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The Knight Library press

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At a time when the library world seems totally consumed by the issues related to electronic information resources, the University of Oregon Libraries have decided to establish a press to produce works which celebrate the technology of printing and the graphic arts. With the financial support of a private donor and the enthusiastic backing of the University Librarian, George Shipman, Sandy Tilcock was appointed, in January of 1999, to the position of Director of the Knight Library Press in the Division of Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Oregon.

The Knight Library Press

by Bernard McTigue

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Ms. Tilcock, the printer-proprietor of the lone goose press in Eugene, has been producing fine books and broadsides featuring the texts and images of Northwest writers and artists for more than ten years. She is also an accomplished book-binder and box maker. A graduate of the Book Arts

program of the University of Alabama, where she studied with the acclaimed printer, Richard-Gabriel Rummonds, Ms. Tilcock has taught classes and workshops throughout the Northwest. The writers with whom she has worked include Barry Lopez and Kim Stafford and the artists include Susan Lowdermilk and Margaret Prentice.

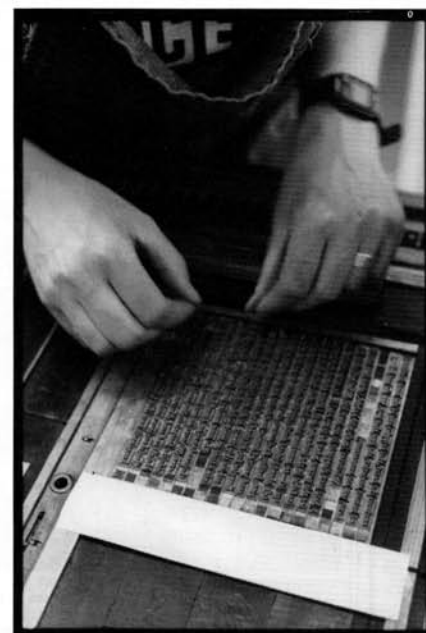
Ms. Tilcock's work comes out of the tradition of modern fine printing that grew out of an earlier reaction to the pressures and pervasiveness of new technology. In the latter part of the nineteenth century,

the Arts and Crafts movement in England and the U.S. arose to confront the triumph of the mass-produced object over the handcrafted production of an artisan class. The men and women active in this movement (most of them educated and middle class) were not so much Luddites as Romantics who perceived a nobility in artisanship and a spiritual, as well as material, satisfaction to be gained by creating and living with objects which gave evidence of the individuality of their creators. Though middle class in its origin, this movement was not some prototype of Yuppie consumer durable fetishism, but was grounded in the desire to create a harmonious mode of production that would reflect a fair and equitable society.

The leading proponent of this naive and unthreatening variant of socialist ideology was William Morris, a man of formidable wealth and apparently unlimited creative energy. Morris designed and produced furniture, textiles, and, most notably, books. His Kelmscott Press, active in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, produced magnificent limited edition, hand-printed books in a medieval style that have appealed to bibliophiles since they first came off the press. Printers in the United States, such as Elbert Hubbard, gave an American twist to Morris' vision that soon spread throughout the country.

On the West Coast, John Henry Nash set up a press in San Francisco that produced books and ephemera in the Morris tradition. In the 1920s he was hired by the University of Oregon as the University Printer, a position he held until the early 1930s. In a sense, the creation of the Knight Library Press is a continuation or a re-establishment of the fine press tradition at the University of Oregon after a 60-year hiatus. But the press is more than an exemplar of a local phenom-

Sandy Tilcock in her studio at the lone goose press (left); Tilcock adjusts a block of type (right).



non. In the post World War II period there has been a flowering of fine printing in this country; most, but not all of it, has been connected with the university environment. Printers like the late Harry Duncan at Nebraska, Walter Hamady at Wisconsin and Kim Merkur at Iowa have amply demonstrated over the last fifty years that the finely crafted book is alive and well.

In more recent decades, women have taken on an important role in the world of private press printing and the book arts generally. MacArthur Fellow Claire Van Vliet is probably the best known of these artists, but the list of those who have produced notable work in this field is a long one and includes bookbinders, such as Carol Joyce, and "all-arounders," such as Julie Chen.

Sandy Tilcock falls squarely within this recent tradition, having collaborated with Ms. Chen and having produced a remarkable series of books and broadsides. Her work may be characterized as collaborative and collegial as well as beautiful. She chooses her authors and artists carefully so as to be sure that text and image will not only be compatible but will also help to create an object which is greater than the sum of its components. Each book also varies its format according to the occasion provided by the text and its accompanying image. Grounded in the writers, artists and ethos of the Pacific Northwest, the output of the lone goose press has itself become a contemporary cultural phenomenon.

It is the intent of the Knight Library Press to build upon this contribution to the culture of the book established by the lone goose press. The Knight Library Press will produce books and broadsides

that will reinforce the library's role as the custodian of the culture of the book. The press makes manifest the balance the library intends to strike in the coming millennium between new and traditional modes of communication. Further, the press expands the library's role as a locus of cultural production, a space in which ideas achieve a concrete presence rather than a space in which the material for concretization is drawn together. The library, through the press and its advisory board, will also take on the role of patron of the literary and visual as well as the book arts, thereby filling a noticeable void in the cultural world.

While some of the work produced by the press will be, because of its labor intensiveness, rather expensive and therefore geared to the private and institutional collector, it is our intention also to produce works which are inexpensive and therefore accessible to a wide audience of book lovers. **Q**



(Far left)Tilcock and author, Barry Lopez, ink a printing plate for an illustration for Lopez's book, *Apologia* (1997).Tilcock positions the paper for the author and his Toyota.



The author's Toyota in the process of making a good impression.