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The Best in Book Arts

Recognized for their contributions to book arts — the activity to which they have devoted their lives and careers — Harry and Sandra Reese have received the 2015 Oscar Lewis Award from the Book Club of California.

Harry Reese is a longtime faculty member in the Department of Art at UC Santa Barbara, and he founded the book arts program within the College of Creative Studies. His wife, Sandra Liddell Reese, has frequently taught book arts courses on campus. Together the Reeses are Turkey Press, a limited-edition, fine press printer and publisher in Isla Vista.

They accepted the award during a special ceremony at the Book Club of California in San Francisco. The Reeses share the honor with historical geographer and author Gray Brechin, who was recognized for his contributions to Western history.

“Making books is a quiet art that doesn’t get a lot of attention or fanfare in a large-scale way,” Harry Reese said. “There are only a few awards in this field, and this is one that Sandra and I feel honored to receive. It’s for not one work in particular but in recognition of our contributions to book arts, and we feel pretty good about that.

“We have produced work for some time, and I’ve taught for a long time, too, and I feel very good about the success of students who have come through the book arts program here at UCSB,” Reese added. “They have had interesting lives and experiences that their studies and dedication to their work have helped bring about. I feel very good about having been a part of that for the students and this award, for

me, in some ways recognizes the teaching and the interest that we've had in giving something back to the field."

The award is named for Oscar Lewis, a historian who, Reese said, "had a longtime interest in the literary life of California and the history of the book in California." Providing a nice twist of serendipity, Lewis and Harry Reese share a personal connection: The former's grandnephew, William F. Lewis, is a longtime friend of the latter; they both graduated from UCSB, and Reese once visited the historian in San Francisco after an introduction from his grandnephew.

"So this award is also a nice coming around of circumstance, a deeply enjoyable moment, for that reason as well," said Reese, who earned a bachelor's degree in political science (1968) and a master's degree in religious studies from UCSB (1971) and a master's of fine arts in creative writing from Brown University (1975).

It was during his years at Brown that Reese first began making books as an extension of studying poetry and its visual shape on the page. He became enamored of the process, as it brought together his lifelong interests in books and writing with a newfound affection for hands-on design, image-making and production.

Such was the start of Turkey Press, which, along with its sister imprint, Edition Reese, is now among the finest publishers of its kind. Featuring handmade paper, typography and design, traditional and experimental prints, innovative book structures and collaborations with artists, poets and writers, their publications can be found in major libraries, museums and private collections around the world. The Turkey Press archives were purchased by the Getty Research Institute in 1992.

Reese has taught print, papermaking, book art, visual literacy and media ecology at UCSB since 1978. He served as chair of the Department of Art from 1996 to 2000 and again in 2004. He now co-directs, with Linda Ekstrom, the College of Creative Studies program in book arts that he established in 1985.

Reese has received grants and awards from a number of organizations, including the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, the Nevada Arts Council and the American Institute of Graphic Arts. His limited-edition artist's book, "Funagainstawake," was published by Granary Books (New York, New York) in 1997. Since 1991, he has worked on temporary and permanent public art projects in California, Arizona, Nevada, North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida.

Sandra Liddell Reese got her first lesson in printing from her husband, who was still just learning himself. She is now considered one of the top printers and binders in the country.

“California has a long tradition of printers and publishers who have made books with high production values — good papers, classical typography or typographic arrangement that is the product of a lot of study and scrutiny,” Harry Reese said. “We certainly feel honored to be part of that tradition.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.