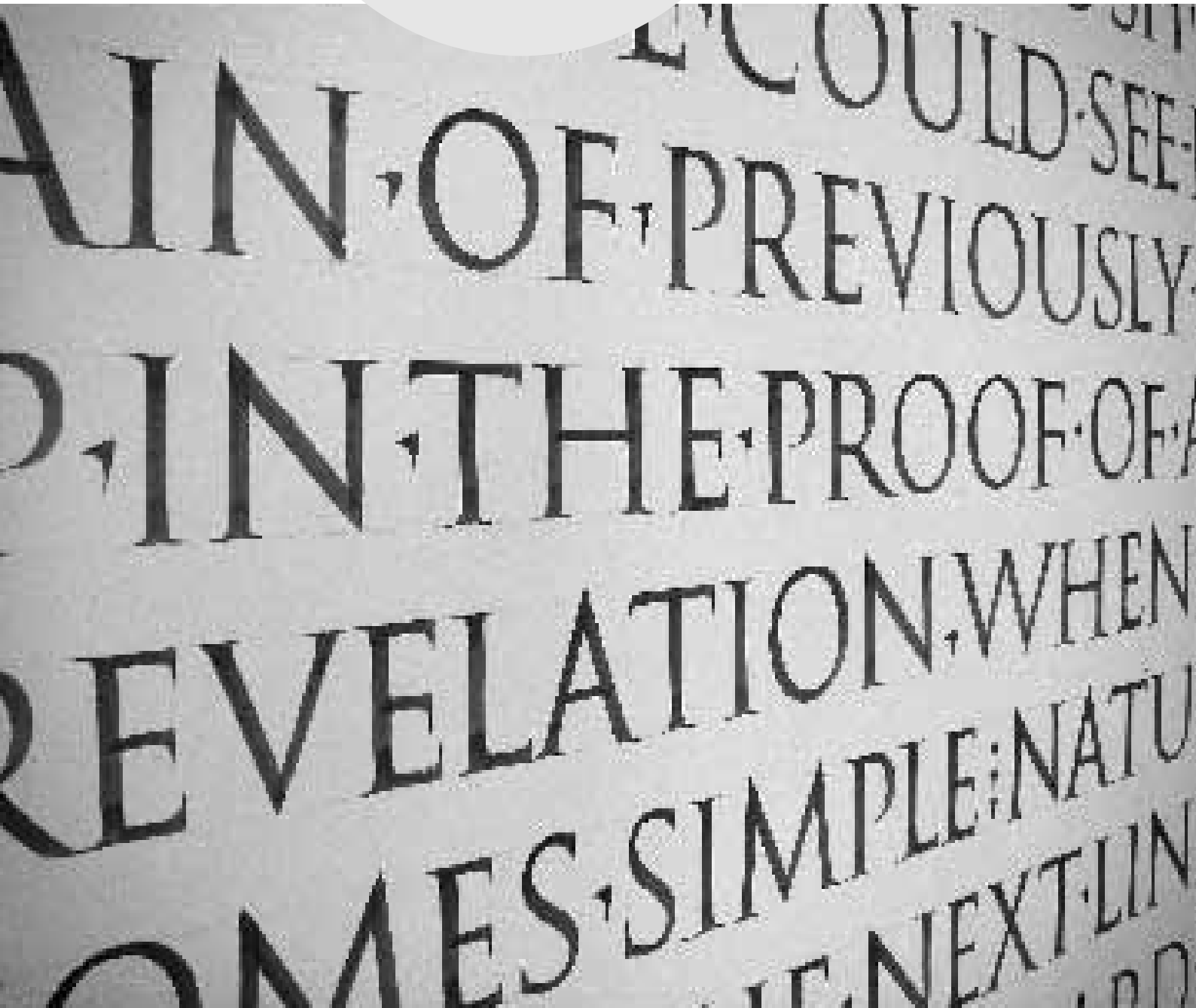


Forum 14

JOURNAL OF LETTER EXCHANGE

£5 Free to members and associates

Issue 14 September 2007



Susan Skarsgard, Anna Ronchi, Rudo Spemann, Learn your ABC, recent commissions by Tom Kemp, Incisive Letterwork & Timothy Donaldson, reviews, listings and more

Forum 14

Contents

Features

- 2 **Susan Skarsgard**
in conversation with Michael Harvey
- 6 **Learn your ABC**
Gary Breeze argues for maintaining standards
- 8 **Anna Ronchi**
talks to Letter Exchange about her career
- 12 **Rudo Spemann**
Christopher Haanes considers the German calligrapher's work
- 14 **Recent work**
Three projects by Incisive Letterwork, Tom Kemp and Timothy Donaldson
- 18 **Ramblings**
Pat Kahn's column
- 19 **New members**
Liesbet Boudens and Susie Leiper
- 20 **Welsh slate; plug-ins for Adobe Illustrator; paint for stone inscriptions**

Information, news and reviews

- 21 Forthcoming Events
- 21 From the Chairman
- 22 Book reviews
- 25 Clippings
- 27 Footnote
- 28 Letter Exchange lectures, information, contact details

Next issue: April 2008

Copy by 15 January please. See back page

Forum is published twice a year by Letter Exchange. See back page for details

Front cover: Tom Kemp, painted inscription, part of installation at QED Studios, Birmingham (see p15)

Above: Susan Skarsgard and Michael Harvey in conversation at Ditchling in May 2007, with Sumner Stone and Tom Perkins



Interview

From early music to car nameplates

Susan Skarsgard talks to **Michael Harvey** about her career and thoughts on calligraphy today

Were you an artistic child? From my experience, being 'an artistic child' had advantages. One's moods, tempers were excused by parents: 'It's his artistic temperament'. Of course, there's no such thing, but one was made allowances for, rather indulged. Does this ring any bells with you? Were your parents sympathetic to the arts?

My parents were both children of immigrant farmers that homesteaded from Norway. Their lives were so taken over by daily subsistence that the arts were not a part of their lives in any real way. So I can't say that there was much influence, understanding or indulgence for such things in my childhood. However, my mother gave me a great deal of independence as a child and my father is a carpenter and excellent craftsman at everything he attempts. Although at times it felt like indentured servitude, I helped him with his work a great deal, and in retrospect see that it probably helped me understand

how to be a 'maker of things'. I grew up in the city of Detroit where visual arts programs were almost non-existent through the public school system, although I do have a memory of winning an award for a sculpture of a fly that I fashioned out of wire when I was around eight years old! I had one older brother and a large extended family of fifty-six first cousins. Among them there is one architect (in London) and several musicians, but I am the only visual artist.

'Maker of things' is a good term. It covers both the hand skills and the attitude to what you do, whether it's calligraphy, drawing or constructing elaborate artefacts. You take care with details. Things have to work properly: not necessarily an attitude associated with being artistic.

I started out as a musician playing flute throughout my childhood and into early adult years. I majored in the study of early music on original instruments, which is how I ended up in Ann Arbor in 1978 where there was, at the time, a very lively early music community. I was one of a small group of musicians who had learned to read from original notation and we worked for a music publisher who would go to Italy to obtain microfilm of renaissance music manuscripts. We would read (play) through these manuscripts for him and he would select which ones to transcribe to modern notation for publication. That is how I first learned about calligraphy.

Didn't Walter Pater claim that all arts aspire to the condition of music? It seems that, with your early interest in and playing of music, this art was in your blood before you became a visual artist. The visual qualities of writing chimed with your response to music: both abstract arts.

I began to realize that the actual manuscripts were way more interesting to me than the music itself. I could really feel the presence of the human being that wrote this music down, and found the visual qualities of this writing to be so compelling. That's when I bought my first calligraphy book, Margaret Shepherd's *Learning Calligraphy*, and set out to teach myself how to draw letters. Not an auspicious beginning, but a beginning none the less.

Serious calligraphers will be surprised to read that you began with Margaret Shepherd's book, rather than, say, Edward Johnston's. Many wouldn't give it shelf-room, although Briem speaks well of it.

Part of the reason I pointed out that specific book is to illustrate that there are many paths to personal development of any kind. Even a questionable path is better than no path. I'm not a big believer in any rigid notion of pedagogy. I think it's more important to develop the ability to learn how to learn. To foster curiosity and develop the patience to allow your head, hand or eye to catch up with one another. That book gave me a beginning and I went on to research and read as much as I could find and eventually landed a copy of *The Mystic Art of Written Forms: an Illustrated Handbook for Lettering* by Friedrich Neugebauer. That book really spoke to me and I knew there was no turning back. It wasn't until much later that I read Edward Johnston's handbook.

You say you set out to teach yourself how to draw letters. 'Draw' not 'write'? Writing is a kind of drawing but usually regarded as a different activity. Do you see these as separate skills?

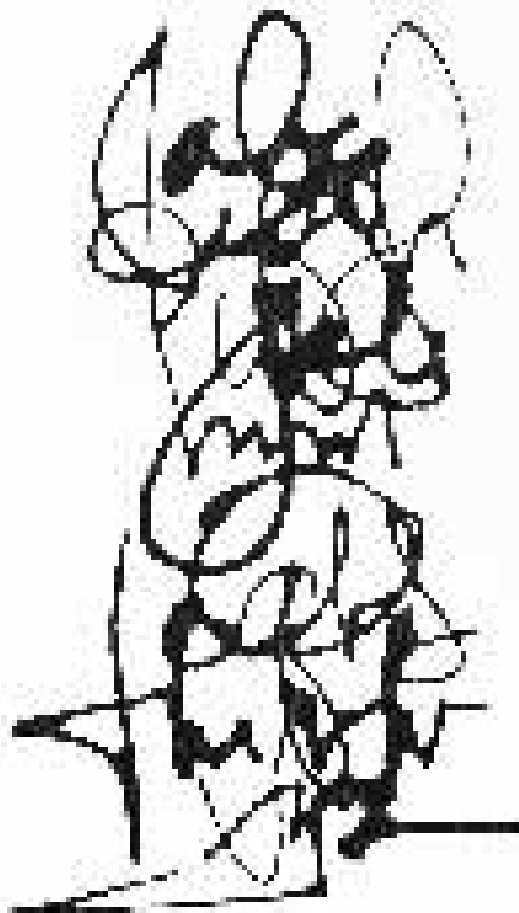
Drawing, writing?...who cares? I do see them as separate activities but I don't attribute a specific value to one over the other. It's kind of like asking, 'Do you see walking and running as separate skills?' Both activities can get you to where you're going, but their qualities are distinct and, depending on the goal, you would choose one over the other (or both). It's more a matter of tools in your box. The more tools or skills you have, the more ability you have to solve problems in unique ways. And certainly one activity informs the other. But much of that kind of talk is kind of beside the point for me. Unless you're only talking about utilitarian or commercial work, the real question for me is: what do you do with

these skills once you have them? In many ways I think western calligraphy is at a crossroads of sorts. There is now a generation of lettering artists with very refined skills that have taken a lifetime of development, and what are we doing with that amazing ability? Writing out another poem on a dead animal's hide? The use of word and image in contemporary art is ubiquitous, but generally not by skilled hands. The word 'calligraphic' is used to describe beauty of line and movement in modern art but generally not by 'calligraphers'. How do we as artists, not mere technicians, create work that is relevant for our time? That is a question that I do not specifically have the answer for, but it is what I think a lot about these days and attempt to address in my art.

