

Firefly Press Archive — Letterpress Broadsides & Typographic Works
John Gerhard Kristensen, Boston / Somerville, Massachusetts
Late 1980s–2014

\$1500

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Collection Overview

This archive comprises thirteen items produced at Firefly Press, including eleven letterpress broadsides and two closely related typographic works in offprint and pamphlet form. The material spans roughly the late 1980s through 2014 and documents Firefly Press work created for teaching visits, bibliophile societies, poetry outreach programs, typographic exhibitions, and private or printer's-file keepsakes.

Together, the group reflects Firefly Press's sustained engagement with classical typography, historical quotation, book arts education, and contemporary literary culture in Boston and New England.

General Subjects

Letterpress printing, fine press and private press work, typography and type history, Boston and New England printing culture, bibliophile societies, printer gatherings, printing education, typographic exhibitions, bookbinding and book arts, broadside poetry, printing ethics and craft philosophy, Daniel Berkeley Updike and the Merrymount Press legacy, historical quotations in print culture.

General Condition

Condition across the archive is uniformly fine. Sheets are clean and bright with strong impressions and even inking, characteristic of careful hand composition and presswork. No tears, creases, stains, or significant handling wear are present unless noted at the item level. Deckled edges are as issued. All pieces are suitable for framing or portfolio storage.

General Scarcity

Scarcity is consistent across the group. These items were produced as keepsakes, teaching editions, society occasion printings, exhibition ephemera, or localized announcements, typically in small and often undocumented distributions. We find no institutional holdings recorded in OCLC/WorldCat for these specific Firefly Press printings, and no duplicate copies are currently located in the trade. Any stated limitation or distribution context is noted at the item level.

Press Overview

Firefly Press (Boston and Somerville, Massachusetts) is a respected commercial letterpress printing office and type foundry founded and operated by master printer John Kristensen. The press is widely recognized for its fidelity to historical typographic craft and its close association with literary institutions, bibliophile societies, and printing education. Kristensen has taught extensively, including service on the Rare Book School faculty, and Firefly Press is frequently credited on poetry broadsides and institutional keepsakes.

Item-Level Catalogue

Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106–43 BCE)

'History is the Witness of the Times'

Firefly Press, Boston / Somerville, 2014

Letterpress broadside

Identifier

Printed as a keepsake for the Northeast Kingdom Typographic Congress, August 19, 2014, marking Sam Ellenport's talk 'Binding Books by Hand in the Digital Age.'

Physical Description

Single sheet; printed in red and black on smooth wove paper; classical balanced layout. Faint paper weave visible when held to light.

Condition

Clean and bright; sharp impression with even inking. No flaws noted.

Scarcity and Distribution

Produced for a single typographic congress event; distributed to attendees.

Notes

Text presents Latin and English renderings of Cicero's dictum from *De Oratore*, a foundational statement on history, memory, and truth. Sam Ellenport, longtime proprietor of Harcourt Bindery, is a leading figure in American bookbinding and book arts education.

Subjects

Cicero, Typography, Bookbinding, Sam Ellenport, Typographic Congress, Fine Press Printing, Letterpress Keepsakes, Book Arts History.



Berenson, Bernard (1865–1959)**Sketch for a Self-Portrait**

Firefly Press, Boston, 2013

Letterpress broadside

Identifier

Christmas keepsake printed by Jerrold Mitchell for the Mitchell family.

Physical Description

Single sheet; printed in black and red on heavy mould-made paper; deckled lower edge. Unnumbered example printed outside the numbered sequence of six copies.

Condition

Fine; clean, bright, and well preserved.

Scarcity and Distribution

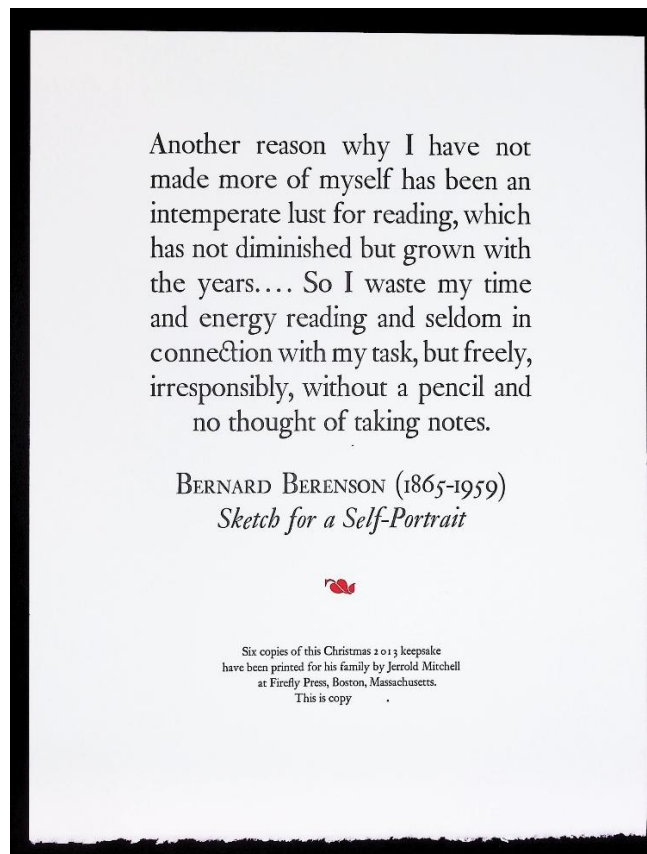
Extremely limited family printing of six copies, plus a small number of printer's-file or presentation examples.

Notes

Text excerpted from Berenson's *Sketch for a Self-Portrait* (1949), reflecting his humanistic philosophy and lifelong engagement with art and scholarship.

Subjects

Bernard Berenson, Letterpress Keepsakes, Book Arts, Broadside, Fine Press, Private Printing, Printing History.



