

**The Center for Book Arts
28 W 27 St, 3rd floor
New York, NY**

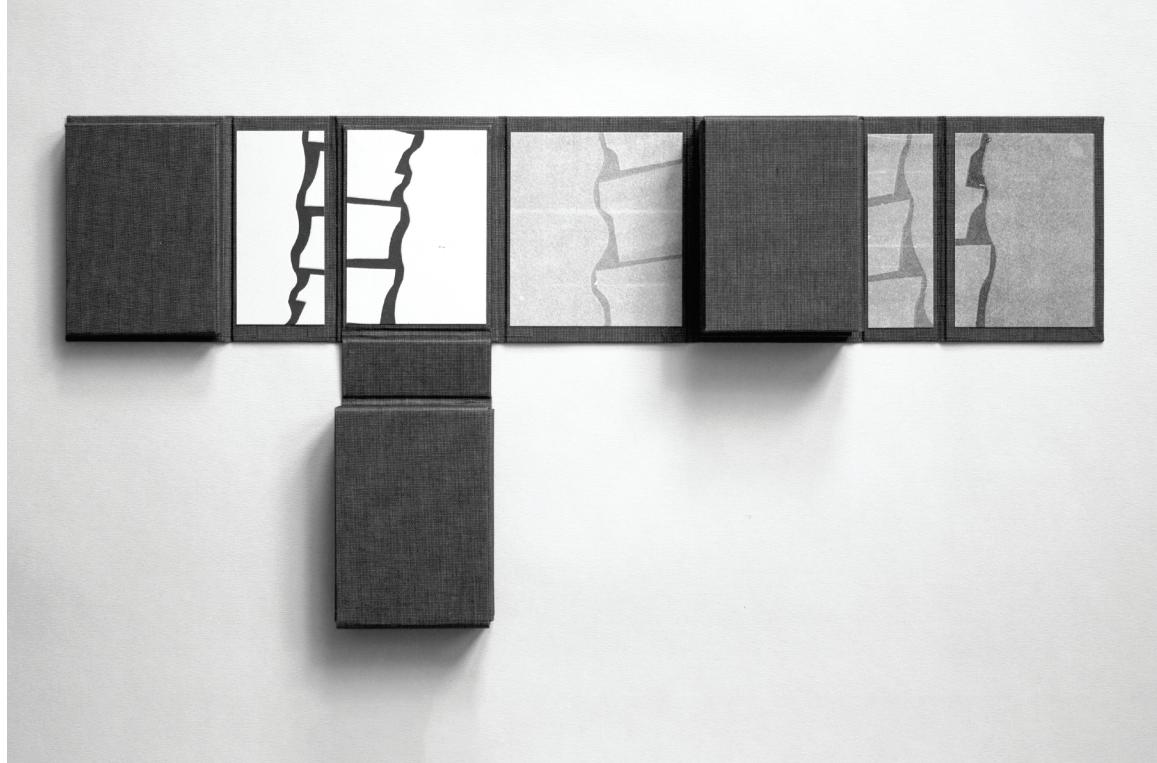
**April 18 to
June 29, 2019**

Featured Artists:

**Shelly Bahl
Milcah Bassel
Charlotte Becket
Alix Pentecost Farren
Bundith Phunsombatlert**

New Book Art:

Workspace Residents of 2018



Introduction

Over the last 45 years, The Center for Book Arts has been supporting book artists through providing space to learn and practice the book arts. This year it is my pleasure to introduce you to the work of 5 talented contemporary artists who are continuing this tradition. Shelly Bahl, Milcah Basel, Charlotte Becket, Alix Pentecost Farren, and Bundith Phunsombatlert have spent the entirety of 2018 pondering the same questions I do every day—what is book art? what does it mean to be a book artist today? These are the questions that make the book arts so interesting to me and that make The Center such a dynamic place to work.

Over the last year these artists have enriched our community with their uniquely contemporary interpretations of the book arts. **Shelly Bahl's** *International Woman of Mystery II* is an excellent example of this. Within this work, Bahl uses fictionalized historical narratives to bring new context to trans-cultural feminist ideas. Her work challenges assumptions of the past and makes visible how surreal these stories are when viewed from a different angle. Likewise, **Bundith Phunsombatlert's** *Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn* also uses narrative explore cross-cultural themes. The cyanotype blue of his prints makes reference to Anna Atkin's *British Algae* book from 1843.