The great jazz musician Sidney Bechet said: 'Whatever way you do something best, that's the way to do it. There isn't but just that one way. Teachers, they mostly forget that'. He was talking about music, but as you and I know, it applies to other arts. And, as you say, one activity informs another: skills cross-breed. There was a time in English colleges when hand-skills were disparaged as inhibiting students' 'creativity', but this is not the place to discuss such nonsense.

I prefer to discuss nonsense. Hand skills are not valued in most academic art programs at the moment in the States. Conceptual art seems to be the latest focus. The thing I can never understand is: why can't you have both? That is when the best work happens. When the underlying intellectual concept is provocative, important, and the human response is from talented hands. To me, that's when art happens.

Ornette Coleman says: 'If you don't have ideas, what are you gonna do?' He's speaking as a skilled musician, but adds 'rid yourself of repeating



Susan Skarsgard, large alphabet woodcut, 40 x 60 in, 2002, collection of the John M Wing Foundation, Newberry Library, Chicago

and rid yourself of style'. Style can become a crutch: better to have a voice than a style, don't you agree? And the Italian designer Giancarlo Piretti wrote: 'Once an artist finds his own language, he is freed from the fatigue of the avant-garde'.

Given your query about the relevance of modern lettering artists writing on dead animals' hides, what are your thoughts on the St John's Bible being created in Minnesota?

I personally don't have any interest in writing on dead animal hides. There are enough other substrates that can do the job well enough for me. However, if there was a direct metaphorical relationship with the overall concept that supported using the skin of an animal to write on, it might make sense.

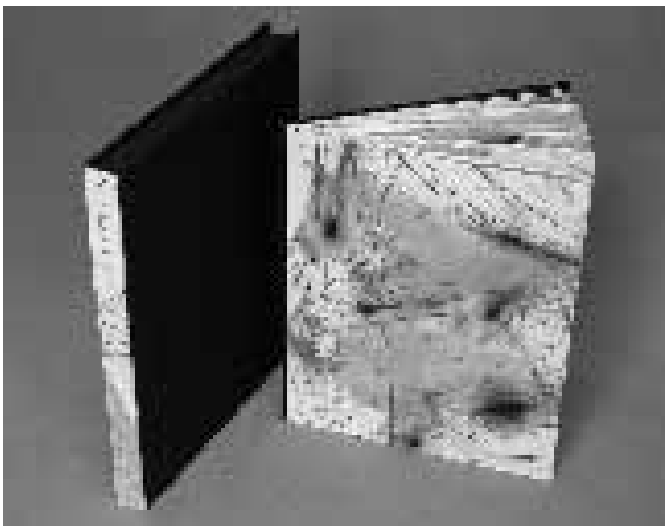
I don't know enough about the St John's Bible project to really speak about it intelligently. However, in some ways it illustrates what I was talking about before, in terms of 'what do the skilled calligraphers of our time do with this amazing talent?' We all have to answer that question for ourselves. I really believe there is a place for our work that transcends the utilitarian/craft/commercial connotation that is hard to escape. Listen, I appreciate fine craft in any form and can be inspired and transfixed by its inherent beauty. But I think there may be an opportunity to create a new genre of art that is built on the traditions of the past and speaks to the questions of our time.

You describe yourself as an artist and designer rather than a calligrapher. I was a 'craftsman' until I couldn't stand the crafts anymore, then 'designer' felt more modern, but the term got debased when it became an adjective. Now 'artist' just about feels okay. Were you an artist from the start?

The title for my very first business card was ironically 'Calligraphy Schmalligraphy' written out in a tentative italic. However, it took some time before I stopped calling myself a calligrapher. After all, I use calligraphy along with other skills in both art and design, so it seems redundant to specify that particular skill as a definition of who I am. (I mean, I also draw and I don't call myself a 'pencil user'.) So, I have landed at 'artist and designer' which does feel 'just about okay'.

Although self-taught you have become a teacher in the US and Europe. In the US, land of the born-again calligraphers, the annual conferences offer classes ranging from writing classic scripts to workshops where unconventional lettering is encouraged. I remember that you attended 'Experiment' at Santa Clara in California in 1989. What is your approach to teaching?

Susan Skarsgard *Psalm 148*, artist book printed by giclée with archival inks in an edition of sixty copies. Binding by Wesley B Tanner, www.passim.us



Yes, I am from the land of the 'born-again calligrapher'. I did attend 'Experiment' as a teacher where I was teamed up with the wonderfully creative American artist Paul Maurer. It was a great experience and I think that conference was the best ever, as it challenged both the participants and the faculty to think and work outside of their comfort zones.

I have mostly taken a break from teaching in the last several years since I started work at General Motors. However, I have been to Europe many times and will teach a class this summer in Italy. I usually try to incorporate whatever I am most interested in at the moment into my teaching. And I almost always use collaborative exercises to get a group to come together and explore ideas. I see it as a form of research in a way. Directed, visual research experiments can really be enlightening as a group endeavor and it is not something that one can easily do alone, so I try to take advantage of that unique quality that workshops provide as much as possible. It probably works best with folks that have a bit of experience and a willingness to abandon pre-conceived ideas.

Whenever I have taught specific skill-building classes, I try not only to demonstrate my approach, but also to build an awareness of how to 'see' in different ways. It's amazing how much an individual can improve technically if they can almost trick themselves into seeing a letter in a different context. Because we have all dealt with these shapes since we were very young, it's easy to fall into our memory of their shapes, as opposed to the actual unique characteristics that each form embodies. For instance, it's sometimes helpful for a student to focus on creating the white counter shapes of letters as opposed to trying to draw the letter itself. And sometimes it's helpful to develop other ways to evaluate their work, like looking at it in the mirror or through a magnifying glass. In any case, learning how to see differently is a very useful skill that I try to 'teach'.

But, again, my focus is always on the question 'What are you going to do with this skill, once you've mastered it?'

I want to ask you about General Motors, a world as far away from calligraphy and craft as one could imagine. How did this come about? Were you head-hunted? Did you answer an ad: 'Hot-shot calligrapher wanted?' Or did you beat down the boss's door yelling: 'You need me!'

The Corporate and Brand Identity group at GM's Design Center has always had a lettering specialist, and my predecessor was Dick Isbell, the type designer of Americana. Before Dick began working at GM, he was a partner with Jerry Campbell in the Detroit design firm Campbell/Isbell Alphabets. So when Dick left to work at GM, I started working with Jerry. When Dick retired from GM, they came to me for the position. So it was a pretty logical progression.

Plus, when I was working as a freelancer, I did the occasional job for General Motors (like designing a nameplate for the Chevrolet Nova vehicle where the name needed to be changed for use in Mexico because in Spanish *no va* means 'doesn't go'.)

I think it was a huge leap of faith for both the folks at GM and myself to think I could function happily in a corporate environment. But I have been lucky to have colleagues and bosses who have been open to my idiosyncrasies and often differing point of view.

From your recent presentation in Ditchling¹, it seems that you happily accept the exacting restrictions of plastic moulding technology, managing to translate exploratory calligraphic sketches into three-dimensional chrome nameplates and emblems that identify particular automobile models. Now the company's lead product designer in this high-tech, international commercial world of computer-aided design, at home in Ann Arbor you are equally happy to make prints on a handpress with your printer husband Wesley Tanner. So it's not a case of 'goodbye analogue, hello digital'² with you!



Yes, we span the centuries of technology here at home. For me, a designer is kind of like being an aesthetic solver of other people's problems. First you have to fully understand the problem, then you have to solve the problem by designing for a result that is achievable or manufacturable in the technology that you are designing for. So, if you are not the ultimate 'maker', it is critical to fully understand whatever technology you are using, so that you can best control the outcome. That is partially why I have such an interest in printing, because when you are proofing a big job on press, it's impossible to get the printer to work with you if you have no knowledge of his capabilities. So, I try to always understand the downstream implications and constraints of whatever I'm designing for.

Three-dimensional vehicle nameplates and emblems are made in many different manufacturing techniques but injection-moulded plastic with chrome finishing is the primary method. The engineering constraints and global production standards for this type of manufacturing are enormous and complicated to design for. But, I look at it like a really hard crossword puzzle. If you just keep at it, eventually the solution emerges. And you learn a lot of stuff along the way.

Teaching lettering in colleges used to be a difficult job. Students who came to paint, sculpt, become artists, couldn't see the point of sweating over their desks writing scripts or drawing letters, especially the Trajan letter. The tutor had to make lettering exciting, to enthrall them; but when letterforms, particularly type, became a major part of graphic communication, in which every kind of distortion was allowed, tutors had to damp things down. Writing and drawing letters became a tool that encouraged students to see, to make informed choices in the lettering jungle. To my mind, if one can really see letters the door is open to seeing form everywhere. That is why handwriting must be taught in primary school. The foundations of visual judgement are laid there.

I do agree that learning to see letters is a great foundational skill for any type of visual artist.

One of the highlights in 'Ditchling' was your video showing Jerry Campbell, a professional lettering artist unknown to me before. Your speeded-up video showed him creating a drawn calligraphic title accompanied by the rollicking music of Fats Waller. He seemed to be what was once known disparagingly as a 'commercial artist'. It was good to see someone outside the calligraphic community demonstrating his skills, someone you obviously admire hugely.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to work next to Jerry and really learn how to be a commercial artist from him. It has allowed me a way to make a living as a creative individual. But mostly I just love him for who he is as a person and as a very creative and skilful artist.

