

Hanke Gallery opening exhibition will show how library collections spark learning



June 30, 2021

Approximately 40 Yale librarians, archivists, and curators have joined forces to nominate objects for an exhibition that will exemplify the diversity of the library's special collections and illuminate how primary sources inspire exploration and discovery. With the organizing concepts of "points of view" and "points of contact," the collaboration will culminate in the inaugural exhibition of the new Hanke Exhibition Gallery, now under construction in the Sterling Memorial Library nave.

"We envision an exhibit that looks across our collections to highlight how they intersect with and complement each other and how they work in tandem to support teaching and research," said Barbara Rockenbach, Stephen F. Gates '68 University Librarian. "By drawing on the expertise of a wide range of library staff, we aim to create a context in which to explore a diversity of human experience across time and culture."

The exhibition, to open in early 2022, will feature about 60 objects drawn from the collections of the Beinecke Library, Cushing/Whitney Medical Library, the Divinity Library, Gilmore Music Library, Haas Arts Library, Lewis Walpole Library, and Manuscripts and Archives, as well as area studies collections. Collection materials that are less well known or that highlight underrepresented voices will be prioritized, and objects that typically reside in different physical locations may be juxtaposed in provocative new ways. A complementary exhibition of audio-visual media from the collections is also being considered at the music library.

The final selection and organization of the objects will be made by three curators: Nancy Kuhl, curator of poetry in the Yale Collection of American Literature at the Beinecke; Bill Landis, head of public services at Manuscripts and Archives; and Jae Rossman, director of the Department of Area Studies and Humanities Research Support, working closely with Kerri Sancomb, exhibition program manager in Preservation and Conservation Services.

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Rather than fitting the objects into a preconceived exhibition narrative, the curators hope that the objects, individually and in conversation with each other, will inspire visitors to develop their own varied connections, interpretations, and further questions.

“Research is the primary motivation for use of our collections by faculty, staff, students, and visitors to Yale,” said Landis. “We are hoping the exhibit will stimulate engagement with the research process.”

The illuminated botanical manuscript, ca. 1600-1700, pictured above, is one example of the objects being considered. Taken from the medical library’s Arabic and Persian Medical Books and Manuscripts collection, its detailed, multicolored illustrations of animals, birds, plants, stones, and humans highlight the dynamic role that Arabic and Persian societies played in creating, cataloging, assembling, and distributing medical and natural history knowledge in the medieval and early modern worlds. Students and researchers interacting with this manuscript—or others like it—may be inspired to consider the wonder of the world in a time period or culture completely different from their own.

With state-of-the-art security, lighting, and humidity controls, the Hanke Gallery will be uniquely suited to accommodate unique, fragile, and rare primary-source materials. A combination of flat table cases and upright, vertical cases will enable a wide range of materials to be displayed, from three dimensional objects, to large manuscripts, photographs, and rare books. The gallery’s location in one of Yale’s most iconic buildings at the very heart of the campus not only underscores the centrality of the research process at Yale, but affirms the critical role of the library in making primary sources accessible to students, faculty, and other researchers.

Designed by Apicella+Bunton Architects, the new exhibition area is scheduled for completion by the end of 2021. Construction has been funded by a gift from Lynn Hanke, a member of the University Library Council, and her husband, Robert Hanke ’60.

—Amanda Patrick

Image: Fara? n?mah / Ab? Bakr al-Mu?ahhar ibn Ab? al-Q?sim ibn Ab? Sa??d al-Jam?l? ma?r?f bih Yazd?. ???
???? / ??? ??? ?????? ?? ??? ?????? ?? ??? ????? ??????? ??????? ?? ????. This Persian manuscript from the Cushing/Whitney Medical Library collections has been digitized and is [accessible online](#) [1].

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[1] <https://findit.library.yale.edu/bookreader/BookReaderDemo/index.html?oid=12297587&page=9#page/202/mode/2up>