

Winter 2003

ARTS ACROSS KENTUCKY

Pressing the Advantage

Printing and the Visual Art of the Written Word

Where Poets Come From

George Ella Lyon Looks Homeward

News from the Kentucky Arts Council

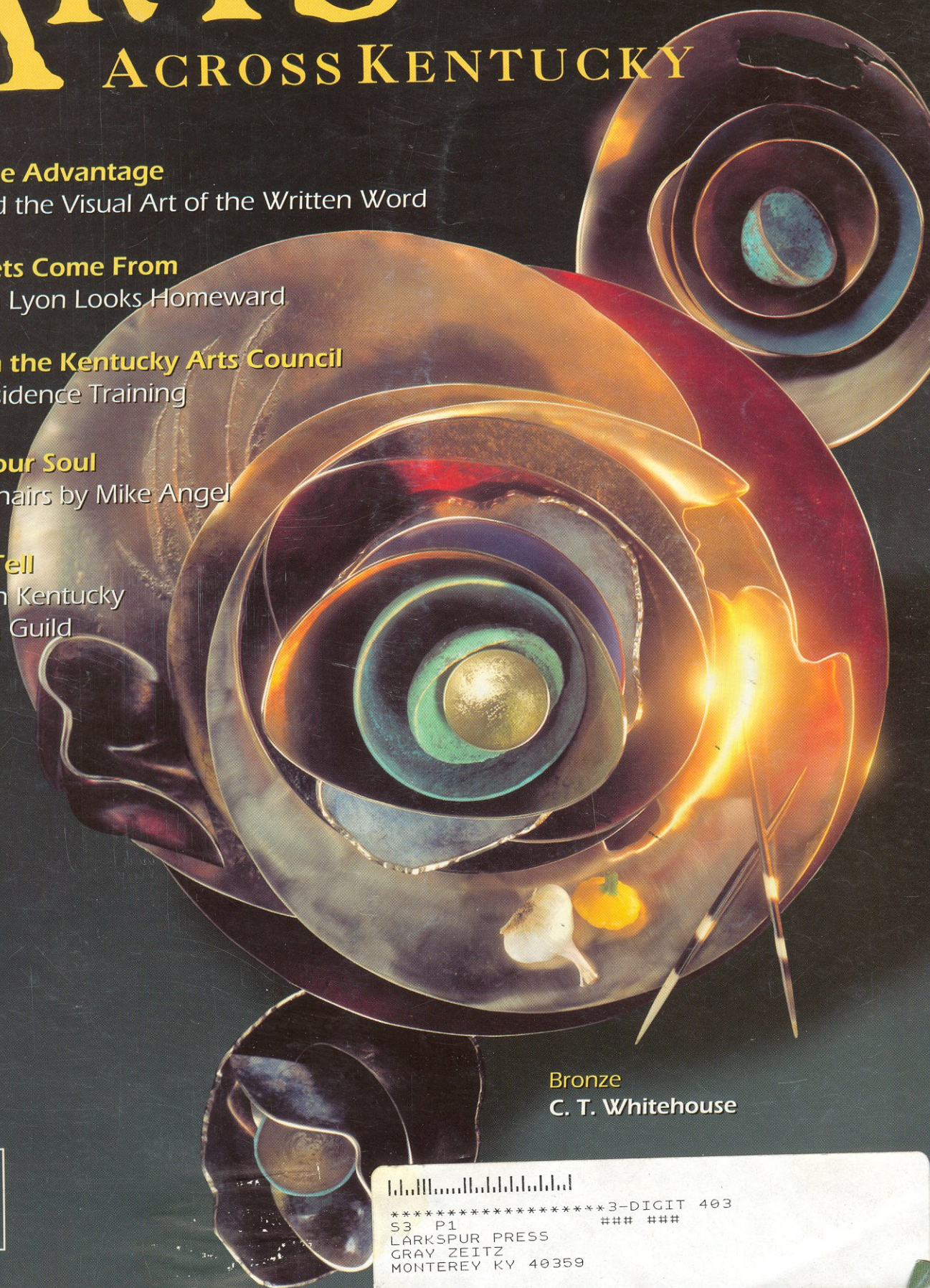
Artist-in-Residence Training

Rocking Your Soul

Mule-Ear Chairs by Mike Angel

A Tale to Tell

The Eastern Kentucky
Storytelling Guild



Bronze
C. T. Whitehouse



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LARKSPUR PRESS
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A WORLD OF BOOKS