This brings me to ask if you have heroes (and heroines) in the calligraphic and wider lettering world. If asked who I admire, as well as

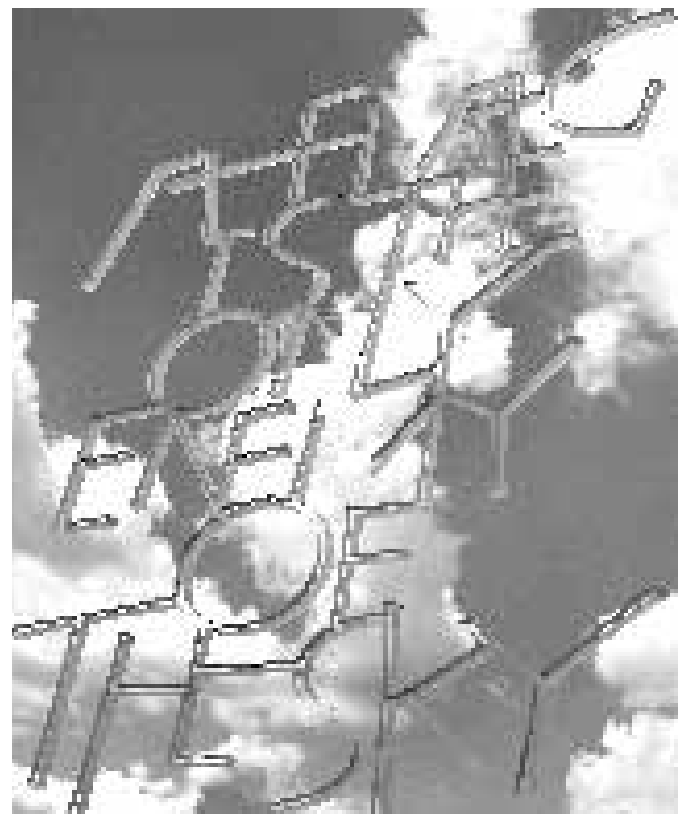
the towering figure of Hermann Zapf, I always name Jovica Veljović – for his superb calligraphy and creation of stunning digital typefaces – and Alan Blackman for his sheer daring and inventiveness with drawn letters. It would be interesting for readers to know who amongst your contemporaries you most respect, and why.

That's a huge question, because there are so many colleagues in our field, including yourself and of course Alan, who I admire greatly. To list them all, with all of my rationale, would be longer than this interview could contain.

But, if forced to winnow the list down to a few, I can say that I have the greatest respect for the work of Friedrich Neugebauer and Hermann Zapf, both masters of design and form. Also, Imre Reiner who worked so fluidly between the many forms of the letter arts with his wild creativity. Hans Schmidt, who has pushed the form with his innovative and surprising use of letters as beautiful objects. And I admire Sheila Waters' mastery of color and form.

I very much appreciate and am interested in where Brody Neuenschwander is going with his work, with his thoughtful and engaging imagery and often provocative ideas. Ewan Clayton's work fascinates me with the broad understanding of history that supports his very contemporary interpretation of line and form. Suzanne Moore's deep, conceptual study reflects itself in her beautiful imagery and expert bookwork. Thomas Ingmire's innovative calligraphic explorations have influenced a generation of artists. Rick Cusick's playful and creative letterform explorations, and always, John Stevens, whose masterful virtuosity paired with his depth of character, produce work that is awe-inspiring.

That's a list, in no particular order and certainly not complete, which comes to mind at the moment. I do feel lucky to have known and have important friendships with many of these folks that I have named. The wonder of this small but diverse community is that it is global in nature and our differing backgrounds support a wide range of thinking and approach to how letters, word and image come together.



Top: General Motors chrome vehicle nameplate designs. 'Grand Am' is a proposal. Right: Susan Skarsgard 'A flag is the only enemy of the sky', 58" x 48", 2002, milled and engraved cast acrylic, text by Robert Kelly

I am pleased that you include Imre Reiner amongst those you admire. The modern calligraphic movement is sustained by amateurs, many could be called hobbyists, whose teachers, few of them professionals, are unknown in the wider world. There are factions too: traditionalists versus free spirits. Much passion and argument. The calligraphic community reminds me of another sub-culture, ballroom dancing, where beginners learn the correct sequence of steps for each dance before progressing to more adventurous variations.

Yes, I do my best work wearing high heels and writing backwards. I learned that from Alan Blackman.

Practising calligraphy can be an absorbing and satisfying pursuit for individuals, a resource to be explored by artists for their own purposes, yet surely it's type that sets the pace today. Of course, type designers need to understand calligraphic form, but written characters are only a small part of the repertoire available to the modern world of visual communication.

For students, the study of calligraphy is a process that can have very deep rewards, as many of us know. It requires a type of meditative consciousness to involve oneself in the tiniest of worlds where the smallest move can alter the rhythm and shape of meaning and beauty. I think that is why there has been a fairly large 'movement', as you call it. Most type designers acknowledge the importance of the study of writing or calligraphy as a basis for understanding letter form. And I guess I emphasize the word *study*, because I don't think the *practice* of calligraphy is a necessary skill to be a competent type designer. In addition, for the sake of scholars studying historical documents, preserving and archiving the history of the written form is a cultural imperative.

Surely the practice of calligraphy today is an individual choice, like taking up watercolour painting? Calligraphy is no longer a major cultural force. Is it merely being provocative to suggest that while calligraphy was for centuries the mother of letterforms it is now the hand-maiden?

You are right that the 'practice of calligraphy' is no longer a necessary tool of communication. We now have faster/better tools to impart information. So it is a time for many of us to reflect on 'what is the point of it all then?' I think most of the professionals in our field come up against this reality at some point in their careers. Some have given it up completely (gone on to macramé?), some struggle to find ways to use this form as a unique voice to reflect relevant issues of our time, some are content with the safety of what they're good at...but at the end of the day, it is a struggle to find a place for calligraphy in our contemporary world. I'm not ready to call it the 'hand-maiden' yet, but I guess you'd need to specify which hand we are talking about!

So what do you think calligraphy has to offer today's world?

If I could modify this question, I would ask 'what can calligraphers offer to today's world?' Calligraphy without context or conceptual depth is an anachronism. But skilful interplay of word and image is a powerful combination. Being the holders of this very unique form of artistic expression, it seems to me that finding a way to make our work relevant for 'today's world' is probably the most important question that we all must answer for ourselves as we shape the future direction of this art form.

Notes

¹ Both Susan Skarsgard and Michael Harvey spoke at the Edward Johnston Foundation international seminar in Ditchling, Sussex, earlier this year.

² This was the title of Michael Harvey's talk.

Opinion Learn your ABC

Gary Breeze argues for the importance of sound training, and of maintaining standards in public lettercarving commissions

We are living in a very precarious time for the craft of the designer letter-carver; more precarious than ever before. More precarious than when dear old Eric Gill took up the baton of the arts and crafts revival and challenged the memorial masonry industry a hundred years ago, breathing life into a dying trade.

In those days, and for the next fifty or sixty years, anyone wanting to join in this craft revival could expect to serve a five-to seven-year apprenticeship, standard to all tradesmen regardless of their artistic pretensions. These apprenticeships were the accepted remnant of a mediaeval guild system which jealously guarded the business and technical knowledge of the trades. This was, to some extent, an insidious and corruptible system that restricted social and economic mobility, but it also maintained a high standard of craftsmanship which could not be undermined or weakened by cheap alternatives. At odds with the concept of a free market, however, these closed shops were largely swept away by the industrial revolution, and the inevitable fall in the quality of manufactured goods soon followed. But even after a couple of hundred years of industrialisation, a long apprenticeship was still the only effective way of learning essential skills in any workshop from foundry to weaving mill.

It would be misleading to paint a picture of a 'golden age' when everyone was happy in their work producing things of great beauty. This was certainly never true of letter-carving, which was in any case never much more than a small part of the broader stonemasonry trade. But on its revival in the designer-craft workshops of the early twentieth century, inspired by their belief in a better, unmechanised society, long term apprenticeships were simply taken for granted. Eric Gill accorded lettering the same degree of attention as any other aspect of carving, and the seven-year apprenticeship was still the accepted norm in David Kindersley's workshop during the 1950s, producing a generation of letterers who have arguably raised the standard of creativity in the field to an unprecedented height. Eventually these apprenticeships did become economically unworkable, but for a time some colleges with good teachers existed that could lay down some groundwork, and when the student did join an established workshop he or she could at least get going relatively quickly.

But now the full-time college courses are all but gone as well. Most aspiring letter-carvers are learning what skills they can in short modules as part of a larger stonemasonry or carving course, much as they might have done in the trade prior to the revival, or they are attending weekend courses. To say these are not adequate to learn this misunderstood craft properly is an understatement. Drawing and carving lettering well is more difficult than that. Certainly one can learn some basics in a few days, and with masonry skills one can begin cutting letters immediately – but, after nearly twenty years practising my craft which included a long and hard training in the workshops of master-craftsmen, I for one regard what I have learned with a jealous eye as the guilds might once have done, and expect anyone who practises my craft to give it a similar input.

