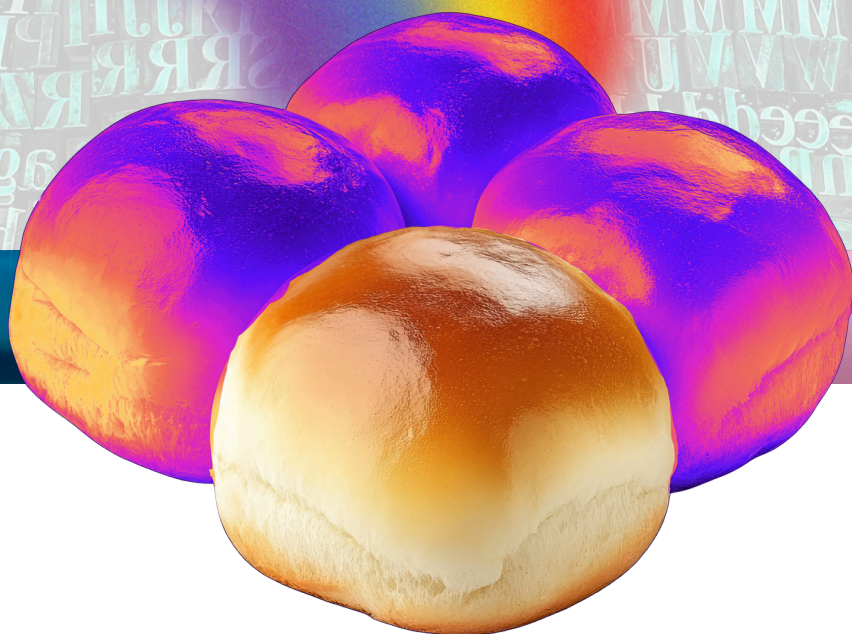




# RAINBOW ROLLS

how to print with **gradient inks!**

aka split fountains!

For Vandercook & other cylinder, inking presses

Amanda Wyatt Visconti

Letterpress for All!  
Series  
BRIOCHE #6

**READ THIS FREE ZINE ONLINE**

(or print as many copies as you'd like!):

**[ZineBakery.com/  
homemade/rainbowrolls](http://ZineBakery.com/homemade/rainbowrolls)**



**To cite this zine:**

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**[ZineBakery.com/homemade/rainbowrolls](http://ZineBakery.com/homemade/rainbowrolls)**.

August 4, 2026. V1.

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- 1) credit me by name, &
- 2) don't sell anything using this zine for \$

Make as many copies as you wish—I'd love for you to share with your library, students, printshop, friends, leave stacks at a local coffee shop, etc.







# RAINBOW ROLLS



*tl;dr is...*

**put more than 1 color of ink on your rollers!**

*(2 to start with, adjacent or slightly overlapped)*

**choose colors that look good blended!**

*(like primary+primary, or secondary+adjacent primary)*

**power until just blended, then keep power off!**

*(so gradient doesn't blend away)*

**cycle power occasionally to help refresh ink!**

*(not enough to blend gradient into one color)*



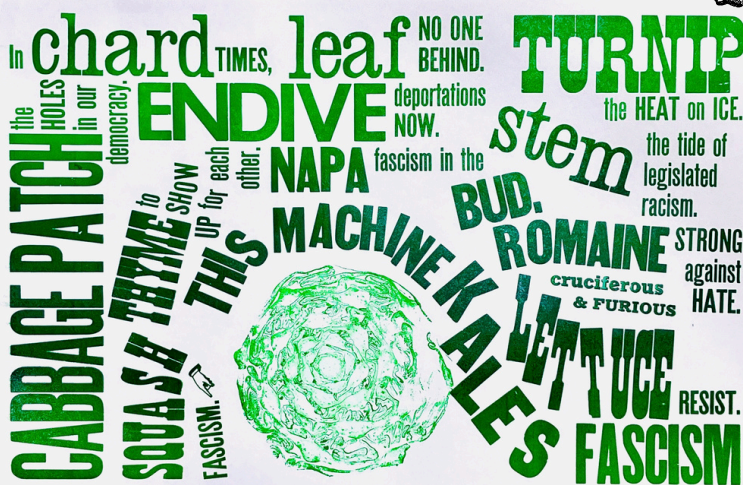


# WHAT ARE THEY?



There are at least 3, fairly interchangeable terms for this kind of multicolor inking effect when printing:

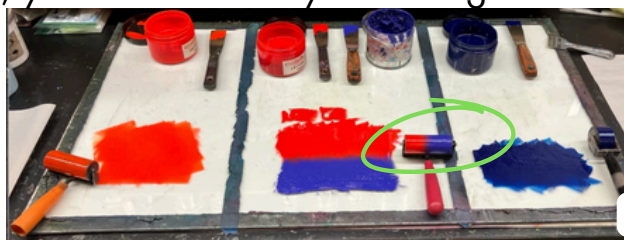
1. **"split fountain"** (from presses with multiple ink wells)
2. **"rainbow roll"**: may be used to mean all gradients, or only ones that resemble actual rainbows in color choice
3. **gradient**: more than one shade (can include varieties across a single color, e.g. different shades of green)



**You can achieve this effect with a hand-brayer, too!**

This zine focuses on press-roller effects, but with a brayer you'd put two colors of ink fairly close on the slab but with some empty space between them (or a light amount of translucent white ink). Then, roll the brayer over & parallel to that empty strip, so the colors merge into a 3rd color & the brayer can be loaded with the gradient. (Unlike with a single color of ink, you need to limit your rolling motion to parallel

& only slightly off-parallel, or you'll overmix your colors.)







