

# The Work of Curation

Curating an exhibit honouring Glenn Goluska takes CHESTER GRYSKI to new depths of his hero's oeuvre.

I'M NOT SURE HOW MANY exhibitions of books and related material I have viewed over the years. However, I have recently come to appreciate how much thought and effort go into making an exhibition if one aims to present the subject coherently and to engage viewers.

I began collecting Glenn Goluska's work in 1975 when, one spring Sunday morning, he gave me a copy of the broadside he had just printed: *Sermon on the First Sunday After Easter*. This was issued under his private press, imprimerie dromadaire (while Glenn was inconsistent in capitalising the name of the press when he first launched it, he settled on using the lower case *i* and *d* for the initial letters of the name). This was not a chance encounter but one of our regular Sunday meetings. Whether I knew at the time that the design and printing of this broadside was in the works, I forget.

Although there are two other contenders for the first publication from imprimerie dromadaire (because they are also dated May 1975), I regard this as the first. It is a proof of this item that Glenn mentions showing to Robert MacDonald in *Glenn Goluska in Toronto* (Gaspereau Press, 2016). MacDonald noted that one could drive a truck between the *T* and the *o*. Glenn corrected the flaws MacDonald had pointed out. Years later, in *imprimerie dromadaire, Books & Ephemera* (Spring

1984), Glenn described himself as a fanatic perfectionist. He could see flaws that no one else could.

My father-in-law, Denis Milton, taught design and printing at what was then Ryerson Polytechnic (now Ryerson University). He taught me to look closely at how books were

put together. I was soon buying private press books (and others) that caught my eye. Collecting Glenn's printing was a natural outcome of this interest.

The first exhibition I ever curated was of Glenn Goluska's work, an informal one that lasted only part of an afternoon. The occasion was the presentation to Glenn of the Alcuin Society's Robert R. Reid Award and medal on May 25, 2011. The ceremony took place at George Vaitkunas's home in Montreal because Glenn was not well, battling the cancer

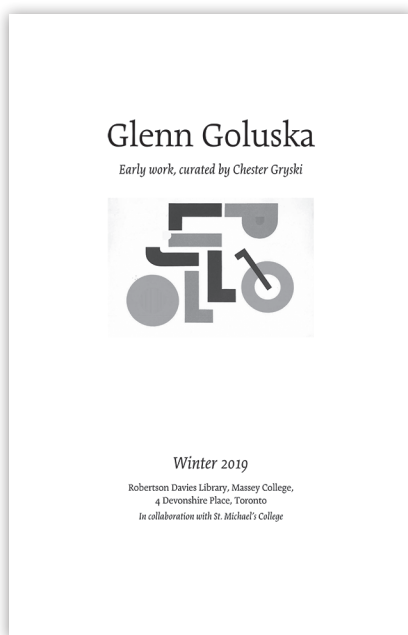
that would ultimately end his life that August. Attendance was limited to people Glenn invited for the occasion. I brought with me examples of Glenn's work under the imprimerie dromadaire imprint and Nightshade Press work printed in Toronto between 1975 and 1990 and placed them on the dining room table for the guests to see.

One of the books set out was *The Natural History of Water: a close reading* by David A. Donnell published by Shaw Street Press (1986). After leaving Coach House Press in 1980, Glenn



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*Glenn Goluska at the keyboard*  
(Allison Gryski photo)

undertook design and letterpress printing of books for several small publishers. Shaw Street Press was one. There are two issues of this book that differ only in the binding. There are the specials, 25 copies quarter-bound with linen and Japanese paper over boards, and the regular issue of 150 copies bound with paper wraps with silvery endpapers. These silvery endpapers do not appear in the copies bound with boards. I put one of the specials on the dining room table. Glenn, looking around, saw it. He told me he hated that binding and much preferred the binding that he had designed for the regular issue. The special binding was the publisher's doing. I quickly switched the copies and chalked up a lesson learned—that the special copies may not be at all special in the designer's eyes. I also expected this would be my only foray into the work of curating an exhibition.