Charlotte Becket's book series *Forcefields* takes on a completely different contemporary interpretation of the

book. Her work references electronics and mechanical objects to talk about our relationship as contemporary humans to consumerism. These books use geometric abstract compositions in combination with traditional bookbinding techniques to illustrate bodily processes like breathing and yawning while also calling to mind technology. Her use of laser cutting and paper folding is particularly effective in accomplishing this. Also working with paper in an exploratory way, Alix Pentecost-Farren combines illustration and letterpress printing with papercuts to create an interactive, rotating print. *The Inclining Dial* invites the viewer to reach out and touch the artwork.

Finally, resident **Milcah Basel's** *Governing Vessels* explores the medium of the book as a sculptural interactive object. Like Becket, Basel is using the book as a metaphor for the body. It unfurls in multiple directions revealing pressure prints of spinal imagery. Her work and the works the other four residents' are great examples of the many ways artists are working in and exploring the book arts.

Corina Reynolds, Executive Director

Credits

Support for the Center for Book Arts' Visual Arts Programs is provided, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

The Center for Book Arts
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New York, NY 10001

Front page image:
Governing Vessels by Milcah Bassel

Special Thanks:
The Center is grateful for the hard work of McCallum Dickens, Jenna Hamed, and Zoe Katz in realizing this exhibition.

www.centerforbookarts.org

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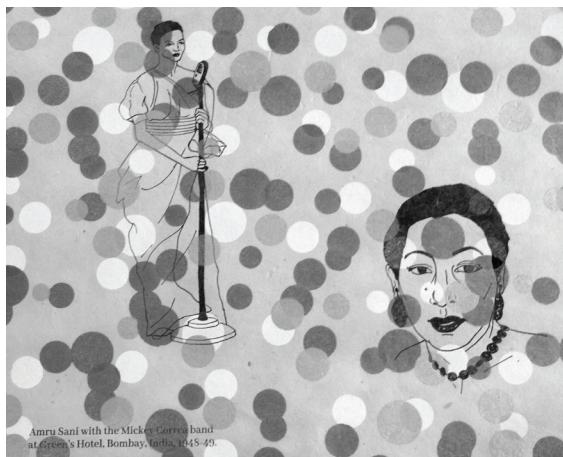
Richard Minsky

Shelly Bahl

Shelly Bahl is an interdisciplinary artist born in Benares, India, raised in Toronto and currently based in New York City. Her art projects have been presented in a number of solo and group exhibitions in North America and internationally, including: Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai; Asian Arts Initiative, Philadelphia; ABC No Rio (In Exile)/Bullet Space Gallery, NY; Villa Terrace Museum, Milwaukee; Shirin Gallery, NY; Queens Museum of Art, NY; White Box, NY; Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, BC; and the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh.

Her artwork has received significant critical attention, and has been reviewed in the New York Times, Time Out Delhi, NOW Magazine, National Post, Hamilton Spectator, Asian Art News, World Sculpture News, Art India, Vancouver Sun, Art Asia Pacific, amongst other publications. She has also worked with numerous arts organizations as an arts educator, curator and programmer, and is currently teaching at Saint Francis College in Brooklyn.

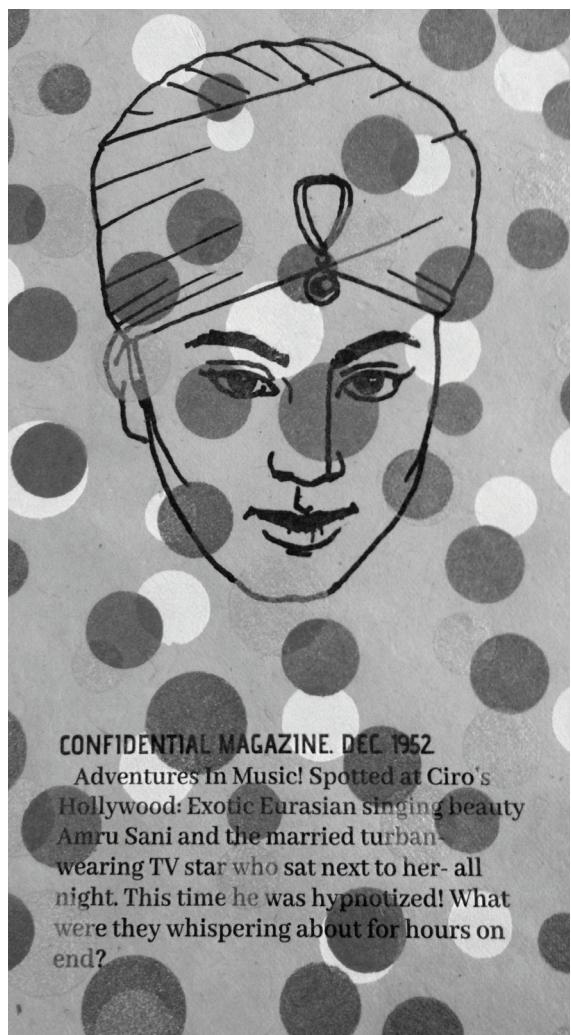
Shelly Bahl's art practice explores the strange and surreal aspects of trans-cultural feminist narratives, hybrid visual cultures, and old and new forms of colonization. The narratives in her interdisciplinary projects are based in facts and fictions rooted in specific cultural histories, which she then re-contextualizes and re-imagines. She is currently developing new drawings, prints and interdisciplinary works based on the fictionalized lives of historical figures such as Amru Sani, a mysterious Indo-Caribbean jazz singer and actress who performed internationally in the 1940's-60's, and who, at the peak of her fame, disappeared without a trace. Amru Sani's story is similar to the main character in Bahl's earlier installations and drawings for "International Woman of Mystery," that were inspired by research into the real-life narratives of four cultural interlopers and cinematic stars. These were all enigmatic and racially ambiguous women who created avatars to move fluidly between cultures, but who also left many deep ruptures in the wake of their disjointed selves.



