

Welcome to **The Gathering Table**, a physical object that holds space to honor women; layered with meaning, it invites curiosity to explore, wonder, and imagine.

The table is made of **quarter sawn Wisconsin white oak**, a strong and stable material traditionally used in libraries. The constellation **Cassiopeia**, featured in the center of the table, connects the expansive sky and universe, and has multiple meanings for the viewer to consider. Cassiopeia speaks to long histories of women being punished for vanity and pride – and for speaking their truths. The constellation is an abstraction of W (for women, wellbeing, Wisconsin, and the world) and breasts.

The **red sand** line connecting the constellation is from the Red Sand Project by Molly Gochman, which raises awareness about vulnerabilities that can lead to human trafficking and exploitation. Grains of sand represent people who slip through the cracks. This red sand line highlights Gochman's project, while simultaneously pointing to larger goals: equality, freedom, and education of women worldwide. The constellation's points and surrounding stars are inlaid brass.

When the oak was shaped, **lead shot** was found embedded in the wood. These pellets are now integrated into the table as the five small inlaid rectangles among the stars. These lead shots prompt questions about the story behind these wounds and the ways in which trees repair themselves from such trauma - an apt metaphor for histories of violence against women, their resilience, and healing. Some wounding is cosmic, and some wounding is earthly. In 2019, we still need to reckon with violence, especially towards POC, queer, and trans women.

Three inlaid brass **concentric circles** can be considered ripples, layers between earth and sky, energy and light waves, and non-linear measurements of space, time, and storytelling. The middle circle has triangles pointing outwards – a compass of sorts – and calls viewers to consider their own “true north.” The equilateral triangles can be interpreted as both a flat image and a three-dimensional symbol of the phosphorus molecule.

Linked symbolically to Venus in mythology and astronomy, **phosphorous** is known as the light bearer, created in the cosmos by crashing stars. In our own bodies, phosphorous allows our DNA and RNA to zip and unzip for the multiplication of our cells. It gave us match heads, phosphorus bombs, and is changing our landscape. Like this molecule, women often take on multiple roles, and are always growing in ways that are complex and multi-sided.

On the outer circle, oak barren wildflowers, prairie wildflowers, and Native food systems reflect communities working together and supporting each other. They connect the table to place: the Midwest, the prairie system we live in, the Yahara River watershed, the University of Wisconsin--Madison, and the Ho Chunk land the campus rests upon. The hand carved flora of the tabletop includes:

- **Prairie Sage** is used by Native Americans as a craft material, as well as for ceremonial and medicinal purposes.
- **Hoary Vervain, Wilde Lupine, Yarrow, and Aster** are important food sources for bees, moths, butterflies, insects, birds, and small mammals.
- **Milkweed** is one of the most complex flowers in the plant kingdom. A critical source of nectar for native bees, wasps, and other nectar-seeking insects, it is larval food for monarch butterflies and other herbivorous insects. Milkweed soup is a Native staple in the Midwest!
- **GoldenRod**, in the Aster family, has edible young leaves. Native Americans used the seeds of some species as food, and it is used in herbal teas to counter inflammation and cleanse the kidney and bladder.
- **Queen Anne's Lace** (non-native, naturalized) is a beneficial weed, companion plant, and a pest in pastures. The root is edible when young and the domesticated carrot was cultivated from a sub-species.
- **Black-Eyed Susan**, in the sunflower family, is a traditional Native American medicinal herb used for boosting immunity and fighting infection.
- **Winter Squash, Maize (corn), and Climbing Beans**, often referred to as the **Three Sisters**, are three of the main crops of many indigenous groups of the Americas. Planted close together as companion crops, they benefit from each other beautifully. Maize grows the structure for the beans to climb; beans add nitrogen to the soil; squash spreads along the ground blocking sunlight and preventing weeds, while helping soil retain moisture.

The five women interacting with the wildflower and Native food landscapes – sowing seed, reclining, reading, reflecting, and imagining – pay homage to “women's work” and represent hopes for women at UW-Madison.

With no sides at a circular table, every place is equally important; the circle and its ripples are ever expanding.

Artists Statement by Sylvie Rosenthal