

# COMMUNICATION ARTS; GRAPHIC DESIGN, ARTIST'S BOOKS AND PRINTMAKING

## Report on Long Term Sabbatical Leave for Fall 2003

Susan Lowdermilk

### Introduction

During my fall term sabbatical leave in 2003, I split my time between two activities, travel research and the creation of artwork. I spent August and September studying historical and contemporary art and design in New York City, Italy, Germany and England. I spent October and November working in my home studio producing prints and artist's books partially inspired by my travel research in preparation for three art exhibitions, ArtCentric, the Corvallis Art Center, the Pierce College Art Department Gallery in Lakewood Washington and at the Jacob's Gallery at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts, here in Eugene.

I designed my sabbatical professional development leave to reflect my split position in the LCC Art Department. I teach half of my workload in the Graphic Design area, a professional/technical program, and half in the studio arts area, a transfer program. Currently, I teach Printmaking, Drawing and Basic Design courses. I have been a co-director of the LCC Art Department Gallery for four years. As a studio artist, I create woodblock prints and artist's books, which I exhibit nationally. My sabbatical research focused on design, printmaking, and contemporary art in order to address these facets of my career.

My research took place in England, Germany, Italy and New York City. I chose these places for the most comprehensive study of art and design both historically and stylistically. I visited many exhibitions, both contemporary and historical, on printmaking, book arts, graphic design and contemporary art. In the archived collections of St. Bride's Type Library in London and the Klingspor museum in Offenbach Germany, I studied examples of fine prints, artist's books and rare books including and works by prominent European typographers. I visited the studios of contemporary artists throughout my travels, and had opportunities to view and discuss their work with them.

### Communication Arts Research; Graphic Design, Artist's Books and Printmaking

#### Graphic Design

The objective of my research in graphic design was to give me a deeper understanding of the field of typography and printing history to pass onto my students and to especially expand my Typography course material. I saw original medieval illuminated manuscripts and books, early examples of books printed from movable type, and the work of many typographers important to graphic design history from the fifteenth century to the present. I took a workshop where I learned a style of medieval bookbinding and traditional techniques in illumination. I also visited many museum exhibitions relevant to my design research.

#### Illumination Workshop, Siena, Italy

I strive to give my students a clear and exciting connection to design history. For example, I bring my Typography students to the UO Knight Library's Special Collections to study original medieval books and manuscripts. So, it was an enriching experience for me to learn manuscript illumination painting techniques in a workshop at Sator Print, the studio of Jennifer Storey and Pierre Georgio Bertolozzi in Siena Italy. Ms. Storey is a bookbinder and restorer of medieval and renaissance books. Mr. Bertolozzi is an illumination artist who uses traditional techniques. In this workshop, I created a sewn and glued codex book, designed an initial letter for the cover and illustrated it on a piece of vellum (specially prepared goat or calf skin) using traditional techniques. I learned how to prepare and apply layers of color using powdered pigment, water, vinegar, honey and egg yolk. This is the method that medieval monasteries and nunneries used to illuminate religious texts during the Middle Ages. The technique is archival and permanent. I also observed Ms. Storey in the process of restoring five hundred year old books. This experience deepened my understanding and appreciation for historic book design and gave me a new appreciation for the original illuminated texts that I saw during my travels.

### **Innovations in Communication Arts Lecture, Siena Italy**

While in Siena, I gave a lecture to students in Ying Tan's 2003 UO Summer Siena Program. Ms. Tan is a Multimedia Professor at the University of Oregon. Since most of the students were in the Multimedia Program, I spoke about history and innovations in communication through the graphic arts. Italy is rich in examples of early communication systems, and I encouraged the students to take notice of them during their travels. After the development of language and then the written word, alphabetic symbols were developed. In Italy there are many examples of Roman, Greek, Mesopotamian and Etruscan writings as well as hand copied medieval manuscripts. Italy played an important part in the development of early printing. Many classic typographic fonts in use today were designed during the Italian Renaissance. I feel we are incredibly fortunate to experience the dawn of the digital age, the most revolutionary change in communications since the invention of movable type in the late 1400's. I encouraged students to consider these communication milestones when they encountered them during their European travels. The students also had the experience of being able to see many contemporary digital art installations at the Venice Biennale created by artists from all over the world.

