

# ELLIPSIS RARE BOOKS



E-LIST #6  
**THE TAO OF MUD**  
NOTES FROM FISHTOWN

*Selected fragments from the Zen-inspired mystical art community, which settled amid abandoned fishing shacks along Washington's Skagit River*



# WORKS FROM FISHTOWN & ARTIST STEVE HEROLD

These assembled pieces represent works from the Fishtown artist's community which existed in LeConner, Washington from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, and constitute an important period in the development of modern Northwestern art.



A “Zen mystic village” at the intersection of Eastern and Western spirituality, hippie and beat cultures, and experiments in cooperative intentional living, this community of “monks” or “river rats” lived in a series of abandoned fishing shacks and boathouses along the Skagit River. . Inspired by the mystic Northwestern art school exemplified by Morris Graves (1910 - 2001) and Guy Anderson (1906 - 1988), this rustic existence without electricity or running water gave the Fishtown residents considerable time for making art, composing poetry, meditation, and the contemplation of the natural world.

Notable community members included the poet Robert Sund, artist and sculptor Bo Miller, novelist Tom Robbins, and Fishtown “mayor” Charles Krafft, the writer and sculptor who rose to fame for his “disasterware” porcelain series before raising controversy in his final years by espousing White Nationalist views.

The majority of pieces in this collection were made by Fishtown resident, poet, calligrapher, and bookseller, Steve Herold who joined the community as part of Sund’s Great Blue Heron Society (which met at “The Temple”, an abandoned boathouse decorated with Tibetan prayer flags) later participated in the first Fishtown group show in 1971 as a member of the “Asparagus Moonlight Group.” Reflecting on his years in the community, Herold would later write about it’s inherently collaborative nature and its impact on the group’s work and creativity. “[Fishtown members] worked together both to create their community and their art. Poets from up and down the river would gather to drink tea and write poems to share and collect. Artists, poets and calligraphers would cooperate on making a single work of art more powerfully combining their talents.”

Largely abandoned by the mid-1980s, Fishtown and its surviving buildings were destroyed by logging efforts before the end of the decade.



“

I MOVED ALL MY POSSESSIONS ABOARD, BOOKS MOSTLY, AND SET UP MY LIFE ON THE SKAGIT FLATS... MOSTLY, I WANTED TO REASSERT MY COMMITMENT TO ART. I NEEDED TO FIND OUT WHO I WAS AND WHERE I BELONGED.

AND I WAS DETERMINED TO BE AN ARTIST EVEN IF I HAD TO STARVE TO DEATH.

- Ralph Aeschliman, Fishtown Resident

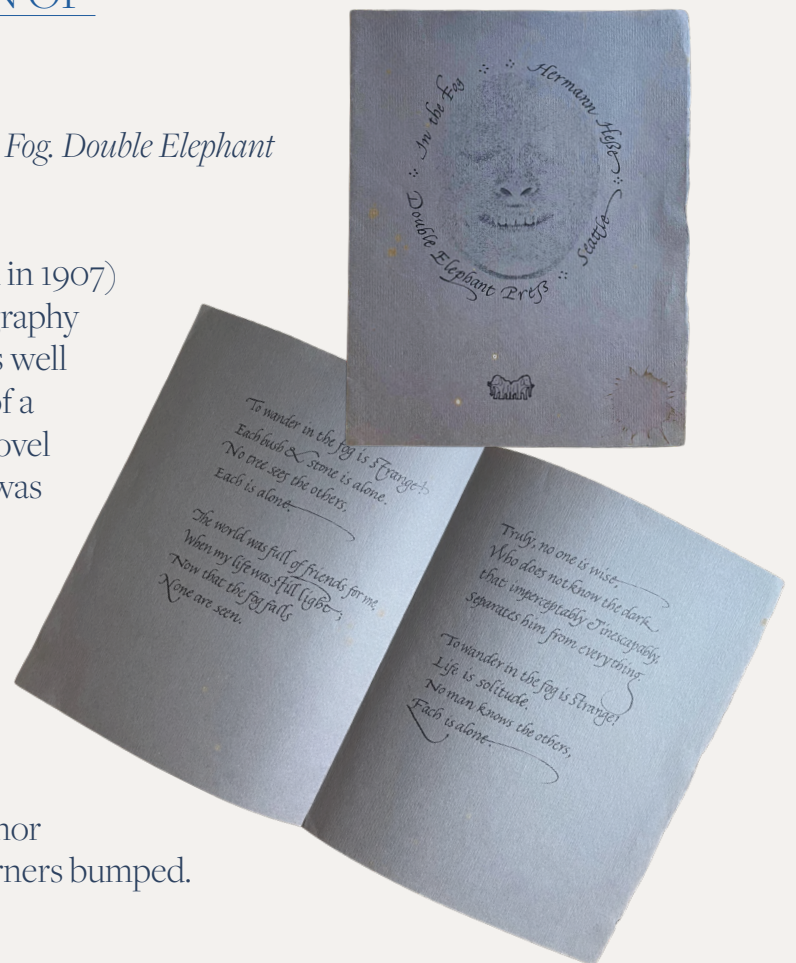
## RARE CALLIGRAPHED EDITION OF HERMAN HESSE POETRY

