

Megan Lotts

Woodblock Woodstock

The Drive By Press at Morris Library

The role of the library in the 21st century is rapidly changing. Today the library can be a space where individuals work together engaging in dynamic cross-disciplinary dialogues while creatively thinking and having fun. At Morris Library on the Southern Illinois University campus in Carbondale (SIUC), the library faculty and staff explore the production of alternative programming and exciting events, which remind students, faculty, and staff that scholarly research and libraries are not just about books and journals. This article gives outlines experience planning and implementing the event Woodblock Woodstock, which explored the evolution of the printing press through a variety of exhibits and ephemeral public events.

Drive By Press

If individuals were lucky enough to walk or bike in the front of Morris Library on April 28, 2011, they witnessed a 14th-century printing press in the back of a Honda Element, loud music, and two members from Drive By Press (DBP), printing and educating the SIUC campus about the ideas of printmaking and mobile art

in the 21st century. Artists Joseph Velazquez and Tyler Krasowski operated in tandem making prints for more than four hours in front of Morris Library for the final event of Woodblock Woodstock.

Since the birth of DBP, members of the artist collective have travelled more than 200,000 miles, printed in 46 of the continental United States, and have been referred to as “Printmaking

Missionaries” or sometimes better known as the Louis and Clark of Printmaking.¹ They have participated in a variety of events, such as travelling with the indie rock band Spoon, printing at the Austin City Limits Music Festival, museum

openings, and even at a few libraries. They have been fortunate to pick up a few sponsors along the way, including Gamblin Artists Colors, Legion Paper, and, in the summer of 2012, DBP began their international travels with a trip to Estonia.²



Drive By Press at Morris Library SIUC Carbondale. Photo taken by Megan Lotts.

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When inviting DBP to campus, depending on your time and budget, you can choose how many days you would like them to visit and what types of events you would like them to present. While visiting the SIUC campus for two days, DBP members provided in-studio critiques with Visual Arts students from the SIUC School of Art & Design (SOAD). A lecture was given by DBP cofounder Velazquez. Last but not least, DBP ran a four-hour printing event out of the back of their Honda Element, which is equipped with a 600-pound 14th-century printing press.³

When DBP arrived on the SIUC campus, they spent their first day working with Art students from SOAD. We found that it would be most effective to begin the visit with studio critiques and student engagement so that individuals that did not have the opportunity to hear about the DBP visit would still be able to attend the following days' lecture and outdoor printing event. Also by having DBP spend a day on campus prior to their big events, they had the opportunity to get to know the community, the physical space, and what makes the SIUC campus special.

For the second day, Velazquez gave an informative scholarly talk about the history of printmaking and the evolution of DBP. In addition to a detailed history of printing throughout the ages, his presentation included comical stories of trials and tribulations from "the road" and what it means to

be a travelling artist sharing your message. Velazquez talked about the beginning days of DBP, and what kind of decisions an artist or student must make when finishing graduate school with no sign of a full-time job in sight.

Also as part of the talk, DBP exhibited more than 200 prints they had collected, traded, or had been given throughout their travels across the United States.

For the final event of Woodblock Woodstock DBP wooed the SIUC community by printing in front of Morris Library in the heart of the SIUC campus for more than four hours. Individuals were invited to bring materials for the artist to print on for \$10 a print or you could purchase a t-shirt they provided and get a print for \$20. Throughout the day many t-shirts were made and many questions were asked

about who these people were making t-shirts on Morris libraries front sidewalk. Although at points the lines to get a print were long, this gave individuals the chance to share with each other their excitement about DBP and perhaps even make a new friend.

Bringing Light Out of the Darkness and Backhanded Compliments

Once the initial plans and funding to bring DBP to campus were set, then planning for the outreach aspects of this event began. Bringing Light Out of the Darkness was an exhibit of materials from the Morris Library Special Collection Research Center (SCRC) on the topic of book art technology and the

MORRIS LIBRARY
WOODBLOCK WOODSTOCK

Images of Joseph Velazquez from Drive By Press

Woodblock Woodstock is a celebration of wood block printing, Morris Library Special Collections, and the SIUC Printmaking program. Throughout the month of April Morris Library will host a series of events sponsored by: **The Friends of Morris Library and SIUC's School of Art & Design.**

- Bringing Light Out of Darkness: A History of Woodblock Printing** an exhibition and presentation by Ann Myers and Melissa Hubbard on April 6th, at 3pm in Morris Library Hall of presidents, reception following.
- Backward Thinking: Reflections on Printmaking** a talk by Travis Janssen, Sang Eun Lee, & Erich Neitzke on April 19th at 7PM in the Morris Library Guyon Auditorium, first floor.
- Backhanded Compliments**- Works by SIUC Printmaking Students will be on exhibit in the Morris Library Rotunda Art Space the month of April.
- Drive by Press** will be on campus April 27th & 28th and a public printing event will take place on April 28th.

For more information about this series of events please contact Megan Lotts at mlotts@lib.siu.edu or visit <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=162751990445117>

Woodblock Woodstock poster created by Megan Lotts. View this article online for more detailed images.

evolution of the printing press. This exhibit was cocurated by Assistant Professor and Rare Book Librarian Melissa Hubbard and Assistant Professor and Special Collections Cataloger Ann Myers from SCRC and placed in the Hall of Presidents exhibition cases in Morris Library throughout the month of April 2011.