# GRADIENTS ON TEXT & IMAGE



To create gradient-inked type, we need to

1. get the press rollers inked with a gradient, then (less obviously!)
2. **keep that gradient from merging its colors** into a single murky color.

**I'm assuming you're working on a floor Vandercook that has power oscillators:** you flip a switch and the rollers automatically oscillate (i.e. move horizontally back and forth while also rolling around), which helps distribute the ink evenly, prevent ink drying, & replenish it as it gets used. If you don't have power oscillation (i.e. you turn a crank manually not just to pull prints, but also to make your rollers turn) then you don't need to worry about this, other than: don't overdistribute the ink (merging the colors\_.





# Prep press & type



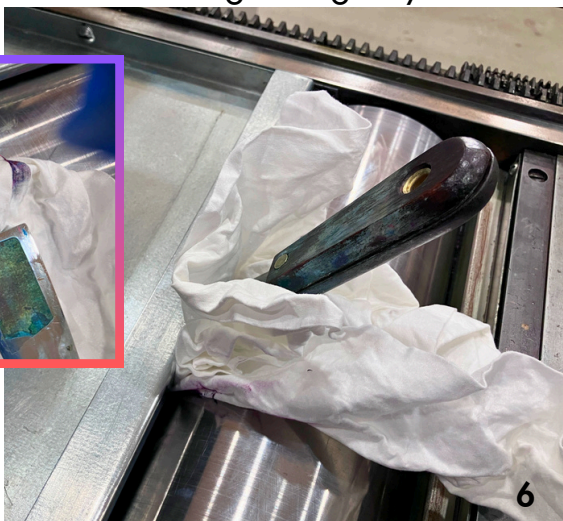
Especially if you share a communal press, or are using lighter inks (pink, yellow, white), it's worth a little extra work to make sure your press rollers & type are as clean as they can be before inking. (If you end up with dark ink from the past mixed in, you may just have to clean the whole press and start over...) This is some supposedly clean communal type I pulled from the drawer & hadn't



inked yet. I've had experience with this type before, so I cleaned it after lockup & before inking... & look at all that dark ink I pulled off, that would've messed up my rainbow gradient ink!

Similarly, **wipe the press rollers** with a clean dry rag to check if anything worrisome needs cleaning.

If you're doing something really delicate colorwise (light gray, weak pastels) you might even want to check if there's old ink stuck around the ink drum, like our local "Vandy B" is infamous for randomly regifting. You can use a palette knife covered in a rag to dig any such dried ink crust out.







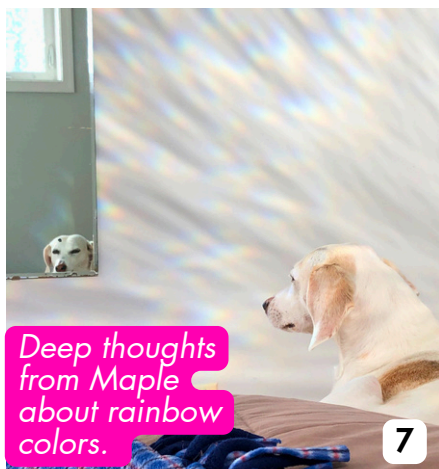
# Choose your colors



Start by trying this with just 2 colors, where you understand the 3rd color that'll result from the press blending across the 2 initial ink colors. You can eventually use a small number more, but it is easier to control & keep the inks how you want for all your prints when using fewer colors.

The reason you can't use 6 colors is that by the time the vertical rolling motion of the press rollers has smoothed and distributed the ink enough to make a good print, the sideways oscillation of the rollers against each other will have overly blurred the inks. (See the "worm gear" page later in this zine for a swap-in part that lets you defy this barrier!)

It's easier to not need to remix colors to match, if your ink runs low and you need to replenish the press. Thus, you may want to start by using color straight from the jar as-is, or mix some extra ahead of time so you know any replenishing you do will match—or mix to some clear recipe you can follow again.



*Deep thoughts  
from Maple  
about rainbow  
colors.*

I suggest starting by using 2 primary colors (e.g. red and blue), or a primary and adjacent secondary (e.g. orange and red). Or be fancy and find out—the worst thing is you hate the color (or how fast it merges into 1 color) and have to clean the press and reink it better, and maybe you learn something cool! It is probably useful to start with 2 primary colors, each on ~50% of the roller, as that might give you visually the clearest sense of what's happening to the ink.



