

CURATORS' STATEMENTS

On a bitterly cold Brooklyn day in January 1971, I found myself locked out of the apartment where I was staying for the weekend. Next-door neighbors kindly invited me to wait in their living room until my host returned. As I sat warming myself on the sofa, I spotted a copy of Emmett Williams's *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, started leafing through it, and was instantly hooked on this remarkable hybrid form of art and literature. Upon returning to my home in Massachusetts, I immediately ran out to a bookstore and purchased a copy—now well-worn and sitting in my office at the U of I Main Library.

In the meantime, the Dada movement, a major precursor of concrete poetry, became the focus of my career. But I didn't forget concrete poetry, and in 1996, while attending an art librarians' conference in Miami Beach, I had the opportunity for an insiders' tour of the Sackner Archive, then housed in Ruth and Marvin Sackner's condo. I eagerly looked forward to this visit, but, alas, realized that I had to chair a committee meeting at the same time as the tour. I bitterly regretted this missed opportunity for the next 23 years, until...

In spring 2019, due to a miraculous chain of circumstances and the incredible generosity of Marvin Sackner, I found the Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual poetry housed a mere 150 feet from my desk! I could wander at will through the shelves of this magnificent word-image collection (at least until the pandemic exiled us from our offices).

So now I have the unparalleled privilege of exploring the collection, assisting visitors wanting to use the material, and co-curating the first of what we hope will be many exhibitions of treasures from the Sackner Archive. I extend my deepest thanks to the Sackner family for making this all possible!

Timothy Shipe

SACK

A large bag made of a strong material such as burlap, thick paper, or plastic, used for storing and carrying goods

NER

A river in Poland

ARC

A part of the circumference of a circle or other curve

HIVE

A beehive

Peter Balestrieri



I am not sure how to explain my thoughts on finding out that the Sackner Archive was indeed coming to Iowa. It was obvious from the outset that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring in an internationally, deservedly famous collection of astounding repute. To find that it is actually here, now, at hand and available to generations of Iowans and beyond whenever needed, is simply astounding.

The best part of working on this exhibit was getting to know the Archive better. It gave me an excuse to explore the shelves upon shelves of material, which cannot help but inspire. The variety of textures, the colors, the dimensions, the shapes, so many of which are surprising and unique, continue to surprise and delight me. This exhibit provides just a tiny taste of that, but I hope the featured items bring you joy as well.

Margaret Gamm

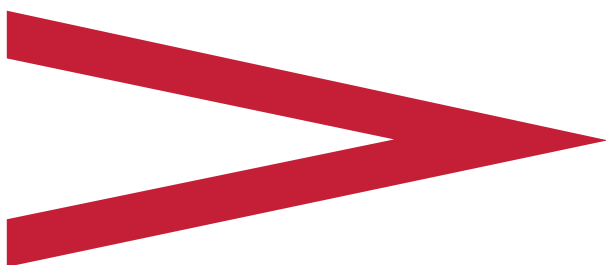
INTRODUCTION TO THE SACKNER ARCHIVE

The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry, containing the largest collection of concrete and visual poetry in the world, was founded in 1979 in sunny Miami Beach, Florida. With over 75,000 items including books, periodicals, typewritings, drawings, letters, print portfolios, ephemera, rare and out-of-print artists' books, and manuscripts, the Archive represents 20th-century art movements such as Italian Futurism, Russian and Eastern European Avant-gardes, Dada, Surrealism, Bauhaus, De Stijl, Ultra, Tabu-Dada, Lettrisme, and Ultra-Lettrisme. But it also includes evidence of social movements, gender studies, technological advances, and more, making it a valuable resource to any who come across it.

The Archive has been open for decades to researchers who contacted Dr. Marvin Sackner directly to request access. The Sackners' "Home Sweet Museum" served a dual purpose, as their daily lives were integrated with their art. Researchers regularly had lunch prepared by the Sackners, surrounded by the material they studied.

The shift of this monumental collection to the University of Iowa Libraries Special Collections in May 2019 marks a new era. The Archive has had a long journey through natural disasters and the hands of valiant movers. After traveling from a Miami house to a Miami condo, then to Long Island City in October 2017 as it awaited a permanent home, and finally to Iowa City where it found one, we are thrilled to welcome this Archive with open arms, and even more excited to open it to the public this year via this inaugural exhibit.

