

Passing it on
an exhibit of new work
from the Watcher Files Project

Oct. 27-December 5, 2014

North Portland Branch, Multnomah Public Library, Portland, Oregon

In 2013, Garrick Imatani and Kaia Sand began an artist residency with the City of Portland Archives and Records Center, a Percent for Art project commissioned by the Regional Arts & Culture Council. Their collaboration has resulted in The Watcher Files Project, an engagement with surveillance documents collected by the Portland Police Bureau on civic and activist groups in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

In 1981, an Oregon law made it illegal to conduct surveillance on organizations not linked to a criminal investigation and these files were slated for systematic liquidation. Officer Winfield Falk, a lead detective conducting this surveillance, stole away 36 boxes of files and stashed them in a barn. In 1987, he died of a heart attack. It would be another 15 years before someone anonymously donated the boxes to the Portland Tribune newspaper, which subsequently ran a series of articles that caught the attention of City Archivists, who then laid the legal groundwork to reacquire the documents on behalf of the City of Portland.

The archivists ventilated the documents with springtime air, drying out the mold spores, clearing off mice droppings, and sweeping away encrusted dirt. They were successful saving most of the documents but some were unsalvageable, such as stacks of photos that had emulsified into bricks. The remaining files contain information on over 300 different organizations.

In collaboration with some people surveilled in the files, as well as other artists, Imatani and Sand created artistic and literary interventions that serve as an addendum to the original files, a way to annotate some of what is missing within the institutional record, as well as investigate what is there.



Where is anonymity

Imatani created a cabinet reminiscent of archival research: one intuits gaps, pieces together stories, and searches for context. This cabinet might be read like a book. Sand's poetry is engraved on the panels, and drawers open like pages to Imatani's triptychs and graphite drawings.

Surveillance creates a bright threat of attention on private lives. But how is this attention blurred? How might someone's identity masquerade inside these files? Where is anonymity within a public document? Imatani investigated these questions by transforming a room at the City Archives into a darkroom, creating triptychs of police investigation files and graphite drawings of mislabeled photos; and Sand embroidered cursive lines of poetry, black thread on black cloth, like an underexposed print.

Despite the blurs of anonymity, how might we commemorate some of the efforts people have undertaken to build a more just city? How would our city be shaped if we could see the contours of all the people who have tread the streets in dissent? The architecture of the cabinet becomes a stand-in for a city plan, a realignment along protest routes. The cabinet and plexiglass sheets take the shape of three overlaid protest routes, commemorating dissent that is not easy to track.

Likewise, “She Had Her Own Reason for Participating” commemorates women struggling for rights, often anonymously. This poem is comprised of sentences excerpted from the surveillance files that Sand hammered into copper index cards.

- *Lifting Cities Like Rocks* / Garrick Imatani / engraved plywood cabinet:

NOW, Revolutionary May Day Committee, Women's Night Watch Flashlight March / 3 protest route permit maps in colored cast acrylic scaled to city. (Source is City of Portland Police Investigation files: National Organization of Women, Revolutionary Communist Party, Women's Night Watch)

1970 Bombing of City Hall I-VI / silver gelatin prints: contact print with 4x5 negative in City Archives, paper negative contact prints. Archives intern, Lindsay Mulcahy.

An Unidentified and Mislabeled Woman / graphite on paper

Saltpeter Lift from WPP HQ / graphite on paper

Fragment / graphite on paper

- *The Bright Threat of Attention* / Kaia Sand / black mercerized cotton and gray silk thread embroidered on black linen and engraved on cabinet

- *Looseleaf Services* / Garrick Imatani & Kaia Sand / subscription-based book atop traveling plinth: silkscreen on cardboard, cast silver and bronze, acrylic on MDF

“She had her own reason for participating” / Kaia Sand / sequence of 44 copper index cards sledgehammered with steel typeface handheld stamps and recast as accordion-fold book between copper / Kaia Sand & Daniela Molnar. Offset printing, Charles Eberhardt (language from Police Investigation files: Alliance for Social Change, American Indian Movement, Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Friends of the Sisters of the Streets, George Jackson Brigade, Mom’s Garage, National Organization for Women, Patriot Party, Rape Relief Hotline, Trojan, Tu-deh Party, Women’s International League for Peace & Freedom, Women’s Action for Nuclear Disarmament, Women of All Red Nations, Women Strike for Peace, Women’s Night Watch, and Women’s Rights Coalition.

Twelve Modes of Suppression / File-folder broadsides. Text, Jules Boykoff. Design and stencils, Katherine Ball. Offset-printing, Charles Eberhardt

Passing it on

There are many roll calls one might take of activists in Portland. The peculiar origin of our roll call—culling through police surveillance files from the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s—brings us to activists who suffered the menace of being watched, and perhaps other modes of suppression.

But this is just a starting point, and working with several people who participated in decades of activism and civic engagement, we considered some of what they continue to pass along—programs created, destruction prevented, enduring concerns, and in particular, books they read. This exhibit launches an ongoing activist bookshelf bench project, presenting reading recommendations by Kent Ford, Lloyd Marbet, Joanne Oleksiak, and Soozie Nichol, who each thought about books that have informed and inform their activism. We borrowed the title from Ford's description of sharing books: "I kept passing it on, passing it on to all my friends" with the hope that you might pull up a bench and open a book, passing it on.

We also collaborated on a sequence of poems that tell stories of Marbet's transformation into a citizen intervener and public citizen; a pamphlet that describes how books have informed Ford's activism, reminiscent of the pamphlets Ford passed on to his friends; an installation that reinacts and updates a performance Oleksiak undertook to account for nuclear weapons using bbs; and a series of inch-by-inch books that gathers some of Oleksiak's activist drawings.

- *Kent Ford bookshelf bench* / Garrick Imatani & Kaia Sand / engraving of interview excerpt with Kent Ford on plywood, books. Photography, Holly Andres.
- *Lloyd Marbet bookshelf bench* / Garrick Imatani & Kaia Sand / engraving of “So He Raised His Hand” letterpress excerpt on plywood, books. Photography, Holly Andres.
- *Joanne Oleksiak bookshelf bench* / Garrick Imatani & Kaia Sand / engraving of archival document on plywood: White Train civil disobedience protest song (City of Portland Archives and Records Center Police Historical/Archival Investigative Files – White Train). Photography, Holly Andres.
- *1945 Nagasaki “Fat Man” 20-22 kt TNT plutonium 239 fission bomb*
2014 W 76 warheads 100 kt TNT twelve in a Trident II: missile /
 Joanne Oleksiak & Garrick Imatani / engraved hemlock, 16,300 steel bbs, cast acrylic

- *Drawing Dissent* / inch by inch books / Joanne Oleksiak and Kaia Sand / line drawings by Joanne Oleksiak gathered from City of Portland Archives and Records Center (Police Historical/Archival Investigative Files – White Train, Red Rose School, Central American Solidarity, as well as Oleksiak's personal files)
- *I kept passing it on, passing it on to all my friends: A Brief Biography of Books with Kent Ford* / a pamphlet written by Kaia Sand in conversation with Kent Ford. Photography, Holly Andres.
- *So He Raised His Hand* / Text, Lloyd Marbet & Kaia Sand / letterpress printed from hand-set metal type and photopolymer plates on a Vandercook proof press. Printing, Inge Bruggeman

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