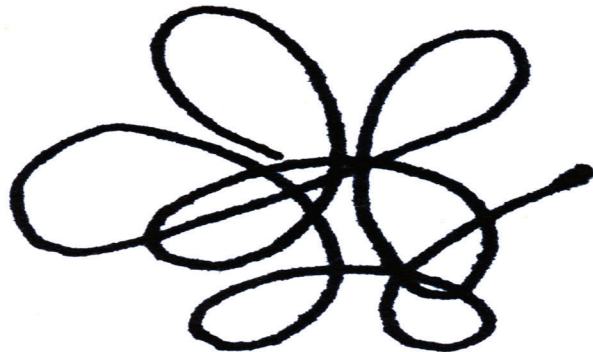


INTERVIEW WITH JULIA GUALTIERI

THE EVERYDAY PRINT



WHO IS JULIA?

Can you give me a short introduction of who you are and what's your profession?

My name is Julia Gualtieri. I am currently working as a Typeshop technician in RISD, and I also teach the Silkscreen Workshop in the department.

I grew up in California, and I knew as a young person I wanted to go into the art field in some way, but I didn't have a very good understanding, but I was drawn to art. I went to University of California at Santa Cruz, and majored in art.

That's where I first started doing printmaking and I really haven't stopped since. I kept taking classes in various community centers and learning other types of printmaking like silk screen and letterpress. In 2007 I moved to Providence to do the graduate program in art education. It is a way to simultaneously continue my interest in printmaking but also merge them with a teaching practice.

LIVING WITH THE PRINT

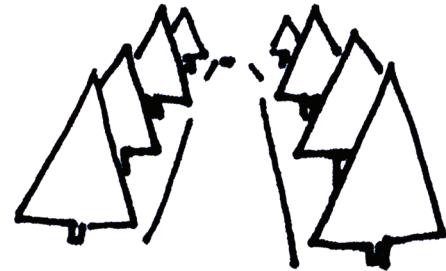
I know you have been working as a press operator, designer, print artist, and educator. Would you mind sharing experiences working with all these specialties?

I move around a lot of things.

I am a maker. I make things, as part of designing things. If you're a printer, and when people know you have that skill set of making, they would ask can you make me a poster? Can you make me this or that? And you end up having to design by accident. I have designed several projects, educational materials for museums or nonprofits.

Print & Design

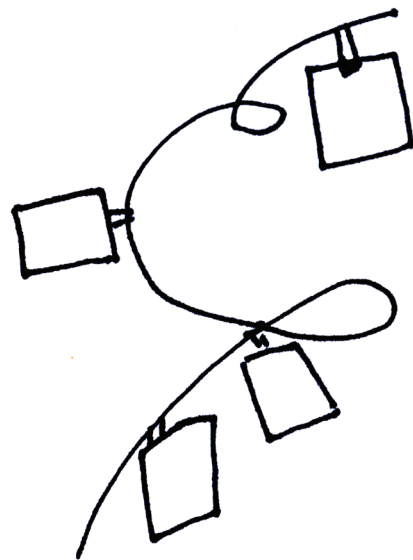
A curator at the DeCordova Museum in Massachusetts had seen something I drew and contacted me to design some materials for a site specific exhibition. One thing that was really fun about this project is that since this was an environmentally focused project, I found this company in Nebraska that hand makes paper and they implant it with seeds. I was able to work with the museum to produce a large order of this custom paper that was implanted with carrot seeds. We letterpress on the paper as the programming card. The idea is, it's not evergreen, once the events pass and you don't need the card anymore, you could just put it in the ground and carrots would grow.

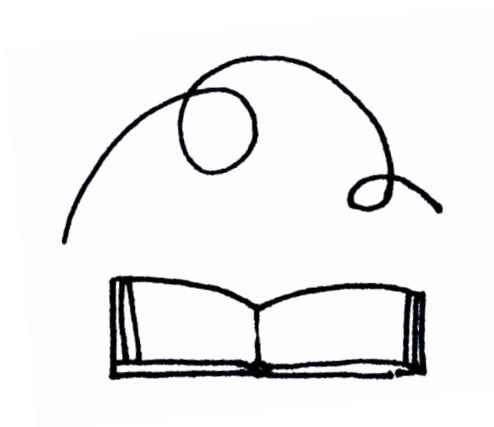


Education & Print

I was the Silk Screen mentor at New Urban Arts for many years. New Urban Arts is a free community studio in Providence for high school students who work with adult artist mentors.

In 2010 I got a travel grant and I went to a skateboard camp in South Africa. We did a lot of printmaking there. We silk screened, we made stickers. I have always been less interested in printmaking as a fine art for museums and galleries and more interested in printing for everyday life. Make your stickers, make your t-shirts, just these things that are part of culture.





Commercial Press

In 2011 a friend of mine was working at a local, Offset and letterpress shop. And that makes me think I'd really love to work in a commercial shop. I worked at a really small commercial shop called Black Cat Graphics in South Providence from 2011 to 2017.