To kick off Woodblock Woodstock and their exhibit, Morris Library hosted a gallery talk by the cocurators, including a reception following the event. By having this event as the initial introduction to Woodblock Woodstock, Hubbard and Myers began educating the SIUC community about the history of print and how it affects our everyday lives. It also gave the SIUC community the opportunity to view and learn about many of the great treasures that can be found in the Morris Library SCRC.

Another important aspect of this project was crossdisciplinary collaboration and getting students into the library to participate in, and plan their own, events. The easiest way for us to accomplish this goal was to reach out to the SOAD Printmaking students and invite them to create an exhibition for the Morris Library Rotunda Art Space, which they titled Backhanded Compliments.

It was important to have this exhibit of undergraduate work as it provided an opportunity for some of our youngest scholars on campus to have a voice and engage in the Woodblock Woodstock dialogue, as well as providing them with another line on their exhibition records. The Backhanded Compliments exhibition also gave DBP the opportunity to see what kind of work

was being produced in the SIUC Printmaking program.

In conjunction with the Backhanded Compliments show, Travis Janssen, visiting assistant professor in foundations and printmaking, gave a public lecture in Morris Library's Guyon Auditorium about the history of printmaking as well as his own experiences as a printmaker and professor.

Funding and publicity

In planning this project many persons were involved from different areas on the SIUC campus. The intent of Woodblock Woodstock



Backhanded Compliment-Morris Library Rotunda Art Space.

Photo taken by Megan Lotts.

was to create a dynamic cross-disciplinary project, and partnerships were desired for fiscal reasons. But partnerships make it easier to reach a wider audience, so it made sense to work with other departments who would directly benefit from

this project.

In the early fall of 2010, an RFQ for a grant proposal was sent out by the Friends of Morris Library. At this time I began getting the word out about the artist collaborative DBP with the intent to invite them to the SIUC campus. Two key players that jumped on board for this project were Hubbard and Myers.

It was decided during our initial brainstorming session that Hubbard and Myers would focus on outreach by using materials from Morris Library Special Collections to create an exhibit of rare books. At this time we also approached SOAD as both a participant and sponsor of this event, and they enthusiastically agreed. Lastly, the proposal was submitted to the Friends of Morris Library

and in January 2011, we received the news that the project would be funded and DBP would be coming to Carbondale, Illinois.

One of the first concerns focused on was how to make the series of events successful while working with a shoestring budget. Although enough money had been raised to cover the cost of DBP coming to campus, there was still roughly \$1,000 in expenses that had to be covered in-kind. Most of the in-kind expense came from housing and feeding the DBP artists in my home, the library's donation of space, and using the in-house Morris Library printing facility, which generously sponsored all the printing for the Woodblock Woodstock events.⁴

Once the budget was under control, the next step was to come up with a name for the series of events to evoke a fluid sense of branding. It needed to be a quirky yet catchy title for this series and after a bit of brainstorming Hubbards's idea for Woodblock Woodstock was chosen.

Once there was a name for the event it was time to create posters and begin circulating our message out to the SIUC campus and the local community. As with any event, it was important to make sure that proper respect and thanks were given at all times to our sponsors. Donors' names were present on all publicity materials and proper thanks were given after the events in writing to all participants involved in making Woodblock Woodstock a success.

Publicity began roughly four weeks prior to the event. The campaign included sending a campuswide mailing of the poster to each department, a weekly e-mail blast to more than 1,000 persons on campus, posting a Woodblock Woodstock Facebook event page, and 75 11" by 17" posters placed throughout the campus and city of Carbondale. Many of the local news sources were able to provide additional publicity at no cost including the *Daily Egyptian*, *Saluki Times*,⁶ the *Southern Illinoisian*, and the *Library Cornerstone*.⁷ We focused mainly on a digital campaign because it was more economical and green friendly. But we also posted four 30" by 40" laminated color posters at the main entrances to Morris

Library to remind library patrons of the events that were going on.

Conclusion and assessment

Collaborative events give new opportunities for students to engage with the library in a number of different ways. In the case of Woodblock Woodstock, students were able to look at rare and unique materials in special collections, attend lectures, show their artwork, take part in critiques in their own studios, and attend a performative event and lecture by practicing artists from DBP.

Since this event, Morris Library has been looking further at the ideas of partnerships and crossdisciplinary collaboration. By bringing the ideas of outreach and cross-disciplinary collaboration to the project Woodblock Woodstock, Morris Library was able to stimulate the SIUC population in a way that had not been seen before in Morris Library.

Overall this project attracted a new clientele of students, faculty, and staff and put Morris Library on the list of places people can go to experience alternative scholarly events on the SIUC campus.

Notes

1. Joseph Velasquez, e-mail to author, April 5, 2012.
2. Ibid.
3. "Drive By Press On-Site Services," www.drivebypress.com/pages/on-site-services.
5. Megan Lotts, "Woodblock Woodstock: A Celebration of Book Arts Technology and the Evolution of the Printing Press" (2012), Conference Papers and Presentations, Paper 16, http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/morris_confs/16.
6. Christi Mathis, *Saluki Times*, accessed April 9, 2012, <http://news.siu.edu/news/March11/033011cjm11100.html>.
7. Gordon Pruett, "Cornerstone the Newsletter of Morris Library," http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&context=morrisnews_cornerstone&seiredir=1&referer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Furl%3Fsa%3Dt%26rct%3Dj%26q%3Dmorris%2520library%2520corner. **ZZ**