The Book Undone:
Thirty Years of Granary Books

Kempner Gallery
Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library

*The following compendium of comments on Granary Books was gathered by exhibit curators Sarah Arkebauer and Karla Nielsen.*

**Charles Bernstein:** At Granary, books are not neutral containers but are invested with a life of their own, conceived as objects first and foremost, entering the world not as the discardable shell of some other story but piping their own tunes on their own instruments. Nothing is taken for granted — the binder is as much a star as the printer or writer. The design is an extension of (not secondary to) the content, just as the content is an extension of the design. For a book, a Granary book, is never about delivering information in the most expeditious form. Piping down the valleys of bibliophilic excess has lead to the palace of Clay — Steve Clay, Proprietor and Impresario Extraordinaire.

**Diane Bertolo:** I’ve had the great fortune to work (as designer and/or producer) with Steve Clay and a number of Granary’s crazy and talented artists and writers for many years. It’s been such a delight, I’m not even sure I should call it work. I am sure, however, that Granary Books is a treasure and Steve Clay is the wily wizard behind it all.

**Jen Bervin:** Without that marvelous intersection of “word, image and page” that Granary Books has pioneered and nourished, so much of what I create would not have germinated at all. Steve Clay’s vision and vastness is a quiet magic that inspires and works on us all, though it seems to manifest in the form of books. Jonathan William’s term for a publisher, a “custodian of snowflakes” suits Steve perfectly, if you add in the fact that his wondrous, originating weather makes them possible at all.
Bill Bissett: Steve Clay n Granary Books

Wun uv th best xperiences i evr

Had was meeting Steve Clay n

Granary Books first i did a poetree reeding he askd me 2 dew whn

He was on Prince Street n thn jump

2 latr wev all gone thru th rest uv th

80’s n th 90’s n i am at his place on Broadway he askd me 2 dew a hand paintid book 4 him with a cd

Sew i wrote Lunaria th serching

Storee uv peopul looking 4 th oral

Aisles 4 th blessings n happeeness

That wud give them it was an art

Narrativ beautiful papr thik blu

Covrs 8 1/2 x 11 — 80 pp 42 copeez

Evree day 4 months i wud hand paint using th best watr colours availabul from russia n england n th united

States th original mss drawings

N handwrittn narrativ wer printid n i

Wud paint ovr them n thru them n it

Was all recordid a long sound pome

In Charles Morrows recording studio

In New York Citee

Steev wud send me th printid copeez sum 5-7 at a time n i wud carree them with me n wher evr i

Wud go lac la hache northern bc vancouvr toronto

N send them back 2 him n he wud

Take them 2 librarees n speshul colleksyuns iul nevr 4get him saying

“its a runaway train” peopul lovd it

N i sew lovd dewing it steev was n is

Sew wundrful n i totalee compleetlee lovd dewing it Lunaria th pictorial

Serch 4 th oral aisles wun uv th best xperiences i was evr part uv evr

William Corbett: The best feature of working with Steve Clay is that he does most of the work. The several projects we have done together were begun by me and finished successfully by Steve and Granary Books. Because he has spoiled me rotten I look forward to working with him again and again.

Johanna Drucker: For a quarter of a century, Granary Books has made a unique contribution to American letters by producing works that share the innovative traditions of modernist literature, contemporary visual art, and the various hybrid formats that go under the general rubric of the artists’ book. Steve Clay’s knowledge of the literary scene is intimate and
studied, and his personal/professional commitment has informed his publishing program across the full spectrum of small and large editions. Most notably, the Granary imprint has demonstrated a consistent theoretical engagement with books as embodied instruments of aesthetic expression.

Timothy C. Ely: Steve Clay is a visionary publisher. The complex projects published under the banner of Granary Books are true gifts to the world and are things never before seen. His is an extraordinary body of work.

Max Gimblett: Steve Clay of Granary Books is the world’s foremost avant-garde book publisher. His books are absolute gems, each one honed down by months and months of preparation distilled into a lake of meaning.