Amru Sani with the Mickey Correa band
at Ciro's Hotel, Bombay, India, 1948-49.

Below:

Details from *International Woman of Mystery II: Amru Sani (Scroll 2)*
Shelly Bahl, 2018



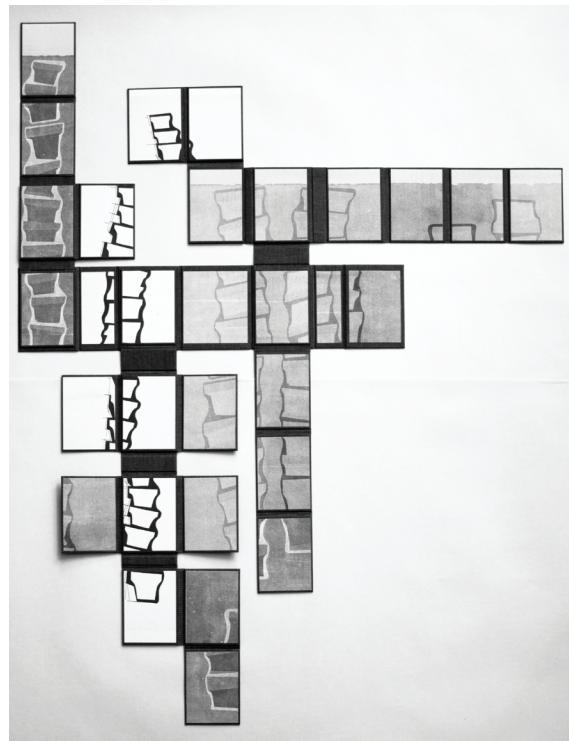
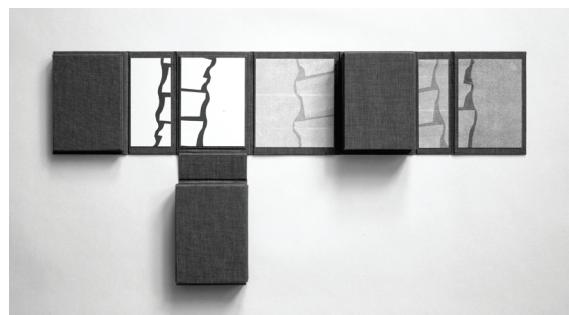
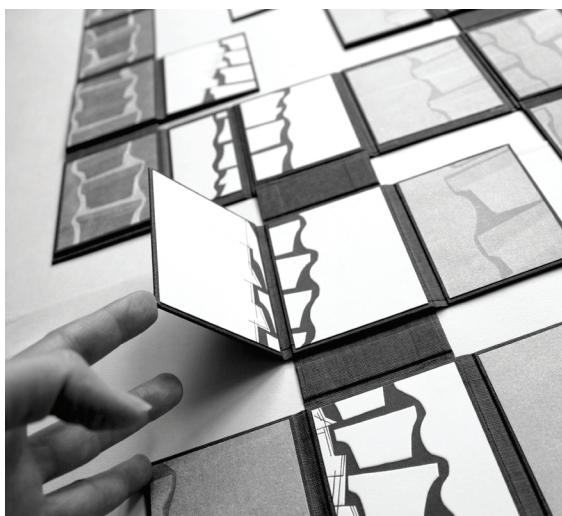
CONFIDENTIAL MAGAZINE. DEC. 1952

Adventures In Music! Spotted at Ciro's Hollywood: Exotic Eurasian singing beauty Amru Sani and the married turban-wearing TV star who sat next to her- all night. This time he was hypnotized! What were they whispering about for hours on end?