Starting this year, scholars from any discipline may freely work with the collection at any time of the year—unfortunately, without the benefit of hosted lunches. We welcome you to this Archive, first via this exhibit, and then in our reading room.

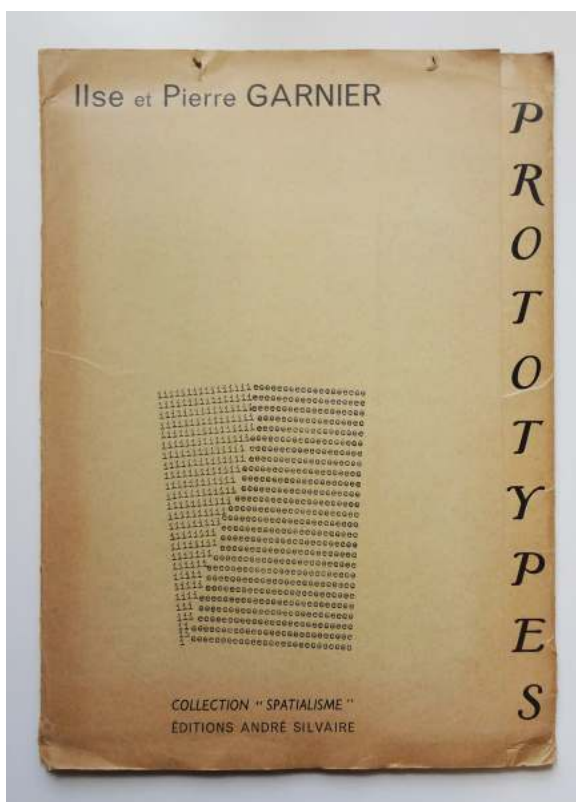


CONCRETE AND VISUAL POETRY

What is concrete poetry? What is visual poetry? Are they distinct forms, or is concrete poetry a category of visual poetry? There is no agreement among scholars, and it is probably more important to appreciate the impact of individual works than to worry about assigning them to a particular genre.

Certainly poetry has had a visual aspect ever since it first appeared in written form. Pattern poems, in which the arrangement of words on a page forms a picture, occur as early as the Greek Anthology. Perhaps the best-known examples in English literature are by the seventeenth-century poet George Herbert. In the early twentieth century, the works of Guillaume Apollinaire were especially influential.

In its strictest sense, "concrete poetry" refers to a movement that began in the 1950s and early 1960s, developing more or less simultaneously in Latin America and Europe. The term was coined independently by the Bolivian-Swiss writer Eugen Gomringer, the brothers Augusto and Haraldo de Campos in Brazil, and the Brazilian-born Swedish artist Öyvind Fahlström. Concrete poetry

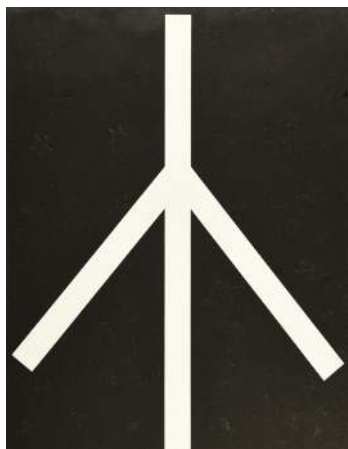


Ilse and Pierre Garnier, *Prototypes* (1965).

emphasizes the dynamic visual impact of words and letters arranged on the page—usually the traditional paper pages of a book, broadside, or magazine, but sometimes utilizing other media such as stone or wood. The effect might be mimetic, as in poems that imitate the appearance of falling rain or a flickering movie screen—or the arrangement might be purely abstract. But it is almost always the concrete visual nature of printed (or sometimes handwritten) language that is foregrounded. In some instances, a poem may use abstract symbols that have the appearance of writing but do not in fact represent any actual writing system (“asemic” writing).

For purposes of this exhibition, it is certainly worth noting Marvin Sackner’s own definitions: “I define concrete poems as those in which only letters and/or words are utilized to form a visual image, whereas visual poems constitute those in which images are integrated into the text of the poem.” Taken as a whole, the Sackner Archive could be described as a comprehensive exploration of what happens when the word encounters the image.

