

## A COMPLETE LISTING OF CONTENTS WITH PAGE NUMBERS

<b>The Beginning and the End</b>	7
<b>The Checklist</b>	
X. All the Incomplete Student Work	11
A. Kat Ran Press Publications	13
B. Printed and Designed	23
C. Designed and Printed Somewhere Else	37
D. Books Printed (But Not Designed)	41
E. The Kat Ran Ephemera Club	47
<b>Fine Printing's Design Problem</b>	51

## THE BEGINNING & THE END OF THE KAT RAN PRESS YOU KNEW

It's difficult to recall what, exactly, I was thinking when I started making books eighteen years ago. I suppose I liked the intimacy of books, and I liked the collaborative spirit. And when I was an undergrad at Syracuse University, the students who knew most about books were the women. I just went where the girls were. My intentions weren't entirely bibliophilic.

The first press book I remember seeing was the Gehenna Press *Presumptions of Death*. I had hacked out a book prior to that, but *Presumptions of Death* was something else. I didn't really understand what it was or how it was made, but I knew it was special. That particular copy belonged to Herb Fox, the longtime printer of Leonard Baskin's lithographs, for whom I worked in the summer of 1995. I snuck a peek at that book whenever I had a chance. I remember exactly where it was in the shop, and even now my heart races a little when I think about it.

The following summer I read Steinberg's *Five Hundred Years of Printing* and Gill's *An Essay on Typography*. Neither book made much sense to me. I didn't have any experience with the tools or ideas they were writing about. That all changed shortly after my twenty-first birthday when my parents gave me a copy of *The Prints of Robert Motherwell*. Page 316 has had a bookmark ever since. It describes the Arion Press *Ulysses*, which was keyed by Michael and Winifred Bixler in Skaneateles, New York—just nineteen miles from my apartment in Syracuse. I didn't know what Monotype was, but I was anxious to see anything or anyone even vaguely related to Motherwell. I skipped the first day of classes of my senior year, and a friend drove me to 4207 Railroad Street. At Michael and Winnie's I saw for the first time the machines and tools I'd read about. I stayed for three years and simply cannot fathom a better environment in which to learn about typography, printing, and books. Not only did Michael and Winnie's shop handle almost every aspect of book production, but they let me use that shop after hours as if it were my own. I was spoiled.

By the summer of 1999 I'd had enough of central New York, so I moved to western Massachusetts, where another generous group was willing to take me in. For the first few months I lived with Jon Goodman, the photogravure printer, while I worked for Dan Keleher, Carol Blinn, Art Larson, Ben Shiff, and Dan Carr and Julia Ferrari. For six months I bounced from shop to shop, until I decided that if I was going to make ten dollars an hour, I might

as well make it for myself. I found a Vandercook SP-20 and started my own shop in Florence, a village in Northampton. My father and I painted the floors, walls, and ceiling that New Year's Eve.

With so many accomplished and superior book printers in the area, I set up thinking I'd focus on invitations and stationery. From the start, though, I was able to get book work—which is what I really wanted to do. Here again I consider myself incredibly lucky to have been able to do exactly what I needed and wanted—until I didn't need or want to.

When I was in college, a classmate asked a professor how one knows if they are supposed to be an artist. The answer has stayed with me: *If you can give it up, you should give it up.* I can give up letterpress printing and fine press books, and earlier this year I sold off the last bit of my shop and ended my eighteen-year career as a designer and printer of limited editions.

The transition was fairly painless. I'd moved away from my shop in Florence in 2006, as printing and fine press books ceased to interest me. They just weren't challenging or compelling anymore, and I wanted to devote myself to the design of what I now like to call *normal* or *useful* books. It would have been easy to continue printing. If one is willing to maintain a certain lifestyle, the pay is really not all that bad. It only takes a week or so to print a book, and the check at the end often makes enduring the tedium worthwhile. This sort of work, though, deserves better. Fine press books deserve to be made by people who aren't just collecting a paycheck.

For most of my career as a printer, I really was consumed by fine press books. It's what I thought, talked, and read about, and it was how I earned my living. I cared deeply about what I was doing, but not every book or job was successful. In fact, there are very few books listed on the following pages that I love or which approach my expectations. In its entirety, though, the books listed here comprise a *body of work* of which I'm proud. Taken individually, there are some real duds.

Readers of earlier drafts of this checklist commented that I was too tough on myself and the books I was describing. That I can't help. I feel strongly about these things, and I feel strongly that there is very little *critical* thought given to fine printing. What few reviews are written tend to focus on the craft and a checklist of people involved. There are references to how noble and hard-working the printers and binders are and how they have overcome adversity to get a book made. Readers of most reviews and press histories are left only with the impression that each book is a triumph of body and spirit, and each triumph is greater and more spiritually rewarding than the last.

However nobody ever says, *This didn't work*. There's never any discussion or admission of anything *not* succeeding. There's no admission that bad decisions are made. Sometimes the spacing is sloppy or the endpapers are the wrong color. Why not admit it? It's OK to think and react critically to these books. Printers and binders shouldn't get a free pass just because they are generally good people trying to do good work. That sort of timid and patronizing approach has been a serious hindrance to the evolution of fine printing—which, I argue in “Fine Printing’s Design Problem,” has ceased to evolve. But that’s another story.

In spite of what you might read on the following pages, I am incredibly grateful that I've been able to be involved with fine printing for all this time. I could not have made it without the support and encouragement of many friends, colleagues, collectors, and clients, only some of whom are: **Katherine Russem**: My constant companion for fifteen years, she always put my needs ahead of her own. She was the best. **Michael and Winifred Bixler**: I knew almost nothing about printing when I walked into their shop, but Michael and Winnie took me in and gave me a career and tons and tons of type. **Corinne Gill**: From 2001 to 2004 I never printed anything without running it by Corinne. She was my second set of eyes and the unacknowledged partner in the Press. **Leah Allen, Kirsten Baringer, Mary Jane Dean, Stephanie Gibbs, Ella Gray, Rosemary Kress, Phoebe Mathews, Melissa Schmechel, and Mollie Zanoni**: A patient staff who helped me to either get work done or get through the day. **Lynne and Bob Veatch**: Enthusiastic dealers who have always bought *many* copies without expecting or requesting special treatment—which is the best way to get it. **David P. Bourbeau**: A binder and fellow procrastinator, David introduced me to the Pioneer Valley book arts community and showed me what a fine press book could be. **Jon Goodman**: A printer and fellow grouch, Jon advised me how to deal with our more difficult clients. **Claudia Cohen, Sarah Creighton, and Mark Tomlinson**: Three of my favorite binders who know that less is more and that sometimes a *little* more is good, too. **Dan Keleher, Carol J. Blinn, and Art Larson**: Printers who inspired me to do good work when on press. **Jocelyn Webb Pedersen, Bob McCammant, Bill Corbett, Fred and Amy Harle, Brooke Schnabel, Santha Parke, Jake Schnabel, Lance Hidy, Jennifer Flint, Martin Antonetti, and Barbara B. Blumenthal**: Advisors, supporters, and friends. **Julie Baine**: She encourages me to do whatever I need and want to do, and she keeps me on-task. She is the best.

**Michael Russem**. The Cambridge Offices of Kat Ran Press, August 16, 2012.