

Vermont Arts Council

Transcript

Vermont Made, Episode 2

“The Art of the (Outside) Broadside with Kelly McMahon”

Desmond Peeples:

You're listening to Vermont Made the podcast for and about Vermont creatives. I'm your host Desmond Peeples and in this episode I speak with printmaker Kelly McMahon, owner and operator of a letterpress shop and binary in Montpelier called May Day Studio. Through May Day, Kelly designs and creates a range of paper goods from business cards and branding to custom illustrated invitations and holiday cards. But Kelly is particularly known for her poetry broadsides. What's a poetry broadside, you ask? Well, it's basically a big piece of paper with a poem printed on it. But Kelly's broadsides or anything but basic. Her broadsides

are works of visual art that interpret and enrich the poems they display.

And last year, Kelly was invited by the Kent Museum in Calais to design a broadside as part of their 20/20 Hindsight exhibit, which brought their usual indoor exhibit season outdoors in a classic COVID pivot. The installation called Outside Broadside, featured Kelly's interpretation of a poem by Vermont poet, Megan Buchanan titled "Two Odes" in a lovely display on the grounds at Kent's Corner surrounded by sculpture installations. To discuss this outside broadside I met with Kelly sort of near her studio in Montpelier. With COVID in mind, we too brought a recording setup outside to a glen behind Glover Hall on the Vermont College of Fine Arts campus where we sat upon stumps. We're going to start

with Kelly reading a short excerpt from Megan's poem. And then we'll jump into the conversation.

Kelly McMahon:

I'll read part two, the second ode. "Outdoor shower. Falling water, wooden floor and walls, trees, clouds and me getting clean, steam, rising straight into sky."

Desmond Peeples:

Can you tell me about May Day Studio? The basics.

Kelly McMahon:

The basics.

Desmond Peeples:

For the uninitiated.

Kelly McMahon:

Okay. So May Day Studio is a letterpress printing and bookbinding studio here in Montpelier. I have the... The germ of the idea came to me just after I finished graduate school. I had two job offers, one had a lot of money and one I could slide my way back into the art world. And I picked art. So ended up in Boston, which was no good and visiting friends in Montpelier found the place to be. And I had had a printing press stored in a barn for a couple of years. And managed to wrangle it up to my second floor apartment. Thanks to a really beefy brother in law. This was a small printing press. By small I mean, like 200 pounds, so yeah, I mean, like, it's like an appliance. Trying to get a refrigerator up a flight of stairs kind of thing.

Desmond Peeples:

Oh okay. And where did you acquire this 200 pound printing press?

Kelly McMahon:

So there's an elderly gentleman in western Massachusetts who has a warehouse full of letterpress goods. And he has been in the printing business since the 1950s. Was his, like, first job out of high school kind of thing. And in his twilight years, he's come to enjoy the chatting and the puttering more than the actual work. So he repairs presses and gets things ready to sell people. There aren't, because the equipment is mostly antiques, so we're talking about made in the 1800s up through about 1950, it often needs repair or it needs cleanup. And this gentleman John, he makes the connections. He knows how things get put back together and he can help you find movers and get it to you.

Kelly McMahon:

So I had this little press and I made some cute cards and put them up on Etsy while I was working my two other jobs and printed a couple of wedding invitations and things started rolling. I had the opportunity to buy bigger presses, which I couldn't fit in my apartment. So I found a studio space which if you don't live in Vermont, studio spaces in Vermont are like unicorns, they are weird and really hard to find. So, I found a space and I've been there since 2007. And now have several tons of heavy metal and no desire to move them anytime soon. So, with all of that, I was still making cards and invitations. But I also have people who wanted to learn, so I started teaching workshops. And I taught some private workshops, and was approached by VCFA to host interns from their MFA writing and publishing program. So I got to find my people.

Kelly McMahon:

I found writers who are interested in bringing their work into three dimensions, or for getting their hands dirty, all of these things I love. And then I met more people, I met more poets and worked on more projects.

Desmond Peeples:

And you're a poet yourself.

Kelly McMahon:

That's what I went to graduate school for and I say that I still take notes. Sometimes life just gets in the way. Especially because poetry is not known for coming with a livable wage.

