

AN EXHIBITION AT POETS HOUSE :: FEBRUARY 9 – JUNE 8, 2013

Toothpaste & Coffee House Press: Change & Continuity

FEATURING THE WORK OF ALLAN KORNBLUM :: FOUNDER & PUBLISHER

The Start: Mimeo Magazines & Books

Like most people at the age of twenty-one, I had no idea what I was going to do with my life when I moved from New York City to Iowa City in early July 1970 for a fresh start as a poetry major at the University of Iowa. Young people dream of many roles in life, but editor/printer/ publisher is usually not one of them.

I had been working the midnight-to-eight-thirty shift at the Grand Central Station Post Office, and attending classes and readings at the New School and the St. Mark's Church Poetry Project, in New York. St. Mark's served as the unofficial headquarters of the New York School poets, and I loved their aesthetic. An appealing mix of energy and hip informality leaped off the pages of the mimeo magazines and books they published. Before I left NYC, I announced that I would start a magazine once I got to Iowa City.

When I arrived in the Midwest, manuscripts from New York had already arrived in the mail. I combined them with the poets I was meeting in Iowa to form the contents of *Toothpaste* magazine. By the end of August 1970, I had mimeographed the first issue at the University of Iowa student activity center, collated and stapled 200 copies, and started selling them on street corners.

Before I made the final switch to letterpress printing, I had published seven issues of *Toothpaste* and three mimeographed books.

- *Toothpaste* magazine, six of seven issues, August 1970 – August 1972, mimeograph.
- *The Mad Shoemaker* by John Batki; Toothpaste Press, 1973; mimeograph.
- *Snow* by Tomaz Salamun; Toothpaste Press, 1974; mimeograph.

Early Years: Learning the Craft

During the Fall 1970 semester, I took a class called Introduction to Typography, hoping that someday, when a New York publishing house accepted my work, I would have a better understanding of how a book was put together. But when I pulled my first printed proof of handset metal type, I was electrified. Although my first project, a little pamphlet of my own poems called *Famous Americans*, showed no sign of either talent or taste, I discovered that I absolutely loved the work.

When I signed up for the class, I had no idea that my teacher, Harry Duncan, was regarded as one of the great fine-press printers in the world. The writers he published included John Crowe Ransom, Hayden Carruth, Robert Lowell, Wallace Stevens, Allen Tate, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams. The list was an impressive, and so was Duncan. With his iron-gray hair and mustache, and his rich, melodic, almost deliberately dramatic voice, it sometimes seemed as if the spirit of craftsmanship hovered about his shoulders.

For the six weeks of Christmas break in December 1971–January 1972, I worked for Duncan in his shop in his home, as he took advantage of the break from his teaching responsibilities to start printing a Cummington Press book. Watching Duncan at work on make-ready, watching him letterspace the capital letters in the poem titles until they looked just right, watching him crumple up sheets in disgust that I would have killed to have claimed I had printed, gave me a breathtaking standard to aspire to.

- *Famous Americans* by Allan Kornblum; no press imprint 1970; 100 copies, handsewn into wrappers.
- *Variations on a Theme in Blue* by Rochelle Ratner; Toothpaste Press, 1971; letterpress broadside in a folder featuring three linoleum blocks by Jim Fink.
- *Gold Rush* by Steve Toth; Toothpaste Press, 1972; 200 copies handsewn into wrappers.
- *Bandwagon* by Cinda Kornblum; Toothpaste Press, 1976; 425 copies handsewn into wrappers.
- *Waterworks* by Paul Violi, linoleum block on cover by Cinda Wormley; Toothpaste Press, 1972; 300 copies handsewn into Strathmore wrappers.
- *Threshold* by Allan Kornblum; Toothpaste Press, 1976; 700 copies handsewn into Fabriano wrappers.

Toothpaste Press Books with Spines

In April 1972, I bought a 10 x 15 Challenge Gordon platen press for a mere \$35.00, and moved it into Anselm Hollo's garage. Next month, Duncan announced that he had taken a position at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Meanwhile Cinda and I were getting booted out of our apartment by an urban renewal initiative in Iowa City, and we were about to get married. So with urban renewal money and a little help from family, we wound up buying Duncan's house. When he moved his equipment out, we moved our press in. Like the fabled fool rushing in, I had committed to a life as a fine press printer/publisher without knowing what I was getting myself into.

At the Toothpaste Press I published a mix of emerging local writers with some better-known authors, to give the press both vitality and credibility. I occasionally used expensive handmade papers, but I mostly stuck with high-end American machine-made papers, hoping with larger print runs and aggressive marketing, we could make a go of things financially.