Updike, Daniel Berkeley (1860–1941)

'Printing'

Firefly Press, Boston, 1990
Letterpress broadside

Identifier

Printed March 24, 1990, for Volney Crowell and students of the Massachusetts College of Art during a workshop visit to Firefly Press.

Physical Description

Single sheet, 8 × 11.5 inches; heavy mould-made stock; printed in red and black; deckled lower edge.

Condition

Clean, bright, and crisp; no flaws or blemishes.

Scarcity and Distribution

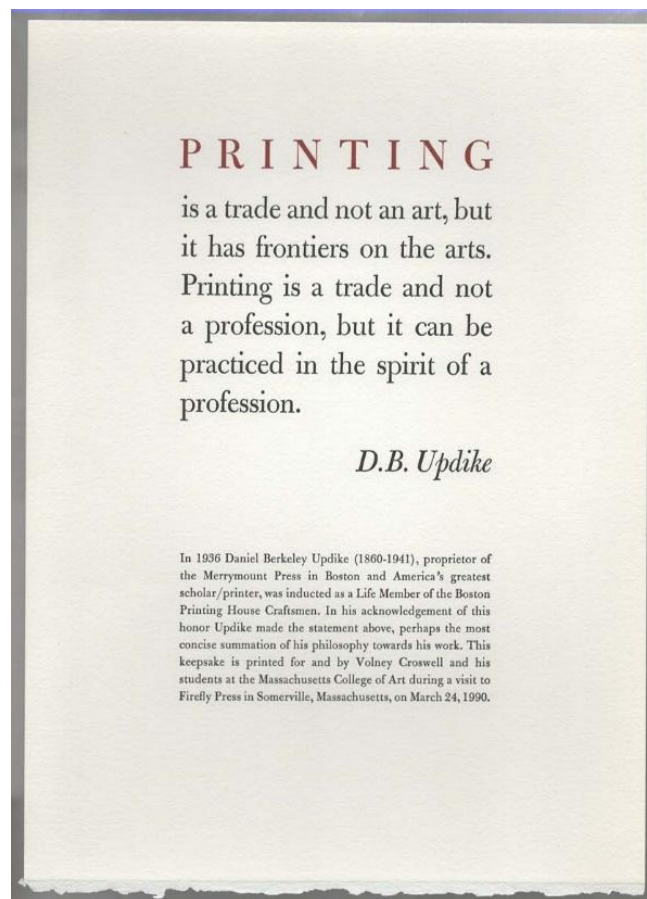
Produced as a teaching piece; most examples distributed directly to workshop participants.

Notes

Text originally written for Updike's induction as a Life Member of the Boston Printing House Craftsmen in 1936, articulating his philosophy of printing as disciplined craft.

Subjects

Daniel Berkeley Updike, Merrymount Press, Printing House Craftsmen, Massachusetts College of Art, Fine Press, Letterpress, Typography, Printing History.



Donnelly, Patrick (b. 1956)

'When in the Uterine Empyrean They Told Me'

Firefly Press, Boston, 2009

Letterpress broadside, edition of 125

Identifier

Printed for the Massachusetts Poetry Outreach Project's North Allston-Brighton Poet Residency Program.

Physical Description

Single sheet, approximately 11 × 13 inches; printed in black and burgundy on Mohawk Superfine stock; set in Caledonia and Bulmer.

Condition

Fine; strong impression and clean sheet.

Scarcity and Distribution

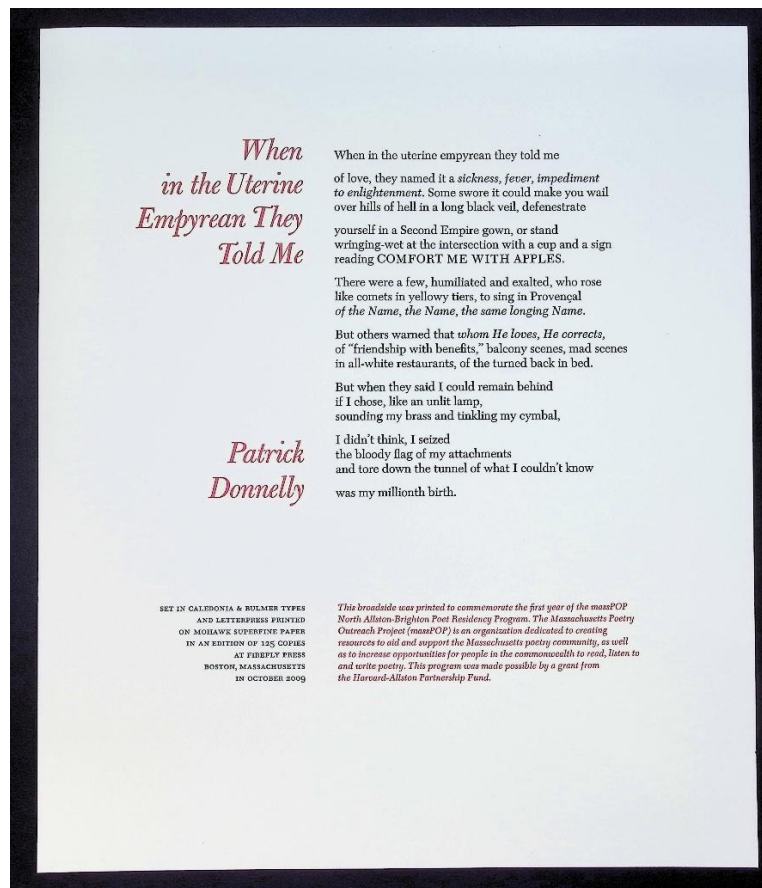
Limited to 125 copies for a regional poetry outreach initiative.

Notes

Donnelly is an American poet, translator, and educator associated with The Frost Place; his work integrates lyrical craft with spiritual and humanist themes.

Subjects

Patrick Donnelly, Massachusetts Poetry Outreach Project, Broadside Poetry, Typography, Poetry, Letterpress Printing.



