

CHANGING HOW ART IS MADE

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PHOTOS BY
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VSU MERGES OLD-SCHOOL
TECHNIQUES AND
NEW TECHNOLOGY TO
REVOLUTIONIZE CREATIVE
INSTRUCTION

VALDOSTA STATE MAGAZINE

Valdosta State University's Department of Art and Design is exploring what happens when longstanding, even ancient, art forms fuse with modern technology and how digital methods of art can be informed by technology dating back hundreds, even thousands, of years.

The collision of old and new technologies across a large swath of creative processes — from graphic design and digital animation to figure drawing and printmaking to ceramics and metalsmithing — is providing art students with increased opportunities for innovation and artistic depth.

In Evelyn Davis-Walker's beginning graphic design course, students are not allowed to touch a computer for the first four weeks of the class. Instead, they learn the anatomy of a letter with help from a machine that revolutionized the printing industry centuries ago — the letterpress.

The letterpress, invented in the 1400s and widely used until the mid-1900s, involves rolling ink onto prearranged blocks of wood, metal, or rubber letters and then pressing that type onto paper. The process of setting the type and prepping the letterpress so that it prints just right on the paper is a detailed, tedious process that requires much concentration.

"Within the graphic design curriculum, typography is the foundation of good visual communication," said Davis-Walker, professor of art. "If you're using the wrong type or do not know how to set type well, it doesn't matter how great your graphics are. The communication tends to not translate. I want to ensure students understand how to communicate with letterforms."

Davis-Walker also wants her students to understand how images and messages were created before computers and gain insight into the evolution of the art form they are studying.

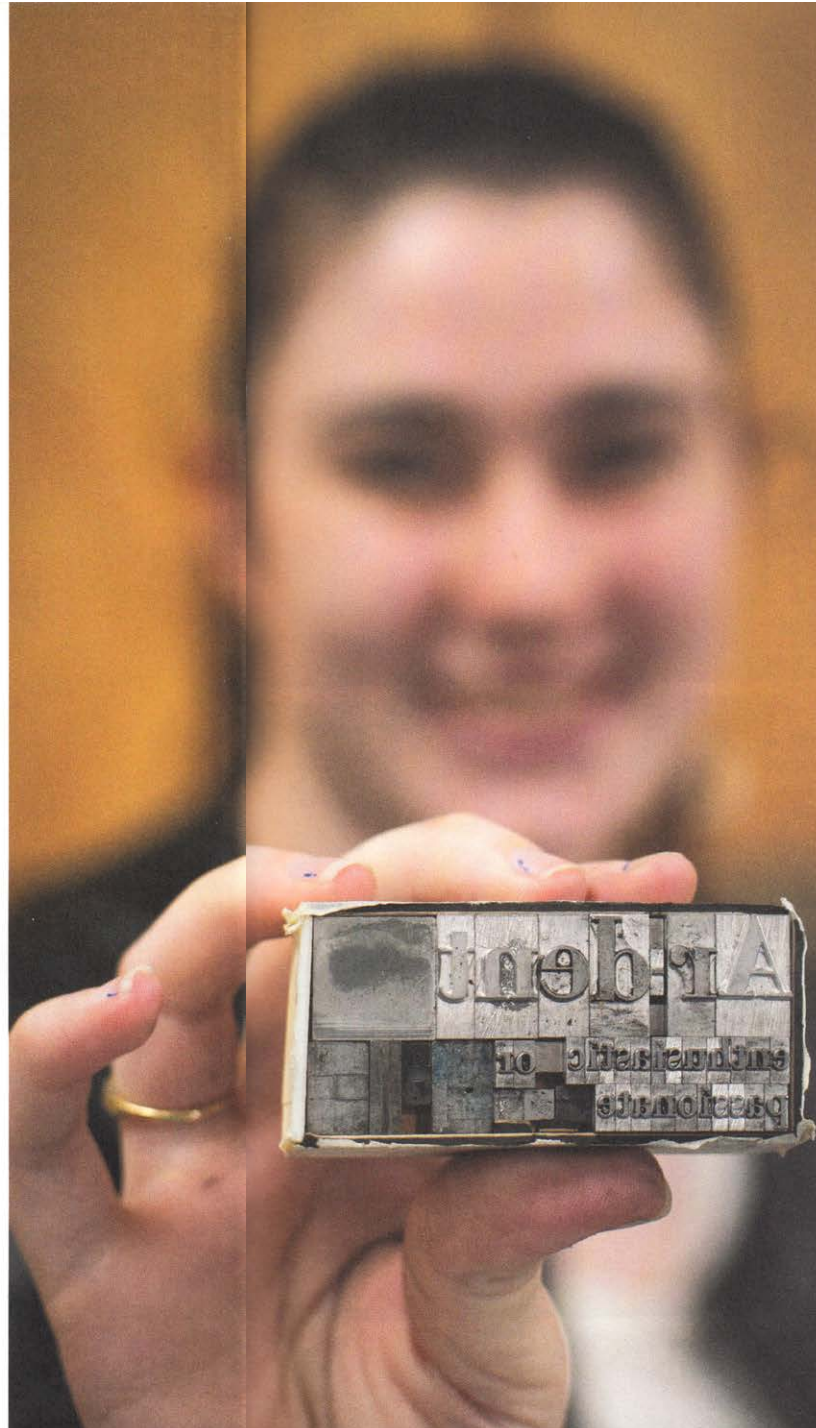
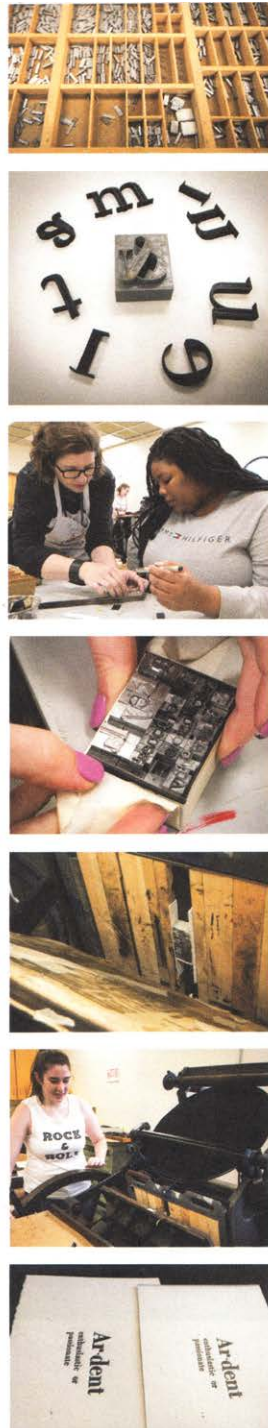
"I believe everything is interrelated and interconnected," she said. "Knowing that, I have a hard time letting go of things that people have chosen are obsolete or out of date because I believe there's a history involved in them. Whatever one learns, even if it was from 100 years ago, can be related and re-contextualized for more of a modern approach."