Desmond Peeples:

It requires a lot of diverse revenue streams.

Kelly McMahon:

Diverse revenue streams, yes, absolutely. So workshops and wedding invitations and cards and teaching in the graduate program.

Desmond Peeples:

And poetry broadsides.

Kelly McMahon:

And poetry broadsides. So meeting more writers and meeting more poets, people really excited about the things that I'm excited about, which are getting words out of books. Words and books are cool, but words, on the page, words out loud, bring more people in, because somebody can close the book, and they can walk away from it. But when poetry is on the wall, you're going to stop and look at it and I love that about it. I love that we can bring really cerebral esoteric things into public spaces, and have everyone have an experience

with it. And so broadsides are really that liminal space for me, they can be cerebral and esoteric. But they can also be seen on a really basic level where somebody is really interested in the art, or they really like this color, or they hate it and it has their least favorite word in the world in it. Ever tried to print a broadside with moist, I mean, people will just like run for the hills.

Kelly McMahon:

So I love being the sort of medium between those worlds, and being able to make those connections between the writer and the art.

Desmond Peeples:

And so let's talk a bit about a particular project. This Outside Broadside, which was a collaboration between you, the Kent Museum in Calais, and the poet Megan Buchanan. So this is a broadside that was displayed on the grounds of the Kent Museum

last year. There's a squirrel! And can you talk a bit about how that project came about and the process of making those connections? Can you talk about that?

Kelly McMahon:

Sure. So one of those poets that I have connected with over the years is Mary Elder Jacobson and Mary is involved in various projects at the Kent Museum. Mary brought this poem, "Two Odes", to the folks at the Kent and said, "I think that this really connects with the theme of the year. And I know just the person to help us get it out into the world." And so Mary and the curators at the Kent brought me this poem and said, "We'd really like you to make a broadside. We'd really like you to be involved in the show this year. Here's the poem that we're thinking about, here's the theme. Here's a little bit more about the Kent. So it's 20/20 Hindsight. So the Kent Museum is a tavern out in

Calais. And not one of those pretty renovated taverns that you would tour with your leaf peeper group.

Kelly McMahon:

It is a falling down, not quite falling down. But it's a bare bones, peeling wallpaper, scratched up paint, totally unheated. They open it up for just one month. That's sort of early fall, September to October and it is a place for art installations. So they have a roster of a dozen or so artists for the show every year. And the curators work their magic create these mystical rooms, all throughout the Kent museum. So the curators came to me in early 2020, and I was like, "Yes, this sounds awesome. I love challenging myself." Not that I've ever done something that might be a fine art piece before.

Desmond Peeples:

As in?

Kelly McMahon:

Well, broadsides I think of more as everyday work. There's something that you could have on your wall, but that you might fall in and out of love with. And this is not a Pollock that you're going to spend millions of dollars on and is going to live in this room forever. There're also generally pieces that are editioned, so they're priced affordably, because there are many copies of them, so it means that everybody can own this art. So doing something more limited edition for the Kent was kind of exciting. And also thinking about their theme of new art in this very old place and they love old technology. So there's a blacksmith and a

glass artists and other kinds of sculptures and textile artists.

Kelly McMahon:

So people working with technologies that would have been around 200 years ago to make this new experience at the Kent. And we were supposed to have a studio visit in mid March. And then mid March happens and we didn't have a studio visit. So we put it off for like a month, We're like, okay, "We'll just see how this goes. And we'll get back in touch in April." And then that didn't happen. And then we really had to rethink how, I didn't have to do much rethinking, yeah, I sort of had my precis. But the curators had to figure out how to do the COVID pivot. "How do we put on a show, but make it safe for everyone to be there?" So it took a couple months of thinking. And it took some outdoor double masked socially distant visits to figure out how to display paper outside because I

couldn't do an inside show. So outside, so with new challenges.