Kristensen, John Gerhard

'Our Fathers / Father Figures'

Firefly Press, Somerville, 2005

Letterpress broadside

Identifier

Privately produced shop keepsake, dated in Roman numerals 23 March 2005.

Physical Description

Square sheet, 10.5 × 10.5 inches; laid paper with deckled lower edge; printed in black, red, and gold.

Condition

Fine; clean and bright, no handling marks.

Scarcity and Distribution

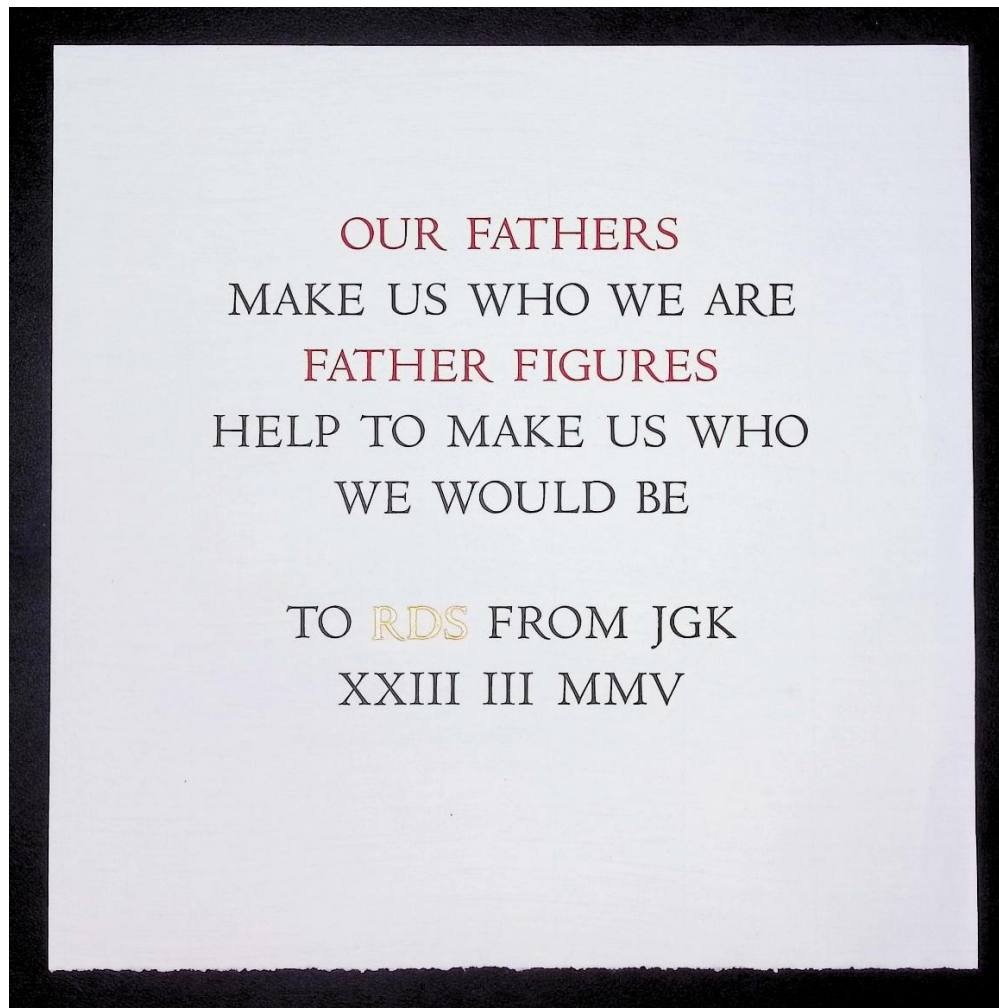
Privately issued in a very small, undocumented run, likely fewer than twenty copies.

Notes

Text and dedication suggest personal authorship and presentation by Kristensen; an accompanying signed label provides direct printer provenance.

Subjects

Private Presses, John Kristensen, Fatherhood Theme, Fine Press Printing, Typography, Broadside Art.



Kristensen, John Gerhard

Cutting, Kerning, Mortising & Mixing

Firefly Press, Allston, 2010

Letterpress folded card

Identifier

Wayzgoose announcement for the Letterpress Guild of New England.

Physical Description

Folded card, 4.5 × 6 inches; handmade laid stock; green ornamental border with black and green interior text.

Condition

Fine; clean and crisp.

Scarcity and Distribution

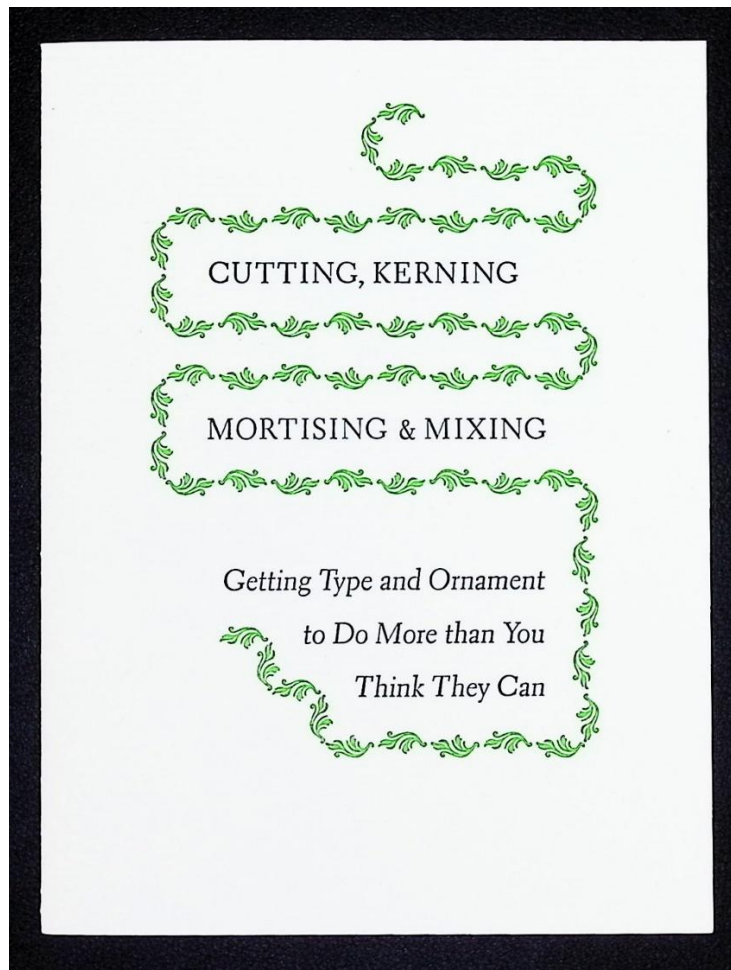
Produced for a single regional guild event; limited local circulation.

