

Witnessing the Remembering of Creation

A series of events at the University of Toronto takes GRANT HURLEY to the genesis—and future—of fine printing in Canada.

PLENTIFUL AMOUNTS OF discarded type and press equipment. An abundance of talented writers. And autodidact printers with verve and vision committed to putting that type to use and those writers to paper. All of these things came together to create a vibrant fine press printing community in Toronto during the 1970s and 1980s. A feeling of the close-knit community born in that era was present in a lecture, a series of exhibitions, and a new imprint launched on January 22, 2019 at the John M. Kelly Library of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. The lecture featured Robert MacDonald—designer, printer, publisher, typographer and co-founder of Dreadnaught Press—and was titled “All Crazy for Type, Ink, Paper and Glue.” The exhibitions, spread across five sites, are collectively titled *Canadian Fine Press* and feature examples of beautiful fine press works from the collections of four of the university's federated college libraries and the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. Glenn



Signage for the exhibit at John M. Kelly Library.
(All photos by Grant Hurley)

Goluska's works are a special focus in two of the exhibits, thanks to the curatorial efforts of Chester Gryski, a director of the Alcuin Society and alumnus of St. Michael's (Goluska was also an alumnus). And the Kelly library has revived its print studio with the hiring of Deborah Barnett, who co-founded Dreadnaught with MacDonald,



Glenn Goluska pictured at Robert MacDonald's lecture. Kelly Library archivist
Simon Rogers is at the podium.

Elizabeth Abraham, Ross MacDonald (Robert's brother) and David Jang. The print studio's inaugural title is *A Tetrad*, a limited edition letterpress chapbook meditating on the library's Marshall McLuhan collections. The chapbook's inspiration is McLuhan's concept of the "tetrad," a series of four questions that McLuhan believed could be used to describe the effects of all media. And, in all of this, the Kelly library turns 50, which provided the rationale for this flowering of fine press appreciation on campus.

THE LECTURE

Robert MacDonald's talk on January 22 set up the exhibitions and chapbook well. It touched on the importance of a supportive printing community with a shared investment in the principles of craft, and motivated by intellectual curiosity. "I spent more than 10 years of my life living and working within 10 blocks of where we are right now," MacDonald began, pointing towards a group of printers that included Stan Bevington and Will Rueter who then lived in the Annex neighbourhood surrounding the University of Toronto campus. He then proceeded to give a tour of his long career and the many paper and ink-obsessed characters he met along the way.

Growing up in Huron County, Ontario, MacDonald worked as a teenager at the *Huron Expositor* newspaper. "I let the ink and Varsol soak into my veins," he remembered. At 16 he left for Los Angeles, where he spent three months

at Disney's animation studios, "painting the yellow in animation cells for the Spanish version of Snow White for slightly more than a buck an hour." After some more time on the West Coast being introduced to the world of underground newspapers, MacDonald returned to Toronto and became involved in the underground press scene there, including the famed *Guerilla* newspaper, before starting the short-lived *Dreadnaught* paper. Work in advertising was followed by his first big gig in the book design world: working for the University of Toronto Press under Allan Fleming and with Antje Lingner, Laurie Lewis, and Will Rueter, among other talented individuals who had gravitated to the press. He spent several years soaking up typography, design and print, and thrived under Fleming's mentorship. "I was a minutiae machine, made to be paper, to be type, to be colour, to be tone, to be atmosphere," he recalled. "He taught me how to listen to the text, what it wanted to look and feel like. And one day, just another everyday, ordinary day, I was a typographer. I thought in type and I could compose whole pieces of work in my imagination, and when complete and perfect there, I then put it down to paper."

Afterwards, MacDonald moved onto a new challenge, one that benefited from the piles of old metal type and press equipment that printers were starting to ditch in favour of photo-typesetting equipment. Reviving the *Dreadnaught* name, MacDonald co-established the co-operative,



Stan Bevington and Chester Gryski at the Canadian Fine Press exhibit opening.