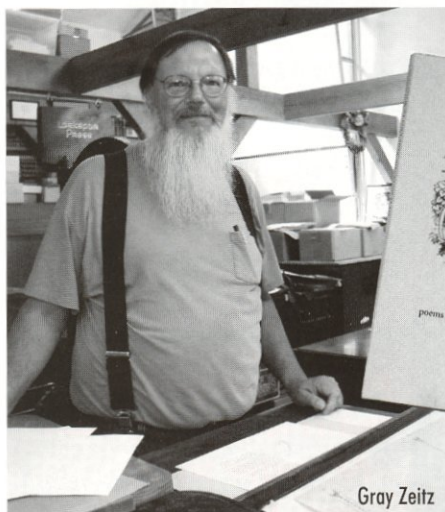
LARKSPUR PRESS

By Nancy Bronner

Kentucky poet laureate James Baker Hall recently elaborated on questions he was asked by a New York literary agent: "How come there are so many good writers in Kentucky today? Isn't this a subject for investigation?" Hall identified several contributing factors, including deep ties to place and home, the state recognition provided by Robert Penn Warren's appointment as the first U.S. poet laureate, and the creative inspiration and support found at our universities.

Another element, at least in part, might be the reverence for the printed word that Larkspur Press owner and operator Gray Zeitz demonstrates in his elegant presentations of contemporary authors, Kentucky writers in particular. His exquisite special editions, bound in Carolyn Whitesel's hand-decorated papers, and masterful broadsides (unbound works by the sheet) are a tribute to the legacy of all

writers. Bewiskered, aproned, and ink-smudged, press lever in hand, Zeitz keeps the literary home fires burning with clamshell printing presses and type-



Gray Zeitz

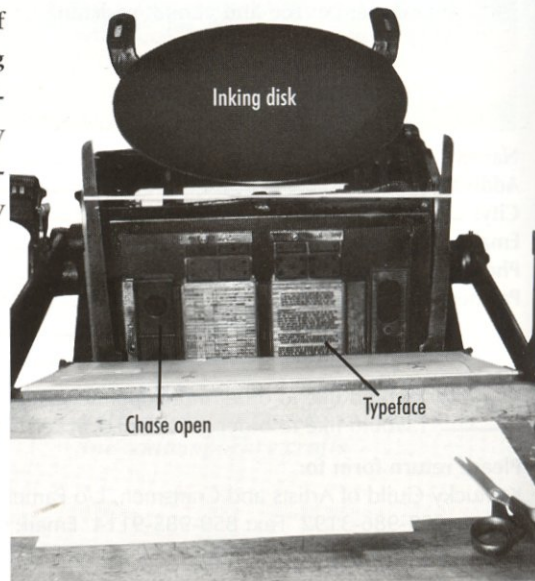
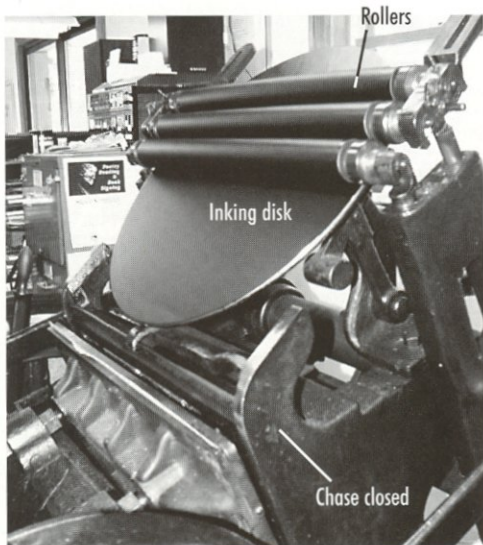
face set by hand. With just a little imagination, one can envision him as a Gutenberg compatriot, eagerly laboring by lamplight with a confounding, cantankerous piece of new equipment in a dark, oily shop, with the sounds of pipe music, bleating goats, and creaking wagons outside in the crowded, dirt-packed alleys of mid-15th-century Mainz. Rural Owen County is, chronologically and geographically, a far cry

