The Exhibition Catalogue Awards for 1996

STEPHEN TABOR

This is the eleventh year of the Katharine Kyes Leab and Daniel J. Leab American Book Prices Current Exhibition Catalogue Awards for Excellence. A generous endowment by the Leabs has made it possible for RBMS' Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee to publicize the results of this competition with an annual checklist, and, on occasion, by a more substantial cumulative list. The Leab Awards are intended to honor superior examples of the genre, at least as judged by one small group of peers. But I believe they perform an even more valuable function by giving an opportunity to appreciate the whole range of what libraries have seen fit to submit. Some catalogs are sent to us with clearly no hope of winning, but only to issue a well-earned crow over the completion of a project that probably cost the catalog producers far more of their lives than they expected to give. Catalogs that misfire on one or two pistons often generate surprising horsepower with the others, and even from the weakest there is something to be learned. We thank the Leabs for the means to give recognition, here and elsewhere, to a variety of exhibition catalogs that otherwise we would never know about.

There were 58 catalogs submitted this year in three divisions according to production cost. The winner in division 1 (cost $10 and up) was Sendak at the Rosenbach, written by co-curators Vincent Giroud and Maurice Sendak and designed by Greer Allen. Any illustrated catalog of Sendak's work is guaranteed some measure of success, but this one uses examples from different periods of the artist's 43-year career to point out certain recurring images which, taken together, give strong evidence of an underlying personal mythology. By juxtaposing them with works by William Blake, Arthur Hughes, Randolph Caldecott, Beatrix Potter, and William Nicholson, among others, the catalog traces the influences on Sendak's several styles. The result is a particularly happy relic of the ongoing close relationship between the artist and the library.

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Division I was crowded with top contenders this year, and the judges felt compelled to hand out two honorable mentions in addition to the first-place award. The Jewish Theological Seminary turned in an absorbing catalog, *The Jew As Other*, written by Frank Felsenstein and Sharon Liberman Mintz and designed by Laura Miller. The exhibition was based on 54 eighteenth-century caricature prints chosen from the Israel Solomons Collection of Anglo-Judaica. Some of these are by the masters in the genre like Gillray, Rowlandson, and Cruikshank; others are quite obscure but no less fascinating. The catalog, generously illustrated with photographs of all the prints, addresses the British gentiles’ sometimes self-contradictory though rarely favorable images of Jews at the time, but the curators point out that the exhibit also “provides an appropriate paradigm for an understanding of our age.”

From the DeGolyer Library at Southern Methodist University comes the other honorable mention catalog, *To Delight the Eye: Original Photographic Book Illustrations of the American West*, written by David Margolis and designed by W. Thomas Taylor. Because of the rarity of intact examples of books illustrated by original photographs, this catalog fills an important scholarly niche. It describes each book and gives a list of the photographs, making it a valuable reference for anyone doing research on photographers, westward travel, and early photographic processes.

The winner in Division 2 (production cost $5.00–$9.99) comes from the Pierpont Morgan Library. *In Praise of Aldus Manutius* was written by H. George Fletcher and designed by the firm of Bessas & Ackerman. The exhibition drew on material from UCLA, making it possible to show a unique selection of important manuscripts and unusual states of familiar books, such as copies illuminated, or printed on blue paper. Fletcher takes full advantage of the opportunity with his fresh approach to a well-worn subject.

The New York Public Library’s submission, *Garbage! The History and Politics of Trash in New York City*, swept the field in Division 3 (production cost less than $5) with its down-to-earth, detailed account of a problem that will not go away. The judges found this thick catalog wholly engrossing, from its fragrant front-cover illustration to the final checklist and bibliography. It was written by Elizabeth Fee and Steven H. Corey, and designed by Marilan Lund; unfortunately but not surprisingly, it is already out of print.

The exhibition business is to some extent anniversary-driven, and 1995 had two: the 500th anniversary of the first book printed by Aldus Manutius, and the 100th of the first production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde, and of his imprisonment for homosexuality. Brigham Young University submitted *In Aedibus Aldi*, whose entries include collations and a substantial text. Princeton’s *Oscar Wilde: A Writer for the Nineties*, though a more modest effort, is full of new and unexpected information. The Fales Library at New York University turned in
a collection of essays, *Reading Wilde, Querying Spaces*, issued in conjunction with its exhibition.

The distinction between catalog and book is often difficult to draw. The Folger Library catalog, *Elizabethan Households*, consists mainly of excerpts from the books on display; Rachel Doggett in her commentary does her best to help the reader understand attitudes which seem at times foreign, even repellent. The University of California Press' *The Frontier in American Culture* contains two hefty essays and some fine illustrations based on an exhibition at the Newberry Library. The Bridwell Library of Southern Methodist University submitted *I Am Your Affectionate Brother JWesley*, a portfolio of three separate items including a checklist of all the Wesley letters at the Bridwell, fourteen previously unpublished letters, a group of loose facsimiles, and an essay by Frederick Maser on the importance of collecting Wesley letters. And the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC) at the University of Texas turned in *Twentieth-Century American Playwrights: Views of a Changing Culture*, a thumping catalog of an exhibition of nearly 250 items, followed by a guide to American theater holdings at HRC.

The subject of fine printing is always well represented among the catalogs submitted. This year the San Francisco Public Library looked at two Bay Area presses: Peter Koch (in collaboration with the New York Public Library) and the Poltroon Press. Both catalogs were written and designed by their subjects, so each becomes more of a personal statement even than the Sendak exhibit. With considerably broader focus, the University of Toronto and the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild undertook a survey of Canadian printers of note from the thirties to the present in *Fine Printing: The Private Press in Canada*.