Kelly McMahon:

So they had this window, this refrigerator glass, glass door of a refrigerator, so this old piece, and I went out to the Kent and we took a look at it and we had to figure out. So I made some recommendations, how are we going to show this? And how is it going to tie in? Is it going to work? And the curators, they are rock stars, really. I had to do much pivoting myself in the last 15 months. But anyone who has to do a big project like this, how do you pull all of this off? I am just astounded. One of the other artists in the show is a metal worker and created a little peaked roof for this refrigerator door. And he also worked with wood so he helped refinish the wood. We were able to seal the back so that it was a double sided glass. And the poem is talking about clothespins

and laundry and rain. So it's really lovely to have it outside, and we hung it on a little clothesline in this little glass enclosure.

Desmond Peeples:

On an actual clothesline.

Kelly McMahon:

On an actual little clothesline, a mini clothesline with mini clothespins.

Desmond Peeples:

Oh and then there were also these enormous clothespins somewhere else on the lawn of sculpture.

Kelly McMahon:

Yes, so another artist in the show, Flywheel Arts, which is a team of three metal and woodworkers, they created these six feet tall clothespins. And the other sculpture on that side of the lawn was some

hanging like ochre yellow panels of fabric. Very Christo and Jeanne Claude esque. Do you know Christo and Jeanne Claude?

Desmond Peeples:

No.

Kelly McMahon:

Oh my goodness.

Desmond Peeples:

Help.

Kelly McMahon:

So Christo and Jeanne Claude were, Christo has died, installation artists who work with fabrics, so they did a really famous one in New York called the Gates. Where they made these like doorways hung with panels of fabric, I think they were in like a deep orange. So the installations move, so they move in the wind and they're meant to be

interacted with. So there was an actual hanging laundry line behind my little broadsides, hanging in the antique refrigerator glass door. And it was lovely. The day that we went, the wind was blowing and there were threatening little drops of rain. And it was lovely to stand and look at this little bit of fine art in an unusual context.

Desmond Peeples:

Yeah, I recall visiting and the display of the broadside really is beautiful. Looks like an info display board in a town, like a beautiful artisan bulletin board, but on it is this beautiful poem with it's... How would you describe yours, the style of broadsides that you do? There're these visuals...

Kelly McMahon:

So I love really graphic broadsides. So big design, big color. And I also love, this is the poet in me, sneaking in that little sneaky last line where

everything turns on its head. I love something that's a little bit transformative or a little bit surprising in the art. Some folks who design broadsides really just like the text on the page, they want it very clean, they want the words to stand on their own which I also appreciate and honor, yes. Because there is room for all kinds of broadsides. As long as there's more poetry in the world, yes. But I want my art for the people. So I want someone to look at this poem, and say, "Well, that's pretty weird." Sure. But I love these little clothespins on this clothesline, and the clothespins as you sneak down the line, the structure grow feet, and the feet are dancing. They're wagging a little bit in the rain.

Desmond Peeples:

So can we talk a bit about this idea of old technology? I mean, letterpress to me, is this... Well, until I took a class.

Kelly McMahon:

Spoilers.

Desmond Peeples:

Uh huh (affirmative). Like this arcane...

Kelly McMahon:

It is a black art Desmond.

Desmond Peeples:

Oh, yeah. The power I feel. So it was obviously that for the Kent to include letterpress in these displays of other old technologies, that was kind of their idea of reaching out. That's why they wanted to reach out to you, correct?

Kelly McMahon:

Yes.

Desmond Peeples:

Yeah. And then also, earlier you were talking about the man from whom you got your first printing press. Who, from the sounds of it, is one of a few experts in that machinery. Well, now we're also sitting with one. So what is it about working with old technology that you're so drawn to?

Kelly McMahon:

Well, it won't surprise as we're talking about broadsides and public art, but I love the tactile nature, it's something about touching the paper, a little letterpress, so you can impress into the paper a little bit. And if you look at it from sort of a raking angle, you can see the impression into the paper and it makes you want to touch it and makes you want to hold it. It's like a really soft T shirt, just everything about it feels so cozy and mysterious and you wonder what in the world could have made this.

Kelly McMahon:

So letterpress 200 years ago was very practical. It was the way that you printed books, it was the way that you printed newspapers, it was how you got large bodies of text out into the world. And printing technology went through various rises and falls. But in the 1960s, less labor intensive methods started coming in. So we're talking about digital, we're talking about early computers, we're talking about offset printing, which doesn't require as many people to make it happen, doesn't require as much training. And me printing from handset type, it didn't require handset type, so there's one more tool that you don't need. So it makes books and magazines and all of that print faster and cheaper.