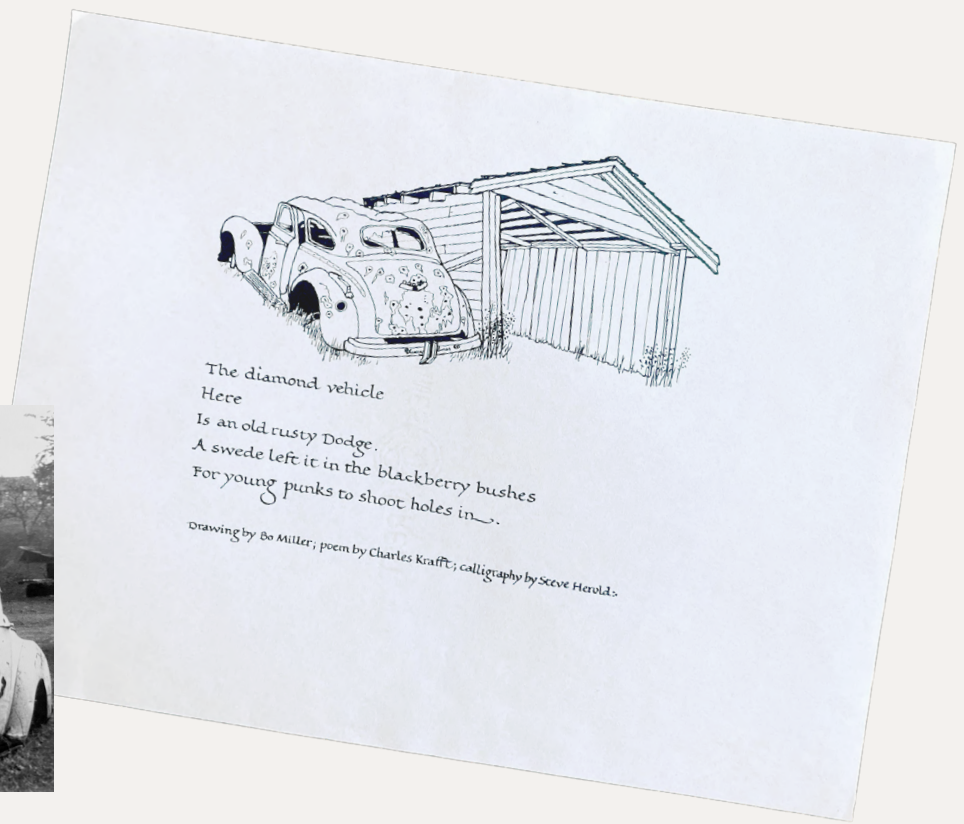
*Hesse, Herman. Herold, Steve, calligraphy. In The Fog. Double Elephant Press. Seattle. 1971.*

An early Herman Hesse poem (first published in 1907) this limited 1971 “folder” edition features calligraphy from Fishtown artist and poet Steve Herold as well as original cover art made from a photocopy of a friend of the artist’s face using still relatively novel xerography. The Double Elephant Press logo was also designed by Walt Crowley (1947 – 2007), Seattle area activist, publisher, and historian.

