

Lit Centers: Community By the Book

BY JUDITH ROSEN

MySpace. FaceBook. Gather. The opportunities to gather in cyberspace are immense, but one vestige of old-fashioned community building is still thriving. "There's so much coming together in a virtual space," says Fred Dewey, executive director of Beyond Baroque, the literary/arts center in Venice, Calif., "that it remains vitally important for people to come together in other ways. That's why our logo is a palm tree coming out of a book, not a laptop." By making a space for literature in a concrete way, Beyond Baroque and dozens of other literary centers around the country create an audience for literature and serve as an incubator for writers. Some offer readings, films, concerts and art exhibits. Others promote citywide reading programs or make poetry and literature available through archives, bookstores and workshops.

Thirty-nine-year-old Beyond Baroque does all of the above—and then some. It has a hundred readings a year, free workshops that even the homeless can attend, a 35,000-title chapbook/small press archive and a bookstore where books are never returned. But one program that makes the country's oldest center stand out is publishing books under its own imprint, Beyond Baroque Books.

From the start, Beyond Baroque has been linked with the written word; its name comes from the newsprint zine published by founder George Drury Smith in 1968. For many years Beyond Baroque kept a Letraset machine upstairs in the Old Town Hall, which has long

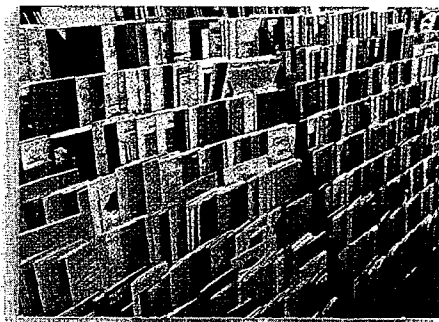
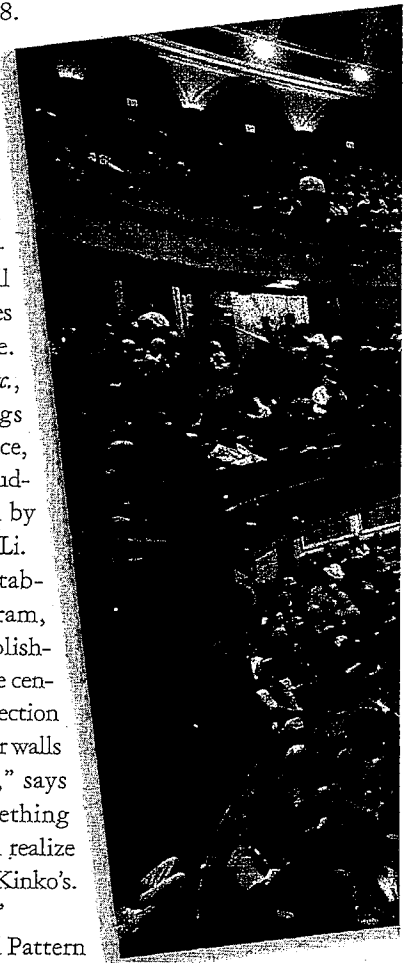
been its home, and people would come to set their books, recalls Fred Dewey, who founded the press in 1998.

"I see Beyond Baroque as a nonprofit version of San Francisco [bookseller and publisher] City Lights Books, or City Lights South," says Dewey. To date the center has published 19 books, and Small Press Distribution handles distribution to the trade. The most recent, *Truth, Etc.*, brings together writings from Israel, Mexico, France, Germany and China, including poems in translation by Jean-Luc Godard and Yan Li.

Despite having an established publishing program, Dewey advocates self-publishing. And over the years, the center has amassed a large collection of chapbooks. "We have four walls dedicated to chapbooks," says Dewey. "Hopefully, something will spark and people will realize that they can go down to Kinko's. It's not so hard to publish."

Milwaukee's Woodland Pattern Book Center, founded in 1979,

houses one of the stores of any literary art gallery, exhibitions, artist talks, writing workshop, a catalyst, putting small press literature. Anne Kingsbury (www.woodlandpattern.com) which is open evenings and stocks more titles, is central to mission.



The poetry a wall and a half, art of chapbooks displayed as fine press drawings, broadsides. Its staff before literary projects.

Chapbook display at Woodland Pattern's bookstore.

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