

**Regula Russelle
Narrator**

**Betty Bright
Minnesota Center for Book Arts
Interviewer**

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At the Russelle Home
Saint Paul, Minnesota**

BB: My name is Betty Bright, and today, August 13, 2015, I am interviewing Regula Russelle at her home in Saint Paul. This interview is being conducted on behalf of Minnesota Center for Book Arts' 30th Anniversary Oral History Project, which has been financed in part with funds provided by the State of Minnesota, through the Minnesota Historical Society, from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

Regula, your involvement with MCBA dates to the early-1990s, from taking classes, serving as an early Co-op member and intern, later as an artist-in-residence, to teaching and exhibiting at MCBA and elsewhere, and working at your own Cedar Fence Press, which you founded in 1999. In addition, you have served on MCBA's Board of Directors since 2012; you are currently on the board. So, we have much to discuss today, and I thank you for sharing your thoughts and reflections.

RR: I am so pleased to be part of this interview series.

BB: Let's begin by introducing you to our listeners, maybe by discussing or describing the work you do at Cedar Fence Press.

RR: Well, it has changed quite a bit over the years. When I started Cedar Fence Press about fifteen years ago, I mainly worked with poets. I felt that I could amplify certain texts, that I could reinterpret them the way a jazz interpreter would interpret lyrics, and make it available to a broader audience. Usually people who don't usually read poetry can most easily understand poetry in small doses. And so I felt early on that the book arts were an ideal way to participate in making that audience much larger. The very early work that I did under the name of Cedar Fence Press was exactly in those ways. I would pick maybe twelve poems that I loved by William Stafford, or six by Naomi Shihab Nye, and then I would shape a beautiful book around that. And when you have just a handful of poems you have to look for a much tighter arc, so when somebody reads a book like that, they will look for a theme, much more so than they would in a normal poetry book.

So, that was my way in, and after that it took me awhile, but then I realized that there were some big issues that I was concerned with in my civic life, in my private life, that I actually had the tools to bring those into full view. I think that the ways that I had selected texts before had to do with that also. It takes a long time to make a book. It might take a year to make a beautiful book, a handmade book. So, I would always choose texts that carried meaning for me personally; otherwise I would not spend that much time with it. But now I am looking more at cultural questions, and I am going to try to figure out how can I find a means to bring that into public view. And so it has changed a little bit, how I do my work, and it is probably linked to my teaching. We can talk about that later, but I think my own growth as a maker of books and a cultural participant has changed because I have worked with young people and older people who are cultural participants, and we talk about that.

BB: And your work can take the form of a book, a broadside, or a sculptural piece.

RR: That is correct. Paper came later; I meant to talk about that. My very early work would look very much like a book to people, just a beautifully made book.

BB: Let's start with how you first came to MCBA? So that started in the 1990s. What background or early interests may have positioned you or set you to respond to the idea of the book arts or a book arts center?

RR: Well, I always loved language, so I grew up with that. That may be unusual for somebody working in the book arts, that language came to me first. I had worked as a designer for a non-profit; I had worked on books. I knew how a book came together, so I carried that knowledge. I had also worked as a printmaker, I did intaglio prints, and once I realized that I could bring the two things together, that I could bring language and the imagery together, I knew this was going to be my path.

I remember an early book that I saw by Susan MacDonald, at a WARM [Women's Art Registry of Minnesota] exhibit; it might have been the late 1980s when that was exhibited. It was the first artist's book that I saw. It was on a low table, it had its own environment, and it was called, *Fall into Winter*. It was reminiscent of a Rilke poem; it had these people falling as if they were leaves. And in an accordion book, and so I gazed at this, and you could walk around it, and I realized how kinetic it was. I couldn't touch it. But because it was an accordion I could see it in its entirety. And I thought, someday I want to do this. I had a really strong sense about that. And I carried that with me for a while. And so I knew that Center for Book Arts had opened through newspaper articles. It sounded interesting, but I don't know what the final little nudge was. I started making books, maybe right before I went to graduate school. I took a class in making a book, just hand making a book without content, and they were beautiful; they were so beautiful [that] for a while I carried them around in a bag. So I could show, look at what I did!

And then our granddaughter was born. Our daughter was a teenage mom and decided she wanted to have this child, and when she decided to have that child, we thought, well, we want that child also! Now Anika is four, and such a wonder in our lives. It was a beautiful thing, and [husband] Michael and I thought, what would be the most powerful thing a small child could have to feel that she would belong, and we thought a book would be the single most powerful thing for anybody to have. And so Michael and I decided to make a book about the wonders she brought into our lives during that first year. And that was really the first completely handmade book I made together with Michael, was that book about Anika, it was a small history really, it was a small memoir. And I still feel for students, it is one of the easiest ways into the book arts, is actually by way of memoir. So, it felt so good.

BB: And you wanted to keep working in that form.

RR: Well, many things happened for me in that point over two to three years. Because I worked in graphics, I loved my work with good organizations, [for example] I have done work for Hamline University, the Red Cross, and so on, but I didn't enjoy working with the computer, I didn't feel it was an interesting tool for me. I felt it took mastery away from me; I loved making things with my hands, and I think better when I work with my hands. So I knew that a lot was involved, and I went back to graduate school to think through this, just to discern what my next steps were.

