

POSTER

RISE

FOR CLIMATE,

JOB AND JUSTICE

Past
Exhibition

HOUSE

The Letterpress Posters of Amos Kennedy

October 8, 2020–January 3, 2021

Intro

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr.'s life took a sharp turn after he saw a vintage printing press in action while visiting Colonial Williamsburg. That chance encounter inspired him to change the course of his career, studying and eventually becoming a master letterpress printer. The pieces on display here chronicle just a small portion of his prolific output, focusing primarily on the advertisement of Black cultural events in the rural South.

Unlike so-called “fine printers” who have chosen to embrace letterpress as a precious form of high art, Kennedy’s work doubles down on the democratic and of-the-moment nature of printing. There’s an excitement and urgency present in each piece, resulting in posters that are just as informative as they are visually delightful. When sold, the majority of his output typically fetches all of \$20, a price point he occasionally waves altogether so that as many people as possible can live with his images. He is best known for his intense use of layering, stacking phrases and words on top of each other until they are abstracted, almost hidden. He deftly mixes wood and metal type alongside handmade pressure prints, linoleum cuts, carved designs, and laser-cut imagery. Visual jokes are plentiful. Most importantly, though, these posters document moments of small-town, rural life that would normally be forgotten, providing witness to people and places often ignored by history.

All posters come from the Poster House Permanent Collection.

Curation

Angelina Lippert

Exhibition Design

Ola Baldych

Installation

John F. Lynch

Robert Leonardi

Graphic

Installation

Keith Immediato



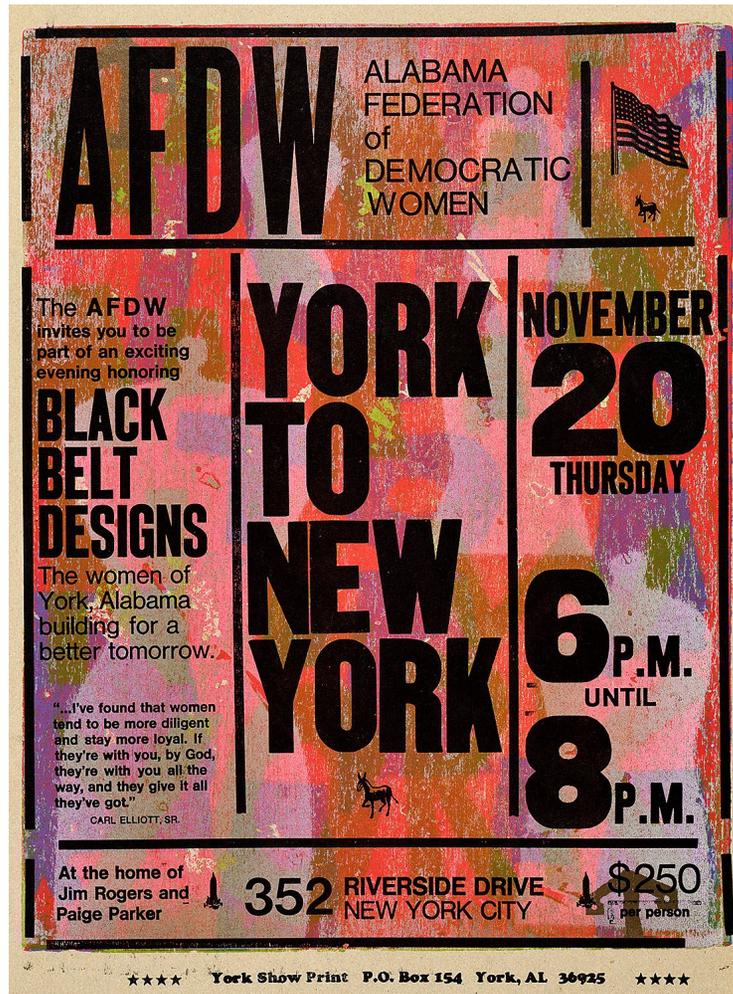
“Printing is a very democratic process: you are able to make multiples that can be shared by people.”

—Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr.