### **"Everyday Typography" Project**

I believe an understanding and appreciation of type history is essential for a comprehensive design education. One of the goals of my Graphic Design curriculum is to make my students aware of type and layout in the world around them. Two years ago I started photographing what I call my "everyday typography" project. I have taken slides of letterforms, and signage in Turkey, Germany, and the western United States. Last summer I photographed Mesopotamian cuneiform texts, Etruscan, Greek and Roman stone inscriptions, medieval manuscripts, early printed books, woodblock printed illustrations, and type examples from modern and contemporary typographers and designers to use in my design classes. My aim is to make history come alive for students by giving them context and connection. I have incorporated these slides into lectures in my Introduction to Graphic Design and Typography courses. They have been an important resource for me in bringing an awareness of type and layout to my students. I continue to expand upon my collection. It is also available to other faculty teaching design upon request.

### **Overlap; Graphic Design and Studio Art**

Old technologies in the graphic arts typically resurface as fine art forms. The etching and woodcut techniques that I teach in my Printmaking classes were considered high technology hundreds of years ago. My Graphic Design and Studio Art areas are linked in part through the history of the graphic arts. I strive to be a bridge and a positive influence to both our Graphic Design program students and our Studio Arts students. Personally, I have learned a lot about design history from being a printmaker and book artist. My design students gain a deeper understanding of design production by working with ink and paper in the creation of prints. Art students learn about the history of communication arts in my printmaking classes. I personally relate to artist/designers like Englishman Eric Gill who was a type designer, illustrator, printmaker and sculptor. The instructors at the German Bauhaus School typically had multifaceted careers ranging from graphic design to interior design and architecture, to painting, sculpture, and other fine arts media. I had the opportunity to see these and other artist/designers' original works throughout my travels.

### **The Venice Biennale, International Contemporary Art Exhibition**

The lines between graphic design and fine art are continually becoming more blurred. I saw a lot of contemporary fine art during my travels, which incorporated digital and multi media technologies, and used type and image that resembled graphic design such as advertising, signage, computer games, or web pages. I find this work exciting as a designer and as a fine artist. I saw many works of this nature in the Venice Biennale 2003 contemporary world art exhibition. The Biennale showcased contemporary, cutting edge art from around the world. It took me two solid days to tour the entire exhibition. Art mirrors life, so it is natural for ubiquitous media like film, video and digital to be commonly used to carry contemporary art ideas. I feel that the true nature of art exists in the connection within the viewer. Art is an experience not a commodity. Much of the art in the Venice Biennale was in the form of installation, which is difficult to commodify. The viewer experiences the work by making a journey through it. Like performance, the experience is a fleeting moment. Many pieces incorporated multiple or oversized video screens and was informed by popular culture. Social themes such as women's issues, poverty, terrorism, world health and hunger issues, world population, genetic engineering, and consumerism were typical, as the works typically focused on contemporary content and message and were rarely based on form alone.

### **Artist's Books and Printmaking**

There is natural overlap of graphic arts, printmaking and artist's books through communication arts. Book art or artist's books is a genre where a book is designed and created by the artist. The book is the art not just a container for it. Artist's books may or may not resemble a typical book form. They may or may not be created with traditional book materials and techniques. Like installation art, the viewer is involved in the work by journeying through it. Like graphic design works, they often involve type and layout and are often narrative. Artist's books challenge and demand the attention of the viewer. The viewer cannot be passive to experience the work. The viewer touches and manipulates the piece as he explores the work, therefore choice of materials, structure and construction are important to the content. So they often offer a more intimate experience for the viewer than work that is presented formally, behind a frame. I feel that artist's books involve the problem solving and design process of graphic design and the personal expression of fine art. Herein lies the challenge and the satisfaction of creating artist's books. I incorporate artist's book assignments in my graphic design and studio arts classes with good success.