And then wonderful things happened. A teacher at Hamline University who is also a neighbor, Colleen Bell—he is not alive anymore—but he lived at that point in a downstairs duplex, and then upstairs was Fred Battell, who had been a letterpress printer. Fred Battell was a librarian at M & O Paper Company, and he had a little Chandler and Price [platen press] with an ashtray clamped on his feed tray in the basement. He was getting elderly, he couldn't see well anymore, he couldn't print well anymore, and Colleen wanted to have printed a small book for him on handmade paper as a tribute to the Battell Chapel—that was his press name. And Colleen said, Regula, how would you like to print a book? I had worked on an oral history book for one of her classes, which was commercially produced. And I said, yes, that is exactly what I would like to do, except I don't know how to run a printing press, but I can learn that. Colleen had her sabbatical coming up and there was a third person involved—they dropped off of the project but by that time I had enrolled for a class down at the Center for Book Arts with Gaylord Schanilec.

[I studied with] Gaylord Schanilec on a weekend, learning how to print on dampened paper. There was nothing creative about that project; it was reprinting a chapter from a book that he had already printed, so it was all about technique, about mixing the inks and how you align type. And I thought, I can do this, I can do this. I knew this early on. The workshop was two days [and] we were a group of five. On that Saturday evening on that first day, Michael comes to pick me up and we are going to a dinner party, and he brings me different clothes, I change out of my grubbies, I put on nicer things. We go to this

dinner party and I don't think I ate a bite of food, I was so excited. I thought this is what I want to do. I just knew that after a few hours.

So that was a big thing. I think it is very, very strong teaching. When you are very capable you can make things complex, but you also have the power to make things simple. I think Gaylord made things very accessible. Wendy Fernstrum, who also is a long time book artist and letterpress printer, was in that class of five. Then, it is a little bit of a tangent, but I learned important things about community, too. I am really interested in how communities come together. We did that book, and then Gaylord said we were going to share the book. Everybody got one of two copies. And he said, you can't have all of them, because some of what I do goes directly over to the Elmer Andersen Center; they collect what I do. And so we sat, Wendy or somebody is who is a high achiever in the group—not me, slow and plodding!—we set our six names—Gaylord's and five other names—alphabetically, so my R, having never done this, was right next to Gaylord's S, one of the best printers and premier wood engraver in the world. I thought, that is a beautiful thing about community, and, oh my goodness, this book is going to the Elmer Andersen Center! I thought that was a very sweet thing to learn about, how you can enlarge communities in very natural, straightforward and simple ways.

Printing is about pressure and alignment, that is the main [thing], and patience, you know, to get pleasure in something that takes time. I actually think that that is a content characteristic in letterpress—that it took a lot of time. We are in a very fast age, and to give something extended attention gives it a certain value. Usually people don't know how long it takes unless they do similar work, but they have a sense that it took care; almost anybody will pick that up.

BB: Who else in the early to mid 1990s did you get to know? [Who] made an impact on you in those early days at MCBA?

RR: I definitely want to talk about Paulette [Myers-Rich], because she was so pivotal. Paulette became my mentor, and I have had other teachers, too. I took that class, it just was a weekend class from Gaylord and I thought, I want to do this. How am I going to do this? I thought I am going to somehow plan a way to do this. I knew it was going to take time. I didn't have any illusion that I could just go down there and print a book. And I felt so fortunate, because I don't know how close those things were together, but they were maybe close. There was a potluck, maybe Amanda Degener or somebody had organized a potluck for MCBA folks, and I just happened to be [there] almost accidentally. Maybe I was just hanging out and she said come on in, you are part of this. And I met Paulette Myers-Rich, and she was the new artist-in-residence. It was a fall potluck and she was just coming on, and at that time I believe artists-in-residence still worked on the printing of the Winter Book. That was maybe part of the agreement; I am not completely sure, but that may have been the case. So she was going to be there for a year, and part of what she would give back to the community would be working on the printing of the Winter Book with some interns.

I had already had an application in for being an intern, and I told her, and spontaneously, before I got official notice, she said, you are on, Regula, I want you! So that gave me a workshop experience over an extended time, where we worked together on a real project. I saw when the type came in, we set things up on the press, we printed on different papers: on smooth paper, on bumpy paper, on translucent paper where the ink wouldn't dry for a really long time; it was wonderful. At that point I had decided, I made it my work for a whole year. I just thought, I will do letterpress printing. I will get good at that.

And the Co-op [Artists' Cooperative] started right at that time too, and I became either the first Co-op member or one of the first batch of Co-op members. [That] made it possible for me to come into the Center every day and just work: start in morning, leave at night. Maybe ask me later about how I got my press, because Paulette was so instrumental in having me get a press and connecting me with the Ampersand Club. I just felt that she was the person that helped me become, not just skilled at what I did, but truly become a member of the book arts community. And people do that for each other quite a bit at the Center, different people for different persons.

I also learned from Chip. [Wilber] Chip Schilling was an early adopter of polymer plates, and I was an early adopter to polymer plates. I might have been in his first polymer platemaking class, when we still used metal-backed plates, and it was more complicated than it is now. So I knew Chip early on. I learned bookbinding—my first classes were from Barbara Harmon, when I learned how to make those beautiful hand sewn book structures. Jill Jevne became a very important teacher later when I was interested in exactness and figuring out how to make boxes; I owe so much to Jill Jevne and the way she taught, a very important teacher. I am forgetting others...

BB: The print studios. Who else was printing when you were there?

