Gathering Galax

Albert Lebron

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GATHERING GALAX

by

ALBERT LEBRON

Under the Direction of Jason Snape, MFA

ABSTRACT

Gathering Galax is a deliberately harvested collection of writings and images about plants, people and landscape in the form of a book and exhibition. The Cherokee people used the Galax plant for a variety of medicinal purposes, and it was advertised as a headache remedy in newspapers during the early 20th century. Galax’s most consistent use has been as decorative greenery for the floral industry. Mostly harvested by white Appalachians in the early 20th century, Latinos pick the majority of galax sold today. North Carolina is the center of the galax industry. The plant ships from this Appalachian region to Holland, England, and even Japan. It’s a global plant with its roots in the South. Gathering Galax shows with affordable printed material how entangled a world can become, all due to a tiny plant.

INDEX WORDS: Environmentalism, Appalachia, Editorial design, Fugitivity, Immigration, Graphic design, Non-timber forest products, Latinx, Book design
GATHERING GALAX

by

ALBERT LEBRON

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Gathering Galax

by

Albert Lebron

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DEDICATION

To the transient, the immigrant, the fugitive—the insecure, who are constantly on the move, always building and arriving home.
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Huge thanks to Jason, your students and I are lucky to share such an electrifying space with you. Big thanks to the ever so thoughtful Dr. Cleveland, your Afrofuturism seminar blew my mind! Mega thanks to Ian. I had no idea you were a history professor (amongst many things) when I met you at the coffee shop. A massive thank you to you three for so many exciting conversations during our meetings.

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Albert Lebron, 2021.

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1 INTRODUCTION

*Gathering Galax* emerged from my interest in the South and its history. In an interview with writer Paul Holdengräber, Robin Kelley agrees with Holdengräber that “the role of the historian is to make the silences of history speak.”¹ There are a lot of stories born in the South that for the most part go unheard, like the social ecology of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) like galax. NTFP are “any product or service other than timber that is produced in forests.”² The most common NTFP are products like foraged mushrooms that wind up on plates in four-star restaurants. Unlike these edible treasures found in the forests, galax (Figure 1) is used for decorative purposes in the floral industry as greenery in bouquets and arrangements (Figure 2).

![Galax in North Carolina](https://www.cifor.org/Publications/Corporate/FactSheet/ntfp)

Figure 1. Galax in North Carolina. Albert Lebron, 2021

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This industry is located in the South, more precisely in the Appalachian Mountains (Figure 3). Galax’s serrated heart-shaped leaf has to be picked by hand; it is then shipped all over the world to florist shops, where it is used to create intricate floral arrangements. The commodity chain begins with galax pickers, commonly referred to as galackers. They’ve been around since the turn of the 20th century. A Christian missionary named Edward O. Guerrant wrote a detailed account in his book *The Galax Gatherers*. Galackers had always been white people until the late 1980s when Latinos began to immigrate to the Appalachia region. Latino’s harvested galax to supplement their income. Estimates suggest that ninety percent of current galax harvesters are Latinos.³

My mom moved my family from California to north Georgia in the early 1990s. She worked in a chicken plant, as did many Latinos in the region. There are many Latino experiences in the South, but picking a plant high in the mountains for wedding bouquets is not a line of work immediately associated with Latinos. With Gathering Galax, I center the experience of one Latino immigrant galacker in North Carolina. His story is worth hearing because it diversifies our knowledge of the Southern Latino experience.

Graphic designers work with writing like historians do. Design scholar Malcom Barnard reminds us that “The word “graphic” stems from the Greek word graphein, which means “mark-making” and includes all forms of writing and drawn marks.” Typography, photography, videography, even geography along with many other disciplines share this same Greek root.

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word. These practices all use a form of writing in some way or another; photography uses light to write on film, typography uses letterforms to write out designs.

The word “design” derives from the Renaissance French word *dessiner* and the Italian word *desegno*. The two terms mean to draw, plan, sketch and design. The other role of the graphic designer is to plan, plot, and designate where writings or “mark-making” go on a page or on a screen. It’s my responsibility as a graphic designer to work with all forms of writing, both formal and informal, published and unpublished. Writing that does not get published is left out of the archive; these gaps leave our knowledge of history incomplete. With *Gathering Galax*, the quote Kelley and Holdengräber were referring to is adapted in this way: “The job of the graphic designer is to make the invisible heard and seen.” This commitment is the reason I’ve created a project around one Latin immigrant’s experience of picking galax and living in the South.

While my conversation with Javier is a major part of *Gathering Galax*, I had to create materials that would help readers and viewers understand the context. My project is organized into three separate themes: *plant, people* and *landscape*. Each section explores its theme through photos and writings, some original and some carefully curated from books, blogs, and other materials. Instead of binding the sections conventionally like in a book with chapters, I bound each section separately, so that each can be untied from the others. Conceptually, this approach gives the work a fugitive quality.

