



Staff photos by GARY CORONINI

A late 1800s F. Wesel Manufacturing Co. hand press (right) and other printing devices are part of the display at the Arthur and Mata Jaffe Center for the Book Arts at FAU in Boca Raton.

FAU's rare editions additions

You can judge
a book by its cover
in Arthur Jaffe's collection
of 10,000 volumes
selected for their status as
aesthetic objects.



LITERARY WORKS OF ART: Items on display in the collection include the *Book of Common Prayer* by artist Miriam Schaer (front), which is a transfer on dyed paper, cut by hand, and *Radio Silence* by artist Julie Chen, Flying Fish Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1995. The book is letterpress printed with aeronautical charts and bound in paper-wrapped boards.

By SCOTT EYMAN
Palm Beach Post Books Editor

To the best of Arthur Jaffe's recollection, his father, Max, only yelled at him twice. The first time was when Arthur was a young man, and made the mistake of saying he was going to slough off some dreary task.

Big mistake.

"Always try your best!" thundered Max Jaffe. The other time was when Arthur was 50 years old and his father berated him for being insufficiently generous to the United Jewish Appeal.

In a roundabout way, these are two of the three tent poles that have supported Arthur Jaffe's life. The other, certainly no less and perhaps slightly more important than the others, is art.

When he served in Army intelligence during World War II, Arthur Jaffe traded cigarettes and chocolate, not for female favors, but for books. Art was more important than sex, and it would be fair to say that Arthur Jaffe's quietly remarkable American life has been defined more by the life of the mind than the life of commercial transaction.

Today, the result of that mind-set is ensconced in a gleaming top-floor area in the Arthur and Mata Jaffe Center for the Book Arts in the Wimberly Library of the Florida Atlantic University Campus in Boca Raton. Partially, the Jaffe Center holds its founder's book collection — a very unusual book collection. There are around 10,000 volumes here, from a Peanuts pop-up book to one-of-a-kind books, but they are all



distinguished by their status as aesthetic objects, irrespective of their actual literary content.

Here is a 300-year-old Coptic Bible that Jaffe found in Myanmar territory in Kenya; there a copy of Barry Moser's edition of the Bible, here the Arion Press edition of *Moby Dick*, there Pierre Louys' *Songs of Bilitis*. Here Donald Glaister's *Brooklyn Bridge*, bound in aluminum and Nigerian goatskin, there the prize of Jaffe's collection, the Cranach *Hamlet*, with 80 woodcuts by the eminent stage designer Edward Gordon Craig. Jaffe paid \$3,000 for it decades ago. It's worth more now.

And beyond that are a couple of printing presses, and actual fonts of type, the sort that has to be set lovingly by hand, a letter or space at a time—a working print shop that lacks only a field of papyrus for the production of books as handmade objects of beauty.

Once again, Arthur Jaffe has done his best.

Swept away by 'Crusoe'

The first book Arthur Jaffe remembers reading was *Robinson Crusoe*. He was a small child in Butler, Pa., near the Ohio border, but he was swept away.

Max Jaffe owned and ran a chain of small-town department stores in Pennsylvania, but unlike many businessmen, who have no time for anything outside their comfort zone, Max Jaffe always had his nose in a book.

"In every mental picture I have of my father, he's reading," says his son, 88 years old, a slender, courtly man of innate elegance. When Max built a house, he made sure to include a library, and when he retired at the age of 55, he immediately went back to college.

In 1938, Max Jaffe told his son, "There's going to be a war. They're coming for us, wherever we are." The identity of "they" didn't need to be articulated. His son took to it heart, and joined the ROTC at Penn State. He was in fact the only Jew in ROTC, and he was shortly to graduate with a degree in Classical Greek.

In 1941, Max Jaffe was finally proven right, and Arthur went into the service. At first he was an infantry officer, then was recruited to command an intelligence unit attached to the army of Gen. Omar Bradley, charged with investigating defections among German soldiers; classical psychological warfare. There were four other American units doing the same thing throughout Europe. Jaffe's specialty was 33 languages, which came in handy, for they traveled with loudspeaker and printing equipment to aid in their work of dropping leaflets and broadcasting spiels calculated to make Germans throw up their hands in surrender.

"It was fairly effective," he says. "If we got 100 soldiers to surrender in a given location, that was pretty good."

Jaffe was in combat for 11 months, landing on Omaha Beach two days after D-Day, and following Bradley's army all the way to Berlin. For his trouble, he got the Bronze Star.

Headed back to college

After he got home to Pennsylvania in October of 1946, he decided to turn right around and head to Hebrew University in Tel Aviv. He shipped out in January 1946—\$200 bought him an ocean voyage from New York to Alexandria that took 13 days.

In that particular turbulent time in Palestine's turbulent history, there were three groups fighting for a Jewish homeland: the Irgun, the Stern group and the Haganah. Jaffe was quickly recruited for the latter. Jaffe says now that he didn't plan to be in the Haganah—"I don't volunteer; I'm no hero"—but he was one of the first eight American students in Palestine after the war, he seemed like a good bet. For the unborn state of Israel, these eight were the leading edge of *The Return*. Jaffe knew David Ben-Gurion



Photo by GARY CORONADO/Staff Photographer

Artist Maureen Cummins' *Ghost Diary* (2003) is a vintage glass negative with its text inkjet-printed on mylar-bound metal. The unique book is one of the collection provided by Arthur Jaffe and his late wife, Mata. The collection is full of bulky and interesting books including a 300-year-old Coptic Bible, the Cranach *Hamlet* and an Arion Press edition of *Moby Dick*.