Later, you might try adding in areas of opaque or translucent white ink, to visually understand how the pigment is being stretched across the rollers. (Just know you'll have some areas printing in transparent, white, or very pastel ink that might not be very visible on the print.) Small amounts of white ink between other colors can be helpful in controlling how the fade/blend happens, so taking the risk of a too-light area on your print when you aren't time-crunched is worth it for expanding your understanding and ability to make neat gradients.



# Applying ink to rollers

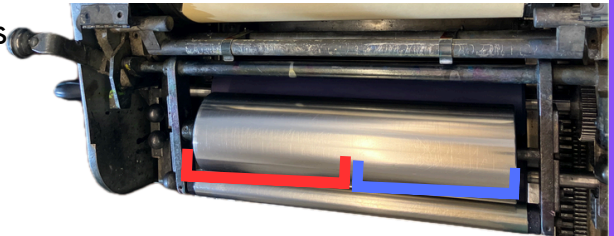


You'll want extra palette knives, so that if you need to replenish ink on the rollers, you aren't putting knives with gradient ink (even if it looks almost the same as the original ink!) back into your ink jar.

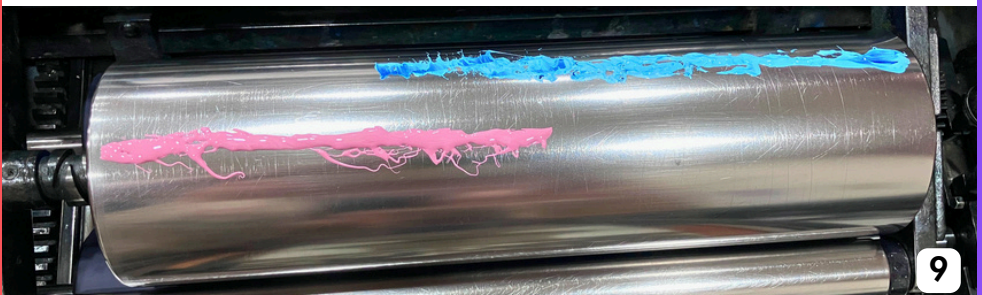


If you've got fresh uncrusty ink in the color you want, you can apply right from the jar. For my example, I'm being a little fancy by mixing up the two colors I want: a pink (lots of opaque white, a little red) & a light blue (ditto). I'll then apply from the ink slab instead of the jar.

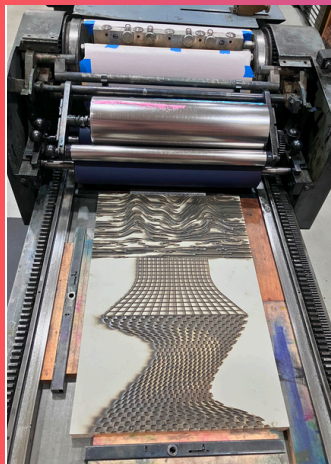
You can apply the inks so they're each horizontally ~50% of the roller:



That will give you 3 main areas of hue. Or, like I did below, overlap the lines of the 2 inks from a tiny amount, or up to this medium amount:





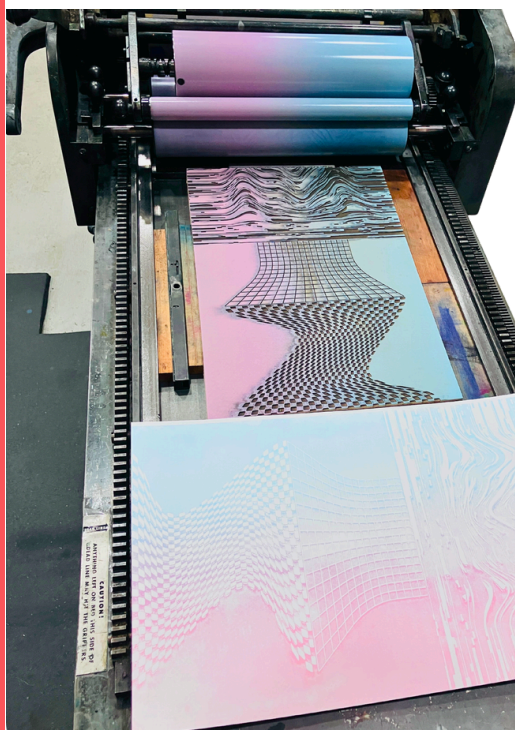


# Initial mixing

We're going to do what we normally do to ink the press: power toggle on, engage/drop the rollers down, stay in "trip" not "print". But!

Stay by the press—as soon as the ink becomes a satisfactory gradient (and has achieved the normal level of needed smoothness across the rollers), you need to turn the power OFF.