There are different ways to understand fugitivity. Theorists write that it can be read as a metaphor for resistance – actions that transgress law and order – but it can also be about actual

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
fugitives, like runaway slaves.\(^6\) Fugitivity is about escaping oppression, but it also connotes precarity and uneasiness – escaping, after all, means that the escapee can be found and punished.

Some of the topics selected for *Gathering Galax* are also fugitive in nature – galax is not carefully cultivated, in tame environments.\(^7\) It grows best in the wild, sprawling over the Appalachian Mountains. Galax pickers seek their harvest in liminal spaces between federal, public, and private property. Javier, the immigrant I interviewed, lives in constant fear of being deported and with the grinding anxiety of facing racism where he lives. Gathering galax in the mountains provides him with a temporary escape.

The book’s format is a companion for the fugitive reader. This book is small enough that you could take it with you as you run away, or you can just take parts of it as you flee. Run away from what? Big data tracks our every move online, so it’s nice to have a physical page to read. Our eyes and minds can take refuge in the printed word without being surveilled.

Paper is in an important component to the book and the exhibition. Javier refers to galax as “hojas” which translates to “leaf” or “sheets.” With pun intended, *Gathering Galax* is comprised of common sheets (leaves) of 8.5” x 11” paper. My choice to use widely-available materials like letter-sized paper, an inexpensive inkjet printer, and painter’s tape for the exhibition demonstrates my accessible approach to production. I hope to encourage people to research, design, and publish work of their own using low-cost, everyday resources.


2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF GALAX

Galax is an evergreen ground cover that grows best in cool, shady, acidic soil. Late spring and early summer, galax parades its white flowers on a swaying raceme that can reach 20 inches tall. The plant’s name derives from the color of its blooms: gala means milk in Greek. When its flowers are blooming, galax’s skunky odor wafts through the air and announces its presence. The leaves go from green in the spring and summer to reddish-purple in the winter, then back to green after the cold season (Figure 4). Their unique color raises the leaves’ value in the floral industry marketplace. If the galax’s white clusters of flowers in spring or reddish-purple leaves in the winter don’t catch your attention, its inescapably pungent odor certainly will.  

When mature, the leaves reach 3-4 inches in diameter. This size is prime for the leaf to enter the floral industry as background foliage in flower arrangements. Galax has also become popular in corsages and landscaping and some floral designers have even begun sewing leaves together to create tablecloths and blankets for funeral caskets (Figure 5). Given the hectic pace of life these days, it’s unsurprising that people seek out ways to incorporate nature’s calm, serene presence into their lives. A bundle of galax might evoke a memory of a peaceful mountain retreat.

8 Predny and Chamberlain, 13.
Figure 4. Red galax red in the winter snow. Hugh M. Morton, dp.la

Figure 5. A rose casket scarf with galax on the end. Walter Knoll Florists, wkf.com
Experiments to cultivate galax in a controlled environment have been successful, but very few people keep it constrained in the traditional agricultural sense. Galax grows prolifically in patches all over the Appalachian Mountains highlands. The town of Galax, Virginia was named after the evergreen plant in 1906 when an official from Norfolk and Western Railway Company saw how vital galax was to the region’s economy.⁹ Hikers, hunters, and other nature enthusiasts can catch a glimpse and a whiff of this waxy leaf poking out from the ground as far south as Jasper, Georgia, a city located about an hour’s drive north from Atlanta.

There’s evidence that galax grew around Five Points in Atlanta, according to a 1940s article in the *Atlanta Constitution* (Figure 6).

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Figure 6. A newspaper clipping about galax being available twenty miles from Five Points in Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta Constitution, newspapers.com

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⁹ Predny and Chamberlain, 5.
But Yancey County, North Carolina, absorbed by the Pisgah National Forest, is the center of the galax universe. In this Appalachian region, conditions are favorable and galax grows abundantly; in this place, people harvest the heart-shaped leaf for sustenance.

In winter, the Cherokee people used galax root tea to cure kidney ailments and soothe nerves. White settlers brought to the region by Edward O. Guerrant’s 1906 missionary excursions to “those suburbs of heaven” used the plant for decorative purposes. Guerrant published a description of his experience in The Galax Gatherers: The Gospel Among the Highlanders in which he describes the galax leaf and its preferred habitat. In his report, galax is a “Foliage plant which grows on the bleak sides and summits of the big mountains of North Carolina. It has a rich green color in the summer, deepening into a splendid bronze as the winter approaches. The leaves (about the size of coltsfoot) used in the homes of rich people for decoration.” Guerrant continues, “it is a hard way to make a living, especially when snow and ice cover the mountains, and when the leaves are most valuable.”