RR: Oh, ok, very importantly so, when I came in for that year, that first year when I decided I will make a book, that little book for Fred Battell that Colleen Bell had asked me to do, Robert Johnson was an artist-in-residence, at least his press was there, I think for many years, and I think that was the old pattern. Allan Kornblum was there before I came to the Center for Book Arts, and Kent Aldrich and Gaylord and so on. When I came in to become a printer, Robert Johnson worked on a press, basically he had claimed it, it had his inks on it, it had his things on it, it was Robert's press. Gaylord told me, go to the Number Four press. There are different presses and they are like old cars—they have peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses. And so Gaylord said, the Number Four: very reliable, not that many people use it, go for that one. Tip. [Laughter] And so I thought, ok, I will get to know the Number Four. Most people used the Universal [press] up front, and so the Number Four, you can't have a good print unless things are adjusted on the press, unless the rollers are adjusted, that they are parallel, that they're the right height. There are some things that need to be right on a press to make it work. [For example,] the tympan, I think at that time we didn't have mylars on the tympan, which means the

tympan probably had to be changed more. I am pretty sure that is true, because I think Phil Gallo told me, why are you doing this, like, you should be using mylar. [Laughter] And so, when something didn't go right, I had Robert Johnson there, and that was a gift to me, and that is how a workshop truly works, because you have people who are new, it is a craft. Content is an art, and technique, that is a craft, and it is dependent on the people who went before you, over hundreds of years, where one person taught another. The workshop is very important [because] you can't do that on your own. So, to have Robert there, and when I had an issue he would stop whatever he was doing and step over and make it right, that is a very important thing, and I am always happy I am a Co-op member, at Minnesota Center for Book Arts, and I do my printing there. I do binding often here and other things in my home studio.

I am so happy to help when somebody has an issue, because I have been the beneficiary of that, and so you are part of this continuation; it is very beautiful. You learn from people who know more, and you pass [what you know] on to people who know a little less, and while you are doing that in a workshop environment like the Center for Book Arts, you also in the periphery see things you would never have thought of doing, because one day you say, oh my goodness, you could be integrating something. I could use translucent paper or something like that; that would not have been an idea had it not been for being in that environment,

I [have done] a little thinking about that. I believe that that journeyman idea in the olden days, when journeymen would travel, maybe before they were married and as young people, [and] they would have a certain knowledge. I understood that that was in part so that they could learn new things in a new place before the Internet and all those [resources], but also so that an exchange could happen in different workshops. I think we are still doing that. That is still part of the beauty of what we are doing, we are working on different [projects and] our voices are different, but we are sharing this technique that has this long beautiful history.

BB: So, from what you are describing, being in that studio, and picturing that original MCBA space which was one big, 8600 square foot space, I am imagining what it was actually like to be working in that studio. If you were trying to describe it for someone who didn't see that space, imagine you were working on that press. Was it very quiet, a low hum, or people chatting?

RR: There weren't that many people there, also I think it would have embraced more people. Because the architecture, I do think architecture tells us a lot about a place, and so it was a wide-open place. You come in up the steps through the beautiful old doors, and I think there were maybe a couple more steps. And then you had a wide view of where things were, which communicates openness, really, that one technique can mesh with another. I think that the new space is designed still in some ways like this. We have more space so we can separate a little bit more. And I have a tiny little home studio. So you separate things that use oil and inks from areas where you do not want to have oils and

inks. So the bindery was beautifully designed, and the bindery had beautiful large tables up by the windows where it really helps you to see well when you do the stitching, and that was separate from the print area, but they were open, and then the paper....I remember school classes coming in, so sweet, oh my goodness. Ellen Ferrari stands out, there are these little kids, like three or four-year olds, and maybe some in diapers, and they sit down and they see the papermaking and they all in unison say, ah! Yes, I enjoyed that a lot.

I think I have the gift of being able to focus, and I can do that in a lively environment. And I enjoy having classes and kids in the new Center for Book. I love that. You hear the voices from above and the steps, the happy sounds, it makes me happy too. Yes, [the original MCBA] felt very open and there was an overview, and there was like a portal of inspiration when you came in. There were a couple cases that I think we still have for the Co-op now, for exhibition. There always was a beautiful exhibit happening so we could see what people in other places in the world or the United States were doing, and on the other side was a tiny little library also for inspiration and for enlarging the world, making the Center a little bigger. I was happy there. I am happy in the new space, but I was happy in the old space too. It was a good space. It had a coffee maker too, you know. Very important! [Laughing]

BB: So, let's imagine. We have talked about the inside of the old space. If you now step outside and you imagine yourself approaching the building, describe what that was like, coming in from the street. What was the actual neighborhood like that surrounded it.

RR: Well that neighborhood, you know, the whole of Washington transformed really under our eyes.

BB: So, the original space.

RR: You mean the inside space or the outside space?

BB: I mean the McKesson Building's old space, that Warehouse District, where we were on First Avenue North and Third Street. What was that neighborhood like in the first space as you approached the building and walked inside?

RR: Well it did have an industrial feel still to it, even now, within two decades, there are so many condos now, there are many, many more people living along Washington Avenue, so it has changed a lot. But there was Café Brenda on the corner, and if we walked a little bit further we could get a cup of coffee that somebody else made, so there were some places. I usually parked down at the Theatre de la Jeune Lune, like I had to go down there every four hours to put more quarters in.

BB: Yes, parking was challenging.

RR: This is true, and so it did feel like a Warehouse District, and I think it is now changing. And of course that is true where the new MCBA is, there was the Liquor Depot, and the parking lots, and the dumpy buildings, and so I think it has changed quite a bit.

BB: You were talking about people you got to know early on. If you think back to when you took the class, what was it like to be in a new student in a center [for] an art form that many people did not understand or recognize at that time? It was all fairly new, still. What was the experience of working in the studios?

RR: As natural as it could possibly be. I just felt that I was meant to find this, and there it was. And so it never felt odd in the least bit, and I always felt like I was a part of it.

BB: I will fast-forward to the Artists' Co-op [Artists' Cooperative]. As the 1990s unfold, eventually there is the move to Open Book. But before that happens MCBA is going through some transitions and the Artists' Cooperative forms, and you were, if not the first one, one of the very first members. Can you talk a little bit about how that came about and how you heard about it, and what the vibe was? What had happened that the artists chose to move into that kind of mode or community?