The clamshell press is named for the movement of the chase, or the framework that holds the two pages of typeface. When the chase is open (as in the picture at right,) the inked rollers have moved down across the two pages of typeface while the paper sheets move into and out of position. When the press operator closes the chase (left photo,) the rollers move up across the circular inking disk, picking up a fresh layer of ink, while the typeface is pressed into the paper.



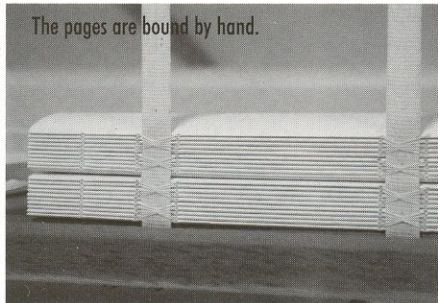
from mid-millennium Germany, but the heart and soul of printing is just as valued here and now as it was when the printing press was an innovation. Laboring in relative obscurity, Zeitz is one of a small vanguard of hand-set-book-printing operations that, by preserving the old-fashioned methods, elevate the printed word to a substantial visual art form.

Zeitz learned printing and book arts as an apprentice to the late Carolyn Hammer (1911-2001) at the University of Kentucky King Library Press. While still at UK, he began publishing his own literary journal, *bandsel*. He enjoyed the various facets of writing, printing, and publishing so much that he decided to make it his life's work.

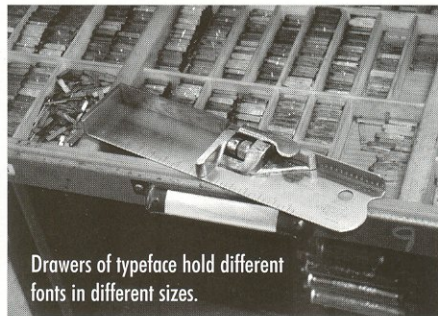


Just shy of a dual degree in English and history, Zeitz moved to Monterey, a thriving artists' community, in 1974; and put his ideas into practice. Hammer reinforced that decision by giving him a Chandler & Price printing press. Larkspur Press's inaugural title was Richard Taylor's *Bluegrass*, and since that first publication, the company has served Kentucky authors almost exclusively.

If, as we hear, timing is everything, Zeitz's rhythm is one that most of us



The pages are bound by hand.



Drawers of typeface hold different fonts in different sizes.

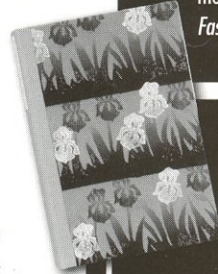
are unfamiliar with. The books he produces usually take two years to come to fruition. He may ponder for up to a year about what font and page layout

will most complement a given text. Each metal letter, punctuation mark, and spacer is set individually. The printing presses are of the letterpress type, one of the oldest types of press. With this method, the inked typeface is stamped directly onto the paper. This, of course, means that all the lettering and images must be reversed in order to print correctly. (The other common method of printing is known as offset. In this method, an intermediary, such as a rubber "blanket," is used to transfer the ink to the paper. In offset printing, there is no reversal of the image.) Moistened paper is used for printing in the clamshell press, which purrs like a contented feline as it uniformly churns out pages under Zeitz's careful hand.