Notes

Functions as both event announcement and miniature essay on typographic craft and ornament.

Subjects

Letterpress Printing, Typographic Ornament, Wayzgoose Tradition, Fine Press Printing, Typography, Printing Ephemera.



Folded accordion broadside

Printed to accompany Kristensen's exhibition at the Club of Odd Volumes, Boston, April–June 2011.

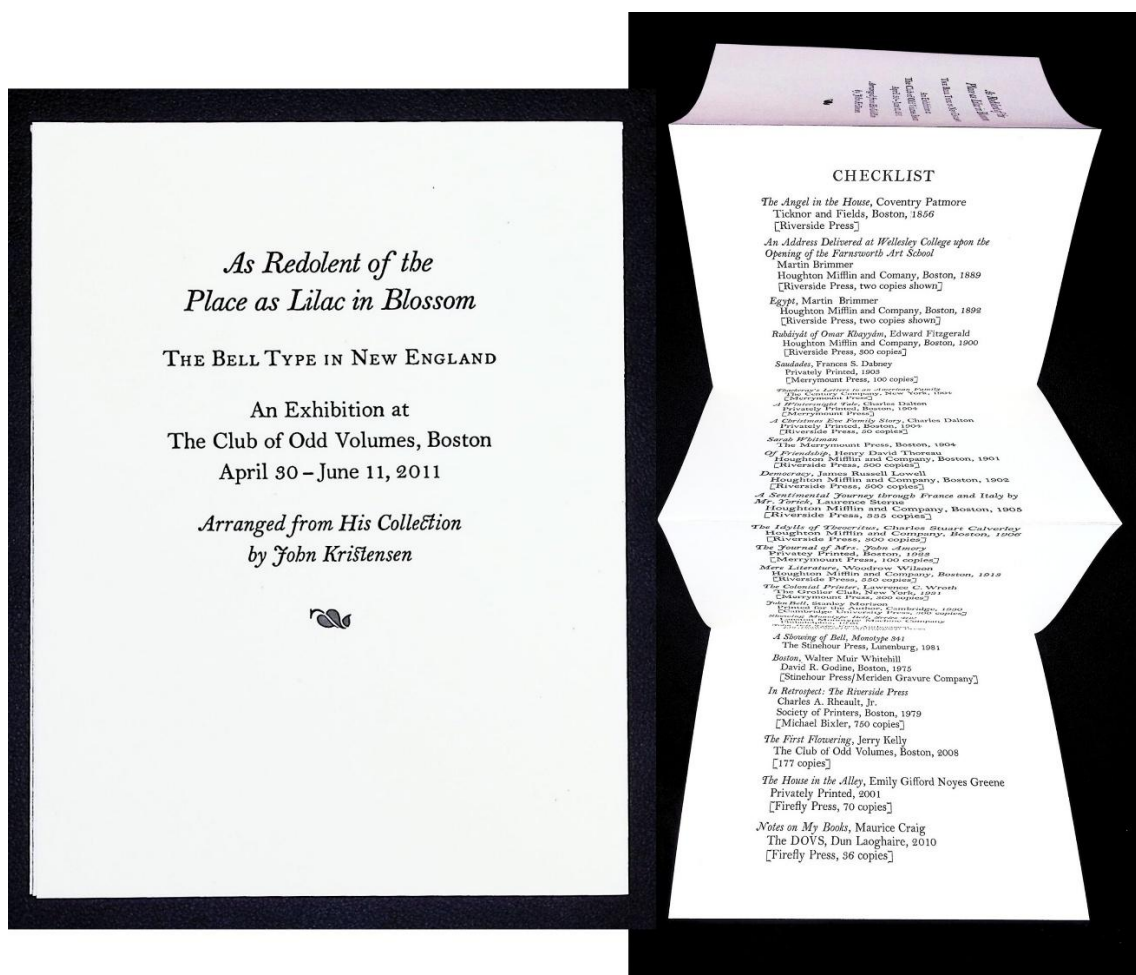
Accordion fold, 4.75 x 6.25 inches folded, unfolding to five panels; printed in black on heavy white wove stock.

Fine; clean and well preserved.

Exhibition ephemera; seldom encountered in the market.

Includes checklist of Bell-type books from 1856–2010, linking Firefly Press to a long New England typographic lineage.

Bell Type, Club of Odd Volumes, Private Press History, Typography, Exhibition Ephemera.



Kristensen, John Gerhard

Hermann Zapf 70th Birthday Broadside, 'Inter Scientias... Typographica'

Firefly Press, c. 1988

Letterpress broadside

Identifier

Keepsake honoring Hermann Zapf's seventieth birthday.

Physical Description

Oblong sheet, approximately 11.75 × 8.25 inches; two-color printing on mould-made rag paper; deckled lower edge; original presentation envelope present.

Condition

Fine; gift quality.