One copy OCLC as of March 2024.

[2]pp. French fold pamphlet on grey laid paper. One deckled edge. Minor soiling to front wrap with blot to lower right corner. Minor bruising from past creases. Spine ends and corners bumped. Good condition. | [\\$150](#)





## ZEN INSPIRED ART AND POETRY FROM FISHTOWN ARTISTS CHARLES KRAFFT, STEVE HEROLD, AND BO MILLER

*Krafft, Charles. Herold, Steve, calligraphy. Miller, Bo, illustr. The Diamond Vehicle. [Tangram Press]. [Berkeley, CA]. [1990].*

Based on original art from 1976 depicting a shot out car left to rot at Fishtown, this broadside combining the poetry of Charles Krafft with the artistry of Miller and Herold was one of 100 copies printed in 1990.

Miller, who composed the original drawing, remarked of his time in the community, “Fishtown for me was a window on a world that could be peaceful, creative and spiritual. I feel fortunate to have spent most of the 70s at Fishtown in a pastoral metaphysical bliss that was/is the Skagit Valley.”

The poems title, informed by the author’s study of Eastern religion, is the literal translation of “vajrayana”, the esoteric vein of Buddhism found primarily in Tibet and among the Shingon school of Japan. Charles Krafft, an early Fishtown member and its self-declared mayor, would later rise to fame with his “disasterware” sculpture before falling from favor in his final years for espousing White Nationalist views.

No copies OCLC.

[1]pp illustrated broadside. Minor warp to lower edge. Very good. | \$300



## LIMITED EDITION POETRY COLLECTION FROM RESIDENTS OF FISHTOWN ARTISTS' COMMUNITY

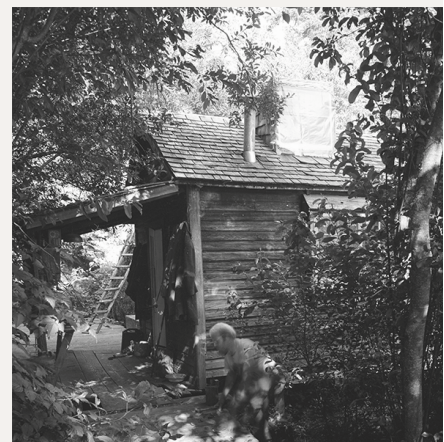
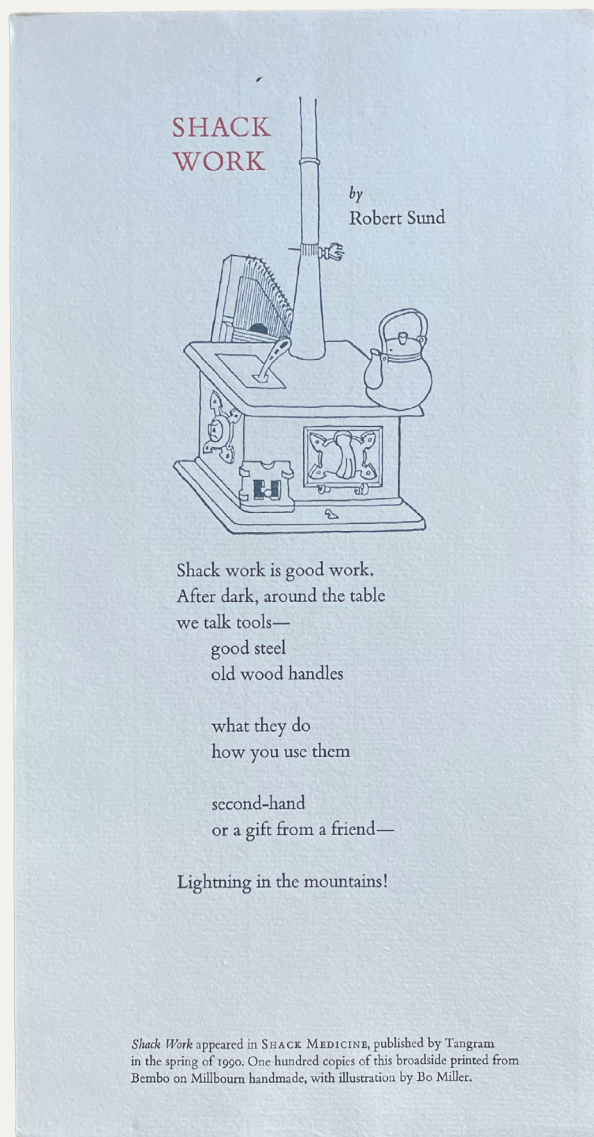
*Hansen, Paul. Herold, Steve, Krafft, Charles. Miller, Bo. Stockley, Daniel. Jarrett, Elizabeth. Nelsen, Hans. Cow Tales: Poems from the Skagit River Delta. The Dharma Foundation. Fishtown, La Conner, Washington. 1973.*