Rooster Day Festival, 2003

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

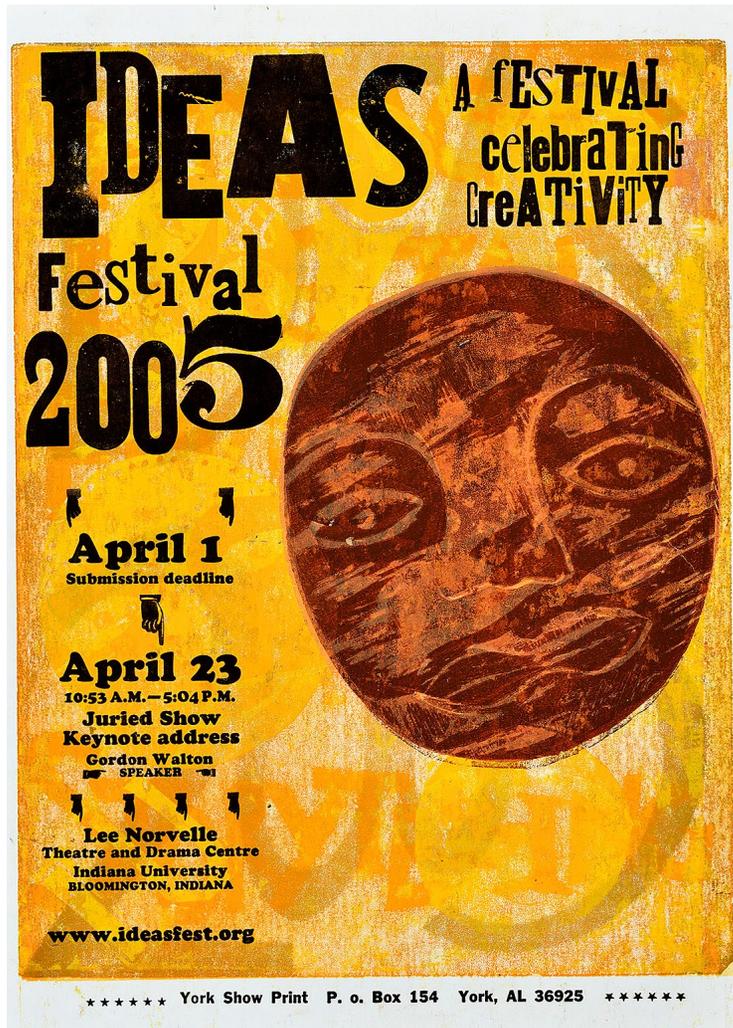
- Starting in 2002, York, Alabama began hosting a Rooster Day Festival, an annual free event focusing on arts and cultural activities.
- This is one of the earliest posters for this show, created at a time when Amos was located in York and printing under the name York Show Print—a nod to the many historic letterpress printers in the United States like Hatch Show Print or Tribune Showprint.
- The green and purple roosters making up the background were created through the pressure print process in which a flexible, raised matrix or background template is placed between the paper and the printing cylinder. When run through the press, the extra pressure of that raised design pushes those parts of the paper into the ink, creating a fuzzy image.