RR: I was too new in the group, so I knew it was a period of change, but I didn't understand the full nature of that change. I knew some people. I knew Bill Myers from Quaker meeting, and I believe he was on the [MCBA] board at that time, and he helped with that move. I knew things were happening, but I wasn't aware of what large decisions [that] people who had been longer with the Center had made at that point. I was an early beneficiary. Looking back, it was kind of through the rear view mirror that I can see that, oh my goodness, this was perfect timing for me, because it was exactly what I wanted, it was exactly what I needed, and so beautiful, and I am so grateful but it is afterwards that I fully understood what it all meant. So I knew it was a time of change, but not knowing the whole story, if that makes any sense.

BB: Who told you about the Co-op?

RR: I am sure it must have been somebody like Paulette. Either it was Amanda or Paulette, I am quite sure. Or maybe Bill Myers. You know, at that point I had connected with some people. I wanted it so badly, I think I hung around there, and when you hang around, you hear. And I was ready to hear. So, I don't know who told me about the Co-op, but, maybe even before it formed I said if it does, I am part of that, I want it, I am ready to learn. I know it was just at the time when I think Amanda, her daughter, she couldn't even walk; she brought her in a pouch or something. Anyway, I think Amanda was just leaving and Mary Jo Pauly was coming on fairly soon [as Artistic Director]. Maybe it was at a good-bye potluck for Amanda at that point, maybe I learned at that potluck. I also learned about the first Winter Book. She said, you know, we are doing a Winter Book. People are going to be contributing and maybe somebody like you will be

contributing? I was a total newbie, somebody like me was not ready to be contributing anything yet, but anyway, I loved that. It was just very embracing.

BB: Ok, now it is happening. MCBA is moving to Open Book. Were you around either as things were being packed up or during moving day? Oh, I am sorry, before that, did you see the raw space? Were you one of the people who toured the raw space, and what were your impressions of that space?

RR: Yes. I was amazed—that Bill Myers was very excited! He grasped the vision more fully. It looked so dump, and smelled, and was like all these tiny little boxed-in areas. But I trusted it, I thought really wonderful people were planning a wonderful thing, and I knew there was this really great enthusiasm, and Michael and I became part of that enthusiasm, and MCBA wanted it, the Loft wanted it, Milkweed wanted it, the community wanted it. Nothing can go wrong. And it still was affordable at that time. I knew it was a good spot, actually, I realized that. It was so close to the University [of Minnesota and] it was close to downtown, you couldn't really go wrong.

BB: What was that neighborhood like back then? You mentioned the Liquor Depot earlier.

RR: Yes. Lots of parking lots. [Laughter] I said, what a waste, it is so close to the river, so ideally it should have been prime real estate a hundred years ago. And I don't know why not, but it wasn't. It was close to that whole corridor along the river, and nobody had thought of making it special. And so I thought it was a very good spot [but] not tended, not taken care of. I mean, what we are doing at the Center for Book Arts has so much to do with tending, with taking care.

BB: So, on moving day or moving time, were you one of the folks around when that amazing day unfolded?

RR: I wasn't there on the day but I was there previously, helping getting things ready at the old spot. And I probably was there early on in the new spot. I remember feeling that the place had soul from the first time in. It is very unusual, even in a remodel. Like, I felt the architects had given these three organizations such a gift, by their vision, that they kept the history of the building and it was respectful. I believe we were interviewed as artists, as printers and binders. We were asked what we wanted. I remember being asked, how does this feel, what do you need? I remember that we said, well, we need the type kind of close to the presses! I think there was at one point having them in different floors or spaces.

BB: I heard that.

RR: So we were asked; it was very respectful. Even somebody like me, who was still very new. I had only worked at the Center for Book Arts for four years as a club member,

so that is not a long time, really, so there was a lot of conversation about how it should be done, and it felt really good right from the beginning. I remember that Denny Ruud made a big book when Open Book started.

BB: Yes, were you there on opening night?

RR: I am not [certain]. I must have been there.

BB: You probably saw the big book there. And they opened it.

RR: And then the book door [which originally provided the primary access into MCBA's space] opened; there is so much about openness. I really feel the metaphor is an apt metaphor.

BB: So, you have had this experience of working in the McKesson building space and now Open Book. Share how it is different to work in the studios at Open Book. What are the identifiable differences when you compare the two in your mind? How are those studios different?

RR: I think it is the people that are different. I mean obviously the studios are different, but there are so many [people]. I think as soon as we made that move, the number of people that came into the Center for Book Arts multiplied enormously, and that makes a difference in the culture. I felt we became public at that moment. I felt quite private before. Even so, I felt very welcomed, I would have felt comfortable welcoming anybody else into that space, but I felt we became truly a public organization with that move, and that name of the building and the architecture with the gates that opened communicated that. And that felt like that, too. I don't know when the Co-op started, when the numbers increased, I have never followed that, but there are more people involved in the Co-op now, that is very vibrant to have that happen. The paper studios are—you can really splash there, they are awesome. There is not just one, but two, so you can have a paper studio to spread out, splash water and not worry about, so really the gift of space in part has to do with the new set-up, too.

BB: So when you think about the community of MCBA, which is the artists at the heart and then the staff and faculty [are] critically important, you have the board of directors, etcetera, I am wondering if you think about the Artists' Co-op and how the artists community got so active as it has grown. Did the community change, did the sense of what MCBA was, and did people's roles evolve because of the Co-op's growth and the move? If you were going to define the community of MCBA back then and now, is there a difference?