*I expected to see the blue-pink overlap area look more lavender, but instead it just looks like there's slightly more blue than pink across the rollers: →*



*Here's how the gradient looks, when inked on a linocut board & printed (note the print has been rotated 90° before being set down). If you look close you can see some blending, but mostly it's 2 colors side by side:*

**blue**

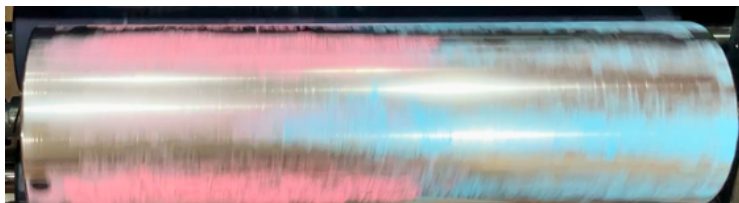
**lavender**

**pink**

Visit [tinyurl.com/rainbowink2](http://tinyurl.com/rainbowink2) to watch the press rollers spin this into a gradient—or see my notation below:

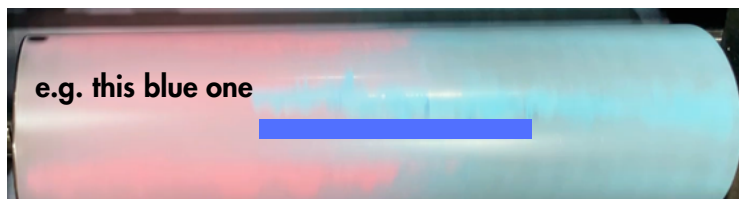
Is it ready yet???

nope



Too sticky & can still see silver roller

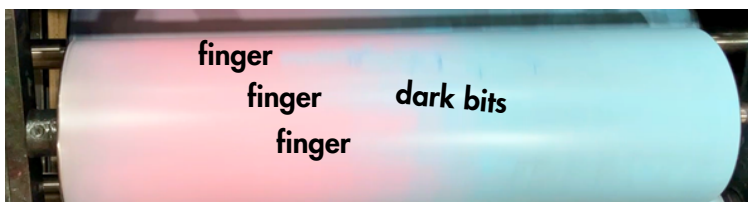
nope



e.g. this blue one

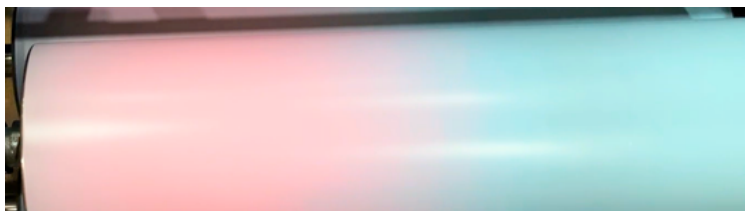
Visible raised patches of unblended color

nope



Close, but still some unmixed "finger" shapes reaching from one color unmixed into the other's area; & areas of darker blue I didn't mix well enough before applying to roller

YES



**Ready! Turn off the power.**

(Unless you want it even more blended together—wait a bit more if so. Really up to you, & you'll develop a feel for it, but eventually things get TOO blended and your print looks like it's in 1 color, possibly a nice color but sometimes kinda muddy or gray, depending on your color choices.)

# 🌈 Printing your rainbow 🌈

Go ahead and print as normal, **except that you're leaving the power turned off.**

Every once in a while, flip the power on briefly to help keep the ink well distributed from the ink reservoir through all the rollers (think 5-10 revolutions of the rollers, not multiple minutes!)—enough you're getting a similar experience to printing with the power on, but without more time than that to avoid the rollers doing that horizontal oscillation that blends the ink colors more than necessary.

*If you're using an ink that dries quicker on the press (not so usual these days) you may want to work quicker & not leave the press sitting unpowered & not printing for hours. Only worry about this if you worry about it with non-rainbow-roll printing—and the worst case is just the ink being harder to clean off the rollers when you're done, in a "more elbow grease" not "ruined press" way.*







# GRADIENTS ON SOLIDS

(i.e not on text/image; backgrounds)



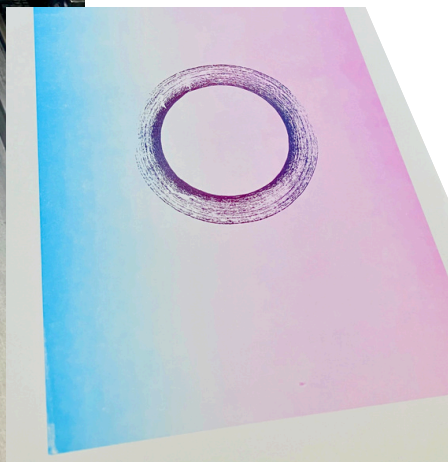
You can use a variety of materials for your board, including acrylic, aluminum, wood, craft foam on mounting. Some will create a smoother print, some will create texture (e.g. many woods). Just don't use glass! (You don't want to

shatter it under the press's hundreds of pounds and need to buy new rollers because yours have embedded glass and permanent scars.)