There are two striking points about Guerrant’s time with the mountain people. The first is that galackers rip the plants away from their local landscape; the plants are then sold to rich city people for decorative purposes, robbing the plant of its traditional, medicinal purpose. The second point is: because galax is an evergreen plant, pickers must risk dangerous winter conditions. During the mid-20th century, year-round demand for galax grew, as people began using it in Christmas decorations. Although this wintertime source of income helped the mountain people, who otherwise would not be working, since agricultural work was not in season, gathering leaves during these cold and

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10 Paul B. Hamel and Mary U. Chiltoskey, Cherokee Plants Their Uses: A 400 Year History (s.l: Herald Publishing Company, 1975), 35.  
12 Guerrant, 12-13.
snowy times of the year up in the mountains was dangerous work. Guerrant notes: “Probably none who enjoy their gorgeous foliage in a stately mansion ever know what labor and sacrifice and suffering these leaves cost poor Highlanders.”

Ron Rash, an Appalachian Cultural Studies professor and writer, illustrates the scene of North Carolina mountain people who depended on galax during the Great Depression. His 2007 short story “Hard Times” is about a frail man named Jacob who pulls galax to make ends meet after the local sawmill closes down. Jacob’s family has only “one swaybacked milk cow to sustain them, that and the galax, which earned a few nickels of barter at Hensley’s General Store.” Jacob knows everyone is having a hard time during the great depression. In the newspaper headlines at the general store, he reads that even rich people in New York are taking desperate measures, like jumping out windows after the stock market crash. In the 21st century, the wealthy would never consider such a fatal strategy. Rich people weren’t hitting the concrete in 2008, but people everywhere struggled. In the Appalachian Mountains, galax pickers continued to eke out an existence with what they earned by selling what they pulled out of the ground. Galax’s reliability through the decades is paradoxical to the precarity typically found in agricultural work.

James L. Chamberlain, a leading researcher in non-timber forest products (NTFP), places galax in the NTFP category along with other wild-harvested crops such as ramps, ginseng, mushrooms, and sweetgrass. Long before people went into forests to cut trees down for timber, people found food, medicine, and decoration in forests. Chamberlain’s central hypothesis is that

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13 Guerrant, 5.
NTFPs play a pivotal role socially, ecologically, and economically, making these products valuable to the US.\textsuperscript{16} He hopes his research will elevate NTFPs’ status so that actions can be taken that will improve people’s lives who work in these marginal economies and depend on these natural resources to supplement their incomes.\textsuperscript{17}

\section*{3 \textsc{Latinos in Appalachia}}

Most stories about galax pickers from the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, found in newspapers and in Ron Rash’s short story about Jacob, are about white people. But at the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, 90\% of galax pickers were Latinos. Appalachia, specifically the western North Carolina area in which galax picking has a long-established tradition, has been occupied by white farmers since around the mid-1800s. Most of these people descended from Scots-Irish migrants, who had found few land and employment opportunities in the Piedmont’s lucrative and brutal slave economy.\textsuperscript{18} These immigrants moved into the mountains, displacing and destroying the indigenous people. After wiping out the native people and sending survivors into exile, white settlers acquired land and put down roots in Appalachia.

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, the South became the new frontier for Latinos. Thousands of Latinos settled in rural areas and small towns across Appalachia, adding tension to the already racially-charged region scarred by ongoing conflict between African-Americans and whites. Latinos burst through this biracial bubble. Sociologists William Kandel and John Cromartie state that, “The growth rate of Hispanics in non-metropolitan counties in the 1990s was 67.3 percent, doubling the previous decade’s growth rate (26.7 percent) and far exceeding

non-Hispanic population growth of 8.1 percent.”\textsuperscript{19} The US Census Bureau reported that in the 1990s, seven of the ten states with the fastest-growing non-metropolitan Latino populations were all in the Southeastern US: North Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, and Virginia.\textsuperscript{20}

My mother moved my family from California to the north Georgia city of Canton in 1991. Canton is the doorstep to Appalachia; on clear days, the Blue Ridge Mountains can be seen when taking Exit 16 off of 575 North. My gateway into these mountains came by way of recreational activities like hiking and camping. Being out in nature brought to my attention the absence of Latinos in the wonderous Southern wilderness. Why weren’t there more people that looked like me taking up environmentally friendly hobbies – hobbies that connected one to nature in life-affirming ways?

