Janusz Pawel Tryzno and Jadwiga Tryzno – Interview with Tom Sowden and Sarah Bodman, with Radosław Nowakowski
Book Art Museum, Łódź, Poland 25/06/08

J = Jadwiga Tryzno
P = Janusz Pawel Tryzno (Pawel)
R = Radosław Nowakowski
S = Sarah Bodman
T = Tom Sowden

Janusz Pawel Tryzno and Jadwiga Tryzno, are the founders of the Book Art Museum in Łódź, which they continue to run with their son Pawel. They have been publishing artists’ books as CdA Press (Correspondence des Arts) and fine press works for 28 years. The museum houses a collection of artists’ books and their working press studio and bindery, full of rescued machinery which is all maintained and used to produce editions. Their son Pawel also runs a Lenticular printing studio in the same building. Between them the Tryznos combine the practice of traditional and modern methods of production for artists’ books, curate exhibitions, promote and teach book arts to a wide audience and maintain the museum collection.

S – How long have you been collecting the machinery and the books?

J – We started to make books in 1980. But because it was forbidden to have press for printing text, we were printing text exactly the same way as graphic artists.

S – But again in editions of less than one hundred?

R – Yes, because in the very beginning they found all these tricks!

J - The first book we made - we didn’t make the book for artistic reasons, but maybe more political or patriotic. The title of the book is Rok Polski / Polish Year, and it’s a collection of poems and graphic works. [Rok Polski: 13 poems by Polish artists selected by Zdzisław Jaskula. 13 prints by Andrzej Graczykowski, Zbigniew Janeczek and Janusz Pawel Tryzno, 1980]

T – Was this printed here?

J – Not here, we were a ‘substandard’ Polish intellectual family, we had a small apartment in a big block, but Pawel also had a studio with his brother, a purely graphics studio, for prints and it was made there.

S – So all these were printed in the studio, – etchings, linocuts, aquatints…

R – Yes. But they had no machines that were typical for printing books.

J – Also some wood cut. We were members of the Polish Artists’ Union, which had it’s own printing studio, so part of the works we could do in Pawel’s private studio, and for part of the work
we used the studio belonging to the artist’s union – because they had bigger machines, they had machines for offset. So at that time as usual everything was really...you know, a mixture of methods.

S – So you were allowed to use offset if you were in the artists’ union, and you could use that to print artworks and no one would check for censorship.

P – Yes. So in 1985 we had a group of four artists working together and we had a private studio, and could also use the studio of the artist union, but in 1985 the group stopped to work together, split up. Then I decided to continue the whole thing together with Jadwiga. So in 1986 I applied and got special permission from the Minister of Culture as a graphic artist that allowed me to buy a typography machine, and once I got that permission in 1986, I could start to collect things like types and different machines because I was allowed to do so. A year later, because one of the very big state printers closed down, we bought some old machines, plus five tonnes of different types from them.

J – Five tonnes!

J – Yes, but because the types was very bad quality because the sets were old, we also started to buy types from other places in Warsaw. The first book made using this new type was The Prophetic Book by Craig Raine. [The Prophetic Book: the 10th publication by CdA in 1988/89. An edition of English and Polish texts in 7 parts, with linocuts by Krzysztof Wawrzyniak]

R – And here is a story almost the same as in the case of my books – a story about paper: a friend of Pawel’s had a studio nearby, he moved to Germany and he was supposed to stay there forever, and told Pawel to use his studio, and because Pawel thought that his friend would never come back they decided to change the studio into a paper mill, because they had some paper but no paper for printing.

S – No good paper.

P – It was impossible to buy paper and it was impossible to steal paper, because there was no paper at all. So we decided well, let’s use our friend’s studio, let’s transform it into a paper factory and let’s start to make paper ourselves.

J – And again another friend friend of ours - and it was a very funny coincidence - he began trading with factories here in Łódź. Łódź was very famous for its’ textile industry and the factories had a lot of textile off-cuts and debris, that were not good enough to make clothes but good enough to use for making paper. And our friend was buying this stuff from the factories and he had a Hollander. So Pawel could get then a paper pulp from him, so he could produce his own paper.