*Chester Gryski, George Walker, Deborah Barnett, Rod McDonald and Robert MacDonald
at the Canadian Fine Press exhibit opening.*

non-profit press in 1970. After more than a decade with the press, including establishing a second arm in Nova Scotia, MacDonald left Dreadnaught and headed back out West to pursue further adventures in publishing, teaching and consulting. He currently lives in Kelowna, in the heart of British Columbia's arid Okanagan Valley. But he noted that he often returned to Toronto during those years to continue to soak in the joys of the fine press world, including his old colleague Will Rueter of Aliquando Press, and printer, designer and typographer Glenn Goluska. MacDonald commented on Goluska's prodigious letterpress printing talent and attention to the finest details: "Who knows where the quest for letterpress perfection comes from? The stubbornness, the willingness to embrace frustrations and failure as much as success. Glenn had it in him in spades and his work shows it. We lost him too soon."

Around the same time, MacDonald was responding to the call of McLuhan, observing the ways in which media can circulate in communities and create change. "I was also coming to the realisation that there was an opportunity to write the script for Canadian publishing," he recounted. "I was spending a lot of time trying to figure out what Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman and others were talking about when they referred to the idea of 'media ecology.' Based on my own experience working with dozens of magazine and

book publishers in Toronto, plus working with Fleming, it bothered me that 80% of the English language books published in Canada in 1980 were published within 10 miles of where we are right now. So I decided the Canadian media needed a farm team. A big, robust cluster of smaller publishers who would represent the stories of their place, tell the stories of their people, and foster the voices of their writers." MacDonald went on to create the Media Futures Institute, a consulting business that helped new and existing publishers establish and reposition themselves effectively.

MacDonald concluded his talk by thanking the libraries for collecting the evidence of the endeavours of the Toronto printers of the 1970s and 80s. "The end of the industrial letterpress age in the early 1970s was delivered into the hands of amateurs like Will, Glenn, Gerald [Giampa] and me and many others . . . We swam into that ocean of tools and knowledge, and we allowed it to sweep us up into its inky embrace as much as we could and used it to honour the people who preceded us, who too had been swept up by type, ink, paper, and glue."

THE EXHIBITIONS

Visitors to several libraries at the University of Toronto were treated to much type, ink, paper and (largely hidden) glue in the *Canadian Fine Press* exhibits. The items on display show a



Top: Posters by Glenn Goluska at Massey College.
Bottom: Detail from Glenn Goluska's preliminary design for the back cover of Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal (Centre for Canadian Architecture) featuring Ernest Cormier and pasted-in cat.

splendid range of fine press printing, much of it centred around the fine press community of Toronto. The initiative, which represents a unique collaboration across libraries at the university, was initiated by Chester Gryski, who

first approached the Kelly library in 2014 with the idea of doing an exhibit of Glenn Goluska's work. Simon Rogers, archivist at the Kelly, ran with the concept to match the library's 50th anniversary and to showcase the range of fine press-related collections across campus. In conversation about the exhibits, Rogers emphasised that they point to the "community of people behind these works," aside from the authors on their title pages, that enabled their creation. The rich threads of connections between them all quickly become apparent to the visitor.

Glenn Goluska's printed works are highlighted at the Kelly exhibit as well as a dedicated exhibit at Massey College's Robertson Davies Library curated by Gryski and P.J. MacDougall. The Massey exhibit also includes a detailed catalogue written by Gryski. The Kelly exhibit encompasses the other fine press-related collections held at the library, including many books donated by Canadian author Sheila Watson, as well as a case of materials showcasing the work of Deborah Barnett during her time at Dreadnaught Press. Goluska's posters and designs created during his tenure at the Centre for Canadian Architecture in Montreal are also a delight to see, including a preliminary layout for the catalogue *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* that cheekily includes a cutout picture of a cat peeking over Cormier's shoulder. The Massey exhibit features many of Goluska's broadsides, including several in Russian, as well as posters Goluska designed for events that showcase his love of wood type. The Kelly exhibit was curated by Deborah Barnett, Chester Gryski and Simon Rogers.

