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'The Altar in the Garden'

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Tuesday January 17, 2023

By Henry Handley

It's the start of the spring 2023 semester at UD, and if you wish it were actually spring, you can get a preview in the Marian Library.

A new acquisition, an artist's book titled *El altar in el jardín* (*The Altar in the Garden*) recalls the sanctuary of a childhood garden. Argentinian artist Marina Soria writes that her grandmother's garden "was a kind of shrine, a mixture of the Lourdes grotto with enchanted forest," which the book vividly evokes. Soria's poetry, calligraphy, watercolor images, and papercraft recall the variegated greens of a shaded grove. The bamboo and cloth binding by Carlos Queseda encloses the garden, and a jute cord with fabric leaves accompanies the book, ready to be draped over or wound around it. Inside, flowers and creatures (birds, butterflies, a wild hare) appear in the margins, and small leaf-shaped cutouts add depth to the decoration.

Soria writes, “I used to cut and braid leaves to create a small hole, ready to shelter an image,” and cutouts in the paper shape a similar space where a statue of Mary appears. The pen nibs that surround the statue form a kind of mandorla, an oval shape that signifies light and holiness, perhaps most familiar in depictions of Our Lady of Guadalupe. It’s especially appropriate for the Marian Library, where numerous examples of writing and art show homage to Mary through creativity.

You can find the book on display — along with an international exhibit, *Madonnas of the World* — in the Marian Library’s reading room on the seventh floor.

— Henry Handley is an assistant professor and collections librarian in the Marian Library.



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Instead of ties or clasps, a jute cord with light-catching leaves can secure the book when closed; it can also drape over it when open.