Scarcity and Distribution

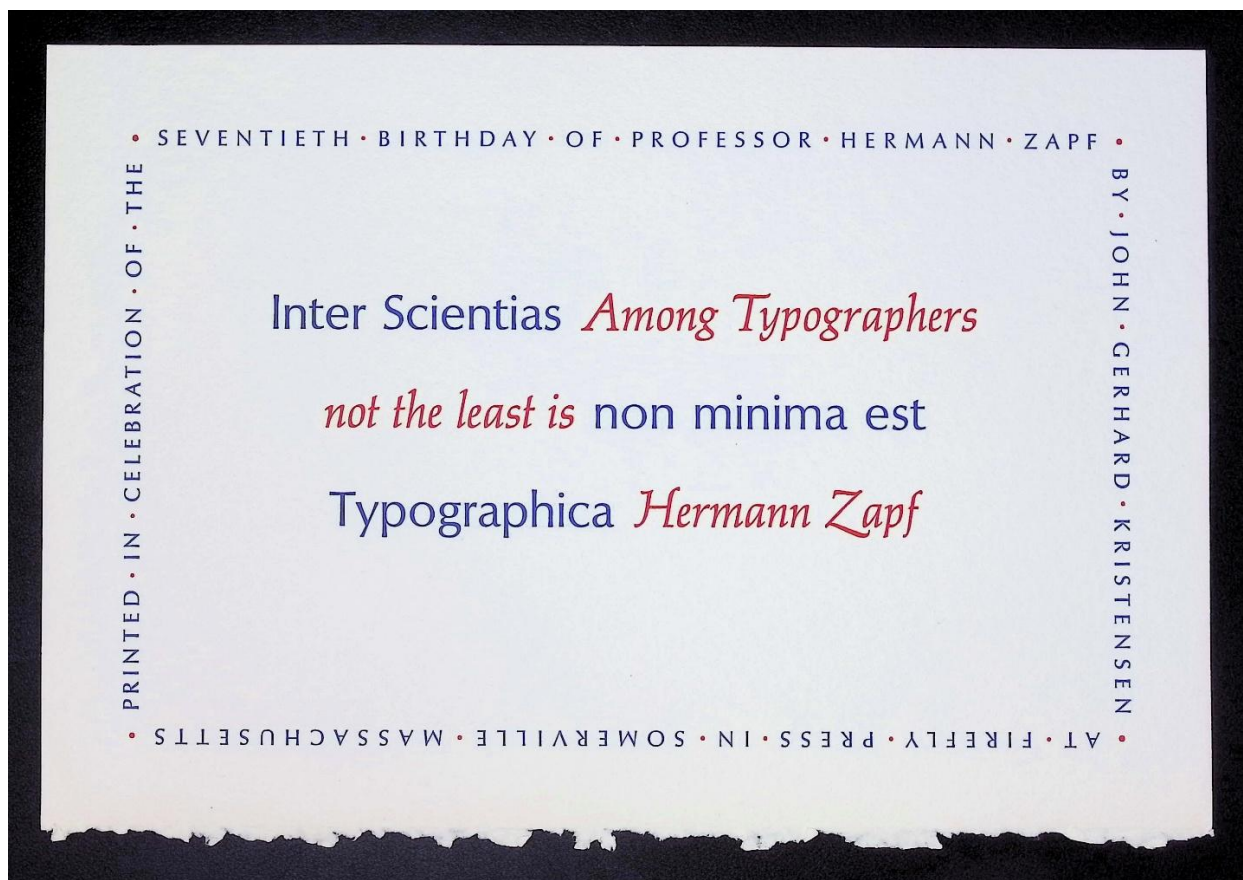
Produced as a personal or professional tribute; very limited distribution.

Notes

Zapf was the designer of Palatino, Optima, and Zapfino; the piece carries strong typographic and design significance.

Subjects

Hermann Zapf, Letterpress Broadside, Fine Press, Typography, Printing Ephemera.



Kristensen, John Gerhard

Buttonhooks for a Brave New World?

Offprint from *Matrix* 29, 2011

Pamphlet offprint

Identifier

Separate offprint of Kristensen's essay from *Matrix*, the annual review of fine printing.

Physical Description

Tall octavo; textured tan wraps with printed label; illustrated with Firefly Press reproductions.

Condition

Fine; clean and sound.

Scarcity and Distribution

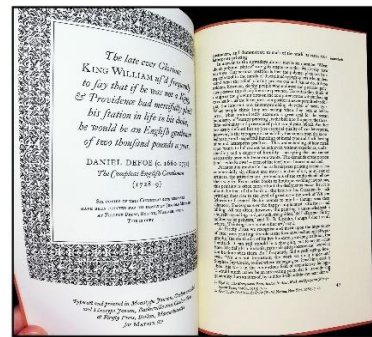
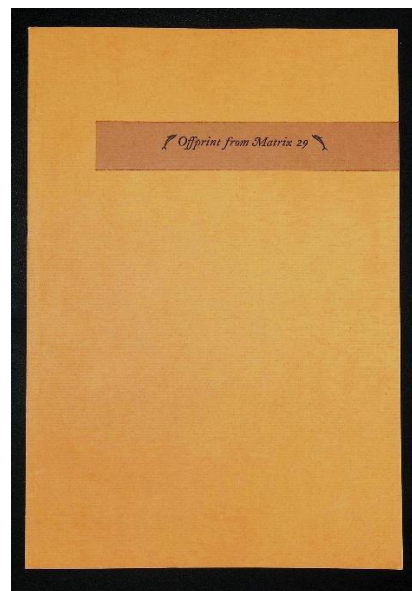
Issued separately in small numbers apart from the journal.

Notes

Essay reflects on the survival of letterpress craft in the digital era, situating Firefly Press within the Merrymount Press lineage.

Subjects

Printing Arts, Matrix Journal, Merrymount Press Legacy, Typographic History, Letterpress Tradition.



