

**Unega Nole Gigage (White and Red)**  
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**Abstract:** Remnants of an art installation, which remained in an outdoor setting for three months, have been reinterpreted as an artists book. The collaborative project between two Appalachian artists considers the understanding and value of place as it relates to two different cultures in western North Carolina.

In the early nineteenth century a newspaper called the *Cherokee Phoenix* was published in the Cherokee Nation before the Trail of Tears. In what is now northern Georgia, the *Phoenix* was published from 1828 to 1834 at New Echota. The newspaper made use of the eighty-five character Cherokee syllabary that Sequoyah had developed in 1821, with the first edition of the *Phoenix* appearing February 21, 1828. Each edition was printed using traditional metal printing type; where the face of each character or letter is cast into metal. While the *Phoenix* was printed again in Oklahoma after the Trail of Tears, and is still a newspaper produced there, letterpress printing in the Cherokee language in the capital of New Echota ended in 1835.

As an Anglo native of East Tennessee who lived near the birthplace of Sequoyah, I was familiar with his accomplishments but knew little about the *Phoenix*. My initial research into the history of the *Phoenix* was conducted for an MFA degree in Book Arts from the University of Alabama. From a fine craft printing perspective, I focused on three primary items that were brought to New Echota for the printing of the newspaper: the type, the printing press and the paper used in printing. The resulting peer-reviewed, limited edition book described these basic elements and their history.

When the opportunity arose in 2007 to move to western North Carolina, near the present day town of Cherokee, I moved, hoping to continue the work. At about the time of my relocation, a new arts organization was forming in Cherokee, North Carolina. The first coordinator of this organization, the Oconaluftee Institute for Cultural Arts, approached me about supporting its development of a

printmaking studio. So we worked to receive grant funding to develop a printmaking studio for the fledgling program. Our primary goal was for students to have a twenty-first century education in the college-level print classes that were to be offered through the local community college. We also, though, wanted to honor Cherokee printing history, and support current language revitalization, by printing in the language in the manner that the *Phoenix* itself had been printed; using metal printing type. If we wanted to print in truly traditional letterpress manner, we needed to find a way for Cherokee metal printing type to be cast again.

Since there was no existing type foundry that could produce such, meaning there were no molds for the writing system into which hot metal could be poured to form the characters, we needed a way to produce the moulds. I was able to work with metal type caster Ed Rayher, in Northfield, Massachusetts, to begin the process of making Cherokee type again. And we have been able to do so, with Swamp Press now having produced four different points sizes of metal type. These have been incorporated into the community college class and my own printing studio. In essence, we may now print again in the manner of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, using a process that is now a part of the larger discipline of book arts (letterpress printing, papermaking and hand bookbinding). Our work continues to reach out to new audiences curious and interested in the Cherokee language. In summer 2013 I offered a bilingual printing class at Penland School of Crafts, and a quantity of Cherokee type was purchased for this activity. Our efforts to support Western Carolina University's Cherokee Studies program increases, as we print with their students and create more student-printed work for distribution in support of language revitalization. It is quite edifying to see a Native American language be printed with the same availability and “normalcy” as would any European language. In October, 2013, my colleague Jeff Marley and I traveled to the state historical site in northern Georgia to print in the reconstructed print shop which once housed the printing of the original *Cherokee Phoenix*. We printed a number of copies of one of Jeff's poems that day at New Echota, the first time movable Cherokee type has been used at that location since 1835.

So that is some of the necessary background to bring you to where I am today. It's truly been an evolutionary process for me. And as the Cherokee printing work has proceeded, I have started to use it in my own art. Additionally, while using traditional codex form bookmaking processes I have learned, I have become interested in expressing other forms a book might take. These two elements have linked into the work we will show in a moment. It is very satisfying to see my former historical research on the Cherokee newspaper segue into a personal interaction with other artists/printers in that community. During this process, questions that I feel important to address are: How do I do this work as an outsider? How might I support the language, while recognizing it is the language of another? I am slowly recognizing that this conversation might find a good home in my own work, expressing these concerns and thoughts directly.