It has been my deepest pleasure to work with Steve on two books and like so many of his publications they are simply masterpieces. The quality of production, depth of content, selection of the artists, all of these are the works of someone deeply and profoundly in love with the printed book.

Granary Books is a unique publishing house, universal, and totally charged with content.

Duncan Hannah: 30 years ago there was a need for a Steve Clay-type to set up a press for Arts & Letters.

Problem was, there is only ONE Steve Clay.

Fortunately for us all, Steve Clay HIMSELF stepped-up & created Granary Books. The rest is history.

Julie Harrison: Once upon a time, a young artist met the seed corn king and the couple journeyed through the thickets of life, begat two beautiful children (the Granary family), and zigzagged in sugar together. The king cultivated many friendships (and collaborations) among those he followed, and built a tower of words and pictures bound in perpetuity. The family survived on a rabbit hole of books (and other objects), danced the jig and sang distant stories. Their mottos were: “Let fly the golden birds” and “When will the book be done?".

J. Hoberman: Against all odds and counter to the supposed logic of so-called history, Steve Clay keeps bringing these beautiful book objects into the world. The man is a hero!

Vincent Katz: Steve Clay is some kind of alchemist of the book. He is someone who protects the idea ‘book,’ while assiduously putting energy behind those taking ‘the book’ to some of
its farthest limits. The thing is, Steve has the expertise and sensibility to be able to go on these journeys with the confidence of knowing where the bases and foundations are that, simultaneously, allow for unusual freedom and also the stability of landing in an actual, beautifully crafted, book-work, adding to and extending the fabulous history of artist’s books.

**Daniel Kelm:** Steve and I met at a friend’s birthday party in Western Massachusetts just after he had moved Granary to NYC. This casual meeting gave birth to a friendship and working relationship, which has now spanned more than twenty-five years and many book projects. Steve creates opportunities by spotting an interesting artist and then inviting a team of collaborators to realize the project. He has a knack for calling the right people together and eliciting their best work. Steve is a seasoned and successful publisher, contributing very substantially to the body of artists books — not bad for a quiet boy from Iowa. Thank you Steve for asking me to play.

**Alison Knowles:** Steve Clay and Granary were an invaluable source for artists and writers to share their often unorthodox material and publish them.

They didn’t necessarily do novels and essays, instead more unusual writing, poetry or works of performance artists, people not mainstream whom I would call avant-garde.

They gratefully showed Something Else Press Books and were wonderful collaborators.

**Nora Ligorano and Marshall Reese:** It makes perfect sense looking at the achievement of Granary Books’ publishing history that their splash page on the press’ first website quoted the poet Ezra Pound. Granary books are indeed “… ball(s) of light in one’s hand.” The range of writers and artists, their collaborations together are astounding. It has given both of us immense pleasure every time we’ve held a Granary book in our hands, from Buzz Specter’s torn pages in *A Passage to The Desert* by Jen Bervin. It’s hard to describe the perverse joy one feels upon turning Henrik Dresher’s latex pages in *Too Much Bliss*. With Granary Books it’s always the shock of the new.

**Kimberly Lyons:** The process of collaborating with Steve Clay along with Ed Epping and Emily Y. Ho and Tony Fitzpatrick on two books: *Mettle* (1996) and *Abracadabra* (1999), was terrific. Each step in the process of making the book was carefully mediated by the Granary bookmakers. Ed Epping mapped out in a diagram every figure in the 36-part poem *Mettle* as a thoughtful, preamble study of the poem. He used Photoshop only six years after its invention to sculpt and layer his images and a Macintosh to print on high-density paper forgoing the traditional printing processes. We came to Tony Fitzpatrick for *Abracadabra* via a lost and found pathway tracking down the artist whose found postcard image had haunted my desk side for many years. Steve Clay remained calm, organized, spontaneous,
inventive, practical, generous and humorous at every instance of what ifness and poet’s hysteria.

