

# THE BRIDGE

by  
HART CRANE

with seven woodblock prints by  
JOEL SHAPIRO



in scroll format  
with an introduction by  
Langdon Hammer  
in a separate volume  
with two photographs of the Brooklyn Bridge by  
Michael Kenna  
and with an extra suite of three prints by Joel Shapiro

published by  
THE ARION PRESS  
in the fall of 2017

## PROSPECTUS

The Arion Press is proud to announce one of its most ambitious publications, an edition of Hart Crane's «The Bridge», a classic of twentieth-century American poetry. The following section is excerpted from the introduction by Professor Langdon Hammer.

### HART CRANE AND «THE BRIDGE»

Hart Crane conceived of his long poem, «The Bridge», in the winter of 1923. He was twenty-three years old and working as a copywriter for a small advertising firm in Cleveland. «The Bridge» was published in 1930, first in a limited edition by The Black Sun Press in Paris, then in a trade edition by Boni & Liveright in New York. Over that seven-year period, much had changed. Crane began his celebration of America's "constructive future" when the Twenties were Roaring. When «The Bridge» appeared, the nation was reeling from the Stock Market Crash and about to enter the Great Depression. It was possible to feel that history had invalidated his vision before it arrived.

He wrote almost no more poetry in the two years between the publication of «The Bridge» and April 1932, when he jumped to his death from the stern of a passenger ship in the Gulf of Mexico before a gathering of stunned onlookers. Once an object of gossip, Crane grew into a figure of legend in the work of American writers and artists such as Marsden Hartley, Tennessee Williams, Jasper Johns, and Allen Ginsberg. By now the outcast looks almost like an official poet. He is the subject of four biographies. His collected poems and selected letters are permanently in print in the Library

of America. Remarkably, the «Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry», the standard college textbook, makes room for the whole of «The Bridge».

Even for specialists, «The Bridge» remains no easy assignment. The poem Crane had viewed in 1923 developed into a 56-page multi-section work dealing with the tradition of New World prophecy, the frontier, the Civil War and First World War, folklore, hoboos, minstrelsy, burlesque, advertising, cinema, popular music, the nineteenth-century whaling industry, the deep time of Native American culture, and the geological formation of the North Carolina seacoast, among many other matters.

The challenge that «The Bridge» poses has less to do with its length and complexity, however, than with the immersive, participatory reading it calls for. It's a hard poem because of the emotional and frankly personal demand it makes on the reader. Crane invites us to join him in the poem, in the same way that he joins the writers he addresses directly: Whitman, Dickinson, Melville, Poe. Keep in mind that, in the 1920s, these were not the secure American classics they are today, but rather overlooked or controversial authors whom Crane identified with, despite the aesthetic risk involved. In effect, he asks us to do the same for him.

The participatory type of reading that «The Bridge» requires is related to what Crane called "abstract form". His ideas about form, abstraction, and how poetry might communicate with its readers were developed in dialogue with visual artists. The crucial word in Crane's phrase "abstract form that would almost function independently of subject matter" is the qualifier "almost". It wasn't abstract art per se that Crane was invested in, but art that