Milcah Bassel

Milcah Bassel is a multidisciplinary artist raised in Israel and based in Jersey City. Her work is an experiential investigation of body-space relations incorporating installation, performance, drawing, and other media. She has exhibited and performed at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Newark Museum, Zimmerli Art Museum, Soho20 Gallery, Pulse, EAB, Untitled, and Select art fairs, amongst others. Bassel earned a Post-Baccalaureate in Studio Art from Brandeis University (2011), and an MFA in Visual Art from Rutgers University (2013). She is the recipient of a Brodsky Center residency and NEA grant (2014), Hadassah-Brandeis Institute residency (2015), Guttenberg Arts STAR residency (2017), Bronx Museum AIM fellowship (2017), Center for Book Arts workspace residency (2018), and was recently awarded a 2019 New Jersey State Council on the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship. Bassel is a part-time lecturer at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, and at SUNY Purchase College.

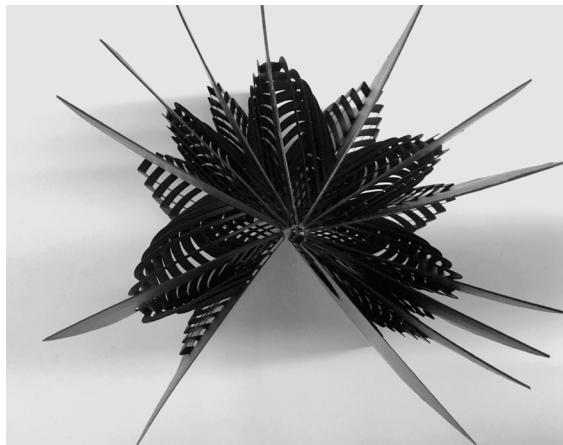
"Through my work I explore the phenomenology of body-space relations, questioning where experience and imagery converge and cross over. The work glides across dimensions, disciplines, and media, addressing contingency and spatial curiosity through physical engagement of artist and viewer. Recent works include games made of ceramics, large-scale paper performances, and interactive artist books in which human anatomy is hybridized with geometric architecture and graphics. A year long residency at CBA led to the development of an unraveling book structure, which playfully synthesizes the architecture and anatomy of a book form with that of the human body. *Governing Vessels*, a variable edition artist book, is a network of cases in which each panel houses a dissected portion of a print. A polymorphic composition of vertebral shapes, the piece is a meditation on embodied hierarchical strata. Viewers are invited to interact with the book."



Left and above:
Governing Vessels
Milcah Bassel, 2019

Charlotte Becket

Charlotte Becket is based in New York City where she is an Associate Professor at Pace University. She attended Hunter College's MFA program and received her BFA from the Cleveland Institute of Art. Solo and two-person exhibitions include CultureHub NYC, Crisp Gallery London, LEAP Berlin, Taxter and Spengemann NYC, and group exhibitions at Gazelli Art House London, and the Invitational Exhibition Academy of Arts and Letters in NYC. She has been the recipient of grants from The Center for Book Arts NYC, The New York Foundation for the Arts, Socrates Sculpture Park, and The Joan Mitchell Foundation. Her work has been reviewed in The New York Times, TimeOut London, ArtForum, and Art in America, among others. Her work is online at www.charlotte-becket.com



Above and right:
Forcefields
Charlotte Becket, 2019



"The artwork that I am engaged with in my studio is sculptural and installation based. I work with mechanization and electronics to create works that incorporate layers of references. These abstract hybrid forms occupy a space that point to both the body and landscape, they are simultaneously familiar and alien. In the work, automation, information, consumerism, progress and erosion are collapsed into a muddle that both celebrates and questions its status quo. While at the CBA, I have been exploring the structure of a book as a hand-held kinetic object. A book offers the viewer a more intimate and tactile experience, one where they have agency over the sequence and temporal aspect of the work."

