

CODEX OPENS TO SUCCESS

The CODEX Foundation's ambitious first biennial book fair and symposium, "The Fate of the Art: The Hand Printed Book in the 21st Century," took place in Berkeley, California, in February. The purpose of the CODEX Foundation is not only to host this book fair, but to promote broader understanding and appreciation of the book arts. While the exhibition hall offered the widest possible range of contemporary book arts at work, the conceptual aspects of the foundation's goals were addressed through the three-day symposium, drawing speakers and panellists from across North America and Europe. Amphora asked book artist and CODEX exhibitor TARA BRYAN for some comments on the event (below). We also invited the other exhibitors from across Canada to contribute their personal highlights from the event (see sidebars).

For an inaugural event with such ambitious scope—in terms of both participants and purpose—the quality and quantity of exhibitors at CODEX were impressive. That they (we) came from across North America, from the U.K. and Europe was a testament to the organizers' skill and planning, and provided a fabulous opportunity for all who attended.

The symposium, limited to 200 attendees, was sold out, as were the 100 tables for the book fair. A diverse array of book artists, fine press publishers, bookbinders, papermakers, librarians, collectors and more gathered to consider the current state and future of the handmade book.

Berkeley in February is an idyllic destination for a Newfoundlander (or Ontarian, Midwesterner or New Englander) who has a long wait for any sign of spring to appear at home, and the promise of meeting with 200 or so other like-minded spirits from around the globe is a great enticement. The cancellation by the South African writer, painter and activist Breyten Breytenbach was disappointing, but overall, I felt the event was a great success. I made some sales and new contacts, but I know from my conversations that sales were uneven; some exhibitors sold out and others sold nothing at all. Attendance was estimated at 700 people, ranging from well-informed collectors to students and curious book fair

Marnie Parsons—an author, editor and budding printer based in St. John's—attended CODEX with Tara Bryan.

TABLES and tables and tables of some of the most striking fine press books I've had the privilege and pleasure to see. That's how I remember CODEX. Rarely have my eyes stretched wider or drunk better than they did those few days. There were books I'd long heard of and wanted to see: the boxed four-piece fold-out of Robert Bringhurst's polyphonic New World Suite Number Three, for instance. Somewhere over the American Midwest, at how many thousands of feet in the air, it occurred to me that that book might be at CODEX—an appropriate spot for such a realization—and what a delight finally to meet the book at the New York Center for Book Arts' table.

There were books I wanted to buy so very much that I thought long and hard about going deeply into debt: yes, the astonishing pop-up opera alphabet book would have required that and then some, but would have been worth it. I visited these two and many other books repeatedly during the book fair, looking at them with longing and great respect. But the book I've found myself telling friends about over and over

since CODEX is Almost Jerusalem, Chevington Press's stunning publication of the confessions of Nat Turner, leader of an American slave insurrection in 1831, dictated shortly before his execution.

Designed and printed by D.R. Wakefield in an edition of 50, on Magnani Acqueforte mould-made paper, with original etchings printed on paper from Wookey Hole, *Almost Jerusalem* is 13 by 9 inches. The text had been set in 12-point Plantin and printed on a 19th-century Albion press. Two of the etchings are double-fold pages, three full-page and two smaller, set in the text. They have a richness and subtlety, a velvety depth, a mingled compassion, humanity and violence that are literally breathtaking. But what touched me most profoundly about the book were the proportions of its pages—these are as eloquent, understated and intelligent as any I've seen.

The text block is relatively small, with very little space between the lines, and it occupies less than half the page. I remember the bottom margins as almost as large as the text blocks themselves, though time and memory may have shifted slightly those relations. What stopped me every time I turned the book's pages was the striking opposition of white and black: the black justified left and right, so tightly constrained, so visibly confined and overwhelmed by the white of the page. It's been years since I first read Turner's confessions, but I remember being deeply affected by them then. They've been given new and poignant life in Wakefield's book; his simple and thoughtful design serves its text so beautifully, is such a finely turned metaphor for its content, that Turner's tragedy and his inherent dignity are made immediate to the eye.



novices (although I felt that the latter two groups were extremely underrepresented). Perhaps the next CODEX event will be better promoted to the public, with more emphasis placed on increasing awareness among the wider public interested in the arts but not aware of the book arts.