The owner has a really awesome connection to the radical political printing scene in Rhode Island in the seventies and eighties. I loved hearing his stories. It just felt like he was a really important mentor to me. He was a somewhat crunchy older man, but we got along really well. And he taught me how to operate commercial presses. It can be difficult to find people who are willing to teach new people this trade.

THE CITY

What led you to stay in Providence?

In the middle of my graduate program, I kind of fell in love with Providence. I didn't necessarily know this before moving here, but it's a really printy town. There's a thriving print culture and an active print scene. It was a happy accident and I was delighted to discover it.

For a printer, having access to equipment is crucial. But after school, where do you find that kind of space? When I moved here, I became a member of the AS220 Community Printshop right away. I used the AS220 facilities to keep making hands-on work.

I've always loved shared community based art studios. They offer a way for people to continue their practice without having to make a huge personal investment. Printing equipment is large, heavy, and expensive. It's not something you can easily set up in a small apartment. So spaces like AS220 felt essential and empowering.

Over time, I got more involved in Providence just by paying attention, go-

ing to events, and talking to people. I started to feel connected to the city. That sense of connection really began to click.

I've always gravitated more toward everyday printed objects than high end collector's items. It's the work used in daily life, shared in public spaces. That's what draws me in. It was this community of artists living and working together, hosting events, and making incredible posters for them. Bold, handmade, and everywhere. You'd go into a coffee shop and see entire walls plastered with screen printed posters for every event in town.

That image really stayed with me. It felt so special to live in a place where people made things like that, where printing was a public, lived, visual culture. I still feel nostalgic about it. There's still a trace of that spirit here, but it was definitely a formative and inspiring time.

I finished my degree in 2009 and decided to make Providence my home.



**What do you feel that has changed
the most about Providence?**

The biggest shift I've felt is in affordability. When I first moved here, rent was really cheap. I was working a scrappy print shop job for about \$11 an hour, and that was enough because rent was so low. That gave me flexibility to experiment, to learn, to focus on the work rather than just surviving.

But over time, Providence has become more expensive for many reasons. Rent is skyrocketing, and it has created a real housing crisis. I think that's had a big impact on the arts community.

Many of the artists I've known through the years were only able to do what they did because Providence was affordable. When that changes, the space for experimentation and creative risk starts to shrink. It becomes harder to make ends meet, which limits what feels possible in a city.

But I also want to recognize that people are still doing cool, interesting, weird things. It's just not as easy or fluid as it used to be.



THE MACHINE

**What is your experience
working in RISD Type Shop?
How do you accommodate
the latest print technology
with space?**

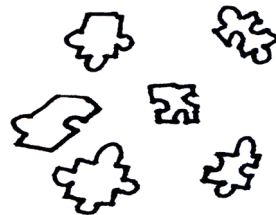
I'm still fairly new to the shop tech position at RISD, so I've mostly been listening to what students are asking for and trying to respond to that. Ed has been here longer, so he leads some of the bigger decisions.

For example, for years students kept asking to print with white ink. The answer had always been, "We don't have any white ink printers, we don't do that here." But eventually, Ed found a way to make it happen. We repurposed one of our older laser printers and figured out how to get it to accept white toner. It wasn't fancy, but it worked.

So I'd say our approach is very responsive. We're not necessarily thinking about the commercial printing industry as a whole. We're focused on this small shop and what our students are excited about. If a certain request keeps coming up, we try to find a way to accommodate it.

We could have bought a brand-new white toner printer, but that would have required a formal purchase request, which goes through a whole process. Departments only get so much funding each year for big equipment, and you have to prioritize what's most needed. We also have limited space. So it's a little bit of a jigsaw puzzle but I don't think limitations are necessarily prohibitive.

We are all creative people. We can figure our way around limitations, whether they're physical or budget or otherwise. It is fun to problem-solve.



**A piece of technology you are most
in love with here?**

Letterpress machines are amazing. They're nearly a hundred years old and still running. But the number of people who know how to maintain or repair them is dwindling. A lot of that knowledge is held by older printers who are nearing retirement or simply won't be around much longer. Some are now actively trying to pass on that knowledge, which I think is really important.

I remember in a commercial shop I worked at, we bought a foil stamping letterpress called a Kluge from a local printer who was retiring. The press had belonged to his father before him from the 1930s. He came by to help us install and set it up. I was so struck by the fact that this press had passed through three generations and was still functioning perfectly. I like that we all build connections to the same object.

Looking around, I'm also amazed by the tools we have here. We can make our own plates and use two functioning letterpress machines. Sometimes I forget how unique that is.

**It's interesting to see how the shop
responds to student demand, but
also how the shop itself shapes the
work that gets made.**

The tools and materials in the space definitely influence the visual culture around them. And I think that's really special. The way students inspire each other and build on what's available is one of my favorite things about working in a print shop. I'm not saying I don't appreciate digital work or find digital tools fascinating. But when I look at a printed piece, I often know how it came to be. And that knowledge makes me love it more.

What I really enjoy is seeing students discover the tools. When they have an idea and start to explore how they can bring it to life with the materials right here, that's a really rewarding process to watch. And that cycle of discovery and invention will continue. There's still so much life left in the analog-digital conversation. It has a lot more life to live.