- *Transmigration Solo* by Joseph Ceravolo; Toothpaste Press, 1979; 1,000 copies in wrappers; 100 signed copies quarterbound with handmade Japanese paper over boards and cloth over spine.
- *Not So Much Love of Flowers* by Allan Appel; Toothpaste Press, 1975; 475 copies Smyth sewn into wrappers, and 26 copies lettered and signed by the author, full-bound in cloth.
- *Scattered Brains* by Darrell Gray; Toothpaste Press, 1975; 575 copies in Fabriano wrappers; 50 signed and numbered copies full-bound in cloth.
- *How Spring Comes* by Alice Notley; cover/title page illustration by George Schneeman, Toothpaste Press, 1981; 900 copies sewn into wrappers; 100 signed and numbered copies full-bound in cloth.
- *Heartbreak Hotel* by Tom Clark; Toothpaste Press, 1981; 500 signed copies with Japanese fold, side-sewn into handmade Bengali wrappers.
- *Tu* by Cid Corman; Toothpaste Press, 1983; 500 signed copies with Japanese fold, side-sewn into handmade wrappers.
- *Hazel* by John Sjoberg; Toothpaste Press, 1976; 450 Smyth sewn in wrappers, 50 numbered and signed copies, quarterbound with handmade Japanese paper over boards and cloth over spine.
- *Orders of the Retina* by Thomas M. Disch; Toothpaste Press, 1982; 1050 in wrappers, and 100 signed copies quarterbound in handmade Japanese paper over boards and cloth over spine.
- *Poems 1957-1980* by Pentti Sarikoski; translated by Anselm Hollo, Toothpaste Press, 1983; 1,000 copies sewn into Strathmore wrappers; 200 copies full-bound in cloth.
- *Makeup On Empty Space* by Anne Waldman; Toothpaste Press, 1984; 1450 copies Smyth sewn into wrappers; 100 signed copies quarterbound with handmade Japanese paper over boards and cloth over spine.

Scraps to Pamphlets

Whenever I planned a book, I thought about how I might cut the paper that came from the mill, so that I would have scraps that could be used for pamphlets. Those pamphlets also provided opportunities for some of the volunteer apprentices who worked at Toothpaste over the years, to see a project through from beginning to end. As I put this exhibit together, I realized that while I'm proud of the larger, full-length books, I'm particularly fond of some of these inventive little pamphlets. They were a heck of a lot of fun to put together.

Note that most of these pamphlets were published under the Toothpaste Press imprint, but two were part of the Morning Coffee Chapbook series, my attempt to continue producing letterpress pamphlets during the first ten years of the Coffee House era.

- *Snapshots from Europe* by Dave Morice; Toothpaste Press, 1974; 200 copies handsewn into wrappers.
- *The Wacking of the Fruit Trees* by Dick Gallup, illustrated by the author; Toothpaste Press, 1975; 350 copies handsewn into wrappers.
- *Echoes* by Robert Creeley; Toothpaste Press, 1982; 2,000 copies on Grandee Text, sewn into wrappers; 200 on Frankurt White, handbound with marbled paper over boards and cloth over the spine, numbered and signed.
- *Little Mysteries* by Ken Mikolowski, illustrated by Ann Mikolowski, Toothpaste Press, 1979; 800 copies of the first edition printed on handmade Mulberry paper from Japan.
- *Vodka and Roses* by Michael Irene Welch, with two linoleum cuts by Cinda Kornblum; Toothpaste Press, 1978; 800 copies handsewn into Strathmore wrappers.
- *Rite for the Beautification of All Beings* by John Brandi, illustrated by the author; Toothpaste Press, 1983; 500 copies on Curtis Tweedweave text handsewn into Canson wrappers; 55 copies on Curtis Ragston, with illustrations hand-colored by the author, sewn into handmade Richard De Bas wrappers.
- *To Bread* by David Duer, linoleum cuts by John T. Walker; Morning Coffee Chapbook series, 1987; 375 copies signed by author and artist, handsewn into handmade Canterbury wrappers
- *Erosion Surface* by Steve LaVoie; Morning Coffee Chapbook series, 1984; drawing by Gaylord Schanilec; 357 copies signed by author and artist and handsewn into wrappers
- *January Zero* by Ray diPalma, with drawings by Elisabeth Brandfass; Morning Coffee Chapbook series 1984; 500 copies signed by author and artist and sewn into Canson Mi-Tientes wrappers.

Toothpaste to Coffee House: Continuity

It has been gratifying that many of the author relationships that began during the Toothpaste Press years have continued to flourish to this day. When I began publishing *Toothpaste* magazine, most small presses folded after a few years. New Directions and City Lights were the only adventurous, small literary publishers that had lasted more than a decade, and only New Directions had supported its authors throughout their careers.