In a book chapter from 2007 entitled, “Migrants, Markets, and the Transformation of Natural Resource Management: Galax Harvesting in Western North Carolina” Chamberlain, together with colleagues Marla R. Emery and Clare Ginger, begins to answer these questions. It’s not that Latinos are absent from the outdoors, the authors explain. It’s that many of them partake in outdoor activities differently; when they’re outside, they’re not hiking or camping. When Latinos are outside, they work. This paper goes on to describe how the tradition of galax harvesting has been adopted by Latinos, who have largely replaced white people as the main population of galax pickers. Migrants from the highlands of Michoacán, Mexico are now climbing the mountains of Appalachia to collect galax and supplement their incomes. In the process, they are profoundly connecting to the Appalachian environment. The new wave of galax

\textsuperscript{19} Heather A. Smith and Owen J. Furuseth, eds. Latinos in the New South: Transformations of Place (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 11.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 11-12.
harvesters have not been welcomed with open arms, however. Whites, who have had the forests almost completely to themselves for almost a century, now have to share the wilderness with newcomers.

Work is the thread that binds both groups to the Southern environment. Picking galax requires hours of time, and many miles of distance, as pickers trek through private property and public lands in search of the valuable leaves. Pickers must have keen senses of navigation and observation: bears, snakes, and insects are all potential encounters, as are mercurial mountain weather events that come out of nowhere. Overcoming so many obstacles to pull up 5,000 leaves in a day only earns a picker about $170-$250 – a lot of work and risk for such a small payoff.21

The physical energy Mexican migrant galax pickers expend in the wilderness has one other, non-monetary payoff, however: by working in the mountains, these people achieve a bodily knowledge of the land. Richard White, an environmental historian, writes in his essay “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?” about how modern environmentalists “ignore the way that work itself is a means of knowing nature while celebrating the virtues of play and recreation in nature.”22 For Gathering Galax it was important to sit down and talk to a Latino galax puller. Learning about their experience and their knowledge in a traditionally white trade will diversify the history of galax.


4 A MEETING WITH A MEXICAN IMMIGRANT GALACKER

American galackers will happily share their knowledge about galax but finding a Mexican galacker is difficult. I stumbled across some online conversations and even exchanged a few words about galax in a North Carolina-specific forum on Reddit. The Reddit user I communicated with gave me some background information about his relationship with western North Carolina and galax. He also shared a common concern about the dangers of overharvesting. “See Figure 21 on page 36 to read more of this comment.”

According to the article by Emery, Ginger, and Chamberlain, long-time galackers blame Latinos and their perceived lack of Appalachian knowledge for disrupting the environmental balance.23 Ensuring the plant’s vitality means one must pull the leaf but leave the root intact in the soil, a practice which some galackers do not (or don’t know to) observe.24 One long-time Yancey County resident I spoke to at a galax packaging and distribution center assured me that the plant grows back easily, but according to Chamberlain, it’s the plant’s rhizomatic roots that make propagation so widespread. Keeping the roots in the ground or sowing a slice of the root is what maintains this plant’s longevity.

My Reddit galacker commented “it was fine when a few locals were the only ones out there harvesting, but it is out of control now.” They continued, “recent entrants into the practice…have no real emotional investments in these mountains, they are efficient at harvesting, and that means grabbing every leaf they can and sorting out the salable ones later.” (Figure 21). Anti-immigrant sentiments aren’t contained to Reddit, however. In a Smoky Mountain News online article, the author describes a scene of galax pickers in an almost criminal fashion: in a

23 Marla R. Emery, Clare Ginger, and Jim Chamberlain, 76-77.
24 Ibid.
“group, or sometimes alone, packing duffle bags of illicit product by foot…as they try their best to evade federal agents…They smuggle their contraband in the trunks of cars…” 25 The article begins with an anxiety-inducing image of unlawful figures rummaging in the forests. A comment by reader Chuck McCurry posted in response to the article expresses hostility toward the “illegal mexicans that can’t get job’s [sic] anywhere else I think that the illegal mexican’s that is [sic] caught picking galax on the Blue Ridge parkway should be fined and sent back to Mexico.” 26 The fear white locals express about the destruction of a native plant is more about the picker’s brown hand than their lack of a green thumb.

With this negative reputation surrounding Latino galackers, I knew I was important to speak to one. To conceal the identity of the Latino galacker I spoke to, I refer to him as Javier. Due to strict immigration policies and other prejudices, Javier and his wife are cautious and suspicious. They won’t speak to a random stranger off the street. They live a somewhat secretive, underground lifestyle.

26 Ibid.
Yancey County, North Carolina is 96% white, with Latinos as the second largest population at 5%.\textsuperscript{27} With galax picking traditionally practiced by whites, my conversation with Javier serves as evidence and documents the new generation of galax pickers. For most of our

\textsuperscript{27} United States Census Bureau,“Quick Facts: Yancey County, North Carolina,” accessed April 22, 2021, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/yanceycountynorthcarolina#qf-headnote-b
conversation, Javier recounts the story of galax through his mother-in-law’s experience as one of the first Latina women to harvest and sell it. Galacking seems to be a gendered activity, with women doing most of the picking. As Javier tells me, even within his mother-in-law’s cohort, galacking was exclusively a job performed by women. Please see spread 40 in Figure 44 for more comments about women galackers.