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*Nelson Adams' Goluska Poster*

#### SURPRISING DISCOVERIES

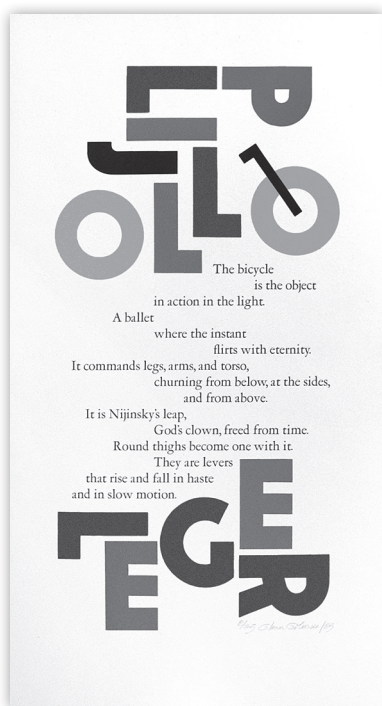
From 1990 to 2000, Glenn was the resident designer at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA). In August 2011, after visiting Glenn in the hospital, I visited the bookstore at the CCA and prowled through the shelves of their publications and found a number that Glenn had designed. I later visited a second time, armed with a list of Glenn's catalogues and posters for the CCA. Although Glenn had left the CCA over 11 years before, a substantial body of his work in their first printings was available, and apparently at the original prices. The posters were the size intended for bus shelters, 90 × 66 cm. I happily bought all that I could. I was amazed that I could still purchase these items so long after they had been published.

As friends gathered to remember Glenn, a group of us discussed the necessity of taking steps to preserve the legacy of Glenn's work. We all thought that an exhibition of his work was

essential. Glenn had taken the first step by giving his linotype, matrices, presses, and lead and wood type to Andrew Steeves of Gaspereau Press in Kentville, Nova Scotia, so that they would continue to be used for their intended purposes. I decided my contribution to the effort would be to create an online catalogue of Glenn's work with pictures, as a start to defining his legacy. My hope was that others would contribute items, too, helping us identify what was available. This became another possible format for exhibiting Glenn's work. Access to the online cata-

logue was restricted. Other contributors to sustaining Glenn's legacy were Rod MacDonald and Andrew Steeves. Rod MacDonald designed a typeface that he named Goluska. A number of book designers have used Goluska for their books, sometimes including a brief note about the typeface and its origins. Andrew Steeves interviewed Glenn in 2011 and published Glenn's reminiscences as *Glenn Goluska in Toronto*.

My first source for the catalogue entries was my own collection. This consisted of the imprimerie dromadaire and Nightshade Press items; invitations, posters and cards that Glenn did but don't bear the name of any press; and the CCA publications and posters that I had just acquired. I soon discovered that my collection was not as complete as I once thought. My second sources were the four (I now know there are at least five) promotional brochures that Glenn prepared to advertise his services to commercial clients. They were titled *letterpress*, *books*, *posters*, and *miscellaneous* and just showed examples of Glenn's work. Later I discovered one called *travail récent recent work*. I regarded these as significant to an understanding of Glenn's work because I interpreted the presence of an item in the brochure to mean that Glenn thought highly of it. Those not in my collection became



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Fernand Léger: The Bicycle

my targets. I also had the help of Glenn's friends and former colleagues like Denis Hunter who provided me with lists of books, and catalogues and posters that Glenn designed for the CCA and also for McGill-Queen's Press, and the University of British Columbia Press. Other friends such as Anne and James Sutherland, Will Rueter, Stan Bevington, Rod MacDonald, Andrew Steeves and Nick Drumbolis provided much needed information. Hugh Anson-Cartwright contacted me as he located items that Glenn had printed or just designed. He had some early broadsides and copies of *Fernand Léger: The Bicycle* (generally just known as the "Bicycle poster").

The poster is Glenn's setting of Fernand Léger's poem about the bicycle, but the highlight is the bicycle and its rider that Glenn created and printed using wood type. While simple on a computer, this is a virtuoso performance by a letterpress printer. I had acquired a copy of the poster when Glenn printed it in 1985. It was framed and then hung in my older son's room. He took it with him when he moved out and I was without a copy. That was now corrected.

