

EXHIBITIONS — WEST

Greenboathouse publisher Jason Dewinetz gets people out playing with books in Vernon

While admittedly still humble and limited by a somewhat specific yet oddly eclectic taste, my interest in typography and handmade books has manifested itself in the form of a reasonably respectable collection of items by printers and publishers from across Canada and the United States. Largely gathered through a slowly widening network of trade subscriptions and gratis exchanges, my shelves are lined with everything from simple photocopied and saddle-stapled pamphlets to slipcased and finely bound letterpress editions, each of which, at least to my mind, stands in its own slim pride of place.

I'd planned to spend a class introducing my creative writing students at Okanagan College to the world of small and fine press books, but hadn't quite gotten around to it, and the term was beginning its sudden wind-down. Also teaching at OC this year is Kevin McPherson Eckhoff, avant-garde poet and publisher of *by the skin of me teeth* books, and we two, I suppose, share a similar preoccupation with these overtly formal and aesthetically charged objects. At some point, while griping about our marking duties between classes, conversation turned (as it often does) to a newly obtained chapbook and, rather flippantly, one or the other of us suggested putting together a small exhibition of books from our two collections, ostensibly to introduce our students to the world of small press publishing, but also, and perhaps more honestly, because we wanted to show off what we both thought of as some pretty cool books.

Gallery Vertigo in Vernon is a small artist-run exhibition space located upstairs in a heritage building in the downtown core. Judith Jurica, the gallery's director, generously offered up the venue, and Kevin and I managed to wrestle a couple of evenings away from marking to curate the exhibition selection.

During this time I also reached out to a few

kind book folks, and additional items were loaned by Jan and Crispin Elsted (Barbarian Press), Rollin Milroy (Heavenly Monkey) and Sharon Thesen. These items included a diverse and rustic gathering of 1970s Canadian poetry (from Sharon), a variety of fine-press items from western B.C. and the Pacific Northwest (from Crispin), and a small handful of painfully beautiful new productions from Heavenly Monkey (including their stunning *Iskandarya*). Between these loans and Kevin's and my own collection, we put together a list of 135 titles from over 25 presses, hammered out some posters, hammered together some temporary shelving in the gallery, and spent two days designing and arranging the exhibition.

The show itself was very brief (Friday, April 18, and Saturday, April 19), but the Friday evening opening filled the rooms and brought together an interesting mix of students and more mature book lovers; this mix, I think, created an interesting atmosphere, and it was a pleasure to see these seemingly distinct demographics mingling and marvelling over ground-level and high-brow productions alike.

The evening began with short talks by both Kevin and me, discussing our own experiences as small press publishers and providing some introductory commentary on the principles and aesthetics of typography and book design. The chairs were then cleared away and the browsing began. As two guys who spend much of our time with books and paper and ink, it was a joy for us to engage with curious and passionate readers and lovers of books.

Ultimately, the experience boiled down to a great couple of days to give these items some air, to allow them the experience of being flipped through and enjoyed by a two-day total of over 100 eager book lovers. And, according to our respective partners, apparently a couple of days out of the house and away from the marking was good for Kevin and me as well.

Jason Dewinetz designs and publishes books by new and emerging Canadian authors under the imprint Greenboathouse Press (formerly Greenboathouse Books).

