co President at PEA, the prevailing message she received was that "*female leaders were meant to be chaste.*"



Charlotte Lisa '21 w/Mercy Carbonell
"This is How To Be a Female Leader"

Inspired by an interview by Charlotte Lisa '21 w/Emily Lemmerman '15
February 2021

Emily identifies as a mixed race, white & Japanese bi/queer woman. At PEA, Emily was active in Student Council, Fem Club and a pioneer with Davis Leonard '16 in the "Why So Gendered?" protest-campaign that helped pave the way for All Gender Dorms & Non-Gendered Dress Code.

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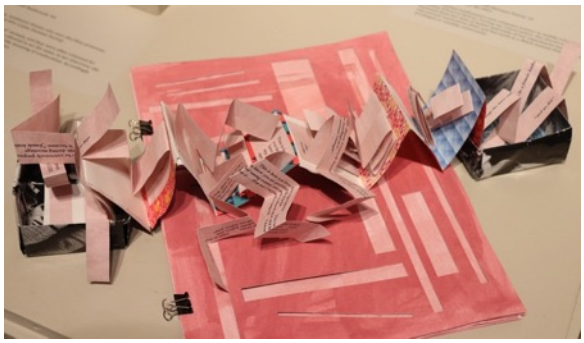
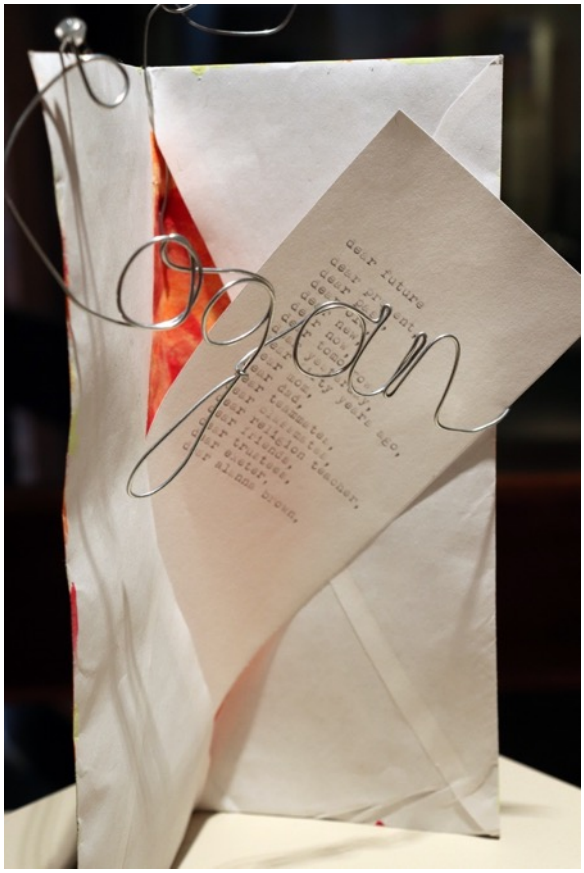


Nahla Owens ‘21 and Helena Mandeville ‘21
Dear Alanna Brown,

Inspired by an interview with Alanna Brown ‘05
January 26, 2021

Alanna, a cis woman with Black and white heritage, and child of a faculty member discussed the restriction she felt as a young student of color growing up in a predominantly white town, particularly one where she felt that her parents and their colleagues were constantly watching her. She found freedom and tapped into her own strength after having her son Tyler, leaving an unhealthy relationship, and starting her own business. During our interview, Helena and I often found ourselves wishing to write to Alanna from the past to let her know just how incredible she grew up to be.



Nahla Owens ‘21 and Helena Mandeville ‘21
Have You Ever Met A Cookie Queen in Congress?