Zeitz generally produces two editions of a single title: a regular edition in a press run of 500 to 1,000 on acid-free machine-made paper and a special edition of 25 to 60 copies, printed on handmade or moldmade paper, hand-sewn, and hand-bound. The actual printing may take only a couple of months, but Zeitz's supply of cast letters allows him to set only 18 to 20 pages at a time. In a given day, he can set the letters for three to four pages of prose or 15 to 20 pages of poetry. Setting the type is one of the processes that Zeitz loves most.



Feathery currents flow across the cover of James Baker Hall's *Fast Signing Mute*.

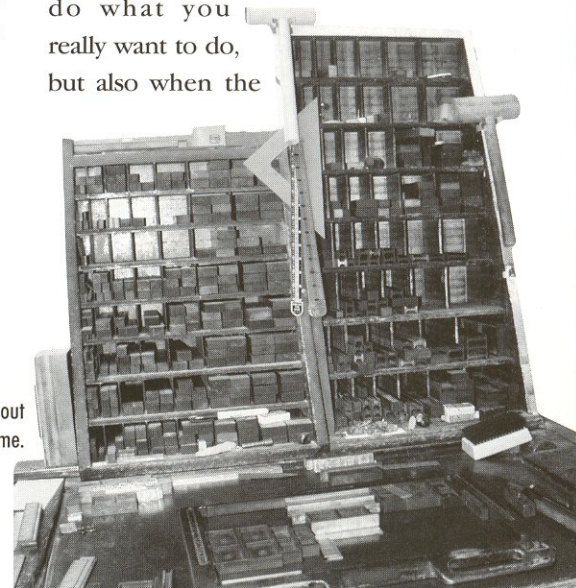


Wendell Berry's *The Farm* is clothed in delicate white and lilac irises.



Bobbie Ann Mason's *Still Life with Watermelon* looks delectable.

In the catalog for *StoneEye*, produced by the Guild of Bookworkers, Zeitz explains: "It is so clear, the difference in hand-setting and printing letterpress. Whether on handmade or good machine-made paper, you can see the difference, and I enjoy the hand-setting. The reward is not only in being able to do what you really want to do, but also when the



The pages are laid out two at a time.

24th-annual
KENTUCKY WOMEN WRITERS CONFERENCE

"It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others."

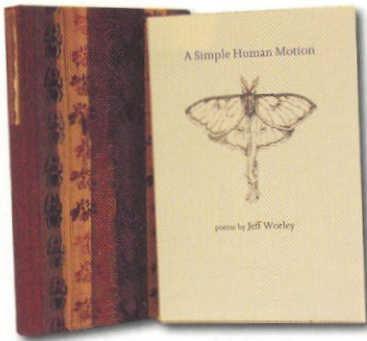
—MFK Fisher, *The Art of Eating*

A Feast of Words: Nourishing the Mind and Body

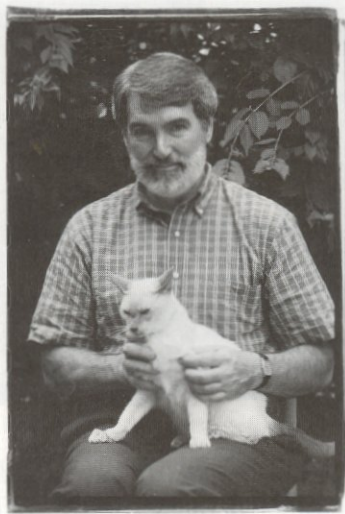
March 27-29, 2003 on campus at UK
and in various downtown venues.

For more information about ticket prices
and participating authors, see our website —

www.uky.edu/conferences/kywwc
Or call Brenda Weber at (859)257-8451.