The exhibit at Victoria College's E.J. Pratt Library is organised around Canadian poets and their relationships to fine presses. Six poets are featured: A.F. Moritz, Jay Macpherson, Margaret Atwood, Richard Outram as well as E.J. Pratt and his daughter Claire Pratt. The ties that bind them are their printers, at least here. Works from Moritz were printed by Dreadnaught Press, and Aliquando Press shares titles from Macpherson and Outram. Macpherson's case includes a presentation copy of her 1954 chapbook *O Earth Return* (printed by her own Emblem Books press) to her teacher, literary critic Northrop Frye, inscribed "For

my teachers especially Norrie.” Atwood’s case includes *Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never be Written* (1981) printed by Glenn Goluska at the Nightshade Press, as well as a first edition Hawkshead Press copy of *Double Persephone* (1961) donated by Macpherson. To round it off, the double case for E.J. and Claire Pratt includes a copy of Claire Pratt’s *The Undertow*, printed at the Massey College press in 1993. And these are but a small list of dizzying connections between writers and printers in a small space. The Pratt exhibit was curated by Agatha Barc, Carmen Socknat, and Gabrielle Fournier.

At the John M. Graham Library at Trinity College, the focus is on an earlier, lesser-known Canadian press: the Golden Dog Press, a small fine press founded by J. Kemp Waldie in Toronto in the 1930s. Its output was small but gorgeous. Waldie was a book collector and bibliophile. Among his personal collections on display is a bookplate (and accompanying letter) designed by famed typographer and illustrator Eric Gill with imagery referencing Gill’s wood engravings for the *The Canterbury Tales* printed by the Golden Cockerel Press in 1929. But the real treat is seeing the work of Canadian wood engraver Laurence Hyde, who illustrated a number of works printed by Wylie. The best of these on display is *Engravings for Macbeth* (Golden Dog, 1939) which consists of a full portfolio of Hyde’s subtle engravings for the play. Hyde would go on to create the remarkable wordless novel *Southern Cross* in 1951. The Graham Library exhibit was curated by Kate MacDonald and Christopher Hogendoorn.

Finally, the Fisher library’s exhibit focused on wood type of the kind favoured by Goluska as well as works of his contemporaries from the Fisher collections. The Fisher exhibit was curated by John Shoesmith.

THE CHAPBOOK

Lastly, the chapbook. At Robert MacDonald’s lecture, a gorgeous prospectus heralded the publication of the even more gorgeous *A Tetrad*, the first effort of the newly revived Kelly Library Print Studio. The studio is now headed by former Dreadnaught co-founder Deborah Barnett. Barnett was hired only in July 2018 but nevertheless produced a fantastic first work

for the Kelly. Rogers collaborated with Barnett on the text and design, and many staff and students at the library worked to collate and sew the book. Rogers noted it was a “collaborative learning experience” regarding the book as physical object. The chapbook is available in two bindings: a pamphlet stitch (125 copies printed) and Coptic stitch with a special slipcase enclosure (25 copies). Both versions are signed by Michael McLuhan, Marshall McLuhan’s son and executor. The chapbook is a meditation on the tetrad concept as reflected in the Kelly library’s McLuhan collections, which focus on materials by and about McLuhan collected by the library and donor James Feeley. As Rogers noted, the chapbook is something of a meta-artefact, “a book about the collection in the tetradic form.” The design is exceptional: a tall and narrow form with covers printed on light blue rag paper from Papeterie St. Armand in Montreal, but which opens in the centre to a square format with a series of four inner flaps that contain interpretations of McLuhan’s tetrad concept: that any new media can be analysed by asking what it enhances, reverses, retrieves and obsolesces. With a nod to these effects, *A Tetrad* includes a digital component that invites individuals to submit their own gloss on the tetrad concept, what Rogers calls a “fine press e-book.” Contributors are invited to head to <http://kellyexhibits.ca/tetrad> to submit their pieces.

THE HOPE

It is worth concluding with MacDonald’s hope for his audience, which bookended his talk: “I hope that like me, you witness creation, and abet it. I hope that like me, you notice each thing so that each thing gets noticed. I hope that like me, you notice the beautiful faces and complex natures of those that are here with us before they are gone.” It seems as if the riches of the era—McLuhan and the fine press ecology of Canada that was right on his heels—have generated their own riches in legacies of appreciation, remediation, and reinterpretation.

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 ~ Grant Hurley is a librarian at the University of Toronto and an ex officio director of the Alcuin Society.