Inspired by an interview with Jackie Weatherspoon
February 17, 2021

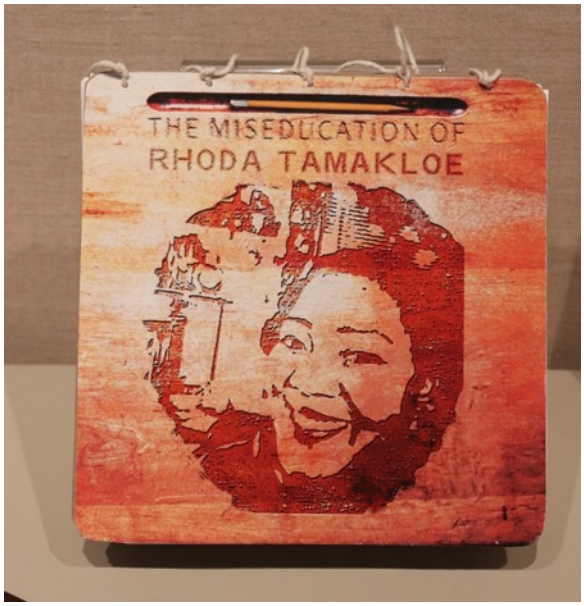
The Honorable Jacquelyne Weatherspoon is a cis, Black woman hailing from Brooklyn, New York. She’s had a robust career in politics, from working abroad for the United Nations to being a member of the state legislature. She has also played many roles on campus as a faculty spouse and Democratic club advisor. In her early years at Exeter, faculty wives were known as “Cookie Queens” because they often baked for the boys in their respective dorms. However, Mrs. Weatherspoon and a number of the other women on campus termed themselves “The Last of The Cookie Queens” during an effort to get women to go back to school and focusing on their own careers.

Nahla Owens ‘21
Beyond the Box, Beyond the Labels

Inspired by and interview with Rose Angelina Martin ‘19
January 27, 2021

Rose Angelina Martin describes her identity as a cisgender, bisexual, Filipina woman morphing into something more complicated in college where she has found freedom and been able to think more critically about her own identity. She once felt that she had to fit into a mold to bring legitimacy to her advocacy, but beyond the surface, she found so much untapped creativity. Much of her time at Exeter was dedicated to organizing, but she also found joy in theatre, particularly in DRAMAT. Excerpts from one of her favorite shows to direct (Hottentotted by Charly Simpson ‘04) are featured in this book.

Nahla Owens ‘21 and Helena Mandeville ‘21
The Miseducation of...



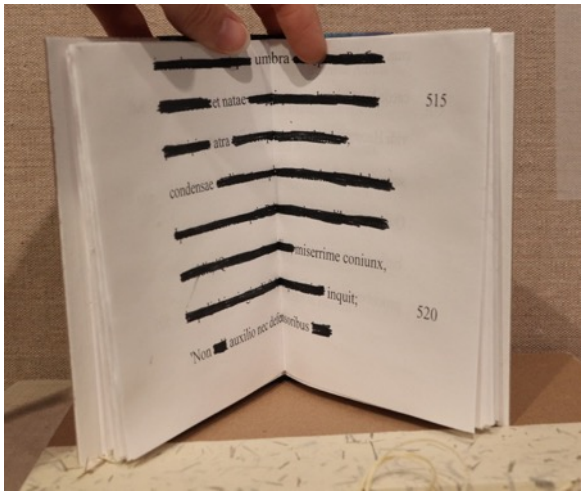
Inspired by and interview with Rhoda Tamakloe
February 23, 2021

Rhoda Tamakloe is a cisgender, straight, Christian, Black woman and a complete ray of sunshine. While at Exeter, she found joy in music, particularly that of her favorite artist at the time Lauryn Hill. She was also an avid acapella singer, founder of Precision, and a proud woman in STEM. She overcame significant challenges in her journey to becoming a medical professional before finding her path in education. Rhoda does not believe in regrets and is proud to have been inspired by so many incredible Exonians. She describes life as a journey where “we are all walking each other slowly to the finish line” and is grateful for the people that she’s had to walk alongside her.