I spent time at Massey College's Robertson

Davies Library looking at its holdings and making notes—a catalogue entry of "miscellaneous items" included in the file folder was a previously unknown list prepared by Glenn, probably for the Massey College librarian, of his own printing from 1975 to 1987. The list gave the month of printing and the number of copies. It brought to light more items. The file included items not on the list but obviously Glenn's, which, if encountered in a different context, would escape notice as his work. The University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library also had a file devoted to Glenn's work that included a fairly large number of items, but these were not itemised in its catalogue and might not be recognised as Glenn's work if found alone. The Toronto Reference Library also had a small collection of Glenn's early work. Anne Goluska, his first wife and partner in imprimerie dromadaire, worked at the Toronto Reference Library and kept an eye on the fine printing collection, but it had nothing that was not at Massey College or the Fisher.

The time spent in the libraries had their amusements. One of the items found at the Fisher was a business card for "Damian Gryski, Magician"—my son and Glenn's godson. It was a gift from Glenn when Damian was 11 or 12 years old and I had forgotten all about it and, more significantly, it wasn't in my collection of Glenn's work. We soon found copies at home.

#### HATCHING A PLAN

In January 2014, I attended a lecture Brian Donnelly gave at St. Michael's College that discussed graphic design in Canada. The lecture referred to Robert Bringhurst's *The Surface of Meaning* (2006), and displayed pages from the book that showed *10 Poems by Norm Sibum* (William Hoffer, 1985) and *Liebhaber's Wood Type* (imprimerie dromadaire, 1987) both examples of Glenn's work. I used that to approach the librarians at St. Michael's about an exhibition of Glenn's designs and printing. Both Glenn and I are alumni of the college and, in fact, it is where I met Glenn in 1965. They were interested and we started the exhibition approval process. However, those plans came to end when it was determined that the ground floor level where the exhibition space was

located was in urgent need of renovations.

Everything quieted down. I kept looking for items to add to the list of Glenn's known works as well as for any items not in my collection. September 2016 brought an e-mail from Massey College librarian P.J. MacDougall wondering whether I would be interested in having an exhibition of Glenn's work at the college's Robertson Davies Library. I was very interested in having the exhibition, but the catch was that it was my responsibility to put it together. I had never curated a full-scale exhibition before.

I started with my list of Glenn's work. Fortunately, I had an electronic catalogue of all my private press collection. I had already entered not only the date and place of publication for each item but also the paper and typefaces used, dimensions, number of pages, binding details and details of any awards the publication won. Now I started to make notes about the stories that ought to accompany each piece—what could be said about the author of the text or the text itself or elements in the design. Glenn was not at hand to answer my questions about these items, making it a longer and slower process than I had imagined—and also nerve-wracking, because I was concerned that I was getting things wrong.

By chance, another opportunity for an exhibition intervened. Robert R. Reid was set to mark his 90th birthday in 2017, and he was being celebrated across the country. I could not make it to Vancouver to see the exhibition at Simon Fraser University, but I did make it to Montreal to see the exhibition at McGill University. I knew Massey College was having an exhibition of his

work, too. The focus of the Massey College exhibition was not examples of his work over the last 70 years but rather his most recent work, designed on his computer and circulated electronically each day under the auspices of David Bellman and CAUSA (Collective for the Advancement of Unified Studies in the Visual Arts). I proposed to P.J. MacDougall an exhibition of Robert Reid's letterpress printing to follow immediately after the electronic work. P.J. agreed. I learned a lot doing that exhibition. The major problem was the physical limitations of the exhibition space. You cannot show everything. There were only four cases and no wall space available. What should go in and what must, sadly, be left out? I learned some valuable lessons from the experience.

In November 2017, I encountered Sheril Hook, chief librarian of the John M. Kelly Library at St. Michael's, at an event and mentioned the Goluska exhibition. She was interested and arranged a meeting with her colleagues. Over the following months, the exhibition proposal expanded from one venue to two. Then the library's archivist, Simon Rogers, took the plans two steps further. He wanted to include other fine printing work from the library's holdings. This would give added context to Glenn's work. Moreover, because this was the library's 50th anniversary, he approached other libraries on the University of Toronto campus to host exhibitions of fine printing from their collections at the same time. As a consequence, Glenn's work was also to be on display at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, the E.J. Pratt Library at Victoria College and the John W. Graham Library of Trinity College.