Image 1, columns 5-8

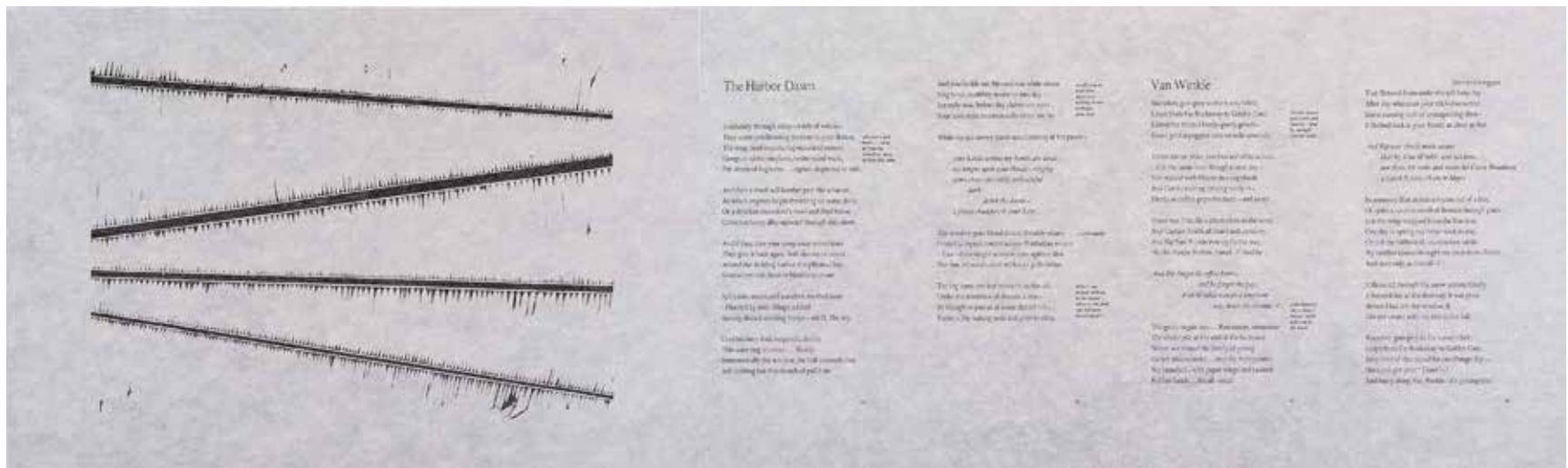


Image 2, columns 13-16

verges on abstraction. What he wanted to capture was a moment at which particulars become generalized, and the surface of the real opens to reveal a further dimension, a place of heightened intimacy where the poet and reader, artist and viewer, might meet and understand each other by means of what he called the “logic of metaphor”.

Harold Hart Crane was born in 1899, the only child of two Midwesterners, Clarence Arthur (“C. A.”) and Grace Hart Crane. Although he would militantly identify himself and his work with the twentieth-century America taking shape in New York City, part of his sensibility would always belong to the nineteenth century and rural Ohio. Arguably, the whole point of «The Bridge» was to connect these two Americas.

The modern art in which Crane educated himself was influenced by European models such as Cézanne and Picasso. It rejected nineteenth-century canons of taste, including realist verisimilitude and Victorian demands for a morally improving message; it made up its own rules without respect to popular expectations, and insistently drew attention to its own properties and dimensions, its “form”.

The autonomy modernism claimed for art, its right to make up its own rules, was closely related to the autonomy artists and other self-consciously modern people claimed in their lives. The ecstatic utopian elements of «The Bridge» represent that generational consciousness perhaps better than any other work of literature.

To Crane’s imagination, Brooklyn Bridge was a symbol pointing toward the “abstract form” of Columbus’s voyage of discovery, “vaulting the sea”, and the westward expansion of the

nation across “the prairies’ dreaming sod”. American history in «The Bridge» presents a series of New World visions, which Crane saw as vehicles and vessels (bridges in motion) connecting the past, present, and future.

The title of Crane’s poem refers to this generalized “abstract form”, rather than specifically to Brooklyn Bridge. Even so, Brooklyn Bridge, in particular, matters. Crane consciously extended Whitman’s vision in his poem “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1856), in a way analogous to how Brooklyn Bridge transformed and updated the ferry Whitman wrote about. By the mid-1920s, Brooklyn Bridge was a classic image of modernity in American art, from popular engravings and postcards to modernist painting. Joseph Stella in particular made the bridge a central motif in his work. His large oil painting “Brooklyn Bridge”, 1919-1920, depicts the bridge at night as a system of labyrinthine tunnels, veering planes, and soaring cables; the painting shares the scale, intensity, and ambiguity of Crane’s vision in «The Bridge», combining dream and nightmare, as “The Tunnel” and “Atlantis” do.

In the end, a friend of Crane’s, Walker Evans, supplied the frontispiece and other illustrations in the Black Sun edition (and for the dust jacket and frontispiece of the Boni & Liveright edition). Evans’s photographs of Brooklyn Bridge were reproduced as daringly small plates on the big pages of the oversize book. They emphasized the lyric intimacy at the core of Crane’s work by inviting the reader to look closely at the bridge from unconventional points of view. That Evans’s work suggests such a precise visual analog to Crane’s intention in «The Bridge» is not surprising, because Crane’s ambition was shaped from early on by