Concrete and visual poetry constitute a truly international phenomenon. This exhibition includes examples in Czech, English, French, Portuguese, and Russian. But one need not know all of these languages to appreciate the works. Indeed, this makes the Sackner Archive uniquely suited to a UNESCO City of Literature: in this marriage of word and image we are able to encounter and enjoy the work of poets from around the world, and to dwell for a moment in languages and cultures other than our own.



Mary Ellen Solt, *Vietnam* (front and back, c 1970s).

PRECURSORS AND PIONEERS

The precursors of concrete poetry may be traced back as far as ancient pattern poetry. Major early twentieth-century influences included the Futurist and Dada movements. Here we present just two examples from 1923: Guillermo de Torre's (1900-1971) *Hélices* and Kurt Schwitters's (1887-1948) magazine *Merz* (featuring his single-letter "i" poem).

Augusto de Campos (1931-), with his brother Haraldo (1929-2003), was a co-founder of the concrete poetry movement in Brazil in the late 1950s.

John Furnival's (1933-2020) *Fall of the Tower of Babel*, depicting the splintering of the world's languages as nuclear apocalypse, is one of the early classics of concrete poetry.

Pierre and Ilse Garnier (1928-2014, 1927-2020) were a husband-and-wife team (he was French, she German) who produced an enormous output of concrete poetry individually and as a couple. In her *Afrikanische Legende*, Ilse Garnier incorporates an African symbolic writing system sewn by women into ceremonial carpets and vestments.

Iowa-born poet Mary Ellen Solt (1920-2007) produced a number of protest poster-poems during the era of the Vietnam war, as well as a series of flower poems. She edited one of the most important early anthologies of concrete poetry.

As befits his name, Henri Chopin's (1922-2008) works are often deeply tied to music; much of his work straddles the line between concrete and sound poetry. In 1985 Chopin visited Iowa City, where he collaborated with UI composer Kenneth Gaburo on the improvisational sound piece "Few," featured in the audiovisual portion of this exhibition.

In former Czechoslovakia, concrete poets used their medium as a form of disguised political protest. Jiří Kolář (1914-2002) became one of Central Europe's most renowned collage artists. Václav Havel (1936-2011) was a poet and playwright, some of whose works were circulated as samizdat (illegally reproduced writings); he became the leading Czech dissident in the 1980s and, eventually, president of Czechoslovakia and the independent Czech Republic. He is probably the only poet in this exhibition to have an international airport named after him.

UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED, ALL ITEMS IN THE EXHIBITION MAY BE FOUND IN: THE SACKNER ARCHIVE OF CONCRETE AND VISUAL POETRY, GIFT OF/ON LOAN FROM RUTH AND MARVIN A. SACKNER AND THE SACKNER FAMILY PARTNERSHIP, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES.

- 1** Guillermo de Torre. *Hélices*. Madrid: Mundo Latino, 1923.
- 2** Merz, no. 2. Hanover: Merzverlag, 1923.
- 3** Augusto de Campos and Julio Plaza. *Poemobiles*.
- 4** Augusto de Campos. *Poesia 1949-1979*.
- 5** John Furnival. *The Fall of the Tower of Babel*. 1995.
- 6** Pierre and Ilse Garnier. *Prototypes*. Paris: André Silvaire, 1965.
- 7** Ilse and Pierre Garnier. *Poèmes mécaniques*. Paris: André Silvaire, 1965.
- 8** Ilse Garnier. *Afrikanische Legenden*. Berlin: Hybriden, 1998.
- 9** Mary Ellen Solt. *Change*. Circa 1970s.
- 10** Mary Ellen Solt. *Vietnam*. Circa 1970s.
- 11** Mary Ellen Solt. *Concrete Poetry: A World View*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969.
- 12** Mary Ellen Solt. *A Trilogy of Rain*. Urbana: Final Press, 1970.
- 13** Mary Ellen Solt. Preparatory typed page for *A Trilogy of Rain*. 1970.
- 14** Henri Chopin. *Graphpoemachines*. Verona: Zero Gravita, 2006.
- 15** Francois Lagarde. Photograph of Henri Chopin. 1978.
- 16** Henri Chopin. *Concerto in Zhopin mineur*. Paris: Artista, 1982.
- 17** Henri Chopin. *Graphèmes en vibration*. Chelles, France, 1990.
- 18** Mark Battier and Henri Chopin. *Transparence*.
- 19** Jiří Kolář. *Evidentní Básně*. Prague, 1966.
- 20** Jiří Kolář. *Improvisation Offset*. Paris: Revue K, 1991.
- 21** Václav Havel. *Antikódy*. Prague: Odeon, 1993.
- 22** Václav Havel. *Vernisáž*. Prague, 1975.
- 23** Jiří Kolář. From *12 Cartes Postales*. Paris: Autographe, 1991.
- 24** Jiří Kolář. *Gersaints Aushängeschild*. Prague: Stanislav Kolibal, 1966.

