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Wonderful Shanghai!

Benoit Junod, Geneva

Several months ago, I received – as did many collectors and artists all over the world – an invitation from Wang Rong president of the Shanghai Fu Xian Zhai Ex-libris Society (SFXZ) to take part in a ‘mini-congress’ from 21 to 25 October this year. Although the invitation did not contain glossy images of the congress venue, and the organisers had to fight a rather nasty ‘smear campaign’ accusing them of being mercantile and only using ex-libris to make money, I decided that the attraction of seeing Shanghai – one of the great expanding capitals of the world – was irresistible. Moreover I had lived there as a child, just before Mao Zedong’s revolution brought him to power, and was keen to see how it was today.

The registration fee was €100 per person, and this covered both accommodation and food – for five days. At twenty euros a day, it was hardly extortion!!! I even decided to take my 11-year old son Nicholas with me, to make him discover China. For a change, the SFXZ had organised a competition for collectors, rather than just artists, for its congress. Such an event had not taken place since the 1995 ‘World of Ex-libris’ and I was very keen to see the results. A quality publication was produced which collectors can purchase directly from the organisers at exlibriswr@gmail.com. It shows the best ex libris of a range of knowledgeable collectors who are not always at FISAE or other major congresses. SFXZ also gave a prize to a major artist and this time it went to the Bulgarian Robert Baramov, whose fine drypoints and mixed techniques are indisputably attractive, even if he has sometimes been in conflict with collectors. Another beautiful exhibition and publication in the congress was dedicated to Jiri Brazda, in the same format as earlier volumes on the work of van Damme, Baeyens and Hamanishi. We

all know that Brazda has an impressive opus of prints, both free graphics and ex libris, with a sharply marked and immediately recognisable style. To see on the wall about 200 of his bookplates is an unforgettable delight.

Foreign participants were few. Apart from Baramov and Brazda, Christos Giannakis was there (he confirmed to me that the process of formally registering a Greek Society is under way), as well as Hisao Haneda from Japan, and myself. Some 20 Chinese artists took part, and about 30 collectors. It was encouraging to see that the average age of the Chinese participants was around 30-35 years, when in European congresses it averages double that figure! Amongst the local collectors were some we already knew from Beijing, like Nannan Wang, but most we met for the first time. All were very friendly and interested, sometimes



Woodcut artist Ding Jingshen demonstrating the ‘watercolour printed woodcut technique’

buying bookplates from other collectors and sometimes exchanging.

I found that the quality of the Chinese ex libris on offer was in general a good deal higher than I had seen in Beijing, and I think that the merit is to a great extent Wang Rong's. If he really blossomed in the field of ex libris after the Nyon Congress, his interest pre-dates it by several years. In 2007, he published a major volume on Chinese ex libris in cooperation with the LuXun print museum of Shanghai, which illustrates the work of about 150 artists: the most highly regarded of the generation just past, established artists and the rising youngsters. Although the aesthetics of some of these seem at first very foreign to the Western eye, their intrinsic qualities are evident and they are comparable to the best of each generation in Europe. Certainly, the fine engravings of the Russian, Bulgarian and other East European artists cannot be found in China, but if one looks at the bookplates in terms of woodcuts and wood-engravings, with fascinating colour printing techniques, they are worthy of as much praise. Also, the work and dedication put by the artists into the creation of ex libris leaves nothing to be desired. Long past are the days of bookplates without collectors' names... Some will recall the story told by Luc van den Briele of his meeting with a Chinese artist close to twenty years ago: the artist showed him a bookplate with 'ex libris' in Western characters, followed by an inscription in Chinese. Asked by Luc if this was the name of the collector, the artist looked puzzled and said 'Oh no! It means "Springtime in Heinan".'

When Wang Rong organised a small auction of high quality Chinese ex libris, I was very excited to see what would happen. Well, all the lots (except one!) were bought by Chinese collectors, and at very substantial prices. Ex libris of major artists who died in the last few years, such as Yang Keyang, went for about €50 to €80; an uncommon Liang Dong went for €30. One important ex libris on offer was a 1987 nude by Li Qun (who is 100 years old!). It sold for €145; when I asked why it went so high, Wang Rong explained to me that it was the first bookplate on the

subject in China and broke taboos. This shows that there is a young generation of collectors out there who are willing to invest in bookplates. Where are their European counterparts?

