

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Robert Reid



The artists Harry and Jessie Webb came to my printing shop one evening in the early 1950s, with a new friend in tow, **George Kuthan**. Recently displaced from his home in Czechoslovakia, George was a graphic artist as addicted to making linocuts as I was to printing. For the rest of my time in Vancouver George became a major part of my printing career. I used his linocuts in every imaginable way. Probably best known is our book *Kuthan's Menagerie* (a sample of which is included with this copy of *Amphora*). One day early in 1960 he showed me colour proofs of linocuts of a number of zoo animals he had done. They were wonderful, and I immediately said "George, we must do a book of these." He agreed and I suggested that he write something about each animal, which he did in his charming broken English. Then I asked if he could do coloured initials to go with the text he had written. He did and these coloured initials were equally wonderful.

While *Kuthan's Menagerie* was our collaboration's high point, just as important — and certainly more widely seen — were George's many linocuts that appeared in issues of *B.C. Library Quarterly*, *Canadian Literature* and a book titled *An Academic Symposium* published by UBC. George's drawings were also wonderful, and Desmond Muirhead and I got him to illustrate a book called *Street Trees* published by Portland Electric Company. Desmond was so taken by the drawings that he talked the Vancouver Sun into a new Vancouver scene drawing by George each week. In 1962 these were published by Macmillan un-

der the title *Vancouver: Sights & Insights*.

Without George Kuthan, my life as a printer and designer would have been far less exciting. Graphic art and printers go together, and he was the only real professional doing graphic art in Vancouver during the 1950s, even though he had to keep his day job in a sawmill all that time. He produced a prodigious amount of work and never let me down on any of our projects. I left Vancouver in 1962, eventually landing at McGill University in Montreal. After my departure, George published his book of erotic linocuts, *Aphrodite's Cup*, which was printed by my old friend and pressman Ib Kristensen. Ib ended up coming to work with me in Montreal, and there was some discussion about George following as well, but that didn't come to pass. For all his talents, George's life was tortured in many ways. He was never accepted as an integral part of the Vancouver art community because he was such an anomaly: he wasn't in vogue by producing popular abstract paintings, and he wasn't a commercial illustrator as we think of them.

George was primarily a graphic artist and wonderful draftsman who also did watercolors. He died in 1966. Like any good artist, he has left behind a wealth of work for future generations to enjoy.



The George Kuthan prints reproduced in this issue of *Amphora* are from the collection of blocks in the UBC Library Rare Books & Special Collections. Proofs were pulled at Heavenly Monkey.