



**STEPHEN FOWLER**

**PRINTMAKING**

Fowler\_01

UoA 32

**REF 2021**





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## 300-WORD STATEMENT

Fowler's multi-component output brings together his practice-based research into rubber stamp and primitive printmaking techniques. His methodology incorporates the investigation of materials through active making and the creative synthesis of archival research into the historical and cultural dimensions of rubber stamps. Fowler has realised rubber stamping's potential as a means of producing more than multiple images and spot colours, evolving into a sophisticated practice of narrative artists' books, exquisite corpses, printed food, body prints and graffiti.

He has worked on producing faux stamps or 'artistamps' - portable, tiny artworks that play with the notion of authority, culture and officialdom. He has studied the history of rubber stamping from the early 1970s, from Fluxus artworks to *Rubber*, a monthly bulletin published by Stempelplaats in Amsterdam. The *Rubber Stamp Album Book* by (Miller & Thompson, 1978) was a seminal influence on his work, as was Thompson's *RubberStampMadness* magazine first published in 1980 in the USA.

Fowler was the first artist to be invited to work with Minnesota Centre for Book Arts' newly acquired rubber stamp archive. Fowler edited stamp compositions created in the archive, and with the art direction of Craig Atkinson, these were reproduced in a small book and included in an artefact box of badges, and original artistamps published by Atkinson's Café Royal Books, launched at the international artist book event BABE, at Bristol's Arnolfini Gallery.

Fowler's research findings were further disseminated through exhibitions, publications including the book *Rubber Stamping* (Laurence King, 2016), artists' book limited editions and workshops. Recognition of the leading role Fowler has in this field is evidenced in interviews, articles about his work, an invitation to be a keynote speaker, and his shortlisting for the AOI World Illustration awards. His work has been part funded by the Art Workers Guild, London.



# RESEARCH CONTEXT

I was the first artist to be invited to work with Minnesota Centre for Book Arts newly acquired rubber stamp archive. The archive consists of over 70,000 stamps, and stamp related artefacts, donated from two significant and respected artists; from the concrete poetry, Fluxus, mail and rubber stamp scenes of the 1960s and 1970s; Scott Helmes and 'Picasso' Gaglione.

Building on the work completed by the MCBA's volunteer cataloguers, I sought to make a visual catalogue representation of the archive, through printed impressions of the stamps, and in doing so it became a 'working archive'; the original aim of the centre's archive.

I was particularly interested in investigating the many commercial applications of American rubber stamps in the areas of education, toys/games, business, authority and documentation for example. I, being removed from American culture, coming from a UK DIY hand carved rubber stamp tradition, had some freedom to work with and change the original meanings and intentions of the stamps through experiential creativity and play; juxtaposing, overlaying stamps from different contexts, and eras.

Encouraged by MCBA's curator Jeff Rathermel and Scott Helmes; I explored stamping composition and sequence through making a small edition of stamped artist books/zines; called 'Stamps' and 'KUNTERBUNT IV'. (The latter book, being included in a collection of books curated by Helmes called, 'VIVA', which will be sold to international artist book collectors and museum/galleries collections).

The stamp sets as artefacts became of interest to me, the box size, packaging; type and image/illustration, the design and stamp selection, be it, subject matter or font for example, and who they are aimed for. This fascination was enabled to be expressed when I was commissioned by MCBA's trustees to make a set of stamps for Reff Rathermel.

I edited my stamp compositions created in the archive, and with the art direction of Craig Atkinson, these were reproduced in a small book and included in an artefact box of badges, and original artistamps published by Atkinson's Café Royal Books, launched at the international artist book event BABE, at Bristol's Arnolfini Gallery.

Part of my residency I ran a two-day rubber stamp workshop with the public, the participants learnt how to make their own stamps from erasers, be inspired by the rubber stamp archive and incorporate them into their creative outcomes. This gave me an opportunity to see the archive through others eyes and understand the potential of combining commercial and DIY stamps.

After exploring the distinctive characteristics of DIY hand carved rubber stamp I wanted undertake an investigation into the nature of rubber stamps made for the commercial market.

I was particularly interested in exploring American rubber stamps, from the past to the present, from 'toys' to businesses, documentation to education. Each have their distinctive qualities, creatively ripe for use in different contexts and/or combinations. Different from the limitations of the 'robust' John Bull printing sets of the UK and the studious quality of French School Stamps. American stamps have less 'character' and so more open to transformation when taken from their intended use. I undertook an explorative route, stamping intuitively; creating unintentional relationships and meanings, from playful to the unsettling for example.

I was invited to be the first rubber stamp artist in residence at the worlds largest rubber stamp archive at the Minnesota Centre for Book Arts, in North America, and to run some alternative stamping workshops for their Biennale.

I was part funded by the Art Workers Guild, London.



# RESEARCH PROCESS AND RESIDENCY



MCBA S.Helmes & W.Gaglione Rubber Stamp Archive room (2017)  
Minnesota Center for Book Arts USA

This is where my practice research took place. The cabinets and boxes contained over 70,000 stamps and stamp related materials



The contents of cabinets and boxes from MCBA S.Helmes & W.Gaglione Rubber Stamp Archive room, Minnesota Centre for Book Arts, USA (2017). French Educational Rubber Stamps (left) Picasso Gaglione's DADA Stamps (right)

I was allowed complete access to the collection to document through stamping, the contents of the archive and create original art works



PRACTICE RESEARCH IN THE MINNESOTA CENTRE FOR BOOK ARTS RUBBER STAMP ARCHIVE



**Pre-Biennial Workshop**

Alternative Printmaking with Rubber Stamp materials & participants creative outcomes (2017) Minnesota Center for Book Arts USA

(left to right) Various boxes of rubber stamps from the MCBA Stamp Archive, artistamps, artist book/zine of stamp impressions.