A perk for persons interested in ex libris techniques was a demonstration by Ding Jingshen of the 'watercolour printed woodcut technique'. Multiple blocks of plywood are engraved and successively printed on a special rice paper using watercolour applied to the blocks with a paint brush. This allows amazing tonal variations which could never be achieved with a roller-and-printing-ink technique. Timing is crucial as the watercolour tends to dry fast, and gradations can be introduced within each block. Obtaining consistency throughout an edition is very difficult. This is why Ding Jingshen proposed an interesting approach to commissioning an ex libris. On a table, some 20 sketches 'before the name' were presented, and potential clients could choose one – but not more than one. For 80 EUR, he offered to produce in time for the FISAE congress at Naantali, Finland, five prints with owner's name and a complete set of the 11 bookplates.

Talking of prices, commissioning an ex libris from a Chinese artist is still considerably more accessible than from a European or Japanese one. Of course, the

SFXZ has its 'team' of artists for whom it finds commissions and takes a percentage – but this has happened in Europe as well, and there is nothing shameful about it. Better for an artist to pay a commission to get an order and get his work promoted, rather than to remain sidelined. After all, such things are not mandatory, but the result of a negotiation.

And now we come to the best: Chongming Island is an alluvial mass formed by the Yangtze River. On the Island the Jingnan San Min Culture Village is an absolute pearl, Chinese-style buildings with comfortable rooms and plenty of hot water, not a sound at night, and an amusing crafts museum spread out over a few hundred square metres of traditional alley houses. We watched a fabulous one-man puppet show of amazing quality – so graphic that you didn't need to know the language. The food was DELICIOUS, and even if my 11-year-old son is hooked on pizzas and hamburgers, he said on the fourth day that he could eat Chinese food for the rest of his life! The vegetables came from the village farm and the fish from the river.

Perhaps the most wonderful aspect of the event was the warmth of the hospitality shown to us. Soon, the girl at the hotel reception noticed that foreigners cannot live without coffee, and she produced endless



Wang Rong at home with family and guests surrounded by bookplates

cups of Nescafé which I think a Chinese would not have touched with a barge-pole; we were made to taste the best local wines with our meals; the President of the Cultural Administration in Beijing came to visit us and thanked us for coming to China. We could not find enough words to thank our perfect host Wang Rong and his family for a wonderful time!

A day in Shanghai on the way to Chongming Island and another on the way back were an opportunity for real discoveries. When I saw the Bund, the old Shanghai waterfront, the images of memory of 62 years ago flooded back, and I remembered walking along the embankment with my father and mother. Of course, the backdrop was different: today it has hundreds of skyscrapers, with the 450m Shanghai Financial Centre dominating them all. I also had the great honour to visit the minute flat where Wang Rong's daughter YinYi lives with her husband Zhu and his mother, and the Aladdin's cave in which Wang Rong is surrounded by bookplates. Even a quick glance convinces you that there is little economic return from ex libris, especially when you think how much they spend on publications, exhibitions and other promotional activities. Thank God, Zhu has a good job and he shares his wife's love for ex libris. This is what makes the Shanghai ex libris world go around, nothing else!

Wang Rong dreams of hosting the 2016 FISAE Congress in Shanghai. We all said to him that Chongming Island is too far away from the city centre to be a feasible venue, and he agrees. But if he finds a suitable setting, I have not the slightest doubt that the managerial capacity of his team, and the dedication they have in promoting bookplates, could make a congress in Shanghai a memorable occasion – in 2016 or later.

This is an abridged version of an article which first appeared in the Ex Libris Chronicle vol. 11, no. 1 published in 2012 by the American Society of Bookplate Collectors and Designers, and is published in the Newsletter with kind permission of the author and James P Keenan.