Catalog design should take its cue from the subject matter. A couple of submissions this year took this idea further than most. *Miniature Literature* from the Bridwell Library weighs in at only a few ounces and is exactly three inches high (technically the limit for a miniature book). Printed letterpress, limited and signed, it is a prime candidate for a modern chained library. The University of Chicago’s *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles: The Transportation Revolution in Children’s Picture Books* has a spiral metal binding and bright pictorial covers evocative of the thirties. And the New York Public Library’s *What Price Freedom*, a celebration of rebels of all sorts, is cut out-of-square, with the text bleeding off the page.

Four further submissions are worthy of mention not for any particular “angle,” but simply for the difficulty they caused the judges during the process of elimination. The Smithsonian’s *Science and the Artist’s Book* exhibits editions of early scientific works paired with recent artist’s books they inspired. The small booklet which was handed out free at the exhibit is full of color and seems to attract everyone who sees it. *The Fox and the Grapes: Aesop through the Ages*, from the Pierpont Morgan Library, does a fine job of tracing the complex threads of Aesopic tradition. *Texts and Their Transformations: Continuity and Change in the Classi-
cal Tradition, from the University of Chicago, does a similar thing for selected classical texts, sometimes branching off in surprising directions. And finally, from Queens Borough Public Library came Blueprint for Change: The Life and Times of Lewis H. Latimer, a particularly well-produced catalog dealing with the achievements of an African-American inventor during the late nineteenth century.

Following is a list of all the catalogs submitted for the 1996 awards. First-place winners are indicated by an asterisk (*), honorable mention by a section mark (§).


Harvard University (Houghton Library, Department of Printing and Graphic Arts). Rudolph Ackermann and the Repository of Arts. Margaret Smith. 1995. $3.00 (plus postage). Order from Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Harvard University (Houghton Library, Department of Printing and Graphic Arts). The Renaissance in France. Anne Anninger. 1995. $5.00. Order from Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Kalamazoo College Library (A. M. Todd Rare Book Room). *Best Sellers Illuminated*. 1995. $25.00. Order from Susan Allen, Kalamazoo College Library, 1200 Academy St., Kalamazoo, MI 49006.


San Francisco Public Library (Special Collections) and New York Public Library. Peter Koch, Printer. Janice Braun. 1995. $25.00. Order from Friends of the San Francisco Public Library, Civic Center, San Francisco, CA 94102, or Publications Office, New York Public Library, 8 West 40th St., 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10018.


Southern Methodist University (Perkins School of Theology, Bridwell Library). I Am Your Affectionate Brother JWesley. Page A. Thomas and Frederick E. Maser. 1994. $25.00. Order from Publications Department, Bridwell Library, P.O. Box 0476, Dallas, TX 75275.

Southern Methodist University (Perkins School of Theology, Bridwell Library). Miniature Literature. David J. Lawrence. 1995. $20.00. Order from Publications Department, Bridwell Library, P.O. Box 0476, Dallas, TX 75275.

from René T. LeBlanc, Albert B. Alkek Library, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, TX 87666.


Trinity College (Watkinson Library). *Spy, Ape, and Company*. Peter J. Knapp. 1995. $5.00. Order from Watkinson Library, Trinity College, 300 Summit Street, Hartford, CT 06106.


University of California, Riverside. *Decoration in Bookbinding*. Sidney E. Berger. 1995. $5.00 (plus postage). Order from Special Collections, Rivera Library, University of California, Riverside, CA 92517.


University of Chicago Library (Department of Special Collections). *Eugene Field and His Books*. 1994. Free. Order from Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library, 1100 E. 57th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

University of Chicago Library (Department of Special Collections). *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles: The Transportation Revolution in Children’s Picture Books*. Neil Harris. 1995. $8.00. Order from Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library, 1100 E. 57th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

University of Chicago Library (Department of Special Collections). *Texts and Their Transformations: Continuity and Change in the Classical Tradition*. Mark David Usher. 1994. $8.00. Order from Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library, 1100 E. 57th St., Chicago, IL 60637.


University of Notre Dame (Department of Special Collections). Eighteenth-Century British Women in Print. Laura Sue Fuderer. 1995. Free. Order from Laura Fuderer, 102 Hesburgh Library, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556.


University of Texas (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center). Twentieth-Century American Playwrights. Cathy Henderson. 1994. $15.00. Order from Mary Luzius, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, P.O. Box 7219, Austin, TX 78713.

University of Toronto (Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library) and Massey College. Elegant Editions: Aspects of Victorian Book Design. Marie Elena Korey. 1995. $20.00 (Canadian). Order from Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, 120 St. George St., Toronto, Ont. M5S 1A5.

University of Toronto (Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library) and Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild. Fine Printing: The Private Press in Canada. Alan Horne and Guy Upjohn. 1995. $15.00 (Canadian). Order from Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, 120 St. George St., Toronto, Ont. M5S 1A5.

University of Toronto (Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library). A Pride of Gifts. 1994. $20.00 (Canadian). Order from Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, 120 St. George St., Toronto, Ont. M5S 1A5.

University of Toronto (Jewish Studies Programme and University of Toronto Library). Yiddish Panorama. Barry Walfish. 1995. $8.00 (Canadian). Order from Cashier’s Office, University of Toronto, 130 St. George St., Toronto, Ont. M5S 1A5.

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