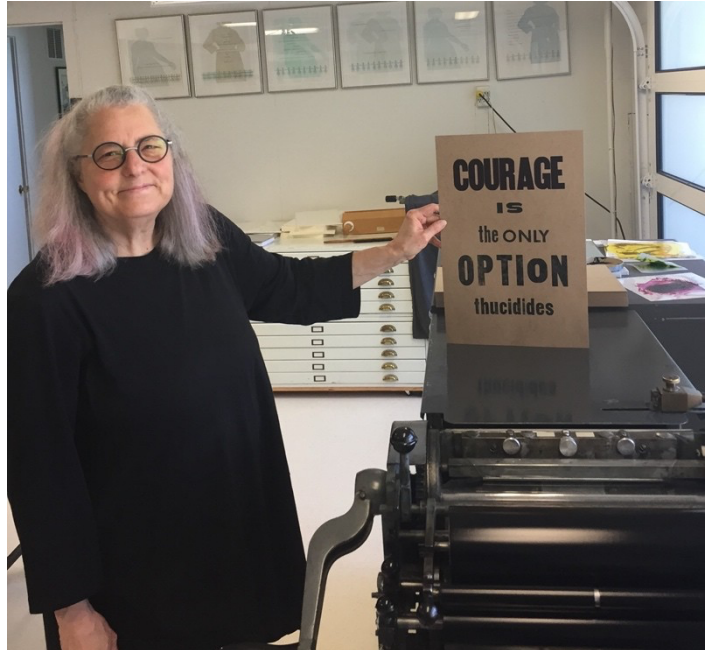


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I have always been passionate about books. As a child, each week, I walked about a mile to the neighborhood library and came home with as many books as I could possibly carry. My first job, while still in high school, was in a bookstore in downtown Chicago where I was introduced to the world of used and rare books. This led to my second job (at the age of 18) in a rare bookstore, Zeitlin & Ver Brugge of Los Angeles. It was at Z&verB where my education really began. Jake Zeitlin specialized in the history of medicine and science. He handled books that not only spanned the five centuries of printing in these fields but important books in history, philosophy, fine printing, and fine literature, as well as original prints and drawings. Jake had been a young poet and publisher and was friends with the librarians and letterpress printers of Southern California. As young men, they had formed the Rounce & Coffin Club as an opportunity to socialize and imbibe over books. Working for Jake presented opportunities for me to meet many of these original members who became eminent printers. Among them was Saul Marks who was proprietor, along with his wife Lillian, of The Plantin Press of Los Angeles. Though I could look at and handle books at Jake's such as the Kelmscott *Chaucer* or a vellum copy of the Doves *Bible*, they were beyond my budget as a burgeoning collector. So, I chose to collect the work of Southern California printers such as Grant Dahlstrom, Ward Ritchie and Saul Marks. Later, I concentrated on collecting Saul's work. I had not yet met him when I found a copy of *A Gil Blas in California* by Alexandre Dumas, which was designed by Ward Ritchie, published by Jake Zeitlin's *Primavera Press*, and printed by Saul Marks. It was a great association copy, and I was waiting to meet Saul to have him sign it. He did sign my copy at our first meeting, very lightly, in pencil.

Saul was a very modest man and was quite approachable. I began to visit him on a weekly basis and have dinner with him and Lillian after spending hours chatting with him about his books. At the time, I would show him copies of his works I had acquired for my collection, both ephemera and books, and he would chuckle softly and tell me about the people he worked with on the various projects and the technical things like the typefaces and paper used. Now that I have been a printer for over forty years, I marvel at the man's patience! He actually stopped the presses when I showed up and sat with me for hours.

I see now what a great imposition on his time I was making. And to have sat so patiently time after time, to tell me the names of the same typefaces over and over again. I blush. Being a printer now, I know what typefaces I have in my shop and it doesn't change much so if I had understood that, I would have known Saul's "house fonts" and not bothered him any more about it. But what I was learning was to look at books and how they were produced in a very different way than I had before. I was coming to appreciate the particular choice of typeface for a particular project, be it book or invitation. And the same held true for layout, paper and the production as a whole. Saul taught me to see the beauty of good printing...the clean bite of the print in the paper with just enough ink to show off the best qualities of the typeface. He paid as much attention to the smallest job for business cards as he did for larger book projects.

I did not acquire my first press until about five years after Saul's passing, but as a letterpress printer, he has been my mentor every step of the way. I still often take his books off the shelf or leaf through my boxes of his ephemera to see how he worked and appreciate anew his clean, beautiful use of typography and ornament.

Where I actually learned letterpress printing was at The Woman's Building in Los Angeles with Susan King. Somewhere around 1978, I had acquired a pilot press. My friend, Patrick Reagh, now a renowned letterpress printer, gave me some type. I just needed to learn how to use everything the way Saul Marks had. Suffice it to say, in the beginning, my eye was far more sophisticated than my design or printing abilities. While I was working on these, I continued to take classes and later to teach classes in printing at The Woman's Building. At the time, this was a place of fermentation of cultural, personal and political expression for women who were finding their own voices and they were producing pieces to express this in the form of performances and printed works. To the notion I had that letterpress printing encompassed the exquisite combination of design and type and paper and binding, I was introduced to the world of artist's books which was much more visceral. These books engaged the reader/viewer in an interactive way that not only elicited appreciative responses, but demanded frissons of recognition as the content and context were inextricably wedded.

Two books which embodied for me this new way of looking at books and involving the reader/viewer were produced at The Woman's Building in the 1970's. The first I encountered was Suzanne Lacy's *Rape* (1972). The other was Cheri Gaulke's book on bonsai and foot binding, *Golden Lotus* (1977). Lacy's book is printed with covers in shiny white coated paper folded to meet in the middle of the front cover. The two edges of the paper are held in place in the center by a dark red sticker on which the word RAPE is printed. In order to read the book, you must tear the sticker which means you violate the book and leave it forever changed, if not damaged. From the first, the reader/viewer is engaged in a way not usually anticipated and, in that way, is forever changed herself. Gaulke's book on Chinese foot binding had a similar effect on me. To read this book, you must first cut the threads sewn on the linen strip that both binds the book and is the book itself. On the long linen strip, there are small panels interspersed with images of how to

wrap a foot for foot binding and how it will look eventually, along with how to prune a tree for a prize bonsai. Again, the dramatic juxtaposition of text and image and the interaction of book and reader/viewer are stunningly unified.

I found these books thrilling. They offered me possibilities for content, form and expression in my work as a letterpress printer and book artist. Among books I have created are *Better than Gold*, a book with gold paper covers about friendship (Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver, the other is gold.), a book titled *On War and Peace* sewn with trailing red threads, an alphabet book called *Primer for Democracy* which must be constructed as if it were a house of cards...about to tumble.

My latest book, created in collaboration with the poet and visual artist, Carletta Carrington Wilson, is *k/Not free k/Not human*. It is a dos-a-dos accordion book that opens to almost 16 feet and is inspired by runaway slave advertisements in newspapers of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Iconic figures of a man and of a woman form the foundation of the visual narrative and are symbols and a testament to the unceasing resistance perpetuated on both sides of the Atlantic by the captives. There are 34 press runs in this book, and it is hand bound with knots. The book covers, and the clamshell box enclosing it are painted with the artist's hands and feet. It represents concern about issues of equality and justice that are yet to be fully resolved.