Keara Polovick ‘21
A Girl in Classics

Inspired by an Interview with Lauren Diehl ‘7
February 6, 2021

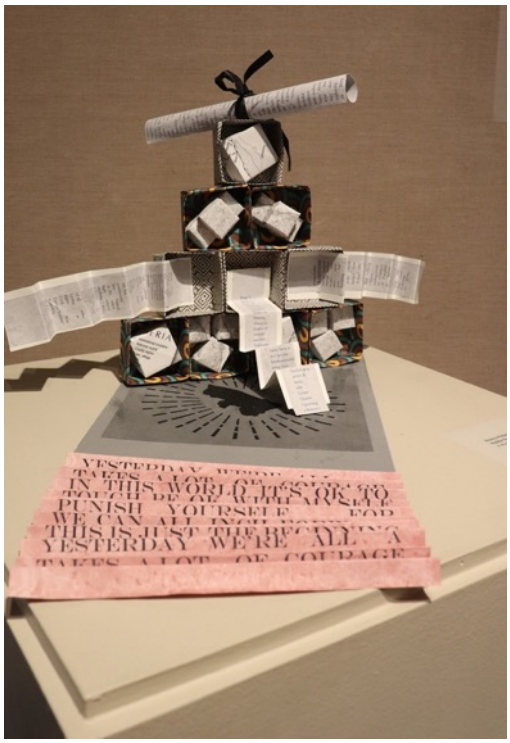
Lauren, a white cishet woman, was the first woman to earn a Classics Diploma at PEA. She was also involved in the arts and theatre, and is currently a lawyer in California.



Keara Polovick ’21 and Nahla Owens ‘21
A Multitude of People

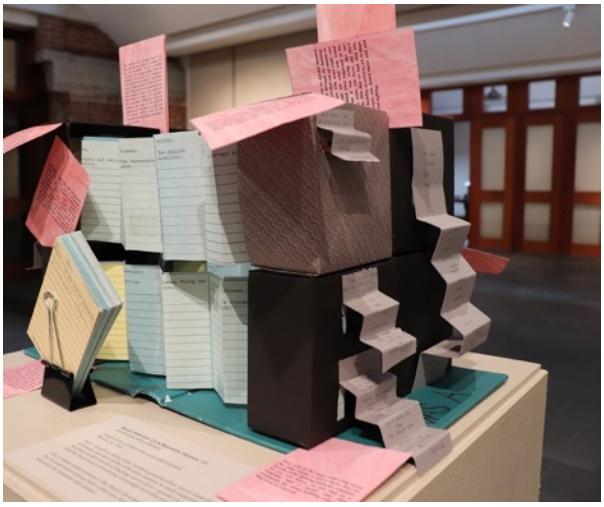
Inspired by an Interview with Ciatta Baysah ‘97
February 26, 2021

Ciatta, a black queer woman originally from NYC, found community in ALES and Langdell while at Exeter. She is now a trustee and works as an attorney in New York. For her, home is many places, from New York to Liberia, where there was a civil war during her time at Exeter.



Keara Polovick ’21 and Meredith Thomas ’21
Anonymous Was a Woman

Inspired by an Interview with Gail Scanlon
March 14, 2021



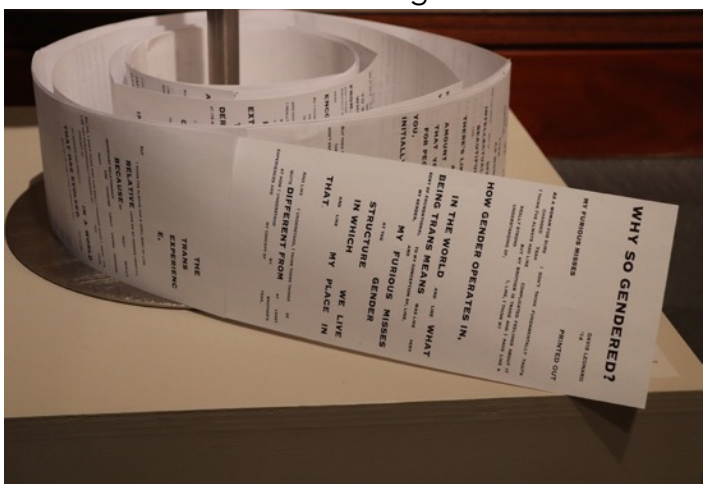
Gail—daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, nurse slash librarian friend, manager of people, overseer of the collection, mentor to staff, supporter, and co-facilitator with teachers in their work of shaping curriculum—speaks on the life of the Academy Library and the importance of noticing seemingly invisible work.

Gail, a white cishet woman, is the Head Librarian at PEA and is retiring this year. Her work has included diversifying PEA’s collection, leading renovations in the library, and providing resources for students and classes.

Keara Polovick ’21 and Violet Goldston ’21
Space for Change

Inspired by an Interview with Davis Leonard ’14
March 17, 2021

Davis, a white woman, started the “Why so gendered?” campaign at Exeter in the fall of 2013, a movement that led to gender-inclusive bathrooms and all-gender dorms on campus.