My fear is that the lack of good training opportunities in recent years is already beginning to show, and in the realm of public



Lettering class for Painting and Decorating apprentices at the Laird School of Art, Birkenhead, in about 1955, from A Lewery *Signwritten Art*

lettering this matters. The majority of badly made handicrafts can be enjoyed safely tucked away in the homes and gardens of the people who choose to buy them, but architectural lettering and memorials are on display for all to see; they are a form of public art. I want to comment on this and it is not a popular stand to take. It has become 'politically incorrect' to criticise another's efforts as an artist, but this is because in the UK being an artist is seen as a form of personal development rather than a profession, as an activity of children and those undergoing occupational therapy. Few public art commissions can be made without the compulsory involvement of a local primary school, and one suspects that local authorities would often rather leave the whole thing to kids and not involve a professional 'grown-up' artist at all. I am not saying that children are not creative and full of good ideas, but we would not be happy if children were asked to design our office buildings. Experts are under attack in our society for making the unskilled or unlearned feel inadequate, whilst popular television shows attest to the fact that being bad at something does not stand in the way of a successful career and the accolades that go with it. I am not condemning the role of the amateur. The word *amateur* is a lovely one, with its roots in the Latin word for lover. Every healthy craft needs a groundswell of enthusiastic amateurs with a love for that craft, for the more or them there are the more truly skilled practitioners there are likely to be too. I would go further and say that 'eccentric' letterforms cut with more love and passion than awareness of good design, so long as they are cut deeply by a competent carver, are OK – certainly better than bad machine work and often better than dispassionate handwork. This was certainly the norm prior to what I have called the Revival. But today any amateur stonemason who is down on his luck, and cannot make enough money carving gargoyles and the like, can set up a website and 'turn out' the odd headstone for a few quid with no knowledge of the appropriate depth or strength of a good monumental letter. Perhaps the only consolation for those of us concerned about good design is that their ineffectual letters will weather away quite quickly; but what of large-scale public commissions, or lettering in other materials? The fact that the architect Jonathan Adams felt qualified to create his own idea of what constitutes good lettering on such an enormous scale at the Wales Millennium Centre*, perhaps the single worst piece of public lettering any-

where, testifies to the low importance accorded to the skills of the letterer and to lettering design in general.

So there is a serious plea behind this diatribe, and it is a plea to the gallery owners, agencies and local authority arts officers, and to the architects who control much of the commissioning of new work in the public realm: Surely it is imperative that bad lettering is not nurtured and encouraged by this network of supporters of the arts whose job it must be to be arbiters of taste and good practice? It must be up to them to have a clear understanding of what constitutes good lettering and what does not. The various lettering societies understand the need to maintain standards in this exacting discipline. They are established by professionals to maintain high quality in a world that prefers cheapness and profit, both in its products and in its college courses. But there seems little point in the preservation of the principles of good workmanship if those principles are constantly undermined by agencies commissioning bad quality work from people outside of these societies.

Exhibitions of lettering too must surely present to the public the highest possible standard in order to heighten public expectations and to give the amateur something to aspire to. The sign of a good craftsman is that they question the quality of their work on a daily basis. The fact that some people believe themselves qualified enough to inflict their inferior workmanship onto an unwary public on the basis of a few week's training is deeply worrying for the future of this craft. Agencies and gallery owners supplying them with work and an outlet for their dismal efforts can only blind these misguided dabblers further. The result is deterioration in the quality of our handmade objects, leading to an eventual acceptance that the cheaper machine-made alternative is actually no worse: In other words, undoing the work of Morris and Gill and leading to a complete reversal of everything that the craft revival has achieved for the lettering arts. Perhaps when there is a demand for high quality workmanship there will be a demand for the proper training once again as well.

*See *Forum 9, Clippings*

Gary Breeze is a lettercutter and lettering sculptor based in Norfolk. See www.garybreeze.co.uk.

Calligraphy saved my graphic design and graphic design saved my calligraphy

Anna Ronchi talked to Letter Exchange in April about her career, from a graphic design training in Milan, via the revelation of calligraphy studies at Roehampton, to the work she has done since, including setting up the *Associazione Calligrafica Italiana*. This is a revised version of her talk.

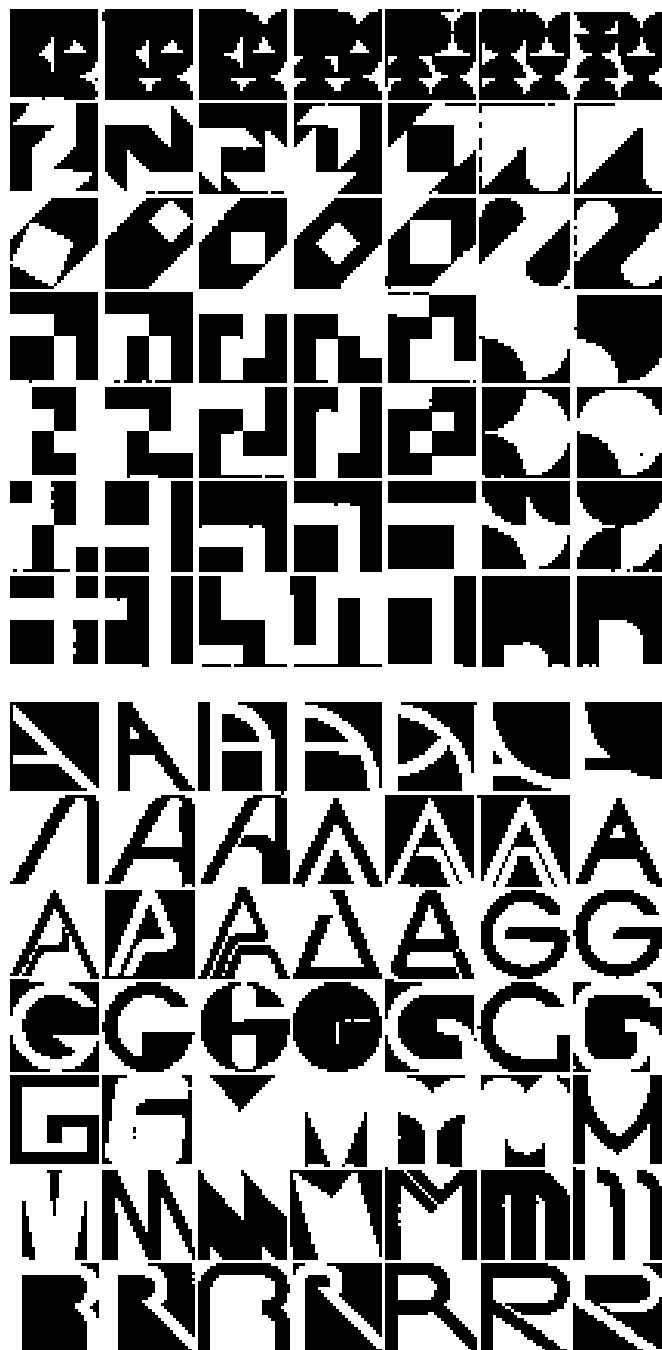
Before taking up calligraphy I studied visual design. The *Scuola Politecnica di Design* in Milan which I attended from 1980 to 1982 had an almost scientific approach to design, based on the theories of Gestalt psychology. It was an Italian equivalent to the Bauhaus, founded in 1954 by Nino di Salvatore and other painters of the *Movimento Arte Concreta* (MAC), an artistic movement following in the footsteps of Russian Constructivism.

But Professor Nino Di Salvatore understood the limitations of this movement and pointed at a new direction. We studied theories of perception (including those of Gestalt psychology), and used them in our own experimental work. The MAC artists who had quite naturally shifted from abstract painting to design and who were involved in teaching at the *Scuola Politecnica di Design* included Bruno Munari, Atanasio Soldati, Gillo Dorfles, Augusto Garau. What made my college unique was that all the teachers shared the same method and philosophy of design. They believed that every kind of designed product needs human creativity: machine-produced work which lacks this is pointless. But this creativity is not the result of personal expression; it must be developed through an educational and pedagogical method organised with scientific rigour. Design was conceived as a powerful, energetic, life-enhancing force; it must have moral integrity and enhance man's creative personality.

As well as all the courses that are common to any design college, we studied form psychology, communication psychology, science of vision, colour, design method. Every one of our works had to be painted with gouache or drawn with a rapidograph and Indian ink, and we used only a fixed paper size of 66 x 66 cm. The square has equal tension in each of the four corners, therefore it was a good operational field for our experiments in shape and colour.

But what about lettering? The theory was that letterforms develop from experimentation with geometrical shapes – dot, line and surface – and the interplay between black and white, inner and outer spaces. So experimentation with the line was one of the first exercises intended to help us build up a language of form, and gain experience of letters as graphic signs. We then worked with the division or multiplication of the square, circle and triangle (see right). When constructed using geometry and simple shapes, letters take on most interesting forms, but there is a problem with legibility. These experiments are good for a logo, but not for a font. What strikes me still is that although we were taught the history of writing, when it came to practice we didn't have a clue about the way Roman capitals, for example, were written or painted. Practice didn't follow theory at all.

My lettering teacher was Umberto Fenocchio, a student and



Anna Ronchi: student experiments with geometric shapes and geometrically derived letterforms at the *Scuola Politecnica di Design*, Milan, in the early 1980s

colleague of Aldo Novarese many years before at Nebiolo. In his very influential book *Alfabeto*, Novarese showed an uncial hand designed with a compass and square. Being an Italian he could not ignore our splendid past but he did not understand it. Probably Umberto Fenocchio was experiencing the same contradictions too.

After college I started working as a designer but was con-

fronted with a situation which didn't satisfy me at all. These were the years of photocomposition: there was a wide choice of styles for headlines, but designers had very few text faces to use. Even now some of them are teaching the students that six fonts are enough for setting any text: Times, Bodoni, Century, Futura, Avant Garde, Helvetica. For a long time even the best Italian designers preferred to work within a limited range of well established fonts, thus showing a lack of typographic sensitivity. Helvetica was used all the time as a solution for every project. When a seriffed type was needed, you can imagine what was chosen – Bodoni. I must admit that when I was teaching lettering recently, I too was tempted to abolish the use of all fonts except one complete set such as Garamond (one of the most common on all computers), in order to teach simplicity and elegance to the students, who are absolutely lost nowadays that we are surrounded by thousands of fonts.

At that time I was getting more and more curious about letterforms. Calligraphic pieces I saw in magazines like the American *US&C* and the German *Novum* were so exciting compared to the absolutely sterile Italian typography scene. I happened to know about Digby Stuart College, Roehampton, and decided I had to go back to school. I attended the 1988-89 academic year. I cannot say how grateful I am to all the good teachers I had there. Their way of teaching deeply influenced me, and I constantly try to be at the same time as rigorous and gentle with my students as they were with me. My work at Digby was clearly influenced by my previous studies. My 'big project' was about the work of Bruno Munari, a previous teacher of mine, as I have said. Munari loved to play with ideas, materials, tools, to discover new opportunities for design, to surprise, astonish and provoke, often with the simplest idea. Just the opposite of so many Italian designers who delight in being intellectuals. Whilst I was fascinated by the Arts and Crafts Movement, Johnston, Gill, and so on, I liked to mix this tradition with the rationalist approach to design with which I was familiar. At the time that was my response to very traditional calligraphy.