News from Queensland: Bookplates unbound

A bookplate project has been undertaken by a group of Queensland artists. The project, *Bookplates unbound*, was born of conversations between Gael Phillips and Wim de Vos regarding the role of printmakers in the creation of fine art bookplates. They invited 29 other Queensland artists to collaborate in a project to make a limited edition of fine art bookplates. Each folio of 31 bookplates, mounted on art paper, is presented in a clam shell box specially made by Tony Gibaud of Craftsmen Bookbinders at Geebung. Each artist also wrote an Artist's Statement to accompany the bookplate. The text was printed by Drawing and Drafting, Digital at Bowen Hills.

Any hand printmaking technique was allowed and, since we are now in the 21st century, digital prints were also included, providing they were printed on acid free paper using archival inks. The bookplates were to be printed on acid free paper of a weight up to 100gsm and they were limited in size to no larger than 90mm by 130mm. The variety of techniques used by the artists included hard ground etching, soft ground etching, aquatint, linocut, lino

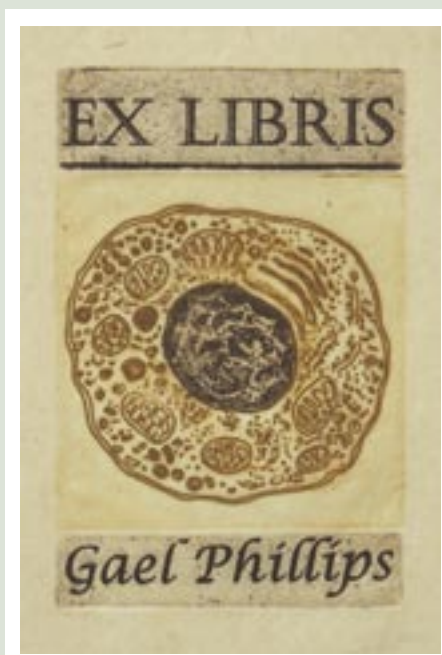


etching, digital print, embossing and silk screen printing.

Some of the participating artists include Malcolm Enright, Barbara Heath, Anita Milroy, Adele Outteridge, Anneke Silver, Doug Spowart, Stephen Spurrier, Madonna Staunton, Jonathan Tse and Wim de Vos.

The project was coordinated by Gael Phillips and Wim de Vos and the work of compiling the folios was done by the participants at The Studio West End, run by Adele Outteridge and Wim de Vos. Each participating artist received a copy of the folio and the few remaining folios of this strictly limited edition of 40 copies are now available for sale to collectors for \$1390 plus postage.

Enquiries about purchase of a folio should be directed to Dr Gael Phillips on 0417 768 610.



Above: Etching by Christine Ling for herself, 2012
Left: Etching by Gael Phillips for herself, 2012
(Photos: Adele Outteridge)

**STOP PRESS:
PUT THESE DATES IN
YOUR DIARY!**

Society offered exhibition space at
Kogarah Town Square Library
(Sydney), July-August 2013

I am very excited to announce to members and friends that the New Australian Bookplate Society has been offered exhibition space at the Kogarah Town Square Library and Cultural Centre under Kogarah City Council's Community Art & Cultural Program. The time period, which includes the mounting and dismantling of the exhibit, is 22 July to 12 August 2013. The Library is a modern building opened in late 2005 – coincidentally the year the Society was launched – and features an attractively light and airy exhibition space just inside the Library's main entrance.

The venue has been offered without charge, and comes with the assistance of staff, and Kogarah City Council may be able to subsidise an opening event with some catering. There is hanging space of approximately 15 metres over three walls and a further 9 metres are available using a large moveable partition; in addition a lockable display case can be used. In the Society's Expression of interest I proposed a working exhibition title of 'Australian bookplates: contemporary and historical', which largely reflects the scope of the Society. Proposed themes were: Bookplates of the golden age, 1890-1950; Modern Australian bookplates; Bookplate design techniques; Lending library and institutional bookplates.