The twist with the letterpress is that Davis-Walker is using a three-dimensional printer to create plastic blocks of type to be used with the letterpress, effectively merging a 21st century technology with a 15th century one. The type is first designed digitally and then printed over the course of a couple hours. Eventually students may be able to design their own fonts and print them, giving them their own set of custom letters.

"People assume that I'm just anti-technology, but I'm absolutely not," Davis-Walker said. "I'm here trying to make both the old and new coexist in a way that no one's ever done before. As an educator, that's my job, to tell people what's been done, what we're doing right now, and how can we make something new."

"The people who built those presses were amazing engineers who created a whole system of gears that worked on an automated level before we even had any type of electricity. So I try to engage students with the past and make them excited about what you can do with the future without feeling like you have to leave the past behind."

What comes out of that process are problem solvers who can succeed in any profession, Davis-Walker said.



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"Every career needs problem solvers," she said. "If students are asked to think about something in a non-linear, non-traditional way, and they're used to that experience as a way to solve their own assignment problems, then maybe they can apply that in their careers."

Davis-Walker's three-dimensional printer is just one of many three-dimensional printers and scanners Hollis Barnett, recently retired head of the Department of Art, purchased in early 2018 in a push to integrate newer technology into as many artistic disciplines as possible.

ONLINE SPOTLIGHT ARTICLE

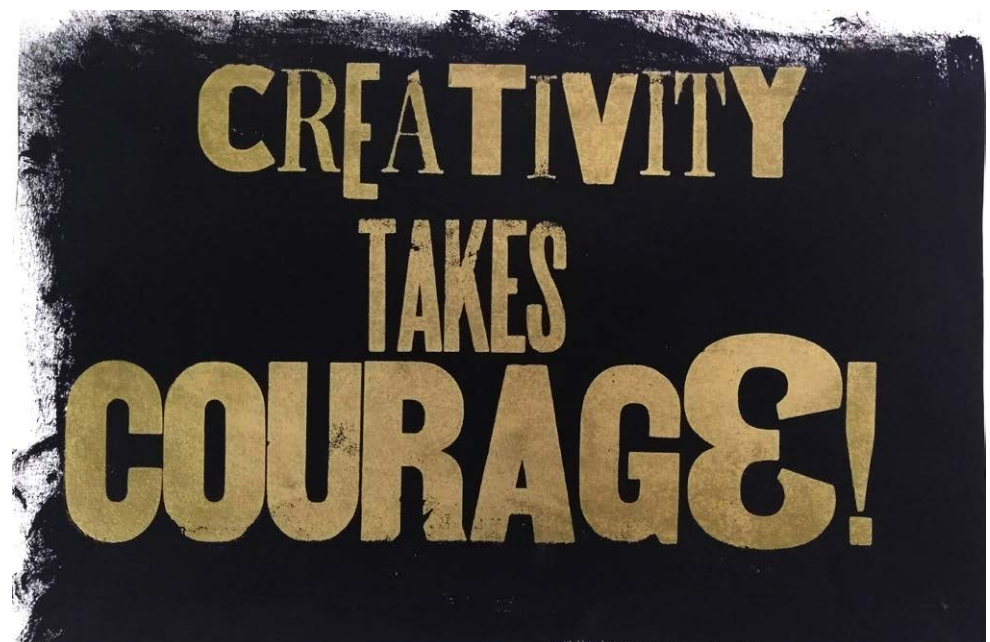
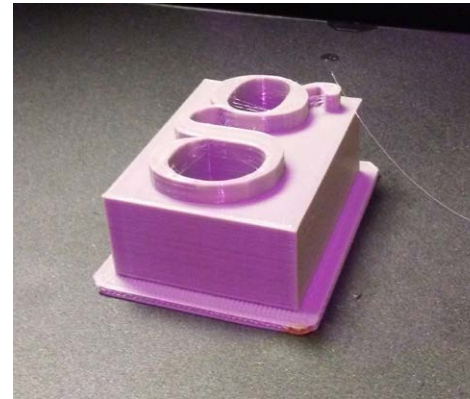
Changing How Art is Made: Graphic Design