Since then I have attended workshops in Belgium and Germany and have experienced different approaches and theories concerning calligraphy. Later on in 1990 I would produce my first illegible calligraphy, and that would be the beginning of new artistic possibilities.

When I returned home in 1989 I was finally confident about letterforms. I felt I had learnt more in England about the Latin heritage than I ever had in Italy. This was the situation surrounding me: wonderful

inscriptional letterforms of the past that nobody knew and appreciated from the point of view of design. Those whose job it was to care for public lettering had no knowledge of letterforms. Calligraphy was neither practised nor taught anywhere. In the design colleges Novarese with all his limitations was still the reference point for lettering studies. Typographic design did not exist as a subject. There was a problem with visual design education generally in Italy: the eldest graphic designers were mostly architects, while the youngest had attended privately run design courses where the training was very superficial.

So in 1991 it was time to create in Italy a society for the promotion of calligraphy. The *Associazione Calligrafica Italiana* was born. So few of us were doing calligraphy at the time that we felt an urgent need to teach. We intended to promote calligraphy and all the related arts and crafts. We had in mind the tradition established by Johnston, but definitely wanted to look forward and be open to all possibilities, experiences and cultures.

I have often wondered why Italy ignored the revival of calligraphy associated with Johnston and others. I think I can explain it like this. In 1900 Italy was relatively backward economically. We were still an agricultural country with much illiteracy. After Mussolini seized power in 1921 all English and American literature was criticized and finally prohibited. Commercial calligraphers or those with a good copperplate hand were teaching in the schools but their subject was considered the least important academically as it was purely a means to finding a job. *Calligrafico* is still a pejorative term in Italian.

Whilst the appreciation of calligraphy was only gradually growing around me, I was able to find work thanks to my background in graphic design. I had new ideas for wine labels, catalogues, letterheads, logos, book covers. When other graphic designers suffered from the recession, I could carry on working. Luckily my earlier training in visual design allowed me to take



Top: logotype by Anna Ronchi

Right: 'The Italian situation'



Packaging for beer and wine by Ronchi Tubaro Thom

charge of the whole design process, so I could control the end result and not depend on advertising agencies who wanted to manipulate my work.

I remember how in the eighties and nineties I used to do the artwork by hand. To arrive at the final stage I needed to take my little sheet of paper with my lettering to the photocompositor, who made all the enlargements or reductions necessary to arrive at the finished artwork ready for the printer. I am glad to have gone through this, but I am also glad of today's digital technology which makes it possible to work faster, and to try many variations of shapes and colours.

But eventually, a few years ago, all opportunities to do lettering for agencies dried up. Neither calligraphy nor lettering was needed any more as any number of digital fonts could do almost the same work much more cheaply.

Many graphic designers with whom I've tried to collaborate were very sceptical about the use of a handwritten text or title; the old habit of using a non-expressive typographic layout was still predominant. But I am very proud to have written the Trajan

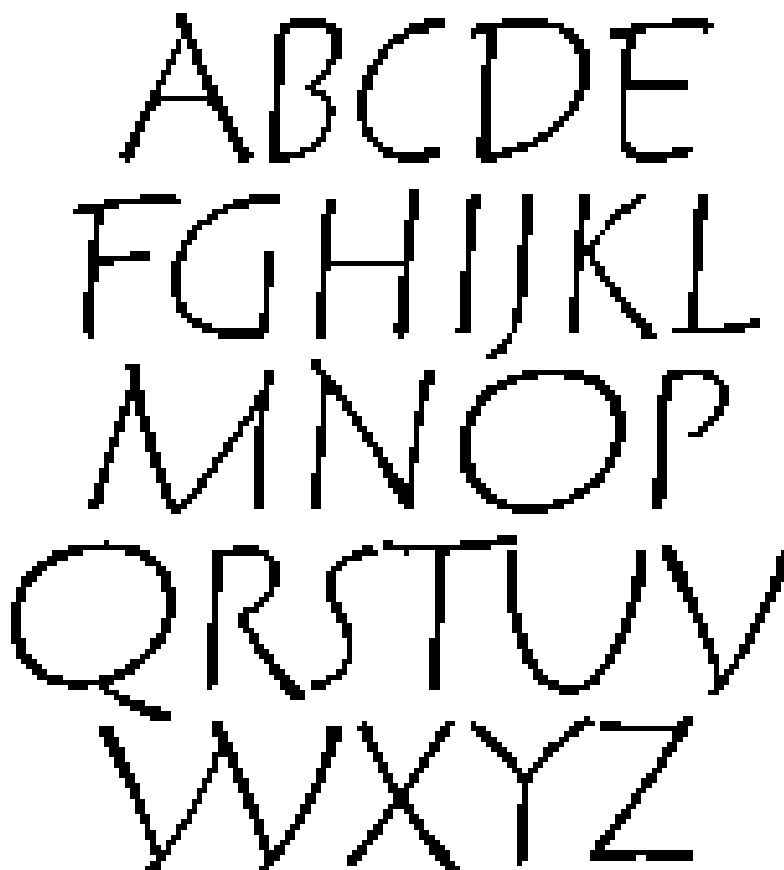
letters that Fronzoni used for a poster. Good designer though he was, he had never used classical Roman lettering. I remember I had to explain to him how those letters were probably written with a brush, because he wanted me to draw them very accurately with a square and compass – the same approach as that of the Renaissance men like Felice Feliciano, Luca Pacioli or Luca Horfeï. Much later on Aldo Novarese was doing the same, as we have seen.

From 1996 to 2004 I had a studio in Milan with two other partners: Ivana Tubaro and Stuart Thom. We named it Ronchi Tubaro Thom, RTT for short. We used to share the same interest in lettering and typography. Ivana Tubaro is an experienced teacher, while Stuart Thom did all the internet and multimedia work. I did the calligraphy and lettering. Crucially, we managed to combine attention to text both as content and as type/calligraphy, and to marry manual techniques and digital technology. We designed books and catalogues with particular attention to detail; we chose type with strong calligraphic influences and tried to set it with great care. Thanks to digital technology, the process of setting the text was in our hands and we felt a strong responsibility to be accurate both graphically and linguistically. In the studio we had good competence in several languages and tried to teach the clients some typographic rules. I remember one of them was convinced that in English no word breaks were allowed. But not all clients wanted or understood this kind of accurate work. Some of them preferred confusion to order; they liked to see a profusion of images on several layers. In cases like these we would use calligraphic marks contrasting with the typography. Around this time I began to feel that calligraphy had to be the opposite of typography: irregularity, expression, contrast were all aspects to be enhanced, while still maintaining the legibility that is so important in graphic design.

We did labels for a brewery who made an exquisite beer right in the centre of Milan (see left)! It was quite an exciting project full of creative possibilities. The names of the beers being very evocative for anybody like us living in Milan, we decided to illustrate their meaning with a symbol and with text. A pen was used for designing both. We tried to keep the calligraphy legible but as expressive as possible. What happened was that two alternative designs were presented to the client, who liked them both. Luckily he didn't suggest mixing them! For the packaging of a wine called 'Sasso Nero' ('Black Pebble') we decided to show what could be done with stonecutting. That's another discipline that is not practiced in Italy.

Etruria (top of next page) is a capitals-only font of mine with wide proportions and a slight forward movement, inspired by Roman sans serif inscriptions. I used the font inverted on the background of black shapes similar to pebbles in an issue of *La Operina* devoted to public lettering, inscriptions and large scale lettering. For some time our studio did the graphic design and editing of this journal of the *Associazione Calligrafica Italiana*.

I have often neglected the actual craft of calligraphy: my profession and my work for the *Associazione Calligrafica Italiana* were taking all my time. But sometimes I was invited to participate in exhibitions, and this gave me the motivation to work on single pieces not intended for reproduction. I made some textile books of paper mounted on linen which can be hung up on a wall or held in the hand like a normal book when they are closed. Keeping the piece of calligraphy unframed, to preserve authenticity and tactile qualities, is an important concern to me. In 2001 I was invited to participate in the duo exhibition *Word and Dance* with the Scottish photographer Roy Robertson. When I was shown the pictures he had shot during many years of collaboration with the Scottish Dance Theatre, I was inspired to work on the same themes of movement and light. I very much liked Roy Robertson's pictures. In them I found shapes, textures, marks, light and shade, density and emptiness, many graphic ideas I could use myself. These are elements I have used in my calligraphy. Some-



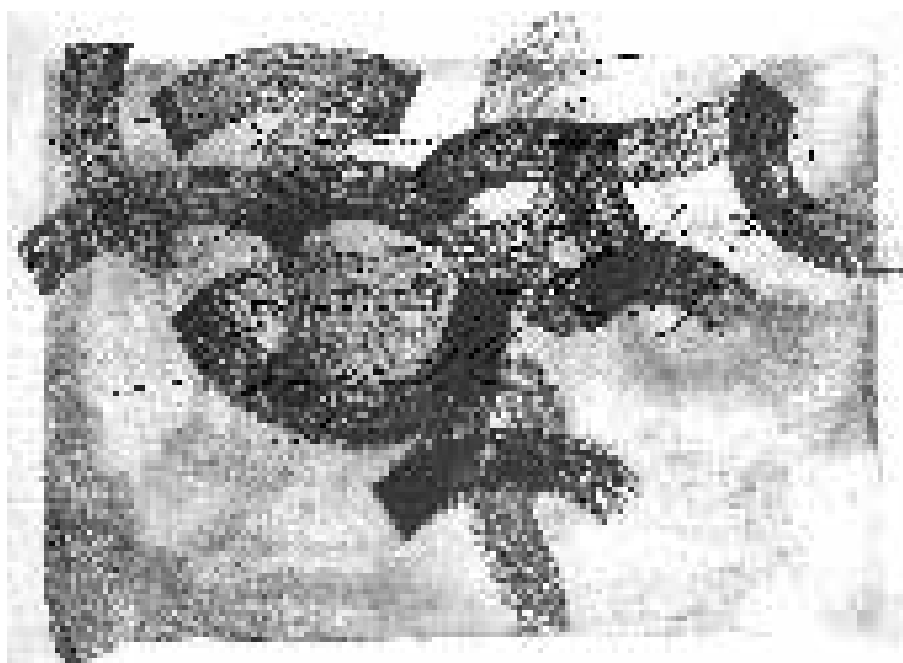
Anna Ronchi, 'Etruria' typeface
 Below: Anna Ronchi, piece made for
 collaborative exhibition *Word and
 Dance*

times I start with a pattern, lines and texture that later would become a text. For the exhibition I chose very short texts which were only a pretext to build up a visual composition. On some pieces I excluded the words altogether and kept only the marks and strokes of handwriting (see below).

