

Deep Influences

BY THE TIME this issue of *Amphora* appears, *Descant* magazine in Toronto will have launched its last number and ceased publication. A book of a magazine, with an eclectic but top-notch range of contributions, it was successful—save in the area of finances.

“Grants have been in decline for more than five years, although other revenues such as sales and subscriptions have held steady or increased. We have cut costs everywhere we could, but many expenses over which we have no control have continued to spiral up,” Karen Mulhallen, the magazine’s editor-in-chief and head of the not-for-profit Descant Arts & Letters Foundation, wrote in a blog post announcing the decision to shut down.

The magazine’s loss hits close to home, and not just because it’s one less item I’ll be looking for at my local magazine store (which is having to make adjustments of its own as fewer and fewer publications arrive to stock its shelves). Grants to the Alcuin Society have also seen cutbacks, making *Amphora* vulnerable to the same pressures and exigencies that claimed *Descant*.

Similarly, the volunteers who contribute to and assemble this magazine face pressures on their own incomes.

Speaking personally, my income as a writer ends 2014 down from last year (for the second year in a row). The work bringing in that cash has diversified beyond writing for newspapers and magazines to include a hotchpotch of work running from assisting new authors to developing communications and social media posts and even preparing a video script. Regardless of whether or not one expected this breadth of assignments, it’s hard to miss the fact that it’s not coming from traditional print media.

So, what is the role of print media?

Patricia No takes a stab at answering that question in her article about Publication Studio, a grassroots publisher in Portland, Oregon (and Vancouver and Toronto) that sees print publishers as more than roadkill on the information highway.

Similarly, Alcuin Society board member Grant Hurley shows how the Internet is helping cast fresh eyes on old books through the Book Traces project.

Tom Smart and Lumi Constantin offer up essays on how artists Alan Stein and Gina Page are working with traditional materials in ways that keep the conventional book arts alive in the present, notwithstanding the Internet.

We’ve also taken time to offer up a truncated version of the respected cartoonist and graphic designer Seth’s talk to the Alcuin Society this past fall in Vancouver. Discussing his influences, Seth’s talk illustrated the depth of the graphic influences we all have—both the explicit ones, as well as those we quietly inherit and come to realize define our own tastes.

Speaking of deep influences, the coming year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Alcuin Society. We hope to include a special feature celebrating the occasion in each issue through 2015. The parlous state of funding for arts groups makes it something of an achievement. Regardless of what the future holds for the book arts in Canada, *Amphora* hopes to remain a forum for discussing all that goes into designing what we read and admire.

~ Peter Mitham, editor