A rare copy of Cow Tales, a joint art and poetry collection by early Fishtown members limited to 200 copies (plus an additional 10 handbound examples). Exemplary of the community ethos, per Kathleen Moles, curator of the Museum of Northwest Art, "In Fishtown, boundaries between artistic disciplines blurred. Poets painted, painters wrote poetry, an architect carved cedar and made mandalas, and calligraphers and scholars became poets. Collaborations were also common, with each artist contributing part to a larger whole." In addition to Steve Herold, who owned this copy, the collection also includes work from Paul Hansen, Bo Miller, and Charles Krafft.

Four copies found in OCLC as of March 2024.

[27]pp. Saddle stitch bound with printed card wraps. Wear to spine ends. Minor soiling front wrap interior. Illustrated throughout. Very good. | [\\$300](#)



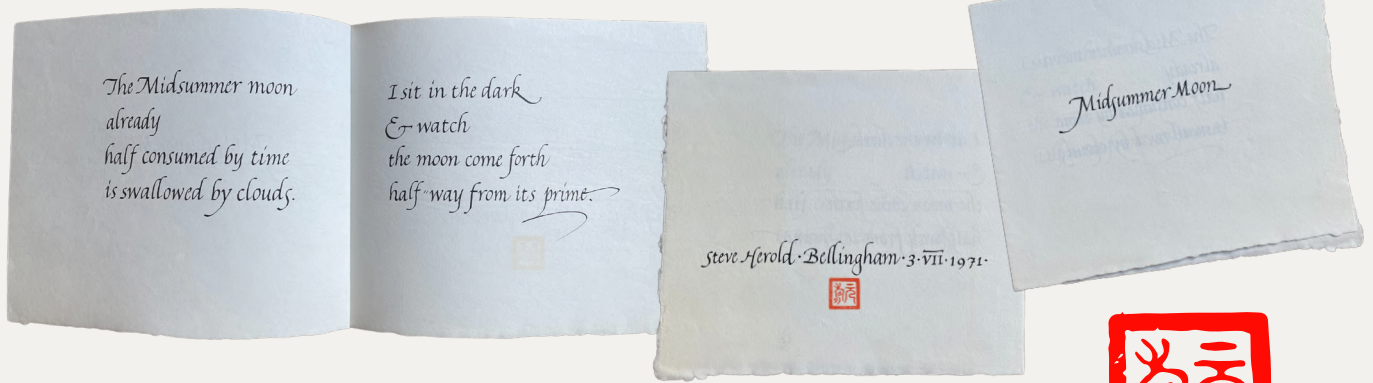


## LIMITED EDITION BROADSIDE FEATURING POETRY, ART, AND CALLIGRAPHY FROM FISHTOWN ARTISTS

*Sund, Robert. Miler, Bo, illustr. Shack Work. [Tangram Press]. [Berkeley, CA]. 1990.*