RR: I do think it is a difference. I do feel everybody is the heart, and that includes the people who come to our events, that includes the audience. I am sure there is a difference, but I think it is so intertwined; it is so difficult for me to put a finger on it. I do think it

has to do with that openness, and having more people come to the Center and work together. The larger that is and becomes, the more vibrant that is, the more alive, and that is true for people who are nationally and internationally-known artists, and that would be true for a kindergartner—they also pick that up. It is the signals, and also the signals you get in the space. I know that when Jeff Rathermel came on as Artistic Director, I think he made it a big point of having exhibits by the wider artist community of MCBA, all the teachers, Jerome fellowship recipients, people who were associated with MCBA had a place to show their work, the Co-op now has a special place where we can show work from Co-op members, so that is a signal. When somebody steps in, they see that this is part of what is valued and what is happening. So I think it is all so connected; it is very, very hard to tease that apart. But I do think it has to do with enlarging community, and the coop is of course part of that.

BB: Well, the odd thing is that you are talking about more people, literally, [in] a shared building with the Loft and Milkweed Editions. I suppose it is not necessarily all the people who come in MCBA's doors, but there is more life in the space as a whole.

RR: I think it is a really wonderful thing. I had that connection as a member of Laurel Poetry Collective only because of my letterpress printing. I had a Hamline connection, and I had my graduate degree from Hamline University, where they have a great MFA degree program in Writing, so people knew I was doing letterpress printing. So, when Deborah Keenan, who was one of the professors there, started a poetry collective to publish broadsides and books, she checked with me and said, Regula, would you be interested in working with us? That was a connection, where their writers' community was really welcome at the Center for Book Arts. We were really embraced by the Center; it was wonderful.

BB: That reminds me of something I want to touch on. When you talk about how MCBA's impact has extended beyond its walls through all these different interconnections, one of the ways it does that is through opening its doors to different interest groups, and also through collaborative relationships with colleges and universities. I am aware that you have been teaching the book arts at Augsburg College for several years, and I wonder if you could share with us how your teaching has been affected or strengthened by your association with MCBA, what you can bring to your students and what your students can gain in return from that wider community of MCBA.

RR: Well, first of all, I wouldn't be teaching if it wasn't for MCBA, because really I learned about printing and making books from the MCBA community. And it had been suggested to me many times before that I should be teaching, and I never did it. Once when I was asked if I would do it, once I knew how to make a book, I said, yes. Because I felt I had something so big and beautiful to share, that teaching would be so easy to do. I feel book arts is one of the great democratic arts, so I get to do that, I am privileged to do that and to show people how to do that. I bring all the classes to the Center for Book

Arts, because when you work on a degree, many students are not art students, there are many teachers who take the classes, and so on.

But if you are interested in being a practitioner in the arts, you need two things usually: you need equipment and you need a community. And MCBA is of course a beautiful community. And students lose that when they graduate. So I bring them to MCBA in part to say, if this is your way of speaking, if books or paper is that, this is your community. If you live nearby, you do have a community. It also offers tools if you want fancy tools. I changed my teaching both at the Center for Book Arts and at Augsburg to make it so [that] if people don't have a lot of money, or a lot of space, that they can still do it. And so I changed the whole curriculum just to make that possible. That is the beauty of what we do. You can do something really powerful. I say this many times, this is a repetition. If you do a book with the right spirit, people will carry it out of burning buildings, and they will do it a hundred years from now, and so it is so powerful, and you can do it with relatively simple tools.

So even at MCBA, every now and then, I teach a class, like making books, printing by hand, and doing it by hand, so that is a possibility in people's lives, and people don't need to feel like they have to spend a year learning how to print on a press. Also, if you want to print a hundred, the press is the path. [Laughter] and it is not that hard, and I am so delighted to teach that. So the two have really impacted each other. The students have also impacted my learning; any teacher would say that, so there is nothing new or fresh about that comment. But in the class, the book arts and the papermaking class is combined, and so when I started, I was honest about that. I knew very little about papermaking. So, just focus on that, and you know, you can maybe invite some guess speakers about the papermaking.

And I thought, no, I can do better than that. So, I took a couple classes and I taught about papermaking, and then I noticed that the students did these awesome, really beautiful [pieces], so many pieces are so much better than I could ever do. I want to say that for history! I work with not that many abilities. I am just determined to do it. And so I have seen a lot of students who do much more powerful work than I am doing, in a much quicker time. Their book arts were awesome, really, so many wonderful pieces. But their paper projects were kind of pedestrian, because of me. And so I thought, oh my goodness, it is me; it is me. I thought I have to fall in love with papermaking. I need to love it. How can I teach anybody else to love it if I don't love it? So then I did a submersion, like when you do a language submersion. [I took] classes for any paper kind of class that came up, and I fell for it. Maybe I want to lift up Sarah Peters, because I think in that class things really shifted for me, because it was dimensional paper, and I was interested really in content, really not that much, I am interested in technique and teaching really careful technique, but I feel it is the carrier of the message, so I am interested in the message, and so I felt the same with the paper. Once I learned to do simple ways of dimensional paper, I thought, oh my goodness, it can carry message. And so then I fell for it and I think it is a major part of my work now. I didn't expect it. I came

back to MCBA when I needed it so MCBA was right there when I needed to learn more that was really my professional development right there. Tax deductible! [Laughter]

BB: And did you see a change in the students' work when you started to communicate that?

RR: Oh yes, immediately, totally, almost overnight. And I think part of it was [my] loving it. You know, I am old enough that I think I understand the dynamics. And in a way, it doesn't make sense to teach anything unless you love it, because that is the only thing that is truly remembered. And you can do it, you have agency, you can speak, because it is a way to speak in the world. Yes, I am very fortunate, because I love what I do and I get to do the work with other people, showing them some techniques and ways to approach that in their own way, hopefully.