Kelly McMahon:

So starting in the 1970s, the artists came in and said, "I'll take that off your hands. You don't need

it anymore." They're like "Yes, get all of this 1000s of pounds of heavy metal out of my shop, because I am for the future." But the artists said, "I have some use for that." So the artists have really kept things going for the last 40 years. But we are still dependent upon that older generation for a lot of that nitty gritty knowledge. I've had to learn on the fly and I've been lucky to have a couple of mentors. But also, there are currently only two sort of shops, and I use shops in quotations, where you could go and buy this equipment and talk to somebody about it. It's not going to be like a Staples where you can go have your choice of printers, you're going to go buy a press, and you're going to buy whatever he's got, because that's what there is, no one's making anything new.

Desmond Peeples:

There are no new letterpress printing manufactories?

Kelly McMahon:

Well, there's some cool stuff happening. But no one is making really fine printing. So there's a guy who's doing some 3D printed projects, and has also designed some really basic... You have to roll on your ink by hand, there's no automation to it whatsoever. I don't print with much automation myself, but having the machine do the inking for you is a godsend. Rather than having to ink each one by hand. I don't even know if that answered your question, really.

Desmond Peeples:

I think so.

Kelly McMahon:

Kind of.

Desmond Peeples:

Yeah. Well, let's...

Kelly McMahon:

I love getting my hands dirty. And I love that setting the type for a poem allows me to get inside the poet's head, allows me to inhabit those world words. I make choices about the type that I use, I make choices about spacing between the words. So it allows me to see and to hear and to feel what the poet intended. Which also gives me more ideas for how I can elaborate and expound upon the themes, or the word choices in the poem to illustrate a broadside. It really is, I really have to get inside the poem to figure that out.

Desmond Peeples:

And yeah, I can see how this really tactile, laborious printing process creates that connection between the person actually doing the labor of

typesetting and putting this published piece together. It makes that connection between that labor and the labor of the artists whose work is being produced. In kind of contrast to receiving the file, putting it into the computer, and then zipping out a bunch of copies or whatever the...

Kelly McMahon:

Right.

Desmond Peeples:

Yeah.

Kelly McMahon:

Which also has a place in this world. I do love the people who I send digital stuff to. They do great work. But this is really me running this broadside through the press six times, doing five people's work. I mean, back in the day, there would have been somebody to edit the text, somebody to set the type, somebody to bring the type over to the

press, taking proofs, carving on linoleum blocks, then actually printing the whole thing, I mean, that's so many people's job. So I get to do that, because I'm the boss, I get to do all the work.

Desmond Peeples:

Well, let's talk technique a little bit. The specific technique that you used with Megan Buchanan's poem "Two Odes" is unique.

Kelly McMahon:

Well, it's new to me. And I love learning new things. Because it keeps me humble, I love to fail. Failure is something I talk about in my workshops a whole lot. It's so good to fail. So I tried something new. I knew that I wanted a big bold graphic image and didn't want to spend a million bucks to make it happen. So I turned to my old friend the linoleum block, and tried to reduction lino cut. So what that means is I started with a

blank sheet of the linoleum. And I knew that I wanted to come out into two and maybe three colors. So you start with the background color, or the lightest color. In this case, because I knew I wanted to print on blue paper, the color was white or a very pale blue.

Kelly McMahon:

So I printed the full image in the white or blue. So I carved and printed the clothespins so there's no detail on the clothespins in the weight. There is only the background color. So they're sort of solid, chunky blocks with just the shape carved out of them. And then I printed the full run which means I printed however many pieces of paper I wanted to end up with at the end. So the downside of the reduction lino cut is, you destroy your block with each subsequent color that you make. Not destroy them like running over it with a car, but as in this image will never be printed in this way again. So

for the second color, I carved out details, so each raindrop got the center of it carved out so I was only printing the outline in the second color, which is sort of a deeper denim blue. Got a little more detail on the clothespins. And some of the raindrops are carved away entirely so they're just sort of ghostly hanging out there in the back.

