

**QUESTIONS
ABOUT COLPA PRESS,
PUBLISHING
HOUSE
LUCA ANTONUCCI
AND CARISSA POTTER
SAN FRANCISCO,
CA, USA**

HIGH CONCEPT
LOW BUDGET

COLPA Press¹ is a publishing company specializing in hand-made art books and limited edition prints.

I.C.
D.A.B.

What do you think about the title “I can do anything badly”?

Luca
Antonucci

It’s actually quite relevant to the way I, and I think Carissa, work. Although at times I am forced to be more careful. I’ve always seen printmaking as an exercise in quality and repeatability. So quality often takes second priority in our projects. This isn’t to say that we make ugly things, but COLPA has always been about high concept/low cost so it sort of fits into our philosophy. Also, I never want to turn something away because it doesn’t fit into our typical understanding of a print or a book. We will always give it a shot.

Carissa
Potter

Getting things done is always really hard. Starting projects is hard. Sometimes it seems like to get things done, you just have to do them by any means you can, and sometimes that in itself alone is a success. I think that we work in a way that forces us to comprise on form. Since we often let the idea shape the form, we get caught using materials or techniques that we are not experts

in. When I read the title, I think it is so hopeful. Yet realistic. A nice combo.

I.C.
D.A.B.

How can you define the COLPA Press? When and where did the project take place? What is Edicola?

Luca
Antonucci

As I said before, low cost/high concept; and what I mean by that is that we want to provide an entry point to collecting art work and publications/prints

are the most effective medium for this . When Carissa and I started COLPA I think we were kind of pushing against a lot of the preciousness that we saw in our field. Not that it all doesn't have a place. It does. We just wanted to print for artists and help them get their artwork out there. That is what led to Edicola as well, a newsstand we ran on Market and 6th St in San Francisco, where we sold art books, limited edition prints, and distributed a free monthly newspaper called Gazzetta.

That lasted two years.

Carissa
Potter

I don't think Luca and I set out to be business owners, I think that at the time, we were both working at a blue chip gallery. As artists we felt it was really important to contribute to the art market and continue the dialogue with other artists.

COLPA was kind of a way to do this. We thought we would make affordable art, while working with artists. We would make things that we could buy on our meagre wages. Both Luca and I really love meeting new people and get really worked up/inspired by new ideas. It is so much fun to see them actualized, and to be a part of their process. When we originally thought about Edicola, I pictured a space where we could just talk about stuff that was interesting and try to sell some work to help other artists out. It was at a time when I was feeling really rejected by the art world, and would have rather created opportunities for other people, since I had few coming in. I thought also that it would be wonderful to be on the streets and actually talk to people who knew nothing about art. I thought the project really held true to my ideals on what art should be and how it should function, in a communal sense.

I.C.
D.A.B.

Do you relate the activity of COLPA Press to "Do it Yourself"? Why or why not?

Yes. Because mostly I do it myself and when Carissa and I were working together we mostly did it ourselves with the help of our interns. But to answer your question more significantly, I think the aesthetic of Do it Yourself is something I often push against but the philosophy is a great

one. I always want to approach projects as an amateur and never as a professional. It leaves the whole world of art making open to you even if you can't perfect it.

Carissa
Potter

I do and I don't. As Luca said, we mostly have to do everything ourselves. I am not sure if that is by choice, however. I love the idea that anyone can do anything. And I really believe it is true with some time and effort and a little cash. I also would love to pay people to make nice things. So in that sense, I am working against having to do everything myself. I think creating jobs, or having others help, is a lovely concept. However, I think it is important to understand your limits, and I try not to be absolutist about anything anymore. I think that if we had lots of funds, we might do things differently, or then again, maybe not.

I.C.
D.A.B.

What need is COLPA responding to? Is it contesting something?

Luca
Antonucci

To say we are contesting something would be to say that something is lacking in the art/art book world. I would rather say that I believe that the relationship between art books and exhibitions should be challenged. That we should always

think about why to make a publication and not a painting or a sculpture, and in some cases a publication that is a painting or sculpture. I admire many people in my field who have done this and continue to do so, from Seth Siegelaub to The Thing (by Jonn Herschend and Will Rogan). COLPA is just trying to add something interesting to the conversation.

I.C.
D.A.B.

Do you relate your ways of production and distribution of arts and knowledges to an economical, political, scientific or artistic drive?

Luca
Antonucci

I suppose I relate it to an artistic drive. Meaning, I believe that an art practice should always question basic functions and modes of operation.

That everything is negotiable, malleable. That there is no right way to do anything. There is always a balance of form and function but that changes with every project. To say that we operate under a philosophy is complicated. I work with people I admire and I try and push them out of their comfort zone.