Actually, few authors would have wanted to be published throughout their lives by the small presses of the day. In the 1970s and early 1980s, presses like Coffee House, Graywolf, and Milkweed, with established editorial schedules and procedures, professional design and production standards, and full-time experienced marketing and publicity staff, simply did not exist.

It was a delight to acquire manuscripts by Anselm Hollo, Ron Padgett, and Anne Waldman for the Toothpaste Press, but it has been the Coffee House Press *team*, including the staff and board, that convinced authors to entrust their careers to us.

- *Heavy Jars* by Anselm Hollo, cover by Patrick Dooley; frontispiece by Joe Giordano, Toothpaste Press, 1977; 1,300 copies Smyth sewn into wrappers; 100 copies numbered and signed by the author and full-bound in cloth.
- *No Complaints* by Anselm Hollo, cover drawing by Joe Giordano; Toothpaste Press, 1983; 975 copies Smyth sewn into Curtis wrappers; 100 copies signed by the author and quarterbound in Japanese paper over boards, with cloth spine.
- *Notes on the Possibilities and Attractions of Existence* by Anselm Hollo, cover by Jane Dalrymple-Hollo; Coffee House Press, 2001. (5 CHP titles)
- *How to Be a Woodpecker* by Ron Padgett, drawings by Trevor Winkfield; Toothpaste Press, 1983.
- *How to Be Modern Art* by Ron Padgett, drawings by Trevor Winkfield; Morning Coffee Chapbook, 1984.
- *How to Be Perfect* by Ron Padgett; Coffee House Press, 2007. (5 CHP titles)
- *Countries* by Anne Waldman, linoleum blocks by Reed Bye; Toothpaste Press, 1980; 900 copies Smyth sewn into Smyth sewn into Strathmore wrappers, and 200 copies numbered and signed by author and artist, and full-bound in cloth.
- *In the Room of Never Grieve: New and Selected Poems, 1985–2003* by Anne Waldman, with CD of the author reading selected poems; Coffee House, 2003. (7 CHP titles, plus 3 anthologies as editor)

“Our teeth were brushed—it was time for coffee.”

That was the answer we gave when asked why we changed our name from Toothpaste to Coffee House. But the real answer was more complex.

- Operating the press as a self-owned business hadn't worked financially.
- Most letterpress printer/publishers were moving toward high-end limited editions—the book as art object. The results were often brilliant, but it was not the route I wanted to take as a publisher.
- When our authors were up for tenure review, they needed photocopies of articles about the press that would help convince the review committee that their Toothpaste Press books were legitimate professional credentials.
- We wanted to start publishing fiction and memoir, and to reprint when needed.
- We wanted to increase the audience for our authors' work.
- The Iowa City “greater metropolitan area” wasn't big enough to sustain the press.

As we considered all of the above, we came up with the following plan.

- Incorporate the press as a nonprofit.
- Use computer typesetting and offset printing for a new line of trade titles.
- Start fresh as *Coffee House Press*, a name historically associated with literature and freedom of speech.
- Print a mix of poetry, fiction, and memoir in our line of trade books.
- Build a board and a staff to help build our ability to better serve writers and readers.
- Move to the Twin Cities.

And that's exactly what we did. Now approaching our thirtieth anniversary, this case contains two big stacks of the poetry books we've published over the years, to give a sense of how the books can mount up to a real contribution to the literary community.

Long-Term Commitments to Authors

When Toothpaste began, small presses only lasted a few years before becoming part of nostalgic stories told over a few glasses of wine. But in Minnesota alone, Graywolf, New Rivers, and Milkweed are in their second generation of leadership. Now Coffee House is in the middle of a leadership transition. We are, to steal from Graywolf's tagline, members of a rare breed of small literary publishers—those who have developed the capacity to turn to key authors and make career-long commitments. Such commitments are a service to writers, and a way for a publisher to say, “These are our *signature* authors; we stand *behind* their work, and we stand *for* their work. This is who we are.” The result at Coffee House has been a long list of prize-winning titles, made more meaningful by the rich, rewarding friendships we have developed along the way. We have included two cases display books by some of the authors with whom we have had such long-term relationships.