S – Wow. So was that successful – did that work in order to print all your books?

R – Yes, it worked. They made the paper that The Prophetic Book is printed on.

T – Did the friend come back from Germany?

P – You know at that time the private studio, it was not exactly private; as an artist you could only get such a studio from the union. But because my friend went to Germany, two and a half years later
the union wanted to get the studio back, and I was in danger of losing the paper factory. Luckily my friend was entirely unsuccessful in Germany, and at the very last minute he came back and let us stay.

R – You know the last studio that Pawel had was on the 11th floor of a big block of flats, and normally you probably wouldn’t be allowed to have a studio there, but luckily there was civil agent living one floor below, and his job was to look out and write reports for our political police - just to write who came and how long they stayed, whether Pawel was working or not, because he could hear Pawel’s machines running upstairs all the time. So they left them to carry on in the studio because it was easier to watch what they were doing from there.

J – The authorities were sure that we were printing illegal political papers, pamphlets and so on.

R – But they were printing artists’ books. So all the time the authorities were waiting for them to print illegal stuff - political things. This one guy below had to keep an eye on their business. But then, suddenly at the very end of the 80’s there was a political turnover, and the guy lost his job. He was no longer employed as a secret agent, and being very bitter, he immediately wrote to the district authorities to say that there was an illegal printing studio upstairs and it was very noisy, and they at once got an eviction notice.

P/J – So when we lost the studio on the 11th floor there was another lucky coincidence - another friend of ours wanted to join a big project called ‘construction in progress’. It was a group of international artists working together and Emmett Williams was kind of a boss of this project and they were looking for a good venue for a printing studio and production. They found a former kindergarten. The funny thing is that it was one of Henryk Grohman’s four houses here. The one that we are in now [the museum] is the biggest one, and the kindergarten was in the second Grohman house. We spent two years in that first house, and in 1993, because we were collecting more machines, we finally found this house.

(Grohman’s villa is a 100 year-old building in a post-industrial textile sector that used to belong to Scheibler and Grohman. The factory owner Henryk Grohman was a connoisseur and patron of arts. The villa became his private art sanctuary where graphics, musical instruments and scores and other artefacts were collected, musical concerts were held as well as special meetings with celebrities of culture. Grohman died in 1939 leaving no heirs. After World War II, under the supervision of UNIONTEX textile factory the building became a nursery/kindergarten but was vacated in 1991 due to bad state of the building. For more on the history of the building see: http://www.book.art.pl/budynek/budynek_eng.htm).

P/J – We really needed more space, and we walked around this district and found this building, totally abandoned and neglected with lots of bushes growing around, and it was closed up of course but we were let in and could see what it was like inside, and we said: well that’s a fantastic place for our museum!

T – Has it become a museum now, rather than a printing studio? Do people still make books here?

P – Of course.

J – In the beginning we didn’t think about a museum, we wanted to concentrate only on making books and collecting machines. We used these machines for making books, but you know when you start to collect more and more and more things…

S – So it’s like a living collection.

J - We thought that it’s good not only to have a museum that is collecting books, but that is also making them. The problem is that for the authorities ‘museum’ is a magic word, if you go to them
and say “I want to have something very unusual – I want to collect actions” it’s nothing. But when you go to the local authorities and say “we want to have a museum”, at once they say “yes – it sounds great”. Museums are very serious.

R – So you know they were looking for a place to work, and when they saw this building for the first time from the outside it looked almost like a factory, so they were quite sure that the interior was more or less of industrial character. When they came in they found that the ground level looked almost like a palace, so they thought it would be an idea to have two levels – one level for exhibitions, meetings, parties, concerts, actions, performances and the collection of books, and another in the basement where you could work, and collect all these old machines, and show, let’s say, the dirty part of the book making process.

J – In 1997 we had to obtain an ‘offshore status’ of a museum from the Minister of Culture, which meant we had to write and present to the ministry our statute - what the museum is for, what we are going to collect here, what we are going to show, how we are going to work etc. So on paper it was more static than it was in reality, but you know for all these clerks working in the ministry it’s much easier if they can say – yeah, they are going to collect artist’s books, books about books, they are going to arrange exhibitions etc. so that was something quite understandable for them.