York To New York, 2003

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

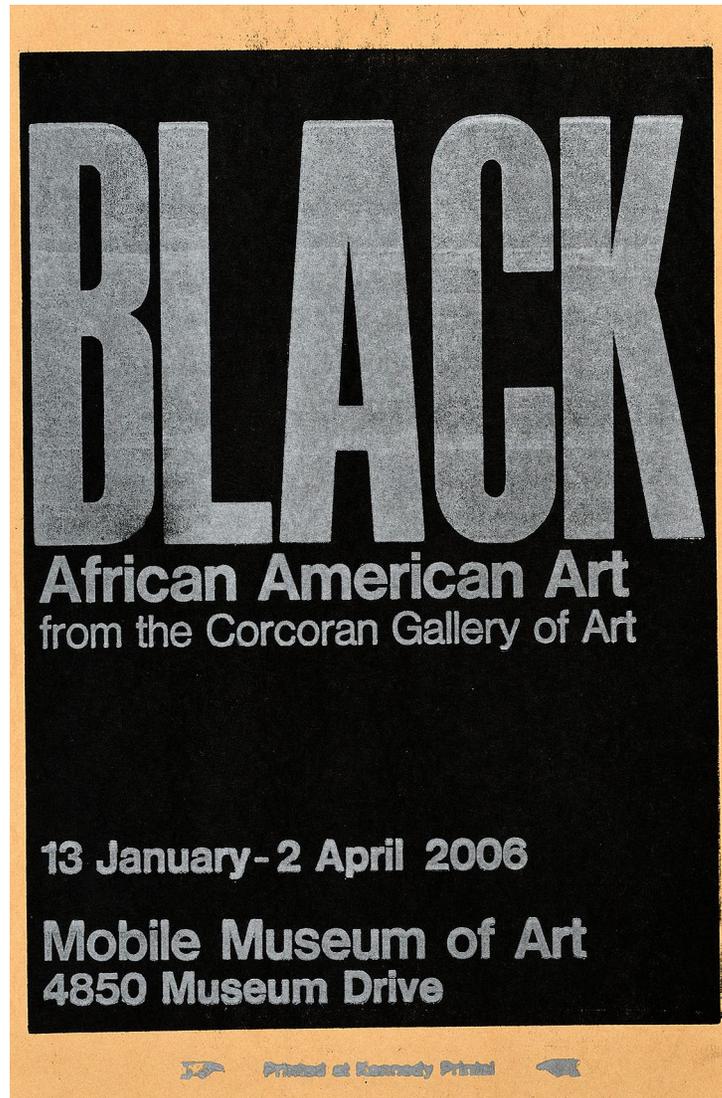
- This poster is for a private fundraising event in New York City benefitting the Alabama Federation of Democratic Women. The host—a prominent financier—had ties to York, Alabama, thus bridging York to New York.
- One part of the fundraiser was a fashion show of upcycled denim garments created by Black seamstresses whose former work had been outsourced to Mexico. The Coleman Center, an arts organization focused on Alabama's Black Belt, provided a creative outlet and means of income for their skills.
- The pressure print in the background includes the word "York" alongside the silhouette of the state of Alabama, while the dingbats (small printing icons) feature the Empire State Building and the Democratic donkey—a further visual link between the two cities.



Ideas Festival, 2005

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

- This submission-based creativity festival took place at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, and featured a keynote speech by videogame developer Gordon Walton (best known for his involvement in The Sims).
- The poster is printed on coated stock, a type of board that Kennedy no longer uses. Not only is uncoated chipboard cheaper, but the brown color of his other posters emphasizes the rural nature of most of these events.
- The mask design in the upper right was hand-carved by Kennedy out of masonite, while the background features a repeated pressure print of the numbers 2005.



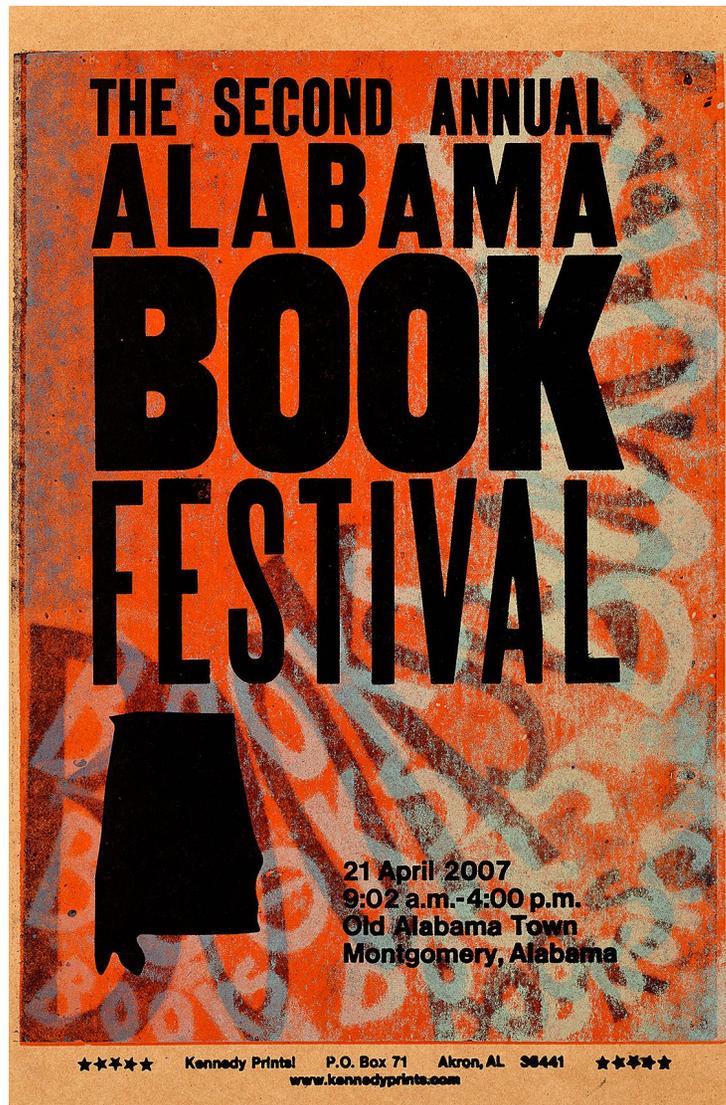
“My work is a snapshot of a part of American culture that is basically overlooked.”

—Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr.

Black: African American Art from the Corcoran Gallery, 2006

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

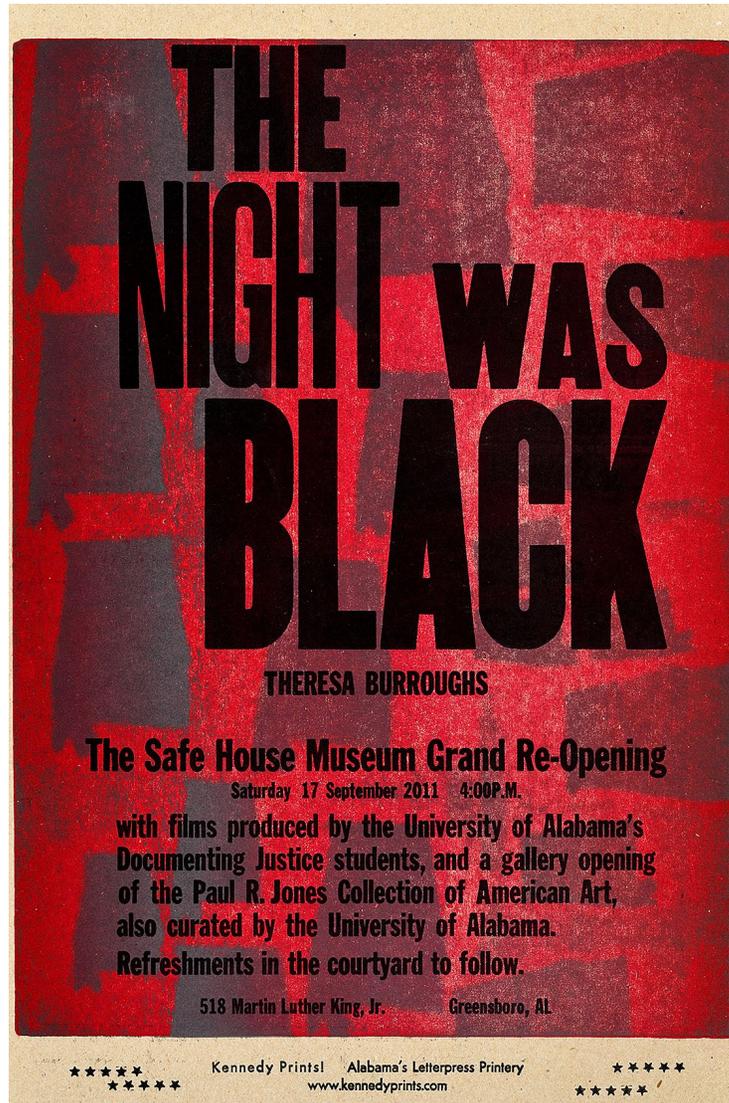
- This poster advertises the traveling exhibition *Black Is A Color: African American Art from the Corcoran Gallery of Art*, on view at the Mobile Museum of Art in Alabama.
- The show featured work by Mel Edwards, David Driskell, Lorna Simpson, and Kiki Smith, among many others, focusing on work in a grayscale color palette.
- The title comes from Raymond Saunders’s 1967 pamphlet of the same name that argued that Black artists should not be forced to solely tackle racial issues in their work.
- Although The Corcoran Gallery of Art was one of the first art museums in the United States, it dissolved in 2014, with most of its collection going to other institutions.