*Glenn Goluska's work displayed as part of the Kelly Library exhibition.*



## TOUGH CHOICES

The sudden multiplication of venues posed a fresh problem: what to exhibit at Massey College, and what should appear at St. Michael's College? The two colleges are both on the main university campus but separated by Queen's Park. While the Kelly had a number of cases available for display, it also had wall space that could accommodate some of the CCA posters. I decided on several criteria. I would use the collections of the colleges as much as possible in the exhibition, and only draw material from my own collection if a strong argument could be made for its inclusion over one of the library items.

Then an opportunity arose in November 2018 for me to visit Bernadette Lefebvre, Glenn's widow, in Montreal to look at Glenn's archive. I was not able to look at all of the archive, but Bernadette generously allowed me to borrow items with the aim of including some of them in the exhibitions. Given the origin of these items and because some of these were unique, they seemed a far more suitable complement to the library holdings than anything from my personal collection.

Of the two college libraries, Massey College had the most extensive collection of Glenn's work because the Kelly library was not collecting fine printing when Glenn was in Toronto whereas Massey College was. In the Massey College exhibition, I inserted two small items from Glenn's archive—a memorial card that

Glenn did in remembrance of his father, and the linocut block of a portion of the illustration for *Brooklyn Bridge*. The text of the *Brooklyn Bridge* is a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky that Glenn illustrated with a linocut showing the Brooklyn Bridge. It is bound accordion style with the Bridge shown over nine panels and portions of the text also appearing in each panel. The lino was placed in the case beside the panel of the printed text. The Massey College collection does not include any CCA work, allowing the exhibition there to focus on Glenn's early career.

The Kelly is primarily an undergraduate library and they were also celebrating the opening of a new print studio. The library had wall space suitable for displaying the CCA posters. My focus here was to show students some aspects of the printing process of which they might not have any knowledge. In this regard, I was fortunate to be able to borrow items from Glenn's archive. These included a sheet from *Typographic Facts* (1985) and a sheet from *Liebhaber's Wood Type* (1987). Both sheets came directly off the press and were displayed prior to being folded and cut open. These could be displayed beside copies of the two books as distributed. I was also able to include Glenn's preliminary sketches for the covers of the English and French editions of the catalogue, *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* (1990) (in French, *Ernest Cormier et l'Université de Montréal* [1990]). The posters on display came from outside the Kelly



Glenn Goluska's work displayed as part of the Kelly Library exhibition.

library. Glenn's archive also supplied a copy of the *Léger Bicycle* poster and also a poster he did for a neighbourhood association, Société Historique de Saint-Henri, his neighbourhood in Montreal. I placed four posters that Glenn did for CCA as well as some CCA catalogues for the exhibitions that the posters advertised.

I provided detailed notes of the items for the exhibition cases at both colleges. Massey College made copies of the notes for its exhibited items for visitors to take away. There was also a very well-attended launch event at St. Michael's College which featured Dreadnaught Press cofounder Robert MacDonald, who knew Glenn and others in the printing fraternity (see Grant Hurley, "Witnessing the Remembering of Creation," elsewhere in this issue).

The first goal of Glenn's friends—to pay tribute to him and to bring knowledge of his work to a wider audience—has now been accomplished, and I was pleased to play a part in achieving it. The next goal will be to produce a catalogue identifying as much of Glenn's work as possible. I found copies of Glenn's work for the CCA as well as the McGill-Queens and UBC presses and several others throughout the University of Toronto library system, but the library's catalogue lacked any note about Glenn as the designer. A catalogue would help researchers, and the libraries themselves, to identify Glenn's work when they encounter it.

## FURTHER READING

Andrew Steeves, *Glenn Goluska in Toronto* (Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2016).

Crispin Elsted, "Private Press Profile: imprimerie dromadaire/Nightshade Press," *Amphora* 62 (1985), 20–23.

Glenn Goluska, "A Linotype for the Home," *The Devil's Artisan* 4 (1981), 25–27.

Glenn Goluska, "Confessions of a Former Vancouverphobe," *The Devil's Artisan* 18 (1986), 15–21.

"Glenn Goluska (1947–2011): A Singular Type," *Amphora* 159 (Winter 2011), 3–12.

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 ~ Chester Gyski is a collector of fine press materials, including the work of Glenn Goluska. He is a director of the Alcuin Society. He lives in Toronto.