The Expression of interest had to be prepared quite quickly and so this is only the starting point for an exciting event in the life of the Society and of bookplate promotion in Australia. We have a few months to decide how we would like to conduct the exhibition and the works we would like to focus on. I invite artist and collector members of the Society to contact me if they would like to contribute to the planning and conduct of the exhibition. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Linda Heald and John Johnson of Kogarah City Council who approached me with the idea of the Society applying for exhibition space. MF

**Drifting amongst
Continental plates**
Jürgen Wegner, Sydney

There is nothing quite like a bibliographical tour of the Continent ... the continent of books. Dublin and Belfast, Berlin then Amsterdam via a half-dozen mostly university towns for the printers and presses, the printing museums and, of course, the superabundant bookshops, new and antiquarian. Ireland has only the population of a Sydney or Melbourne and yet it has, in Dublin, an extraordinarily well-appointed National Printing Museum. Amsterdam for the wonderful ambience of its Friday antiquarian Boekenmarkt op het Spui and for the aptly named Minotaurus Boekwinkel specialising in bibliography, private presses and typography. And Berlin ... Berlin because it just has everything. Though I did manage to miss by a couple of months *Die Buchstaben*, Anselm Kiefer's extraordinary installation in the Walter-Gropius-Bau featuring printing presses, casters and type!

And, of course, books are everywhere, not to mention remarkably inexpensive. This is not just because of the current favourable exchange rate which now makes 'Euroland' affordable to most everyone. A variety of factors have made a great many good books on the subject of 'books and printing' literally worth little more today than the paper they were printed on. While many of the books on 'books and printing' are languishing in the bargain bins out the front of antiquarian bookshops, each year a number of significant new works continue to be published. You also get to see books which you could never have imagined existed.

Bookplates are not a great interest of mine unless as part of that grand subject: printed ephemera. So I don't particularly look out for books on this subject, though I did regularly see books on them everywhere. One dealer at the Boekenmarkt even had several shelves of such works. They were classics and the subject seems still to be of interest there so the books were a fair price. But, equally, you do see more recent thematic anthologies of bookplates – from



owls to academics. These are rarely more than €5 to €10 for quite well-produced, illustrated and substantial books – and often for less. There are so many other good books here that I just couldn't afford to buy in an area of marginal interest (as much as I would have liked to). However, I did buy one large illustrated study for its ephemera value. It had been recently published and now was already remaindered:

Grönert, Alexander (ed.). Exlibris: die Welt im Kleinformat: Klein- und Gebrauchsgrafik aus der Blütezeit des Exlibris (Exlibris: the world writ small: small and applied graphic art from the golden age of the ex libris). Bedburg-Hau, [Germany]: Stiftung Museum Schloss Moyland, 2009. 229 pp.

The book was produced in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name held at the Museum Schloss Moyland in 2009. It is a beautifully produced hardbound quarto with hundreds of large (actual size?) illustrations in colour. The contents are arranged chronologically from the 'New Heraldry' and free interpretation, to Jugendstil [ie Germany's *art nouveau*], the transition period of bookplates as art then applied graphic design, to the golden age of the bookplate. The bookplate artists include notable figures from the arts such as Otto Hupp, Max Klinger, Peter Behrens, Otto Eckmann, Melchior Lechter, Walter Tiemann, Emil Preetorius, Alfred Kubin

– to name a few. Many of these were also active in book illustration and typography. There is a brief history of the Deutsche Exlibris Gesellschaft (German Exlibris Society) as well as many chapters dealing with thematic bookplates: professions, libraries and reading, owls and antiquity, nudes, eros and death, industry, war.

My favourites are, of course, those of the Jugendstil artists such as Ludwig Hohlwein and Bernard Wenig. Peter Behrens and Melchior Lechter are also personal favourites as are the many bookplates featuring books in their design such as the ‘Dog bites book’ bookplate for Vally Wiener. There are also some shorter chapters on *Book labels and typographical exlibris* and *How to collect and research exlibris* not to mention a bibliography with about 200 references. The coverage is Germanic so perhaps a welcome change from the general fare of bookplate books. Originally published at €34.90 and now remaindered at €15.00 (or about A\$20).