**The Second Annual
Alabama Book Festival, 2007**

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

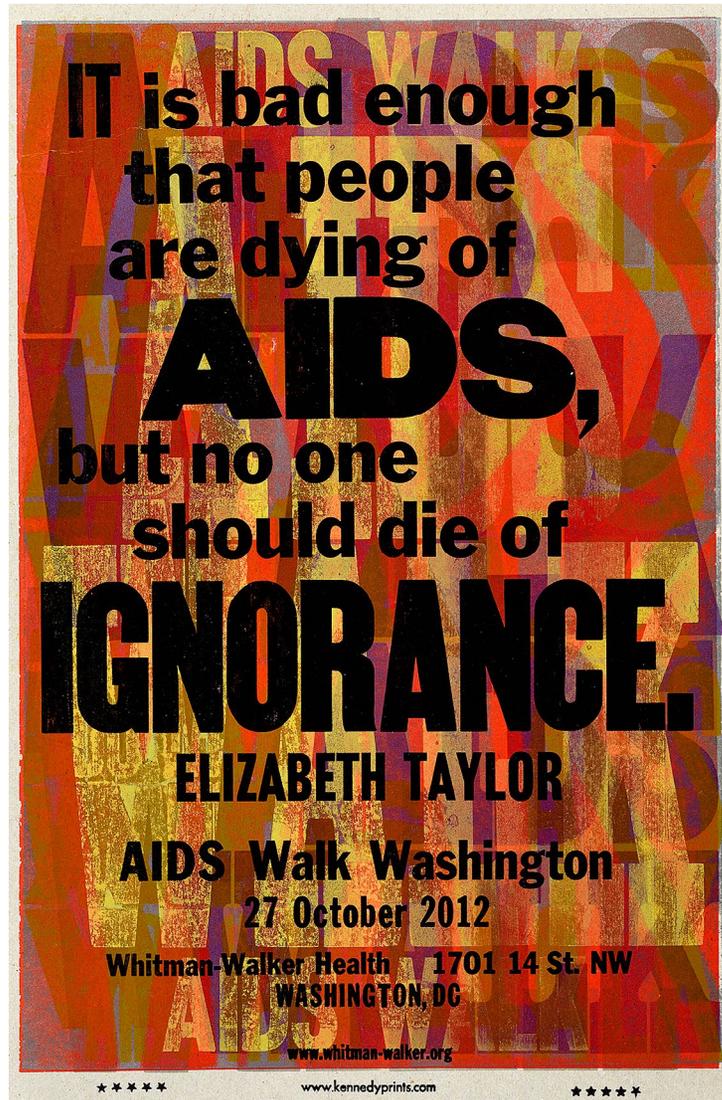
- Founded in 2006, the Alabama Book Festival is the largest literary event in the state, drawing thousands of visitors each year.
- The repetition of “books” in the background was created through a pressure printing process, more details of which can be found on the label for the Rooster Day Festival.
- This is the earliest poster in the show to feature “Kennedy Prints” in the margin, created when Kennedy moved to Akron, Alabama.



The Night Was Black, 2011

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

- This poster was created for the reopening of the Safe House Black History Museum in Greensboro, Alabama. The organization was founded in 1992 by Theresa Burroughs, a childhood friend of Coretta Scott King and participant in the march to Selma over the Edmund Pettus Bridge.
- The museum is housed in the building where Martin Luther King Jr. hid from the Klu Klux Klan on March 21, 1968, a few days before he was assassinated. Today, the museum's programming generally focuses on Civil Rights history at the local level.
- When speaking of that evening, Burroughs noted that "the night was black and so were we," referencing how members of the Greensboro community hid in the brush around the home to protect Dr. King. The first half of that quote is printed at the top of this poster.