In 1996 I was involved, together with James Clough, in establishing a course in Typographic Culture and Design. My subject was type design whilst James taught the history of printing and of type. After the war the college had organised the first course on book design in Italy, so they still had all the printing machines and characters. These were rather old – quite interesting because they represented a good choice of Italian display faces from 1900, but not good as text faces for our books. For that we bought some Monotype Dante. For the final design of an alphabet or a composition I made the students experiment with a wide pen or brush or with a soft pencil, altering the thickness of the stroke, before making the accurate drawings. We didn't do any digitisation: I preferred to put the accent on manuality. I also used to teach some bookbinding techniques when we did proportions and page layout. The students were professionals or postgradu-

ates. They lacked in-depth training in book and type design, but particularly practice, drawing free-hand. They learned to set type and print so that a booklet could be produced at the end of the academic year with their designs, the whole process being done by hand.

In conclusion, I must say things have very much changed in Italy as far as type design is concerned. There have been exhibitions and conferences (like the ATypI Conference in Rome in 2002), specialist magazines are published and a lot of the milestones of typographical literature have now been translated into Italian. The credit for that goes to Giovanni Lussu and Stampa Alternativa, but also to Sylvestre Bonnard of Milan, a publishing company specialising in the history of the book. More young people now have a better education thanks to the new faculties of design established in Milan, Rome and Venice. The *Italian Association for Visual Communication (AIAP)* is doing very important work in the field of typography. There is more awareness; some new fonts have been produced, and these were reviewed in the catalogue of the exhibition *Italic 1.0*. And there is finally a printing museum in Italy too. There are in fact several collections of



printing machines and type but not all are open to the public. This one in the North East is really fabulous. It's the work of a large commercial printer who devoted time, energy and seemingly unlimited finances to the project.

For me, things have also very much changed. I have devoted all my life to working, but however successful one woman can be, there comes a time when she needs something more permanent, something that lasts for future years. So in 2004 I had the most important experience in my life: my baby was born. As I wanted to give her a lot of attention I gave up my job and I also moved to a healthier place than Milan. Now the studio is reduced to two people and is inevitably called Tubaro Thom. I concentrate mostly on teaching calligraphy workshops or on working on personal projects.

One of these projects for the future is trying to grapple with the problem of children's handwriting. I have accumulated some experience with adults. I have taught many classes on handwriting: how to improve it from the point of view of form and readability. My starting point has been the chancery hand of Ludovico degli Arrighi because it is particularly significant for Italians to read and follow his method. I managed to simplify it, adapting it for a common writing instrument like a ball point pen. As I didn't want to ignore people's personal handwriting (when it was readable and elegant), the result has often been a compromise between italic and the copperplate that is so familiar to many people in Italy. Talking to mothers with children at school and looking at many examples, I became aware of a growing problem. A lot of children are in the tragic situation of having unreadable handwriting. The main problem to overcome is that four models are currently being taught: Roman capitals and the related lower-case are taught in parallel with cursive handwriting (majuscule and minuscule) which derives from copperplate. A little bit too much! And are we sure we want to carry on teaching basically the same hand as in 1800? With such complicated initials? So I have started a work in progress within the *Associazione Calligrafica Italiana*. It's time for calligraphers to give their opinion and show how letters should be written!

I am very proud to have been invited to talk to Letter Exchange. It's a honour I don't think I deserve, but it makes me very happy as I derived all my knowledge from the British calligraphy and lettering tradition.

I finished my talk by saying 'thank you' with the signs used by the deaf. This is my current challenge: to learn a visual language I'll never be able to write!



Logo of the *Associazione Calligrafica Italiana*

The *Associazione Calligrafica Italiana* has an excellent website: www.calligrafia.org. Anna Ronchi can be contacted on anna.ronchi@calligrafia.org.



Rudo Spemann: visual asceticism

Christopher Haanes considers the work of one of the 'Klingspor Scribes'

The British 'Johnstonian' lettering tradition, in which I was trained under Ann Camp, is characterised by its formality: the making of legible letters within a formal context. Its business was, in Johnston's words, 'the making of beautiful letters and arranging them well'. Commemorative pieces after the Second World War – memorial books and the like – gave calligraphers commissions and, to an extent, a livelihood.

In the German lettering tradition, however, things are more diverse and complex. In German (and in Norwegian), there is one word for the various disciplines of handwriting, calligraphy, lettering, typography and applied lettering: *Schrift* (in Norwegian *skrift*), a noun referring to the visual aspect of letters. Hence the Austrian Rudolf von Larisch's often quoted phrase *Schrift kommt vom Schreiben* ('Letters come from writing'). Pioneers of this tradition of *Schrifthandwerk* included von Larisch, Rudolf Koch, and Edward Johnston's former student Anna Simons who translated *Writing and Illuminating, and Lettering* into German (under the title *Schreibschrift, Zierschrift und angewandte Schrift*). Over the past few decades German scribes and lettering artists have exerted a profound influence on the international lettering scene, not least because of the remarkable archive of their work held at the Klingspor Museum in Offenbach. The work of scribes such as the aforementioned, and other excellent calligraphers like Ernst Schneidler (Spemann's teacher), Hermann Zapf, Friedrich Poppl, Karlgeorg Hoefer and Werner Schneider, to name but a few, has come to be admired by an international audience of aficionados.

The German scribes have tended to cross borders between calligraphy, typography and lettering, working in fields as diverse as textile design, printmaking, book design and type design. One may well remember William Morris, who, decades before this, also worked across many disciplines and in a wide variety of materials. The English Arts & Crafts Movement certainly influenced the 'Klingspor Scribes'. The work of these scribes covers a wide range from traditional to expressive, from formal to experimental. And although there are similarities between them, there is also a rich diversity, just as there is in the modernist literature of the period: Rilke, Musil, Canetti, Hesse, Robert Walser etc.

After I was first confronted with the work of Rudo Spemann in the Klingspor Museum I felt the need to rethink certain aspects of the craft. The level of skill with which his pieces are executed, and their striking simplicity, made me look at contemporary calligraphy more critically, at least those pieces which toyed with superficiality and fashion. Work in which colour and painterly backgrounds featured prominently ceased to appeal to me. I got more interested in the basic building blocks of the alphabet: strokes and letters.

The librarian of the Museum brought forth one box after another, filled with Spemann's manuscript books, written in the tiniest script: hundreds of pages. Some were written at a speed of about one book a month. The execution of letters this size (some were as small as 8 pt type) is an accomplishment understood, perhaps, only by those who have attempted to write such letters themselves. Every little insecurity and trembling of the hand is registered, every unevenness of the paper. If the ink doesn't flow well, or one is distracted, the whole piece may be ruined. The fact that these letters appear in manuscript books makes them very difficult to exhibit. They therefore remain largely unknown.

One may be tempted to compare Rudo Spemann to Rudolf Koch, but in my view this does not do him justice. After his early formal work, Koch's later experimental and rough work (uneven gothic textures, the typeface Neuland etc) points to a break with tradition, a 'breaking away'. This does not apply to Spemann. Instead of breaking away from tradition, he matures. We may perhaps see traces of Ernst Schneidler's handwriting experiments in Spemann's work, but the gothic cursive styles were widely used at the time. However, to label him a traditionalist would be too limiting: his later pieces (some were written as greeting cards in tooth-paste from a Soviet prison-camp) certainly look contemporary, almost Japanese, in their flowing and inventive linework, asymmetrical arrangement of lines and contrast of sizes and styles.

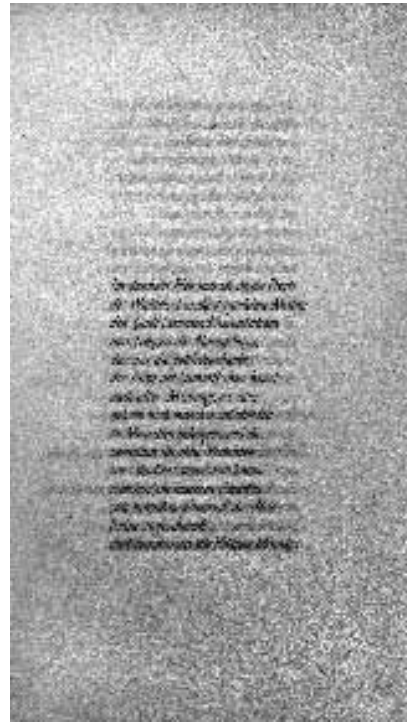
Spemann rarely uses colour, and limits himself to certain styles, namely gothic textura, gothic cursives, 'cancelleresca' cursives, roman capitals, uncials (rarely) and sometimes hybrid shapes. In his later pieces some strokes are thickened up with a pen or brush to give them more visual energy. All his pieces are characterised by a controlled and active use of space. His work has an 'ascetic' quality. He is, perhaps, indebted to Edward Johnston in this. We may do well to remember Friedrich Poppl's words: 'Only in the contrast between black and white does form remain incorruptible'.

Spemann's work, with its unforced, ascetic freedom, deserves our complete attention, because it is born out of complete attention. I would rank him among the best scribes of the last century.

Rudo Spemann was born in 1905 in Würzburg, Germany, and died in 1947 in a prison camp in Shepetovka, USSR. He studied in the 1920s in Munich and Stuttgart, and was Ernst Schneidler's assistant from 1930 to 1935. From 1937 to 1939 he lectured at the *Akademie für Graphische Künste und Buchgewerbe* in Leipzig. The script typeface *Gavotte*, by Spemann, has been digitized and issued by Linotype.

A version of this article first appeared in a catalogue issued by The Klingspor Museum in 2005 to accompany the exhibition *Rudo Spemann – der Klang in der Schrift*.