A copy of the 1990 limited edition broadside featuring the poem Shack Work by notable Northwestern poet and Fishtown resident Robert Sund, which originally appeared in his collection Shack Medicine also published the same year by Tangram Press. Devoted to his craft above comradery, Sund established himself down river from the main Fishtown settlement in a hand built shack (“filled with the simple beauties of stone, wood, pottery, and paper art”) where he lived and worked for 11 years. Created after the destruction of both the cabin and Fishtown, this broadside represents both a collaboration and a continued connection between the community members with the poem by Robert Sund being elevated by original artwork by Bo Miller and calligraphy from Steve Herold. It was limited to 100 copies. Three copies found in OCLC as of March 2024. Single sided broadside on laid paper. Wear to top and bottom edges. Very good. | \$150





## ORIGINAL CALLIGRAPHED POETRY FROM FISHTOWN ARTIST STEVE HEROLD

*Herold, Steve. Midsummer Moon. Banks Books. Bellingham, WA. 1971.*

A rare remnant of the collaborative period between poet and calligrapher Steve Herold and fellow Fishtown poet Paul Hansen, later a noted translator of Chinese poetry, “this poem is a distilled, empty mind observation fueled by lots of weed”. On his chosen art form, Herold remarks, “Realizing I would have to spend my life on some aimless subject or other, I determined on calligraphy, which pleased my eye and seemed to straighten out my head as well”. In addition to a shared interest in calligraphy, both Hansen and Herold took to marking their work with Chinese ink seals, one of which (not featured here) became the official seal of Fishtown. No copies found in OCLC as of June 2024.

[2]pp. French fold pamphlet on WSH English handmade laid paper. Deckled edges.  
Very good. | [\\$250](#)

