

Melbourne
September 30, 2008

As you may be aware, The Melbourne Museum of Printing is in need of support in order to continue to offer its unique services and, if support becomes available, plans to move into more suitable premises.

For many years I have been working with contemporary offset printers and letterpress printers. My first project, in 1994 was with an Italian letterpress printer in Venice Italy. It was difficult to find letterpress printers or those who had a good understanding of printing traditions. Most recently, letterpress has experienced a huge resurgence in popularity in North America and Europe. It is simply a matter of time before Australia experiences the same desire for traditional printing techniques. Students will choose schools specifically for their association with the Melbourne Printing Museum since it will allow hands on experience , increase their understanding of typography and finally allow them to become designers who will compete on the world market.

Just five years ago I could not find letterpress printers. My clients wanted letterpress products for their weddings, personal stationary and business cards. I recently relocated to Melbourne from London, and was impressed to find a printing museum which would both educate and allow hands on training and letterpress production.

Melbourne has an opportunity to be a leading figure in the field of graphic design and design education. To my knowledge there is only one other "working museum" located in the United States in the state of Wisconsin. The Hamilton Wood Type Printing Museum has one of the largest collections of wood type in the world along with six presses. The Melbourne Museum has an unparalleled collection of both type and presses. Provided that the museum is able to develop, Melbourne will be strategically placed to draw people globally to work with the presses and type.

Leading typography and graphic design schools in London and New York recognize the importance of teaching the history of letterpress, typeface design, the derivation of typographics, combined with hands on experience with setting type by hand and running the different presses. Consistently the leading design schools require and expect their students to spend time with traditional forms of printing.

Attached in Appendix A are quotes from professors from the world's most recognized design universities. They understand that teaching typography is integral to producing leading designers.

In conclusion, the American Printing History Association (www.printinghistory.org) will be holding their annual conference on October 10-12, 2008 at Columbia University in New York City. They will be discussing "Saving the History of Printing". Melbourne has already started its effort to save the history of printing. Sadly this will be lost if the Melbourne Museum of Printing closes due to lack of financial support.

Appendix A

The quotes are from Steven Heller's *The Education of a Typographer, copublished with the School of Visual Arts (NYC)*, 2004.

Steven Heller is the art director of the New York Times Book Review and co-chair of the master of fine arts design at the School of Visual Arts, New York, USA.

Below each quote is the name of the university and teacher.

"I believe typography must be taught with a historical and factual basis. Students cannot be thrown into aesthetic projects right away and expect to succeed if they do not know (ie have not be taught) anything about type as a tool. Therefore, I devote the entire first term to the history of technology of type. I start with historical developments (from Gutenberg, type mold and type body through linotype, monotype and phototype and up to digital typography). Through this historical discussion, we cover nomenclature. Leading, point size, x-height, characters in a font, etc., are all covered through the historical context. This take up about one third of the term. The next third is devoted to typeface classification, which helps students learn about letterforms and identify various characteristics of typefaces. The final third of the term is devoted to practical application, applying all they have learned to applications on the computer. I would like to have letterpress taught, ideally required"

Jerry Kelly, Pratt Institute, NY, USA

Students can see the many links between typographics history and their own design process.

Peter Bain, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn USA

If our goal is to produce well rounded students, I believe it is important that they understand and are familiar with out typography traditions. It is for that reason that one of the projects I give the students involves setting type by hand and pulling proofs on the Vandercook press.

James Craig, The Cooper Union, NY, USA

We do introduce students to setting lead type by hand for letterpress, so they might understand digital typesetting as a process that evolved from three-dimensional forms. We enable our students to cultivate an eye and vocabulary for type classification and for choosing a typeface for a project, again by giving them as much information, advice, and theory.

Gerard Unger, University of Reading, Reading UK

Siobhan Donoghue
Illustration & Design

3

Desktop publishing made designers aware that they need a basic understanding of typography...and...of project management, the use of technology, collaboration, and doing business with real clients.

Huub Koch, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London

Year 1 students take part in a half-day introductory letterpress workshop. We see this not as an exercise in nostalgia or even craft, but as an essential part of teaching contemporary designers about contemporary design practice. The physical manipulation of type case on a physical body and the experience of controlling type and space on the block facilitates an understanding of the way type can be seen to similarly (though not precisely) operate on-screen in programs such as QuarkXPress, and helps those who may go on to use the type design programs. It also fits well with the rest of the course, which has retained all the old printmaking media alongside the new. Having done this introduction, students can then use letterpress when they need it for other projects throughout the course.

Catherine Dixon Central Saint Martins College of ART and Design, London

We regard old and new technologies as one that can coexist, as opposed to one necessarily replacing the other. It is often the interface between technologies that can provide the richest source for exploration. In terms of exposure to letterpress, students in undergraduate and postgraduate courses study hot metal setting. Students report that engaging in the physical process of composing type 1) aids in their understanding of the derivation of typographics terminology 2) develops their appreciation of the typographic form; and 3) helps them learn the system of spacing inherent in traditional and digital forms of setting. This system of spacing introduces them to the notion of grid structures, which has currency within the digital domain.

David Dabner, Jamie Hobson and Tony Pritchard, London College of Printing, UK

Emphasizing a handmade approach to book making, this course will focus on the history of DIY aesthetics in book design with particular emphasis on collage, experimental book structures, and hand-rendered type. Art historical slide lectures about collage, revolutionary printed matter, zines, and books as sculptural objects will complement printmaking workshops in which students are encouraged to compare traditional concepts of the book with expanded possibilities. Students are expected to generate their own books for critiques, utilizing the print studio (such as letterpress or silkscreen) or other fine art mediums. The instructor will discuss how a book's structural elements support content to consider slippages between craft and fine art. Assignments investigating editorial structure, imagery, layout, typography, bookbinding, and cover design will illustrate the multiple stages involved in book coordination. Discussions of contemporary book publishers and designers will help students grasp currents and trends in today's book market. Though this course focuses on a book's visual aspects with emphasis in printmaking, textual matters are crucial in the study of book design and reading and writing will be required to underscore the fundamental connection between text and image.

Trini Dalton , Printmaking "Book as Art" NYU Steinhardt (New York University)