

PAPER : CATHERINE ALICE MICHAELIS



MEET Catherine Alice Michaelis and **WATCH** a video that features the artist at work and **MAKE** an artwork inspired by the artist. **REFLECT** on your finished artwork as you consider what you might want to make next.

MEET

MEET CATHERINE ALICE MICHAELIS, book artist.

"I think nature is both inside us and outside us. And that there is no limit to what nature is."

—Catherine Alice Michaelis



Top: Catherine Alice Michaelis, *Erotica Botanica*, 2010. Above: Catherine Alice Michaelis, *A Cherokee Primer*, 1993. Images courtesy of the artist.

BOOKS, AND THE PAPER they contain, have been treasured to record, keep, and share memory, emotion, and information. The pages of books have preserved histories, stories and personal memories, as well as the field notes and sketches of researchers and creatives. They've featured a range of handwriting, calligraphy, illumination, printing, and illustration styles reflective of their time in history. Natural elements have been integrated into the creation of books, from the materials used to make them to the subject matter found within them. Catherine Alice Michaelis, a book artist who holds a deep reverence for both nature and tradition, explores the world of bookmaking in ways that incorporate new approaches while also paying homage to the practices that have come before.

Early in her career, Michaelis sought inspiration from her grandmother, who was of Cherokee heritage, as well as the legendary Sequoyah, a Cherokee who long before had invented the written Cherokee language. When making her very first book, Michaelis relied on the histories of both her grandmother and of Sequoyah, combining traditional letterpress printing methods with indigenous bookmaking materials to create *Book: A Cherokee Primer*. Progressing from this early work, Michaelis has, since the 1990s, explored various ways to integrate natural elements into her books, from pressing flowers and leaves directly into the letterpress printing process to dyeing the paper she uses for printing with locally gathered plants.

Letting her curiosity lead, Michaelis allows her curiosity and explorations of the natural world to inform her book artistry. Known for unique edition printings, Michaelis' May Day Press publications feature delicately dyed, colored, inked, and printed pages meticulously prepared by her in ways that integrate deep bookmaking tradition with her own brand of visionary exploration.

WATCH



See and listen to Michaelis describing her life as a book artist.

<https://youtu.be/EO0lqI-wy-I>

After viewing the segment, consider the following:

- Recall some of the different approaches to paper preparation and bookmaking you saw in the video.
- What makes a book a book? What are some different ways to create handmade artist books?
- In the video, Michaelis describes how nature inspires her. Have you ever created a unique object inspired by nature?
- Search the internet to find out more about artist books. Have you ever thought of books as an art form? Think about how artist books are different from books typically found in libraries and bookstores.

MAKE



Make your own nature-inspired artist book. Your artist book can be entirely handmade or created partially or entirely with purchased or re-purposed materials. As you plan, create, and assemble your artist book, think about how it could function as a handheld, interactive artwork.

- Do a simple internet search of do-it-yourself artist books. As you view various types, think about the kind that you could make.
- Consider the different ways nature inspires book artists like Michaelis. You might try something like what you saw in the video segment you watched about her. What plants or other natural elements could be incorporated into your work?
- What kind of paper will you use? You might make your own paper or purchase it.
- Do a simple internet search for do-it-yourself bookbinding techniques. What kind of assembly or binding techniques could you use? Try some of the techniques recommended in your internet search—accordion folding, snake folding, or saddle stitching, for instance—and see what you like best. You might use a pre-bound book and transform it in a unique way.

- What special features will be found in your artist book? Will you include text, imagery, or something else, like collage or pop-up engineering?
- Think about how a person might interact with your artist book. Will a person hold it or will it be placed on a surface? Is it portable? How might you add durability to prevent damage?
- How will you finish your book? Will it have a title? Will you create a cover, a dust jacket, case, or closure of some sort?

REFLECT

LOOK at your finished product.
Think about the process.



Catherine Alice Michaelis, *Four Leaves*, 2010, image courtesy of the artist.

- How would you describe your book to someone you know?
- Are you pleased with what you have made? Why or why not?
- Would you try making another artist book in the future? What will you do next time?
- What else would you like to make out of paper?