

Hot Type! Live Performance Typesetting

A letterpress studio featuring Woodward's heritage flatbed press is only one component of a brand new community media arts centre in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

By Honey Mae Caffin



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A ROOMFUL of people, a letterpress, an assortment of wood, metal and vinyl type, DJs, VJs, MCs, live video streaming and Twitter feeds are placed together the same room? The result is Fresh Hot Type! live performance typesetting.

On October 24, 2009, W2 Community Media Arts—a community arts centre set to open in Vancouver's redeveloped Woodward's complex in spring 2010—in association with LIVE Biennale and Heart of the City Festival, launched the first ever Hot Type! event, dubbed "Fresh Hot Type!" The event inaugurated W2's letterpress studio winter 2009–10 community access workshop series.

Fresh Hot Type! was a celebration of old and new remixed. Participants explored innovative ways to bring both analog and digital communications media side by side, in a fun environment where they could express their ideas.

What is live performance typesetting, exactly? In no particular order: a video feed of the event

was streamed live back onto the Web. Through the social networking service Twitter, folks who were not able to attend the party in person participated by sending their tweets. The VJs projected these

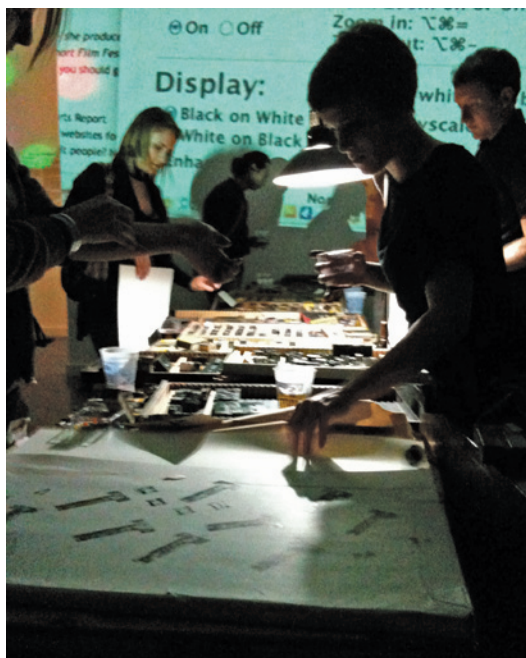
Twitter streams back into the room.

The evening's host MC, Mike Sheehan of Victoria, alternating with guest MCs, rhymed Twitter-length lyrics freshly typeset by the audience on the W2 letterpress, over an eclectic mix of tunes by DJs the Funk Hunters, Revise, Carlo and Albert van Abbe.

The party also celebrated two other historic events: the successfull

conclusion of the first ever Fresh Media conference (freshmedia.me) and the Bridge to a Cool Planet climate change community action (www.bridgecoolplanet.ca), both of which had taken place earlier the same day.

W2's letterpress is an original heritage flatbed printing press used by Woodward's department store to print advertising flyers. It is currently housed in the W2 Culture and Media House



Participants collaborate in "live typesetting" at the first Hot Type! event. Honey Mae Caffin photo.



Poster advertising Hot Type II, created on the former Woodward's press.



Photo by Kris Krüg

at 112 West Hastings Street, across from the former Woodward's building, while construction of the W2 Community Media Arts Centre at Woodward's is underway.

Besides a letterpress studio, W2 will feature a 150-capacity performance space, community TV studio, FM radio station, gallery, social enterprise café, telepresence and mobile media programs, and more. W2 brings together hybrid

art forms, community art practices, individual human development and community cultural development in a single environment.

It will be home to a diverse grouping of Vancouver arts and community service organizations offering developmental programs in writing, radio and television production, painting, sculpture, photography, mixed media, video and cross-media. W2 includes Co-op Radio (102.7 FM), CJSF Radio (90.1 FM), the Kootenay School of Writing, Indigenous Media Art Group, W2 Youth Media Lab, KickstArt and others.

After W2's relocation into the Woodward's heritage building this spring, the letterpress studio will become a permanent community cultural heritage asset. This community access program is designed to provide access to local Downtown Eastside residents into the \$400-million Woodward's redevelopment, from which most have become alienated.

The letterpress studio will host a range of workshops and open studio access as well as host artists-in-residence. This winter, the studio hosted artists-in-residence Favianna Rodriguez, an internationally renowned printmaker and community activist from the Bay Area; the B.C.-based First Nations printmakers Tania Willard and Marika Swan; and Vancouver's own design professional/artist Jeremy Crowle, who is reimagining typography as a contemporary interdisciplinary practice that can engage community expression.

The workshop series, generously supported by the B.C. Arts Council, is a W2 Letterpress Studio initiative to imagine the neighbourhood's future by empowering Downtown Eastside residents with lead type and printmaking skills to reclaim public space and bring forward community memory. As Woodward's reopens, artists-in-residence will share their printmaking skills to collectively re-insert community aspirations into the largest redevelopment in Vancouver's history.

Hot Type II will take place February 18, 2010, at the W2 Culture and Media House, 112 West Hastings, Vancouver, B.C. Visit www.creativetechnology.org for more information, including more photos and a video of the inaugural event and its audience-generated prints.

~ Honey Mae Caffin is a Vancouver graphic designer and director of W2 Community Media Arts.