Coincidentally, the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz was showing a special exhibition on the theme of *Museum trifft Theater, Theater trifft Museum* based on its extensive special collection – the Gutenberg Museum is about so much more than ‘just’ printing. The performing arts have a rich heritage of bookplates, and this exhibition, curated by the Gutenberg Museum’s Elke Schutt-Kehm (Research Fellow, Exlibris) and produced in co-operation with the Staatstheater Mainz, displays what I have translated as ‘ex libris for theatre fans and stars of the stage from Caruso to Karajan and from Tilla Duriex to Doris Day’. My translation of the brochure follows:

Those working in the cultural sphere often have many books as a result of their profession. And those who love books are also often lovers of the theatre. The Gutenberg Museum has, with its over 100,000 specimens, the most extensive collection of exlibris in the FRG [ie the Federal Republic of Germany – a somewhat odd use of terminology as its now all Germany]. With the inclusion of the ‘pictures of the stage’ of Heinz Decker and Claus Wittal (both long-standing members of the German Exlibris Society),

the exhibition displays over 300 notable examples from all over the world. Here the passion for books and the theatre are combined: the simple functional as well as the luxurious ex libris for the collector of prints, those of the bibliophile theatre goers and of the stars of stage and screen, the works of famous artists, examples from the golden age of the ex libris of around 1900 as well as many modern examples – all of which proves that the ex libris is alive and well today.

The life stories of the successful and the adulated as well as of the exiled and the outlawed are to be found behind many of these small sheets.

The exhibition is on until 13 January 2013. A fine illustrated catalogue has also been produced though I have been unable to find any trace of it—I saw it there on the table or was I dreaming?! There is also a monumental work in two volumes on the Gutenberg Museum’s bookplate collection:

Schutt-Kehm, Elke; Wittal, Claus. *Exlibris-Katalog des Gutenberg-Museums*. Wiesbaden: Wittal, 1998-2003. 2 v. [The trade press says it describes about 50,000 of the collection’s 120,000 bookplates; available at about A\$250].

The Gutenberg Museum’s website contains many illustrations of bookplates including a featured ‘Bookplate of the month’ at: <http://www.gutenberg-museum.de/index.php?id=29&L=1>

Gutenberg Museum’s bookplate collection: <http://www.gutenberg-museum.de/index.php?id=53&L=1>

Free original wood engraving (not any longer!)

Stephen Hall, Society of Wood Engravers, Newcastle upon Tyne

I bought this wood engraving – or I should say I bought about 200 of them along with the block – at a car boot sale. ‘Why?’ I hear you asking. Well, they were cheap, I hadn’t bought anything else that day and was feeling deprived, it may have been done by a famous wood engraver, they were printed in

a lovely shade of blue, I could easily smuggle them into the house thus avoiding awkward questions like, ‘What are you going to do with those?’ etc etc. But the truth is I don’t know why I bought them.

*‘How much are they?’ I asked the man
‘Four quid.’*

‘I’ll give you two.’

‘Two? No, no, no, I cudn’t let ‘em go for less’an three. Them’s vintage labels them is. Probly off sum antique wine bottles or somethin’, proply stamped an’all. See that bit o’ wood? That’s wot they’ve been stamped off. Musta taken sum bloke a week to stamp ‘em. I cud get a fortune for ‘em on Ebay. Very collectabil these days, labels is. Tell yer wot, I’ll chuck-in the bit o’ wood free!’

I have one question, can anyone identify the artist? The letters E J C and date 1950 are on the left. If any ex libris collectors, or wood engraving collectors (or anyone else for that matter!) would like one just send me a stamp addressed envelope and I’ll get one to you. (Pleeeeee say yes!) [Unfortunately for NABS members they are all spoken for now – Editor].

This note first appeared in Multiples, newsletter of the Society of Wood Engravers and is reproduced by kind permission of the author; thanks also to Mike Carter for spotting this gem!