*Gathering Galax* centers around my long format interview with Javier. It is the anchor of a new narrative of galax pickers in the 21st century. He tells his story of how he was kidnapped and endured forced labor here in the US. It is a harrowing experience to read about. It led him to lose faith in people; he doesn’t trust anyone outside of his family and church community. Javier claims that everyone in Yancey seems to be after him, especially authority figures. It’s his Latin origins that cause hate in the eyes of his neighbors. But, he reminds me, he is here to be at peace with the mountains from which the galax grows. He adores the strange land even if the residents, park rangers, and police seek to harm him and his family by charging them harvesting and trespassing fees. Stories like Javier’s need to be added into the environmental history of western North Carolina and the South as a whole.

5 THE BOOK DESIGN

My interview with Javier is long. Nothing is left out. Our attention spans are so short and fragmented these days, a long format printed conversation represents a refreshing piece of media. Joe Rogan hosts one of the internet’s most popular podcasts, with episodes reaching an average of 2 hours and 32 minutes.28 In that time, Rogan gives listeners an opportunity to sink into,

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absorb, and linger in the conversations he has with guests. Using a similar strategy, slow media like this printed book invite the reader to sit with the content and contemplate it a little bit longer.

As a curatorial practice, Gathering Galax incorporates additional content like citations from James Chamberlain and Mary L Predny’s annotated bibliography of galax; an op-ed article by Appalachian writer and hiker Dale Neal; an excerpt from This Radical Land: A Natural History of American Dissent by Daegan Miller; and both sourced and original images. Moreover, I’ve included original design projects like a timeline using two newspaper clippings about galax for each decade of the last 100 years and a maze showing the importance of North Carolina in the worldwide distribution of galax.

The following sections will show figures after the subsequent design explanation. For the full book layout of Gathering Galax, refer to Appendix 1.

5.1 Identity and Sequence

The three themes of Gathering Galax are: plant, people and landscape. Each theme follows a couple of rules. Each theme’s title cover and back cover is printed on cardstock. The title is in white Monarcha typeface with a solid colored background. I chose Monarcha because of its wide and round lower-case letters that visually echo the galax leaf’s shape. Monarcha’s lowercase italicized g has a single tail that points left, which is more aesthetically appealing than the “loop tail” lowercase g seen in other typefaces. I used Monarcha for the body text and titles throughout the book. Titles are done in lowercase to reference galax’s low growing habit: it is a ground cover. This playful design choice draws the two elements closer together.
Roc Grotesk is the second typeface I used. It complements Monarcha’s curviness with its sans serif condensed fonts. It is perfect for captions, quotes, page numbers and secondary information.

The spread following each title cover has a small image of the subject on the left page with a caption facing a solid color on the right. Each color corresponds with its theme: the plant section is green, the people section is blue, and the landscape section is brown.

The bulk of the content follows the solid color pages. Each section ends with a final spread containing a quote relevant to the theme on the left and a small photo on the right with a short caption. The back cover repeats the theme’s name with a slight alteration. “See Figure 10 for the sequence layout.”

Lastly, the main title of the book, the editor’s note and table of contents are printed on a single sheet of cardstock. This single sheet is folded in half and placed on top of the three sections.

Figure 8. The main title of the book in lowercase italicized Monarcha. The subtitle on the cover and the body text throughout the book is set in Monarcha Book Albert Lebron, 2021
"The aggressive version of Smokey the Bear was first published in a New Mexico community newspaper called El Grito del Norte (1966-1973). The poster translates to "The greatest robbery of our land." In reference to the dispossession of Mexican-American land with the establishment of the national park system by Theodore Roosevelt in 1908. According to Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez, one of the founders of the paper, Smokey is a symbol of a Forest Service administrator usually an Anglo-American, who favors large commercial ranching. Whether in the SW or in Appalachia, a tension exists between who gets access to certain segments of the wilderness and who is left out of it. (Italics: Albert Lebron)

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Figure 9. A caption and additional information set in Roc Grotesk Condensed Light. Albert Lebron, 2021
5.2 (Un)Binding and Format

The plant and landscape sections are saddle stitched with staples. The people section is Coptic stitched. “See Figure 11 for Coptic and saddle stitch examples.” The people section is distinct from the other two sections for two reasons: 1) Coptic binding is more practical to use
when working with large amounts of paper because the sewing method allows neatly bound signatures of four sheets of paper. Using a saddle stitch method would have made the pages fold too far out from the covers because this section has many pages; 2) This section contains the highlight of the book (the conversation with Javier), so it needed to contrast the other two sections.