Carissa
Potter

I think that the way that I work is from a point of longing for connection. I want to have meaningful relationships

and push social boundaries to make meaning. It also seems to make me feel good to help others out and make things. It is all selfish in the end, perhaps.

I.C.
D.A.B.

To what extent is COLPA Press autonomous? In what ways have you achieved autonomy, and in what ways are you still searching for it?

Luca
Antonucci

I have no intention of being completely autonomous. COLPA can only survive on the loving community it has around it and we often ask a lot of the people around us. I love to fantasize about a shop that is complete with every device or a distribution model that is thorough but in reality, I don't think that we would operate as well without the vagabond aspect of our work. I know this sounds simplistic but we can accomplish so much more as a group. If I can Riso and you can offset. We can Riso and offset. We try to share our knowledge as much as possible and learn from others as well. For example, for the exhibition at the Berkeley Art Museum, *The Possible*, we are helping setup and run the print shop and teaching people how to use some of the equipment while learning other techniques, as well as working with artists to print projects.



- I.C.
D.A.B. Where do the techniques of printing and of collecting texts, objects and contributions come from?

What methods of classifications do you adopt?

Luca Antonucci

As a collector, I buy books. I am interested in books that are aesthetically appealing or I suppose you could say beautiful. The child in me wants this book. But I try not to permit myself to buy it unless I am especially compelled by the content, and by that I mean that the project is carried out within the book. This doesn't have to be an all or nothing situation. There can be reference and writing about other sites, but I am most interested in a publication expanding a body of work or creating a new body of work, rather than cataloging one. Those are the books I buy, and the work I try to make and it's nothing new. I think every designer/artist is looking for the perfect marriage of form and function.

- I.C.
D.A.B. How would you define creativity in this context of being a publisher?

- Luca Antonucci

Ideas dictate everything for me. If you have an idea you believe in, then everything else is already decided from binding to print quality to finishing. I try to let the idea guide me and the artist I am working with through every project. For example, David Kasprzak and I just finished his book Minimalist Sculptures Found in a ULINE Catalog, and we wanted to follow the aesthetics of a 70s-80s conceptual/minimalist catalog while acknowledging the shipping aesthetic and using it in our materials. I think that the balance of those two is what makes the book so great. It is wrestling with two visual languages and resting somewhere in between. The idea is the only reason for this. Creativity is listening to your ideas.

- I.C.
D.A.B. What do you see as the relationship between Do It Yourself ethos and the community, activities, and objects that gave form to COLPA Press? What are your thoughts on the relation between individuality and community in the context of research and sharing knowledge more broadly?

Luca Antonucci

I would say that collaboration and the sharing of ideas is the most important characteristic of art



making. If you work on something and have something to say your work will always be yours. I try not to think about representing myself accurately but instead on how I can use my particular skills and ideas to contribute to an artwork. I think community is often misrepresented in art. It's not for everyone but it's not exclusive either. It's for people who are invested in the work itself. Not the community. The work is everything. It takes priority. This is not necessarily artists but people who take the time to want to participate in any way, whether it's productive or destructive.

I.C.
D.A.B.

How is knowledge and experience transmitted among the group? In terms of “the group” as a social concept as well as “the group” as the collaboration that shaped and maintained the COLPA Press. Is it important?

Luca
Antonucci

I think Carissa and I started working together as a group because we thought print was the most effective way to communicate with a larger group. You can't collaborate with the entire community so you have to choose a few people that compliment but also challenge your practice.

Carissa taught me everything I know about traditional printmaking and from there I was able to develop my own practice. But more importantly, her ideas are so different from mine (where they come from, the motivation behind aesthetic decisions) that it often has me question my decisions, which is important.

I.C.
D.A.B.

How important is it for COLPA Press to be both the producer (printer), and a direct distributor/retailer (through Edicola, your website, and book fairs)? What are the constraints, difficulties and necessities to work with retailers?

Luca
Antonucci

Working with retailers is tough because they take a percentage of the sale. This, of course, is necessary but with companies like COLPA that can barely cover their own end, and get by on a project-to-project basis, we have to balance our distribution between retailers and selling our own work through fairs or directly through our website. Edicola was another way to do this but grew to something more than that. It's a good problem to have. You are forced to think creatively about something other than just making art or printing. Distribution models and retail become



an art project of their own. When I look for retailers to sell COLPA work, I look for stores that really make sense for what we make. I like the idea of having a wider audience but it's only worth it if those books are placed in the right hands so to speak. And I don't mean this in an exclusive way. It's more that you wouldn't sell toys in a tobacco shop.

I.C.
D.A.B.

What is your relation to hierarchy in this project? By what types of hierarchies do you feel either constrained or motivated?