Kelly McMahon:

But again, this is it. Once you carve away I could never print that white layer again. And originally I was going to print a third color and I was going to have those little dancing shoes at the end be black. And I got through that second color. So I did the white and then the blue and decided I needed for them to be not as bold as the text, I needed the text to stand out a little bit more so that I wouldn't get lost in this field, I wanted your eye to be drawn to the text first. So that text is printed in a third pass in black, which I think allows it to stand out a

little bit more. For the paper, so this is the other part of being the bosses, you get to make all kinds of good choices.

Kelly McMahon:

I really wanted a handmade paper, I wanted a really rough textured 100% cotton. I wanted it to be like fabric as much as possible. And I was really stuck on this sort of deep sort of denim blue color, because I wanted it to be a slightly stormy sky background. And then COVID happened, and we pivot again. I couldn't get paper from Canada, which is the closest handmade paper maker. I couldn't get paper through my suppliers in New York, nothing would arrive in time. I contacted some handmade paper makers, I couldn't get anything in that time. I mean...

Desmond Peeples:

Everything going to toilet paper?

Kelly McMahon:

Well, not being able to have as many people working in the same small room means that the paper makers can't get their assistants in, which means they can't get as much done in a day, which means my tiny order keeps getting pushed off and off and off. And I don't blame the paper makers at all. Nobody foresaw this. And crazy shipping delays means that I had to leave a bunch of extra time, but even so we were bumping up against FedEx, being down in Nebraska and not being able to get my paper from the paper maker to me in Vermont. So we revise and we revise again. And I found a couple of old sheets of handmade paper in the bottom of my flat files. So the addition was different than what I had planned, and it was a different color blue than I had wanted. But...

Desmond Peeples:

You found some old sheets of [crosstalk].

Kelly McMahon:

Of handmade paper. That happened to be blue. There was kind of a bright sky blue. But they were handmade in Vermont, by Langdale Paper, which closed about 10 years ago and I still have this paper hanging around. It's very precious. So we had a really small edition on that handmade paper. And that's what was hung up for the show last year. And then I did another 25 or so on a more commercial paper, which just means like a bigger paper mill. So it doesn't have the same really rough texture that I wanted. But it means it was much more affordable, and I could print more, and people could take them away for 10 bucks. So three colors on the front, on this handmade paper, really limited edition.

Kelly McMahon:

And then my favorite part of broadsides is actually reading the end books too. I don't know if you'll like this. But I love to read the acknowledgments at the back. And I love to read the typeface that they used. And I love to read all of those silly details cataloging all of those things away in this crazy archive of my mind. So on the back of each broadside is what we call a colophon. And that is the details. That paper and the typeface and the how it was printed. Sometimes it's what press it was printed on and then everything gets individually numbered because they are a limited edition. And that's my favorite part. Because as much as I love failure, I also love process. I want to know about all of the steps that made things happen.

Desmond Peeples:

So almost like a colophon on the back is kind of an acknowledgments section, in a small...

Kelly McMahon:

It's a small acknowledgement, yes, I mean, it's acknowledgement to me because my name is on it. But also to the paper that made it happen and to the typefaces and all of those details that make up the crazy hole. Yeah.

Desmond Peeples:

Now, you mentioned that you created a small batch on commercial paper for sale. Have you already sold those? Or are you planning...

Kelly McMahon:

So the broadside, for all of you folks out there, is actually going to be hanging at the Kent again this year. And thank you to Vermont's amazing vaccination rates, we'll be able to have an inside

show this year. So, inside at the Kent this September, will be several artists, including me. So you'll get to see "Two Odes" again, plus a range of other broadsides and things. The Kent also has a little spot they call the general store, so artists who have editioned work or related work can have a little spot for sale. So if you're curious, you can pick up a broadside at the general store at the Kent as well.

Desmond Peeples:

Awesome. What dates do you think?

Kelly McMahon:

Oh, I probably should have prepared that.

Desmond Peeples:

That's okay. Well, we'll put it in the notes. No problemo.

Kelly McMahon:

I want to say it's mid September to mid October.
Yeah.

Desmond Peeples:

That makes sense.

Kelly McMahon:

That sounds about right.