So far I’ve discussed the three main section’s binding choices. The final component, containing the cover, editor’s note and table of contents, is printed on one sheet of cardstock. All four of these separate components are bound together by a green elastic cord.

When a reader slips the cord off of the four pieces, the book takes on a fugitive state. The sections are not tied together anymore; they can metaphorically run away from each other and reconvene in a different order. The reader could even decide to stuff one section in a bag or pocket for reading later in a more congenial reading spot. The book is, after all, only an inch taller than a conventional Unigrid National Park Service brochure.

The small size and adaptable form reflect the fugitive concepts outlined in the Nick J. Sciullo essay I referenced earlier in this paper. Drawing on scholar Tina Campt’s definition of fugitivity, Sciullo quotes, “Fugitives are those who cannot or do not remain in proper place, or places to which they have been confined or assigned. The concept of fugitivity highlights the tension between the acts or flights of escape and creative practices of refusal, nimble and strategic practices that undermine the category of the dominant.”29 Books are conventionally bound together between covers, but Gathering Galax escapes this confinement. Escaping boundaries is an overarching theme in my thesis project’s design choices and content.

29 Sciullo, 4
Figure 11 (Left) Coptic stitched binding on pastel colored paper. (Right) Saddle stitched with staples on green cardstock. Albert Lebron, 2021
Figure 12. Three books with all three sections and cover bound together with a green elastic cord. Albert Lebron, 2021
5.3 Themes

With those initial guides established, each section is oriented and designed in a way to further reflect the subject matter. The front and back cover of each section gives the reader an idea of what shape the design style takes. In this section, I’ll briefly discuss the design choices at

Figure 13. Loose book sections and a color coded table of contents printed on various colored cardstock paper. Albert Lebron, 2021.
work in the *plant*, *people* and *landscape* sections separately. Selected figures accompany and illustrate my brief explanations. Please refer to the Appendix for the full layout design. Page numbers are on the bottom left and right corners of the thumbnails in the layout design.

The design choices in the *plant* section are intentionally sprawling and organic; they metaphorically echo the subject matter. Disobeying the rules of the rigid 4.25 x 11 grid, the body text is designed in patches, images overlap each other and extend over preordained gutters, rows and columns. Tracking, leading, and kerning are inconsistent in titles. Right angles do not appear often in nature; hence, the frames around the pictures are oblong and round.

*plant* pages 4-11 introduce the ecological and botanical characteristics of galax, followed by galax’s historical uses. Every image is cited so that the reader can explore further. The array of sources in this and subsequent sections showcases a diverse set of voices. On one page, a botanical photograph from the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) shares space with a drawing of Pepe Le Pew. Just like the complex ecosystems in which galax plants thrive, we need rich and nuanced information in order to understand all sides of this issue.
Pages 12-17 are typographic illustrations that display the alternative names for galax. Each illustration shows the scientific name and the common name. On the bottom right of each of these spreads, emojis denote the subject of each sentence. These emojis conform to the contemporary pictogram language used in day-to-day interactions.

Pages 18-23 are activity spreads. The galax character was inspired by cut-outs from *Appalachian ABC’s* on page 18. This cartoon character follows the reader across three spreads.
prompting the reader to look closer at the images. The galax character challenges the reader to find galax in a corsage, then in the next spread challenges the reader to spot the box of winter galax. This last prompt requires the reader to look at the image more intently and to perhaps notice a busy workforce of Latinos in a packaging facility. This packaging facility image contrasts sharply against the previous commercial and sleek images of people with galax. Moreover, this last image alludes to my conversation with a Latino galax picker in the people section.

Figure 15. One of three typographic illustrations on pages 12-17. Albert Lebron, 2021.
I designed the people section in portrait orientation with an overall upright composition to subtly reference the (standing) human figure. The content follows the vertical columns more precisely as the section continues. The first set of images contains pictures of white women from 1930 on the left-hand page; on the right-hand page, an image taken from a 2020 Facebook post
shows a Latino galacker in the woods. The two juxtaposed images illustrate the shift in galax picker demographics. “See Figure 17.” This spread also demonstrates the persistence of galax-picking as a job. I used the image of the Latino galacker again on page 11, this time with the accompanying Facebook comments originally found under the photo. “See Figure 18.”

Pages 12-21 include a timeline I constructed through newspaper clippings. This timeline resembles a TV crime investigation, with parts of the newspaper articles circled or covered with scribbles. I formatted the quotes using different Roc Grotesk fonts and opacity levels to insinuate multiple voices through the time periods shown. Ads and other images from various time periods are sprinkled throughout these pages as embellishments, like the boxer image in Figure 19.

