

SUCCESSFUL PRESS

«I have always preferred publications that are messy, unruly, and weird...»

Grayson James

How would you describe *Successful Press*, and its objectives?

Successful Press is an independent publisher. It's a way for me to help facilitate the production of the kinds of projects that I'm most excited about. I have always preferred publications that are messy, unruly, and weird, so publishing that kind of work is my main goal with *Successful Press*. That and, have fun, I guess?



©Grayson James,
A Finger Runs Along Spine

In your statement you say that you are supporting emerging artists that are “unproven, unstable, unfinished or experimental”. Could you say a word on your commitment towards the art community?

I’m aiming to build something where the artists I work with can do the kind of projects they’ve never been able to. I want the publishing process to be fun and goofy and stress-free, I want it to be the place where artists can try things they never have before, and to share work that more “formal” outlets might not. The arts community is literally the only community I’ve ever fit into, and I am deeply grateful and indebted to all of people I have met and worked with here in Toronto. In my own small way, I hope that *Successful Press* can help give back to this community.

Can you explain to our readers your common process of publishing?

Normally I’ll reach out to an artist/writer and we’ll have a meeting about what they might want to do. Then I typically forget to follow up for a couple of weeks. Once I remember, we get whatever “content” (for lack of a better word here) they want together. I’ll do a rough sequence of the publication and make a cheap maquette. We’ll meet again, and go through everything to see what the artist thinks.



©Grayson James, *From me to you*



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That happens a couple more times, and then in theory the piece is as finished as we can get it. Most of the things that I publish are photocopies that I hand bind, so once the book is ready I'll run it over to the printer, and then spend a couple of nights trimming/binding each copy.

For those who don't know the art publishing landscape, can you explain what is an open edition? And why do you choose to publish in open editions?

Open editions are great! We should all do more of them. Essentially, an open edition is an artwork that can be reproduced infinitely. For example - we all know that you can make as many copies of a photograph as you would like. In order to jack up the prices of their work, most photographers artificially limit their print runs, into what are known as editions. For example - Gregory Crewdson only ever sells his images in editions of three, so there are only ever three prints made. In contrast, works like Félix González-Torres' candy piles are an open edition (and free! He was seriously the best), because there is no point in time where the candies "run out".

« The open edition has the opportunity to live a huge range of lives; the objects pass from multiple hands, through multiple homes, and die in multiple ways. »

I've chosen this model for a couple of reasons. The first is that an open edition denies, or at the very least challenges, more intensely profit-focused models. Instead of producing a limited run of works for very high prices, I produce an unlimited run of works for very low prices. The other part of the open edition that I'm interested in is the ways in which it can contest underlying ideological structures around archives and histories. They are finicky to pin down, they are messy, and they have far more vitality than the slick coldness of a limited edition does. The open edition is a convivial and conversational art object, one that rejects the stuffiness of the archive, the farce of permanence, and the profit-motive that dictates so much of art.

According to you, what could be the added – value of an independent publisher like you for the Art community? Artists?

I think independent publishing is a vital part of an artistic community. It is one of the few opportunities artists have to make work that is actually affordable to their peers; it allows artists to build, or at least work towards, economic models that focuses on the community rather than on a select few collectors. Beyond the economics, I think (with an expanded definition of publishing here) that independent publishers allow artists to test out new ideas, to take risks, and to play, in ways that are often impossible in galleries. Thinking of the book form specifically, there's also the chance to produce a more guided experience than an installation, as one can use the relatively rigid structure of the codex to both construct and break narrative expectations. In printed matter, as well, there is a haptic intimacy that galleries can rarely afford.

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Could you explain the challenges and objectives for an independent publisher nowadays?

I mean the obvious, and by far biggest, challenge is money. People don't buy books, so every project is risky. In terms of objectives, I would agree with Breton (by way of Eva Weinmayr) that "one publishes to find comrades." The thing that brought me to publishing, and the thing that will keep me doing it, is the community and the people who are a part of it. The goal, for every project, is to help bring people together, to help them share what they're thinking about, and of course, to have fun doing it.

