

A Message to Employees, Instructors, Fellows, Members, Artists and Friends of Center for Book Arts from Stephen Bury, Chair of the Board of Directors

*To state the obvious, Center for Book Arts and many of the wonderful people who make up our community have been in turmoil since mid-February of this year.*

*CBA is a small nonprofit with a small Board of unpaid directors. There is no press office, in-house legal officer, or social media department, so we were unable to defend, in a timely manner, CBA, its practices and values from the criticism and invective that flowed from Sister Sylvester's posting. I recognize and regret that CBA was unable to respond immediately to those who rushed to judge us and that this has hurt CBA, and disappointed and offended staff and others in our community, who assumed our lack of response was an admission of the accuracy of the accusations made against us by Sister Sylvester. I am also grateful to members of CBA who sent us letters of support.*

*I and the Executive Committee of the Board have met with our employees to begin a process of healing and of adopting strategies to avoid situations like this one in the future. We hope this message to our community of instructors, fellows, members, artists, and friends will also be the beginning of a healing and learning process for all of us.*

*Below is a Statement, approved by the CBA Board, which sets out the actual facts and occurrences leading up to CBA's decision not to invite Sister Sylvester's performance piece, "The Eagle and the Tortoise", to be performed at CBA.*

*By way of background, CBA was very favorably impressed by Sister Sylvester's performance piece "Constantinopoliad", and investigated in 2023 the possibility of [hosting] a performance of it at CBA's loft. However, Sister Sylvester advised CBA that the piece was likely unsuitable for our space. Sister Sylvester then suggested another piece for CBA's consideration, "The Eagle and the Tortoise". After viewing that piece, CBA determined it was not suitable for CBA for the reasons enumerated in the Statement below.*

*At no time did CBA explicitly or impliedly commit to hosting a performance of "The Eagle and the Tortoise" at CBA.*

*Stephen Bury, Chair of the Board of Directors*

## BOARD STATEMENT

Center for Book Arts (CBA) in its entire history has never censored the conduct or content of its classes, exhibitions, speakers, or publications; and it has championed a diversity of experiences and backgrounds over 50 years. CBA has not strayed and will not stray from the values and ambitions that fueled its formation a half-century ago.

In April 2023, the Executive Director viewed a performance by Sister Sylvester (Kathryn Hamilton) of *Constantinopoliad*, and found it to be a visually and conceptually compelling performance that centers on the collective reading of an elaborate artists' book.

On October 9, 2023, Sister Sylvester proposed presenting a performance in CBA's loft. Acknowledging that presenting *Constantinopoliad* would be "tech-heavy", she suggested instead *The Eagle and the Tortoise*. Even that, Sister Sylvester acknowledged, would be "disruptive" at CBA—Sister Sylvester revealed that the performance could take up to six days for the set-up and performances. In a meeting on October 30, 2023, Sister Sylvester suggested CBA "view the performance before deciding" to make sure it wasn't "too performancy".

CBA's Executive Director followed up and attended a January 21, 2024, performance of *The Eagle and the Tortoise*. Although the performance was about the Kurdish/Turkish conflict, prior to the beginning of the performance Sister Sylvester addressed the audience and expressly framed the piece in the context of the Gaza conflict. Immediately at the conclusion of the performance, Sister Sylvester again addressed the audience with a statement that included "Free Palestine".

The Executive Director reasonably concluded that the performance of this particular work at CBA was outside the bounds of CBA's mission and objectives as a small non-profit arts organization promoting active explorations of the book as an art object, and emailed Sister Sylvester on January 30, 2024, explaining CBA's decision. The Executive Director was also extremely concerned that if CBA were to depart from its mission in this way, it could damage, perhaps permanently, CBA's long successful efforts to promote and maintain a welcoming environment that is open to all—a core CBA value.

On February 9, 2024, the Executive Director's private January 30, 2024 email communication (with name redacted) was then leaked on social media by Sister Sylvester together with Sister Sylvester's interpretation of events.

We recognize and very much regret that CBA as an institution, our employees, our instructors, fellows, members, friends, and our broader community have been hurt, disturbed, and dismayed by these events.

We have met with our employees to begin the process of healing and are developing work plans to assess and mitigate potential conflicts, amongst other things, where the boundaries of workplace safety/well-being and freedom of speech intersect.

**3/27/2024**