

# (M)ÖTHÊR TÕNGUÉ PRESS

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HIS ARTICLE represents the beginning of an *Amphora* series on private presses. It is the intention of the editors to initially cover private presses in the Lower Mainland of B.C. and on Vancouver Island and adjacent islands. We will then expand our coverage to other parts of B.C. and then eventually to the rest of Canada.

Our first press to be featured is (m)Öthêr Tõngué Press situated on Salt Spring Island and owned and operated by partners Mona Fertig and Peter Haase. The article is based on material supplied by Mona and from other material previously published in a variety of newspapers from which I have borrowed liberally.

I plan to ask each proprietor for the same four items of information: (1) a brief history of the press; (2) a brief description of the press (3) the types of materials the press is interested in publishing; (4) any thoughts about private presses in general or contemporary private press work. If readers have suggestions for additional questions as the series progresses, they will be most welcome.

## *History of (m)Öthêr Tõngué Press*

Mona herself reports that “Our press began in 1990 as an international underground literary periodical [(m)Öthêr Tõngués] which I ran for four years after my association with P.E.N. and attending the International P.E.N. Congress in Toronto and Montreal in 1989. I would publish poetry from “mother tongue” translated into English (side by side) from writers around the world. Then I started the first Canadian poetry chapbook contest which ran for four years. We would publish beautiful limited editions of 100 copies for the 1st and 2nd prize winners for the best unpublished poetry manuscripts. We wanted to publish something that would stand the test of time longer than the usual basic designed and stapled chapbooks. Something that people would love to handle and savour as art. Something that would satisfy visual as well as intellectual needs. Judges were well-known Canadian poets such as Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Phyllis Webb, Marilyn Bowering, etc. Winners also received award money. After four years of the

contest the press evolved into a private literary press. It was just too much work to read all those manuscripts. Since then, 1995, we have published 20 chapbooks and broadsides, two or three a year and increasing.”

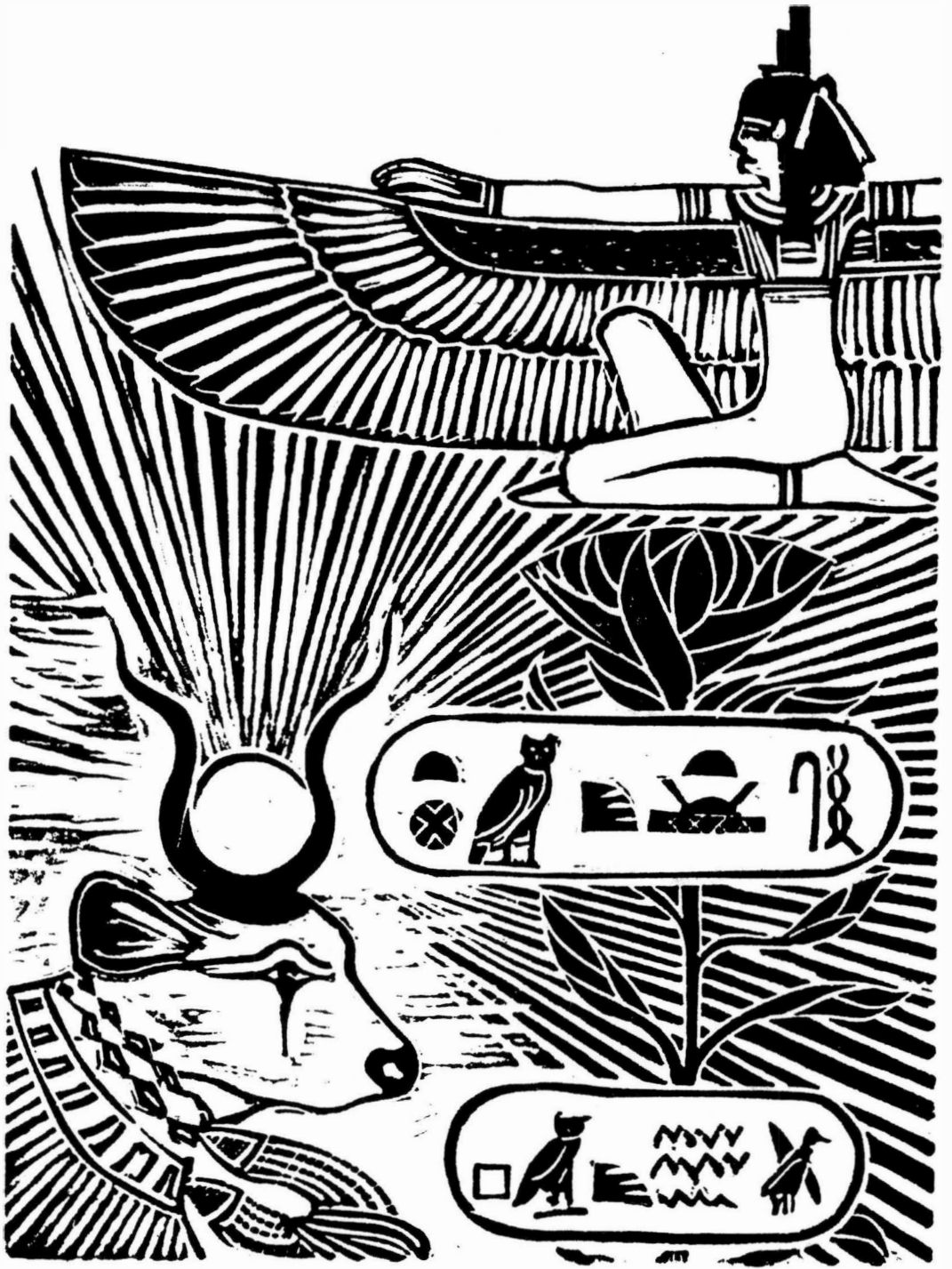
The letterpress equipment that fills the basement of Fertig and Haase’s home in Ganges on Salt Spring once belonged to master printer Frank Pengelley of Victoria. Pengelley had worked as a master printer along with his wife for over 60 years when Haase heard about him and went to visit him. Pengelley was surprised at Haase’s interest in what some would consider an obsolete trade with equipment Pengelley had been using for many years.

