new bedford whaling museum

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# The New Bedford Whaling Museum Examines Design, Structure, and Materiality of Books in New Exhibition, *Boundless: The Book as Art*

***Mixed Media Portrayed in Many Different Forms of Books Including Contemporary and Historical Comparisons***

**NEW BEDFORD, MA (September 30, 2026)**—The New Bedford Whaling Museum (NBWM) presents *Boundless: The Book as Art*, an exhibition that celebrates the inherent artistry in bookmaking, highlighting the mastery and creativity in traditional book arts, including printing, typography, illustration, bookbinding, papermaking, and graphic design. The exhibition includes over 200 rare books in all their forms that showcase the evolving methods and concepts of bookmaking. *Boundless: The Book as Art* opens October 16 and will be on view through February 15, 2027.

“In a time when screens dominate so much of our daily lives, *Boundless* celebrates the intimacy of reading from the physical page and the allure of a

new book – the distinctive smell of fresh ink and texture of new paper. It considers the creative processes and craftsmanship of bookmaking, featuring three-dimensional works employing a range of media and techniques," said Naomi Slipp, the Douglas and Cynthia Crocker Endowed Chair for Chief Curator and Director of Museum Learning. "In exploring books as unique art forms, the exhibition considers the many creative and commercial makers of books and their audiences, and underscores books as cultural and social touchstones. This is a not-to-be-missed show for bibliophiles and bookworms of all ages!"

Among the rare and historical publications on view are unique Japanese painted scrolls, an illuminated book of hours from the 1460s, a guidebook to the St. Lawrence river with an 11-foot-long pull out map, and textile sample books showcasing materials manufactured in New Bedford factories; hair albums, herbaria, and seaweed albums made by regional women; books bound in tooled moroccan leather, featuring unique fore-edge paintings, or showcasing elaborate marbled endpages; and those who subject matter make them icons of printed material, including a first edition of Frederick Douglass's autobiography, Benjamin Asher's *The American builder's companion, or, A system of architecture* (1816), and *Charts of the Coast and Harbors of New England* (1776). In addition, owing to the Museum's historical focus on our oceans, the exhibition showcases an incredible array of illustrated natural history volumes including the Museum's earliest printed book, Theobaldus's *Phisiologus Theobaldi Episcopi de naturis duodecim animalium*, printed in Cologne in 1494, and a volume by Louis Renard showing vividly colored fish and other aquatic lifeforms printed in Paris in 1754; early catalogs for cabinets of curiosity, like the *Museo Cospiano* (Bologna, 1677) and *Museum Wormianum* (Amsterdam, 1655); and the 1930 double volume Lakeside Press printing of Herman Melville's classic novel *Moby-Dick, and the Whale* illustrated by Rockwell Kent. Many of these editions are on view to the public for the first time.

In *Boundless*, a variety of book formats from the Museum's collection are placed in conversation with works by contemporary artists, including Andrea Dezsö (b. 1968), Melanie Mowinski (b. 1970), Anneli Skaar (b. 1969), and

Tracey Cockrell. Their unique sculptures, books, and paper collages, many made specifically for this exhibition and on view for the first time transform and rethink the idea and format of the traditional book in dynamic ways. When exhibited alongside historic publications, these contemporary artworks—complex and varying in structure and design—create a dialogue around the boundaries of traditional bookmaking and its relationship to art.

The New Bedford Whaling Museum has more than 28,000 books in its collection, ranging from rare folios, first editions, and scrolls to scrapbooks, journals, logbooks, and artist books. Spanning nearly 500 years, these works were printed around the globe in dozens of languages and cover topics as diverse as shipbuilding, natural history and global exploration, visual arts, poetry, and literature.

**Image credit:** Andrea Dezsö (b. 1968), *The Diver's Clothes Lying Empty*, 2022. Cotton watercolor paper, linen thread, acrylic color. Laser- and hand-cut, collaged and sewn, collapsible, multi-layered one-of-a-kind tunnel book. Courtesy of the artist.

High-resolution images available here.

**About the New Bedford Whaling Museum**

Founded as the Old Dartmouth Historical Society in 1903 and known as the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the Museum's mission is to ignite learning through explorations of art, history, science and culture, rooted in the stories of people, the region and an international seaport. As the region's historical society, NBWM documents and shares the diverse stories of this vibrant maritime region and its people, both bygone and current.

The New Bedford Whaling Museum is the leading cultural institution in the region, reaching 190,000 visitors in New Bedford and through traveling exhibitions annually. Accessible by the South Coast Rail service and with easy parking one block from the front entrance, the Museum is located at 18 Johnny Cake Hill in the heart of the city's historic downtown. The Museum is open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and is free from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

every second Thursday of the month for AHA! Nights. Admission is free for Museum members; adults $24, seniors (65+) $22, youth $18.For more information, visit www.whalingmuseum.org

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