

## An overview of Les Éditions Lucie Lambert

Talk to the Alcuin Society, Vancouver BC

By Lucie Lambert

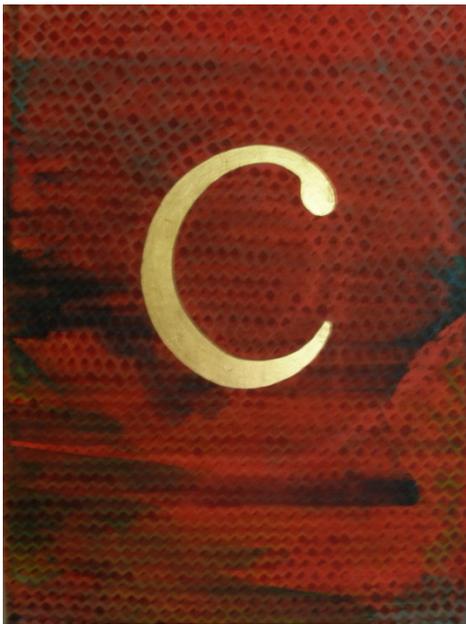
On April 11, 2019

Before my talk on publishing, let me show you a brief pictorial overview of the 13 publications I created over more than 40 years. [Images not shown]

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And now, let me share my views and lessons learned as an artist who also happens to be a publisher.

Culmination is the word I am using to start my talk. It is current, it is fresh, it just happened a few days ago: the sale of my book Alphabets. A book that was published in 2011. The repository of twenty-eight of my original gouache paintings of gardens, of pages of Arabic letters repeated to create a pattern, of Chinese strokes dancing on the surface of paper, of evocations of manuscripts flourished with ornamentations, of references to nature in the form of fish and snails and flowers.



I applied myself to draw in a large size of 5” x 8” each letter of our alphabet in italic serifs, inspired by the letterforms designed by Eugène Grasset in

1898. Robert Bringhurst in his book The Elements of Typographic Style wrote:

It is true that most romans are upright and most italics slope to the right ... Italic serifs tend to slope at a natural writing angle, tracing the path from one letter to another.... Italic and roman lived quite separate lives until the middle of the sixteenth-century. Before that date, books were set in either roman or italic, but not in both. In the late Renaissance, typographers began to use the two for different features in the same book. Typically, roman was used for the main text and italic for the preface, headnotes, side notes and for verse or block quotations.

The production of Alphabets took five years. In part, because of the time for me to draw each letter of the alphabet; the time for the poets, Robert Melançon and Ted Blodgett to write respectively their 26 poems; the time for Reg Lissel to make the 70 sheets of paste paper; the time for Jason Dewinetz to come up with the book design and to print the text on his Vandercook press, (the book is comprised of 52 poems, a title page, a bilingual preface, a dedication and a colophon); the time for Alanna Simenson to create and fashion the book casing; the time for Alex Widen to transfer the digital text on polymer plates, replacing the traditional lead foundry type for printing letterpress.

According to Wikipedia: Before desktop publishing, type foundries manufactured and sold metal and wood typefaces, and matrices for line-casting machines like the Linotype and Monotype machines designed to be used by letterpress printers.

Many of these collaborators were working in different locations: Robert Melançon in North Hatley in Eastern township, Quebec; Ted Blodgett in White Rock, Jason Dewinetz in Vernon, BC; Alanna Simenson had her working space at Barbarian Press in Mission; Reg Lissel had his studio in Vancouver Chinatown, Alex Widen in Clinton, Caribou region of BC; Ryan Mah, the photographer, Sheila Martineau, the designer of the slide show for Alphabets, David Leith, my web designer and I, we all live in Vancouver. Publishing a book requires to coordinate the work of many excellent collaborators to achieve the desired result of a unified piece of artwork.

Robert Reid, the legendary book designer and founder of Private Press in Canada in 1949 with the new publication of the book: *The Fraser Mines Vindicated*, wrote in the Colophon:

Fine books have literary value, and they have commercial value, but it is their value as works of art which distinguishes them from other books. This intangible, aesthetic quality is not easily obtained. The designer's use of binding materials, of type, of paper and of inks, all contribute to the feeling of luxuriousness and of fineness. There is another element, **personality**, without which a book is lost. It results from the designer imparting something of himself into books -- his love for fine books, his consequent sincerity of purpose, his grasp of the elementals of the printing craft.

