



VINGAARDS OFFICIN

Notes from
a book printing museum
in Viborg, Denmark

by
STEEN RØNNOW

CODEX ♠ **POLARIS**

The origins of Vingaards Officin lie in the Middle Ages, when Hans Tausen, a former Franciscan friar, then royal preacher (and later bishop in Ribe) cleared the path for the Lutheran reformation in Denmark. In 1528, in order to propagate Luther's doctrines, Tausen called in a German master print-maker named Hans Wyngarthener to establish the first Danish non-Catholic printing office i Viborg, where he received royal privileges to publish the documents of the reformation.

450 yars later, in 1981, three citizens of Viborg, Mogens Brynjolf, Erik Damgaard and Henning Elving acquired parts of the apparatus of a defunct printing office in Southern Jutland, with the idea of establishing a graphic workshop where artists would be given the opportunity to work with letterpress and printmaking. From the name of Wyngarthener, joined with the tradesmen's word for a printshop, the name *Hans Vingaards Officin* was adopted.

In cooperation with Peter Seeberg, then the leader of the Viborg Diocesan Museum, Officinet (as it is called) more or less became part of that museum. For several years it existed in a hovel in the narrow

alleyway called “Navnløs” (nameless) in the official maps. When this building was sold, new workshops were established in two smaller sites, in the museum garden and a cellar room under the prison in Sct. Nicolaj Gade. In 2010 the printing office moved to more spacious premises overlooking the Søndersø lake, where the volunteer members set up the spectacular Vingaards Officin—Letterpress Museum Viborg. Outgrowing that space as well, Officinet is now located on an old farm, with spaces for linotype and letterpress, stone lithography, book binding, and an ever-expanding collection of working printing machines.

As a working museum, it is important that Vingaards Officin does not only display artifacts accompanied by explanatory texts on the wall. No—the coming generations *should experience a working printshop*: the hand composers’ diligence in spelling and aesthetics; the typesetting machinery clattering in the room; the odour of freshly moulded lead and its warmth on the fingers; the thunder of the presses and the smell of printing ink; the fulfillment of pulling from the platen press a business card composed and printed by your own hand; the printer’s

self-critical joy of having produced the exact colour and having avoided monks and friars; the engineer's dexterity and his know-how in fitting spare parts, including those of his own production; the sheen of buffed machinery; the texture and odour of the hand binders' materials and the sight and sound of book blocks giving in under the pressure of the nipping press. The visitor should be able to experience all of these things, but most of all the atmosphere of the printshop and the lives lived there, with its impact on social and family life.

The policy of receiving donations has mainly been derived from our name, *Letterpress Museum*. Accepted into the collection are all books depicting any segment of the printing business, but when it comes to machinery, the museum exclusively collects equipment related to intaglio and relief printing, tele- and photsetting and classic lithography. Machinery from 1970 and later is uninteresting, as it belongs to the "chaotic period of printing industry" and an array of different systems—often with a very short life span. Heavy investment in non-viable systems from this era cost many print shops economy, hours of labour, the joy of work,

and ultimately lead to bankruptcy. Vingaards Officin ranks among those “pockets of resistance” who pushed back against the trends of those chaotic years, offering well-functioning equipment and workshops in the older techniques, acting above all as a resource and opportunity for those who are interested in letterpress printmaking.

To do all this today, as well as in 10 or 30 years, it is necessary to have active members, who can bring life to the various techniques and use their knowledge to re-enact the narratives of the print shop to the visitors. The current challenge lies partly in the age of these members, the average of which is around 72 years; within a few years, it will be difficult to find new active members who were professionally apprenticed as composers and printers in the traditional letterpress business. The museum therefore looks for a path forward, in which its field of interest can be widened to include those who work in the field now, including commercial artists, graphic designers, art directors, photographers, and offset printers, while remaining true to the original objective of existing as a place for letterpress printmaking. Vingaards Officin will therefore begin to

collaborate with Kunstforum (Art Forum) Viborg, to bring in both new members interested in other printmaking techniques, and thereby widen the scope of activities available to guests and members of the museum.

A Codex Polaris commissioned text for

Bibliotek Nordica

2018

Set in Garamond and
printed by Vingaards Officin
Viborg, Denmark

www.vingaards-officin.dk