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Santa Barbara's Off Register art book and print fair brings art, prints and interactive exhibits

You never know what you're going to find at an art book & print fair. At the last one artist Alex Lukas went to, he purchased a book on Indonesian designs from cooking products. It was a well-produced book of fascinating designs, vacuum-sealed with a little packet of spices.

"At most they made a couple hundred copies and now I have one," said Lukas, an associate professor of print and publication at UC Santa Barbara, who is on the organizing committee for Off Register, the first-ever Santa Barbara Art Book and Print Fair taking place on Saturday, Nov. 16, at the Community Arts Workshop. "It's this beautiful way of interacting with artworks and directly supporting the creators."

In addition to co-organizing, Lukas will be among roughly 60 exhibitors from around California and across the country that will be selling many different kinds of printed materials, including 'zines and artists' books, silkscreens and fine art publishing. The event will feature hands-on demonstrations of innovative contemporary print techniques, symposium-style panel discussions, and performative readings, alongside a gallery exhibition of printed work. His co-organizers include Garrett Gerstenberger '11, James Van Arsdale, Kestrel Tseng, Madi Manson, Albert McCartney and Jayes Caitlin.

Among the fair's offerings is a 2 p.m. roundtable discussion moderated by Lukas on "Text as Practice" with David Horvitz, Louise Sandhaus and Allyson Healey. Panelists will explore the tension between reading and seeing. Lukas simplifies this tension with a slide for his lower division image studies classes. "I pause before I show it and I say, 'Okay, shout out the next color that you see.' And it's the word 'red' in bright 'blue.' Half the students shout out 'red,' half the students shout out 'blue,'" said Lukas. "And for me that's this beautiful tension of just these two very basic things. We think we know what we're doing when we say reading and seeing but frequently they are conflated. Artists and designers have played with that confusion."

For Lukas, organizing and exhibiting at fairs is also part of his research and artistic practice in print and publishing arts. In his work, he often activates spaces outside of traditional art venues, moving between the roles of organizer, artist and curator. What constitutes a venue is no more fixed – such as his gallery CA53776V2, an exhibition space on the dashboard of his 2007 Ford Ranger from 2021 to 2023.

"Off Register" comes on the heels of Lukas's solo exhibition "Wide Scenarios for Indoor & Outdoor," an exploration of the print-on-demand flag at Interloc in Maine.

Also tabling are College of Creative Studies lecturer Madeleine Ignon MFA '19 who is in the artist collective Beta Epochs with Lukas, and recent graduates Madeleine Adele (CCS) '21, Galas and Julia Saige Bielenberg (L&S) '22 (Bald Bitches Press), Owen Jenkins (CCS) '24, and Moxie Bright (CCS) '24 is bringing their Rolling Roasters Coffee Cart art project.

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About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.