Luca
Antonucci

Hierarchies are funny things. We are very interested in them. Constraints are also good. All great art is made under and against constraints. COLPA recently participated in the LA Art Book Fair, organized by Printed Matter and it is very important to us to bring conceptual art books made with DIY zine techniques there. That way the conversation is always present. I want books to be a part of something and at the same time fighting against it. I want publications to be self-aware. If you look at art publishing as a binary system, which you never should, with zine on one side and art book on the other, COLPA is always looking to ride the fence.

I.C.
D.A.B.

What is your personal strategy for sustaining your practice of publishing from an economical point of view, in a long-term perspective?

Luca Antonucci

My priority is always to make good work. Sometimes I fail but it's something I always strive for. I am a romantic in the sense that I believe if you make good work your customer will find you. Ideas do not belong to us. They are shared between thousands of people or sometimes just 50 or 100. Being a publisher is about being able to estimate those numbers while believing in your artists and supporting them along the way. People often think too much about making money and it leads them towards bad decisions. But I suppose that this isn't much help to anyone or a bit obvious. I'll try and rectify. I think what is equally important is being interested in other people's work. A community is defined by a group of people sharing knowledge and ideas. If you invest yourself in other's work, they will invest in yours and then you are half of the way there.

I.C.
D.A.B.

How does this project of publishing interact or interfere with both of your practices as artists?

Luca
Antonucci

At this point, they are almost indistinguishable from each other. I still make work under my name and not COLPA but it always involves an element of COLPA in it, whether that is publishing or not. Meaning that my artistic practice is also one of collaboration and there the two don't feel different so why try and separate it. I think the important thing is to make whatever you want to make. It just so happens that this is something I thought of sometimes and other times not.

I.C.
D.A.B.

In what ways is your desire to record and conserve your methods, objects, and actions based on a desire to transmit them? In that sense, are you more concerned with the past, present, or future?

Luca
Antonucci

I think that when any artist is making anything they are thinking about how best to communicate their thoughts. We are bound by the fact that we are social beings. This is part of being an artist or a publisher. How can we learn from mistakes we made in the past and make better decisions for the future? My friend and collaborator Daniel and I always talk about filling the gaps of history. In a way, we are always finding these empty

spaces, and telling stories in them, so that they can be filled and we can move on.

I.C.
D.A.B.

What are the difficulties in sustaining the publishing of COLPA? What were the difficulties encountered in the project Edicola, especially in terms of interaction with the most general and random street audience?

Luca
Antonucci

The difficulty is always money. We have been fortunate to be supported by the community here in the Bay Area and in the places we have visited but as a country we just don't give that much money to the arts and that makes it difficult to survive. I always hope that there are just enough people around that are interested in what we are doing to keep it going. Edicola was a success and failure in this aspect. We discovered a community of artists who wanted to be represented in our little shop and forged some great friendships. We also discovered a group of people who were interested in all this work and didn't know where to get it. But we also found that a lot of people would just walk by with no interest or time to spend looking at art books on a sidewalk. I try not to think about those people. I try to concentrate on the people who are interested, even mildly.

I.C.
D.A.B.

Do you think your methods could be extended on a large scale, if they are not already? To what extent or for how long do you think they would keep their autonomy without being standardized into more efficient modes of mass-production or distribution? How would your methods need to change in order to be mass producible? Would that be of any interest to you or would it change the goal of the project?

Luca
Antonucci

I think it all depends on the project. Some times it makes sense to print a flyer and hand it out on the street. Flyers are beautiful. The sloppiness of their carbon copy. The original having shifted slightly on the scanner bed. The way people take things when they are free. The way people handle books when they cost 5, 10 or 2,000 dollars. It's all interesting. If there was a project that came along and it seemed like the best way to communicate the idea was to print 10,000 copies and distribute them globally I would do it. The idea is to be open to whatever could possibly happen and fail where you will. I don't think COLPA would be betraying itself if we became a larger publisher. Our mission would remain: The marriage of production and concept.

I.C.
D.A.B.

How has working as a duo of associates made your project stronger or more challenging? How are conflict and decision-making dealt with in this context?

Luca
Antonucci

My time spent working with Carissa was invaluable. I learned so much from her and we thrived off each other for almost three years. That comes with a boat load of problems. Butting heads, fighting, crying, making up and everything in between. We tried to just let the work make decisions for us when this happened. We often failed but hopefully learned every step of the way. I cherish the moments that we can work together now that we are running separate operations. They feel more intentional. I like to think that overtime we have learned how to collaborate on projects where our participation makes sense. Where we can use our friendship and skills to accomplish something.

¹

COLPAPress is now a partnership between David Kasprzak and Luca Antonucci.

ONCEPT COST

Learning by doing is a shared responsibility