Kristensen, John Gerhard

Sir William Berkeley 'I Thank God'

Firefly Press, Somerville, 2011

Letterpress broadside

Identifier

Printed for members of the Ticknor Society during a visit to Firefly Press, April 26, 2011.

Physical Description

Single sheet, 10 × 13 inches; printed in black; handset in Baskerville and Cloister Black on fine laid paper.

Condition

Clean and bright; excellent impression.

Scarcity and Distribution

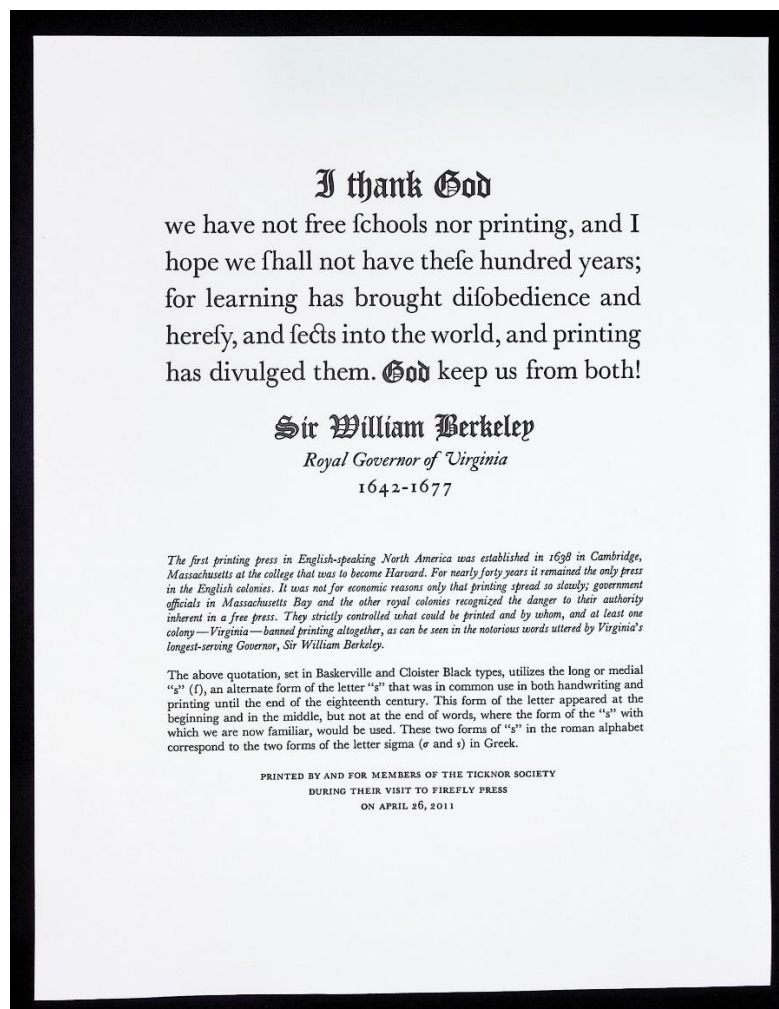
Produced for a single society visit; distributed to participants.

Notes

Text reproduces Berkeley's 1671 statement opposing printing and education in colonial Virginia, with typographic commentary on the long 'f.'

Subjects

Ticknor Society, Book History, Colonial Printing, Typography, Fine Press Printing.



Roush, Jason

Distance

Firefly Press, Boston, 2009

Letterpress broadside, edition of 125

Identifier

Printed to mark the first year of the Massachusetts Poetry Outreach Project North Allston–Brighton residency.

Physical Description

Single sheet, 8 × 13 inches; printed in two colors on Mohawk Superfine; set in Bembo and Bodoni Open.

Condition

Fine; subtle ink gradation visible.

Scarcity and Distribution

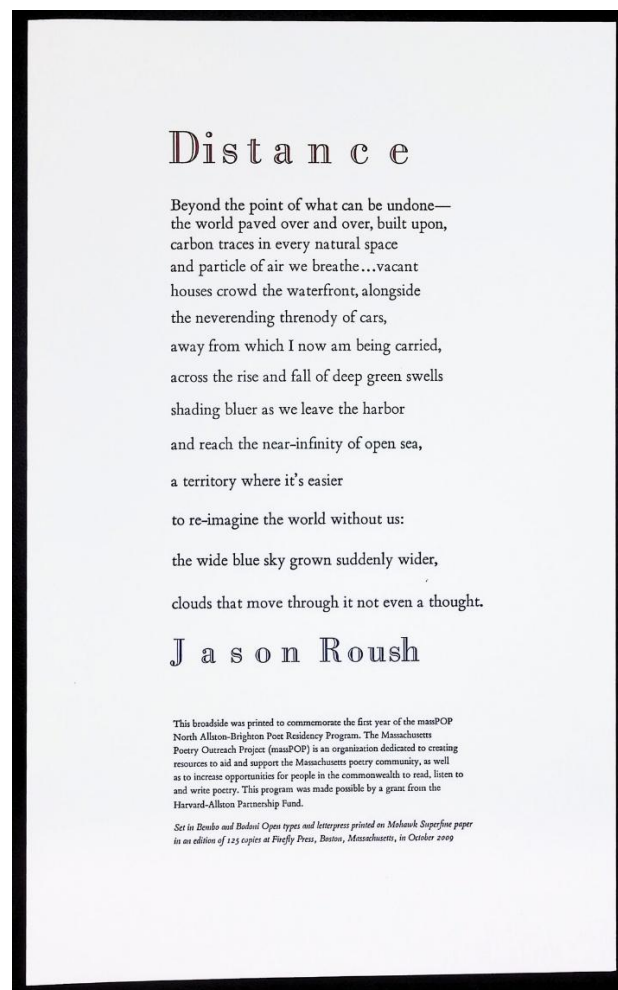
Limited to 125 copies for a regional arts initiative.