I met with book artists and printmakers in Italy, Germany, England and New York City, in their studios and had opportunity to view and discuss their work with them, which I found very personally inspirational. I also visited many artist's book and printmaking exhibitions and galleries. I purchased many artist's books and prints for my own collection that I share with my students as creative and technical examples. I also collected new visual resources in the form of slides, books, and exhibition catalogs to enhance my coursework.

In southern Germany, I stayed with Marlis Killermann and Peter Marhle, Winnenden, Germany. Ms. Killermann is a commercial book designer, book artist and papermaker and Mr. Marhle is a letterpress printer/designer. I had the opportunity to see their current projects and worked with them in their studio on their letterpress. We visited a historic pop-up book museum, a contemporary book arts and paper museum and a modern art museum in. They were very helpful to me for my typographic research and travel.

I am a member of the Society of Wood Engravers, in Oxford, England. I visited the art studio of Simon Brett, a well known wood engraving artist and illustrator, and author of Wood Engraving, How to Do It. I also met with Nigel Hamway, the Society's Treasurer and viewed his collection of engravings. I am including the medium of wood engraving in my Relief Printmaking course. I am a self-taught engraver. It was a rewarding experience for me to discuss engraving processes and techniques with the artists I met. I purchased some original historic and contemporary prints to show as examples to my students.

### **Artist studios visited**

Sator Print, Jennifer Storey and Pierre Georgio Bertolozzi, Siena, Italy (early printed books and book binding, medieval illumination)

M25, Marlis Killermann and Peter Marle (book designer/artist, letterpress printer)

Julia Farrer, London England (intaglio printmaker and book artist)

Simon Brett, Marlborough, England (wood engraving artist/illustrator)

USUS, Uta Schneider, Offenbach am Main, Germany (book artist)

Dobbin Mill, Robbin Silverberg, New York City, (papermaker and book artist)

Kirsten Rorke, New York City (printmaker, painter)

Nigel Hamway, Oxford, England (Treasurer, Society of Wood Engravers, Collector)

### **Research conducted in the following collections**

Klingspor-Museum Offenbach am Main, Germany

I was able to research special collections with museum Curator, Stephan Wildhirt. The Klingspor Museum contains a major collection of book and writing and printing materials including modern international book art, calligraphy, and works of designer/typographers, Rudolf Koch, Peter Behrens, Otto Eckmann, William Morris and others. Mr. Wildhirt purchased one of my wood engravings for the Klingspor collection.

St. Bride's Type Library, London, England

I specifically researched the work of type designer/artist Eric Gill and the wood engravings of Thomas Bewick, who was credited with inventing the medium.

### **Non-toxic Intaglio Printmaking Workshop, Florence, Italy**

I learned nontoxic intaglio printmaking (Solarplate) and monotype in a workshop at the Santa Reparata International School of Art, in Florence Italy taught by printmakers Dan Welden, Ron Procrasso and assisted by Kubo Takuji. Dan Welden was one of the inventors of the Solarplate process. This process differs from traditional etching in several ways. Intaglio prints are traditionally made using copper or zinc plates. The plate is covered by an acid resist and the image areas are exposed and then submerged in an acid bath, which etches drawn image into the metal. A print is made by filling the etched grooves with ink, wiping the surface clean and running the paper and plate through the press. The paper is forced into the grooves picking up the ink and creating the print. The Solarplate method differs by using a UV sensitive polymer plate. The image is created when the plate is exposed to an image transparency. The image areas are washed out with water, creating the grooves that will be filled with ink to create the print. Solarplate can also be processed and printed as a relief print, printing only the surface. I found the Solarplate method was not a replacement for traditional intaglio printmaking. Rather, this method lends itself to a very different creation process. It offers the possibility of easily working with hand drawn as well as digital and photographic imagery. Students are increasingly interested in incorporating the computer as a tool in their work. Solarplate offers exciting design possibilities for fine art prints, illustration and artist's books. I am interested in expanding our printmaking curriculum to include this method in the future. Also, we used no toxic chemicals in this workshop. Traditional printmaking uses acids and solvents. I have been adopting less toxic practices in our printmaking studio, and I learned more nontoxic studio habits to teach my students.