Christopher Haanes is a calligrapher and teacher based in Oslo, Norway. See <http://web.mac.com/chaanes>.

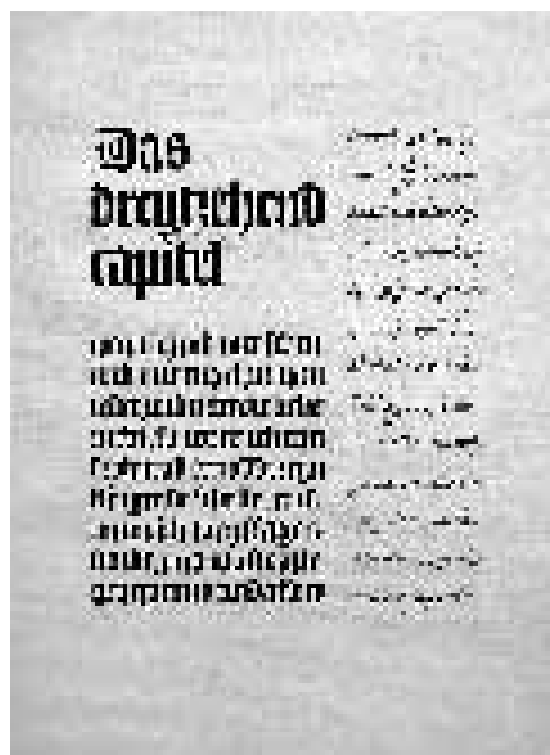
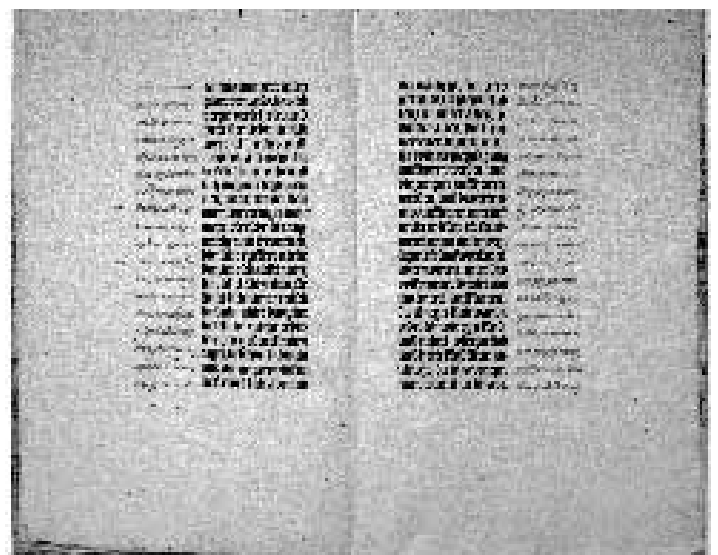


Facing page: Rudo Spemann: title, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, dated 1935

This page: more of Spemann's work. Bottom two images also from *First Epistle of Paul*, with German and Greek text

Klingspor Museum, Offenbach. Reproduced by kind permission of Herr Wolf Spemann

Photos Gareth Colgan and Klingspor Museum



Recent work

Threads of lettering

Two memorials by Incisive Letterwork

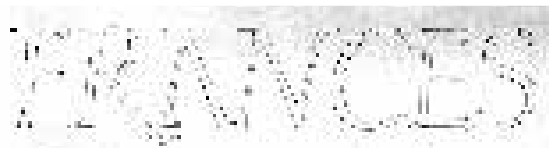
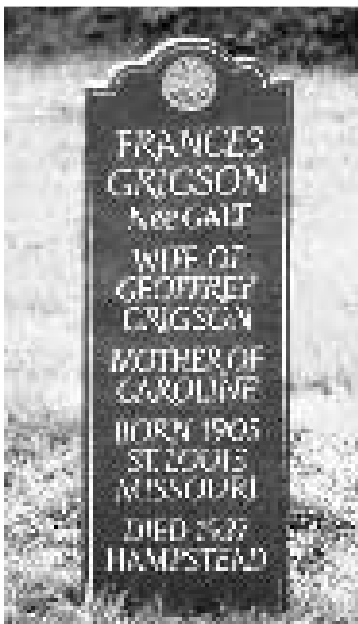
Colin Banks bought our dual text slate 'Inceptis Gravibus' at our exhibition *The Ground Beneath our Feet* in 2000. He had apparently had his eye on it since the *Spirit of the Letter* show at the Crafts Council in 1989.

We first met his wife Caroline when we went to fix the slate on their garden wall in Blackheath, memorably for us, in the pouring rain. We were really honoured to see it there as we had long been admirers of Colin's typographic work.

After Colin died Caroline contacted us to discuss the possibility of making his headstone. He is buried in the churchyard at Broad Town in Wiltshire next to their daughter Frances whose greenslate headstone had been carved at the Kindersley studio. Caroline wanted a companion stone but not a facsimile. This meant taking into account the proportion of the stone, tall and narrow, and the overall feeling and spirit of the place and Frances's memorial. When we delivered the stone to the church rain was again bucketing down.

In 2006 Caroline asked us to carve a stone for her mother, Geoffrey Grigson's first wife Frances, who is buried in the churchyard at Pelynt in Cornwall. Caroline's grandfather is buried close by and his memorial was carved by Eric Gill. She suggested that we use the same stone, Delabole slate, and the same shaped top to imply the family relationship. Many years previously Colin himself had made a preliminary drawing for this stone. Caroline felt she would like something of its flavour to be expressed here and provided a copy of his original drawing for us to look at. We used his lettering style but made it bolder for carving purposes. The layout was started from scratch. After trying to make the stone look like Gill's and not succeeding because of the wording, it almost inevitably grew into a tall and narrow memorial. We simplified the top and used a carved line to echo the moulding on the Gill stone. In the end the relationship was there and the stone has a contemporary look rather than being a copy of something from the earlier part of the twentieth century. On seeing the stone in place Caroline wrote to say that Colin would have approved.

Brenda Berman and Annet Stirling



Clockwise from top left:

Incisive Letterwork, 'Inceptis Gravibus', slate, 1989 (detail)

Eric Gill, Memorial to William Grigson, Pelynt, Cornwall, c1931

Incisive Letterwork, memorial to Colin Banks

Colin Banks, sketch for lettering for memorial to Frances Grigson (detail)

Incisive Letterwork, Frances Grigson memorial, Pelynt, Cornwall

'I don't do interior design'

Tom Kemp makes a permanent installation in a new office space in Birmingham

QED Studios (a market research company) commissioned me to be the sole artist providing art for the walls of their new office space. After establishing that I didn't do 'interior design', I'm not sure what they expected, never having worked with an artist before. The only brief was 'I want all my clients who come here to say "WOW!"'. On the one hand this was too open to be useful, but on the other it meant that the owner was trusting enough to let me just get on with whatever it is an artist does.

The space is divided into many small rooms but with a large atrium and reception area. I knew I wanted to paint directly on the walls but also wanted lots of hangable works to put in each of the rooms. I had picked something up from the first meeting, something about proof, about argument, about rationale, about explanation and understanding. It took two weeks of wandering around, sketching, reading to come up with the complete plan.

I'd make a mural which looked like a conversation. It would seem to argue back and forth between understanding painting as a rational, systematic venture and understanding it as an arational, unpredictable, skirting-on-the-edge-of-vacuity sort of thing. The mural would be an example of its own debate. To provide props for the arguments (I see them as 'lemmas' or propositions in a proof), all the other pieces would supply their own piece of evidence. The viewer/reader should be able to recognise that they are the subject of the discussion.

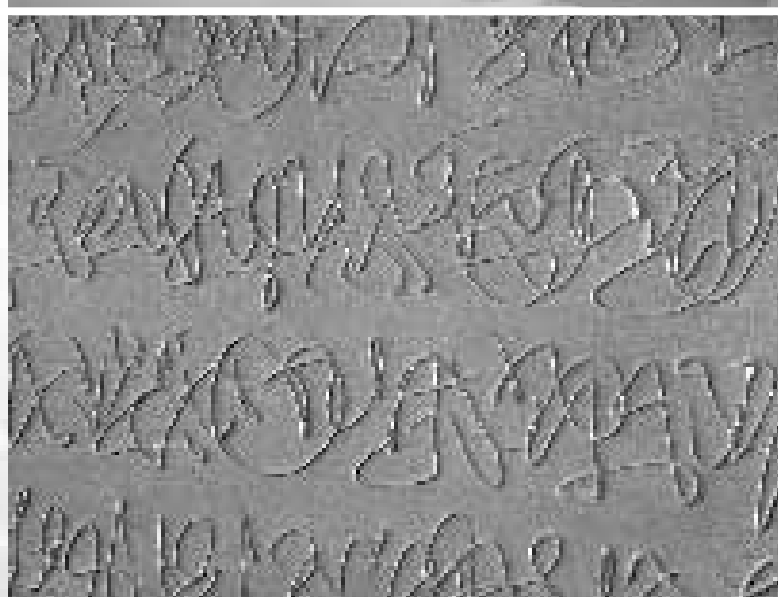
I locked myself up in my studio for a couple of weeks to make the twenty-four paintings. Minor setbacks included my framer stopping trading half way through and Damien Hirst buying the entire stock of primed linen canvas from my supplier. I used a number of my usual painting techniques, including painting directly with my right hand and the extensive use of an ink dropper. However, the two largest canvases needed something else. I poured enamel from a large-necked bottle and then wrote through it with a very wide, edged brush. The enamel was undiluted so spread very little when brushed; this lent an image of speed to the strokes which slightly exceeded the actual speed of the brush. I started to understand how the enamel dries over a few days. The pooling means that whatever marks I made will be enlarged or eradicated by the paint continuing to flow long after I have stopped painting. It's something to consider: paintings which continue after I have gone.

All the time I was thinking about the mural. It's of course the heart of the entire installation. It's always going to be a painting, a painting of writing. It's always going to play on that fact. It's never going to stop laughing at its own joke. But it has to take account of the viewer who a) won't get the joke and b) will soon be bored with trying to. Up a ladder for four days on four different walls, I learned to pay attention to the minutest movements of the brush as it performed each of the strokes to make each of the letters. That's the thrill for me. That execution. So very deliberate, seemingly slow, so anti-painting and yet entirely painting. Hour after hour of repeated movements, ever closer to the end of the work.

