

Zine Machine – February 22, 2009
Jessica C. White

The Zine Machine originated as the “Book Drop” in 2001 in the North Lobby of the University of Iowa’s Main Library. It was set up as part of a class, Structure of the Handmade Book, taught by Gary Frost and offered through the UI Libraries and the UI Center for the Book. It was stocked with books made by students in the class and the bookbinding kits they produced, including the Ethiopian bookbinding kits still available now. Aramark Inc. generously provided the vending machine for this unusual venture.

In the summer of 2006, it was revitalized as the “Zine Machine” by UI student Jessica C. White, with a new focus on vending zines and minicomics. First contributors to the Zine Machine included, along with Jessica herself, many Iowa City zinesters: Cody Gieselman, Christina McClelland, David Morris, Lucky Creature, and United Action for Youth. As word spread about the new vending machine, zines started to come in from around the country. The machine was soon stocked with daily comics, literary zines, graphic novellas, comics compilations, a coloring book zine, and a free booklet to explain what zines are and how to make them. Zines from around the country continue to arrive in the Zine Machine’s PO Box along with local submissions. Prices vary from \$1 to \$10, and some are even given away for free. No commission is taken on the sales, but any donations, determined by each individual zinesters, goes to benefit the UI Book Arts Club. Payouts are mailed out twice a year.

Soon after the machine was set up, Jessica created the website www.ZineMachine.org to give updates on items currently in the machine, let people know how to submit their own zines, and to offer links to other zine related sites. The Zine Machine also has a presence now on the social networking site We Make Zines.

The Zine Machine was represented by Jessica White and Cody Gieselman at the 2006 Madison Zine Fest, where they introduced the Zine Machine to many Midwest zinesters. It has also sponsored events for zine promotion and creation, starting with a zine-making workshop in Iowa City, taught by Jessica and Cody in November of 2006. The following fall, a zine reading was held at the White Rabbit Gallery, also in Iowa City. The featured guest, John Porcellino, stopped while on his Midwest tour to read from “King-Cat Comics”, a series he started in 1989. With 5 other readers and about 30 attendees, the little gallery was filled to the max.

Although its main purpose is to sell zines, the Zine Machine is more than just a sales device. At its new location in the UI Main Library’s Print Alcove, it continues to encourage artistic and literary expression through independent publishing. As an art form existing outside of mainstream media and fine art, zines represent postmodern impulses to appropriate, smash boundaries, and to actively participate and engage in public dialogue. When making zines, students learn to communicate through both words and images, while physical the act of making zines – copying, stapling, folding - empowers them to realize their personal visions in material ways that can then be shared with the community. Like K.G. Congdon said, “zines embody ideas and assume action.” The Zine Machine plays an active role in fostering both the creation and consumption of print media.