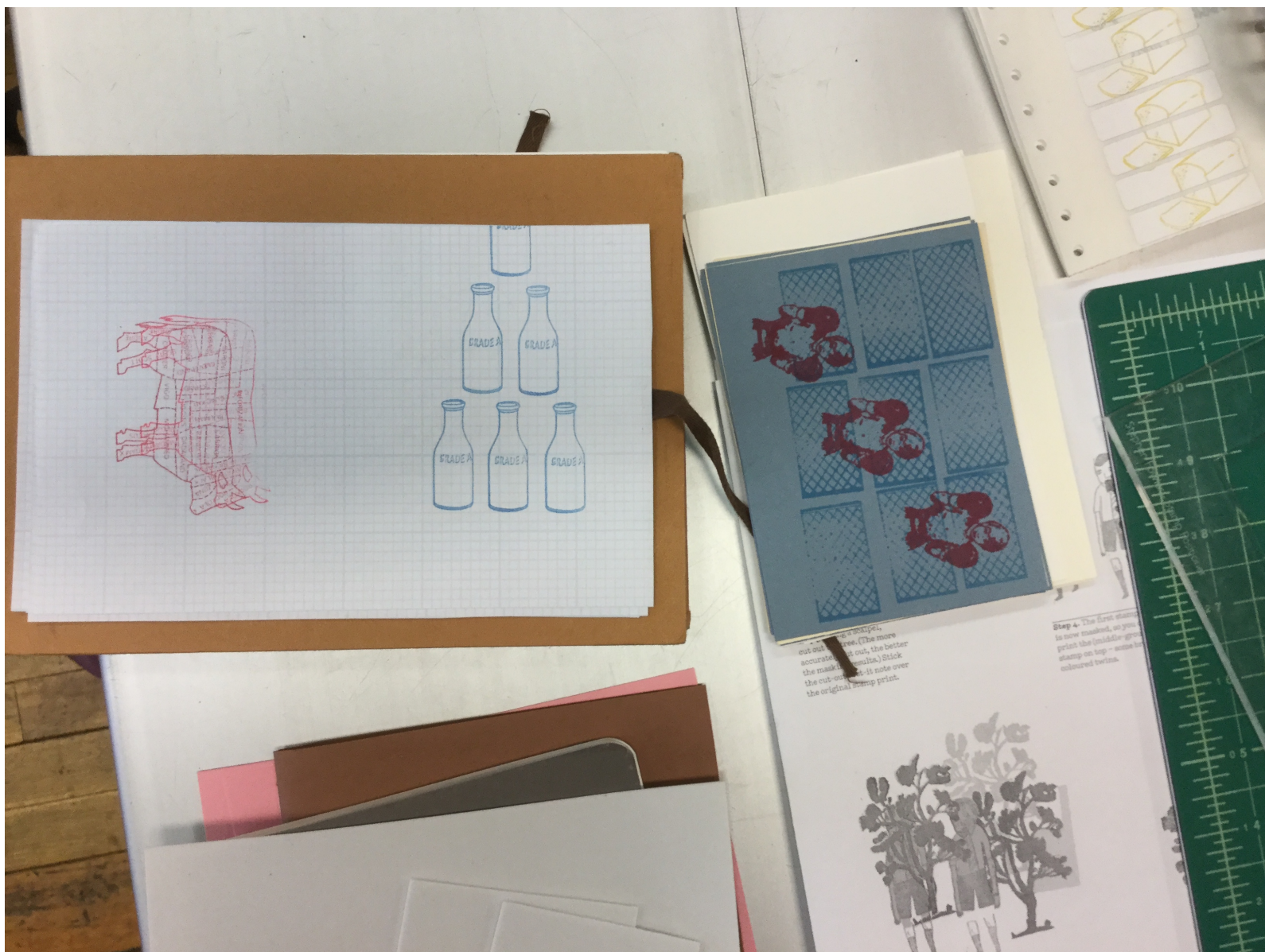




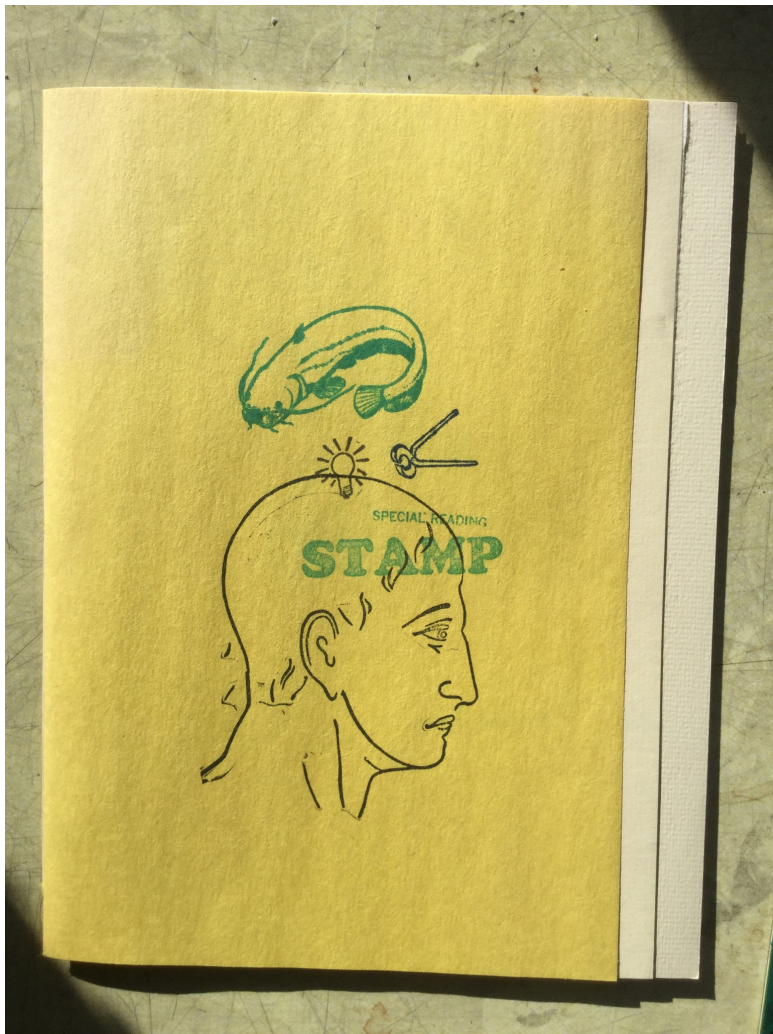


SPAM rubber stamp and various stamp impressions (2017) Minnesota Center for Book Arts Rubber Stamp Archive room  
Rubber Stamp, various stamp impressions on assorted paper

