

About David Esslemont

Artist, designer, printer, bookbinder & publisher

David Esslemont is an artist who makes books, by hand. His current passion for food and cooking have lead to a string of “food” books – visual narratives that include *Pizza from Scratch*, *Taxi Driver Curry* and his prize-winning *Chili: a recipe*.

Esslemont was born in Northumberland, England in 1953 and studied Fine Art (painting) at the Central School of Art and Design in London (now The University of the Arts). He was Artistic Director of the University of Wales Gregynog Press from 1985–97 and has won many book design awards including the Felice Feliciano International Award for Book Design in 1991.

His work can be found in both private and public collections worldwide, (his archive to 2005 is held at the University of Iowa.) He now lives in northeast Iowa.

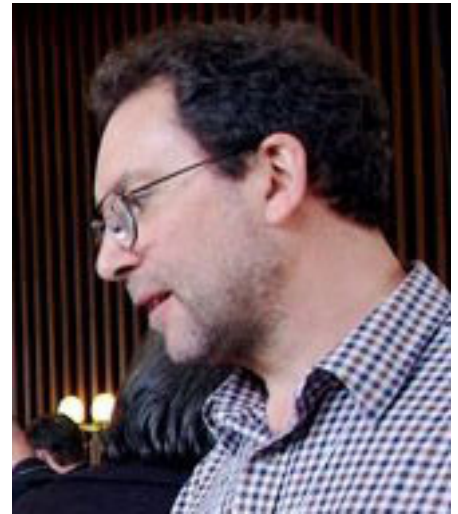
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His many honours include the *Printmaking Today* “Innovation in Printmaking Award” for *Chili: a Recipe* and “Best of Show Award”, also for *Chili*, in the exhibition “Feast” (23Sandy Gallery, Portland, OR, 2013). *Inside the Book* was chosen as the set book in the Open-Set Fine Binding Competition (American Academy of Bookbinding, 2017) – Esslemont was also one of the judges. His books and fine bindings have been included in numerous exhibitions such as: “InsideOUT” (Designer Bookbinders UK, 2014–15), “Feast” and “Marking Time” (Guild of Book Workers, 2009–11). He has won the Limited Edition Category at the British Book Design and Production Awards several times.

Esslemont has lectured widely in the U.K. and U.S.A., and his work can be found in both private and public collections worldwide. His archive to 2005 is held at the University of Iowa. He has been artist-in-residence with the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, England, and Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA) in Minneapolis.

His paintings, drawings and prints explore the relationship of elements in both the natural landscape and the abstract world. Often transforming and juxtaposing detailed images to create large scale montages in work such as ‘To Autumn’, where they become the background for lyrical calligraphy that further transform into a book.

His bindings have become blank canvases of leather or paper and increasingly his book art is moving beyond the covers to the walls and while the textual element may still be referenced, it is visual forms that are currently predominant.



Fine printing in Wales

From 1985 to 1997 Esslemont was Controller (managing and artistic director) of the Gregynog Press in Wales. At Gregynog he designed and printed several prize-winning books including *Giraldus Cambrensis* for which he won the Felice Feliciano Award. He commissioned artists to illustrate the books, many of which have become sought-after collector's items. At Gregynog he was responsible not only for the design and printing but also the strategic development, marketing and general management.

Design

As a designer Esslemont has worked on a variety projects: from book design for the British Library to a new visual identity for the University of Wales Swansea, and a book stamp for the Bodleian Library's Department of Special Collections.

Bookbinding

From the outset Esslemont has also bound his own books in full leather, quarter leather and designed fine bindings, often with gold tooling.

Solmentes Press

Esslemont established his first press in 1978 in Newcastle upon Tyne, England and hand-printed, bound and published a number of books including several with wood engravings by Thomas Bewick. The imprint Solmentes Press was first used for *Inside the Book* in 2002.

His first books were hand-printed from metal type on a Columbian press, then a Heidelberg Cylinder and today they are still printed letterpress, but from photopolymer plates on an Ostrander Seymour "Extra Heavy" iron hand press. Inkjet printers are also used. The subject matter of Esslemont's books range from bibliography to poetry.

Above all there is a desire to make distinctive, elegant books that are a delight to all the senses. The choice of materials and attention to detail reveal a passion for books and a respect for, and knowledge of, the history of books and printing.

He is a member of the Double Crown Club and the Wynkyn de Worde Society.

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