FAU's rare additions

Good looks, U.S. passport

When he wasn't training young soldiers, Jaffe was using his good looks and American passport for reconnaissance work. "I could go anywhere," he remembers, "so they would send me to Damascus or Lebanon and just tell me to look around and report back on what I observed." Other times, he monitored wiretaps that revealed highly placed Americans already bargaining for the Middle East's oil reserves.

Jaffe doesn't give the impression it was a particularly dangerous time, although history indicates otherwise. He remembers Beirut as being "gorgeous, the Paris of the Mideast" and says that there was a great sense of mission and *esprit de corps* that only occurs once. If you had asked me in 1946, when I got there, if it was going to be possible for there to be a Jewish state in 1948, I would have said "No."

That said, he seems to feel that he didn't really complete his mission. After three years in Palestine, he got sick with a tick-borne illness common to the desert and had to come back to America for treatment. He had spent the entire decade of his 20s in the service. It was time for something else, but from the vantage point of his old age, looking back on that time of fervor and commitment to a larger mission, Jaffe says that, "In a way, everything since has been anticlimactic."

Back to the States

After he got well, Jaffe and his brothers took up the family retail business, more or less because it was the path of least resistance. His aesthetic interests became a sort of added value to the business of buying wholesale and selling retail.



Books always have been a crucial part of the life of FAU donor Arthur Jaffe.

"I had an affinity for art. Not as an artist, but in terms of taste. I always had great taste. I could design a store. I did great windows and ads." At their height, the House of Jaffe had 13 stores.

In Palestine, Jaffe had begun collecting woodcuts, with an initial attraction to the ancient Hebrew alphabet, each page printed from a single block of wood containing both picture and caption. He was, he remembers seduced "by the fiery tendrils recalling the biblical burning bush, reaching towards heaven."

He met Lois, his first wife, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh. She was obviously the right woman; on their first date, he bought her a book at the Peabody Book Shop at Charles Street in Baltimore. It was written by the wife of Marc Chagall, and had illustrations by the artist.

He asked her to marry him after their first date. "You're crazy," she said, "but I will."

It was a great marriage that produced four children. After she died at the age of 50, he decided to retire. He sold out his interest in the business to his brothers and moved to Pittsburgh, where he met his second wife, Mata, a speech pathologist. He founded the Jewish Community Foundation of Pittsburgh and remarried in 1979.

By then, Jaffe already had begun to focus on books, not necessarily because of the way they read, but because of the way they looked. Books by artists, one-of-a-kind books, rare books, physically beautiful books, even some commercially available pop-up books. Books as *objets d'art*. When he moved to Florida in 1984, he gave most of his books away except for the *objet d'art* titles, and after he got here, he began expanding it exponentially, eventually donating it to FAU in 1998, three years before the death of Mata Jaffe.

MAKING AN ENTRANCE: Modern touches mingle with pieces of literature at the entrance to The Jaffe Center of the Book Arts Collection at Florida Atlantic University's Wimberly Library.

The Jaffe Center for Book Arts was opened earlier this year and, although it carries his and his late wife's name, he insists that "It's not about Arthur Jaffe. I don't own these books anymore. The reason I gave the collection away is that the pride of ownership was long gone. The books were sitting there doing nothing. My wife was ill at the time. I use a cane, I had to make a decision. I could give them to a dealer to sell, or I could see if an institution was interested. The University of Pittsburgh was interested; Carnegie Mellon was interested; Penn State was interested. And when I offered it to FAU, they were interested."

Anthony Catanese, the university president at the time, asked "What academic program does the collection support?"

"Probably none," was the honest answer.

"Then I'm not in favor of it, but take it to the board."

So Jaffe cherry-picked five or six of the prizes of his collection and made a presentation to the FAU board. They wanted the collection, the only such collection in an American university.

Distinctive collection

"It's such a distinctive collection," says William Miller, the director of Libraries at FAU. "It's highly unusual in the world, and it's the only one of its kind that's accessible to the public. It adds a different dimension to an appreciation of books, and broadens the idea of what a book is. And it graphically illustrates the connection between books and art. It's also my belief, that 50 or 100 years from now, libraries and basic book collections will all be pretty much the same: all electronic, pure text. What will make a library distinctive is collections like this one."

The Jaffe Center has a full-time staff, two, plus some part-time help. John Cutrone, who runs most of the day-to-day operations at the center, was a student at FAU 15 years ago and remembers that when he went looking for a book on book production, there was precisely one book in the stacks—the only one in print.

Now the presses that had been waning for decades and that would drive are once again holding lines of hand-set type—also essentially extinct, except for a magical place in Boca Raton. Writing is frequently a time-waster, but it's the most seldom skill. Arthur Jaffe's fondest hope is to rectify that lack.

"My goal is to create a place where the me I used to be could come to create," he says. "I think that in this digital age, there's an increasing fascination with handmade objects—something we have less and less experience with."

The Jaffe Center teaches printmaking, letterpress operation, bookbinding, paper decoration and other related arts. There is only one other academic institution with a similar collection of similar equipment, at the University of Alabama. The pleasurable tautology of the process—setting the type, choosing the paper, binding the book, and controlling the object—has translated to full rosters of students.

You can go to libraries in London and Paris and Vienna, and find wonderful, beautiful and occasionally handle wonderful manuscripts, but if you want to see a book bound in aluminum and Nigerian goatskin, or the Cranach *Hamlet*, you have to come to Boca Raton.

For those who view *in situ* as predominantly utilitarian, useful for imparting facts but of little other use, all this might seem pointless.

Arthur Jaffe meets these objections with a wise smile. He looks at it this way: "You can produce a baby in a test-tube, without any human actual sex, but let alone actual sex. But which way is more fun?"

●scott_eyman@poptast.com