What drives you to work with artists?

This is a mix for me - when I reach out to artists it's normally based off of a gut reaction to their work. If I see something that feels a bit like a punch in the stomach it tends to be a good sign. I'm putting out my first call for submissions this fall, so I imagine the process will be a little more formal from this point on, but up until now it's really just been me hitting up people I think are doing good work. I'm lucky that everyone I've talked to has been on-board with everything, and amazing to work with.

What kind of relationship do you build with artists to work on a project?

I try to build a pretty close relationship; I, like most people, like to make new friends, and that often is the best part of working with artists. Beyond that, I think of myself mostly as a facilitator when working with anyone. My job is to make sure they have everything they need to make their best work, and then to help them figure out the best form for each project to take.



©Grayson James,
Anonymity Tee
modèle: Rowan

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in the stomach it tends to be a good sign.»**

What are the main influences that make up your team, your work and found your identity?

I'm lucky to have smart, compassionate, and talented friends, and I would be remiss to not acknowledge how important they have all been in helping me learn and grow and improve as a human and artist. Beyond that, I grew up in the skate/punk/graffiti worlds, which is how I came to self-publishing, and I would be lying if I denied the lasting influence those worlds have had on my practice. Beyond that, Walter Benjamin, Hito Steyerl, Judith Butler, and Félix González-Torres have all fundamentally changed the way I think about art.

What is your own definition of “printed matter”? Artist’s independent publication? Multiples?

I'm hesitant to answer this - just because no matter what I say I think I'll be wrong. For me it comes down to “Is there more than one of these? What did the artist say?” and almost always the answer is “Yeah probably that could be a multiple”. Printed matter, in theory is easier, because I'll just be pedantic and say it's matter with something printed on it - t-shirts to zines to change trays. I've always been more interested in context, intent, and action than I have in rhetoric and definitions.

How would you describe the current art publishing community in Toronto? Worldwide?

In Toronto I would describe it mostly as small - and I mean this in the best possible way. I love this city, and consider myself lucky to be a part of such a tight-knit and vibrant community. In Toronto we have the opportunity to continue building a unique and specific publishing community by building on a rich local tradition. Our economic situation provides us with the opportunity to focus more on collaboration and community than the American market, and I think that is reflected in the work local publishers put out.

According to you what should (or could) an independent publisher look like?

I think independent publishing can and should look like anything! It exists as a site that doesn't need to follow any rules, that can be chaotic and scattered, and that can deny any easy classification. Those qualities make it fun and, often, radical, especially compared to traditional sites (like commercial galleries and larger publishers). That being said, I do believe firmly in the notion that everything we do is political, and given the now explicit slide towards fascism in global politics, EVERY publisher should be thinking about what they can do to challenge, contest, and change, the status quo.

Which publishing traditions did we wish to continue, and which did we wish to challenge? How would we distribute printed matters, art publications?