Image 3, columns 17–20

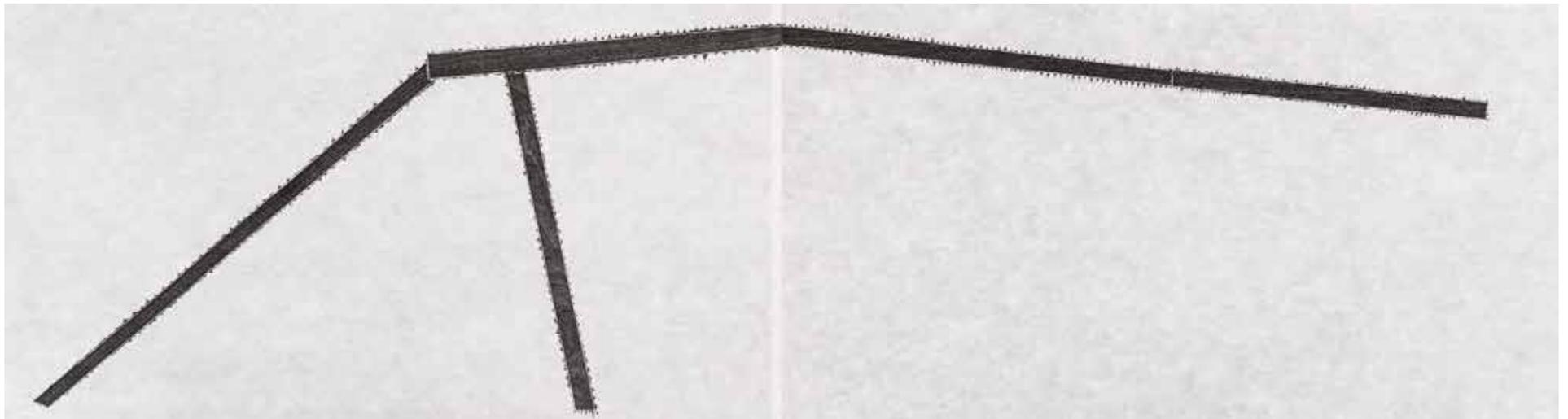


Image 4 (included in the extra suite)

his engagement with the ideas and practice of visual artists, many of whom were his close friends.

«The Bridge» points back in time to Whitman, Dickinson, Melville, and Poe, forward to Allen Ginsberg and Jasper Johns, to writers and artists of today—and to ourselves, supposing we are ready and willing to be counted alongside Crane.

### THE CONCEPT

The publisher, Andrew Hoyem, conceived of a scroll format for «The Bridge» while he and senior editor Diana Ketcham were on a two-week tour of China in April 2017 organized by the Grolier Club, an association of bibliophiles in New York City. The theme of the trip was the history of paper, type, printing, binding, and the collecting of books, both private and institutional, in China. During the first week they visited the Red Star Paper Company in Wuxi, Anhui Province. The Chinese government has recently sought to revive and support traditional crafts. Red Star is the foremost producer of handmade paper in the nation, using ancient methods and many plant fibers in exacting proportions to make sheets of beautiful thin paper, used mainly for calligraphy and ink and watercolor painting. In Beijing they visited the most important book collector in China, who showed them an unmounted scroll from the eighth century. Hoyem was inspired to order handmade paper from the mill and to make «The Bridge» in a single-spool scroll format. The book is 13½ inches tall and over 50 feet long, made up of joined sheets measuring 13½ by 25 inches.

When Hoyem had initially invited the artist Joel Shapiro to make prints for a large folio edition of «The Bridge», the artist

proposed abstract works on paper to be reproduced in color. However, for the scroll, Hoyem urged Shapiro to make original graphic works, woodblock prints. Though Shapiro is best known as a sculptor, he has made many woodblock prints over the years. For this project, he produced seven prints: four for 13½ by 25 inch sheets, two narrower, and one double-spread, nearly 50 inches wide, joining the image across two sheets. Though the prints are untitled, the abstract imagery is suggestive of themes in the poem. They appear at junctures between sections and subsections of the poem. The images and examples of the typography are reproduced in this prospectus.