Soon after Pengelley passed away Haase bid on the equipment through a distant cousin of Pengelley who had no immediate family. Of the four or five bids received, Haase was the only bidder interested in saving all of the equipment and putting it to use. Much of it dates to the beginning of the last century.

After Fertig and Haase acquired the equipment and built a studio downstairs, Fertig thought to get in touch with Jim Rimmer, a master printer who teaches letter press and printed one of her books of poetry, *Releasing the Spirit* (Colophon Books) in 1982. “He has been a tremendous help,” says Fertig. This was the beginning of Fertig and Haase’s ongoing letterpress education. Another step was a visit to Arion Press in San Francisco. After Andrew Hoyem opened his shop to them on a Sunday, they received a tour of the premises and were further inspired. Fertig also took several book art workshops with Claire Van Vliet, one of the best book artists in North America.

Fertig’s first foray into publishing was in 1972, when a chapbook of her own poems was published by the Worker’s Compensation Board. A group of injured workers printed *The Illusive Unicorn*, her first book of poetry written when she was 18 years old, as part of their WCB physical therapy. “They printed it, but I designed it and did the cover and illustrations,” Fertig explains.

Unlike Fertig, Haase didn’t always work with books. His journey from electrician to becoming a printer and illustrator began in 1995. After Haase had a bad accident working on a construction site, he was forced to change his occupation. Soon Fertig and Haase spent many months trying to con-



*Illustration from Suite Ancient Egypt, Linocut by Peter Haase.  
See [www.mothersongpress.com](http://www.mothersongpress.com) for a description of this book.*

vince the WCB that letterpress printing was a viable career option for Haase and that he should be retrained in it. Haase did his training with Jim Rimmer, Barbarian Press, Blackstone Press and Anderson Press. They were obviously successful in this since, as mentioned above, they have managed to produce a total of twenty chapbooks and broadsides since 1995.

### *Description of the Press*

The name (m)Öthêr Tõnguê originates from Fertig's early interest in translated poetry from other languages. All the accents and grammatical touches in the (m)Öthêr Tõnguê logo reflects a visual diversity of languages.

Fertig's and Haase's books are the result of two creative minds working together, and a marriage of old and new technologies. Most of the inside pages, for example, are laid out by Fertig using QuarkXPress on her Macintosh and printed on special 80 lb papers, while all the covers and some special interior pages are hand-set by Haase, using time-honoured skills and traditional typefaces. Haase sets the type by hand and does the actual press work, drawing on a collection of old platen presses. He also illustrates the books with lino-cuts. Fertig is the editorial and design half of the team and handbinds and constructs all of the books.