The symposium began mid-morning on Tuesday, February 12, with Sarah Bodman's presentation on contemporary book artists in the U.K. Entitled *The Hybrid Lexicon: An Overview of Contemporary Artists Publishing in the U.K.*, Bodman's talk included images of numerous young artists, and she talked about her work as Research Fellow for Artists' Books at the Centre for Fine Print Research, University of the West of England, Bristol. We were introduced to an array of work that explored new forms, expanded the boundaries of book work and provided an exciting beginning to the conference. An enthusiastic proponent of book arts, Bodman began the conference with a bang.

After lunch, Filipe Ehrenberg, one of the symposium organizers, presented *Cutting and Pasting: Metaphor of Life*. Ehrenberg is a relaxed and quite entertaining speaker. He presented an overview of his diverse experience in printing, which includes cutting and printing his body. Originally trained as a graphic designer, Ehrenberg is known as a draughtsman, painter, book artist, performance artist and cultural liaison.

CODEX

He spoke about books “happening” to him. The range of his interests and production is fascinating, pushing the limits of whatever medium he is working in, and his free-flowing process made him an interesting ingredient in the mix of speakers.

Tuesday evening there was a preview of the book fair for participants and the media, during which wine and hors d'oeuvres were served in the lobby. I found myself too tired from travelling and sitting most of the day to look at the other exhibitors' work attentively, but I got a sense of the magnitude of the work present and realized that it would be impossible for me, as both exhibitor and symposium attendee, to absorb it all. I did see enough to be amazed and delighted by the range of work, and over the course of the fair I made several short forays around the room. I was not, however, able to really peruse the displayed work thoroughly or even to visit all of the tables.

That the following two days' big

Lucie Lambert

Les éditions Lucie Lambert

PETER KOCH, a man with a vision, achieved his goal *de main de maître*. The CODEX Foundation was indeed a marketplace of ideas, of books and of knowledge. Koch was in charge, forefront, taking full responsibility for what was happening, and like Moses, he opened the way to all those who were present—bookmakers, book publishers, book collectors, librarians, curators, writers, artists, typographers, printers, bookbinders, readers and book lovers—to the promised land of communication, of cross-pollination and of business.

This event gave me the chance to widen my cognitive perspective by listening to Robert Bringhurst's presentation *Spiritual Geometry*. He

Rosemarie Keough

Nahanni Productions

THE sheer scale and scope of Peter Koch's vision for the CODEX Foundation was impressive: the founding of a biannual book arts festival attracting participants from as far as Russia, Australia, Colombia and across Europe as well as from the U.S.A. and Canada. My personal highlight was the reunion of the artistic community of which I am proud to be member; I also relished the opportunity to meet people, new to me, who share similar passions. I was delighted that here was a venue where I finally was able to talk face to face with people with whom I have corresponded through the years, such as Steven Albari of 21st Editions, Publishers of Fine Art Photography Books, and Carol Holden, curator of Canadiana at the British National Library. Perhaps not so surprisingly, the draw of CODEX being so strong, during the symposium I finally crossed

paths with Robert Bringhurst and Lucie Lambert, both of whom I hadn't chanced to meet here in British Columbia despite being near neighbours—thanks so much for the introduction, Rollin!

To say hello to and share news with collectors of our work, including Ruth Rogers of Wellesley College, Duke Collier of Boston and Mark Dimunation of the Library of Congress was as important for me as getting to know other private and institutional collectors and introduce them first-hand to our body of work. Andrew McGeachin, shop manager of Henry Sotherans of London's Piccadilly, came to see ANTARCTICA, and during discussions we realized that a few years back, Andrew's good friend Angus Robb, book manager of Bond Street's Asprey, had recommended to us that we approach him to see if Sotherans could promote our volume in England. This lead we never had time to follow up on, and coincidentally here at CODEX Andrew found us.

referred to letterforms as snails—“snails are breathing, living geometry”; to writing as spiritual geometry—“Scripts are spiritual geometry made visible with material instruments”; and to all design and poetry as an expression of the wounded human—“Imperfection is essential to life in any design.”

CODEX gave me the ideal conditions to meet face to face with my peers, with librarians of many American institutions, with private collectors and with book dealers. I sold copies of *Conversations with a Toad* by Robert Bringhurst to the Library of Congress, Stanford University and Smith College. It was a wonderful experience and the future is promising! Thanks to Peter Koch, *maître d'oeuvre*.