This tapestry of many hands working together was revealed in the form of the book Alphabets. This book is now in the collection of the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art due to four generous donors and patrons. Three men and one woman who believed in the value of my work as an artist and as a publisher. My book could not have found a better home in the context of Cynthia Sears's collection of 1,900 artist books, which she is donating to the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art.

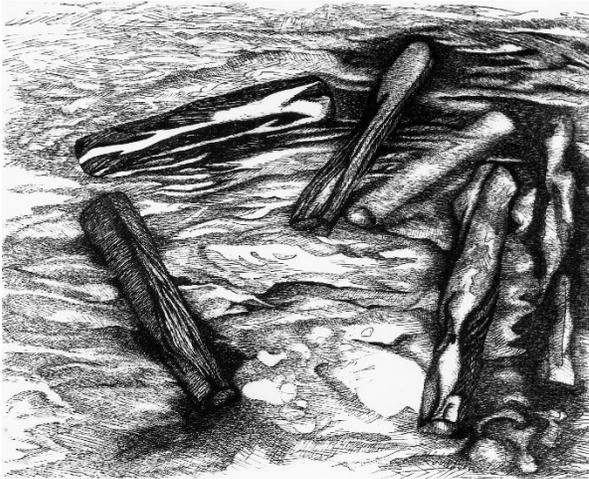


Alphabets is mostly a west coast production which has found a home in a unique museum dedicated to the art of the book. Alphabets will become visible, displayed, filmed and therefore will be accessible to those interested

in the field of book arts, of literature, of crafts and history. It is not the Library of Congress or the Boston Athenaeum, but the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art which acquired my magnum opus due to the generous financial contributions of four donors and patrons: Cynthia Sears, Béla Szigethy, Réjean Beaudoin and Zoltan Szigethy. I am heartfully grateful to their appreciation and support.

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I began publishing my books in 1976. I finished my Bachelor of Arts in 1968 and my Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1975. In 1976, I applied for a Quebec Government Grant as a printmaker. I got a first grant of \$3,000 for the publication of my first book *Frayère* (Spawning pool).



The pictures in *Frayère* arose out of the play of relationships between **water and wood**, inspired by childhood memories of playing among the floating wooden logs in the Saint-Maurice river before they were transformed into pulp and paper at the Shawinigan Water and Power plant, Quebec.



The **solid forms** of wooden logs in a **liquid environment**, the **rough texture** of the bark contrasting with the rippling of the wind on **the water** appeared in the nine black and white serigraphs. I then invited the professor of French Literature at McGill, Yvon Rivard, to write nine poems, drawing his inspiration from these images.

Here on this picture taken in Vancouver in 1984, you see from left to right my friends. All come from Shawinigan, my hometown. They are the ones I worked with for my three first books: Réjean Beaudoin, François Ricard and Yvon Rivard.



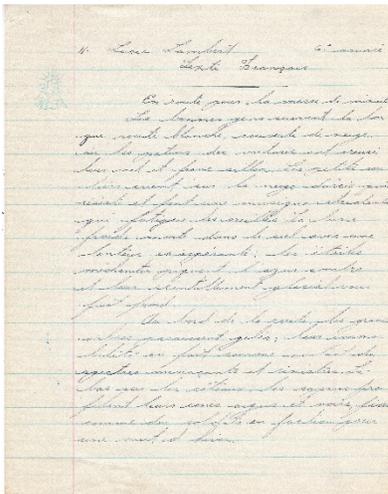
Right from this first experience with Yvon Rivard for Frayère, I became committed to the idea of forming close associations with poets who would work inspired by my images, except for the book Les Roses for which I created 28 woodcuts to accompany Rilke's 24 poems.

