

CAROL CAMP

New Horizon, 2014
Acrylic, mixed media on canvas, 36 x 48 in



COURTESY: THE ARTIST

JACK SHOEMAKER

Before Catamaran

George Hitchcock
and Kayak

In the late sixties, South San Francisco and the Peninsula were filled with job printers, augmenting the work done in the city for more than a century by the fine printers for which San Francisco had become justifiably famous. There was, of course, no Silicon Valley. What was officially called “light industry” was punctuated with binderies, printers, paper warehouses, typesetters, and lithographers. The new boom in the print world was the result of increasingly inexpensive and increasingly available machinery devoted to offset printing. A brand new item, the Gestetner tabletop offset press, with its overhead projector stencil maker, had made it possible to have something in your bedroom that could reproduce high-quality pages at a decent speed. I had one in mine.

Offset printing, like its predecessor letterpress printing, ran sheet-fed, not using the giant rolls of paper later developed for general use. Sheet-fed paper, when printed, required the printer to trim off the ends of paper with giant paper cutters, the blades broader than a dining table and sharp as ice. These paper ends, the trims, sometimes forty inches across and sixteen inches high, were waste. An enterprising soul, George Hitchcock, ran his station wagon up to the backs of a few of these print shops and collected this waste as the raw material for his newly founded magazine, *Kayak*. The print shops were upgrading, and in their own minds, the old engravings and woodblocks they’d used to dress up their publications had become worn and dated, and their customers had begun to demand photographs instead. So George was able to have for the hauling boxes and boxes of these plates and blocks, which he dutifully took back to his house. The printers were glad to be rid of them, and George was entirely tickled by his score.

Using a converted treadle-operated Chandler & Price letterpress printing press, together with a cranky but adequate offset press, carefully cutting the ends of paper into useable sheets, and playing with his blocks like a large child with a secret, George produced the early issues of *Kayak* magazine. By the time I introduced myself, *Kayak* had become something of a legend (at least in George’s mind), and he was full of advice about how a print shop/publishing operation could be run on the edge, essentially “recycling” before that word had found currency. George was a big and flamboyant presence, and it was a delight to stand his awe, as he apparently wished.

His method of securing paper explained why his publications often had such an eccentric look and feel. And because pages might be printed on several different sheets, the collation of a magazine required some care, as people walked around the collation tables to gather up their allotment for stapling. So collation parties became a method and a necessity. Quite a bit of this eccentric method escaped the appearance of accident and began to take on the look of foresight and even genius. But as a bookseller, I did need to contend with the fact that my customers might return a recent issue for one that had all the pages present in the right order.

When we launched our bookshop, the Unicorn, in Isla Vista, off the campus of UCSB near Santa Barbara, we immediately started a publishing company alongside it, and often we produced postcards and broadsides of work by the poets we invited to read in the store. George was one of those. He loved our shop, thought our publishing operations were a bit grandiose, and immediately offered us a book manuscript, which we gratefully accepted. Using prints produced by hand by Gary Brown, an artist teaching at UCSB (or maybe he was still a student or TA in those days), we produced and published a large-format book of George's text, *The Dolphin with the Revolver in its Teeth*, and I think it is safe to say it was our most elaborate production to date. George continued to be a friend of the shop, generous with his advice and counsel. He was a great public reader and performer. He was certainly the first person ever to wear an ascot in Isla Vista—at least the first one without a trick-or-treat bag in his hand.

Years later, when North Point Press was getting itself organized, one of our first hires was Dave Bullen, who went on to design almost every title of the nearly four hundred we published in our dozen years. In fact, Dave and I still work together on Counterpoint Press books. When I approached him about joining North Point, Dave explained that he was a member of the West Coast Print Center and one of the founders of the magazine *Cloud Marauder*, indebted in every way to *Kayak* from format to contributors, and that he had first gotten involved in small press work by helping collate *Kayak* at parties where dedicated work was followed by dedicated drinking, and where a group of young poets were hanging out. The first issue of *Cloud* was printed on an offset press purchased

from George when he was upgrading his own equipment. And so I have reaped the benefits of my old friendship with George in several ways.

I did not see George much after he removed himself to Santa Cruz. The literary scene in San Francisco had for a few moments organized itself around a few literary magazines—*Kayak*, *City Lights*, *Contact*, the White Rabbit group—and they were somewhat antagonistic towards one another. That's another story for another time. By that time my bookselling and publishing had moved north to Berkeley, and my own literary associations had focused more on the members of the San Francisco Renaissance group—Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Robin Blaser—and on my work with Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Lew Welch. But in 2010 George's obituary brought back fond memories, and when I saw the first issue of *Catamaran* a couple of years later I thought, How wonderful! How we all go on!

Jack Shoemaker was born in California in 1946, and came of age working as a bookseller at a time of political and literary revolution on the West Coast. He has been co-founder, editor, and publisher of three major independent imprints, North Point Press, Counterpoint Press, and Shoemaker & Hoard. The list of titles published by Shoemaker traces the careers of several contemporary masters such as Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry, often from an author's first book to his last.

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Starting Over, 2014
Acrylic, Mixed Media on Canvas, 24 x 30 in



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