INSPIRED BY & INSPIRING THE CURRICULUM

The Sackner Archive holds much art with strong or subtle connections to various schools and disciplines at the University of Iowa. Here, we present a variety of artworks influenced by and relating to the Humanities, Science, and Business. We look forward to connections and inspirations yet to be discovered.

25 Jenny Holzer. *Protect Me From What I Want*. 1987.

26 Barbara Kruger. *Matchbooks*. 1984. (Curated selection.)

27 Richard Tipping. *Man Aging Direct Or*. 1984.

28 jw curry. *Industrial Sabotage #47*. 1990.

29 Hanne Darboven. *Kunst und Pangeometrie*. Brussels, 1973.

30 John Giorno. *You Gotta Burn to Shine*. 1992.

31 Paul Laffoley. *Cosmogonic Historicity*. 1975.

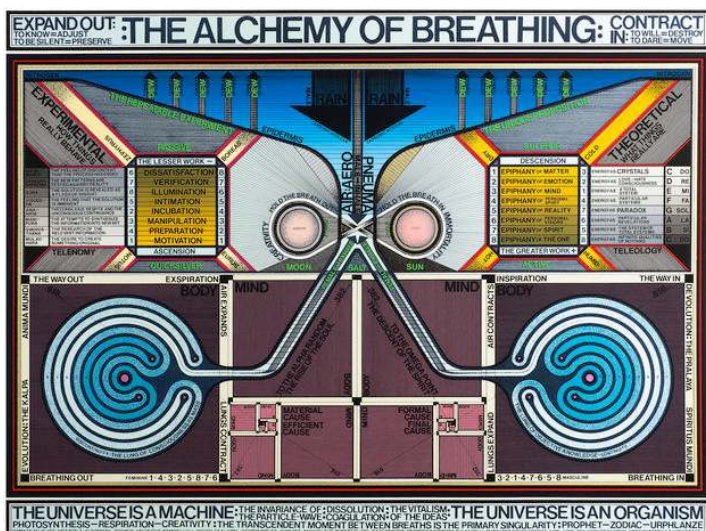
32 Paul Laffoley. *The Alchemy of Breathing*. 1992.

33 Rutsaalo Eino. *Kelteunen Naulaboksi (Yellow Nail Box)*. 1967.

34 Dmitry Babenko. *Walks Along - Oiku Mene*. 2006.

35 Carol Forget. *I'm Your Normal*. 1985.

36 Anatol Knotek. *Jean-Michel Basquiat*. 2003.



Paul Laffoley, *The Alchemy of Breathing* (1992).

PRECURSORS AND PIONEERS (CONTINUED)

The British artist Tom Phillips (1937-) is perhaps best known for *A Humument*, one of the most renowned of all artists' books. Taking copies of *A Human Monument*, a second-rate Victorian novel by W. H. Mallock, Phillips covered the pages with drawings and collages, leaving portions of the text visible to create an entirely new narrative. The work evolved through many iterations. The Sackners amassed a major collection of works and unpublished papers of Phillips, including many of the original modified pages of Mallock's book that were reproduced to create *A Humument*. Phillips also designed a number of book jackets for novels by Iris Murdoch, whose original manuscripts are held by the University of Iowa Special Collections.

The most pastoral of the classic concrete poets, Ian Hamilton Finlay's (1925-2006) work frequently alludes to themes of sailing, gardens, and Classical Greek and Roman monuments. Many of his poems were inscribed in stone, and his five-acre Little Sparta near Edinburgh is a literal garden of concrete poetry. The Sackner Archive includes a massive collection of Finlay's publications and papers.

Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson (1940-2015), an artist from Columbus, Ohio, was a speaker of history via visual images. She worked primarily with homemade paper and "hogmawg," defined as "a collection of mud, clay, twigs, leaves, lime, animal grease, and glue." Robinson strongly believed in the importance of history and the African concept of Sankofa, "learning from the past in order to move forward." Her three unique pieces in the Sackner Archive, two of which are on display in this exhibition, tell elaborate, community-based tales through multi-piece works.

TOM PHILLIPS

37 Iris Murdoch. Manuscript of *The Message to the Planet* (1st Notebook). Iris Murdoch Papers, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries.

38 Iris Murdoch. *The Message to the Planet*. London: London Limited Editions, 1989. Dust jacket by Tom Phillips.

39 Tom Phillips. *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*. First Edition. London: Thames and Hudson, 1980.

40 Tom Phillips. *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*. Fourth Edition. London: Thames and Hudson, 2005.

41 Tom Phillips. Manuscript of individual page from *A Humument*, Fourth Edition. Circa 2004.

42 Inscription from Tom Phillips to Sackners.

IAN HAMILTON FINLAY

43 Ian Hamilton Finlay & John Furnival. "Xmas Rose." 1970. (Ship print.) Dunsyre Lanark: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1971.

44 Ian Hamilton Finlay. *A Sailor's Calendar*. New York: Something Else Press, 1971.

45 Ian Hamilton Finlay. *Modern Antiquities*. New York: Nolan/Eckman Gallery, 2000.

46 Ian Hamilton Finlay. *A Rubbing Post for Wild Boar*. Dunsyre Lanark: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1997.

47 Ian Hamilton Finlay. *Enchantment*. Dunsyre Lanark: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1996.

48 Ian Hamilton Finlay. *Two One-Line Poems for Posties*.

49 Ian Hamilton Finlay. *Homage to Walter Reekle's Ring Netters* (Postcard). Dunsyre Lanark: Wild Hawthorne Press, 1996.

AMINAH BRENDA LYNN ROBINSON

50 Aminah Brenda Lynn Johnson. *Book Walk Series in the Backwoods*. Columbus, Ohio, 1978.

51 The Papermakers - PIECE FROM: Aminah Brenda Lynn Johnson. *Book Walk Series in the Backwoods*. Columbus, Ohio, 1978.

52 PIECE FROM: Aminah Brenda Lynn Johnson. *Book Walk Series in the Backwoods*. Columbus, Ohio, 1978.

53 Aminah Brenda Lynn Johnson. *Cries of Poindexter Village*. Columbus, Ohio, 1980.

ARTISTS' BOOKS / BOOK ARTISTS

Like concrete and visual poetry, artists' books straddle a blurry line. Are they books, art, both? The Sackner Archive is alive with artists' books that raise these questions and offer a wide spectrum of what artists and book artists have imagined.

- 54** Derek Humphries. *Elsewhere*. 1987.
- 55** Susan Grant. *The Wink, The Kiss, The Slap*. 1987.
- 56** Jenni Lukac. *Cabalistic Book*. 1992.
- 57** Zena Zipporah. *Recall of the Soul*. 1989.
- 58** Greta Schodl. *[Blatter]*. 1988
- 59** Dmitry Babenko. *Man from Red*. 2000-2001
- 60** Johanna Drucker. *History of the/my World*. Bow and Arrow Press, 1990.
- 61** Francis Hamilton. *She's Not Ugly But*. 1982.
- 62** Joelle Thabaraud. *Texts - Textures*. 1983.
- 63** Francois Aubral and Anik Vinay. *Epitome*. Atelier des Grames, 1979.



Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson, *Book Walk Series in the Backwoods* (1978).

LETRISM

Developing about a decade before concrete poetry, paralleling many of its techniques but with a significant philosophical dimension as well, the French Lettrist movement was founded by the Romanian-French writer Isidore Isou (1925-2007). Lettrist literature emphasized asemic writing (using invented symbols that look like writing but do not belong to any existing alphabet). A major exhibition, *Lettrisme: Into the Present*, was held at the University of Iowa Museum of Art in 1983, and included numerous works loaned by the Sackner Archive.