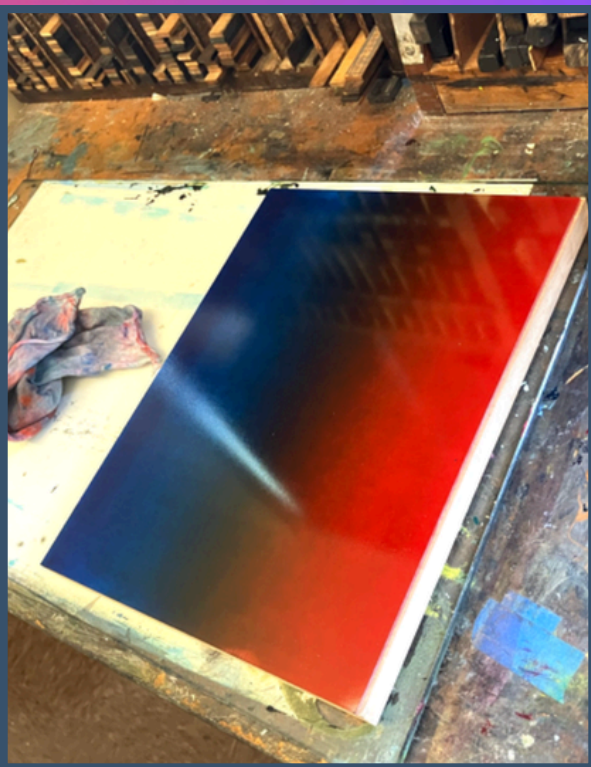
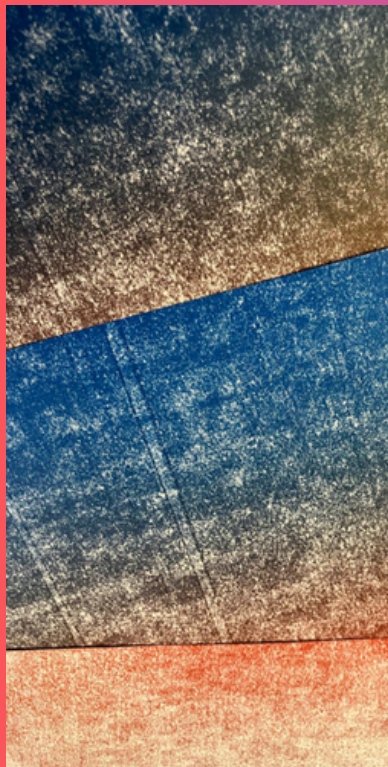


 again!

Make cool backgrounds!







A rainbow-rolled board can add gradient color & texture to your paper —which you can then print text on as normal, as I did with this quote from Hannah Alpert-Abram's powerful writing:

What I can tell you is  
You already have  
*everything you require*  
to write  
to teach  
to be a voice for your community  
Fuck credentials.

You are already  
extraordinary and  
powerful and  
valuable in this world

Hannah Alpert-Abrams



# Ink changes over the day

Here's the progression of gradient appearance as I worked on several different projects over the course of a day, sometimes adding opaque white in an attempt to brighten or pastelize the colors:



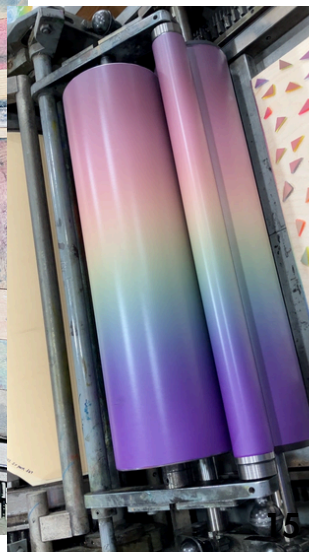
Visit [tinyurl.com/rainbowinking](https://tinyurl.com/rainbowinking) to watch the press rollers spin this into a gradient



added white ink



added more white ink







# FANCY MECHANICS:



## Cory Wasnewsky's Short Oscillator (Worm Gear)

Fantastic prints Cory Wasnewsky ([threecheerspress.bigcartel.com](http://threecheerspress.bigcartel.com)) designed this swap-in piece reducing blending/allowing more colors per gradient. The worm gear is a short grooved cylinder inside your rollers, that has either a crescent or pin move along its grooves, controlling how far the roller oscillates horizontally when moving. That's the motion that keeps your ink nicely blended, but for many-color stripes it's the enemy. Wasnewsky's short version restricts that oscillation, reducing the horizontal blending so that you can leave the press powered on but not lose your gradient—and fit in many more stripes too:



Little wormy dude I lasercut to thank Cory for his Penland class, actual oscillator in middle

(class: highly recommend, learn to print weird stuff without hurting the press, for cool print effects! how I could print cabbage & seeds!)



