

NEVERMORE PRESS 1960

KUTHAN'S MENAGERIE *Completed*

Preface by Robert R. Reid



HEAVENLY MONKEY 2003
Vancouver

One day in 1960 George Kuthan showed

me some multi-color linocuts of animals he had done. They were wonderful, and I immediately said, "George, we must do a book of these!" That is how the story of *Kuthan's Menagerie of Interesting Zoo Animals* began. Now, 43 years later, I am able to write the ending.

Kuthan's Menagerie has been called the most imaginative private press book ever produced in Canada. That may have been true in 1960, but much has happened since. It is, however, undoubtedly the high point of my years of collaboration with George. We were introduced by the artists Harry & Jessie Webb in 1951. Born in 1916, George entered the University of Prague in 1939, to study art. Unfortunate timing; displaced from his home in Czechoslovakia by the war, he spent some time at art school in Paris, and then emigrated to Canada with his wife Arlyn shortly before we met.

George was as devoted to making linocuts as I was to printing. I left Vancouver eleven years after we met, but during that time George was a big part of my career as a printer. I used his linocuts in every possible way, including issues of *B.C. Library Quarterly* & *Canadian*

Literature. But *Kuthan's Menagerie* was our only fine press project together.

By 1960 my private press had published three limited edition books: *The Fraser Mines Vindicated, Gold, & The Journal of Norman Lee*. All dealt with early history of British Columbia, and George's linocuts presented the opportunity to do a book more in the *livre d'artiste* mode. George liked my idea, & agreed to write something about each animal, which he did in his charming broken English. Then I asked if he could cut initial letters to go with his text, & what letters he came up with—totally wonderful.

I had the perfect paper for the book. It was a British mould-made sheet called Golden Hind that a dealer in Toronto had imported and could not sell to anyone in the East. It was a thin sheet, with a lot of show through, so we only printed one side, in the Japanese style. This also gave a little more bulk to the book. Although the linocuts were horizontal, the book had to be bound vertically because we couldn't accommodate a landscape page on my Miller cylinder press.

The book became a multi-cultural endeavor, with people from all around


the world helping. Thinking we would never assemble such a diverse group again, we thought up a new press name under which to publish the book—the Nevermore Press. Unfortunately this created some bibliographic confusion over the years, with the imprint being mistakenly attributed to George; as the colophon states, *Menagerie* was issued from the Private Press of Robert and Felicity Reid. It was not until two years later that George undertook the role of publisher, issuing the limited edition book *Aphrodite's Cup* under the imprint Honey-suckle Press.

The entire edition of 130 copies was sent to Fritz Brunn in Victoria. He bound them in quarter leather with patterned Japanese paper sides; a big mistake, as I see after all these years that it does not wear well at all. Perhaps it is fortunate that not all the copies were bound this way (or at all!), which brings us to the story's conclusion.

We sold copies as they were ready (signed and numbered by George after being bound). As is common with these endeavors, the plan was for sales to pay for binding subsequent copies. As publisher this was my responsibility, but after 60 copies I was distracted by more immediate matters of family & business, & the unbound sheets languished in the bindery. When I left Vancouver in 1962 they were still there.

When Fritz died, in 1973, I was moving from Montreal to New York & had all but forgotten about the sheets. They were eventually purchased from Fritz's estate in the '80s by the booksellers William Hoffer and Stephen Lunsford, both of whom championed my books as milestones in the history of printing in Canada. But Bill & Stephen couldn't decide how best to issue the sheets so, after a few sets had been distributed, the remainder were stored away again.

When Rollin Milroy was researching a bibliography of my early Vancouver private press books several years ago, Stephen (by then the sole owner of the sheets) offered to supply pages from incomplete copies in storage for inclusion in our book, *Reid's Leaves*. After that project, Rollin and Stephen had the idea of issuing *Kuthan's Menagerie of Interesting Zoo Animals* in the present format. So, thanks to the foresight of the booksellers who saved them from Fritz's bindery, we are able to finally issue these "lost" copies from the original edition.

Without George Kuthan, my life as a printer and designer would have been far less exciting. But George's life was tortured in many ways, and despite all his talents he had to keep his day job at a sawmill the whole time we worked together. He died in 1966 but like any good artist, he left behind a wealth of work for future generations to enjoy. 



Kuthan's Menagerie Completed

was published in 2003, in an edition of

50 copies signed and numbered by Robert R. Reid.

In addition to an original, unbound copy of *Kuthan's Menagerie*, it contained a new title page, preface and colophon, all printed at Heavenly Monkey in 18-pt Perpetua on the same Golden Hind paper used for the book. This reduced facsimile of the title page and preface has been printed from polymer plates by David Clifford at Black Stone Press. Seventy-five copies have been printed on Arches Cover, for distribution at a talk by Robert R. Reid on May 13, 2004 at the Vancouver Public Library. There are also 350 copies printed on Mohawk Superfine, issued as a keepsake for the Alcuin Society members.

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Printed in Canada