Notes

Funded by the Harvard–Allston Partnership Fund.

Subjects

Contemporary American Poetry, Massachusetts Poetry Outreach Project, Letterpress Broadside, Fine Press Printing.



Tyler, Royall (1757–1826)

'Convivial Song'

Firefly Press, 1986

Letterpress pamphlet

Identifier

Early Firefly Press printing, likely private or demonstration issue.

Physical Description

Octavo pamphlet, 8 pages; sewn through the fold; blue paper wraparound cover; red and black typography.

Condition

Fine; clean and well preserved.

Scarcity and Distribution

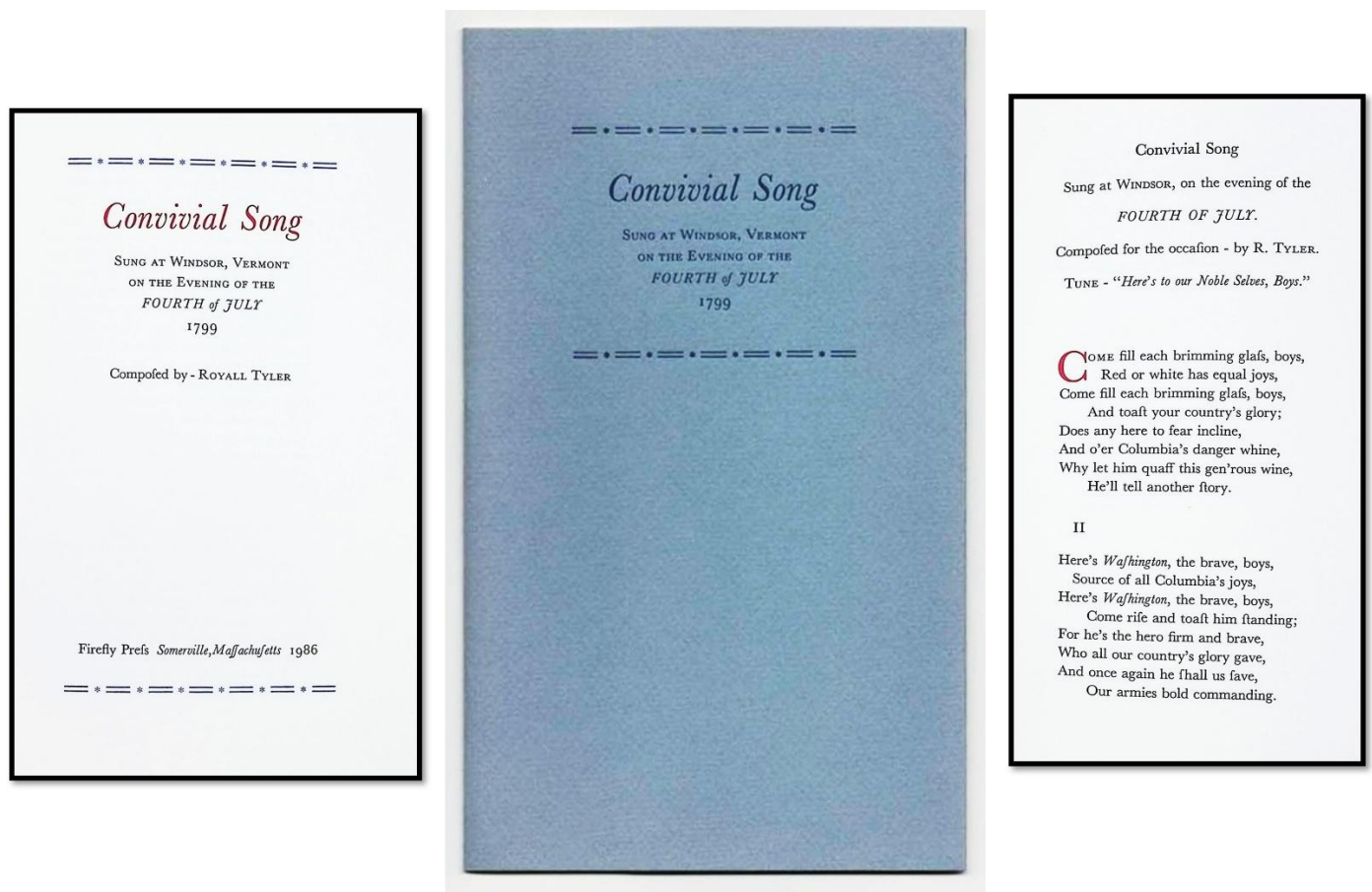
Few examples recorded; predates Firefly Press's later, more documented output.

Notes

Reprints Tyler's 1799 Fourth of July song, reflecting early American patriotic verse.

Subjects

Royall Tyler, American Independence, Private Presses, Fine Press Printing, Historical Reprint.



Updike, Daniel Berkeley (1860–1941)

'The Practice of Typography'

Firefly Press, Boston, 2002

Letterpress broadside

Identifier

Printed for the Society of Printers to commemorate an address by Sinclair Hitchings.

Physical Description

Single sheet, 11 × 15 inches; printed in black and red on heavy white card stock.

Condition

Fine; clean and crisp.