Evidence of unearthing curious stamps from the collection, and beginning to juxtapose various stamps from different decades and countries





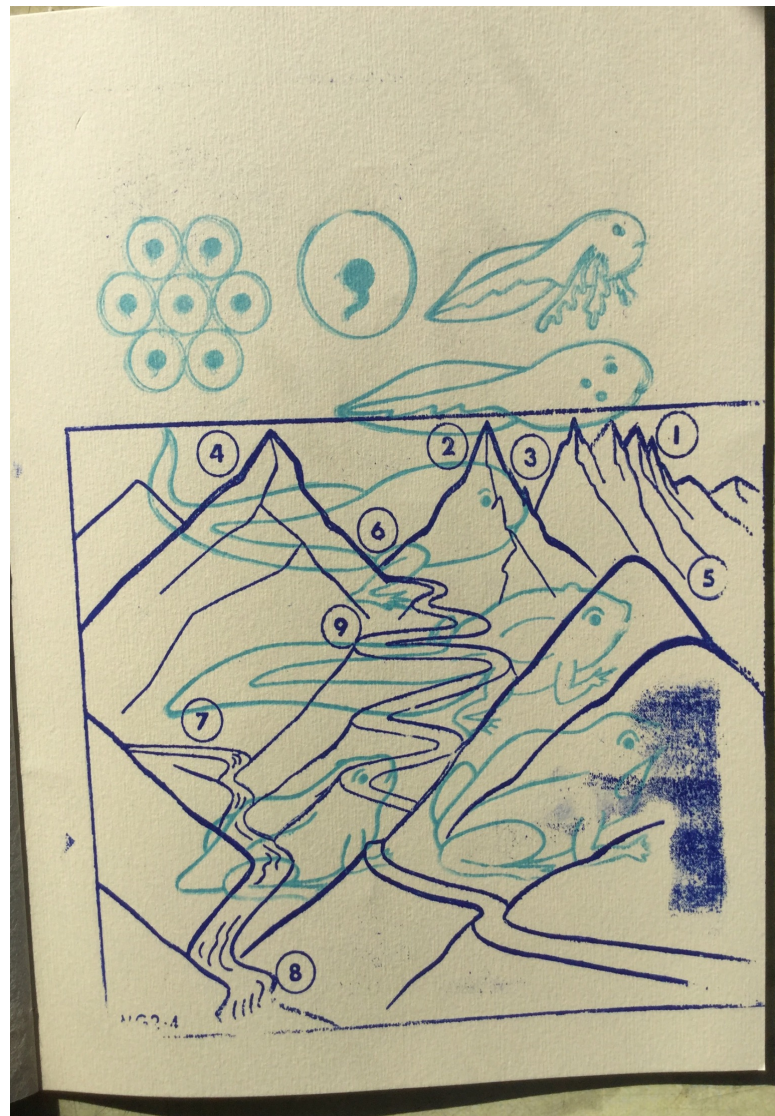
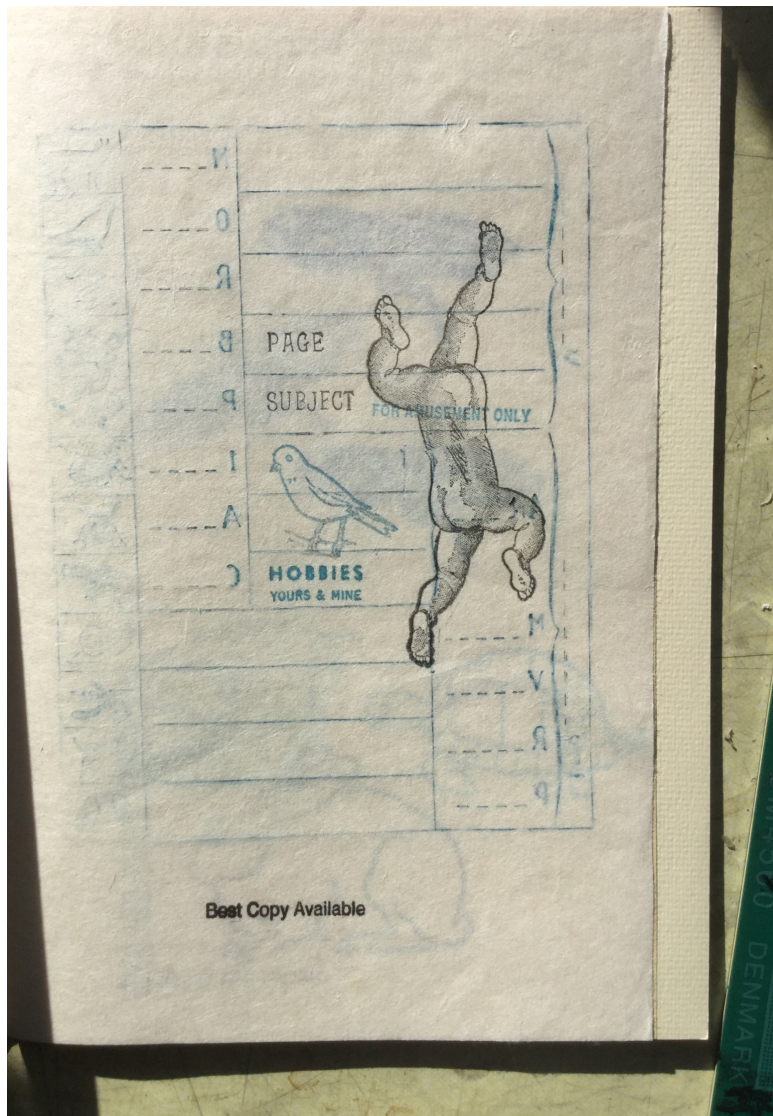


