2020 / 2021 Letterpress Annual Report

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STAFFING

During the 2020-2021 academic year Noah Lagle worked for the full year, with Muriel Condon working in the fall semester, and Conor McGrann in the spring semester.

SHOP USE

In an effort to maintain the university’s COVID-19 social distancing guidelines for this academic year, the Letterpress studio instituted the following protocols:

1. Maintain a strict limit of two customers at a time within the studio premises.
2. Institute an online scheduling portal.
3. Encourage newcomers to watch the new instructional videos on the Letterpress website before arriving to work.

These measures allowed us to stay open for public use while staying safe. Our total attendance for the year was 42 visitors. By comparison, in 2017-2018 we had 486 visitors. This difference certainly reflects an overall sense of hesitancy stemming from many months of COVID-19 restrictions as well as a lower level of incidental traffic in the building due to the prevenance of online teaching modalities. As part of the COVID-19 preparations, the studio was limited to no more than 2 visitors at a time and a “Letterpress Resources” section of the website was added with video tutorials to make introductory tutorials more efficient. Keeping these tutorials on the website is a resource that will be retained in the future. We expect 2021-22 attendance to return to pre-pandemic levels.

This year, we promoted the Letterpress studio with posters and an electronic notice that was posted regularly in email messages to the School of Art and was shared with the College of Architecture and Design as well as the Department of English. The studio website is: https://art.utk.edu/printmaking/letterpress/

This academic year, the Letterpress studio open hours were as follows:

Fall Schedule:
Monday & Wednesday: 12:30-6:30
Friday 9:00-2:00

Spring Schedule:
Tuesday & Thursday: 8:30-4:00
Friday: 12:00-2:00

In the fall, Meredith Hale asked her students to compose and print haikus in the Letterpress studio. This was a part of her First Year Seminar (FYS 129 -Tennessee Type), in which she introduced students to
different letterpress resources in Knoxville. Students were encouraged to donate one of their prints to the university library’s Special Collections.

EVENTS

Events were rare this academic year. We didn’t have any opportunities to bring out our smaller presses in order to drum up interest. So, we decided to produce some posters that were sold at the Print Club run Print Sale that took place in the student union. Through the sale of these posters (pictured right), $210 were raised to benefit Southerners on New Ground (SONG). We are beginning to foster a new relationship with The Bottom, in hopes of building programming that incorporates letterpress and other print media.

The shop also produced some thank you cards for Christopher McNulty, Director of the School of Art.

TYPE

We have a large collection of the following lead typefaces in assorted sizes: Craw Clarendon, Stymie, Gothic, Bodoni, Gothic Franklin, Univers 55, Spartan, Cheltenham, Bernhard, Modern, Typo, Romany, Onyx, Nubian, and Tower. We also have a collection of wood type that includes the following fonts in assorted sizes: Gothic, Futura Gothic, French Clarendon, Cheltenham, and Antique.

The Hellbox has been sifted through and is now mostly full of various types of spacing. The smaller bits of type have been collected for use in an ongoing project by Noah Lagle, but the larger ones are being resorted. Many of the drawers are currently being reorganized, as many of the drawers have become mixed over time. This is an ongoing project that will need to be continued when there is little traffic in the shop (special attention should be given to condensed and bold versions of the same sized font, as they often get confused for one another).

Vegetable oil has been banned in the shop everywhere except the palette. As the oil dries it congeals and glues the type together, causing damage to the letters when students tend to throw them against the table to break them apart. Instead, a solvent based press wash (such as odorless mineral spirits) or Lithotine should be used.

PRESSES

The Challenge press continues to get closer to being in working order. One of its rollers was replaced this year, as a concavity has developed over the years, making the ink distribute unevenly. Bryan Baker of Striped light has been a great resource in the servicing of this machine. At this point we are able to
pull clean prints, though some more time with this machine is necessary to figure out the intricacies of running it at volume.

The Kelsey presses are all in working order, though they have not been used at all this year. This coming year, we hope to build a low table on which they can be mounted in order to incorporate them into the regular workings of the shop.

The Vandercook SP-15 is working well and has been serviced regularly throughout the academic year. At this point, most of the sticky residue that resulted from the use of vegetable oil as a solvent has been scraped away. If there comes a point when the Kelsey and Challenge presses can meet the production needs of the shop, there are some areas on the Vandercook that could be disassembled for a deep clean.

**EQUIPMENT**

The studio continues to use rubber-based inks as well as a small selection of oil-based inks. The shop has a slug cutter for leading and continues to hold a floor unity corner rounder that is not in working order. The cutting mats and paper cutter are a benefit to the shop. A sheet of plate glass is near the ink shelves to make that work area more serviceable for mixing inks, but we also have handheld palettes that make it easy to bring your ink over to the press.

The type case closest to the Challenge press is in need of repair. Most of the type draws have been removed because the case was beginning to cave in. This may be an easy fix, but at this point we have enough space in our other type cases to accommodate what we have. We may want to look for a used type case to replace this current one, or perhaps get rid of it altogether in order to accommodate a better work flow.

We have been in conversation with the print shop technician, Elysia Mann, about ways we can improve the Letterpress studio’s capabilities from both a production and education standpoint. This includes building of a new station for printing with the Kelsey presses, moving some of the type cases into the breezeway, upgrading the drying racks, and building some new streamlined organizational shelves.

**PAPER AND INK INVENTORY**

**Rubber-based Inks**
Rubber Based
12 assorted reds
5 yellow
3 green
6 blue
2 violet
7 black
4 tint base

**Paper** (approximate counts)
~75 19x25” Kraft Tone Index Off White Kraft
~100 12.5x19” Kraft Tone Index Off White Kraft
~40 12.5x19" Kraft Tone Ledger Green Kraft
~50 12.5x19" Construction Fuse Green
~100 12.5x19 Durotone Off White
~100 12.5x19 SpeckleTone Madero Beach
~50 12.5x19 SpeckleTone Kraft
Off cuts of assorted sizes, mostly in charcoal grey and a warm red. A little bit of white.

DONATED PRESS AND TYPE

Since the UT Letterpress Studio was founded twelve years ago, the Challenge Press and type on the north wall of the studio was on long term loan to the School of Art from local artist Chris McAdoo. Working with Chris Cox from the Development Office in the College of Arts and Sciences, in the fall of 2020 McAdoo has gifted the press any type to the School of Art. To recognize the gift, the Challenge Press is getting a plaque to honor McAdoo’s grandfather.