My time at the CBA has culminated in a series of pop up books that explore animating geometric abstract forms using methods and materials sourced from the various courses I took at the CBA during my residency. Like the other work, these books explore geometry as a means to describe bodily gestures such as breathing, flexing, or yawning. Similar to the sculptural work, these books suggest a looping or rhythm, again, recalling bodily rhythms and cyclical time."

Charlotte Becket

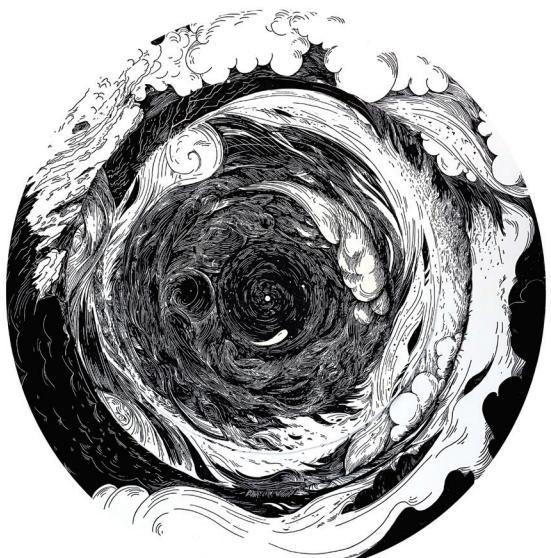
Alix Pentecost-Farren

Alix Pentecost-Farren is an illustrator and visual artist. She studied illustration and filmmaking at the Rhode Island School of Design before moving to New York. Her work has been awarded a silver medal from the Society of Illustrators, a Communication Arts Award of Excellence, and shown by galleries in the U.S. and abroad. She has been an artist in residence at the SVA RisoLAB, Elsewhere Museum, and the Vermont Studio Center.

Her work is motivated by her passion for the environment, developed during her upbringing in rural North Carolina. Equally inspired by folktales and scientific journals, she uses ornamentation and symbolism to reflect on the human relationship to the natural world. Much of her work is an attempt to process the Anthropocene—the age of human influence on geological systems long thought to be immune. She uses delicate imagery and finds unexpected ways for the audience to encounter the work in an attempt to create opportunities for people to think about the unthinkable.

Although inexperienced in bookmaking before her time at CBA, Alix Pentecost Farren's work often employs sequence, text and paper. The residency was an opportunity to explore new mediums and refine her craftsmanship under the instruction of professional artists as she developed the next phase of her work. *Inclining Dial* is a volvelle with five rotating discs. The mechanism is informed by a long history of circular calculation devices and predictive objects. It is a

mix of crystal ball, celestial map, and meteorological chart. The imprecise nature of the instrument recalls earlier times when natural phenomena were a mystery, and science and magic intertwined. Swirling lines suggests the nebulous future of our climate. Sliding rings shift the image, variables interacting in an infinite number of ways to make up the full image. The interactivity emphasizes the viewer's own impact on the outcome.



Above and below:
The Inclining Dial
Alix Pentecost-Farren, 2019



Bundith Phunsombatlert

Bundith Phunsombatlert is a media artist living and working in NYC. His selected exhibitions include at Osage Gallery, Hong Kong (2019); International Print Center New York (2018/2014); Smack Mellon, NY (2018); Delaware Art Museum (2018); Cuchifritos Gallery, NY (2015); Flushing Meadows Corona Park/Queens Museum (2014); NYC DOT's Urban Art Program (2013); Socrates Sculpture Park, NY (2012); Location One, NY (2011); The 4th Auckland Triennial, New Zealand (2010); The Third Guangzhou Triennial, China (2008); The National Gallery, Thailand (2004); The Third Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Australia (1999); and The International Biennial of Graphic Art, Ljubljana, Slovenia (1997). He has been awarded grants and residencies from the Brooklyn Arts Fund (2019); NYSCA (2013); Harpo Foundation (2012); Eyebeam (2011); Pollock-Krasner Foundation (2011/2001); Skowhegan (2009); Asian Cultural Council (2007); and UNESCO Digital Arts Award (ISEA2004).

Phunsombatlert received an MFA in Digital+Media from RISD; and a BFA/MFA in Printmaking from Silpakorn University, Thailand.

Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn collects the stories of senior immigrants from Caribbean countries who are now Brooklyn residents. The project is in the form of an artist book represented in digital and cyanotype versions; the symbolic use of flowers and plants in images show the seniors' journeys and lives.

