

# Graphic Impressions

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# From the Encyclopedia To Google to the Middle Ages

By Susan Rostow

*I spent many wonderful hours of my childhood reading the encyclopedia. A set of books from A to Z neatly organized on a shelf with the entire world's information gave me great joy.*

I may be a romantic, waxing poetic and nostalgic about the past but that hasn't stopped me from enjoying the present times of clicking and swiping through Google images and other internet sites. My ongoing fascination with information, books and images continued to grow through decades and is presently expressed in my printed sculptural books created during my artist in residency at the New York Academy of Medicine Library.

Libraries across the country may be facing tougher times as people turn increasingly to the Web. But dedicated librarians continue to maintain collections and provide important services. The rare book room at the New York Academy of Medicine is home to one of the most significant historical libraries. The room itself is a printmaker's dream. Dim and cool, the walls are lined with built-in bookshelves housed with book spines full of character. Softly lit lamps feature engravings and lithographs evoking not just the history of medicine, but the history of printing as well. As one of five, NYAM's artists in residence, I had the opportunity to explore the collection over a period of six months doing research in the Drs. Barri and Bobbi Collier Rare Book Reading Room.

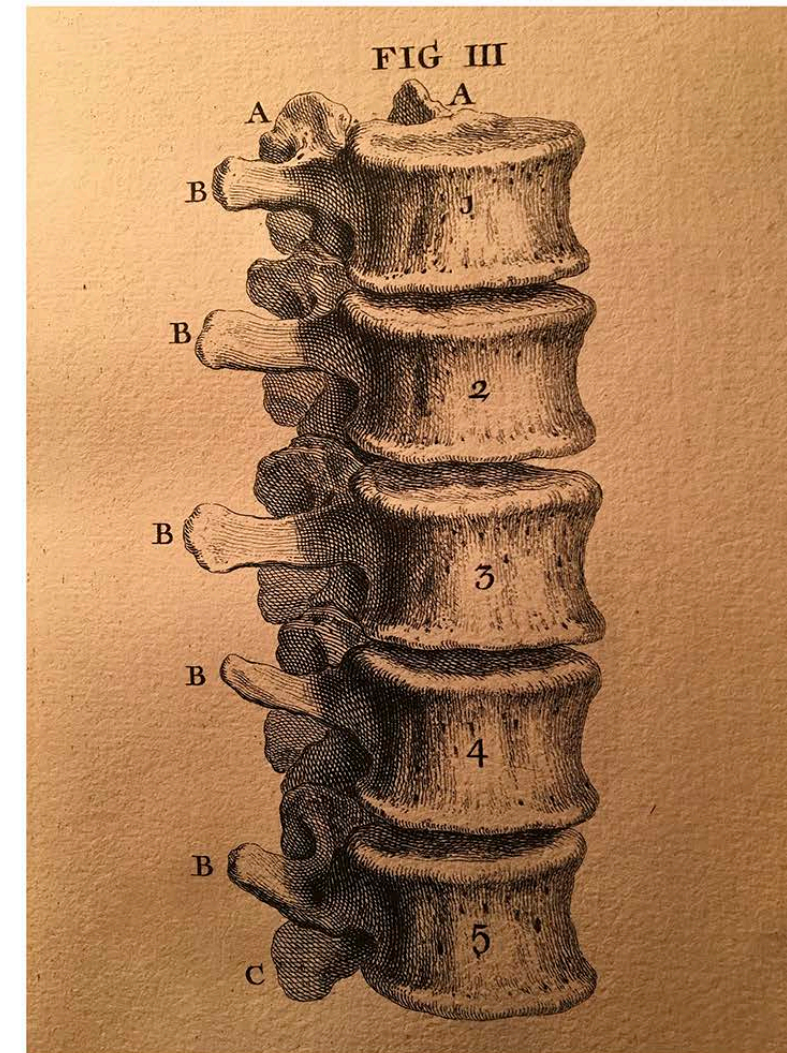
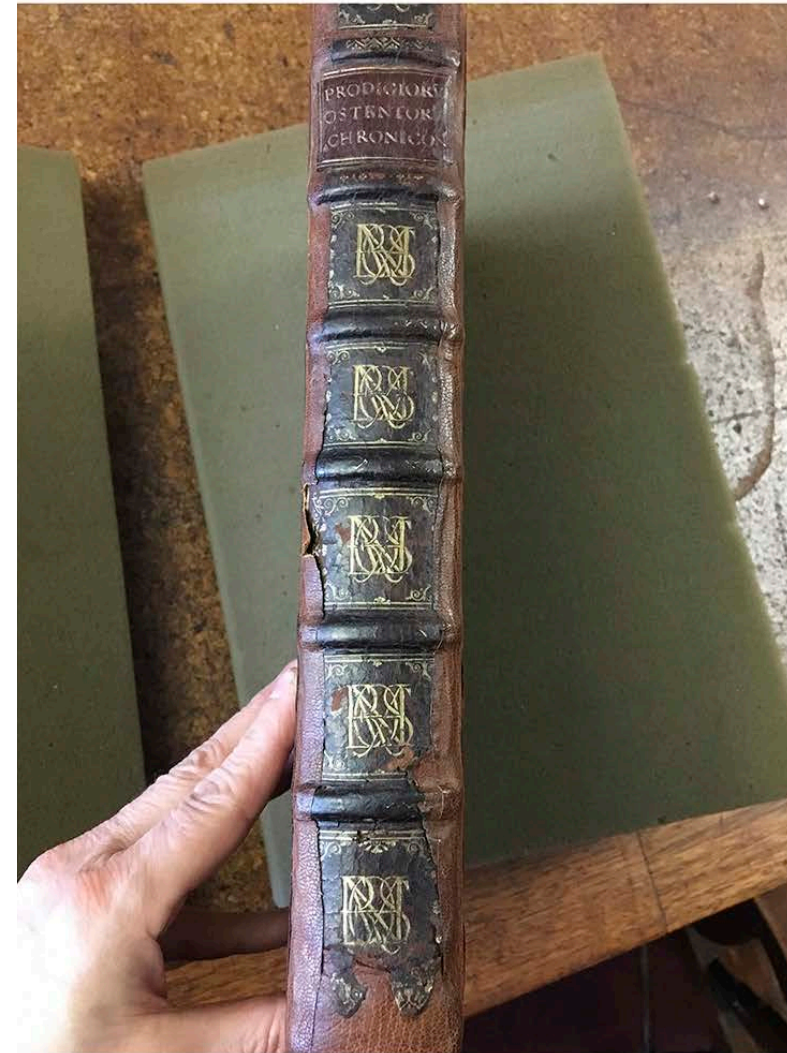
The first time I entered the NYAM library and was surrounded by rare books dating from the 15th through the 18th centuries I felt as