Helena Mandeville ‘21 & Meredith Thomas ‘21
(See)ding

Inspired by interview with Kathleen Pottle
March 16th, 2021

Kathleen, local teen tennis player turned PEA veteran, has watched coeducation unfold from its deepest roots in her 47 years at the Academy. Her greatest offering is her expressions of gratitude.

Meredith Thomas ‘21 & Ms. Carbonell
Someday

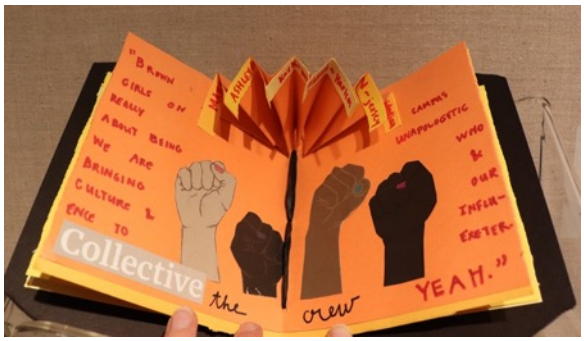
Inspired by an interview with Barbara James
February 2nd, 2021

Bodacious Barbara, retired director of student activities and never one to be kept “quiet & reserved", speaks on the expectations enforced upon faculty wives & constant relining those boundaries.

Meredith Thomas ‘21
Forget-Her-Not

Inspired by an interview with Laura Ortiz
February 19th, 2021

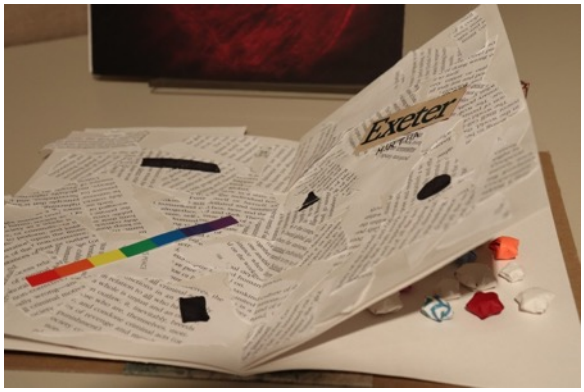
Laura, Afro-Latina Puerto Rican woman from the Bronx, surrounded herself with a powerful coalition of friends & mentors in her four years at the academy, now works as an alumni interviewer to pass on her certainty that it is just as important to show Exeter who you are as it is to absorb the backgrounds of different types of people, particularly for POC.



Sophie Turer ‘21
Existing Outloud

Inspired by Interview with Marlow Bull ‘04
March 13, 2021

Marlow identifies as non-binary, white & recently changed their name to Marlow. They recently married their love, Robin, and together are raising daughter, Amalia. Marlow is finished their MBA at Yale School of Management and soon to work in marketing at PepsiCo. Marlow got an MFA in Acting from Columbia, is currently reading Detransition Baby, love to cook, powerlift and travel.



Sophie Turer ‘21
Distance and Community

Inspired by Interview with Laura Zak ‘02
January 27, 2021

Laura, a white, queer woman, grew up in Exeter, NH & now lives in LA, where she is a writer, actor, producer & activist. At St. Johns’ college, Laura brought Eve Ensler’s “*Vagina Monologues*” to campus & served for eight years as Campaigns’ Manager for Eve Ensler’s V-Day, a global movement to end violence against women and girls. A writer and actor, she is the co-creator and co-writer of the Emmy-nominated and Gotham award winning series “*Her Story*,” and is a writer and voice actor for Amazon's upcoming animated series “*Danger & Eggs.*” She has created & been a part of films including "*Twelve Forever*," "*Proof of Loss*," *“#Hashtag: The Series.*" She is currently a staff writer for Dreamworks, Inc. Laura returns to NH to visit with family & to lead PEA MLK Day Workshops.