64 *Lettrisme*, no. 14, Jan.-Feb. 1967
(cover maquette).

65 *Lettrisme: Into the Present* [labels]. 1983.

66 *Lettrisme: Into the Present* [brochure]. 1983.

67 *Lettrisme* (Robert Dupont), print, undated.

68 *Lettrisme*, no. 46/47/48, 1975.

69 *Lettrisme: Into the Present* [invitation], Roland Sabatier (from PS1, no. 1), University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1983.



70 Maurice Lemaître. *Qu'est-ce que le lettrisme?*
Paris: Centre de Créativité, 1966.

SACKNERS AS FAMILY AND COLLECTORS

The Sackners lived with and among their Archive. Birthday presents from the kids often featured words as images, and gifts and purchases arrived via mail almost daily.

Building the Archive was a team effort and family bonding activity. Marvin traveled to conferences pertaining to his profession as a pulmonologist, and his family journeyed with him. On their travels, they visited with other collectors, met artists in their studios, and dealers in their shops. They built relationships with these individuals over many years, resulting in extensive written communications. The Sackners carefully archived almost every letter received, and copied almost every letter sent, for decades.

While this portion of the Sackner Archive promises a wealth of information to researchers in the future, it will remain closed for several years as archivists must process the papers and remove confidential information pertaining to living individuals. In the meantime, we offer a small sampling of the riches to come, in the form of correspondence between the Sackners, Tom Phillips, and Johanna Drucker. Correspondence between Phillips and the Sackners extends across two binders and many years, beginning with the letters from Phillips seen here.



THE WORD IN SOUND AND MOTION

Sound poetry—spoken performances with little or no connection to any known language—could be seen as the flip side of concrete or visual poetry. Both forms emphasize the physical aspects of human language (whether visual or auditory) rather than semantic meaning. Many poets worked in both genres. In the audiovisual portion of the exhibition we hear several examples by Valeri Scherstjanoi, by Henri Chopin (his 1985

Correspondence between the Sackners and Johanna Drucker

71 Custom postcard by Johanna Drucker to Ruth and Marvin Sackner. February 18, 1984.

72 *History of the/my World* postcard by Johanna Drucker to Ruth and Marvin Sackner. October 1, 1990.

73 New York postcard by Johanna Drucker to Ruth and Marvin Sackner. March 22, 1991.

Correspondence between the Sackners and Tom Phillips

74 The first letter from Tom Phillips to the Sackners. July 27, 1977.

75 A series of *A Humument* postcards by Tom Phillips to Ruth and Marvin Sackner. 1979-1980.

76 Ruth and Marvin Sackner. *The Art of Typewriting*. Thames & Hudson, 2015.

77 Ruth and Marvin Sackner. *The Ruth & Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry* 1984. Miami Beach, 1986.

78 Jill Cannday, *Portrait of Ruth Sackner*. 1976.



University of Iowa collaboration with composer Kenneth Gaburo), and by Augusto de Campos (reading his own concrete poetry). Some kinetic concrete poems or “concrete movies” by Nico Vassilakis are also included.

Alternating with these pieces is *Concrete!*, a documentary from Padded Cell Pictures, produced and directed by Sara Sackner in 2003. *Concrete!* delves into the lives of the Sackners and their circle, as viewed by their daughter.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

SACKNER ARCHIVE was drawn almost entirely from The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry at the University of Iowa Libraries Special Collections. We recognize and appreciate the decades of constant, careful work that Ruth and Marvin put into curating this collection for their Home Sweet Museum. We remain honored to have been chosen as its new Home Sweet Library.

EXHIBIT CURATION

Timothy Shipe, Peter Balestrieri, and Margaret Gamm

PREPARATION & INSTALLATION

Giselle Simón, Bill Voss

DESIGN

Kalmia Strong

EXHIBITION COORDINATION

Sara J. Pinkham

EXHIBITION TECHNOLOGY

Chris Clark, Will Brown

PUBLICITY & WEBSITE

Jennifer Masada, Sara J. Pinkham,
Ken Clinkenbeard

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

Rich Dana, Beth Stone,
Diane Dias De Fazio

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IOWA

LIBRARIES

Main Library Gallery
125 W. Washington St.
Iowa City, IA 52242
lib.uiowa.edu/gallery