though I went back in time and entered the Middle Ages. I was taken with the smell of the leather covers, amazed by the weight and size of some of the books, marveled at the odd titles on the bindings, and was captured by highly detailed and precise illustrations, engravings and lithographs. *Prodigiorum Ostentorum Chronicon* by Lykosthenes Konrad, *Osteographia*, or, *The Anatomy of the Bones* by William Cheselden were a couple of my favorites.

Feeling incredibly inspired, I took my excitement to the printmaking studio along with photos of the pictures from the various books I had observed. Once I returned to my studio, armed with a plethora of images and plenty of ideas I began to work on my vision. Images of medicinal mushrooms and text pertaining to plant cures

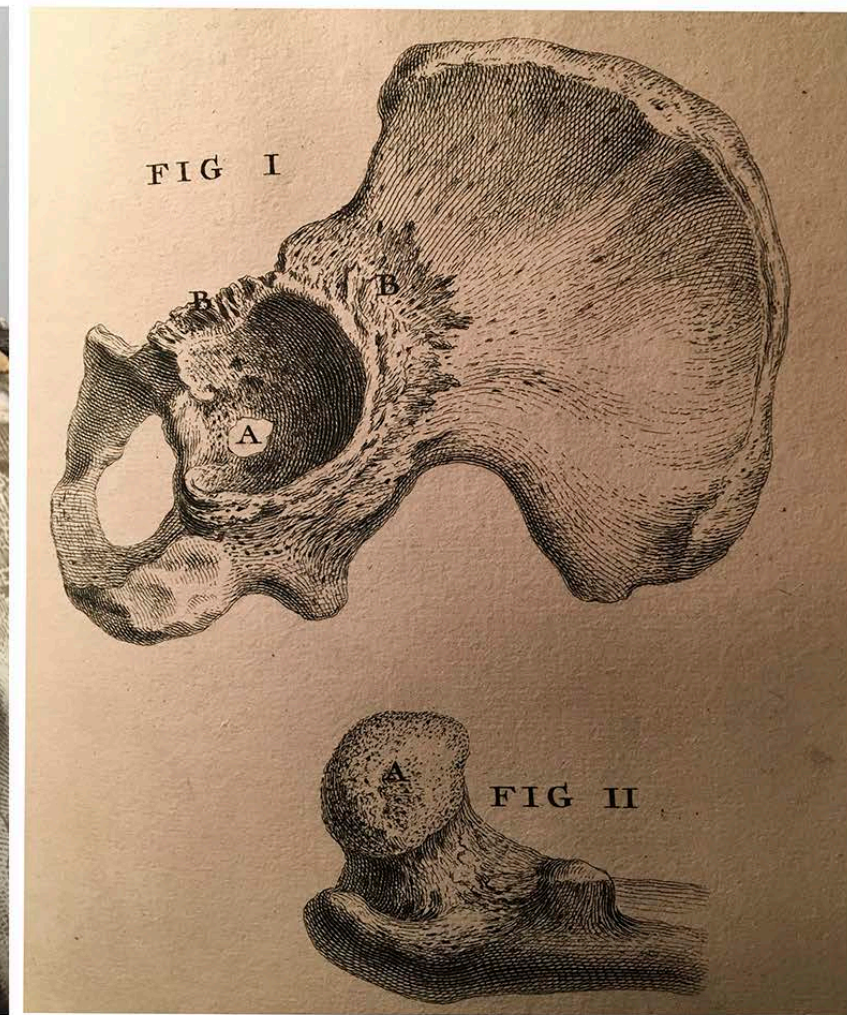
*“...housed with book spines full of character.”*

were put to use by first making carborundum printmaking plates. This simple, but elegant technique allowed me to connect with some of the similar hand techniques used by the original artists. I printed them with an etching press, a simple press whose basic principle has not changed for centuries. Choosing to use this technique with an old style press made me feel connected to some of the prints from NYAM's rare books collection.



*Prodigioky Ostentory Chronicon (center) William Cheselden's anatomical illustration, detail from Susan Rostow's sculptural book Bone Fungus.*





*Susan Rostow, sculptural book Bone Fungus. (another view) (center), detail Cheselden's anatomical illustration*





*Susan Rostow working in studio 2017*



*Fungi, installation of printed sculptural books*





After printing hundreds of images of mushrooms and text on paper, the prints were bound together with dried mushrooms, mud, natural glues, and pigments. Paper, tree fungus, roots, soil, and casts from bones merged together creating sculptural books that look, smell and feel like unearthed relics secreted beneath the earth. Hopefully this synthesis captured some of the magic that I felt when I first viewed these incredibly printed and illustrated books.

Plant Cure, a collaborative project with The New York Academy of Medicine, and CENTRAL BOOKING, 21 Ludlow Street, New York, NY was curated by Maddy Rosenberg, curator and founder of CENTRAL BOOKING, NYC. The five selected Artists in Residence at The New York Academy of Medicine - C Bangs, Nancy Campbell, James Martin, Susan Rostow and Mary Ting, spreading over three of its spaces in the Lower East Side gallery, the exhibition will be on view September 6 through October 29. While uptown, display cases at the New York Academy of Medicine document the research, source material, and working methods employed by the Artists in Residence during their six month process of creating their work for Plant Cure.

Accompanying programming at CENTRAL BOOKING includes an Art & Science Discussion Panel on October 13 at 6:00pm and a Brown Bag Artist's Talk at The New York Academy of Medicine on September 18th at noon. •

*Susan Rostow is a NYC based artist and the creator of Akua inks. She has conducted numerous demos at SGCI since 1998. Prints featured in this article were originally demonstrated during her Carborundum demo at Georgia State University, SGCI 2017 Terminus: Arrivals & Departures | Atlanta, GA.*

More on Susan Rostow and her work can be found at [www.susanrostow.com](http://www.susanrostow.com)

Susan Rostow, Shelf Fungus 25"x26"x26" sculptural book, carborundum prints, mixed media 2017