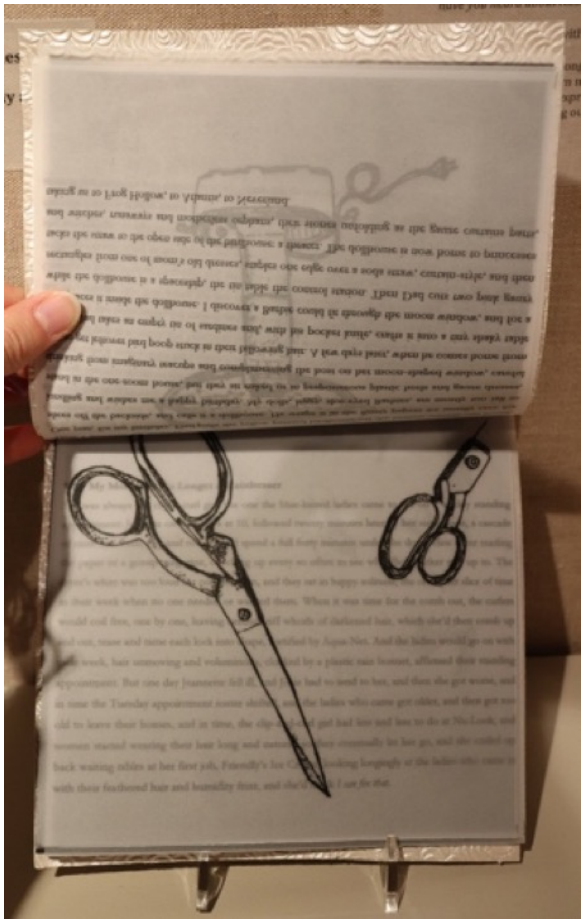
Margaret Northsworth-Edghill '21, Brody Faliero '21, Lyric Zimmerman '22
A School Built for Boys

Inspired by an Interview by Keara Polovick '21 with Emily Barr '76 January 29, 2021

Emily, a cishet white woman, was in one of the first coeducational classes at PEA. During her time at Exeter, she lived in Amen Hall, where there were still urinals in the bathrooms after it turned into a girls' dorm. At the time, girls also had trouble accessing birth control.

Erica Plouffe Lazure
(Un) Learning to Become
April 2021

Erica Lazure is an Instructor in English at PEA since 2009, a 2009-2010 George Bennett Fellow. She draws and writes stories in her copious amounts of spare time. She is the author of two flash fiction chapbooks, Heard around Town and Sugar Mountain. Her short story collection, Proof of Me, is forthcoming in March 2022. Singer, guitar player, garden grower, creative in the kitchen. She is known among some for her Pandemic Patriarchy Ice Parties & her radical cross-country skiing while story-telling.



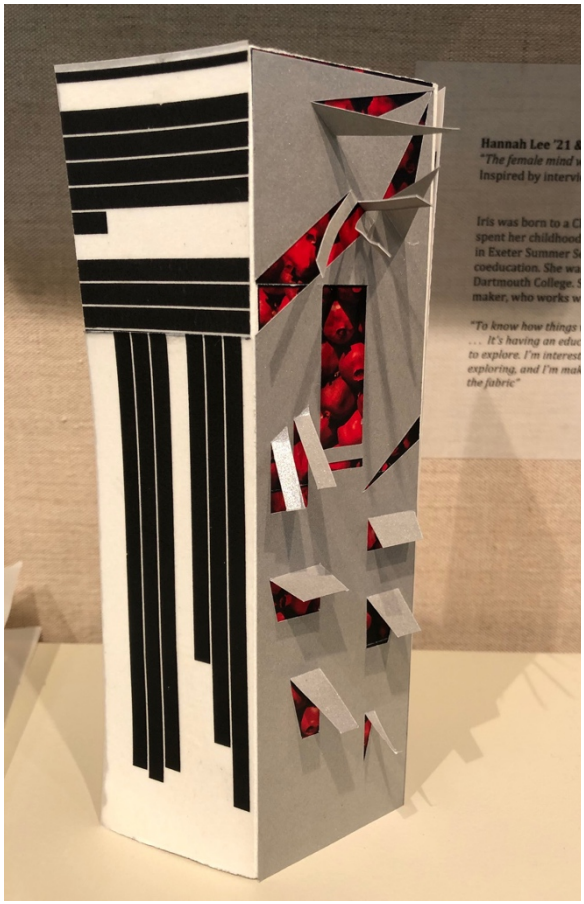
Mercy Carbonell ’96 (Hon)
Instructor in English
Written in Space/Textual Air: A Bookmobile of Student Voices

Inspired by a 1976 visit to Alexander Calder’s studio & in resistance against Marcel Duchamp’s representation of women, I imagined this installation to honor the mobile form’s redefining of space as feminist metaphor & students inscribing their own experiences in lyrical forms: erasure/redaction; found/collage; lyric narrative.

