

Books Made Fresh Daily

Co-founder PATRICIA NO explains the history, philosophy and practice of the print-on-demand Publication Studio, which began its life in a Portland hotel.

THE PHYSICAL BOOK places a large demand on publishers: it requires material resources, but faces competition from digital copies that take up no more space than the device on which the text is accessed. And who is accessing those texts, anyway? Too often, the ease of sharing digital texts eliminates the relationships—the pencil marks and stains—that adhere to physical copies. It was concerns like these that led to the launch, in 2009, of Publication Studio. Amphora asked co-founder Patricia No to share the story, which she does below.

THE IDEA WAS to publish, make and sell books in a totally transparent and direct way—philosophically as well as economically. We invested a small sum of money in a paper trimmer and hot-glue perfect binder, and Publication Studio set up shop at The Cleaners, the event space of the Ace Hotel in Portland, Oregon.

The Ace Hotel generously allowed us to use the space from 5 a.m. to noon each day, which inspired our moniker “Books made fresh daily,” as we were getting up at the break of dawn to physically produce books that were going to be sold that day. We make all our books on demand, only printing and binding a copy when an order is placed. This negates the need to buy—and warehouse—a print run of 1,000 books, which in turn allows us to be flexible in what we publish. We can publish works we believe in and love, regardless of how big the market is for that particular title—whether fiction, poetry, art book or material of social and community interest. For example, Publication Studio Vancouver, B.C., has reissued several out-of-print books that pertain specifically to the history and/or culture of their city, or original work of the same ambitions. *Affidavit* by Jamie Hilder (a Vancouver artist and critic) deals with a political situation in downtown Vancouver.

A STOREFRONT THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER AROUND BOOKS

In 2010 we were able to move into our own storefront space in downtown Portland. Having an architecture—a space visible and accessible—is hugely important to what we do, as we care deeply about the social life of the book and need a space to cultivate a “public” out of publication. We use the space both as our working studio and to host several events per month. Bringing people together around books brings a new life to the studio, one that we find essential to publishing. As artist Christoph Keller wrote in 2005 to Roger Willems of Roma Publications in a now well-circulated letter, “Books make friends.” Our studio is open to the public, and we invite anyone to come and use our Wi-Fi, eat lunch, have a coffee.

Building a community is the first step in starting the conversations that turn into projects, collaborations, idea exchanges and relationships, both professional and social. Through the years, we have also gathered a nice little library of books and zines that people donate to the space, and this library is open for anyone to browse. This year we plan to host the sixth annual Publication Fair, an event for local small presses and bookshops that we founded in 2009, as well as a “Publisher’s Residency,” where we invite small presses without storefronts to utilize our space to distribute their books.

Our material practice is modest and simple (file folders for covers, rubber-stamped title), reflecting both Publication Studio’s pragmatic aesthetic and its pedagogical ideals—making books the way we do is a quickly learned skill that allows other people to contribute, and perhaps apply these skills to their own projects. While we would love to expand our equipment, we’ve opted for simplicity over extra expense.

Although our books are perfect-bound, the hot-glue method means the spine's integrity and longevity is not perfect. There is a method which uses a cold glue, PUR (polyurethane reactive adhesive), but it is not within our budget. We use a digital printer that is housed in our studio, but also collaborate with screen printers, letterpress printers and offset printers.

SIBLING STUDIOS INCREASE THE CATALOGUE, AID DISTRIBUTION

When we first started, we hoped to open sibling studios around the world, which would enrich our catalogue with a diversity of published materials and would help with the distribution and circulation of books. The idea was that this would create a network of publishers serving their own communities and geographies, while sharing our philosophies and methods of production.

The first sibling studio to open was in Berkeley, California, by the artist Colter Jacobsen; the second studio was in Vancouver, B.C., by Keith Higgins and Kathy Slade. They just moved their studio into a public storefront at 222 East Georgia Street, which is very exciting!

We now have a total of 12 sibling studios, all of which operate autonomously with their own imprints, but under the umbrella of Publication Studio. If you visit our online store, you'll see a complete catalogue of all our books, but you'll also notice that each book has a tagline that says which studio published it. However, we also share all our files on a server that allows each studio to make each other's books (we all use the same machines and methods for book production). This facilitates distribution of our books—especially since international shipping is ridiculously expensive.

All of our books are available not only as softcovers (which we make and ship), but also as DRM-free e-books that can be read in their entirety online on our free reading commons. Anyone—in addition to just reading full texts—can annotate in the margins and read the notes of other readers; this is another way that we attend to the social life of the book, creating a digital reading group. We care about the reader-writer-publisher relationship and try to bring agency

back into the exchanges between them, both on an emotional level and on the market level.

We hope to encourage people to care about our books because they're a participant in the social life of the book; we want readers and buyers, not merely consumers of books. Making books one at a time ensures that each book we make is going to a person who really wants it and will use it, and it's reassuring to know that none of our books end up in warehouses, go on discount or get pulped.

We also love that anyone can come into a Publication Studio, ask for a book and watch it take shape right in front of them. It takes only a few minutes to make a book on our machines (after years of practice), and making a book especially for the reader is personally rewarding. The only information on our spines is a date stamp that signifies the day we physically made that book. Having each of our books indicate the day it was produced is a way to sort of "edition" our books, as there's no print-run number with print-on-demand. It's great to be able to pick up a book from our archive and know exactly the day that we launched it!

Publication Studio believes in the durable form of the book, but looks for ways to bring it to life; this happens through facilitating new works that might ostensibly be censored by the market, creating a social life for the book in various ways (both digitally and physically), or connecting readers, writers and publishers in a novel and intimate way. Readers and writers have a right to work and enjoy that work for pleasure alone, and we certainly do.

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~ Patricia No is co-owner with Antonia Pinter of Publication Studio in Portland, Oregon; its online home is www.publicationstudio.biz.