See www.lucielambert.com for examples of Lucie's work.

lectures began at 8:30 a.m. was a source of frustration, making me feel like I had landed back in a university classroom rather than at a conference. Stefan Soltek's lecture *Verso Recto: Bookart as a Matter of Sidesteps* used historic examples of German typography and calligraphy as a backdrop for the book arts of the late 20th century and was the most formally academic of the presentations.

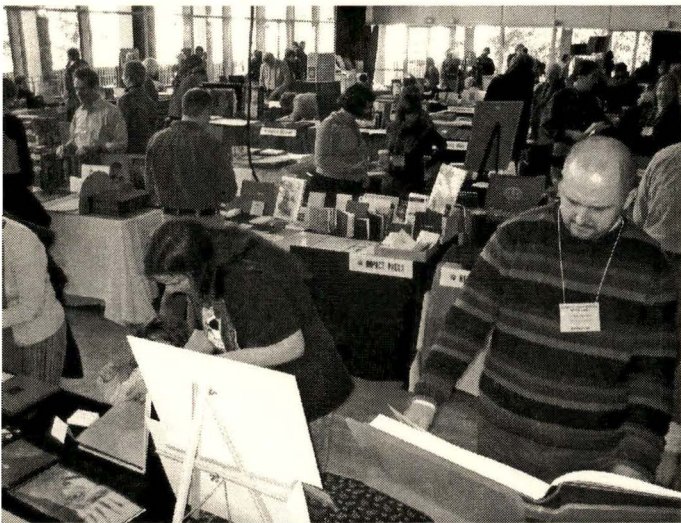
I was disappointed by the panel discussions, which were not moderated, allowing the presenters to use up the entire hour-and-a-half time slot and leaving no time for Q&A or discussion. Perhaps these talks were interesting and useful to the representatives of universities and libraries attending the conference, but I found them long-winded and irrelevant to my practice as a book artist or to the development of critical thinking about books as art. Perhaps I have spent too much time holed away in my studio, but I had the sense

Most stimulating, on an intellectual and emotional level, was the fertile exchange of ideas during the insightful lectures and panel discussions, also throughout the symposium among the creators of artist's books, fine press books, distinctive handmade papers and supple bookbinding leathers. Among the most satisfying experiences for me was the response to our tome ANTARCTICA by the talented Dmitry Sayenko—papermaker, letterpress printer, author, woodcut artist and publisher from Russia. Dmitry's unfulfilled dream since childhood has been to explore the Antarctic. As he lives in St. Petersburg, a world centre for polar research, his dream is constantly fuelled. Dmitry was visibly moved by our volume, and I shared with him story upon story of our experiences. It was my delight to be able to give of myself to another sensitive artist who was so appreciative of our art, our subject matter and our journey. Perhaps, though, it was the enveloping bear hug of greeting from Crispin

Elsted that warmed me the most, through and through, along with the wonderful camaraderie shared during a luncheon with him and Frances McDowall of Old Stile Press. CODEX is a truly international event that everyone who enjoys the book arts should make a point of attending.

Details of the Keoughs' work and ANTARTICA can be seen at www.keough-art.com.





that these presentations might have served better as promotional fundraising talks to alumni or college board members than as presentations at a symposium intended to initiate significant critical dialogue.

Robert Bringhurst's Thursday morning (again, too early) talk *Spiritual Geometry: The Book as a Work of Art* was, for me, the highlight of the conference. In his dry, understated speaking style, Bringhurst talked about natural geometry, architecture, linguistics, and the difficulties of creating the fluidity and elegance of calligraphic design within the constraints of typography, using snails, gondolas and Persian script as some of his visual examples. A master at drawing parallels illustrated by unusual visual examples, Bringhurst took his audience on a spiralling journey ending where it began, with the image of two snails on the rim of a flower pot in his garden.

Apparently chief organizer Peter Koch heard opinions similar to mine regarding the panel discussions, and it reflects well on the organization that his response has been to listen and incline against including them at the next CODEX. "We will try for a very interesting group of speakers for the next event—not the usual characters seen at all fine print and artist book conferences—and also to get better public response," Koch said. But the really important result of

Rollin Milroy *Heavenly Monkey*

CODEX was a madhouse, a very intense and busy few days of talking to dealers and collectors, and trying to keep names and commitments straight in my head. By the end of the second day, I needed to decompress, and that's how and why the highlight of my week in Berkeley actually was tangential to the fair.

