

the artists' books included here could be accessed in a virtual display that included a page-turning device, permitting curious readers to peer inside the books. It was a pleasant surprise, for instance, to be able to see that the pop-up structures in Carol Barton's *Five Luminous Towers*, about various towers she visited during a trip to Italy, are echoed in the pages between the tower pop-ups: the explanatory texts about each of the towers sit on their own little pop-up plateaus.

The virtual display also included a zoom feature that enabled the reader to examine small (too small!) portions of each page in greater detail. Unfortunately, this virtual display has now been discontinued on the NMWA website.

This is a well-produced and affordable book of compelling examples of artists' books in the collection of the National Museum of Women in the Arts. One hopes that the museum will continue to thrive and to collect further examples of artists' books that increasingly reflect the artistic sensitivities and cultural diversity of women.

These glimpses of the museum's collection made me wish, if not for a trip to Washington, DC, then at least for a touring exhibition of some of the books; in my case, a tour stop somewhere in the Pacific Northwest would be handy. Treat yourself: buy a copy of this book and prepare to spend hours curled up in contemplation of the imaginative world each of these wonderful books represents.

Reviewed by *Gina Page*

111 West Coast Literary Portraits

By various authors. Introduction by *Alan Twigg*. Photographs by *Barry Peterson* and *Blaise Enright*. (Mother Tongue Publishing, 2012, \$48)

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT TIME, and it took time to make.

The story began 15 years ago when the earliest photograph was taken as part of a five-year collaboration between Barry Peterson and Blaise Enright. With guidance from *BC BookWorld* publisher Alan Twigg, the duo travelled the West Coast and Gulf Islands seeking writers in their natural habitats: a living-room corner, a woodpile,

a greenhouse, even a bathtub. They shot more than 60 black-and-white portraits and evolved an art quite different from routine studio photography—more revealing of the characters behind the written word. The photographs became part of *Lit Happens*, a travelling exhibition that criss-crossed B.C. between 1999 and 2008.

When their artistic and personal collaboration ended in 2002, Peterson continued to photograph B.C. writers, with the intention of creating a photographic archive of B.C. literature. But who should publish the record? Mona Fertig and Peter Haase of what was then Mother Tongue Press saw the book as an impressive project that should be handled by an outfit with greater capabilities than their letterpress studio. But as time passed, Fertig and Haase established Mother Tongue Publishing, a trade publisher with a mandate to produce quality art books with a West Coast connection. And so the book, like the travelling exhibit of *Lit*, happened.

Peterson was patient, however, having honed his discipline in the darkroom.

The photos for *111 West Coast Literary Portraits* were primarily taken with a Hasselblad camera with Carl Zeiss lenses—"the best in the world," he says. The film was hand-processed to ensure the highest possible quality. From a negative selected by the author, Peterson developed archival fibre-based photographic prints, a time-consuming process that is used very rarely in what he calls "this instantaneous and impermanent" digital age.

In a darkroom built in his basement, he took all the time and effort required to achieve the envisioned result. He explains: "Film photographs have a depth to them that digital can't duplicate. Digital images are printed flat on paper, and film images are printed on layers of emulsion within the paper. Film and fibre-based prints have been around for 186 years, and many of the first prints are still around—and that was before they knew how to archivally process prints."

MTP has showcased the photographs in a fit manner, giving each writer two facing pages, one for the photograph and one for a minimal text set in Jim Rimmer's Amethyst Pro. The images range from elegiac (Al Purdy, P.K. Page) to cheeky (Linda Rogers, Gregory Scofield), and they include some historians and journalists as well as the expected poets and novelists.

A few of the writers, like Alice Munro, who graces the front cover, enjoy international

reputations; others you've not yet heard of. The selection is highly personal, with criteria known only to the photographers, the publishers and perhaps Alan Twigg, whose database at www.abcbookworld.com contains more than 10,000 B.C.-related writers. Here we have one percent of those. If we are patient, there may yet be time for at least some of the 99.

Book launches and partial exhibitions are scheduled on Vancouver Island and elsewhere in B.C. through the winter of 2012–13. At time of writing, Fertig and Haase were looking for a big city venue to show all 111 portraits.

Reviewed by *Phyllis Reeve*



The Book of Books: 500 Years of Graphic Innovation

Edited by *Mathieu Lommen* (Thames & Hudson, 2011, \$68)

IF YOU, LIKE ME, were unable to get to Amsterdam this spring to see the exhibition *The Printed Book: A Visual History* at the University of Amsterdam, I suggest you order the book produced to accompany the exhibition.

The intent of *The Book of Books: 500 Years of Graphic Innovation* is “to showcase book design in all its forms: reference works, and works of

art, ‘machines for reading’ and picture books, prestigious collector’s items and throw away paperbacks.” In this, the book is a success. The books featured are significant, the commentary on them is insightful, and the design by Cees W. de Jong is a perfect match.

The exhibition that gave rise to the book drew from the holdings of the Special Collections of the University of Amsterdam. The library originated in 1578, and more recently the University of Amsterdam established the Heritage Centre for Graphic Design, Typography and Advertising. While it is not clear to what extent this book mirrors the actual exhibition, the book stands on its own. Save for a reference in the postscript, the exhibition is not mentioned at all.

The book is the combined effort of seven people associated with the University of Amsterdam: Mathieu Lommen, the editor, plus Paul Dijstelberge, Frans A. Janssen, Cees W. de Jong, John A. Lane, Lesley Monfils, Adriaan Plak, Jan W. H. Werner and Johan de Zoete. Their credentials are set out and they are impressive.

They have chosen 128 books whose dates of publication range from 1471 to 2010. The book is organized on a chronological basis into nine sections: The invention and spread of printing; Decoration and Illustration; The Dutch Golden Age; The Eighteenth Century; Nineteenth-century Graphic Techniques; Private Presses and Traditional Book Typography; Avant-garde and New Typography; Modernism and Swiss Typography; and Postmodernism. Each section has a brief introduction written by one of the contributors.

This book is modern in its design. The type used is *Avenir Next*, a sans serif face designed by Adrian Frutiger. The book’s introduction and the introductions to the sections are set in what appears to be a bold version of this face set well led. In contrast, the title of each section is set in a regular weight and placed at the beginning of the first line of the text of the introduction. Throughout, the commentary on each individual book is set in the regular weight.

The book is 464 pages with a page size of 31.9 by 22.7 centimetres. Many images of the featured books appear to be reproduced at actual size and in colours closely approximating the originals. The illustrations do not reduce the commentary; at least one double-page spread is devoted to each book and often two or three such spreads. The first spread