Name Stephen Fowler

'Stamp' limited edition rubber stamp artist book (2017)

Jeff Rethermel ( MCBA curator) and Picasso Gaglione both received a copy of 'Stamp'

This book was produced during my residency and completed with my own archive of stamps back in the UK. It explored the unexpected meanings and associations of multiple image impressions on the page and sequences through the book





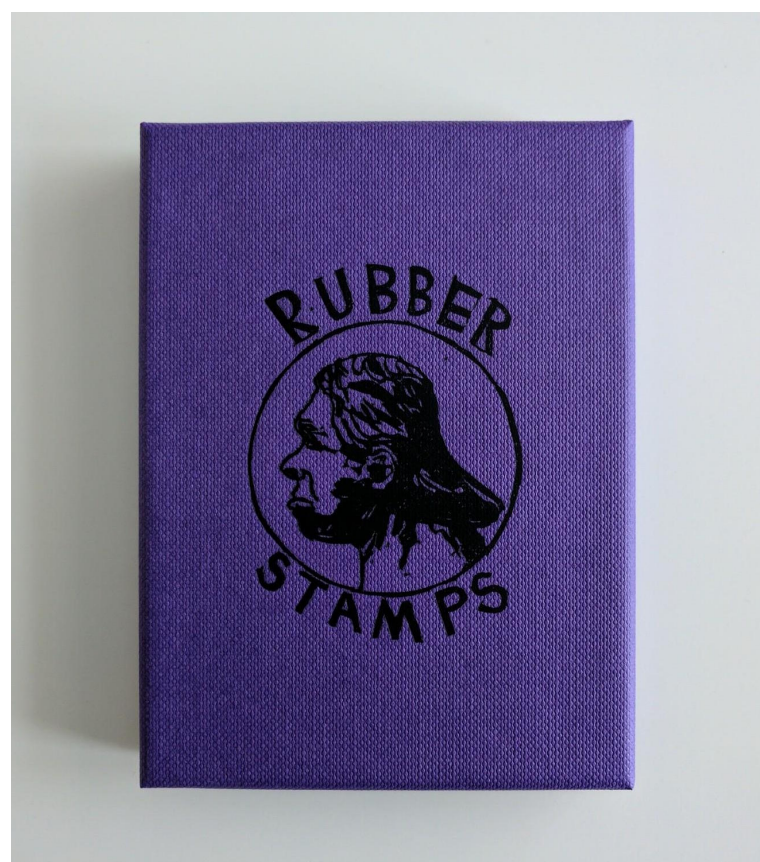
# RESEARCH OUTCOMES, DISSEMINATION AND EXHIBITIONS

## PUBLICATIONS: ARTIST'S BOOKS

These outcomes relate to an exploration into the world's largest public archive of rubber stamps. Only very recently donated by S.Helmes and W.Gaglione.

I was the first artist to work with the archive, creating works exploring the creative potential of this North American archive through re-contextualization, juxtaposition and overlay in limited edition artist books & zines, and an explorative workshop for the public.

The outcomes have been disseminated via a box/book for Café Royal Publications, an international symposium, exhibitions, book launch at international artist book fair, specialist magazines and websites. One off original artifacts were created; a stamp set and artist book of 'found stamps' – of which is hoped will be part of an international institution collection.



Name Stephen Fowler

'Rubber Stamps' (2019) edition of 50 boxes 11 x 8 x 1.5cm

Contents: 32pp zine, b/w digital a selection of hand made prints and badges

Café Royal Books published the outcomes created during the MCBA Rubber Stamp Archive residency, allowing my work to be distributed & giving access to the stamp archive further afield





Name : Stephen Fowler  
 Kunterbunt VI (orange book on left) part of  
 Viva Art Book Series 21-30; a collection of  
 artist books made from hand towel paper  
 curated by artist Scott Helmes.  
[http://www.vampandtramp.com/finepress/s/  
 stamp-pad-press.html](http://www.vampandtramp.com/finepress/s/stamp-pad-press.html)

Whilst visiting the archive I was invited to  
 collaborate with Scott Helmes ( one half of  
 the rubber stamp archive) we learnt from  
 each other and made various stamp artworks,  
 Kunterbunt VI was part of the work made;  
 a one-off artist book comprising of found  
 stamp print impressions ( made from kitchen  
 utensils)



Name Stephen Fowler  
 Alphabet Stamp Set (2018)  
 Hand Carved Rubber Stamp Set  
 mounted on wood

Inspired by the many stamps sets within the  
 MCBA Rubber Stamp Archive I created this  
 one off set for the archive curator Jeff  
 Rathemel. It was commissioned by the  
 center's trustees as a gift marking and  
 celebrating Rathemel's work for the center





## Exhibitions

Café Royal Publishing launched 'Rubber Stamps' at B.A.B.E (Bristol Artist Book Event) Arnolfini, Bristol (2019)

13,000 visitors to the Book Fair

<https://www.arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/babe-at-arnolfini-2019>