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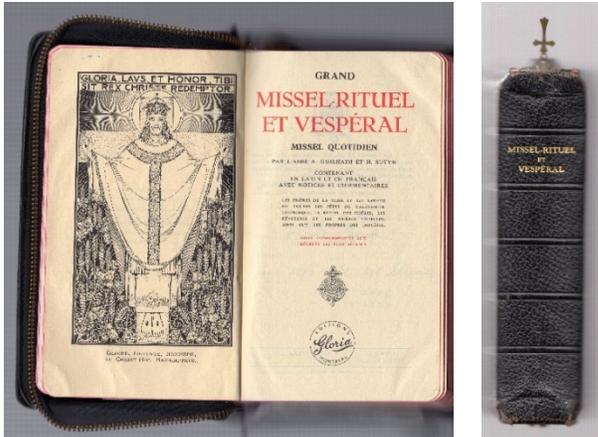
But let me take you back to the early stimuli instrumental to my later development as artist and publisher, and tell you a little of how others have viewed this art form we call *le livre d'artiste*.

My influences go back to my childhood. Curiously enough, books to read were not so important. I was more an outdoor type of child but at school I was fascinated by writing. To have good **hand writing** was important to me and I liked the **pen and ink** material to write fine letters for dictations or to use a well sharpened pencil. A beautiful page well written was not only pleasing to my eyes, it was an accomplishment, a satisfaction that involved my deep self.

Here you see my writing with pen and ink when I was eleven, in 1958, in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

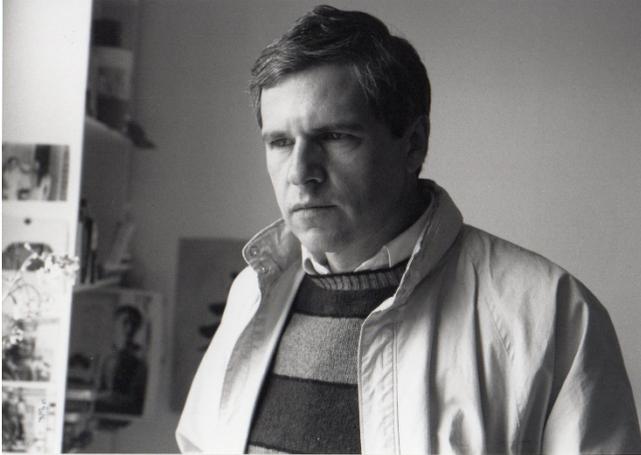


I remember that when I was six years old, my grandfather made a little desk for me with a padded yellow chair, adapted to my size. That was a real shift for me to feel the quietness of my bedroom, conducive not only for sleeping but also for writing and studying. It might be that solitary activity which led me, in my thirties, to undertake the study and practice of Chinese calligraphy. For 25 years, I enjoyed that practice of calligraphy as a visual yoga that had the power to quiet my mind and channel my energy.



If there was a book that was influential when I was young, it is the Catholic church **missal**. I was sensitive to the quality of the onion skin paper, the vermilion title and initials, the gilt edges and the beauty of the layout, added to the content. Plus, this book was considered precious, with pious images illuminated with golden details and bound in leather casing, with a golden jewelry cross. All that decorum shaped my taste for appreciating beautiful books, well made and well designed, something to care for.

I completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1975 with a major in printmaking at the University of Quebec in Montréal (UQAM). The influence of my professors was profound. Our teachers were publishers of *livres d'artiste* and the University library had a collection of them, so they were accessible to us, students. We could see them. We could hold them. We could feel them. They were tangible. My decision to be a publisher as an artist printmaker didn't come out of nowhere, it's part of my culture.



In retrospect, I realize that I could not have done these books without my association with Réjean Beaudoin, my partner for 18 years, who is a writer, a scholar, and the author of my third book, *Aléa*. He became professor of French literature at UBC in 1983. This is when I came to live with him in Vancouver. Here you see pages from Aléa.



My trips to Paris starting in 1968 were also very important to perfect my trade, to exhibit and to meet with print collectors, especially in Strasbourg in the Eastern part of France where I had three exhibitions in 1973, 1976 and 1979. In Alsace, I made friends with collectors and printmakers. They became my artistic family that I could rely on for decades. Here you see Robert Stehelin, the great collectors of Western prints with whom I exchanged a long correspondence of 435 letters over 13 years.



I lived in Paris from 1980 to 1983 and worked at the internationally known Atelier Lacourière et Frélaud, a professional printing studio where Picasso, Miro, Chagall and other noteworthy artists worked. This is where I created etchings and printed three of my books: *Le Prince et la ténèbre*, *Aléa* and *La Naissance des nuages*.