An in-depth one-on-one interview about my integration of 3D Technology (3D Printers and Laser Cutters) with traditional printing presses from the 1800-1900s.

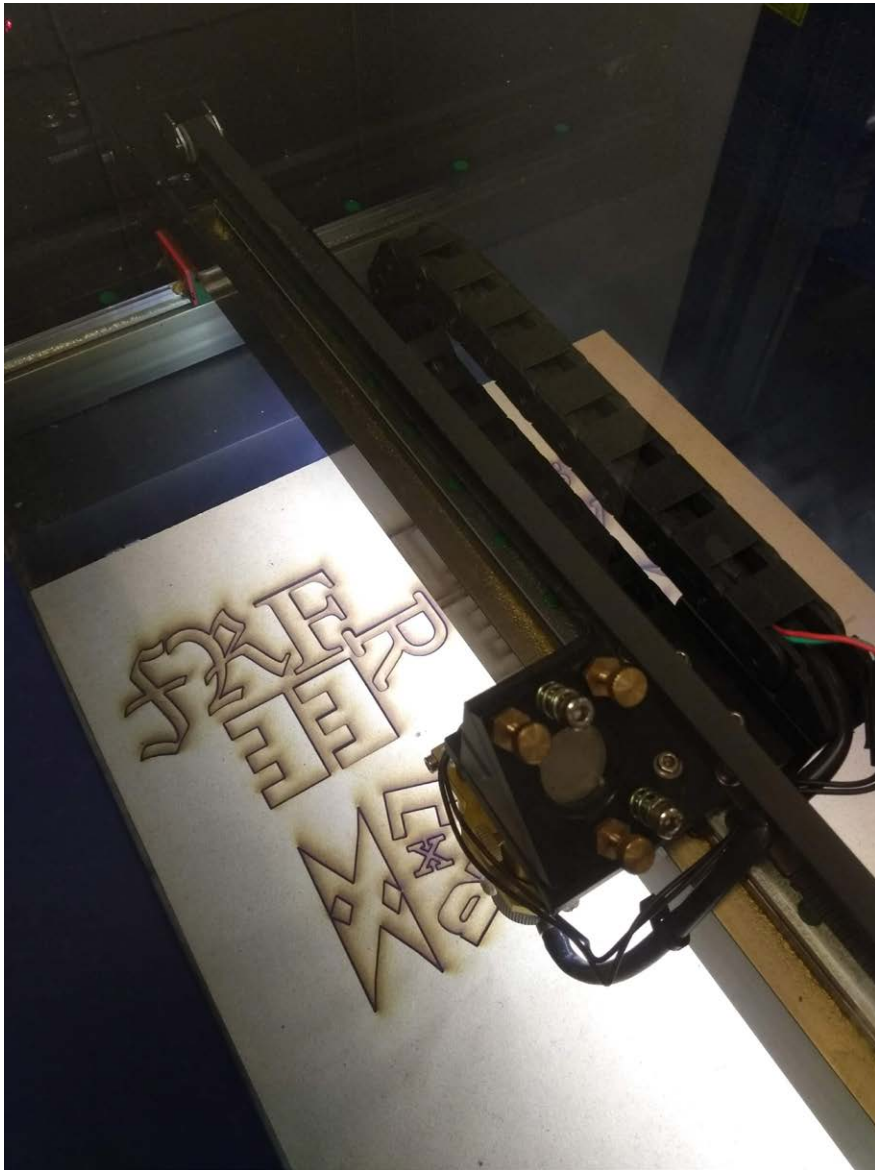
Please visit: <https://valdosta-state-university.foleon.com/strategic-content/art/graphic-design/>

EVELYN DAVIS-WALKER (*Communication Design Educators Nominee*)

3D Printed letterforms made custom for use in late 19th century letterpress machine.



Student work examples of letterpress printing in ART 3091 with found letterforms.



Examples of laser cutting wood blocks for use as custom printing plates in our 19th century letterpress machines.

PROCESS PROJECT (First four weeks of ART 3091 Graphic Design)