## Exhibitions

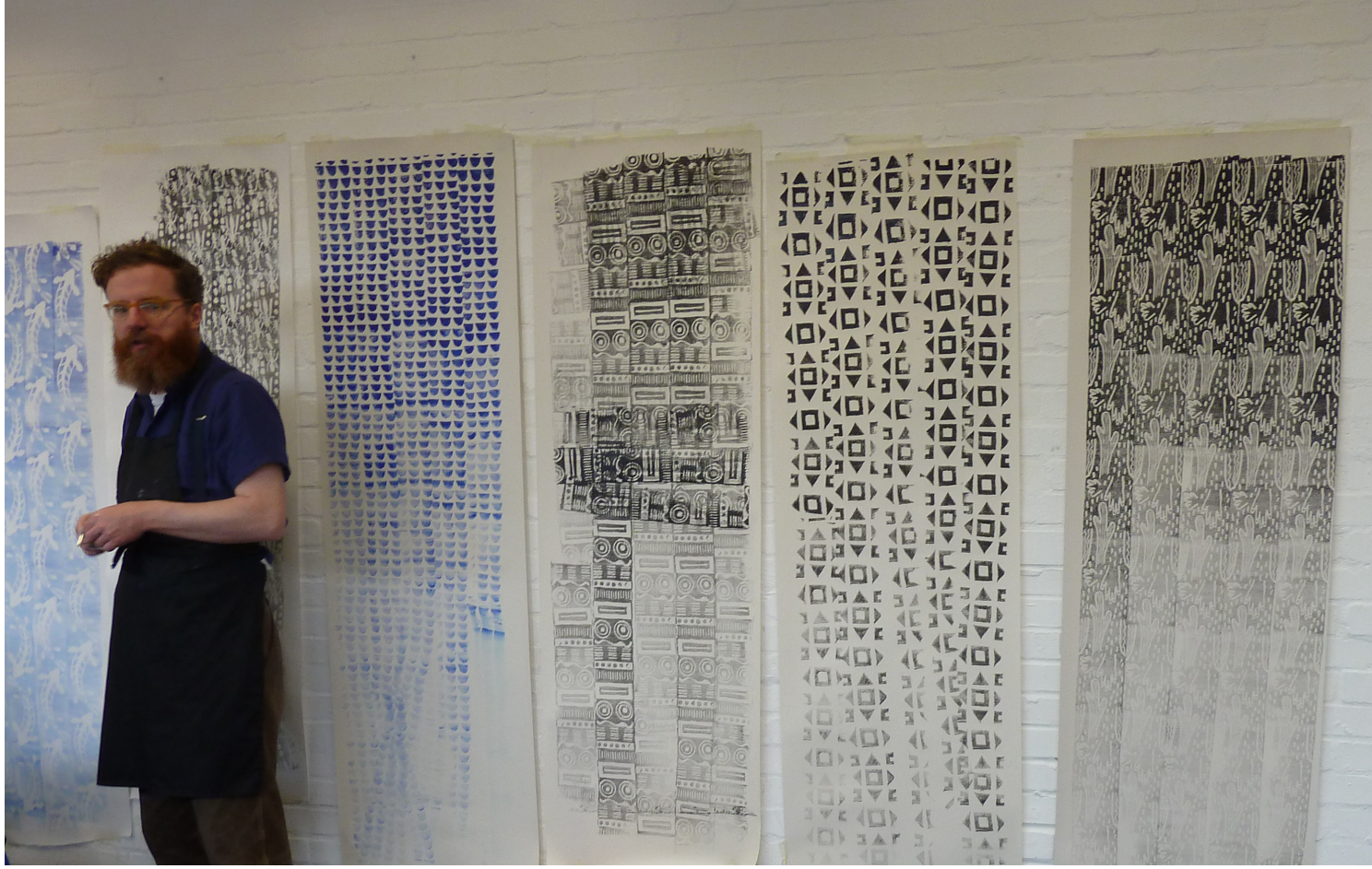
Table Top Museum, Art Workers Guild, London 23/09/17

Visitors; approximately 800.

An inventive celebration of the madness and the individual and extraordinary rules of those who collect, curated/organised by Bro. Stephen Fowler and PM George Hardie .

As well as organising this event of over a dozen different table top museums, I exhibited the 'Stephen Fowler Rubber Stamp Archive'; inspired by the S.Helmes & W.Gaglineo Rubber Stamp Archive at MCBA









## WORKSHOPS

MA Print UWE (University of the West of England) ,  
Primitive Print Public Summer School UWE, 2018  
Printing in the City Public Summer School UWE harbourside Bristol.