BB: This is a great transition. I have some more general questions to finish up with, but I asked you if you could share some work that has a connection with MCBA's studios or a Winter Book? I know we have it here on the table. I am wondering if you would like to take a break and we will talk about it. [Gesturing] So, what do we have here, Regula? I am curious about this gorgeous Winter Book. Please tell us anything you can about it, how it was made, and what it was like to help out with the production.

RR: Yes, this is the beautiful deluxe version that was made for, *Playing Haydn for the Angel of Death*, with a poem by Bill Holm. This beautiful paper was made by Amanda Degener with the help of Erica Spitzer Rasmussen, who I believe was an artist-in-residence at that time when the Winter Book was made. This is a suite of prints that people have made. And this book, which was also part of the standard and the reader's edition, contains the actual poem. I don't know if it is visible here, but it is printed white on white, and here is the angel of death, and it slides, you can kind of have the angel of death slide onto the chair, so we had a fun time with it. Later on, then at the reading when we asked Bill Holm what did he imagine the angel of death looking like, he said more or less like himself.

BB: So, there is a poet.

RR: More fleshed out than this version here. [Laughter] When we printed this, I learned how to letterpress print when I was an intern with Paulette, and we printed this. So I printed on many different papers, we printed on this very smooth translucent paper, and it is very hard for the ink to dry. I can't remember any more, but we may have used a kind of a dryer in the ink, too. We had to have them out there for a long time. This is a little sleeve that is coming off. We did have a straight back chair, and I believe we moved a piano into the Center for Book Arts, and a straight-back chair, which is something that is coming up in the poem. Here are the pieces: Bill Holms' signature, these pages with the poem that we printed. It is a Grand piano.

We did have a little mishap happen. Usually this doesn't happen, but humidity affects the inks. So when we printed it we didn't put slip sheets in between and usually that is not necessary, and we did have some ink offsetting. One page was printed and then we put the next one on the top, and it was slightly offset so we had to be very calm about that—ok, we will do this again. That is actually a very important thing about printing, and I have been told by an intern who I worked with that it was part of the lesson, that you can't speed it up. If you have to redo something, you just have to redo it. And that is part of the work. And so you always learn much more than just the printing, you also learn a way of being. I remember with Paulette when we would set things up, maybe something needed to be fine-tuned, and we printed this from hot type so sometimes little pieces [of type] stick up a little bit. When that happens when you run a proof, we had to adjust this and be sure that everything was nice and tight in the press bed. And she would say, well, a printer should now have lunch, because without lunch you cannot really do this very well. And sometimes when it didn't go well she said, maybe this isn't the day. Sometimes you just don't have a good day, and let's come back tomorrow. So that is really part of learning, too. And I want to say too that at that time we printed together for weeks, and I didn't have my own press at that time. And Paulette said if you are a printer you need a press. If you are a piano player, you need a piano. If you are a printer you need a press. Just make a list of what you need, Regula, and then we will go get stuff, and that is really how it happened.

BB: That is great. Thank you so much for showing us the book, Regula.

RR: That is a beautiful book, and an amazing box.

BB: Absolutely. Let's see, what do you have next to show us?

RR: I brought this book. I thought it might be interesting. For several years CB Sherlock and I did some books, collaborative work together, books with Minnesota authors, and we had some interns. We thought it would be a really neat way for interns to learn about how a book comes together, so that is how we really got started. She said, Regula, how about teaching a class together and making a book. I said well, maybe we should just make a book and then have people do that with us.

So, this book we did a couple years after Paul Gruchow tragically died. He did such beautiful writing about Minnesota, and we thought it would be a way of honoring him. We chose this beautiful essay, *Putting Tomatoes By*, which was in a larger book published by Milkweed Editions, which is [also located] in [the] Open Book building. I thought it would be really beautiful to do this since Milkweed Editions gave us permission to reprint the beautiful essay on canning tomatoes. [Gruchow] writes about canning tomatoes. His mother always had canned tomatoes. They were poor and rural, and he talks about how when you can tomatoes, you actually don't save money. You could probably save money by buying a can of Del Monte's in the grocery store. But you

add beauty to your life. It is a very beautiful thing to do. So he compares canning tomatoes to writing, to the writer's craft and to the writer's life, which was his life.

And Corey, CB [Sherlock] and I felt that this was a little bit of a manifesto for us, too, that the printers and the binders and the papermakers also do it because it is beautiful. It would be cheaper to buy a sheet of paper in the store, and it would be cheaper to buy a book at Amazon than to print one, but [a handmade work] is beautiful and it adds a dimension to life that you cannot have in any other way. So when we did the images we had the growing tomato plants and we wanted to have a little bit of imagery that would conjure up a country tablecloth, so we had that plant grow through the pages; it is a kind of a tree of life. [Turning pages] So the plant is growing, and here is the harvest. And then we decided we would go beyond the harvest, and the plant withers. And we made that most complex; it is the only image that is intertwined, because when a plant withers it becomes part of the soil, part of something else. And we wanted to link that in, with the tribute we wanted to make to Paul Gruchow.