Hannah Lee ’21 & Mercy Carbonell
“The female mind was on the line.”
Inspired by interview with Iris Gowan ’71
February 2021

Iris was born to a Chinese mother & white American father from NH. She spent her childhood in Nigeria & identifies strongly with Asia. After two years in Exeter Summer School, Iris came to PEA in one of the first classes of coeducation. She was one of the first female graduates of PEA and of Dartmouth College. She is an alum, a parent of alums & a professional quilt maker, who works with Manhattan Quilters.

“To know how things work . . . There's no straightforward way to be a quilt artist . . . It's having an education that gives you something to think about something to explore. I'm interested in structure . . . I'm interested in creating landscapes, exploring, and I'm making physical landscape when I make a quilt . . . To honor the fabric”



Vedika Amin ‘24
Mindscape
Posca paint markers and Sharpie on umbrella
Activism in Art Club

One of the most well-known architects of the twentieth century, Walter Gropius, once said," The mind is like an Umbrella. It is most useful when open." These words aptly encapsulate my artwork "Mindscape," in which I have used an umbrella to project my innermost thoughts, optimistic ideals, positive beliefs, values, sentiments, imagination, expectations, hopes, and wishes connected to the role of Gender, Sexuality, and Identity in cultivating a progressive co-educational environment.

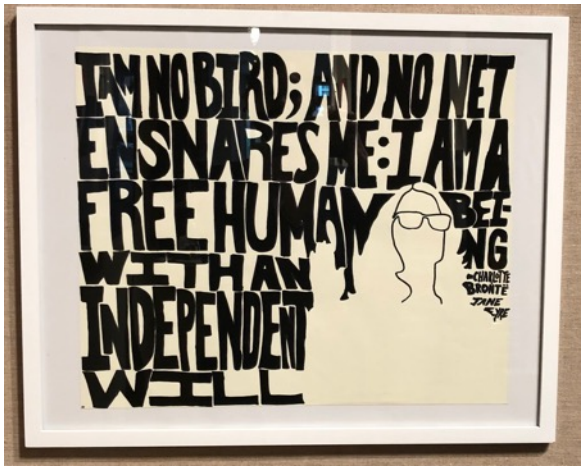
An umbrella is all-encompassing and all-inclusive, in that it provides protection from nature's harsh elements such as the sun and rain. Similarly, my artwork titled the "Mindscape" is a canopy of positive affirmations and graphics which help to remind, empower, and inspire me and others. It emphasizes positivity, open-mindedness, and acceptance, and protection against negativity and vulnerability when it comes to distorted and misplaced human prejudices regarding sexuality, gender, and identity.
Since an umbrella protects people and objects, it's also a symbol for something that binds people together, and unity is a cornerstone of progressive co-education.

I chose a white umbrella because white reflects ideals such as purity and balance, as well as calm, peace, and serenity, all of which are increasingly needed in today's world.

Every thought we have shapes our future, and we can improve the world through inclusive co-education if we act with kindness and compassion. Only by being kind to one another can we make the world a better place for everyone.

Eleanor Bolker ‘22
No Net Ensnares Me
Paper, acrylic paint, and sharpie marker

Activism in Art Club



Ailla Crossman ‘21
Contemplation Space
Watercolor, colored pencil, mixed media on Bristol
Activism in Art Club

There can be a lot of pressure to have a definitive identity to declare at any time. How can we go about deciding how to categorize ourselves? Internal and external factors build and shape an identity over time, and the identity shifts with them like its own tiny ecosystem.
Choosing the correct set of words takes careful consideration, and an extra measure of courage when an old one no longer fits.