Case 1

- *Gorgeous Chaos* by Jack Marshall; Coffee House Press, 2002. (7 CHP titles)
- *Darkacre* by Greg Hewett; Coffee House Press, 2010. (3 CHP titles)
- *Cantos to Blood & Honey* by Adrian Castro; Coffee House Press, 1997. (3 CHP titles)
- *In the Shadow of Al-Andalus* by Victor Hernández Cruz; Coffee House Press, 2012. (5 CHP titles)
- *Rounding the Human Corners* by Linda Hogan; Coffee House Press, 2008. (3 CHP titles)
- *Dog Road Woman* by Allison Hedge Coke; Coffee House Press, 1997. (2 CHP titles)
- *The Book of Medicines* by Linda Hogan; Coffee House Press, 1993. (3 CHP titles)
- *Off-Season City Pipe* by Allison Hedge Coke; Coffee House Press, 2002. (2 CHP titles)
- *The Magic Whip* by Wang Ping; Coffee House Press, 2003. (5 CHP titles)
- *Legends from Camp* by Lawson Fusao Inada; Coffee House Press, 1992. (2 CHP titles)

Case 2

- *Transcircularities: New and Selected Poems* by Quincy Troupe; Coffee House Press, 2002. (5 CHP titles)
- *Errançities* by Quincy Troupe; Coffee House Press, 2012. (5 CHP titles)
- *It Was Today* by Andrei Codrescu; Coffee House Press, 2012. (7 CHP titles)
- *Jealous Witness* by Andrei Codrescu; Coffee House Press, 1986. (7 CHP titles)
- *Click and Clone* by Elaine Equi; Coffee House Press, 2007. (5 CHP titles)
- *Surface Tension* by Elaine Equi; Coffee House Press, 1989. (5 CHP titles)
- *Thirsting for Peace in a Raging Century* by Edward Sanders; Coffee House Press, 2009. (2 CHP titles)
- *Let's Not Keep Fighting the Trojan War* by Edward Sanders; Coffee House Press, 2009. (2 CHP titles)
- *Blood Dazzler* by Patricia Smith; Coffee House Press, 2008. (3 CHP titles)
- *Teahouse of the Almighty* by Patricia Smith; Coffee House Press, 2006. (3 CHP titles)

Major Coffee House Efforts

I'm proud of everything we publish, but the poetry books customarily are a bit thinner than our fiction titles. In fact, when I googled the phrase, *slender book of poetry*, I got 4,490,000 hits. Although we are committed to increasing the audience for all our books, it is true that we face some sales challenges for our poetry, so it makes sense to keep our costs under control by mostly publishing our poets in “slender” books, just like the clichéd phrase. But now and then we have found projects that led us to throw caution to the winds—and it does get windy during a Minnesota winter. In one of the smaller cases, you will find our massive hardcover three-volume set of the *Complete Collected Works* by Paul Metcalf, and the complete *Iovis Trilogy* by Anne Waldman in one massive cloth bound volume. Those are sort of books that might never have been published, if we hadn't believed in these authors and their work. Even for Coffee House, these were probably “once a decade” books—but I hope we can do more of them in the future.

- *Paul Metcalf • Collected Works • Volume One • 1956–1976*; cover photograph by Jonathan Williams; Coffee House Press, 1996.
- *Paul Metcalf • Collected Works • Volume Two • 1976–1986*; cover photograph by Marilyn Patti; Coffee House Press, 1997.
- *Paul Metcalf • Collected Works • Volume Three • 1987–1997*; cover photograph by Steven Trubitt; Coffee House Press, 1997.
- *The Iovis Trilogy* by Anne Waldman; Coffee House Press, 2011.

Leadership Transition

In 1994 a twenty-one-year-old Carleton student went through the Coffee House internship program, and then just kept hanging around. When an editorial assistant position became available, Chris Fischbach got the job. In no time, we began getting letters from authors telling us that, “Chris is a treasure.” During the last decade, he’s acquired authors who will provide a strong core for our list during our next twenty-five years. As a result of his distinctive editorial acumen and his outstanding organizational ability, Chris became the publisher at Coffee House in July 2011; Allan Kornblum has continued on a part-time basis as founder/senior editor, editing books, and writing about the history of Coffee House Press and the history of books and printing. We hope this innovative approach to leadership transition will prove useful to other presses and arts organizations, as a generation of Baby Boomer founders head into their sixties.

This case provides a sample of some of the important authors Chris has acquired for Coffee House Press, and for our community of readers.

- *Broken World* by Joseph Lease; Coffee House Press, 2007. (2 CHP titles)
- *Word Group* by Marjorie Welish; Coffee House Press, 2004. (4 CHP titles)
- *The Loving Detail of the Living and the Dead* by Eleni Sikiliano; Coffee House Press, 2013. (4 CHP titles)
- *The First Flag* by Sarah Fox; Coffee House Press, 2013. (2 CHP titles)
- *Becoming Weather* by Chris Martin; Coffee House Press, 2011.
- *Whorled* by Ed Bok Lee; Coffee House Press, 2011.
- *You and Three Others are Approaching a Lake* by Anna Moschovakis; Coffee House Press, 2010.
- *Bright Brave Phenomena* by Amanda Nadelberg; Coffee House Press; 2012.
- *Entrepot* by Mark McMorris; Coffee House Press, 2009.

