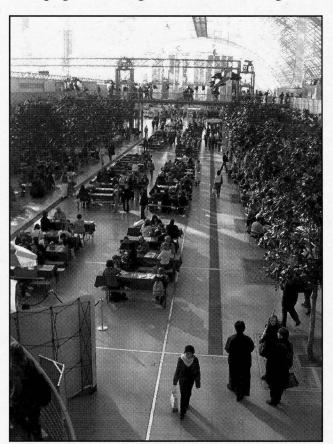# ALCUIN GOES TO LEIPZIG

The Alcuin 2004 Book Design Award winners mark Canada's debut at the German book fairs.
Leah Gordon and a few other members joined the trip.

BOOKS, PUBLISHERS, BOOKSELLERS and readers have been travelling to Leipzig every year since 1497, when Kaiser Maximilian I granted the town the privilege of holding trade fairs. In 1594, the first Leipzig trade fair catalogue was published (for booksellers). And over 400 years later (overlooking a 20-year hiatus during the Second World War and Cold War years), the fair continues; but 2006 marked the first time with an official Canadian presence.

Since 1991, the German group Stiftung Buchkunst has organized an exhibit and competition called The Most Beautiful Books from all over the World as part of the larger book fair. In June 2005, they contacted the Society and asked us if we would participate in the competition on behalf of Canada, since we run the only national competition of its type in the country. We jumped at the chance and sent our 2004 prizewinning books to Germany for exhibition at the fall book fair in Frankfurt. After that exhibit, the Stiftung packed up the material and sent it to Leipzig for the international competition in February and the subsequent presentation of awards at their exhibit in March.

A miscellaneous little group (Anne Yandle of Vancouver, Jeannine Green of Edmonton, Marlene Chan of Ottawa and myself) decided that we couldn't miss the opportunity to go to the first international exhibit of our material. We were joined on the trip by one of the prizewinning designers from the 2004 competition, typographer/printer/publisher Alan Stein (Church Street Press in Parry Sound, Ontario), whose book *In Smoke* was included in the exhibit.

Leipzig was buzzing with excitement, as I gather it does during the book fairs. Advertising

posters and flags lined all the streets: "Leipzig liest!" ("Leipzig reads!") over a picture of an open book. It takes nearly 20 minutes to walk directly from one end of the fair complex to the other—five enormous glass halls, strung together loosely with buttressed walkways. Outside the halls stood an enormous statue, probably 40 feet long by perhaps 15 feet high, of the complete Brockhaus *Encyclopedia* standing on edge, every volume labelled.

The fair features a series of interviews and readings that take place almost on the half-hour throughout the various buildings. One of the authors featured was Canadian Joseph Boyden, whose translated novel *Three Day Road* (*Der lange Weg*, Knaus Verlagsgruppe) has become a bestseller in Germany, selling an amazing 20,000 copies in its first three weeks.

He was interviewed (in English) and filmed at the fair for the popular German TV show *Das blaue Sofa (The Blue Sofa)*. The only other Canadian to give a reading was Alan Stratton, author of *Chandra's Secret*. In fact, this was the only other reading in English, which is not nearly as widely spoken in the former East Germany (where Russian was the second language of choice) as it is in the west.

The Most Beautiful Books from all over the World exhibition garners an enormous amount of interest at the fair.

Three Day Road *author Joseph Boyden with Astrid Holzhamer, Canadian cultural attaché, Berlin.*

Despite being held in the last hall (Hall 5), at the very back, it was crowded with viewers. The books are arranged by country (under "K" for Kanada) and shelved (under close watch) so that people can browse through them. The exception is the limited editions category, with books beautifully displayed in locked glass cases.

The winner of Die Goldene Lettere (best in show) was Marie-Cécile Noordzij, designer of *Jakob Demus: The Complete Graphic Work, 1983–2005,* edited by Ed de Heer (Hercules Segers Stichting, Amsterdam). The gold medal was won by Joost Grootens, designer of *Metropolitan World Atlas,* by Arjen van Susteren (010 Publishers, Rotterdam). Silver medals were won by Clemens Theobert Schedler (Büro für konkrete Gestaltung), designer of *Strategien des Handwerks: Sieben Porträts außergewöhnlicher Projekte in Europa,* edited by Landschaft des Wissens (Haupt Verlag AG, Bern/Stuttgart/Vienna), and by Irma Boom (Irma Boom Office), designer of *Blizzard of White,* by Ellen Gallagher (The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh; Hauser & Wirth, Zurich/London).

Five bronze medals were awarded, and five "Honorary Appreciations." The 14 awards were selected from a shortlist of 66 titles, chosen from the 634 books submitted by 34 countries, 18 of which had shortlisted entries. Four Canadian designers were among those shortlisted:

❖ Michael Torosian, designer of *Dave Heath: Korea,* by Michael Torosian (Lumiere Press)

❖ Anne Tremblay, designer of *Le Visuel Dictionnaire Thématique: Définitions,* by Jean-Claude Corbeil and Ariane Archambault (Québéc Amérique, Montréal)

❖ Tim Inkster and Paul Hodgson, designers of *Looking for Snails on a Sunday Afternoon,* by Rudolf Kurz (The Porcupine's Quill).

While we returned from the fair, the books remained. The Alcuin Society contributed a set of our winning books from 2004, as we shall again this year, to the Museum of Type and Design (located in the Deutsche Bibliothek in Leipzig). As well, the three winners of last year's Limited Edition awards also chose to contribute copies of their books (which usually are returned after the Society's competition), thereby completing the set.

Leah Gordon is chair of the Book Design Awards Committee. She lives in Vancouver.