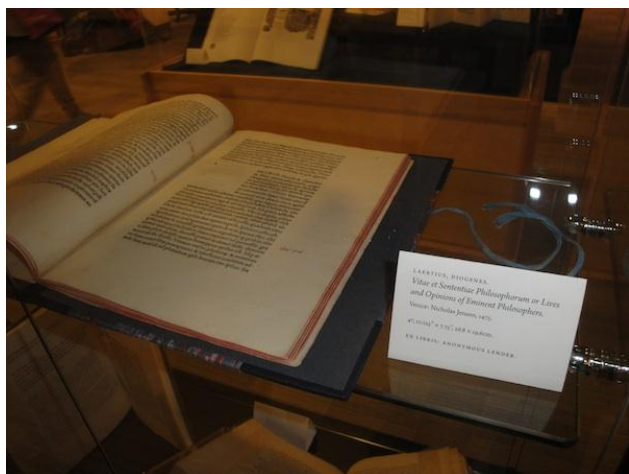


Books: A rare and beautiful sight

By Michelle Ward.

March is that crazy time when librarians are besieged by students baffled by requirements for scholarly sources and for reading books! But for one week, Okanagan College students passing through the Library foyer to the chaos of the InfoCommons, were transfixed by the beauty of the printed book.

The College's Department of English collaborated with the Library to present an exhibit of exceptional books from local private collections – 20th and 21st century fine press books, with a few guest appearances ranging from the birth of printing in the late 1400s through the 16th and 18th centuries, including stunning examples from contemporary Canadian and BC-based letterpress printers ([Aliquando Press](#), [Barbarian Press](#), [Lucie Lambert Editions](#) and [Pie Tree Press](#)).



The oldest book in the project: Laertius, Diogenes. *Vitae et Sententiae Philosophorum or Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. Venice: [Nicholas Jenson](#), 1475. Photo by Michelle Ward.

The exhibit was an outgrowth of the College's [Diploma in Writing & Publishing](#). DWP instructor and curator, Jason Dewinetz is himself a book designer and printer, and proprietor of [Greenboathouse Press](#). Rather than simply bringing in historically significant books for his students to examine and to inspire their design projects, Dewinetz envisaged a larger year-long project for the class, aimed at the audience of a public exhibition.

Students were paired up with significant printer/publishers about whom they researched and wrote introductory essays. The goal of posting the essays to an exhibit website was to provide the audience with context and insight to the books. Their research encompassed the books primarily as a survey of typography and printing. Many of the books focused on a secondary theme – of a genealogy of type designs, including one of the first roman typefaces ever produced, by [Nicholas Jenson](#) in 1470, and later interpretations such as the [Doves](#) type of the early 20th century, and [Bruce Rogers'](#) Montaigne and Centaur types.

The students also enjoyed photographing the books in the period setting of historic [Mackie Lake House](#) in Vernon. Far more than simply producing the content for the website, this multi-faceted project culminated with the students developing their curatorial skills. They planned the exhibit design and displayed their chosen books for presentation at an opening reception to members of the College, library and local communities.



Enthralled visitors to the opening reception. Photo by Michelle Ward.

Within the next year, Dewinetz will be setting up a fully-functional traditional letterpress print shop on the College's Vernon campus, where students will participate in the printing and production of fine press books for the revamped [Kalamalka Press](#).

The exhibit has been a truly engaging collaboration for the Library with Dewinetz and his student project team and with the audience of students. It has been inspirational (and reassuring) to watch them discover the enduring power and beauty of print design and to consider that this craft will not be lost, even if transformed.

To learn more about the books showcased in the exhibit, the student essays with photographs can be viewed at the exhibit website:

www.kalamalkapress.com/bookexhibit/

*Michelle Ward is Kelowna Campus Librarian at
Okanagan College, Kelowna, B.C.*