Embossing, the process of creating a raised image on paper, is one particularly compelling application of old and new using one of (m)Öthêr Tõnguê's C&P platen presses. Haase described part of the process: "I drew the image, e-mailed it as an attachment to Victoria, and they etched it with a laser on nylon." The plates, created with the aid of computers and phone wires, are placed between the antique press and the paper. An enormous amount of pressure is applied and just like in the old days the image appears on the page, raised in texture.

The basement studio in the Fertig/Hasse home is described as a "living museum." The studio is filled with four huge, antique presses, a linotype machine made in 1906, about one hundred and sixty trays of type in California job cases, a display of finished books and broadsides, and an array of works in progress spread over the available work space.

A charming offshoot of the Press, and the fact that creative people need to

be particularly creative when it comes to their own financial well-being, is Fertig and Haase's BookLover's Cottage and a newly completed book art gift shop next to the press. The cottage is described as "A home away from home' for readers, writers and friends." It is further described as "a beautiful, bright and cosy vacation cottage ... available year-round, adult orientated." For further information visit [www.mothertonguepress.com](http://www.mothertonguepress.com).

### *The Press's Publishing Profile*

As Fertig reported directly to me, "We are interested in publishing Canadian writers (primarily poets) who have done their time and particularly those that have not been published for awhile as well as strong new Canadian voices, whose work I admire. We do not take unsolicited manuscripts." Following are descriptions of the press's two latest books:

#### *Fire in the Cover* by Maxine Gadd

The first book in 20 years by a legendary west coast poet, this volume contains 24 unpublished Galiano Island poems written between 1977 and 1984. \$55.00 + Mailing.

This beautiful book is 7 1/8 by 9 1/8", handsewn, with 52 unnumbered pages of text in Arial Black and Comic. The cover is hand-constructed to create a non-adhesive binding that slips around the body of the text. The cover paper is Keaykolour Metallics Rustic 80 lb text from Europe (with a unique surface sheen evocative of sheared oxidized metal or a burning wood fire). Title: Arial 60 @ 32 pt. with hummingbird embossed on the front cover and black ink behind the image, printed on a C&P Platen press by Peter Haase. Title and author and press letterpressed on the 1/4 spine. Press name embossed on the back cover. Folded cover end paper: Voice Rye, recycled 80 lb text. Inside text printed on a digital Xerox 480 on recycled Paradox Smokey 70 lb text. Text endpapers: Voice Rye. Center of book: a full page colour xerox of island midden (close-up photograph). Tipped-in linocut of Maxine's cabin by Peter Haase. Design, typesetting, layout, photography and book construction by Mona Fertig. Published in a limited edition of 100. Signed and numbered. Comes in an archival polyethylene bag.

*Poem Canzonio With Love to AMK* by P.K. Page.

P.K. Page is Canada's poet matriarch. Profoundly prolific at age 85, *Poem Canzonio With Love to AMK* is both a complex and a beautiful poem. \$155.00 + Mailing.

Six months in the making, *Poem Canzonio With Love to AMK* is an unpublished poem on 11 x 17" broadside of handmade deckled paper made with cotton, cedar, copper flakes and P.K. Page's fuchsia linen handkerchief. Four stanzas, eleven lines each, this poem is letterpressed in 14 pt. Italian Old Style with ligatures. Seven colour suicide linocut with underlying organic shapes in blues and copper around the border by Peter Haase. Printed on a Vandercook SP-15. Each broadside was hand-rolled through the press eight times. Backed and shrinkwrapped. Limited numbered and signed edition of 65.

These are descriptions of merely two of (m)Öthêr Tõnguê's creations. For descriptions of others and for ordering information please visit the press's website at [www.mothertonguepress.com](http://www.mothertonguepress.com).

### *Thoughts on Private Presses by Mona Fertig*

"There is lots of room to grow in this field. Compared to the States we are at the beginning stages of a new literary book arts revival/revolution in Canada where the old presses will be reused as art presses instead of newspaper presses and job printers. But we need to get a distribution system happening. Possibly a West Coast Private Press Guild or Association that promotes member's books to the public. Communication and networking will be the key. The Internet will be a great help to those who know how to use it. I'd like to see a Book Art Fair in Vancouver in the near future as well as a flea market for used presses, old type, etc., and eventually an old press museum and book arts center like San Francisco, New York, Chicago and in the Southern States. So much of this equipment is being dumped in back alleys in towns and cities. We need to save these presses and retain the experience of operating them before it's too late."

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