Daniel Cui ‘21
Lily
Acrylic paint and colored pencil on watercolor paper

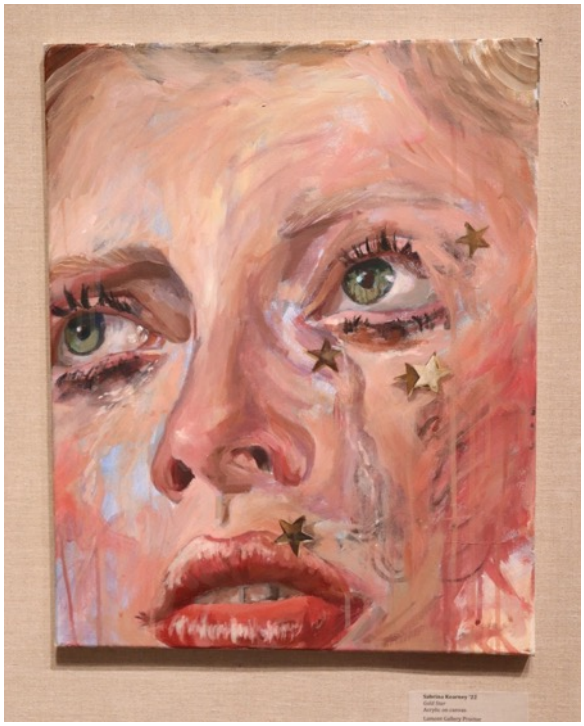
Activism in Art Club

Frankie Getman ‘21
Greta
Acrylic on canvas

Activism in Art Club

Sabrina Kearney ‘22
Gold Star
Acrylic on canvas

Lamont Gallery Proctor



Sabrina Kearney ‘22
Enough
Acrylic on fabric

Lamont Gallery Proctor

Alysha Lai ‘23

Encapsulating Education

Collage of magazine cutouts

This collage made from magazine cutouts intends to encapsulate the feeling and freedom of education. We all have a common pursuit of and hunger for knowledge. We all enjoy that burst of excitement when we learn something new, and curiosity is the motivating force to hold on to and deepen that information. When something seems previously so incomprehensible or unattainable, we cry of joy or satisfaction when we finally find it. This is why co-education is essential to fueling that familiar desire to seek out new information. It’s time to celebrate our common love of learning which we all share as fellow lifelong learners.

Danielle Sung ‘22

Girl Wearing a Black Dress

Acrylic and graphite on paper

What makes portraiture powerful is that it fully captures an aspect of one’s identity – while dedicating my artworks to portraiture for the past few years, I have experimented with many aspects of myself including my cultural background, valued materialistic goods, and my religion and faith. For Girl Wearing a Black Dress I experiment the idea of my female identity.

In the self-portrait, I depict myself as a woman with long, black silky hair wearing a black dress. Having long hair and wearing a dress in our current society signifies one’s femininity, which stems from the idea that girls must always “look good” and dress “like a girl.” While I am placed in the center of the artwork and am therefore considered to be the subject (which is also reinforced through the title Girl Wearing a Black Dress), the vibrant red and green background and the strong brushstrokes that overlap the self-portrait and the dress depicts my questioning of the social construct of the concept of “femininity”.

Leandra Sze ’22
Two Generations Later
Oil painting
In the Activism in Art Club

My grandmother was born in Beijing, China, on February 7, 1922. I was born in London, England, on February 7, 2004.

As a child, one of my grandmother’s close brothers died of hepatitis due to contaminated food at school. Her parents then withdrew her from the local school and enrolled her in 4th grade in a French school run by nuns. All of the classes were taught in French, so she understood nothing when she first sat in class. Later on, she attended Peking American School. Growing up, she had aspirations of starting her own cosmetics business. She made her own makeup and sold small quantities of them to her classmates.
My grandmother's photograph on which this self-portrait is based was likely taken sometime in the 1930’s.

After high school, she attended the University of Rochester, graduating in 1943, and then went on to be one of the very few women to receive a master’s degree from Columbia Business School in 1945.

Most career paths were not so open to Asian women in the 1940’s, so she eventually became a stay-at-home mother. She also wanted to do so because she and her siblings had a relatively distant relationship with their mother, and she wanted to raise her children herself.

She was always interested in fine arts. In the 1960’s, she studied with Jack Tworkov, Romare Bearden and Hans Hofmann. In the 1970’s, she received an award from the Art Student’s League for a triptych of abstract expressionist paintings.

She passed away in Portsmouth, NH, at age 80 on June 1, 2002, 5 years before I was born.

Although I never had the chance to meet her, my grandmother is a prominent female figure in my family whom I look up to. She has shaped and influenced my life in many ways. Hearing her stories from my father, I admire her hard work and eager attitude in following her passions through education and art. I have decided to dedicate and model this painting after her as a tribute to my grandmother.