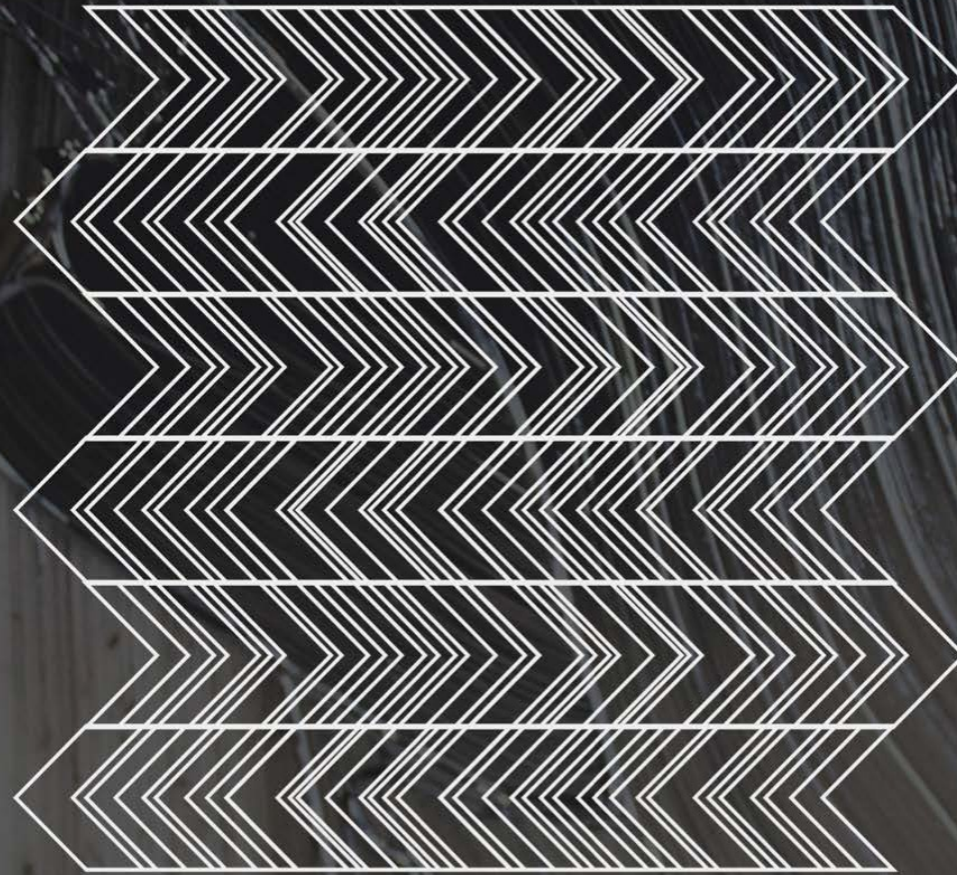
Adapted Rollers and Scaffolding Foam, Assorted paper Brass Rubbing Sticks, Clay and Caligo Printing ink  
Working Collaboratively and individually exploring the characteristics and creative potential of a variety of  
'primitive printmaking' processes

Left to Right; Roller Printing, Creative Rubbings, Clay Printing



# ALL INKED UP

Kent's International  
**Artist Book Fair**  
Artist Book & Print Event.  
**Symposium**  
UCA Canterbury  
**Workshops**  
The Brewery Tap Folkestone



30 Artists and Universities from all over the world will be showcasing, selling and talking about their work. For the full programme visit UCA events and Folkestone Fringe. The events are free.



Symposium  
Fri. Oct. 17  
**UCA 13**  
10.30-6.00  
UCA Canterbury  
Artist Book Fair

The Brewery Tap Sat. Oct. 17  
**14**  
11.00-7.00  
The Brewery Tap Folkestone  
Artist Book Fair

The Brewery Tap Sun. Oct. 17  
**15**  
11.00-4.00  
The Brewery Tap Folkestone  
Artist Book Fair

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER

'All Inked Up' Symposium 13/10/2017

<https://research.ucreative.ac.uk/4561/1/All%20Inked%20Up%20newspaper.pdf>

I was the keynote speaker, workshop leader and exhibitor at the 'All Inked Up' international print symposium and artist book fair organized by and situated at the University of the Creative Arts, Canterbury.

I discussed and presented my practice based research into rubber stamping and findings from the MCBA Stamp Archive





## MAGAZINE FEATURE

'Pressing Matters' magazine Issue 4 (2018)

Making an impression by Stephen Fowler  
 I discussed my MCBA Rubber Stamp Archive artist residency, and its inspiration for the instigation for my own stamp archive, some of which was featured in the article.

<https://www.pressingmattersmag.com/shop/issue-four-pdf>

## INTERVIEWS AND ONLINE WORKSHOPS

Artist News Letter. Artists Books #21: A British invasion at the Minnesota Book Art Biennial 2017  
<https://www.a-n.co.uk/news/artists-books-21-british-invasion-minnesota-book-art-biennial-2017/>

Jackson's Interviews and Features: Artist Interview by Julie Caves  
<https://www.jacksonsart.com/blog/2017/07/07/stephen-fowler-printmaking-with-rubber-stamps/>

Fine Books & Collections. MCBA Book Art Biennial Amplifies Individual and Collective Voice  
<https://www.finebooksmagazine.com/news/mcba-book-art-biennial-amplifies-individual-and-collective-voice>

MCBA Book Art Biennial Symposium Pre-Biennial Workshops  
<https://www.mnbookarts.org/book-art-biennial-2017/#more-13515>



Author: Stephen Fowler

*Rubber Stamping: Get Creative with Stamps, Rollers and Other Printmaking Techniques,*

Lawrence King : London (2016)

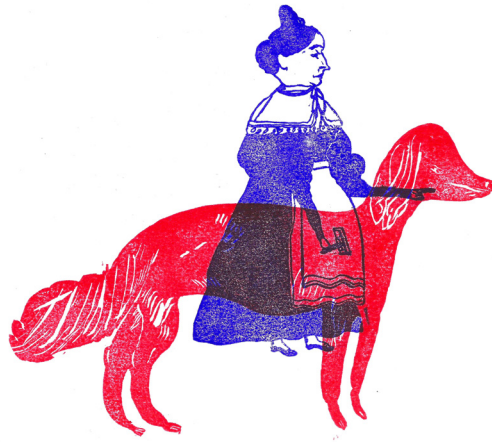


Following several years of independent practice based research into the rubber stamp printing process, and an extensive national workshop profile in public galleries and museums, art schools and universities I was approached by Laurence King Publishing to propose a publication on rubber stamps, the publisher, inspired by the 1980s book; 'Rubber Stamps and How to Make Them' by George L. Thomson, wanted an up-to-date practical guide on the subject.

Inspired by the free DIY nature of the printing process I sought to make a book that explored and conveyed the medium's distinctive character through examples, case studies from the past and present day, to projects and easy to follow step-by-step instructions.

