

Press Release: Tara Publishing Handmade Books



Taking on the Giants

In a climate of declining independent publishing and global takeovers, Tara Publishing, India, presents a pioneering initiative at this year's Frankfurt Book Fair – the book made entirely by hand, which returns the feel, smell, and beauty of ink on paper. We use locally available skills and resources to come up with a product impossible for the giants of the industry to emulate. This year, our master printers C. Arumugam and T.S. Manikandan have been invited on the Indian Guest of Honour program to show visitors the skill and precision that goes into every stage of the book-making process.

Each page of every book they create in their workshop is screen printed and bound by hand on handmade paper, making each page an original print. These are not esoteric artists' volumes: they are individually made, but match the price and consistency of mass produced books. The challenge lies in how many times a book has to be handled, while still maintaining precision and perfection. On an average, the printer pulls the ink over a screen placed on the paper about 100 times to make one 32-page book with three colours. That's half a million pulls for a book with a print run of 5000 copies. Over the last decade, we've created over 120,000 such books.

The idea is a daring one, and we are proud to say that we have been successful not only in finding an appreciative and growing market, but also in winning several prestigious international awards. We've sold a record number of rights world-wide, including a special handmade series for the J. Paul Getty museum. As an instance of a creative response to global challenges facing the book industry, we think book lovers and professionals who visit the Frankfurt Book Fair will be intrigued by our demonstration of what is possible.

We believe that the process of re-inventing traditional skills in the service of fine contemporary bookmaking has led to the book itself being redefined as a cultural object. When authors, artists and book designers work closely with an organised community of book craftsmen, they merge modern notions of art and authorship with an older sense of bookmaking itself as a craft.

People and Beginnings

Tara's handmade printing unit is run by C. Arumugam, invited to demonstrate his craft this year at the Frankfurt Fair. The son of a subsistence farmer from a small village in South India, he learnt his skills entirely on the job, silk-screening business cards in a tiny room that he shared with 6 others. His equipment was all in one tin trunk which he stored under his bed.

In 1995, he met Gita Wolf who had just started Tara Publishing. Impressed by the quality and precision of his work, she asked him if he would like to print a children's picture book using the silk-screen process. Agreeing to what was clearly an experimental effort, Arumugam went about securing a small house to carry out the project. It turned into *The Very Hungry Lion*, an exquisite picture book using the Warli style of tribal art painting from Western India, screen printed in three vivid colours on handmade paper manufactured in Pondicherry.

With a few pages from the book, Gita Wolf came to the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1996, and managed to sell the rights to Annick Press, a Canadian publisher who wanted 8,000 copies, handmade in India. *The Very Hungry Lion* went on to become an international success, winning first prize in the prestigious Alcuin Citation for Excellence in Book Design. Published amongst others by Seuil in France and Novib in Holland, Tara Publishing has made over 35,000 copies of this title entirely by hand, a project which took over a year to complete.



The handmade printing unit – managed by Arumugam – has of course grown since its beginnings. Now offering training and employment to a dozen skilled artisans from local villages, it is run entirely on a fair trade basis. The craftsmen live and work in a commune, sharing all household tasks.

Tara Publishing

Tara Publishing has been called India's most innovative publisher – apart from our handmade books, our list ranges from children's books to visual arts, fiction and non-fiction. Tara's books have been published in 17 countries, with rights to over 75% of our titles sold in the international market. We constantly explore new forms of the book, and ways of bringing marginalised visions to our readers – by creating unexpected contexts for traditional genius to gain a contemporary form. www.tarabooks.com

Handmade Book Awards

- **2006** Honourable Mention: Independent Publishers Awards - *The Legend of the Fish*
- **2005** Winner: Association of American University Presses Competition - *Sophocles' Oedipus*
- **2005** Notable Book Award, American Library Association - *Tiger on a Tree*
- **2005** New York Book Show Award - *Tiger on a Tree*
- **2002** Special mention, White Raven's Catalogue of world's best children's books - *In the Dark*
- **2002** Western Book Exhibition Award - *Sophocles' Antigone*
- **2002** Museum Publication Design Competition: Honorable Mention - *Sophocles' Antigone*
- **2002** Independent Publishers Award, USA : Outstanding Book of the Year (Best Bookcraftsmanship) - *Sophocles' Antigone*
- **1999** The Biennale of Illustrations Bratislava - *HenSparrow Turns Purple*
- **1999** The Biennale of Illustrations Bratislava - *Tiger on a Tree*
- **1997** Star from the French Union of Culture and Libraries for Excellence in the Genre - *Tiger On a Tree*
- **1996** The Alcuin Citation for Excellence in Book Design, Canada, First in the Children's Book Category - *The Very Hungry Lion*

For more details, images, or to schedule interviews,
contact Shalini Umachandran (shalini@tarabooks.com)
or Ross Fulton (ross.fulton@tarabooks.com).
Call us at our office: +91-44-24401696
or at the Frankfurt Book Fair: +49 174 7709 484
www.tarabooks.com