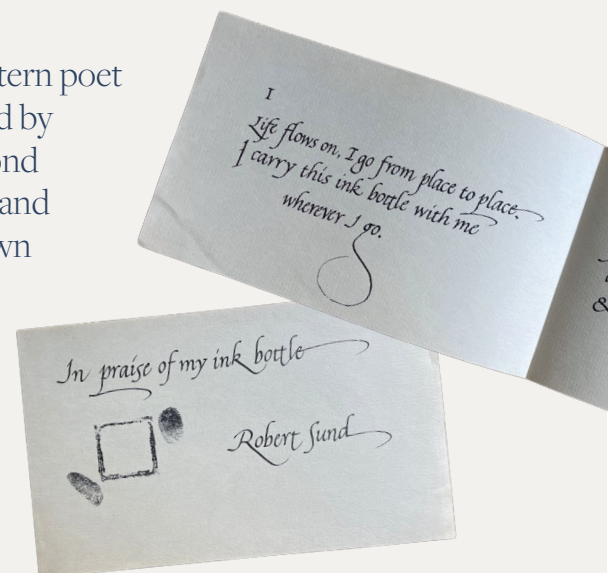
---

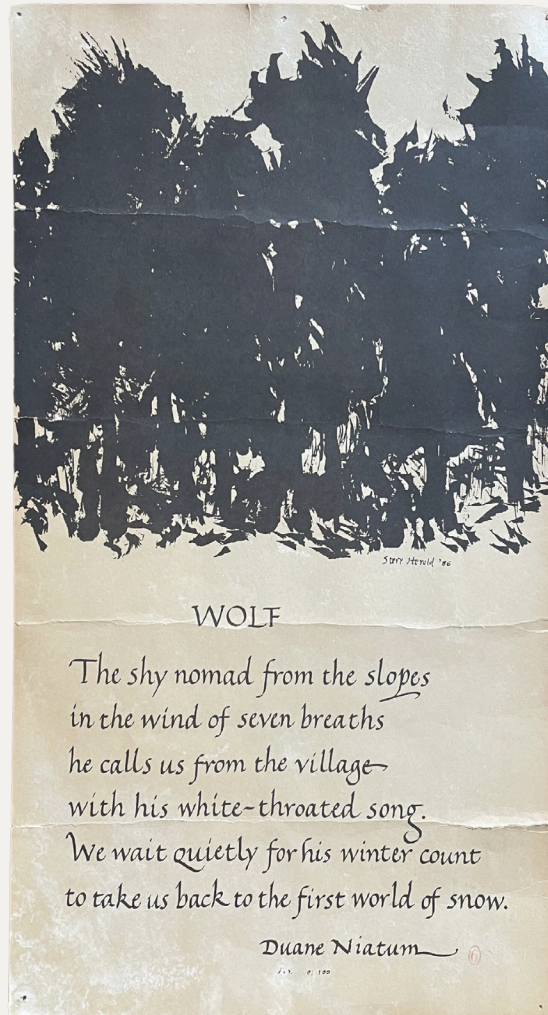
## LIMITED EDITION POETRY BY ROBERT SUND

*Sund, Robert. Herold, Steve, calligraphy. In Praise of My Ink Bottle. Double Elephant Press. [Seattle]. 1971.*

A copy of one of the earliest publications by notable Northwestern poet and Fishtown resident Robert Sund, calligraphed and published by Fishtown artist, poet, and bookseller Steve Herold. Sund’s second published work, this pamphlet — which include both the poet and calligrapher’s finger prints — was the first he created at Fishtown following his 1965 self-published, *Ish River Poets in Folio*. One of 1000 copies. Three copies found in OCLC as of March 2024.

[2]pp. French fold pamphlet. Fore corners bumped with crease to lower corners. Very good. | [\\$250](#)





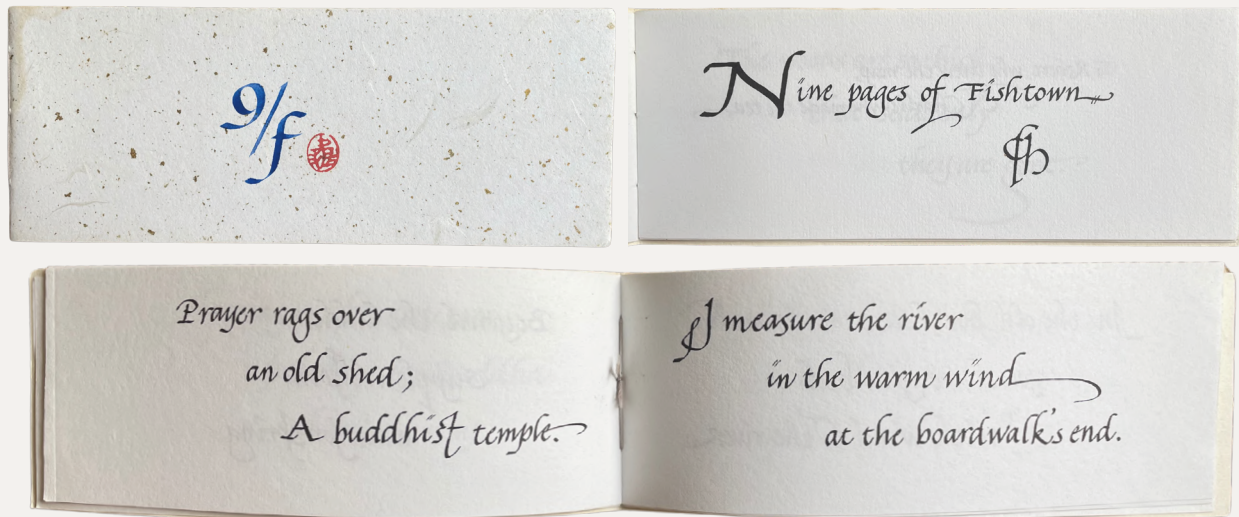
LIMITED EDITION BROADSIDE FEATURING POEM BY  
DUANE NIATUM OF THE S'KLALLAM TRIBE