It was important to undertake because there hadn't been a publication since the mid 1970 ( the height of the Fluxus and the International Mail Art scene, and the transition to a popular crafting craze in the US) to fully explore the medium, although in the 1990s an American University published a (small edition) research publication on Rubber Stamp Mail Art Groups and the renewed interest in the field. My research sought to explore the process's past and the contemporary stamping scene, and its place in a post digital DIY image making culture, and look to new outcomes created from the so-called limitations of the repetitive process which can be argued is not just a means of reproduction, but an art form in its self.





(Left to Right) Bird Cage, Woman & Dog, Cosmic Forces.  
 Bird Cage; Rubber Stamp & Roller Print, Woman & Dog; Rubber Stamp & Ink Dye Pad, Cosmic Forces: Bleach, Rubber Stamps, Ink and Ink Dye Pad.

Exploration into the characteristics of rubber stamps, overprinting to produce unconventional images, colours, and the expressive 'spirit' like qualities of stamping and stamping with bleach.



(left to right) Food stamping, stamping on bodies and mail art (2016)  
 Mail Art, response to Erasmus Field Trip, produced for UCA Farnham Illustration course publication Rubber Stamps, Dye Stamp Pad Inks.

Research exploring unconventional contexts for stamping, and the tradition of Mail Art, a non-gallery art form.



## Gallery Workshop

### Stephen Fowler (Public) Printing Workshop

Arnolfini Bristol 17/09/16, attended by over 600 people.

Join printmaker Stephen Fowler for a drop in workshop in rubber stamp making and printing. Create your own rubber stamp, get printing and help us decorate the walls of the Arnolfini Foyer. The afternoon workshop will be followed by a launch for Stephen's new book *Rubber Stamping: Get Creative with Stamps, Rollers and Other Printmaking Techniques*, in the gallery bookshop. <https://www.arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/stephen-fowler>

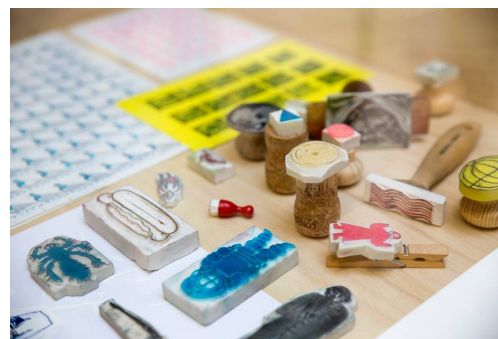


## Hatched! The Hive Worcester

<http://www.daisyhirst.com/2017/06/hatched/>

Group exhibition of Worcester Illustration Lecturers, featuring; the Laurence King publication, and the Picture Books & Graphic Novels and by Piet Grobler, Becky Palmer, and Daisy Hirst. Original artworks and artifacts were exhibited.

During the opening each Lecturer talked about their publications to an invented audience of University of Worcester staff, local dignitaries and students



Grafixx, an international graphic arts festival based in Antwerp visited by approximately 10,000 visitors. In response to my publication I was invited to run a weekend long drop-in workshop, I taught 600 people how to make stamps.

Stephen Fowler (UK) demonstrated how erasers can be used to stamp beautiful cards

[Grafixx.be/en/archives/](http://Grafixx.be/en/archives/)

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1186658534802401/>

<https://weekup.be/festivals/20>





## REVIEWS, INTERVIEWS, MEDIA COVERAGE

Printmaking Today Vol 25 No 4 Winter 2016 : Book Review

BFR Autumn / Winter 2017: Interview

<https://bfrmag.com/Issue-22>

Idler March-April 2017: Book Review

Craft Stamper Publisher: Pocket Magazines: Interview & how-to-do project article early 2017

11/10/16 BBC Radio Bristol

Steve Yabsley Interview: 'Stephen Fowler, Britain's leading Rubber Stamp expert, who'll give tips on how you can easily make your own'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p048bz19>



Association of Illustrators Book Review by Simon Whittaker:

<https://theaoi.com/2017/02/17/rubber-stamping/>

Library Journal Book Review by Nanette Donohue <https://www.libraryjournal.com/?reviewDetail=rubber-stamping-get-creative-with-stamps-rollers-and-other-printmaking-techniques>

Design Week Review by Aimée McLaughlin <https://www.design-week.co.uk/inspiration/rubber-stamping-stephen-fowler/>

Amelia's Magazine Interview & 5 haves to get started in Rubber Stamping: <http://www.ameliasmagazine.com/art/5-essential-things-you-need-to-get-started-with-rubber-stamping-and-other-thoughts-from-artistauthor-stephen-fowler/2016/10/19/>

ARLIS UK & Ireland Art Libraries Society Artists' – Books News, October 2016 <https://arlis.net/artists-books-news-october-2016/>

Online Public How-To-Do Workshop

Yodomo: Make DIY alphabet stamps with Stephen Fowler <https://courses.yodomo.co/p/make-diy-alphabet-stamps>





**Rubber Stamping Book Review** by Jeff Rathermel,  
Executive Director of the Minnesota Center for Book Arts  
(MCBA).

"[the book] provides a wonderful overview of the amazing things that can happen when artists meet vulcanized rubber. [Fowler] concludes the book with examples and instructions for a variety of non-rubber alternative print processes. While rudimentary in their everyday applications, Fowler raises the unassuming practices of vegetable, clay, and plaster printing to new inventive levels."

BOOK ARTS NEWSLETTER ISSN 1754-9086 Vol 25 No 3 Autumn 2016 Published by Impact Press at the Centre for Fine Print Research, UWE Bristol, UK

[https://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/pdf/newspdfs/106.pdf\\_page\\_52-53.](https://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/pdf/newspdfs/106.pdf_page_52-53)

### Creative Review Magazine Interview 04/10/2016

Let's Get Rubber Stamping!

A new book by Stephen Fowler, out this week, will teach you everything you need to know to get into one of the most enduring craft trends: rubber stamping. We talk to him about what makes stamping so special. By Eliza Williams

CR: What particularly appeals to you about the medium?