In this picture I am arriving at the studio to work at one of the seven work stations dedicated to artists coming from different countries - Switzerland, United States, Canada, Norway, Japan, to name a few – to take advantage of the skill of professional printers of etchings and the technical assistance of Jacques Frélaud, the Director of the printshop. It was a real enriching experience to work in Paris at that studio, since it was conducive to networking and making friends with my peers.

The next picture shows me at work in the printshop. I was younger then, in the full flower of my youth. Yet, with the passing of years, this photo still depicts how I work today.



As a publisher, the most influential people were those with whom I worked. **Pierre Guillaume**, the Montreal-based typographer-printer for my four first books: *Frayère*, *Le Prince et la ténèbre*, *Aléa* and *La naissance des nuages*, brought with him his French book design tradition. **Crispin and Jan Elsted**, proprietors of Barbarian press in British Columbia, were trained in England as typographers, typesetters and printers. Crispin designed three of my books and handset the poems printed by Jan in *Conversations with a Toad*, *A Thousand Hooded Eyes* and *Air*. **Robert Reid** in Vancouver, the legendary founder of Private Press in Canada designed three of my books at his computer: *Terre d'or (Golden Earth)* *Les Roses* and *Au coeur du bois/ In the Heart of the Wood*.



Each book designer represented a different tradition that I have benefited from. I worked closely with letterpress printers and assisted them all along the process of printing each of my books.

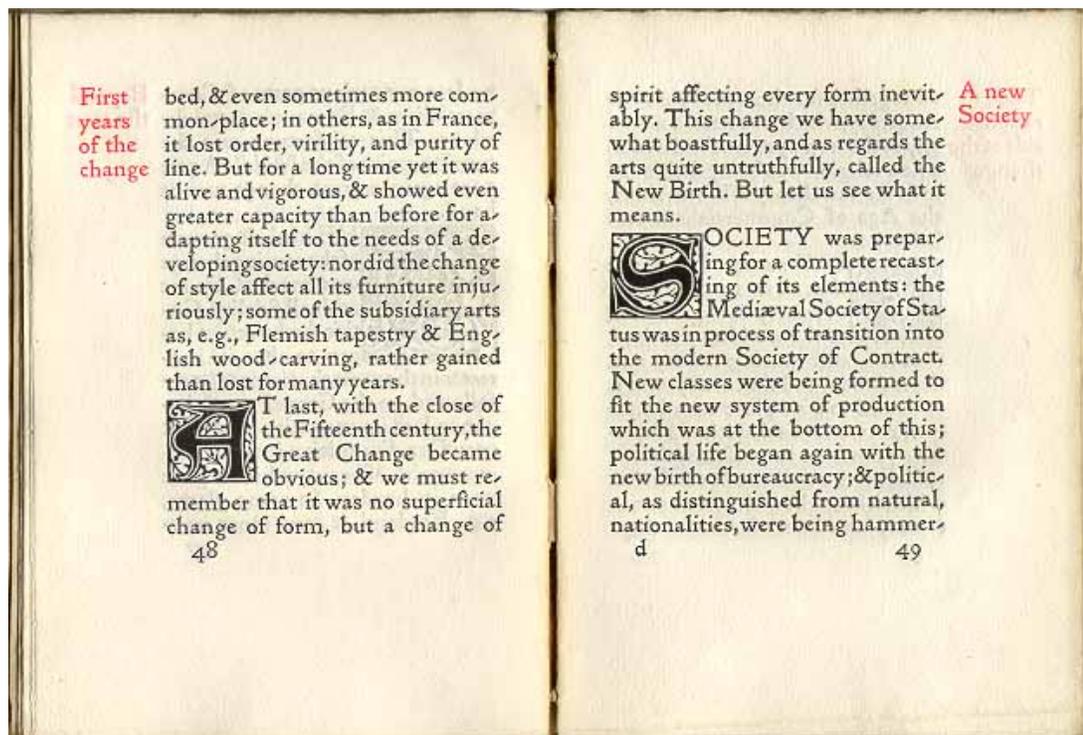
Masters of their crafts, those artisans are a fount of invaluable and increasingly rare knowledge and know-how in operating hand press or cylinder press, using foundry type for hand composition and figuring out the layout of the text in regard to the images. Our age of technological revolution has nearly eliminated from industrial production all the crafts traditionally associated with the art of the book.