Desmond Peeples:

Yeah. Okay. And do you want to say anything about the other broadsides or works that you're planning on showing? Or what do you think?

Kelly McMahon:

Well, I don't know what the curators will pick. But there will possibly be an artist book, which is sort of a broadside exploded into a sculpture. And the other broadsides, I have to get permission to use them. But hopefully, you'll see some famous

names, Major Jackson, Dede Jackson. So hopefully, you'll see some famous names up there. But they're all work that I really love doing and love getting inside of.

Desmond Peeples:

Yeah. The whole the connection between printing and poetry. I think we've talked a lot about that. But the idea of getting inside the artists mind. And well, also just you as a poet, I guess what I'm curious about is how printing has affected your own poetry. Or yeah, that's what I'm wondering.

Kelly McMahon:

That is a really good question, Desmond and I don't know if I can answer it. I think for me as a poet, I hate revising. And setting my own poems in type is the way that I get inside them even more, and I am able to edit things down to the quick in that moment. I love hearing Bianca Stone talk

about editing. She is really good at it and really diligent, and I am not, I am a lazy, lazy poet and I just want to let things go. I write it and then my soul is clear. And I'm able to walk away. But if I bring it back to the press, I get back inside it again. And I'm able to clean it up even more. Yeah. It's hard. I mean, because I could... I'm my own worst critic. I'm a lazy poet, I just want to write it and call it perfect and I know that it's not.

Desmond Peeples:

Well, that kind of reminds me of something you were saying earlier about the nature of a broadside, that it's kind of this everyday thing. Like it's a little bit more accessible than fine art, at least the way that you do it. And so kind of removing the need for the poem, or the text to be like this perfect thing and just requiring it to be a physical thing, seems like one way to kind of bridge that perfection gap or.

Kelly McMahon:

Oh yeah, you really hit me right there. That perfection really just comes back in. Part of it is my process. So letterpress, making the same thing identical, multiple copies, every single time. I mean, six passes through the press is extreme for any one project. And making sure that they all look really good every time, that's the way that I practice perfection. So I guess, writing and making broadsides, it's really just living in that moment. Maybe it's like a Polaroid. This is my Polaroid. This is my snapshot of this one moment in time. And you can breathe real deep and breathe it in, and then walk away. But if I'm putting things into books, then I do want to do a whole lot more editing.

Desmond Peeples:

Into...

Kelly McMahon:

It feels more permanent, right? A book feels more permanent,

Desmond Peeples:

Like a book that you're not producing in your press. But...

Kelly McMahon:

Right. So if I were sending out a manuscript, yes, then I would really be kicking myself in the behind to do some revision.

Desmond Peeples:

Have you workshopped? Do you join local writing groups or something? You mentioned, Bianca Stone, I know she has one.

Kelly McMahon:

No, I have not. Yeah, I know, Vermont's a really small state, but Bianca lives far away. So it's hard.

I'm sure that you'll hear this, it's hard to find that artist community out there. And poetry is such a big field. I mean, we're still like a goldfish in a very, very big pond. But there are so many different types of writing poetry. When I first moved here, for example, everyone who called themselves a poet that I met was a spoken word poet, which I most definitely am not. So it's hard to find that community. And I'm not a nature writer either, which is another thing that Vermont poets are famous for. So if you have recommendations send them Desmond.

Desmond Peeples:

Well, what kind of poet are you Kelly?

Kelly McMahon:

Everything else I guess. It's hard because I let that side of me lapse for so long trying to make art. So trying to access the poet side of me was my goal

for 2020, and then things happened. I had a writing residency lined up, I had all sorts of big plans for being able to spend more time writing and then I didn't.

Desmond Peeples:

Would you say that the when you're making broadsides of this really graphic nature that takes a lot of artistry, does that kind of activate the poet you as well? Or are those two kind of separate kinds of artistry for you?

Kelly McMahon:

I don't think they're entirely separate. But I do think that they live in their own worlds. Their neighboring galaxies perhaps. With the broadsides, I know that I am looking for impact, I know that I am looking to explain the poem at a glance to someone who may not be interested in poetry at all.

Desmond Peeples:

Would you call your broadside process ekphrastic?

Kelly McMahon:

I don't like the word.

