

## *Pressing Matters*

Go into the upscale vintage and retro shops in any major city these days, and it's more than likely you'll find a tray of old type — metal or even wood. The gift and craft shops are the same, with letterpress postcards and greeting cards offering up toothy papers that have received impressions and are intended to make some, too. The old way of printing seems like it never died, only it did (just ask Crispin Elsted, Stan Bevington and the others around when whole fonts were being left in lanes and tipped in landfills as printers upgraded to a new generation of equipment).

This issue of *Amphora* looks at the curious range of letterpress printing still being done today — where it's come from, how it's survived and where it might be going.

Paul Jay shares stories of travelling to various corners of the world and discovering how letterpress printing survives at the margins of global society, merged and reinvented within local traditions. His article recalls the revelations that awaited Jennifer Van de Pol and Adrian Robertshaw on their journey to India in April 2008 (see Jennifer Van de Pol, "A Letterpress Pilgrimage," *Amphora* 151 [Spring 2009], pp. 7–9).

Closer to home, William Rueter — this year's recipient of the Robert R. Reid Medal and Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Book Arts — shares his story, and that of the Aliquando Press, with Rollin Milroy of Heavenly Monkey Press in Vancouver. The saga is no less fascinating, spanning more than a century of family connections and creative interests, and underscoring the legacy left by successive generations of artists to each other and the world.

How the next generation will adapt and reinvent that tradition is a major question, however. While a graphic arts instructor may draw on traditional South Pacific designs for silkscreening projects, Rueter sees love — more than money — being the driving force for the

next generation of letterpress printers. Sure, everyone wants to be rich, but is it feasible?

"What a treat to see letterpress still making a living for what looked like a family business—and not a computer in sight," notes Paul Jay after visiting a shop in Thailand.

This may work in Southeast Asia, but for others — as in the community he describes in Fiji, or among the lauded creative class of North America — it's love and commitment to the craft that support the ventures. Claire Van Vliet of the Janus Press proudly describes her house in Vermont as "the house that paper built," but like yours truly — a full-time freelance writer paid by the word when he's not volunteering his time for *Amphora*, and paying down a mortgage in Canada's least-affordable city to boot — the cash is hard-won and we know what went into garnering it.

The richest of us are those who love what we do, and through it find personal satisfaction and a connection with the larger world through that work — Van Vliet, Rueter, myself, and even the collectors who develop collections that eventually find their way into public institutions (a topic Paul Whitney explores).

The work of creating — writing, designing, printing — may be solitary and lowly paid, but being able to see it within a larger context lends it dignity. Or, as Van de Pol recalled after a particularly poignant exchange in India: "We stumbled back to our \$5 hotel room, drunk on history and overwhelmed by the legacy human beings are capable of leaving in this world, in this case through the art of printing."

~ Peter Mitham, editor