Introduction to Letterpress Printing

Discover the unique tactile quality of relief printing.

Time-Life chose Gutenberg’s invention of printing from moveable type as the most important of the second millennium. Letterpress printing, as it is known today, is the finest method for printing type on paper. This workshop begins with an explanation and discussion of letterpress terms, tools, type, history and paper. The differences between fine book printing and ephemera are discussed. Correct procedures for setting type by hand and printing on a Vandercook proof press are thoroughly demonstrated. Traditional aspects of letterpress design and typography are explored. Students print copies of a frameable, two-color type specimen broadside on rich-textured 100% rag paper. Class discussion covers the requirements for setting up a small working letterpress studio at home, including the equipment needed and where to find it, the presses that work well in a home studio situation, and how best to move and install a press that – though relatively small – can still be heavy. Additional discussion touches on the use of digital typesetting and imaging in combination with letterpress printing, and how photopolymer plate technology can work in combination with – or as an alternative to - the 500-year-old technology of moveable metal type. Subsequent course time is devoted to the planning, design, setting and printing of a personal letterpress project: a poetry broadside, card, small booklet, stationary or announcement.

Charles Altschul

Charles Altschul led the transition of Maine Media Workshops + College to non-profit status and served as its President from 2006 – 2011. He received his B.A. and M.F.A. from Yale University where he also held a faculty appointment as Senior Lecturer. Altschul founded the New Overbrook Press in 1982 (now Camden Hills Press) to publish handcrafted artist books, most notably an illustrated folio signed by Nobel prizewinning author Samuel Beckett. In 1991, he moved to Camden, Maine to become Director of Education at the Eastman Kodak Center for Creative Imaging, a facility that pioneered the teaching of digital arts. Subsequently, Altschul worked with several art schools, including the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena and the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York, to integrate digital technologies into their curricula. In 1997, he created the nation’s first B.F.A. program in Multimedia at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Working in both 500-year-old as well as cutting edge technologies, Altschul’s work as an artist and teacher stems from contemporary as well as historical perspectives.