The project was inspired by Anna Atkins' *British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, the first book illustrated with photographic images, produced in 1843. My book creates a link between the immigrants' stories with images and the original cyanotype book. The stories focus on personal experiences of migration, the journeys through a specific cultivar of flowers, plants, and geographic landscape of origin to new land, which seek to add something that was absent in the original book. *Sunny Garden in Blue* connects cold emotional experiences in blue with the warm process of sunlight exposure in cyanotype.

Aida Ramos



Aida Ramos
Born Puerto Rico, 1944

Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn is a memory of the United States, as Puerto Ricans can travel to the mainland without any passport or visa.

When her mother left, Aida and her siblings lived with their father in Puerto Rico. For the first seven years of her life, Aida was raised by her stepfather. Her father had a job as a cook for a doctor, so he could afford to send his children to school. Aida had two brothers — boy and girl — with her father.

After her mother died, they moved to New York. In 1951, Aida turned 11 years old, at the age of eight. Her mother bought plane tickets for each child and both took a boat to New York. They settled in Brooklyn, New York, and lived on St. Felix Street, Brooklyn. Aida could not remember her mother, but Aida had remained too strong. Her father, Luis, and she were able to live there for a few years.

Her mother, Cecilia Rodriguez, died when she was still a baby and was buried in Puerto Rico with her father. Their mother could not financially afford to take care of all three

children at the same time. Her mother also thought that it would be too difficult to take a son in the United States since she was afraid he son would become a gangster.

Aida's brother held a grudge all his life against his mother because he believed his mother had betrayed him. The reason why he held a grudge is that he did very well in Puerto Rico by working with the politicians there. He is now retired.

Aida worked as a paraprofessional in an elementary school, as well as a receptionist, and she also worked in a hospital. She has been a volunteer for the Brooklyn Homeless Center.

Aida loves roses, her favorite flower. She loves roses since her wife died three months ago. Aida does not have any plants or flowers in her apartment because she believes that flowers need a great deal of care. Aida loves yellow roses, which her husband bought her frequently. After Luis passed away, Aida never planted again.

Aida Ramos



Aida does not have a lot of memories of Puerto Rico since she left at such a young age. She remembers the plants she remembered, like the orange trees and the palm trees. At one time that Aida does not remember, she got a call from her mother. It was during a visit to her mother's house. Her mother had just had a stroke and her husband had died. On that day, Aida's mother had to leave her brother's head and they had to take him to the hospital.

Aida married Luis Ramos on December 17, 1960, when she was sixteen and Luis was twenty-three. At the time, her mother forced her to choose between either marrying Luis or staying with her. Aida chose Luis because she wanted to stay with him.

Luis was killed one night by two robbery who came to their apartment on Sutter Avenue, Brooklyn. Luis was shot in the head and he died in his chest. Due to the robbery, the police gave Luis a hero's burial. He had died in his sleep. Luis had a heart attack and he had survived it. Luis had a good job. Aida fought for Luis to be buried in Brooklyn, New York, where she was born. Luis died in 1979 when she was forty-six and Aida was thirty-five.

Twenty years ago, Aida went to visit her father at the Hospital in Puerto Rico one week before Christmas. She brought him a bouquet of roses. She was shocked when the daughter of the best friend passed away. Although his best friends family had passed away, Aida still wanted to go to the cemetery to pay her respects and to prepare the cemetery for all the members of the family.

Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn



Aida Ramos

Above:
Sunny Garden in Blue- Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn (Aida Ramos Story)
Bundith Phunsombatlert, 2018

Works in the Exhibition

1. Shelly Bahl

International Woman of Mystery II: Amru Sani (Scroll 2)

2018

Letterpress and screen print on paper, three panels.
Edition of 3.
22 x 15 inches each.

2. Milcah Bassel

Governing Vessels

2019

Pressure prints and polymer plate prints on Somerset paper, uncommon hardcover binding.
Variable edition of 5.

Closed: 4 x 3 ½ x 3 inches

Open: 34 ¼ x 26 ½ inches

3. Charlotte Becket

Forcefields

2019

Cut paper, drum leaf binding.
Unique.
8 x 12 inches

4. Alix Pentecost Farren

The Inclining Dial

2019

Letterpress print on cotton paper, brass post.
Edition of 5.
15.5 x 15.5 inches

5. Bundith Phunsombatlert

Sunny Garden in Blue: Stories from the Caribbean to Brooklyn

Aida Ramos Story

Jose A Felix Story

Kenneth Beckles Story

2018

Digital print on paper (cyanotype version forthcoming). 24 stories on 24 spreads in total.
Edition of 10.

14.25 x 20 inches per spread