This is a beautiful saying [Reading], that all of us have it within our power to build and tend some manner of garden right where we are. I actually feel that is what we do at the Center for Book Arts, and I feel that is what I do at the Cedar Fence Press. It is growing some manner of garden right where I am. The beautiful thing about this book, too, is that so many people helped. So we had many, many people help with bringing this together. I can read those names just to honor them here: Jenny Eisenman Anderson, Jennifer Bolanos, Wendy Fernstrum—my good friend, Wendy Fernstrum—Fred Larson, Candida Pagan, Stephen Pittelkow who used to work at MCBA, and Jana Pullman who is a premier bookbinder and has worked on many, many Winter Books. They all contributed to this book. I believe that the thread was done, now I am not sure if I am seeing the name, and her name slips me, but the thread was done by a woman who used to work at Center for Book Arts, and she had a business going dyeing thread, and we commissioned having a thread dyed in tomato color, and she did a perfect job for us.

I want to say something else about a reason for art. There are many reasons for art, why we should do what we do. One reason is that we experience life differently, and I never really liked tomatoes very much as a child. I started to draw them, and I realized not only did I not taste them, I hadn't looked at them. They are beautiful; they are all individual. And I think it is one of the great benefits of making, that [what] you are seeing all changes and once you have seen something you never not see it again. And so they are all different, they are like little harbors and little boats, the seeds are like little boats, which refers, I think, to what Gruchow is writing about too. And so I started eating tomatoes that year, and I now eat more tomatoes than I did in the decades before. My relationship to tomatoes altered, which is a fringe benefit of what we are doing. So that is maybe all I want to say about that. It was a lot of fun to work [on it].

BB: Except maybe [for] the closure.

RR: CB is a great, great artist. So this is the stake that closes the box, a fun thing. Boxes are really important, like you saw when I talked about the Winter Book, the beautiful box that Denny Ruud made. That box creates an environment. As an artist I think one of my primary reasons for doing what I do is actually to create quiet spaces in a busy world. So the box creates a quiet space, a space set apart.

This is a newer [work], and it has handmade paper in it. When you beat abaca fibers for a very long time it becomes translucent, so it is resilient but it also looks fragile, and you can see through it, so you can get a layered effect from that. I learned this from Sarah Peters when I took a class in my total immersion in all things paper. At that point I was working on a project for an exhibit that had a theme of correspondence, and I thought it would be interesting to look at what is the same the world over. The exhibits were going to be in Poland, and I thought I want to do something that does not rely on language; I want to do something with images. I have a mandala that looks a little like a world, and with a seam. I wanted it to come together the way a book comes together. That something is held together, like that, and things are alike on two sides. And it was my concept and maybe my first paper project. I am interested in touch, so I am happy when people touch things like this world.

BB: Does the sound [the paper] makes, the rattle, appeal to you as well, in appealing to the senses?

RR: All of it. I feel motion. Also, when something looks fragile, people hold it gently. And that is part of the piece; I think people need to hold the world gently. So I would like how it feels [to the reader, to] correspond to what I want it to say. You don't know completely how something is understood, and that is all right, but I am pretty sure that people hold this gently. I like having my books open for people to see, when there are events like [an opening]. I think it has only been once or twice that there might have been a little spot [left] on something. It almost never happens; people automatically do that, and so I feel that is part of the piece, is how you hold something, or how you approach something. I like the unevenness of it.

This is the colophon; I called it, *Musical Notations*, because they are international. If somebody doesn't speak English then maybe they know music, and I am particularly interested in things that come together, like this would show that notes are played together. And I gave it a key, so I did write that in English for the English readers. [This image] is tomato and basil, and Michael and I know this because we have a friend who told us, but, you know, basil is an old world plant, and tomato is a new world plant, and Michael and I are from new world and old world, and we planted two together, so that is a romantic thing for us, so that is kind of a little bit of an inside thing. And they are kind of going over the divide a little bit. I put a book in here. I made some things that nature made that we share, and then I put things in here that are fabricated, that we make, works of culture.

I actually think music is probably our biggest work of culture, I am pretty sure about that. It is the most inclusive, has no boundaries. But I love tables, I love bowls, almost all of my work, printed or otherwise, has bowls in it of some sort. It is a big metaphor for me. I play a little recorder. When you do your own work you get to put your favorite things in. My granddaughter plays the accordion and viola. [There] is a bird's nest in the middle and I put some seeds in the most central part. I have a little colophon. Words can go a long way when something is mainly visual. And I put the beautiful saying by Rusty Schweickart, who was one of the first astronauts [and] who saw the world from afar, and he said, oh my goodness, if I hold up my thumb, it is gone. You know, like it is beautiful and it is fragile and it is luminous and very precious, and it is a whole. I did add some language, but I wanted to do it mainly without language.

So, all these things are skills and crafts that we teach at the Center for Book Arts. I learned how to make boxes at the Center for Book Arts, so that is a technique in book arts, a binding technique, I printed it at the Center for Book Arts, so I did the printing, and then I made the paper at the Center for the Book Arts in the beautiful upstairs studio, splashing all day. [Laughter] Being happy as a clam.

BB: Thank you so much, Regula. That was wonderful.

RR: Well, thank you.

BB: I so appreciate the perspective that you are bringing to our conversation, one that spans twenty years in the book arts. So if we just have a few more questions from the perspective of your involvement and including your service at the moment on MCBA's board of directors as well as a working artist. How would you characterize what MCBA means to you? How would you characterize it today as compared to how it was in its infancy when it was just getting started at McKesson? Is there a way to make a differentiation in how it has grown or changed? Is the organization a different organization or has it not changed over that time?

RR: I feel I am so repetitious about this, but I do think it has changed, and I just feel it has to do with having become more multi-faceted. The boundaries have enlarged, they are ever enlarging I feel, it is very dynamic, actually. Yes, I think in part it is growing, it is natural, it is not here is this, and then there is this. It is a gradual outward [growth], and we were helped so much by that change. I have to say that [it] helped to be in a more extroverted space. It is true. [Laughter]

BB: I know your work is collected nationally, and so you are aware of the field. What role do you feel MCBA plays in the book arts field as a whole? Where do we fit, what do we contribute, or what is our action as an organization related to the larger field?