I was inspired by the artists I met during this workshop. It is fascinating for me to observe the creative processes of artists I meet. Each instructor focused on a different print media and gave in-depth demonstrations—Dan Welden, Solarplate, Ron Procrasso, monotype, and Kubo Takuji, copper engraving. I had the opportunity to discuss their personal work with them and ask them questions about their technical and creative processes. Mr. Takuji visited Eugene this spring, and I had the opportunity to meet with him and share new works, and talk shop about engraving, tool sharpening and other processes. Mr. Welden will be visiting the northwest next spring. I am in the process of bringing him to LCC to do a workshop on Solarplate in the spring of 2005. Mr. Welden also offered to exhibit his collection of contemporary Solarplate prints at the LCC Art Department Gallery in the future.

### **Art-o-mat**

At the Whitney Contemporary Art Museum gift shop In New York City I purchased four original works of art from their Art-o-mat machine. Created by Clark Whittington in 1997, Art-o-mat machines are retired cigarette vending machines that have been converted to vend art. Original artworks cost five dollars each and are the size of a box of cigarettes. There are over 400 contributing artists from 10 different countries currently involved in the Art-o-mat project. There are currently 71 active Art-o-mat machines in the United States. This year the LCC Art Department Gallery will host the 72nd. Upon returning from my sabbatical, I coordinated with our Art Gallery committee and the LCC administration to host an Art-o-mat machine. Mr. Whittington is currently renovating a machine for us. We will be the only Art-o-mat west of the Mississippi river and north of Los Angeles. I was instantly interested in our Art Department gallery hosting an Art-o-mat machine for several reasons. Art-o-mat dispenses original and affordable art showing a wide variety of media and ideas, which will be inspirational and educational for our students and the public. The public will have access to artwork from a wide variety of national and international artists. I feel that quality art doesn't have to be inaccessible or expensive. I first saw Art-o-mat as a potential moneymaker to help fund our Art Department Gallery. In time we will recover the initial cost of the machine and bring in revenue. However,

Mr. Whittington described more benefits from hosting an Art-o-mat machine. I am expecting LCC and our gallery will get a great amount of initial publicity due to the unique and novel concept of the Art-o-mat idea. The Art-o-mat installation will be constantly changing as new pieces are added. One column of our Art-o-mat machine will be reserved to dispense artworks from LCC students. We also plan to move Art-o-mat to other venues around Eugene during summer and winter breaks to promote LCC's Art Gallery and expose Art-o-mat to a greater slice of the general public.

### **Contemporary Art**

I believe it is essential to study original works as an art educator because this sort of observation and awareness gives me a deeper understanding of processes and essences of contemporary art. Attending exhibitions keeps me abreast of trends in contemporary European and American art. It is important for me as an artist and as a member of the LCC Art Department Gallery Committee to keep current with contemporary art issues. Our committee strives to choose diverse and compelling exhibitions that serve as inspiration to LCC students as well as to our local community. Our gallery is a teaching tool used by all art faculty. Contemporary art exposure helps me to be a more informed artist and committee member. I also feel that travel is one of the best forms of education. My travels have broadened my understanding of other cultures and their art and design.