SF: Its stunning diversity, and contradictory nature – it can be exclusive and inclusive in its application. Artists and illustrators play with its official form of visual language. For instance, Saul Sternberg questioned the power of officialdom through the intentionally unreadable stamps and seals he produced during the 1960s, whereas Jeremy Deller's use of rubber stamps at the Venice Biennale made everyone a part of the British Pavilion 2013 show

CR: How did you first discover the joy of rubber stamping?

SF: It wasn't until I, as a tutor, introduced it to my own students, that the lightning struck and I realized the diversity of the medium – then I was away producing all manner of things. It's true what they say – you learn so much through teaching. Both student and tutor are transformed by the experience.

<https://www.creativereview.co.uk/get-rubber-stamping/>



## AWARDS

Shortlisted for the World Illustration Awards 2017 in the Book Category  
<https://theaoi.com/wia/rubber-stamping-get-creative-with-stamps-rollers-and-other-printmaking-techniques-stephen-fowler/>



## King of Stamps

**ARTISTS' BOOKS** Artist **Stephen Fowler**, author of a new book on rubber stamp printing, speaks to Sarah Bodman about this universal, portable process

Stephen Fowler has been utilising relief printmaking processes to create artists' books for many years, and is particularly known for his expertise in rubber stamp printing, a skill he has been passing on to artists and art students for more than 15 years. Initially Fowler used rubber stamping to produce endpapers for his books, but through teaching countless workshops and seeing how students used the process, he quickly realised rubber stamping's potential as a means of producing more than multiple images and spot colours, evolving into a sophisticated practice of narrative artists' books, exquisite corpses, printed food, body prints and graffiti.

More recently he has become hooked on producing faux stamps or 'artistamps'; portable, tiny artworks that play with the notion of authority, culture and officialdom, as he explains 'With the right stamp you can get in and out of jail, clubs and across borders'. Researching books at the V&A's National Art Library, interspersed with trips to his favourite supplies shop Bladerubber, he has studied the history of rubber stamping from the early 1970s, from Fluxus artworks to *Rubber*, a monthly bulletin published by Stempelplaats in Amsterdam. *The Rubber Stamp Album* (Miller & Thompson, 1978) was a seminal influence on his work, as was Thompson's *RubberStampMadness* magazine, first published in 1980 in the USA, which started a craze for making cheap, multiple artworks, and is still going today.

Fowler also exchanges mail art with artists around the world; one of his favourite collaborations is with artist Jo Cook of Perro Verlag in Canada. He is inspired by her 'strong graphic shapes and punchy colours, her work is free and immediately inspiring to respond to; when something like this clicks you realise you have an affinity with the sender that everything turns into magic'. Producing 'artistamps' first occurred to Fowler when he visited Exchange Stamps in Bristol's St Nicholas Market, where the owner explained how charities and clubs produced their own stamps as fundraising currency. For example The Scout Association sell 'Scout Post' stamps which can be used for local delivery of Christmas cards by scouts. Fowler soon realised there was 'a whole world of stamps outside the "real" stamp world'. The idea of underground exchange was exciting, 'as an artist you have all the means of production at your disposal, you don't need a studio or expensive machinery'. Fowler began creating what philatelists refer to as 'Cinderella stamps' (i.e. fake), and using official stamp terminology to inspire his puns and plays on mail/male art, pigeon post, blotters, etc. Also influenced by the beautiful Curwen Press endpapers designed by Marx, Nash, Ravilious and Bawden from the late 1920s onwards, Fowler explored the endless possibilities of working in repeat, cutting his stamp designs and alternating colours during printing, 'it becomes like magic, as if someone else is doing the work for you'.

His understanding of repeat pattern was helped through conversations with the artist Jantze Tullett, and on reading a book from the 1960s on potato cut printing, things fell into place. 'It used the simplest language – rather than saying "adjust 45 degrees" it just said "turn upside down", it was an organic, crazy patchwork of ideas and through that I understood how patterns work, it was quick to learn and exciting.' Having mastered the repeat stamping process, Fowler could see how it was informing his use of colour in woodcut and relief printmaking 'I understood the positive and negative so much more, it all became intuitive.'

Researching for his new book on rubber stamps, roller printing and plaster and clay print was a truly rewarding experience. Fowler says his



new book is 'very much in the spirit of 60s and 70s Batsford art books – to share an open recipe rather than say "you have to do it this way." It's about inspiring people with examples and letting them think how they will use the process; it's a beginning of something rather than an end.' Teaching workshops and classes has informed his practice enormously: 'Participants within a group each have a different approach or find a different object to print with then lose themselves in that meditative moment of concentrating on hand/eye coordination before the big reveal at the end when everyone realises how much they have made! Teaching constantly shows me potential from someone else's perspective, you learn from their tastes too. I'm endlessly fascinated by what people make.'

*Rubber Stamping: Get Creative with Stamps, Rollers and Other Printmaking Techniques* by Stephen Fowler is published by Laurence King.

### Images

*A Collection of Carved Rubber Stamps* (2016) by Stephen Fowler. Photograph: Ida Riveros  
*Rubber Stamp Mail Art* (2015) by Buckminster Bucky Fleur (aka Jo Cook) & Stephen Fowler, 110 x 220 mm

Printmaking Today Artists' Prints, Books and Multiples Vol 25 No 3 Autumn 2016

King of Stamps article by Sarah Bodman, Senior Research Fellow at Centre for Fine Print Research UWE & Multidisciplinary Printmaking Program Leader

'Researching for his new book on rubber stamps, roller printing and plaster and clay print was a truly rewarding experience. Fowler says his new book is 'very much in the spirit of 60s and 70s Batsford art books – to share an open recipe rather than saying "you have to do it this way". Its about inspiring people with examples and letting them think how they will use the process; it's a beginning of something rather than an end.'

Link to the article <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/916991>



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