Veronique Plesch in 2002 at the Conference “From Image to Word” in Germany delivered a talk about my books, in which she said:

It is interesting to note that Lambert stresses that her work is at the junction of two contemporary bookmaking traditions: the Anglo-American based on the principles espoused by William Morris’s Kelmscott Press, and the French, with the bibliophilic *livre d’artiste*.

William Morris wrote about his intentions in founding Kelmscott Press, his publishing house:

I began printing books with the hope of producing some which would have a definite claim to beauty... I have always been a great admirer of the calligraphy of the middle ages... As to the fifteenth century books, I had noticed that they were always beautiful by force of the mere **typography**... It was the essence of my undertaking to produce books which would be a pleasure to look upon as pieces of printing and arrangement of type.



Looking at my adventure from this point of view then, I found I had to consider chiefly the following things: the paper, the form of the type; the relative spacing of the letters, the words, and the lines; and lastly the position of the matter on the page.

Jean-Pierre Duquette, Emeritus professor of French Literature at McGill University defines *livre d'artiste* as follows:

These volumes, once called « luxury editions, » have to meet certain criteria in order to merit the term of *livre d'artiste*: they must be meticulously typeset and hand printed on the highest quality paper, presented in bindings and casings of distinction, and, finally, published only in limited edition. ... The book's materials and appearance are quite definitely as important as the texts and the engravings: all elements must flow together smoothly to form a work of art whose components blend into total harmony.

The second bookmaking tradition comes from Paris in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The French *bibliophile* does not have the same requirements as the English book lover. The *French bibliophile* wants a **grandiose book** and puts the emphasis on the **illustrations**, which overrun the whole page or even overflow onto two pages and blend in with the text. Because of their large size, these might be called “albums” rather than books.

Now I would like to quote the words of Matisse. In a letter, he wrote:

The artist and the writer should act in concert: separately, but in parallel. The drawing should be a visual equivalent of the poem. I will not say first and second violins, but an *ensemble concertant*.

I see myself as an artist printmaker and publisher, a Quebecoise who follows a French book art tradition, initiated in Quebec by Roland Giguère in 1949 with the publication of his book *Faire naître* (Give Birth).

Jennifer Van Evra, who wrote for the Vancouver Courier in 1998, remarked:

Although the *livre d'artiste* remains a relatively popular art form in Quebec and France, it has never made the leap into the English book-making tradition, which is better known for typography and binding methods.

For me, these books are an opportunity to learn new techniques, for example jewelry, calligraphy, woodcarving, and wood engraving; an opportunity to travel to other countries; and an opportunity to meet a wide range of people (poets, typographers, printers, papermakers, binders, librarians, brokers and collectors of books.)

For me, there is no more fertile ground than the multi-faceted work of producing a *livre d'artiste*. It is in this work that I fulfil my destiny, my *raison d'être*, and my way of being in the world. I experienced a great sense of satisfaction in producing these books and thus making my own contribution to a tradition that goes back to the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead.

The field of *livres d'artiste* is a blend of many elements, including **past and present**. It is the product of numerous encounters between

- image and text
- poetry and typography
- print and paper
- handpress and computer
- binding and ornamentation
- ancient crafts and modern technologies

In summary, book art continually brings together elements **from near and far**.

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I have a few anecdotes to share with you about the ups and downs of publishing, but let me begin with one in the context of my most difficult book to bring about, which was the book Air:



Let's title this one Murphy's Law, or, if something can go wrong, it is likely to go wrong.

- The images in Air were refreshed from woodblocks engraved 20 years earlier which had to be recut and reworked.
- The size of paper was large 20 x 26 in., therefore difficult to handle at the press.
- I was using a very large press that I was not familiar with, too big for me, so that I had to find three assistants to help me in printing because two of them were not present consistently during the ten days it took to print this book. Jan Elsted, the owner of the press, gracefully completed what needed to be done.
- The borrowed press broke at one point and had to be repaired by the owners.
- I ended up having a clash between traditions: mine as an artist publisher of books, and my typographer of a literary background who did not want to use type bigger than 18 pts but I insisted on a 24 pts Garamont due to the size of the paper versus the size of the text. As a result of this difference, our working relationship was ruined and ended.