The op-ed essay “Winter of Our Discontent” was important to include in this section because the author Dale Neal writes about a snowy hike he made one winter. During this hike he ran into two Latinos who were looking for galax. This encounter prepares the reader for the people section, which dives further into Latinos working with galax.

Pages 30-31 show screenshots of comments taken from different online platforms that espouse harmful views on Latino galackers. These racist sentiments frame and contextualize the following pages which contain “Hojas,” my thoughtful conversation with Javier.

The “Hojas” conversation begins with a full bleed gradient. The green and spotted red suggest the change in color of the galax leaves in the winter. The subtitle “a conversation with a Mexican Immigrant Galax picker” is designed to mimic the back-and-forth of a conversation. Before the conversation officially begins, I provide an introduction that explains how I met Javier. The conversation transcript is designed conventionally, with clear indentations and color distinction to let readers know which are my words and which are Javier’s. Because “Hojas” is the longest piece of the book, I designed it with the reader’s comfort in mind: the page margins
provide enough space to accommodate the reader’s thumbs. See Figure 22 for selected spreads of the conversation. Refer to the Appendix for the entire conversation.

Captions and additional information appear throughout the conversation pages, in the margins and under images. Larger, bolder font formatting pulls the reader into memorable quotes. Page 43 contains a brief retelling of a Purépecha legend, written by Robert Bitto and illustrated by my partner, Elisabeth Taylor. Javier briefly talked about his indigenous side, so including the legend is a nod to his culture that complicates and enhances our understanding of Latin Americans.

The following figures are in the same order mentioned in the above text.
Figure 17. Pages 2-3 show a juxtaposition between two women galackers in 1931 and a Latino galacker in 2020. Albert Lebron, 2021
Figure 18. Pages 6-11 contain photos of galackers. On the spread above the Latino image from page 3 is placed with the original text from the Facebook comment. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 19. Pages 11-21 contain the timeline with newspaper clippings. The book spread above shows the green timeline going across the top page, with green right angles indicating which newspaper clipping belong to what year. Underlines and circles bring attention to some of the content. Quotes from the clippings are set in red. Albert Lebron, 2021
Figure 20. Pages 22-29 contain the op-ed by Dale Neal. The spread above shows the cover for this piece of writing. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 21. The spread above shows the screen capture from comments from various online platforms and a short blurb. Albert Lebron, 2021
Figure 22. Pages 33-63 contain the conversation with Javier. The figure above shows six selected book spreads. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 23. The book spread above shows the conversation with an inserted retelling of a Purépecha legend. The image above shows the legend closed (on the left), then shows the legend opened (on the right). Albert Lebron, 2021.
In the *land* section, I used landscape orientation, again, to subtly reinforce this section’s information. The content in this section adheres to a grid structure, though readers must rotate some pages to comprehend the expansiveness of land. This section’s design choices are heavily influenced by the excerpt taken from *This Radical Land*, written by historian Daegan Miller. In this passage, Miller writes about how the grid was used during Jefferson’s presidency to parcel out diverse landscapes, which “stripped [the land] of its individuality and imagined it to be exactly like every other commodity of its class.”³⁰ I designed this excerpted text to complicate, refuse and resistance simplicity. At times the reader has to rotate the pages several times in order to read the entire text. I provide a small orange arrow for guidance. “See Figure 24.” To further complicate our understanding, I juxtapose contrasting images, like a picture of an extravagant bouquet featuring galax leaves and a screen capture of a Facebook comment section in which people discuss how their impoverished relatives could only afford galax to decorate graves during the Great Depression. “See Figure 25.”

A poem and a maze, both about galax’s distribution, follow Miller’s excerpt. Facts about the places where galax is picked and exported accompany the maze. The maze challenges us to reach England by way of Texas without going through North Carolina, demonstrating how central North Carolina is to the circuitous route galax travels to reach distant lands.

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Figure 24. A spread from Miller’s excerpt. The green drop cap shows the reader where to begin reading. Small orange arrows and the end of each paragraph instructs what orientation to rotate the spread. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 25. The spread above is part of Miller’s excerpt. It shows various sources juxtaposed each other. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 26. A maze showing some facts on the left and a prompt asking the reader to complete the maze. Albert Lebron, 2021.
6 GATHERING GALAX: AN EXHIBITION

The thesis exhibition for Gathering Galax took place at the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design galleries from April 12-16, 2021. The exhibition had three parts.

The first part displayed each spread from the book side by side across three walls of the gallery. This format presented viewers with every spread at once while giving them an opportunity to look at each spread individually. The spreads were printed on cardstock and taped to the walls one inch apart using yellow painter’s tape to avoid harming the gallery walls during deinstallation. I adhered a real galax plant on the center of the main wall to highlight my central subject in a literal way.

