

Book printing in Texas as a fine art

PRINTING ARTS IN TEXAS (Al Lowman, with Foreword by Stanley Marcus; Roger Beacham, \$75).

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SMU

There is an immediate sense of quality book production in encountering this volume—itsself a precise demonstration of the author's subject. On laid paper with subtle tactile character, the elegant Janson type is arranged without flamboyance. The binding is just right, and the deluxe edition has end papers of hand-marbled designs as intriguing as a painting by Arshile Gorky.

THE CAST of characters producing this tribute to the best craftsmen and designers of printing in Texas is formidable. Joining author, Al Lowman are members of the Holman typographical dynasty of Austin, who dominate this publication both visually and technically: William R. Holman, designer and typographer; David Holman, printer of the 395 copies; and Barbara Holman, providing the chapter illustrations and hand-marbled papers.

Lowman's text traces the works of those rare individuals in Texas who, from the early days to the present, have demonstrated that printing can be an art as well as a job. Here we have the most complete history of our fine printing yet to be found. Lowman provides careful description and studied analysis of most of the best books published in Texas, and the last half of this volume provides reproductions and comments on most of these examples.

BEGINNING with the first printing of consequence on Texas soil by Samuel Bangs in Galveston in 1839, the author follows the evolution of printing through handbills, posters, political proclamations, business papers, laws on colonization, and some books. More often than not book printing was a spare time spin-off of idle newspaper presses. However, early in the twentieth century, a few isolated individuals such as Edwin B. Hill of El Paso were quietly learning to master the hand press; and Hill produced more than 200 distinctive items under his printer's mark, the cowboy hat.

It was a proper sequence of fate that El Paso should also produce Carl Hertzog, that greatest master of the printing art in Texas, who began his work there in 1923. Hertzog was fortunate in finding authors and artists to reflect his devotion to excellence in book production. Collaboration with artist-author Tom Lea has resulted in a remarkable number of publications, celebrated for their distinction both in content and in graphic design. Jose Cisneros, artist and historian, and Harold Bugbee, illustrator, joined Hertzog in many publishing ventures of great variety and individuality. The depth of Hertzog's talent continues to enrich the printing arts.

SOME HIGH POINTS in good typography became evident in the centers of most trade publishing (for commercial and advertising). Early leaders in Dallas were Jagers-Chiles-Stovall, and Dealey and

Lowe. In 1929 Stanley Marcus and others launched the Book Club of Texas, giving regional printers reason to move toward better book design; and in the 1930's the Southern Methodist University Press appeared as the first of the university presses in the state, making frequent use of all talented designers from Carl Hertzog to William D. Wittliff. In Houston many carefully produced books were issued by the Rein Company.

By 1950 Austin began to assert itself as the coming center of fine printing with the advent of the University of Texas Press, under the direction of Frank Wardlaw and with Jo Alys Downs as designer and illustrator for many of its most distinctive products. In 1960 Kim Taylor came from England to be consultant to the university publications program and to produce a great number of works in many media of outstanding quality and originality. Another agency to support better printing has been the Pemberton Press and its moving spirit, John H. Jenkins III.

UNDOUBTEDLY the most influential and active practitioners of the printing arts in recent years in this region are William R. Holman and William D. Wittliff, both of Austin. Examples of their expert and tasteful efforts are often listed among the Fifty Books of the Year selected by the American Institute of Graphic Arts. William R. Holman, who was born in Oklahoma and seasoned in the printing arts in California, brought his talented family to Austin in 1967; and the Human-

ities Research Center and many other endeavors have benefited since then from their presence. William D. Wittliff, through his Encino Press, now provides another potent source of creative typography and spirited publishing ventures.

These courageous and single-minded individuals eminently deserve the praise given them by the author in bringing about "the printing renaissance which has evolved in the state since the second decade of this century"—and this volume traces and illuminates that theme with solid authority and obvious enthusiasm. Followers of fine printing will certainly be quick in securing this instant collectors' item from the publisher, Roger Beacham, Box 8254, Austin, Texas 78712.