The first place that I start with much of my work is with the making of the paper. As a printer of handmade books I have the need to begin with the substrate upon which I print. One source of fiber for the making of paper is the steaming of tree bark or plant stalks, and then beating the fiber to a pulp. After the sheets are formed they may be printed upon and potentially shaped, making the substrate for a book, a sculpture or installation element, or alternative book form. Acquiring enough fiber for a big project is a slow, but rewarding process.

But why do this type of work outside? Paper will degrade in an outdoor environment. John K. Grande's 2004 book *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists* served as a starting point for my desire to develop an outdoor installation. After having been successful in having my handmade books bought by libraries across the US, I thought about where they were. They're in climate-controlled environments. It is quite gratifying for me to see them so well cared for, but the paper originally came from a tree or another plant! I want to take it (back) outside to where it started. It is an effort to come "full circle" and perhaps not be concerned so much with what humans would do with the paper and the words, but perhaps what the natural world (where it is derived) would do with them. I find satisfaction in creating art using materials from a specific location, and I then try returning

that artwork to its origins. Natural decay of the work will be part of returning it to its outdoor surroundings.

So, now I find myself in the site-specific location of the former (and present!) land of the Cherokee in North Carolina. A dialogue might transpire in how a location might be viewed by individuals from the two cultures. So, in collaboration with my colleague here today, Jeff Marley, we present to you the first of three outdoor installations, this one entitled “Unega nole Gigage.” Or White and Red (the colors not the people) was placed in a mountainous setting for three months between the Anglo town of Dillsboro, North Carolina, and the town of Cherokee. Using traditional book arts disciplines of hand papermaking and printing, I made the installation elements from hand processed okra stem paper and then letterpress printed the text. A global positioning system (GPS) was used to produce the imagery. This is the particular shape here. I was very interested in having a map, evocative of Europeans, that showed the exact movement from the location where I lived at the time, to the location of the installation. I also wanted to further identify the location in a rather pedantic way, printing the latitude and longitude of the general area. I'm trying to think “like an Anglo” in approaching the place, measuring and numbering. Other elements I considered, for example, were finding an estimate for the cost of buying such a parcel of land in this location.

When I completed the printing, I then affixed wooden dowels to the ends of the prints, and used mono-filament and nails to secure them to the ground. I learned quickly the amount of leaf litter, the depth of decomposing material, is quite deep on the mountain! It was a rather fascinating process as I was literally up to my elbows in reaching the dirt level! (And just above the dirt level is a somewhat “open” area where I'm sure animals and such move about!)

Some 40 “prints,” or as I came to think of them as “books” in a different kind of “library,” were installed in the setting that Jeff and I had previously discussed. I know at least enough about Cherokee culture to ask if it mattered if the books were presented in a certain orientation, and Jeff asked me to place them in a north-south direction.

The prints remained in the outdoor setting for 108 days. I had no idea how long they would last, but the tree canopy shielded them from a lot of the weather. This was a bit of surprise to me. But about two months into the installation, a ferocious windstorm came through, complete with hail! You could even see some of the punctures in the paper from the hail. This water hastened the decay of the books.

The remnants of the installation were then brought indoors to be reinterpreted and bound as an artists book, but I came to realize that the objects themselves were of particular interest simply as an artist book without alteration. We have an example today for you to see. For the other remnants that I did manage to gather, I am now working on how they may be incorporated into a traditional codex form book which would include letterpress text from two stories based on the sense of place in regard to displacement: one story from an Anglo perspective and one from a Cherokee perspective.

During the time of the installation, Jeff interacted with it via two performances, one centered around ani, or strawberry. Jeff will discuss his perspective on this alternative book installation now.

Sgi/Thank you.