**Gerard Malanga:** Granary Books under Steve Clay has been publishing volumes of exceptional quality for near to 30 years now. In all that time nothing has been overlooked in the quality & details embodied in each of its books and boxed sets. But even more, in a time when the physicality of the book is being challenged, the love emanating from the Granary Books imprint will secure the tradition of the book for all time.

**Emily McVarish:** Steve Clay’s slightest moves are effective. The trust he inspires makes anything possible. He is sure-footed and generous, expanding the grounds for collaboration with every reference and book given. In my experience, Granary projects combine lucidity, consonance, and joy.

**Maureen Owen:** Granary Books is the cosmic glue that holds this lyric world together! We can only bow to Granary’s visionary voyage and the great star map of treasures it has created for us. Bow and sing for Granary a Rhapsody!

**Ron Padgett:** Some years ago I swore off writing blurbs. Sorry to be of no use to your project, which sounds terrific. Like Steve.

**Simon Pettet:** Steve Clay’s knowledge, taste, devotion, dedication, aesthetic sense, bibliochops, compositional skills, art-making skills, good humor, and probity, has resulted in something quite unique and extraordinary — the remarkable achievement of Granary Books. It’s truly an honor to be — (to quote our good friend Robert Creeley’s phrase) — “in (his) company.”

**Archie Rand:** We are grateful that Steve Clay’s Granary Books has made manifest and available evidence of the great bond that exists between artists and writers. His press has continually produced fine examples of works that would have remained underappreciated curiosities if he did not document, and even validate, that rich connecting in which painters and poets have long engaged. It is a notable accomplishment that the extent of Granary Books’s unremitting commitment has, almost single-handedly, grudgingly nudged the discourse into accommodating these collaborative activities into the larger aesthetic dialogue.

**Harry Reese:** The only thing better than working with Steve Clay as a seller of our publications was working with Steve Clay as a publisher of our creative work. Steve is widely regarded as one of the most important and valued leaders in our field, and it’s been that way for the last twenty-five years.
Jerome Rothenberg: The history of poetry in our time has also been a history of those who provide conduits & vehicles, containers & wrappers, for the physical presentation of poetry: publishers, typographers, printers, designers, or those artists-as-such who are often the collaborators in making poetry a visible, even a visual, art. With regard to that, Steve Clay’s Granary Books, as a press & resource, is exemplary of how poets & related artists in the post-World War Two era were able to establish shadow institutions that operated, nearly successfully, outside the frame of any & all self-proclaimed poetic mainstreams. The books that Granary published, while bringing together poets & artists in the work that many of us practice in common, have been beautiful & always consequential, & in their making Clay has not only been a master publisher but a true fellow artist for all who have worked with him.

Edward Sanders: What a treasure is Granary Books and its founder and moving force, Steve Clay. His erudition, sense of History, and calm yet very Energetic creativity, make his Granary Books so lastingly important and “in the Vortex.”

Kyle Schlesinger: A Secret Location on the Lower East Side, edited by Steve Clay and Rodney Phillips, sent me on an enthralling journey that hasn’t stopped. I am forever indebted to Steve for cutting me loose in this wild, ecstatic terrain.

Carolee Schneemann: Steve Clay, being a hands-on visionary publisher, conceived of a rare printing for my image/text, Vulvas Morphia. We designed a unique layout for the enlarged image vocabulary with its incisive text. Following the sensuous dynamics of this work, it was printed on heavy grey stock. I wanted a crimson velvet cover for the book, which seemed unlikely, but Steve found the remnants of a velvet fabric that by magical coincidence covered each book exactly.

