

- ~ *The Life and Art of David Marshall*  
By Monika Ullmann  
(Mother Tongue Publishing, 2008, \$34.95)
- ~ *Rocksalt:*  
*An Anthology of Contemporary BC Poetry*  
Edited by Mona Fertig and Harold Rhenisch  
(Mother Tongue Publishing, 2008, \$24.95)

Mona Fertig chose a fortuitous time for the metamorphosis of her (m)Öthêr Tõngué Press into Mother Tongue Publishing and the appearance of her first two trade titles. *The Life and Art of David Marshall* initiates the series, Unheralded Artists of B.C., in an evolving art milieu more receptive than she dared hope. *Rocksalt: An Anthology of Contemporary B.C. Poetry* coincides with a British Columbian self-awareness spurred by the province's 150th anniversary in 2008 and the Olympics in 2010.

Thirty years ago Mona Fertig made herself forever a part of Vancouver arts, letters and counter-culture by opening her Literary Storefront in Gastown. A lifesize rag person – I would not call her a “doll” – presided from the window. In the tradition of West Coast coffee houses and underground bookstores, the Literary Storefront sponsored readings and workshops, lent books, offered members copying services and the use of an IBM Selectric typewriter, and published a newsletter.

Abandoning the city for Salt Spring Island in the late 1980s, Fertig and husband Peter Haase established (m)Öthêr Tõngué Press to print limited edition letterpress chapbooks. Mother Tongue's two inaugural works, though differing in intent and presentation, together carry on Mona Fertig's very personal approach to the making of books.

Unheralded Artists grew from Fertig's determination to showcase the work of her father, the painter George Fertig. In the course of her research she found a generation of artists who had slipped between the cracks of changing trends. When Vancouver's international art presence came to depend more and more on post-modernist installations and photoconceptualism,

institutions and art schools had no room for outmoded modernism and traditional media. Or so it seemed.

As subject of the first of a planned 20 books in the series, Fertig chose not her father but his colleague, sculptor David Marshall. Marshall's work is on show in Vancouver's Van Dusen Gardens but *The Life and Art of David Marshall* puts the artist in his rightful context as an international figure in the Modernist tradition of Henry Moore.

Fertig can gloat over the volume's success as a vehicle to showcase Marshall's art and force attention to be paid. Printed on paper of just the right gloss to highlight the spectacular photographs, handsomely printed and bound by Friesens, the book has the heft Fertig desires for it.

Monika Ullmann, a freelance writer and editor with close ties to art and artists, tells the story of the man and his art from a viewpoint perhaps unjustly neglected but her insistent reiteration of grievances against the local establishment wears after a while. While choosing to distance himself from prevailing trends, Marshall was not adverse to activism and joined other groups as part of the “Pendulum” group that packed the Vancouver Art Gallery AGM in 1958 to counter the perceived “in” group.

Moreover, signs indicate that Mother Tongue could be less defensive in future volumes. Deborah Campbell, quoting art teacher Liz Magor (mocked by Ullman for her use of “artspeak”), notes in a recent issue of *Canadian Art* that students are shifting back to traditional media: “Since the shame veil has been lifted, you're not ashamed to choose painting or sculpture . . . I hope you're not ashamed to choose photoconceptualism either. But no matter what medium you choose, you've got to be prepared to contribute something.” The Unheralded Artists series must emphasize the contribution and minimize the whining. A new generation stands ready to appreciate Marshall and his peers.

*Rocksalt*, perfect-bound and much less glossy than *David Marshall*, immediately attracts with its mysteriously gorgeous cover painting by Diana Dean. Rock for mountains and salt for sea, the anthology proposes a “snapshot of what B.C. poets are working on right now” and includes only poems not previously published.

As the first anthology of British Columbia poetry since Fred Candelaria's *New: West Coast; 72 Contemporary British Columbia Poets* and Patricia M. Ellis' *Western Windows: a Comparative Anthology of Poetry in British Columbia* (both appeared in 1977), Rocksalt could have been an encyclopaedia or a sampling. Mother Tongue opted for the latter.

While there are surprising omissions in the volume – Lorna Crozier, Brian Brett, Patrick Lane and Marlene Cookshaw, for instance – 289 poets submitted work and 108 are included. The collection includes a poem from each, a short biography and a statement regarding their craft. The book would lose little from the omission of the statements (which border on the bafflegab of which Ullmann accused the art establishment), and gain from a more attractive arrangement of the poems themselves. Too often the last few lines of a poem trail sadly overleaf, losing visual contact with its body. Fertig's own "Year of the Dog" is one of these.

Both books suffer from the use of the abbreviation "B.C." for British Columbia throughout the text and even on the covers. Will the abbreviation be immediately meaningful to those beyond our provincial borders? I quibble but these books are so close to real excellence that I lament such imperfections.

REVIEWED BY PHYLLIS REEVE

~ *Pie Tree Press*

By Jim Rimmer

(Gaspereau Press, 2008, \$59.95)

~ *In Black and White*

By Wesley Bates

(Gaspereau Press, 2008, \$59.95)

Gaspereau Press has stepped up to champion Canada's private presses with two hard-back trade-edition autobiographies by British Columbia's Jim Rimmer and Ontario's Wesley Bates. Both books are commercial takes on earlier limited editions by smaller presses; the Pie Tree Press' *Leaves from the Pie Tree* (US \$650) and Bird & Bull's edition of Bates' *In Black & White* (US \$275).

*The Pie Tree Press* presents what Jim Rimmer describes in his own conclusion as, "a scrap-

book rather than a proper piece of bookwork. But perhaps the apparent lack of direction is its direction." It is an example of both the modesty and clarity evident in Rimmer's account of his life in printing, typography, illustration and type design. Rarely does a career unfold in perfect order, and Rimmer's book is a tale of a type designer's working life, one with its own concentric patterns, its own unity. Part autobiography. part typefounding manual, part type sampler.

Rimmer takes us on a journey beginning in Vancouver with his youthful dissatisfaction with formal education, his apprenticeship to the typesetting trade, later a freelance typography and design career (still in Vancouver), and ultimately the establishment of The Pie Tree Press in New Westminster. He taught himself how to cut and found type, and he spells out his methods and techniques in detail. The book concludes with a parade of digital types Rimmer has created. *The Pie Tree Press* is beautifully written with a raconteur's skill. Rimmer's recollections form short stories with their own shape and he is a compassionate observer of the characters that populate his past.

Wesley Bates rolls out a clever narrative with *In Black & White* that reveals the development of an artist through recollections and insights. Sometimes the narrative flow is a bit choppy, but my great discovery in reading Wesley Bates isn't that he is a talented artist and accomplished wood engraver – I knew that already – but that he's also a cracking good writer.

Bates begins with an early childhood connection to art that he forged through a set of wood engravings illustrating an edition of *Wuthering Heights*. Then he jumps ahead to the 1970s with his first interaction with wood engraving tools. As the book progresses, he draws a word portrait of the city of Hamilton in the 1970s and early 1980s, a vibrant urban environment full of artists and writers. He writes: "I wanted to illustrate texts that were proven and available, yet uncommon." Many neophytes entering the world of the private press will relate to Bates' own experience, such as the description of his early printing efforts, and the pile of waste paper nearly equal to the finished sheets.