Desmond Peeples:

It's pretty harsh.

Kelly McMahon:

It's a harsh word right?

Desmond Peeples:

For a beautiful thing.

Kelly McMahon:

Right.

Desmond Peeples:

Right.

Kelly McMahon:

But the sounds are so not good.

Desmond Peeples:

So ekphrastic being art produced in response to another piece of art. Yeah, yeah. But too harsh.

Kelly McMahon:

But it feels harsh. It doesn't feel joyous.

Desmond Peeples:

No, it doesn't capture what's actually happening. At least when I'm doing it.

Kelly McMahon:

It feels more like a mosh pit.

Desmond Peeples:

Mmhmm (affirmative), mmhmm (affirmative).

Kelly McMahon:

Right?

Desmond Peeples:

Pretty creative energy.

Kelly McMahon:

Frenetic energy. Yeah.

Desmond Peeples:

Well, I interrupted with this buzz word.

Kelly McMahon:

Yes, no, that's good. Thank you for elevating the conversation. With some bonus vocabulary there. But poetry for me it's the water running through the tap, that I have to turn on and off. So it's deeper, and it's not necessarily for the public, at first glance. Also, because I'm very shy, and it's really hard for me to get out and talk to people and like, have these conversations, and definitely not get up on stage and read. Like I did a faculty poetry reading last year at VCFA. And oh, my gosh, it just triggered all of my nerves, deep, deep imposter syndrome. Like, who am I? Who am I doing this? This is not what I'm known for. This is

not... It wasn't a place that I felt confident. Like talking to you about reduction lino cuts, I can talk to you about that for a while anyway. But talking about poetry is really hard and it's really place of vulnerability.

Desmond Peeples:

Well thank you for being vulnerable.

Kelly McMahon:

The setting also probably makes it really easy to talk. Our quiet little glen here.

Desmond Peeples:

Mmhmm (affirmative). Record in a glen folks. Well, yeah, you teach... Well, let's say before the pandemic, were you giving private lessons regularly? I know that's something you did at the studio.

Kelly McMahon:

Yeah. So teaching letterpress and block printing and press maintenance for those folks who have their own presses.

Desmond Peeples:

How many folks in the area would you say?

Kelly McMahon:

I have taught a handful of press maintenance classes, actually.

Desmond Peeples:

I'm thinking of getting one myself.

Kelly McMahon:

What?

Desmond Peeples:

Yes.

Kelly McMahon:

Because you need more skills. Yeah.

Desmond Peeples:

Mmhmm (affirmative), mmhmm (affirmative).

Kelly McMahon:

Mmhmm (affirmative).

Desmond Peeples:

I need more output, more paper on the ground.

Kelly McMahon:

You can do it.

Desmond Peeples:

Well, I'll be coming to you. For sure.

Kelly McMahon:

One of the first projects I did when I got my little press in my little second floor apartment was made tiny flyers that I put up on all labels and boards

around town. What is letterpress? And did some little type. They're little images that are cast like letters of type but they're graphic, they're image.

Desmond Peeples:

Like the big first letter on an illuminated manuscript or something?

Kelly McMahon:

Yes, like that. Or little flourish or star sort of at the end of a text.

Desmond Peeples:

A dingbat?

Kelly McMahon:

A dingbat. Here comes Desmond again with the vocabs.

Desmond Peeples:

Yeah.

Kelly McMahon:

So I decorated it with dingbats and stuff. So guerrilla art, yes. More paper out in the world. And I did get some curious emails from people after that. Mmhmm (affirmative). You could do that in your own tiny corner of Vermont for sure. Go out and make art. It helps us find each other in this crazy crazy world.

Desmond Peeples:

Well, that's our show folks. To learn more about Kelly and her work and for details on the upcoming indoor exhibit at the Kent Museum, which will have more of Kelly's broadsides. Check out the show notes on our website at vermontartscouncil.org/podcast. Vermont Made is a production of the Vermont Arts Council, the primary provider of funding advocacy and information for the arts here in Vermont. Which is the traditional and unceded territory of the Abenaki

people. And don't you forget it. Thank you for listening. And be sure to subscribe, leave us a review and tell your friends about the show.