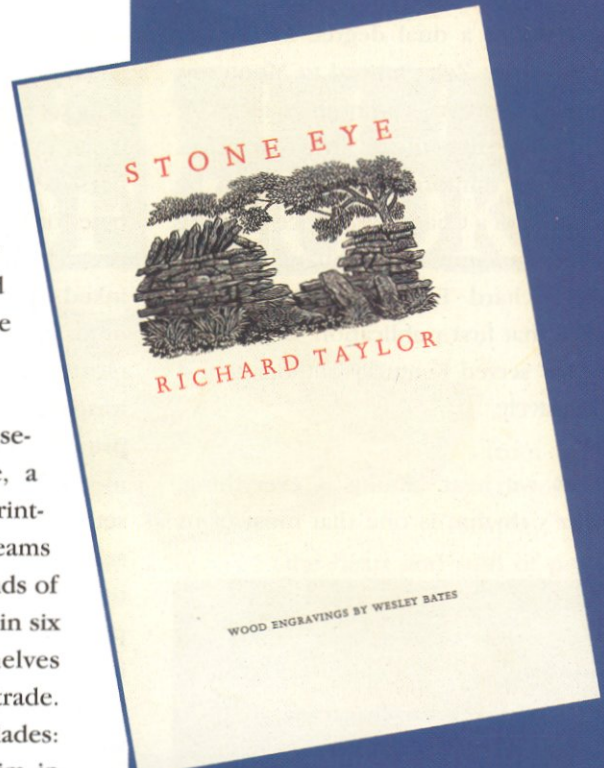
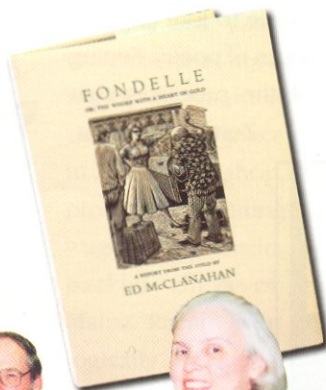
Jeff Worley, editor of *Odyssey*, the University of Kentucky's research magazine, was the First Place Grand Prize Winner in the Poetry 2002 International Competition sponsored by the *Atlanta Review*. His book of poetry, *A Simple Human Motion*, was published by Larkspur Press.



(l-r) Gray Zeitz, Ed McClanahan, Richard Taylor, and paper artist Carolyn Whitesel share a moment over McClanahan's book, *Fondelle, or: The Whore with a Heart of Gold*.

author is pleased with the outcome. When you have pleased the author, that's it, that's the best."

Larkspur Press is a library, a museum, and a workshop in one, a world unto itself, filled with printing presses of different kinds, reams of paper, drawers with thousands of tiny mirror-image metal letters in six different fonts, and bookshelves packed with samples of the trade. Zeitz has received many accolades: *Southern Living* highlighted him in 1994 as an Outstanding Southerner, and in 1998, the University of Kentucky Libraries hosted Larkspur Twenty-five, a quarter-century celebration of this Kentucky treasure. That is little enough praise for a man whose books are each a world. "...and books, we know, Are a substantial world, both pure and good." (William Wordsworth, "Personal Talk" [1807], sonnet 3.) 🐾



Louisville's Portland Museum Hosts Stone Eye Exhibit

Kentucky communities are proud of their histories. Even the smallest of towns has a museum, often run by volunteers, dedicated to preserving the legacy of the township's establishment and growth over the centuries. Larger cities have museums or historical societies, and neighborhoods within cities have venues as well. The Portland Museum (TPM) is a perfect example. Located near the river, close to the Falls of the Ohio, TPM chronicles the township of Portland and its gradual incorporation into the city of Louisville. The museum was founded in 1978 in a single classroom and has grown into a community-based, not-for-profit educational institution at Beech Grove, an antebellum "country estate." The museum also presents small rotating exhibits on contemporary topics, such as *Stone Eye*, which opens December 15.

Portland Museum
2308 Portland Avenue
Louisville, Kentucky 40212
(502) 776-7678
www.goportland.org