*Niatum, Duane. Herold, Steve. Wolf. Steve Herold. Washington. 1986.*

A copy of the poem *Wolf* by Duane Niatum with calligraphy and illustration from Fishtown artist and poet Steve Herold. Though never a full-time Fishtown resident, Niatum (b. 1938), a prominent Northwestern Native poet of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe noted for his collections like *Ascending Red Cedar Moon* (1973) and *Songs for the Harvester of Dreams* (1981) as well as editing the influential anthology *Carriers of the Dream Wheel: Contemporary Native American Poetry* (1975), was considered a fellow traveler and friend by many members of the community. This limited edition broadside was limited to 100 copies printed by Herold in 1986.

One copy found in OCLC as of June 2024.

Broadside. 9 x 17 in. Creases from past folding, with partial split to right side of lowest fold. Wear to edges with some losses. Pin holes to corners and top center. Stamped no 6 of 100. Fairly good. | \$100



ORIGINAL CALLIGRAPHED POETRY BY FISHTOWN ARTIST  
STEVE HEROLD OWNED BY JOHN TARR

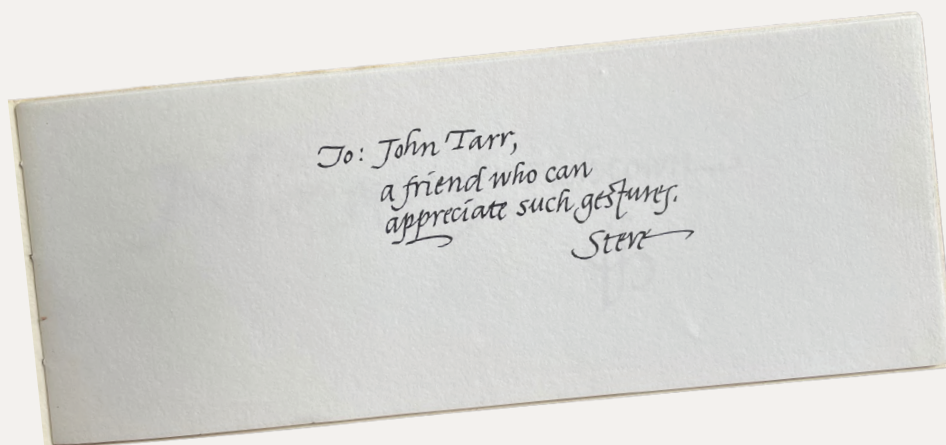
*Herold, Steve. Nine Poems of Fishtown. [Steve Herold]. Fishtown On The Skagit. 1971.*

One of 35 handmade copies of an original collection of poetry written, calligraphed, designed, printed, and bound by Fishtown artist and calligrapher Steve Herold (an additional 90 were made by machine).

This copy is inscribed to friend of the artist, John C Tarr (1894 – 1976), English calligrapher, author, type designer and draughtsman at the Monotype Drawing Office in London. In addition to writing the books *Good Handwriting* and *How To Acquire It and Printing To-Day*, Tarr is remembered for his work on Times Roman and cutting the matrices for the fonts of Eric Gill.

No copies found in OCLC as of March 2024.

[9]pp. Oblong saddle stitch pamphlet. Inscribed by author on first page. Slight warp to front wrap. Tea stain with soiling to front top spine and back wrap. Good. | \$300





ELLIPSIS RARE BOOKS



Andrew Lenoir, Proprietor  
[andrew@ellipsisrarebooks.com](mailto:andrew@ellipsisrarebooks.com)