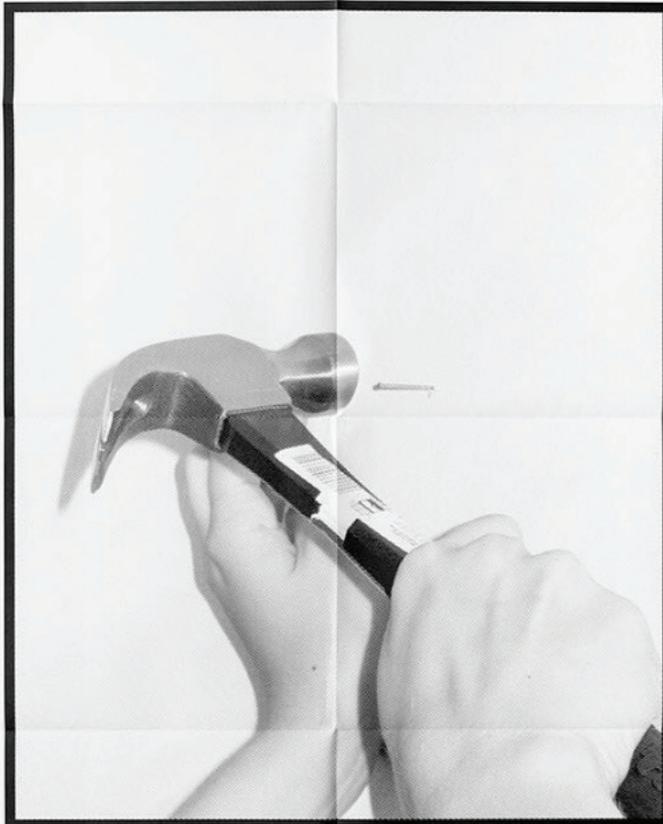
We should always be challenging everything! It is what publishing and art do best. These are ideal sites to ask "hey, why do we do this thing?" The history of independent publishing is closely intertwined with the history of radical politics, and I hope that tradition continues. I would also love to see publishers turning towards community further, and asking how they can expand what their doing to reach more diverse, and less privileged, audiences.



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HARD WORK IS



HARDLY WORTH IT

©Grayson James,
Work – poster

What are your thoughts on TOABF 2018 theme of political activism and resistance?

I think foregrounding these thoughts in the independent publishing world is crucial, and was super happy to see TOABF doing it so explicitly. We obviously live in a liminal era that is watching the effects of forty-odd years of neoliberal policy take place with disastrous consequences. The art world, and to a lesser extent, independent publishing, has been at best lazy with its critiques of this system and at worst complicit in it. I think that a reminder of the radical roots of publishing, and a refresher on how to engage in politics as cultural workers, is much needed.

Can the magazines be used as a political medium to critique and subvert the established practice of traditional institutions today? If so, how?

Aside from the more obvious means of contestation (as in didactically political works) independent publishing can propose and test alternative ideological models and provide the opportunity for self-representation (amongst many other things). Part of my attraction to the open edition, as I mentioned earlier, is because of the ways in which it facilitates a messier, more materialist, reading of history. It produces objects that can wash up at our feet, that we can take and use, and that remind us we are not alone. Magazines specifically can provide a rhetorical site for politics that might not otherwise be presented in the mainstream media - especially for writers and artists on the left.

According to you, what is the future for the independent artistic print culture?

I mean who knows! I think anything I guess for here will be proven wrong in five years.

I've been thinking lots about the ways in which digital technologies/networked culture/post-human thinking can apply to or be used in independent publishing. The internet (and who knows, maybe the blockchain?????) provide a chance for us to expand our communities and test out previously untried or unimagined models and definitions of publishing. I'm certain there are people who know more about all of those things and what they will look like than I ever will. That being said - I don't think things like zines are going anywhere. We will always need sites that circumvent and contest bourgeois media, and with the now omnipresent surveillance state, radical and militant activists will need new avenues through which they can organize - I sincerely hope this is something that independent publishing can help with.



©Grayson James, *Swan* poster

What are your expectations concerning Toronto Art Book Fair?

I'm psyched! I've been at the book fair the past two years as an attendee, and have been super impressed with it so I'm really looking forward to being a part of it this year. It's the first fair I've tabled at as Successful Press, so it feels a bit like a debut. I feel like one of those pageant mums who wants to make their kid perfect.

A few words to conclude?

I'm not sure when this is being published, but if you live in Ontario go vote! Beyond that, I think I touched on a lot of the points that are most important to me - but I'm going to plug a couple of projects quickly! I'm working with several outstanding writers on new publications for the book fair, so keep your eyes peeled for that. I've also recently launched a publication subscription. Please check out our social media for more information on all those things:

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@graysonjames.info

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Also - make zines! Publishing is cool!



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