R – The funny thing is that they were the first private museum in Poland with the statute. And because they succeeded to work out a kind of a pattern, others who want to get the statute follow that now.

S – So they all ask for your advice.

P – Yes, but you also have to remember that for many years everything belonged to the state here, so private property was almost a crime, so somebody thinking in terms of private property was someone dangerous, was an enemy of the system and the state.

J – If you look in this book [Eye on Europe: Prints, Books and Multiples/1960 to now, Deborah Wye and Wendy Weitman, MOMA, New York, 2006, ISBN 870 703714] it say that we were not only the first here in Poland but the first in the whole of Eastern Europe.

S – To get the museum status?

T – That is a lot of work, actually a really amazing thing to do – to get that piece of paper…

J – This one here is also a very special book, a book object; a work of the museum [see image on right]. Here are letters written to local authorities to keep the building as a museum. Fifteen years of letters and applications, and these are the replies.

T – So this is years of correspondence between parties, a book made from your letters to the authorities asking to keep the museum, and their responses.

J – And of course when I finally gathered all these correspondences and made a copy of the papers, I was interested to see which part was heavier, the authorities or ours. So Pawel made this.

S – How many publications have your produced as CdA?
J – That’s very important - ‘Correspondence des Arts’ that’s the name of the small press, our foundation, and this is separate from the museum. Of course because we always had an idea to combine different art forms, and we realised that the book is a good place to do this – graphic, painting, typography, poetry, writing etc. So that’s why we decided to have such a name ‘correspondence des arts’.

P – The main idea of CdA is the format of the codex and what the limits of the codex are. And we are always trying to refer to it, to somehow to distort or to extend the possibilities given by the codex.

R – And, the other part of the job is that they have to earn money somehow, so they make different designs and they print things simply on demand. So there are a lot of things going on - printing catalogues for friends and unknown people, sometimes books, invitations, newspapers, and some of them are really interesting and individual works.

J – There is also The Scriptorium Project, an idea to exhibit side-by-side “the epoch of manuscripts” and digital era at Frankfurt Book Fair 2000. We found a lot of associations with the digital era and middle ages. This is important for our activity, yes, we are collecting old machines, and using them but we haven’t closed ourselves off to the future.

J/P – All the time we try to be open for everything that is very new and can be used for books. So we work to combine old technologies with absolutely new things. Because everything is ultimately only a tool for production.

S – Exactly. And a tool is to be used, and new ones used as they develop.

R – So it’s a bit the same as in my case. I told you yesterday, all the time I am somehow dependent on technology.

R – It’s exactly the same thing in their case. Each book was a kind of a challenge for them, because they tried to see what was possible to be made with the kind of machine they possessed. They had certain ideas about what they would like to do, but they found that it was impossible to do it with this or that kind of machine. Or let’s say, if it is impossible with this kind of machine, maybe we can find a different solution. If there is no paper, maybe… And you know it’s also the same as in my case because they were not educated in making books, they had to start from scratch. So each book is also the evidence of how they get their knowledge of book making. Step by step if you see all of them all chronologically.

T – So, why did you start making books - if your background is not in book making?

J – The answer is very simple. When we made this book [Rok Polski], and as you know it was made for political reasons, everybody liked this book very much, and people used to say ‘well go on, you can make beautiful books, make another one’. And we started to think: well maybe it’s a good idea to make the next book.

R – And as I said, we were all living in isolation. And the funny thing is that Rok Polski was made in 1980, and in the next five years they made several other books but they were absolutely unaware that these were so-called ‘artists’ books’ or fine press books, because they knew absolutely nothing about these kinds of books being made all around the world.

J/P – We couldn’t use any patterns, because we had no patterns at all – we had to invent everything by ourselves.

J – In 1985 a curator of the Slavic collection in the British Library made a small exhibition of our books, but we knew nothing about it, because the books were all bought by different people and
loaned for the show, so we had no idea!

S – So these were all books brought by private collectors and then shown through the library.

J – And she was trying to get in touch with us to inform us that she made an exhibition of our books in the British Library…

P – She eventually succeeded through the university library in Łódź, and because of that the University library decided to let us in and show us the collection of books they had, by different Polish writers and artists living abroad, immigrants, mainly in Great Britain.