# See what happens!



Why not???

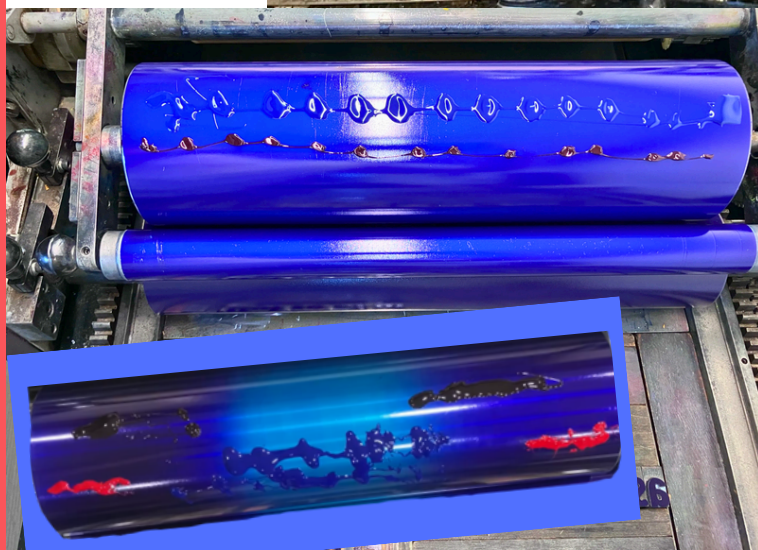
Just try stuff.

It only costs  
cleaning the  
press  
(okay, that is  
some work...)

Defy  
authority!

Embrace  
anarchy! \*

Put ink  
on top of  
previous ink!



Sincerely,  
do embrace  
anarchy,  
which is not  
"chaos" (lol)  
but systems  
that don't  
put anyone  
above  
anyone else,  
& good that  
can come  
from that.



REVOLUTION  
IS  
DOWN  
TO  
EARTH

RUN TOWARD THE FIRE

(Psst...sometimes not fully  
blending the ink looks rad too)



(hand-blended examples... stay tuned for  
a "special effects" zine where i cover a  
bunch of little things like this, eventually??)











# CALIFORNIA PiZZa TYPECASE



Special **PIZZA**  STYLE! 

Nearly everybody likes  
**PRINTING**





# Trans Pride Gradients!



INFRASTRUCTURE  
IS SOMETHING  
WE OWE TO  
ONE ANOTHER

♦ Meg  
Smith



TRANS  
JOY!  
& A LITTLE  
BREAD.



AS A TREAT



TRANS  
JOY  
& A LITTLE BREAD,  
AS A TREAT



Envision  
trans  
futures

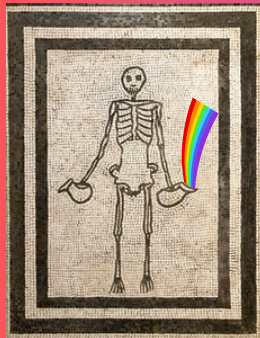


## EXAMPLES:

# More Gradients!





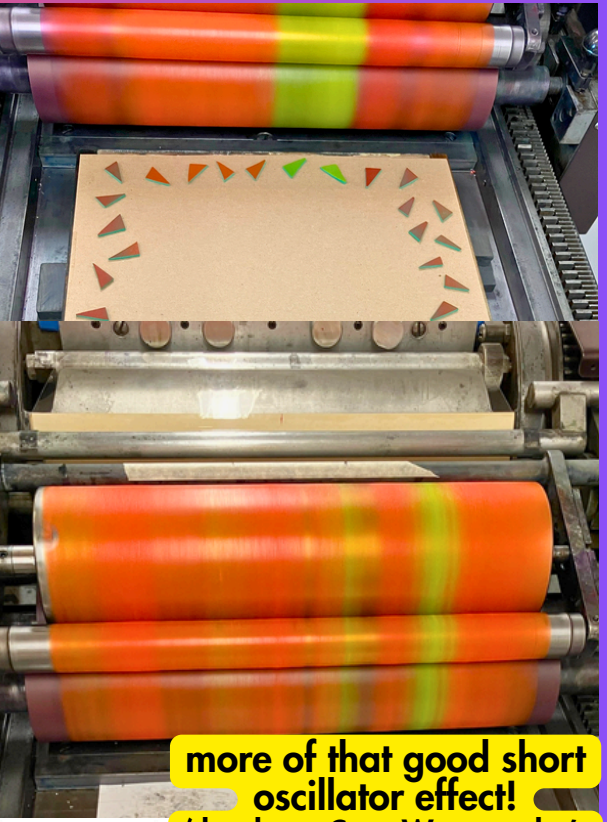


y not  
print  
more  
queer  
tho!!?!