Francie Shaw: Working with Granary’s Playing Bodies with Steve Clay was a fortuitously timed event for Bob [Perelman] and I. Steve had invited me to do an artist book earlier. I had done the “Dino” paintings in 1999. Then, when Bob decided to write poems for each of the 52 paintings, it seemed the perfect project for a book. Like us, Steve was interested in a trade book rather than a collectors’ book, so that worked out well. From a distance, it seems like it was very complicated and it was more complicated in the old days before it was all done digitally. Steve wanted to make sure it came out right and we are glad. Thank you Steve, for giving us this opportunity!

Jane Sherry: Steve Clay of Granary Books was so much fun to work with on my limited-edition book, Venus Unbound. He was very responsive to my vision of the world and the expert craftspeople whom we worked with were also very tuned into the subject matter of the book and responded with magnificent supportive work. It was a collaborative project that Steve shepherded into being with great humor, patience and generosity.
I feel very lucky to have had a book published by the Granary Books. Steve's enduring vision of an intelligent art world has been like a beacon amidst a sea of commodified art.

**Buzz Spector:** What can you say about a friend who would let you turn hundreds of his shelved books around so that their white fore-edges would imitate a National Geographic photograph of Iguazu Falls?

Granary published my torn book edition, *A Passage*, in 1995. The printing and binding were done a year earlier but Steve waited patiently while I excised, leaf by leaf, half of the edition's total material output. Who could ask for a better publisher than one willing to support the most hands-on editing ever?

**Ian Tyson:** Working with, or for, Granary books is a very rewarding experience. Steve Clay is a consistent, clear-sighted editor and collaborator. However his main attribute is that he CARES about books. He cares about their content, how they are printed and on what kind of paper, how they are bound and above all that they contribute something to the world.

It is one of the privileges of my life to have known Steve as a dealer, publisher, collaborator, and friend.

**Erica Van Horn and Simon Cutts:**

WROUGHT

*for the flyleaf of a Granary Book*

*Erica Van Horn & Simon Cutts 2015*
Anne Waldman: Granary Books is one of the smartest, most elegant and salient interventions on our recent literary landscape. Its scholarship and inspired ethos on the part of editor Steve Clay has been prolific and encompassing. Granary has captured and unleashed numerous books covering post-modern experimental worlds of poetry, small press publishing, visual art, cross-genre collaboration and archival documentation. From its nexus one feels the throb of cultural activism at work, necessary to the lifeblood of discourse, and survival of art and intellect. These books, these objects, have an extended life, each so different from the next but always they tremble, they sing, they educate, they enter our mindstream and startle us with awakened imagination.

Rosmarie Waldrop: Granary Books is a national treasure. There is no other publisher so aware of the book as book, both material object and “spiritual instrument” (to quote Jerome Rothenberg). Each Granary book is a celebration.

Lewis Warsh: I worked on four book projects with Granary, and I’m forever grateful to Steve Clay for his thoughtfulness, generosity, clarity of vision, and devotion, the totality of all the care he brought to each publication. Of special note is The Angel Hair Anthology, which I co-edited with Anne Waldman, and which reprints the texts of numerous limited-edition books that Anne and I published with Angel Hair from 1966–1978. It was a book only Granary would do — one of many of Steve's great archival projects, and one close to my heart. He also initiated the collaborative work, Debtor's Prison, which Julie Harrison and I worked on together, and which would not have seen the light of day without Steve's inspiration and support. Our first book together was a limited-edition of a 1-copy artist’s book that I created — a kind of memoir of a summer in Maine, Bustin’s Island ’68, and it was Steve's idea to include original prints of archival photographs in each of the 75 copies. Finally, Inseparable: Poems 1995–2005, another book that’s meant a lot to me. Also of great importance is his remarkable annotated checklist of many of the independent presses and magazines of the 1950–1990 period, A Secret Location on the Lower East Side. I know I’m not alone in saying that Steve's luminosity of spirit has made a positive and lasting difference over the last three decades — in my life and in the literary world I think of as “home."

Marjorie Welish: From the treasury of BILD TEXT, encouraging all loose ‘canon,’ come these artifacts, for which we grateful artists give thanks to our publisher and friend.

www.granarybooks.com