- The 24 pts Garamont type was available on the market, but only for the English language alphabet, therefore I had to find a typecutter to design the French accents and to cast them. Luckily, I knew Jim

- Rimmer from New Westminster who was able to design and add the accents to the character font.
- I had always worked with the same bookbinder – the Quebec master Pierre Ouvrard – but I was interested at that point to explore working with someone new. Everything went so wrong with that person that I almost ended up in court. The new person claimed that a specific bookbinding technique which has its roots in Chinese tradition was his invention, and he claimed to have a copyright for this technique. This dispute led me back to my original bookbinder, Pierre Ouvrard.
  - By the time the book was finished, I had hired more than 15 people, and travelled across Canada to make sure the final work became exactly what I envisioned.

As you saw at the beginning of my talk about Alphabets, publishing is complex. As you can see in this example with Air, that complexity can result in many difficulties.

Now let me share three more anecdotes that I will not develop as fully, but which may provoke your curiosity. As with the anecdote on Air, I have given a title to each of them.

### Patience pays off

Lao Tzu, the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC Chinese philosopher, supposedly said:

Can you remain unmoving  
Until the right action arises by itself?

For my latest book, Vraie demeure, abécédaire, published in 2018, I waited a year and a half to find a printer. One would have liked to do it but he was busy building a house and a studio. The second one, a French man in Montreal operating under the name La Presse de Paris, had accepted but he had to drop my project as he didn't have his immigration papers in order.



The third one when I contacted him was depressed, mourning the loss of a loved one, but actually a year later Martin Dufour, at 82, accepted to take the Herculean task of printing from polymer plates for the first time. I assisted him, as I always do when it comes to printing. It took us 10 days, standing 7hrs a day to complete the printing of Pierre Nepveu's poems, the title page, the dedication and the colophon.

### Never give up

I was looking for a poet to write based on a series of seven cold blooded animals. A poet in Mission accepted to take on the challenge but he didn't honor his commitment. While travelling in California, I went to Stanford University in 1988 to present my book Conversations with a Toad to Mark Dimunation, who suggested I work with a Native American poet, Scott Mommaday, whom I contacted. After he accepted, I sent him 14 prints of wood engravings; two colors for each of the 7 animals. But then he didn't like that I pressed him to write his poems within six months in order to launch the book for the show that was planned at McGill. As a result, over the phone, he hung up on me; our association then came to an end and he never returned the prints.

In the end, I was referred to Douglas Jones by the poet Jacques Brault. His collaboration turned out to be stimulating, gracious and satisfactory. Not only did Jones write more poems for me to choose from, but he intervened with the journal **Ellipse** to have a whole issue dedicated to each one of my books, where poems were translated from French to English and from English to French. That was really good fortune.

### Unusual Inspiration



Bill Reid in 1984 gave me a chunk of boxwood to sculpt, and he said, “There is a frog seated in it; find it.” I had never been interested in drawing animals but I was ready to take on that challenge. I bought a toad at the pet shop and called it “Kiss”. I kept the toad as a pet and as a model for a year and a half, feeding it with meal worms and crickets, having all kind of adventures with that animal with golden eyes. I made drawings, prints, sculptures and jewelry inspired by my toad. Two books came out of these studies: Conversations with a Toad by Robert Bringhurst and A Thousand Hooded Eyes by D.G. Jones. My bookbinder suggested to use a frog skin imported from Belgium for binding A Thousand Hooded Eyes and I adorned the cover of that book with a silver sterling jewelry medallion of a frog.

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Now I would like to shift to a different, and more personal, theme – namely, how publications changed me.

Let me begin this theme by telling you a poem I know by heart. Because my native language is French, the original French poem comes more easily, but I will read the English translation for you.

Jardin sombré sous les ombres  
Je cultive des reflets pour mirer  
Au plus épais des nuages  
L'espace insaisissable

In the garden sunk under shadows  
I cultivate the least glimmers  
To make out in the intimacy of thick cloud  
Intangible space

You see, the most personal and most surprising effect of my participation in these publications is an abiding love of poetry.