u can







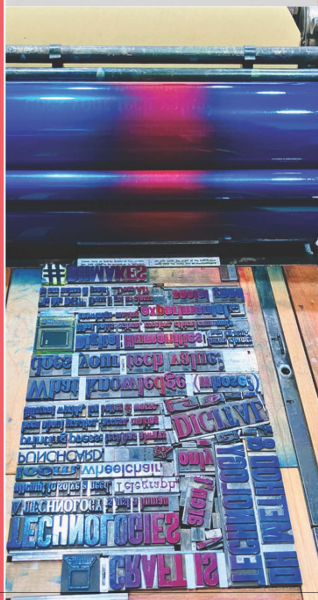
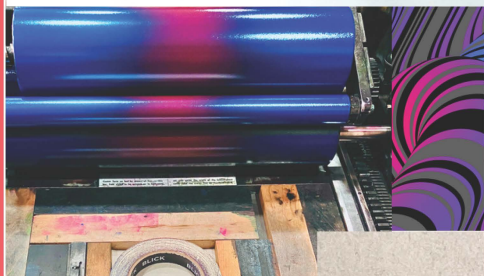
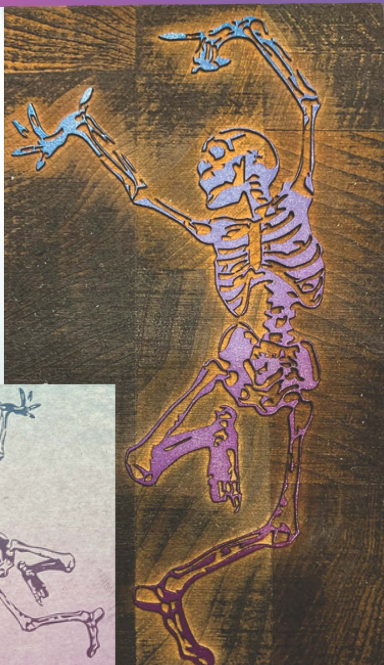
more of that good short  
oscillator effect!  
(thanks to Cory Wasnewsky's  
special worm gear)





For there is always **LIGHT**,  
 If only we're  
**BRAVE** enough to **SEE IT**,  
 If only we're  
**BRAVE** enough to **BE IT**.

— AMANDA GORMAN



**CRAFT IS TECHNOLOGIES**  
 A TECHNOLOGY is just a human attempt to solve a need. Telegraph, loom, wheelchair, PUNCHCARD, printing press: tech has always been about practice, access, making different worlds, for better & worse.

**DH METHOD & TECHNOLOGY**  
 aren't only DIGITAL

What knowledge (whose?) does your tech value?



**Digital Humanities** forms change (apps! CD-ROMs!)  
 What holds: critical, creative, ethical community knowledge-making **experimental** for

"Is this DH?" Does it get us closer to our values & goals? ...Does AI?

**social good**

**#DHMAKES**



HOPE



what if things  
were a bit easier?

IS A  
THING

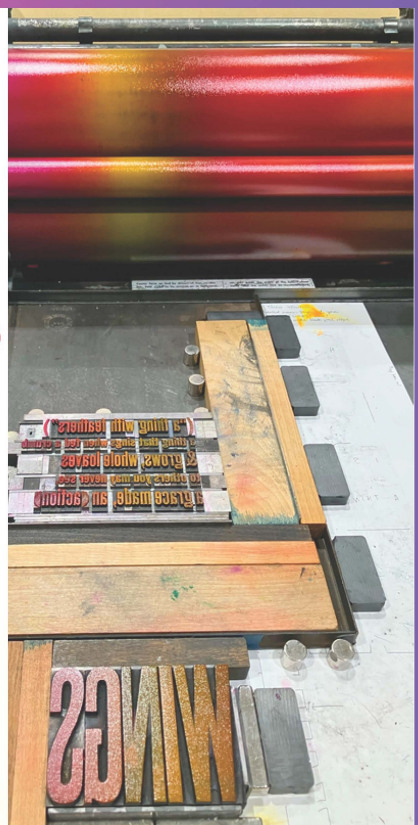
("a thing with feathers")  
a thing that sings when fed a crumb  
& grows, whole loaves  
to others you may never see,  
a grace made, an action

if we dream of what could be,  
& rise to find the  
recipe in our hands?



WITH  
WINGS

what if we have  
enough for all?



BOOKMAKERS & BINDERS



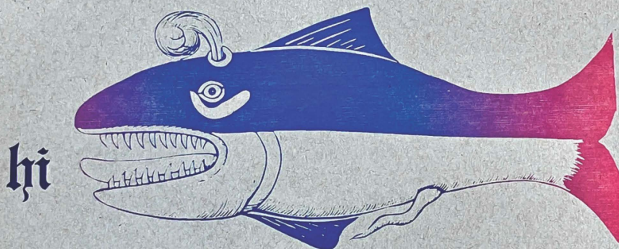
ALL  
YOU FASCISTS BOUND TO LOSE

JUSTICE  
HINGES on our

GATHERING  
BIND US TOGETHER;  
LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

# moby dick

is about **WHALES**



**DH** ★ ★ ★  
**MAKES**  
TOGETHER... & ALSO  
**DH** **SAT** IN   
**GOOD!**  
**COMPANY!**



coffee   
 code

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Speaker: \_\_\_\_\_  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Coffee: \_\_\_\_\_

coffee   
 code

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Speaker: \_\_\_\_\_  
Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
Coffee: \_\_\_\_\_



i am simply

too floof to wolf

(woof)

i am simply

too floof to wolf

(woof)

i am simply

too floof to wolf

(woof)

i am simply

too floof to wolf

(woof)

i am simply

too floof to wolf

(woof)



sunset  
gradient  
= hand  
inked!