RR: Well, I think it is enormous. It is huge. It is bigger than we know. There are people from other places in the United States that come and visit the Center for Book Arts, there

are people in England who come and see how we do things, to use us as a model on how it can be done. We have the symposium that invites in the world of ideas, the Biennial, it is very large I believe and it [has grown] larger as I have been with the organization. I think we have an awareness of that, and yet I don't think we have become so [big] that somebody who is just starting out couldn't come in and it be just a perfect place for them. I think that is an art to do both of these things together. But yes, I think we would be a national treasure if we were in Japan. [Laughter] We can self-designate ourselves!

BB: So that is nationally even internationally. You have lived in Minnesota since....

RR: Since 1982. That is a long time; you do the math!

BB: So if you think about the Minnesota cultural world as you have navigated through it, where do you think MCBA fits today, in how it contributes to Minnesota's culture?

RR: I also feel that is huge because books especially are carriers of culture. All the arts are carriers of culture, so in that way we are not unique, but I think the books are, especially. When you make a book, when anybody makes a book, they have to decide what stays outside and what stays inside. And so it is all about what is carried forward, and that is a big thing. And we are teaching kids how to think about that. There are thousands of kids coming through the Center. I know that the book arts [play] a big part in education now, because you are looking at wholeness. It is a very big way to see something in its entirety. And we are there for many, many different people, and I think we are very generous, and I have heard that from other people, who said, oh, you are sharing what you know? We are not hugging techniques [close], and what they have figured out is always available for people, from more comes more. But I think we can be particularly proud of what happens with children. Because early on, kids already know that, and some of them will take that further. It takes time, you know, to do it well. Any art or craft requires a commitment, and so that is a different thing. But yes, big contribution to Minnesota.

BB: So, looking back at that history and its longevity, now we are talking about our thirtieth anniversary. Do you think that there are any particular aspects of MCBA's organization or its community that continue? Because some organizations don't continue, for one reason or another. What might have helped MCBA to navigate those waters and be here on its thirtieth anniversary? Any longevity keys?

RR: I think we should just do wholeheartedly what we do well. We are in the business, in part, of dissemination, and it is already growing in ways that we can't see, so I think that we are in the world, and that is not going to be dependent on anything, really, because it has already passed on so many places, especially through our many teaching functions, an artist who started here and then moved to Oregon or elsewhere. But I think we have a really good chance to become really, really old! [Laughter] Why? Maybe changing? We became quite different from thirty years ago. So I would expect us to maybe be different

in another thirty years, but if we can be wholehearted and true to our mission and alive to that, I think it will be beautiful.

BB: That actually also goes to a question I had about legacy. If we have a legacy, it seems as though that wholehearted openness, and moving forward with how the field is changing: could that be what we are offering so far, that may carry us forward?

RR: Part of it is the work that comes out of MCBA, the work itself is legacy also. It is not just the building. I would say a legacy would also, if somebody comes [to visit]. [For example] I think Simon Goode who came from London [who started London Centre for Book Arts (LCBA)]—that is a legacy. He came to learn—I think he went to other book art centers too, but he came to learn, how is this done? So the legacy in part is about community building. Or if we can inspire somebody else to have a Co-op someplace, well, that is a legacy. Or if we teach teachers, or if I teach somebody who is becoming a teacher, and they say, well, what I learned here I am now teaching to children. All those things are legacy. So it is multi-faceted. Some of those things can easily be seen, you know, Patrick Coleman [Acquisitions Librarian at Minnesota] Historical Society, who is so generously collecting many of our works, our Minnesota work—that is in part a legacy, but I think it is much freer and [more] underground than we imagine. But it is totally there, oh my goodness.

BB: If we talk about that legacy, is there a piece of that that might be characteristically Minnesotan? I know you have lived elsewhere, and you have emigrated here, so you have a very broad perspective. Do you think any of this is unique or Midwestern as opposed to some other way of working in the arts or making community?

RR: I thought about this a little bit and I think in Minnesota, people support public groups, there is this kind of spirit—oh, the word escapes me—of when you provide monies to help make things happen. The Co-op movement came, I think was very vibrant early on in Minnesota, so I do feel like there is support and spirit to make groups like ours flourish. Not just from the people who are directly involved, but also from people who want to have it happen—allies in the community. I think that first board of directors may have been a really good snapshot of that kind of spirit. Where people said, ok, if you want to have this happen, we want to give energy and money to make this happen. So I think there may be something with that kind of Scandinavian, northern attitude that may contribute to that. I do know that in Switzerland there is nothing like this. But there is also nothing like the Northern Clay Center, or the Weaver's Guild, or other groups, or food co-op, farmers may have cooperatives and so on, and I think the farm cooperatives may be the oldest ones.

BB: So it might be American initially, and maybe Midwestern.

RR: Maybe so. It may even come from emigrant culture, where barn raising or quilting bees, or, I love folk dancing and folk singing, where people come together and they make

something beautiful happen together. So, it may come out of this strand of American folk tradition, where people come together and shape something that is beautiful. I haven't lived in that many places, but I don't think it is in Switzerland. I think it is very beautiful and a good thing.

BB: Well, I guess we could end there. I just want to say, on behalf of MCBA's community, the thousands of children, all the artists, board, faculty, everybody who gives and receives amazing things at MCBA, I want to give you our sincere thanks for participating, Regula.

RR: Well, I feel so greatly honored to be part of the group, and to speak about MCBA, which I love, and without which I can't do what I do.