T – The university here has a collection - How did they build the collection though? Were people sending their books back to Poland?

J – I’m not exactly sure how, maybe they got gifts from somebody, maybe they used to buy some things. But anyway somehow they collected quite a lot of things, by Polish book artists and writers living in Great Britain. Artists who were making let’s say fine press art books. You know in those times, almost every Pole was smuggling something from the West, so it could have been possible to bring them in.

S – And the books that were showing at the British Library; how did those people buy the books? Were they selling all their books in the UK?

J – I don’t know but I suspect that a friend of mine had these books, and he brought them to England and wanted to sell them, although we haven’t had any money! And the curator said she got these books from him, and she kept buying books.

S – So after she had bought those, she contacted you to buy other books from you?

R – Yes, and she regularly used to buy all the books they printed here. And most probably the British Library has a full collection of their books up to 2000 when she retired.

S – That’s a shame she retired. So they don’t buy now?

R – There was another exhibition in the British Library, not by the first curator, but by Janet Zmroczek who was responsible for the collection after that. I met Janet Zmroczek in Krakow about 4 years ago, when she came to do some things in the Jagiellonian Library, and at that time she bought some of my books. But we are not in contact with her now.

S – Well, that can happen. I think it’s really interesting that you (Radoslaw) and the Tryznos, really move with the times and you have no kind of hang-ups about what you use, it’s just like – I need to make this, I need X to make it, and if I don’t have it I will try Z and it doesn’t matter what it is, it gets the job done, and all without knowing that others were doing it too.

J & P – The first time we realised how big all this was, was at Mainz [The Mainzer Mini Pressen] It was around 1990 the first time we went and we were really astonished!

S – So that was the first time you realised that there were all these other people like you!

R – All these people were very nice and very friendly and the Tyznos had really a very warm welcome.

J – So at that time we got a lot of information about what was going on elsewhere in Europe. And new friends in Germany told us it could be quite a nice idea to spend the rest of our lives producing new books and travelling from one event to sell them. And at first we liked that idea and said yes
great, and we even thought about buying a big boat.

R – Yes, to travel all around Europe, with a living space and a studio with printing machines. They found, just from studying a map, that although it was possible to travel because there were enough channels connecting all the rivers, the biggest problem was GDR [Former German Democratic Republic (East Germany)]. They simply couldn’t cross the GDR with a boat, it was not allowed.

J & P – But of course the GDR was not the only reason we gave up the barge project, we were a little bit tired of making only bibliophile books and fine press, and began looking for something new. Of course we could produce more and more books but we wanted new challenges. At that time we met Emmett Williams and moved more towards installations, maybe, more beyond the codex. Because normally you know a book is a codex but the small and very significant difference is that normally in the case of a codex when you glue or sew the pages, you are trying to make it as narrow as possible. And in this case [Orpheus and Eurydice, the 22nd book published by CdA in 2004, contains 5 CDs with an opera, images and poetry, see image on right] we tried to go in a different direction to make it as wide as possible. And now, well, you know, this is almost a half metre wide, so it’s a good place to hide something inside for example to put a collection of CDs.

J – We decided to stay and to work on the museum and our press. We also continue to work a lot with the local schools and colleges. Student groups visit the museum to see the collection of books and the machines. The local grammar school also has an annual book art competition, and at the local university, students learn about artists’ books in relation to publishing and editing and papermaking. We are often called upon to lecture at Universities and for book groups. There is a large group of bibliophiles in Łódź who worked with us to produce a book of the old and current literary scenes of the city. Just like you mentioned that you would like to make a directory for your project, we published the bibliophiles guide to Łódź, with a map of the venues that are connected with printing, with books, with selling books, libraries etc.

R – It would be great if you have such directory or map of other areas - you want to go somewhere to meet an artist, you just check, send an email to say you will be there...

J & P – Along with Pawel upstairs in the studio we can combine anything that we or others want to use to make a book, from traditional to computer works, we like very much the idea to contact with a wider audience, to engage with and enjoy the museum.

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Book Art Museum, Łódź
www.book.art.pl

http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/canon.htm