- You will recall that my initial inclination, training and production centered on visual art.
- I had no special interest in the world of words.
- But if you're going to collaborate with poets, it's hard to avoid being touched by their language!

Each of my early collaborators, naturally, had some influence on my thinking and appreciation of written expressions – but it was the arrival of Jacques Brault's poetry in my life that hit me like a thunderbolt.



- He collaborated with me in 1984 on La Naissance des nuages (or The Birth of Clouds) and in 2005 on Au coeur du bois/In the Heart of the Wood.
- I find in Jacques Brault a unifying prism to look at the world. I connect through his poems with the immediacy of life, with the synchronicity of cricket sounds chirping close to the ground as lightning bolts flash in the sky.
- With poetry comes an open space, a sense of depth and mystery. With poems come unusual associations, rare words, rhythmic syllables, and musical cadence. In one word, with poems comes **SOUND**. Poems need to be memorized to be heard. One feels whole, one feels alive and participating in something bigger than oneself. One feels enlarged to embrace many dimensions of interconnectedness of all things, which we see, which we hear and beyond. Poetry is words with music, the song emerges and carries the voice beyond what is common and ordinary. Poetry takes you to timeless themes of love, solitude, joy and nature, to the spaciousness, to the unnamable, to the invisible...
- I was so struck by Brault's poetry that I began to memorize first his poems written for my books, and eventually I memorized 15 more on the theme of flowers and now I can recite over 50 of them – all of which are still lodged in my memory. And then I began to memorize other poems in English by other writers, like those of Lao Tzu – a practice which I continue to this day.

- As a result, when I now visualize my images in The Birth of clouds, I also “hear them,” in the form of his poems. Likewise, when I recall his poems, I simultaneously “see” my images that inspired him to write.
- Having said this, you will not be surprised that the poem I recited earlier is by Jacques Brault in the original French; and in the English translation by the poet D.G. Jones.

My visual artistic life has developed a second – verbal – dimension in reciting poems as I walk to the park and as I wake up in the mornings. My life has been enriched, simply and directly, by my choice to become a publisher. In one way or another, I hope each of you has a similar personal, enriching experience as you expand your interests in life.

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Permit me a few concluding summary remarks.

My role in *livre d'artiste* has two primary aspects: I have contributed the art which stimulates others; and I have orchestrated the publication process and its production.

As you can appreciate, the work of an artist can be, and frequently is, a lonely one. There is need for a quiet, internal space to create visual images in various media, which in my case have been prints, paintings, jewelry, drawings, ceramics, and miniature sculptures in wood that are then cast in silver or gold. Such work requires solitude, concentration and self-motivation, not to mention creativity.

Orchestrating the publication process and its various elements, in contrast to the artistic aspect, requires interaction with many varied individuals and institutions. Among other actions, it calls for finding poets, collaborating with book designers, fabricators of paper, printers and binders, selecting the appropriate font and style of type, no less ensuring the legal status of the final product and then their sale into the public domain. This aspect requires interpersonal, social, organizational and motivational skills.

Both the artistic and the interpersonal aspects call for patience, tolerance for unanticipated events, and determination to tinker with all contingencies until a satisfactory end is attained.

Step by step, with each new skill developed through trial and error, study and practice, I worked my way through pencil crayons and then pen and ink drawings; I learned printmaking in etching, woodcut and silkscreen at the University of Quebec in Montreal; I practiced Chinese and Arabic calligraphy in Paris under the guidance of Korean and Iraqi masters; I consulted Oriental manuscripts at The Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris before I started to create “my gardens” painted with gouache medium enhanced with gold-leaf motifs; I came to live in Vancouver in 1983 and was introduced to woodcarving, tools and jewelry making under Bill Reid – this is when I started to explore the third dimension in making masks and miniature sculptures; a few years later I took weekend workshops offered by the excellent Salish artist, Laura Wee Lay Laq to work in clay that led me to learn the process of handbuilt ceramics and the primitive method of sawdust firing that I applied to shaping a series of over 30 human figures, and even multi-media mixtures of all these arts.

My eye, curiosity and creative drive continue unabated and I expect that this urge to create will last throughout my life.

Thank you for your attention and time. I would be pleased to address questions you may have about this presentation.

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