### **Printmaking and Artist's Books, New Works**

#### **Studio Work in Eugene**

My leave was an opportunity to work on artwork for three regional exhibitions. I exhibited woodcuts in a group show at ArtCentric (the Corvallis Art Center) with five other printmakers in November 2003. I had a solo show of woodblock prints at Pierce College in Lakewood Washington in January 2004. I also exhibited woodblock prints and artist's books in the Jacob's Gallery at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts here in Eugene, January through February 2004 with two other printmakers, Ken Paul and Tallmadge Doyle. Both are art professors from the University of Oregon. The shows in Eugene and Corvallis opened with artist lectures. In addition, we held several three-hour lecture/demonstrations for the public in the ArtCentric Gallery and at the Hult Center. We each had one hour to explain and demonstrate our printmaking media and processes on a printing press we moved into the galleries. All of the lectures were well attended. We held a second Hult Center lecture by popular demand. Listening to other printmakers discuss their ideas and techniques is educational and enlightening for me. I feel printmaking is a lot like cooking. Beyond the basics, each artist develops their own technical methods and skills. As an artist I felt enriched, observing the other artists demonstrate etching, spit biting, waterless lithography, engraving and monotype. My demonstration was on wood block printing. The general public is not familiar with how prints are created and the differences in print media. We welcomed the opportunity to give the public a deeper understanding so that they would better appreciate our work as well as the works of other printmakers. I learned tips, tricks and techniques to use in my studio and to pass on to my printmaking students. I was happy to see that several of my students attended the lectures.

I worked daily for several months creating art in my home studio. This block of time allowed me to explore and improve the techniques and philosophy that I teach. I feel it is essential to be a practicing artist in order to be a positive role model for my students. I feel part of my job is to pass on artistic passion and discipline. The best way to do this is by example. It is also important for my own professional development to attend art exhibits in major art centers, to discuss my experiences with my students and encourage them to do the same.

To produce a cohesive body of artwork for exhibition necessitates hard work and focus. It is essential to have enough time to devote to my artwork to explore and experiment with the techniques I teach. Time in my studio after my travel research was the best way for me to use my inspiration to directly affect my work, and offered me appropriate time for reflection upon my research. My most current body of work was inspired by the content, visual relationships and ideas that I saw in artworks during my travels. I was inspired by the work of Damien Hirst and Bill Viola in London, installations from Canada, Iceland, Israel, and The Netherlands at the 2003 Biennale in Venice. I was also inspired by the book arts of Uta Schneider and Marlis Killermann in Offenbach and Winnenden Germany, and the artist's books of Robbin Silverberg in New York City. These artists' works do not resemble mine in form or technique, but I connected with these artists' handling of

content and ideas, as well as their use of metaphor. I feel that my work is increasingly idea oriented, and that form and content are inseparable and important to the outcome.

The body of work I created for the Hult Center show was generally non-objective. I created woodcuts that looked like painted brushstrokes or other spontaneous sketched marks. Generally, when I look at an exhibit of prints, am interested in studying how the artist created the textures and how the processes are used or combined. I am also interested in the philosophical idea of mark and impression. A print is an impression. The original matrix is removed, sometimes destroyed—but its mark remains. Our minds and hearts are imprinted by experiences, emotions, dreams, and memories. We form impressions of each other through our interactions and through communication. The woodcuts and woodcut artist's books I exhibited in 2003-2004, explored mark and impression as visual and conceptual ideas.

### **Conclusion**

This is the first time I have been granted long term leave at LCC. I found my Sabbatical experience to be an essential opportunity for me to research, create, reflect and thus gain necessary perspective on my career. No matter how much I prepared and planned my leave, I could not have anticipated many important conclusions I made connecting my graphic design and studio arts career. I have come to view my split teaching position as a bridge, and a way to influence the learning of students in both the graphic design and studio arts which will undoubtedly enrich my teaching as well as my art creating.