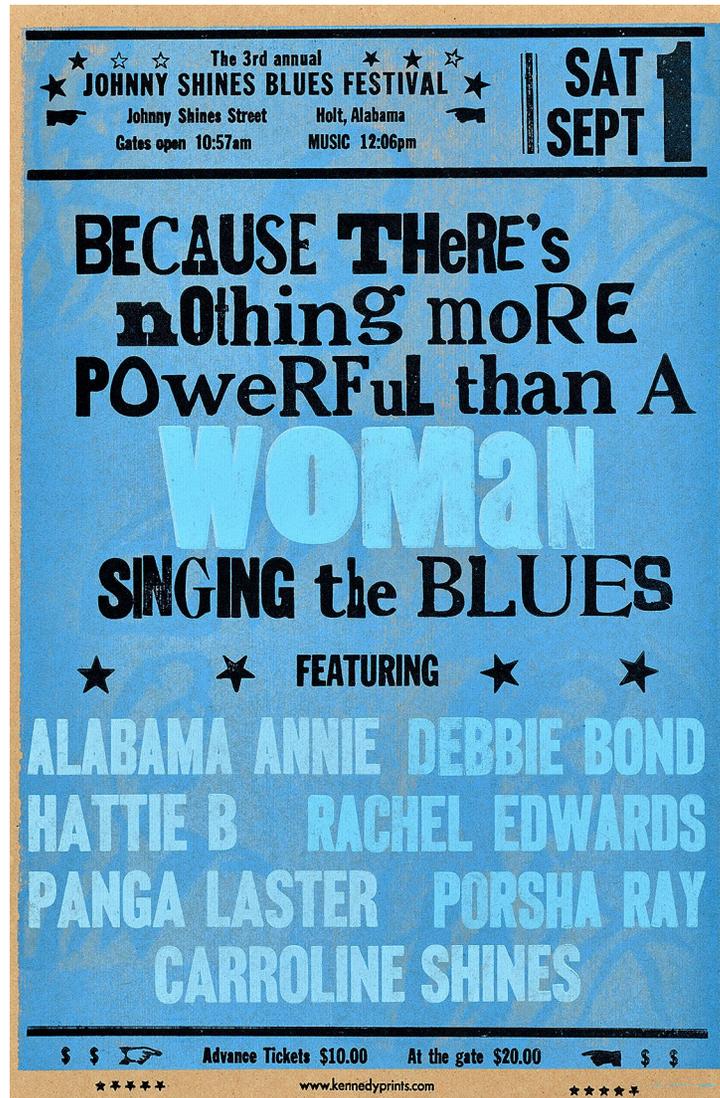
**“When you make something,
you’re reflecting the society you
want to exist.”**

—Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr.

People Are Dying of AIDS, 2012

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

- In the 1980s, Elizabeth Taylor became one of the first major celebrities to speak out about the AIDS epidemic, using her platform to bring attention to the national health crisis.
- In this poster, Kennedy uses one of Taylor’s most famous quotes from that era to announce the 26th annual AIDS Walk in Washington, D.C., organized by Whitman Walker Health.
- This is an excellent example of Kennedy’s signature layering technique in which he has printed the words “AIDS WALK” in at least four different colors, overlapping them through multiple passes through the press in a variety of lockups. There is also evidence of a pressure print of the word “AIDS” in the upper register.



“Everyone has a calling in life.
I think my calling was to print.”

—Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr.

Woman Singing The Blues, 2013

Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

- This poster announces an all-female blues lineup as part of the Johnny Shines Blues Festival in Holt, Alabama.
- Kennedy frequently includes visual jokes in his posters. Here, he’s noted the starting times as 10:57 and 12:06, the logic being that something unexpected will make a poster more memorable.



Rise For Climate, Jobs, And Justice, 2018
Amos Paul Kennedy, Jr. (b. 1948)

- Grown out of the 2014 Peoples Climate March in New York City, The Peoples Climate Movement organizes ongoing mass mobilization for causes related to climate change, as well as economic and social justice.
- This commissioned piece was created for the 2018 march and repeatedly features the word “rise” in a variety of flame-like colors. The result is an incredibly evocative call-to-action.





★
MY WORK IS A SNAPSHOT OF A
PART OF AMERICAN CULTURE THAT IS
BASICALLY OVERLOOKED.



★
LETTERPRESS PRINTING
REALLY ALLOWED FOR NO
IDEA TO DIE.



★
PRINTING IS A VERY
DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.
YOU ARE ABLE TO MAKE
MULTIPLES THAT CAN
BE SHARED BY PEOPLE.



★
WHEN YOU MAKE SOMETHING,
YOU'RE REFLECTING THE SOCIETY
YOU WANT TO EXIST.

THE LETTERPRESS POSTERS OF



AMOS KENNEDY



★
PRINTING HAS A CALLING
IN ME. I THINK MY CALLING
WAS TO PRINT.

Press Reviews

FineBooks
& COLLECTIONS

POSTER

HOUSE