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# New Publication Celebrates the Intersection of the Arts and Sciences

**BY CHRISTINA PAPADOPOULOS '23**



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**Inspired by the isolation of pandemic-era social-distanced living, [Biodiversity, Earth & Environmental Science](#) PhD candidates Karmi Oxman and Virginia “Ginny” Caponera set out to rediscover the roots of their passions, both in academia and extracurriculars. This took the form of creative postcards sent to each other during the height of COVID-19 lockdowns. Whether collages of naturalistic images or lighthearted drawings of giant sheep-eating isopods, the lab partners used old-school communication as a way to remember community is still out there, even while tethered to the digital world and virtual academic landscape.**

“Getting this piece of physical mail from Ginny made me feel closer to her, because prior to the pandemic, I had only been in the lab for two quarters. Just when I was starting to feel settled in and bonding with my labmates, suddenly we were at home,” Oxman recalled, a smile growing on her face at the memory of their pandemic correspondence. Oxman and Caponera work in the same lab, studying social invertebrate behavior. “Though we’re not geographically far away, sending each other mail was a nice way to remember there are humans behind all the computer communication we had to fall back on.”

The idea to start a BEES arts zine was inspired by this creative exchange and their backgrounds attending liberal arts colleges for their undergraduate academic careers. It was common practice for students to create independent zines covering a wide range of topics, creating a physical memento for students to take home and remember. This was something both Oxman and Caponera were very fond of during their undergraduate education, and they wanted to bring that back in some way while pursuing their doctoral degrees at Drexel.

The arts zine, [Green Verses](#), features creative work from students within the BEES department. There was a variety of original poetry, photography, artwork and other pieces submitted to the zine, all promoting students’ passion for their academic field.

“There was an appealing nature of being able to send out a physical zine to people, and we had these handmade envelopes we made for all of them,” Caponera mused. “It’s a good reminder to students and whoever received one in the mail that we’re still here, we’re still thinking of you, and we care about you. It’s always nice to get a piece of mail even if it’s from someone you don’t personally know.”

Along with wanting to reignite the physical sense of community, Oxman and Caponera were inspired by their combined interests in the arts and sciences. Oxman worked on a project with an undergraduate student, Daouda Njie, on scientific illustrations. This renewed her passion for integrating arts into science and using art to communicate scientific ideas. She found that utilizing illustrations helped refine observational skills, and as a TA, she learned that many students in scientific fields had abandoned artistic talents they could learn to use to their advantage as a researcher.

“I’ve given some talks about justifying the use of arts in science, and I have learned a lot about mixing the two. In terms of communicating science, it’s a really important skill to practice. If you’re going to sit at your lab bench in the corner and quietly do your research project, and maybe write a paper about it, how many people are going to read that one thing and understand it?” Oxman asked. “I think [art] can help you increase the audience that hears and understands your work, and as you get better at communicating your science, with either words or visuals, I think you increase the accessibility of what you’ve discovered.”

In the College of Arts and Sciences, there’s an emphasis placed on bridging the gap between these two areas. Oxman and Caponera feel particularly strong about eliminating this divide.

“I think the larger idea is dissolving the barrier in arts and sciences. People are multifaceted, and there’s no reason why—to be a naturalist or an environmental scientist—you have to just do science all the time. Those artistic parts of yourself are not contrasting or disagreeing with that part of you. You can be both. It’s a good thing to be both, and there’s space to be both,” Caponera said. “The high intensity of a 10-week quarter is tough when you want to take time to draw for an evening, but making space for yourself to do that is important, and ultimately rewarding. It helps you build yourself as a person. You can be both arts and science.”

With this in mind, Oxman and Caponera feel ardent about continuing to create and gather content for their BEES arts zine. The first issue of [Green Verses](#) came out in mid-April, with printed copies sent to contributors and an anonymous mailing list. Oxman and Caponera created handmade envelopes out of supermarket bags to ship the zines, encouraging BEES’ mission of sustainability. There was also a digital version sent to students across the department. Both Oxman and Caponera hope to continue working on this publication through their academic careers at Drexel.

“I have huge appreciation for all the people who contributed to the zine, because they sent in submissions so quickly and so happily, and they expressed their excitement to us. I’m just so thankful that there are so many people who are interested in contributing to it,” said Oxman. “I’d love to see more students get involved in putting this zine together in the future. Since this was the first issue, I was glad to have Ginny on board with the idea. I don’t know that it would have gotten out the door if we hadn’t both been equally pushing it forward at each step, but I think now that we know how it works, we can get even more students and faculty involved.”