Hoyem handset the long poem himself, because typesetters on staff were busy with other projects. The type he chose is French Elzevir, 16-point for the text, 24-point for titles, and 10-point for subsidiary material. It is based on a modernized French oldstyle, cast by American Typefounders in the early twentieth century, purchased by the San Francisco printer John Henry Nash as new, then acquired by the Grabhorn Press in the 1930s when Nash went out of business, then inherited by Hoyem in 1973. For display on the title page and half-title pages Kabel capitals are used in larger sizes. That type was designed by Rudolf Koch in 1926-29, and cast by M & H Type. The Chinese handmade paper proved impossible to feed on our large cylinder press because its porousness caused the suction feeding system to pick up several sheets at once. Instead, the printing was done on a large Vandercook Universal III proofing press, hand-fed. A sample piece of the paper is attached to this prospectus.

As a reference to the metal Brooklyn Bridge, Hoyem chose



Columns 37–40 and 41–44 (on either side of Image 4)



Image 5, columns 53–56

to have the spools fabricated of metal rather than wood. He enlisted master machinist Kevin Binkert of Standard Metal Products, San Francisco, who proposed using aluminum, anodized black, with the endcaps on either side knurled on their edges and titling engraved on the outer surfaces, revealing the silvery aluminum beneath the anodizing. The papers at the beginning and end of the scroll are reinforced with grey binding cloth. The scroll is presented in a cloth-covered box with foil-stamped titling on the lid, which, when removed, exposes the introductory volume on top of the scroll. That book was set in Kabel by Monotype and printed by letterpress on Magnani, Italian mouldmade paper, 120 gsm.

A sheet of instructions on how to handle the scroll and how to display it will be included with copies of «The Bridge».

#### JOEL SHAPIRO

Joel Shapiro was born in New York City in 1941 and received his B.A. and M.A. from New York University. Since his first exhibition at the Paula Cooper Gallery in 1970 he has been the subject of numerous solo and retrospective exhibitions worldwide. His work can be found in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Tate Gallery, London; and the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; among many others. Mr. Shapiro is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was named Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters by the French Ministry of Culture in 2005. He lives and works in New York City.

#### LANGDON HAMMER

Langdon Hammer is a literary biographer, poetry scholar, and the Niel Gray, Jr. Professor of English and chair of the Yale University Department of English. His first book was a study of Hart Crane, «Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism», (1993), followed by an edition of Crane's letters, and then by the Library of America's edition of Crane's complete poems and selected letters. His recent (2015) biography of poet James Merrill was widely praised. He has published essays on such twentieth century poets as Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, Thom Gunn, and Frank Bidart, and serves as the general editor for the three-volume history of American poetry that is part of the «Oxford History of Poetry in English».

#### MICHAEL KENNA

Michael Kenna is a British photographer known for his haunting black-and-white images of landscapes and architectural sites around the world. He is the artist for Arion Press editions including «Thomas Jefferson's Paris Walks», «The Silverado Squatters», «Le Désert de Retz: An Eighteenth-Century French Folly Garden», and «The Hound of the Baskervilles». Michael Kenna's two photographs of the Brooklyn Bridge in the introductory book were taken in 2000 and 2006.

#### THE EXTRA SUITE OF PRINTS

An extra suite of three woodblock prints from the scroll have been printed on Magnani Italian mouldmade paper, 180 gsm, on 13½ by 25 inch sheets. The first is a combination of the first and last



woodblocks in the scroll, the large and small spheres. The second is the wide two-panel print of a span, trimmed at 49 inches to butt. The third is an oceanic image with full moon. The three prints are presented in a cloth portfolio with documentation. The prints are not sold separately or individually; the suite is sold only with a copy of «The Bridge».

#### THE EDITION, PRICE, AND ORDERING

This is the one-hundred-and-tenth publication of the Arion Press. The book edition is limited to 300 numbered copies for sale and 26 lettered copies for complimentary distribution to participants in the project. Of the books for sale, 30 copies are accompanied by the extra suite of three prints. The suites for sale are numbered 1/30 – 30/30. In addition there are 5 artist's proofs, numbered