### **Museum and gallery exhibitions**

#### **Italy**

Museo dell'Opera, The Choir Book Miniatures from the Siena Cathedral, medieval illuminated manuscripts)

Spedale degli Innocenti Gallery, Florence Italy (illuminated manuscripts)

La Biennale di Venezia, 50th International Art Exhibition, Dreams and Conflicts, The Dictatorship of the Viewer, Venice Italy

Uffizzi Museum, Florence (private tour of the collection by Mr. Massimo Pinetti, Renaissance and Post Renaissance art)

St. Mark's Library, Venice (La Vitas nei Libri, exhibition of early printed Venitian books)

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice (20th century European and American Modernism)

National Gallery of Modern Art, Florence (Contemporary art collection)

Modern Art Museum, Prato, Tuscany (Contemporary art collection)

Le Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia

National Archeological Museum, Sienna (A rich collection of archeological objects and historical documents from prehistory to Roman age. Examples of Roman and Etruscan typography)

Archeological Museum, Florence (Sacristan Museum, examples of Roman and Sacristan typography)

#### **Germany**

Museum for Paper and Book Arts, Lenningen (contemporary paper sculptures and artist's books)

Gutenberg Museum, Mainz (Gutenberg's printing history and book collections from the middle ages through to book art of the 20th century, as well as many related collections. Special exhibition, the most beautiful books published in Germany in 1999)

Bauhaus Archive/Museum of Design, Berlin (The Bauhaus was the most important design and modern art school of the 20th century. The museum featured the history of the Bauhaus School as well as instructor and student works.)

Pergamon Museum, Berlin (Greek, and Mesopotamian antiquities, including the famous Pergamon Altar, Many examples of cuneiform tablets)

Sonderausstellung Gallery, Berlin (Exhibition of Goya's etchings; Los Caprichos, Los Disastres de la Guerra, La Tauromaquia, Los Disparates)

Kathe Kollwitz Museum, Berlin (Featuring the prints and graphic work of early 20th century artist/activist Kathe Kollwitz)

Stadtmuseum Esslingen im Gelben Haus, Historic Lithographic Printing and Pop-up Museum, Esslingen produced many 19th century pop-up books

Corporal Identity - Body Language, 9th Triennial Exhibition for Form and Content, USA and Germany, Klingspor Museum Offenbach (Contemporary art including artist's books and sculptural works)

Tubingen, Germany, Book und Shift, (contemporary book arts gallery)

Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, Germany (20th century art, focusing on western European painting and american modernism)

## **England**

McBride Type Library, London (I was able to research and photograph examples of art and design work by Eric Gill and historic wood engravings by Thomas Bewick from the library's archives)

Vitra Design Museum, London (contemporary graphic design)

Book Arts Book Shop, London

Editions Alecto, Prints 1960-1981, Original graphics, multiple originals, Bankside Gallery, London England  
Saatchi Gallery, London (Contemporary works of Damien Hirst, Jenny Seville, Richard Wilson and others English artists)

Tate Modern Art Museum, London (Contemporary fine art and graphic design)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Book Art Book Shop, London, England (artist's books and zines)

Postal Museum, Bath, England (History of mail, as well as historic examples of stamps, cards, and letters)

## **Paris, France**

Musee d'Orsay (19th Century art, art nouveau design)

Pompidou Museum (Contemporary art, special exhibition on Chinese contemporary art)

## **New York**

Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York City, (Current exhibition, National Design Triennial: Inside Design Now. Breaking developments and future horizons across the fields of design practice, from architecture and interiors to product design, graphic design, and fashion.)

The Center for Book Arts, New York City, (Exhibitions of political artist's books and book art) International Society of copier artists, James Keenan, The Art of the Bookplate, Exhibition in Portland's Multnomah County Library Summer, 2004

Printed Matter, artist's books shop, New York City (artist's books, Society of Copier Artists)

National Museum of the American Indian (contemporary native american art, historic baskets)

Holocaust Museum (new contemporary sculpture by British sculptor, Andy Goldsworthy)

Galleries in Chelsea district (Notable; Printed Matter book arts, prints by John Cage)

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Brooklyn Art Museum (exhibition of pulp fiction book cover art from the 1930's to the 1950's)

## **Oregon**

Helen Frankenthaler Woodcuts, Portland Art Museum

Project Mobilivre Bookmobile Project, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon

Barbara Tettenbaum, Letterpress pressure printing workshop and lecture, University of Oregon