Scarcity and Distribution

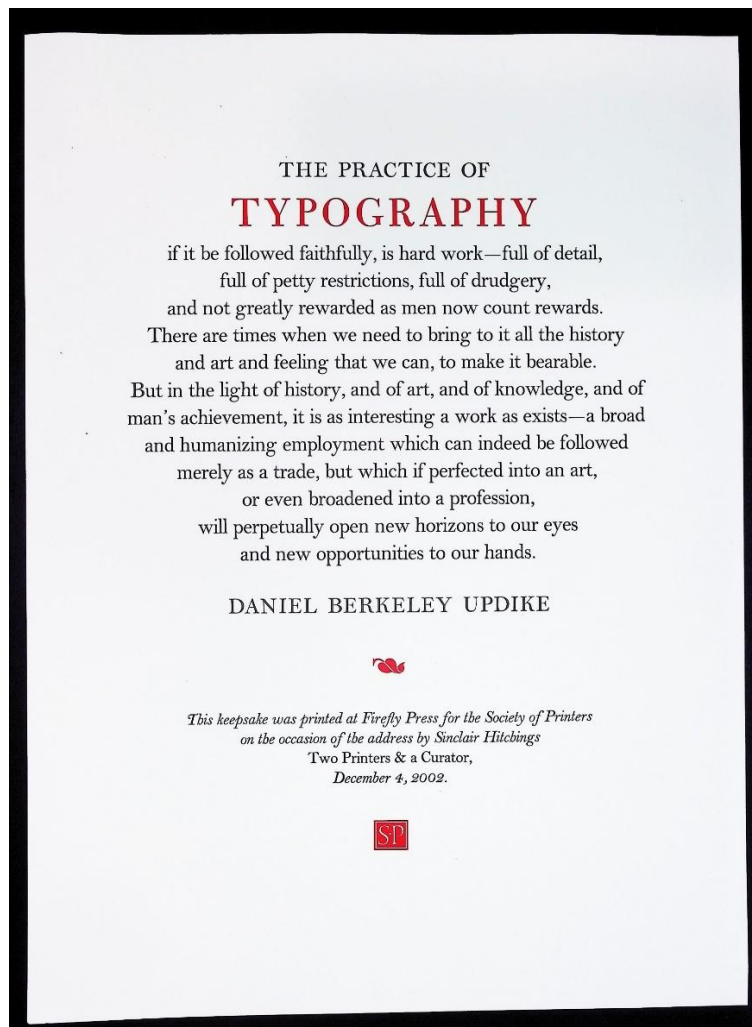
Produced for a single Society of Printers event.

Notes

Text articulates Updike's philosophy of typography as moral and aesthetic discipline.

Subjects

Society of Printers, Daniel Berkeley Updike, Typography Philosophy, Fine Press Printing, Printing History.



Updike, Daniel Berkeley (1860–1941)

Comparative Table of Types Used by the French National Printing House

Firefly Press, 1994

Letterpress keepsake

Identifier

Printed for the American Typecasting Fellowship Conference, Buena Park, California.

Physical Description

One sheet folded into thirds; 18.5 × 11 inches opened; printed on Strathmore Writing Cover Bristol; red rule borders.

Condition

Fine; clean and well preserved.

Scarcity and Distribution

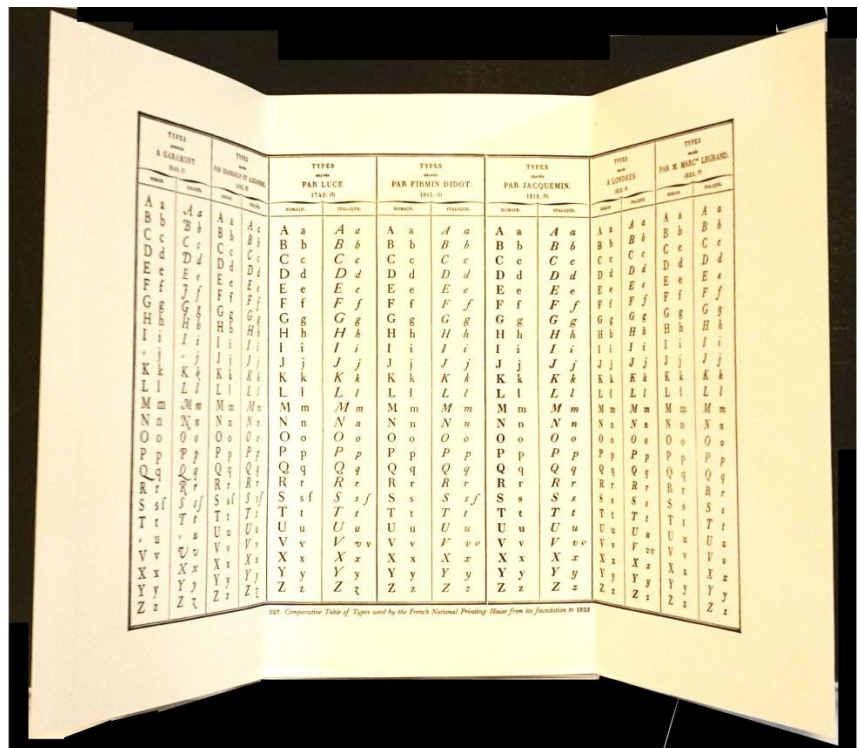
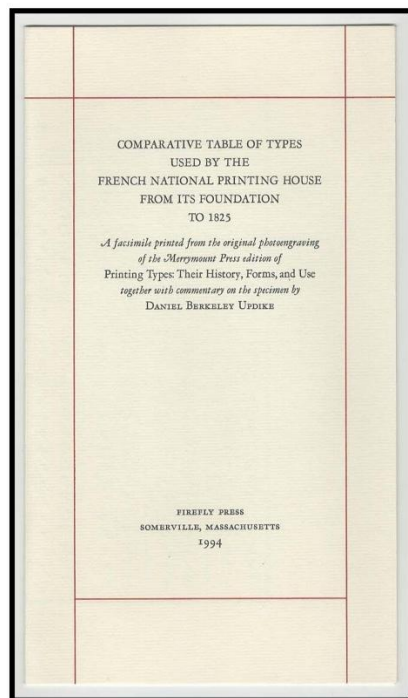
Limited to 100 copies for a single typographic conference.

Notes

Facsimile derived from Updike's *Printing Types*, demonstrating Kristensen's commitment to typographic scholarship.

Subjects

French Typography, American Typecasting Fellowship, Merrymount Press, Typographic Specimens, Printing History.



All images are documentary photographs intended to support bibliographic identification and typographic study.

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