Wood engraved bookplate by E J C for F I Calvert, 1950

Bookplate collections: University of Technology, Sydney

Mark J Ferson, Sydney

As was noted in *Newsletter* no. 26, in the September 2012 issue of his *News from Brandywine*, Jürgen Wegner drew attention to two bookplate related events at the University of Technology, Sydney. The first was the celebration of the acquisition by the University at auction of the Jack Kemsley collection of Norman Lindsay material, including a small gathering of his uniquely styled bookplates. Incidentally, and I have no doubt said this before, so please excuse me for repeating myself, a fair number of bookplate collectors were drawn into this collecting field by an interest in the work of Norman Lindsay. The second related item was the note that art patron and bookplate promoter Pat Corrigan had donated a collection of 68 bookplates to the UTS Library in 2006. The Lindsay collection is described as follows:

This special collection of material relates to the Australian artist, writer and sculptor Norman Lindsay, 1879-1969. The Collection of over 700 items was formed by the cartoonist and television broadcaster James Kemsley, and purchased by the Library in 2011. The Collection consists mostly of printed material – books, journals, ephemera, original illustrations, letters and the manuscript of an unpublished novel by Lindsay, as



The room at UTS Library housing the Norman Lindsay Collection, with librarians Brenda Linn and Stephen Gates, October 2012 (Photo: M J Ferson)

well as some audio-visual material, all produced between 1858 and 2006.

Of interest to historians and researchers in the social sciences and visual communication fields, the Collection contains books (including censored novels) and journal articles by and about Norman Lindsay, his extended artistic family including his brother Lionel and his literary son Jack, and the artistic milieu in which they moved.

Early 20th century journals include the famous Lone Hand, The Tocsin, and Cartoons Magazine, illustrated by a young Norman Lindsay. Ephemera include postage stamps, coins, invitations, art exhibition catalogues and postcards. Of course no Lindsay collection would be complete without over 80 items relating to The Magic Pudding: first editions, Japanese & Korean translations, sheet music and toys.

On one morning of my recent holiday I arranged to visit the UTS library to ‘investigate’ the special collections where the bookplate and Lindsay material were held, and met with Stephen Gates and Brenda Linn, collection development librarians. Both were enthusiastic about the acquisition of this unique material by the university library which refreshingly had a light and modern atmosphere reflected in modern art works on the walls. A room had been dedicated to the Lindsay collection and a small display of bookplate books were placed there (including, maybe not coincidentally, one of my own in the company of works by Barnett and Peake). I was gratified to hear, when I followed up with Stephen Gates after my visit, that UTS Library had put in orders for a number of bookplate books, paid a 2012 membership subscription to the Society, and bought a full set of back issues of the *Newsletter*. A new bookplate resource in the making!

Editorial

Although an Australian society, your Editor continues to be offered for publication good material of international interest, or

perhaps I should say global interest, as my intention is to tantalise bookplate collectors and students wherever they may reside. I am grateful to Benoit Junod, a long-time collector and FISAE committee member, for allowing me to use his article on a trip to Shanghai and the bookplate and other cultural and culinary delights he found there; also to Jürgen Wegner for offering his report on his bookish tour through northern Europe with particular bookplate references and which he felt better suited to the *Newsletter* than to his printing history orientated *News from Brandywine* (which nevertheless has been the source over the years of a few items concerning bookplates); and finally to Stephen Hall of the Society of Wood Engravers (UK) for his rather charming story, told in the vernacular, of a bookplate bargain obtained at a car boot sale.

In this issue, I have also drawn members’ attention to the exciting news that the Society has been offered an exhibition space in the modern, light and airy Kogarah Town Square Library and Cultural Centre (in Sydney’s south). So please put the dates 22 July to 12 August 2013 in your diaries, and let me know if you would like to offer any of your own designs (if you are an artist) or stunning examples from your collection for the exhibit. A subcommittee will be formed to plan and hang the exhibition with the assistance of Kogarah City Council staff – if you would like to contribute your time to organising this significant event in the life of the Society, please do get in touch.

The final item in the *Newsletter* continues the occasional series on bookplate collections held by Australian institutions begun in *Newsletter* no. 12 with a short note about the bookplates held in the special collections of UTS Library at the University of Technology, Sydney – and it seems the Library is keen to increase this aspect of their collections.

And so it just remains for me to thank all who contributed to the *Newsletter* in 2012, to record my especial gratitude to designer Mary Keep and our printer Siung Tan for such a beautiful production, and to wish all members and readers compliments of the season, a happy New Year celebration and much fun with bookplates in 2013. MF