(sun &  
sheep both  
laser-cut!)





This print's big text is all made from  
BROKEN wood type

# BROKEN

Are we Guthrie's  
"machines for  
hoping"- or are we  
the beings who,  
uniquely, self-define?

DISABLED CRAFT CRAFT.

Aesthetics

BROKEN: fruit shares its sweetness; bread, feeds more. IF TO LOVE old wood type's patina, galaxy of pits & scars is LOVE of traces of messy human use so is BROKEN TYPE doubly TREASURE.

# RELATIVE

Capitals

"Broken" is only relative to intended function, intruded by whom? for what? Free from definition-by-profit, we are known whole.

Art & Body

Each craft a plural flexible LITERACY as by any body

graaaaadient!

seeds . IF TO LOVE







# Free resource zines

This is one of a series of free zines about various letterpress topics, starting with some basics aimed at inexpensive & otherwise-accessible welcome:

Letterpress for All!  
Series  
BRIOCHEs

Free at  
[ZineBakery.com/lp4all](http://ZineBakery.com/lp4all)

And all my zines are available for free at  
[ZineBakery.com/homemade](http://ZineBakery.com/homemade):

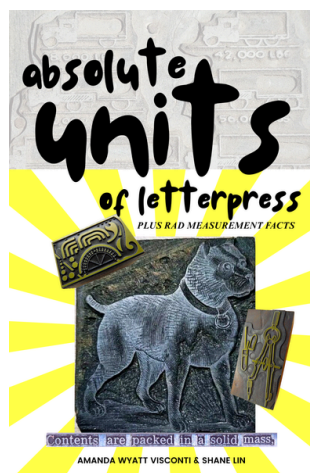
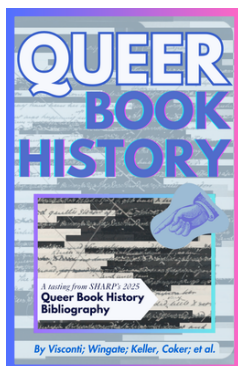
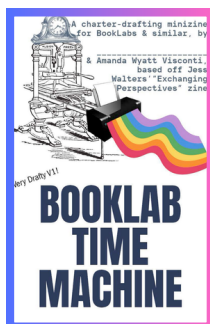
## ...& related free zines

**Look!! Here's your unusual letterpress blocks invitation to joy: a collage mini-zine**  
(Zine Bakery Hand Pie #1)

**BookLab Time Machine Minizine**  
(ZB Biscuit #3)

**Queer Book History**  
(w/collaborators; ZB Bakeshop #4)

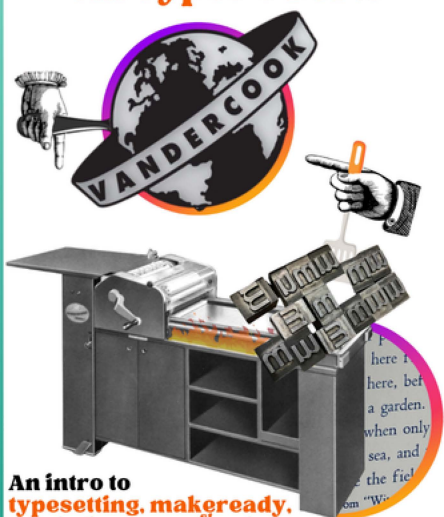
**Absolute Units of Letterpress:  
Plus Rad Measurement Facts**  
(with Shane Lin; ZB Bakeshop #5)



\* The "Letterpress for All!" series is numbered as "Zine Bakery Brioche #n" because no one can stop me from non-stop bread-related theming/scheming, especially the Zine "Bakery" excuse. 31



# Vandercookin' Letterpress for All Types & Sorts



**An intro to  
typesetting, makeready,  
& printing your 1<sup>st</sup> print  
on a >Vandercook press<**  
by Amanda Wyatt Visconti

# MY FIRST PRESS

Accessing or buying a press for letterpress printing



Amanda Wyatt Visconti



# TEXT ART NOW!

(\*WHAT\* AM I TRYING  
TO IMPRESS?)

(DO I EVEN NEED A  
PRINTING PRESS?)

Letterpress for All!  
Series  
BRIOCHE #4

Amanda Wyatt Visconti