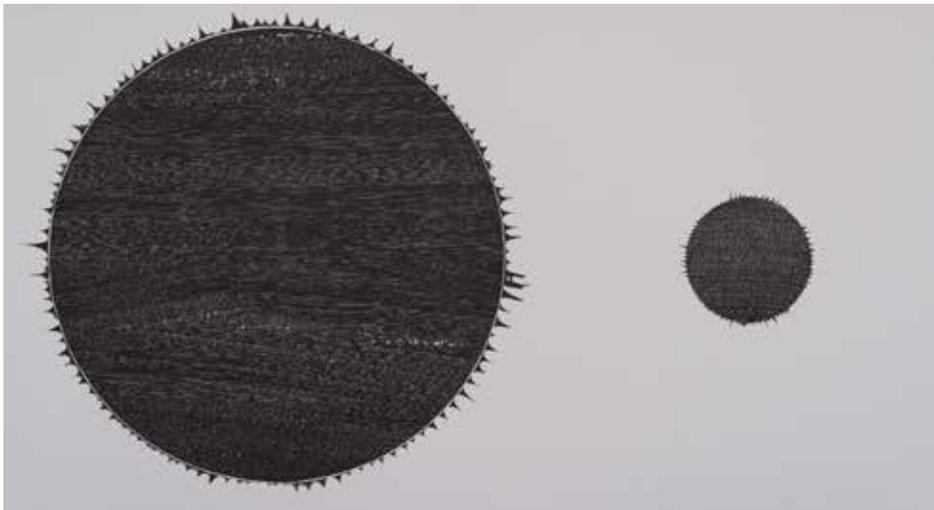
AP 1/5 – AP 5/5, and 5 printer's/publisher's proofs, numbered PP 1/5 – PP 5/5. All of the books and the prints in the suites are signed by the artist. The books are also signed by the publisher.

The price of the book is \$2,500. The price of the book with the extra suite of prints is \$10,000. A portion of the edition has been reserved for subscribers to Arion Press, individuals and institutions committed to purchasing the annual series of publications who receive a 30% discount.

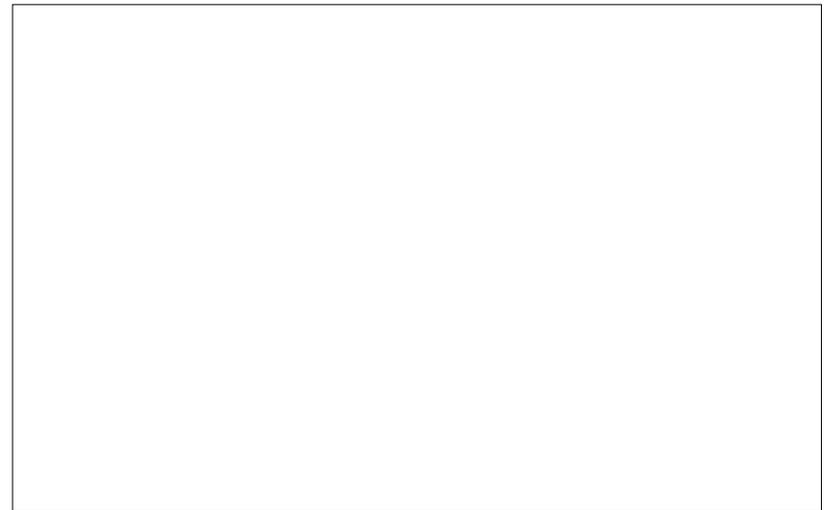
To place an order or for further information, contact:

#### THE ARION PRESS

1802 Hays Street, The Presidio, San Francisco, California 94129  
415-608-2542 • arionpress@arionpress.com • www.arionpress.com



Print 1 of the extra suite



Sample of Chinese handmade paper



PROEM

## To Brooklyn Bridge

How many downs, chill from his rippling rest  
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,  
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high  
Over the chained bay waters Liberty -

Then, with inviolate curve, for sake our eyes  
As appositional as sails that cross,  
Some page of figures to be filed away:  
- Till elevators drop us from our day -

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights  
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene  
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,  
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen:

And There, across the harbor, silver-paced  
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left  
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride, -  
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft  
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,  
Tilting there momentarily, shall skirt ballooning,  
A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leals,  
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;  
All afternoon the cloud-blown derricks turn...  
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,  
Thy guerdon... Accede thou dost bestow  
Of anonymity time cannot raise  
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,  
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings?)  
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,  
Prayer of pariah and the lover's cry, -

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift  
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sign of stars,  
Beading thy path - condense eternity:  
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the pier, I waited,  
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.  
The City's fiery parcels all undone,  
Already snow submerges an iron year -

O Sleepless as the river under thee,  
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,  
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend  
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

Scroll open



Scroll resting in box with box lid and introductory volume