For years I have been hearing about the party Peter Howard throws at Serendipity Books on the Wednesday before the biannual fair of the American Booksellers Association in San Francisco (which CODEX was wisely timed to immediately precede). Serendipity is famous, and Peter perhaps more so, thanks to his mentorship of several generations of young booksellers as well as to his unique pricing policies (about which two pamphlets I know of have been published): the prices in the books don't necessarily mean much; customers collect what they want, and prices are adjusted by Peter at the desk, depending on the books' codes, his mood and the kind of impression you make.

I wasn't crashing, though I don't think that would be a hard thing to do. Claudia Cohen, whose book *Chasing Paper* HM Editions debuted (and sold out) at CODEX, was invited (she's practically on a monthly payment plan with Serendipity). We—Claudia, her fellow Easthampton binder Sarah Creighton, and artist Sarah Horowitz (whose Wiesedruck Press is producing some stunning editions, the next one an English and Hebrew alphabet collaboration with Claudia)—arrived about 7:30, greeted by a huge table of fantastic food, a few dozen people and a women's choir. There was more food in a tent outside (the Polynesian roast pig had been carted out a few hours before,

but there was still plenty left), along with the bar. After eating what was my best meal (with the most courses) during the trip—no small boast in that city during that week—we each drifted off to the particular corner of the labyrinthine shop that appealed, occasionally encountering each other as we wandered, drink in hand. I made the supreme sacrifice of letting Claudia buy the chromolithographed Nonesuch *Conte de Maitre Espapidour*, bound in limp vellum, that I'd found in the French section (the sacrifice made all greater when it was knocked down to a paltry \$25!). A true collector, she's had the good form to acknowledge this sacrifice several times.

Sarah H. found a small book from the 1930s filled with multicolour linocuts. We went up to where Peter was holding court, resplendent in his fleece top, longyi and sandals, a Cosmopolitan at his side. Sarah introduced herself, to which he skipped over a greeting and jumped directly to asking, "Do you know how Burmese say hello? They sniff." Having been somewhat warned what to expect, Sarah held up her end of the brief discussion. When Peter held out his hand to see what she'd selected, he sniffed (more in dismissal of than salutation to the book) and knocked the price down by three-quarters.

I wimped out and didn't buy the Cheloniidae *An Odd Bestiary*; even with an almost 50 percent discount, it was still in the four figures, and I exercised restraint (don't know where it came from). Sarah C. found a few things, but the process of getting through Peter's interview proved too drawn out for her, so we hung around outside, waiting for Claudia to clear her latest batch. It was cool, no cabs were in evidence, and the evening had been great. We waited, ready for another day of madness.

the three days in Berkeley is that there will be a next CODEX, in 2009, and all who attended this inaugural event promised enthusiastically to return. One European veteran went so far as to tell Koch that it was the "best fair of a lifetime!"

Tara Bryan's award-winning walking bird press publishes limited editions printed letterpress and featuring her own relief prints.

See www.tarabryan.com for more information.

JUST before this issue of Amphora went to press, the CODEX Foundation's board of directors announced that a second Biennial Bookfair and Symposium would be held in Berkeley in February, 2009. The theme for the symposium will be "Painters, Poets and Printers... when the rubber hits the road: collaboration and the artist's book."

Between then and now the foundation will publish BOOK/ART/OBJECT a comprehensive catalogue of the 2007 events. The volume will include an introduction by the editor, David Jury, a foreword by Peter Koch, the symposium proceedings, selected reports from around the world on the "State of the Art," and a lengthy section of illustrated books by the CODEX bookfair participants. "In all this will provide an in-depth snapshot of the state of the art on a global scale never before presented," the foundation's announcement stated. Publication is scheduled for early 2008.

For further information on the CODEX Foundation, see Amphora 143 for an interview with Peter Koch or visit www.coodexfoundation.org.

PRINTERS' FALL

During the third week of November the Society will be hosting a series of events in Vancouver, leading up to the third Alcuin Wayzgoose on November 17. The evening before will be dedicated to a celebration of the work of book designer and fine press publisher Robert R. Reid, hosted by Simon Fraser University. Earlier that week the Society will host the Canadian launch of author and designer Barbara Hodgson's *The Temperamental Rose*, a lavish limited edition exploring the history of colour wheels.