The second part is a stand-alone wall that documented my creative process. Post-it notes from initial thesis brainstorm sessions, books that inspired the design, sketches of logo types, misprints, photos and field research notes, book prototypes, galax rubbings done with charcoal, rejected designs, and an unfinished script for a galax-themed horror movie clutter this wall. I taped another galax plant in the center of this maelstrom-like layout. This wall also features my process to produce the book. There are photos of my room and the printer, as well as all of the book binding supplies used for this project. There is even a screenshot of the tutorial I watched to learn how to do the Coptic binding. I’ll show a couple figures after this brief section of explanations, but refer to Appendix for more.

The third part of the exhibition presents three final books on each of their own pedestals. Gallery visitors were encouraged to touch and flip through the finished product.

All of the work in my exhibition is made of everyday materials to demonstrate how anyone can create things at home with regular letter-sized paper and an inexpensive inkjet printer. I want to encourage gallery visitors to research, design and publish their own books,
zines or any printed material. There is empowerment in publishing. By creating our own content and sharing our own stories, we let others hear our voices and “correct” traditional historical narratives.\textsuperscript{31}

Visitors were invited to take a Spanish version of “Hojas,” printed as a small pamphlet. This Spanish version contained a brief introduction about galax and my conversation with Javier, printed in the language in which it was originally spoken. Offering the conversation in Spanish makes it possible for me to share this Latino experience with other Latinos. The story differs from many conventional immigration stories in that it gives the perspective of Latinos living in the rural Southern US – a viewpoint we don’t often hear. The full Spanish conversation can be read in Appendix 2.

Media scholar Lisa Gitelman writes in \textit{Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents} about paper’s dual, somewhat contradictory nature: it is a stable medium used for preserving knowledge, but it’s also incredibly delicate and insubstantial. She says that paper can be “a figure both for all that is sturdy and stable (as in, ‘Let’s get that on paper!’), and for all that is insubstantial and ephemeral (including the paper tiger and the house of cards).”\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Gathering Galax} shows the history and uses of a plant and documents the “undocumented.” Its leaves of paper contain physical evidence that commit the Latino galacker story to history; and yet, the book itself is ephemeral. The exhibition itself could be wrinkled, crinkled, wadded up, and easily tossed away.


Figure 27. A brief explanation about the exhibition. Albert Lebron, 2021.

Figure 28. A view of the exhibition from the right side of the gallery. Pictured here is the process wall, the pedestals in the center with the final books, and the far-left wall of the gallery. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 29. A view of spreads on the left corner of the gallery. Albert Lebron, 2021.

Figure 30. A view of the center and right wall with the three pedestals in the center of the room. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 31. A real galax leaf from North Carolina taped to the center of the wall. Albert Lebron, 2021.

Figure 32. The process wall. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 33. A close up of the process wall. Albert Lebron, 2021.

Figure 34. Through out this wall there are resources about the binding process. This is a close up of a tutorial I watched to learn Coptic binding. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 35. The process wall shows additional readings I was greatly inspired by, like Chapter 1 in “A Thousand Plateaus” by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze because of the discussion about books. Also shown is “The Mushroom at the End of the World” by Anna Tsing because in a similar way to my project she centers a matsutake mushroom into a larger narrative. And the figure above shows “Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet” because of its unique book design. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 36. The process wall with taped misprints, galax patterns, notes and a film script. Albert Lebron, 2021.

Figure 37. Books on a center pedestal. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 38. Pages from the book on a center pedestal. Albert Lebron, 2021.

Figure 39. Spanish pamphlets. Albert Lebron, 2021.
7 CONCLUSION

Galax is just one of many non-timber forest products. Now that I have designed and published one book, others can follow in a series. Mushrooms, ginseng, wild ramps – all have their own unique ecologies that are entangled with people and land. Using a plant as an entry point creates space to explore these difficult subjects. There’s so much to learn, share and publish about non-timber forest products, and we all have the power to learn, share, and publish our findings using simple tools and everyday materials.
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APPENDIX 1: GATHERING GALAX LAYOUT

Figure 40. Gathering Galax Layout 1. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 41. Gathering Galax Layout 2. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 42. Gathering Galax Layout 3. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 43. Gathering Galax Layout 4. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 44. Gathering Galax Layout 5. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 45. Gathering Galax Layout 6. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 46. Gathering Galax Layout 7. Albert Lebron, 2021.
APPENDIX 2: A CONVERSATION WITH A MEXICAN GALICKER

Figure 47. Spanish Conversation Layout 1. Albert Lebron, 2021.
Figure 48. Spanish Conversation Layout 2. Albert Lebron, 2021.