No time. Time dissolved in the action.

For more of Tom's work see www.tomkemp.com.

All images on this page, and the one on the front cover, are of Tom Kemp's work at QED Studios



'Audience-generated narrative'

Timothy Donaldson at the Imagine IT conference in Bologna

In the autumn of 2006, I was sitting on a hard chair in a former library, a room that had once heaved with text but was now full of people. This was a conference about type, and those present were people who love type, like to use it, like to collect it, like to call it by its name. Then came a lengthy pause, the previous speaker's PowerBook (or maybe it was a PC) had been disconnected from the big projector and the next person was connected but not yet hitting the ground running. My mind wandered to thoughts of the Gettysburg Address as a Power-Point presentation, and I drifted into wondering if anyone ever gives lectures any more, even illustrated ones: are they all 'presentations'? Then came the notion that something else could be happening while the technicians were mumbling and fiddling with the technology, something involving the audience. Something involving writing, real writing, not just playing around with bézier curves in Illustrator, could be going on while we were waiting. A little later on I had a chat with Caroline Archer, one of the conference organisers¹. She didn't recoil in horror so I thought I might be on to something.

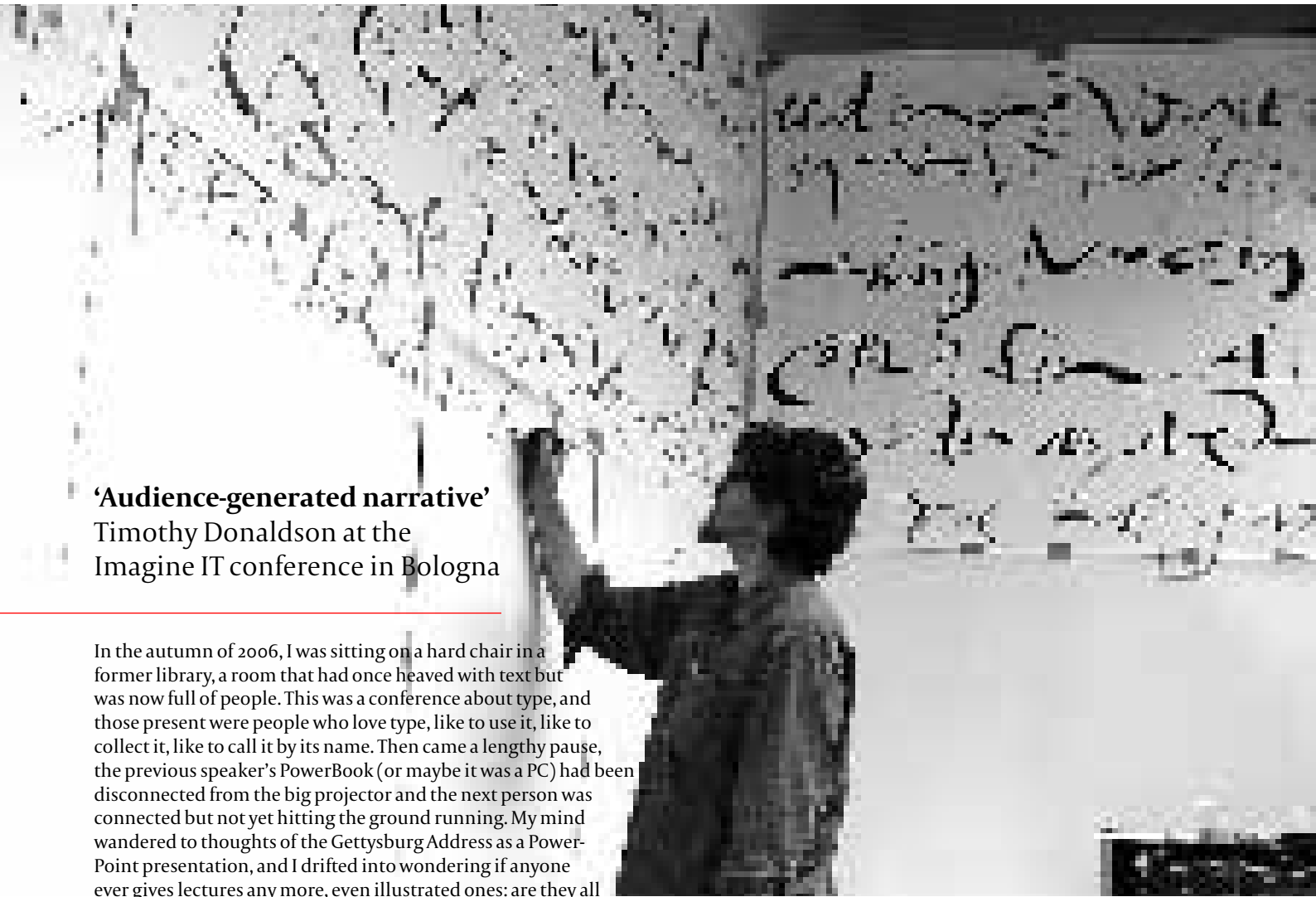
When the call for papers came for the Imagine IT conference at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Bologna in March 2007, I proposed something stimulated by the thought that a conference always contains a large body of people who have no voice, the audience. They sit and listen respectfully to all the lectures – ahem... presentations – and then maybe get to ask a question at the end. What if their question wasn't about the lecture but they felt it needed to be asked? Perhaps people have other observations they would like to make but there isn't the opportunity. I thought about all of the thoughts that pass through people's heads; this collective stream-of-consciousness or stream-of-conference-consciousness. I thought about the modern phenomenon of the blog, a text generated by one person typing on a computer and read as pixels on a small screen, and what it would be like if you had the same thing but changed every other parameter: a text generated by many people, writ large by hand and read from a physically huge notepad. So, what to call it? An undigital polyvocal big blog? A stream-of-conference-consciousness? I settled on *Audience-generated-narrative*.

The proposal was accepted. Thirty years ago, I thought writing on my bedroom wall was edgy, now I was being invited to go and write on the walls of the oldest university in Europe. Things had changed.

At first my suggestion had been warmly embraced by the organis-

ers of the conference, but there was a little confusion as we approached the reality of it all. It seemed that space was at a premium and the unconventional nature of the activity and a fear of damaging the fabric of the *Accademia's* old convent walls were going to work against it. Worried that the excitement of big-writing was going to be forced on to the sidelines by the usual focus on typefaces and 'cool' graphic design, I made an impassioned last minute plea, including a Photoshopped visualising of how I saw the thing. Fortunately, this image, the excellent organisational skills and diplomacy of Simone Wolf, and the generous spirit of Professor Carlo Branzaglia saved the day.

I stepped off the plane at Bologna airport to discover that it was actually Bologna (Forli) airport, or rather Forli (Bologna). This gifted piece of marketing by the cheap airline cleverly concealed the fact that there was still an hour of travelling to be done. It was raining when I got to Bologna but I didn't get wet as the entire walk to my hotel was under porticos, which I later discovered were the natural companion to just about every pavement in the city. I went to the *Accademia* the next day to meet with Simone and Carlo. The walls of the 'social area' where I would be working would already be covered in paper and I wanted to take some measurements, check the surface and get a sample of the paper. The *Accademia* is a beautiful old building with large gnarled wooden doors opening onto a long hallway of full-size plaster-casts of famous statues and inevitably populated by demonstrative, loud and lively students speaking in Italian, a bit like a working-man's V&A. I felt right at home. I walked past Michelangelo's *Pietà*, towards Hercules and turned left towards my space. The space was excellent. I took it as a good sign that one entered by some glass-fronted cabinets containing a variety of old manuscripts, deeds and indentures. These led to a high room with sixty-nine square



metres of wall facing a windowed courtyard with lots of natural light. There was also a bit of wall on castors that could be moved around. The only problem was that there was no paper on any of the walls and an art history class was in progress. I began to feel a little anxious and so popped back out for some fresh air, an *espresso* and a quick glimpse at the two towers (leaning but still standing). When I returned I was introduced to Sandro and Sarah, two bright and charming students from Tehran who were to be my assistants. I think they sensed my distress because they immediately set about gently assuaging my fears in their perfect English, helped me measure the room, set up the ceiling camera and went off to find out what was happening with the paper. I went back to my hotel and got my brushes out: a yellow Daler-Rowney and a da Vinci with transparent handle, both one-inchers. I stretched a piece of lining paper out along the longest bit of wall in my room and sat on the bed and stared hard at it. What should the writing be like? A spiky italic? Roman capitals? Humanist minuscule? Well, those are all Italian, so no one could accuse me of an inappropriate choice. The paper remained blank while I went to meet my hosts and a galaxy of stars at a restaurant near the *Accademia*. I was excited to be seated opposite George Hardie, the man who had inspired me to be a graphic designer all those years ago with his intelligent axonometric drawings used as cover art by Hipgnosis. I told him it was all his fault. Meeting heroes is not easy but George is a charming human being. After the grub and booze, it was back to the hotel to try some writing on the wall and put together a quick explanatory... er... presentation in PowerPoint to explain the concept and encourage people to get involved. I managed a few disappointing daubs on the hotel room wall, finished the slides and fell asleep around 3 am.

When I arrived the next morning at the start of the conference, the paper had arrived; it was Fabriano, which was good, but there were only two rolls of it, which was bad. We started to put it on the wall where it would be needed first. I then started worrying about the content. I had prepared a submission sheet which encouraged people to contribute their thoughts and had received a few back from speakers I had met the previous day, but these were certainly not enough to fill the space before me. I was called to give my little... er... pep-talk with slides to encourage participation. It seemed to go well, everyone went for lunch and I went back to the room and stared hard at the blank paper on the wall. I wanted it to be a piece of handwriting, a large example, granted, but handwriting nevertheless, certainly not a piece of 'calligraphy', a word I have struggled with for a long time. Just like any piece of genuine handwriting it would need to have all of the traits of such: immediacy, irregularity, variation. The text was to be written 'straight-off' onto the paper with no ruling of lines, which was just as well as with three days to complete the work there was no time to faff about. I set the camera to record, climbed the ladder and dipped my yellow brush into the dark black indian ink. The letters that sprang from the brush were a spiky italic, at least as spiky as a brush can make them. I wrote an introduction and then moved on to the first of the speakers' comments. These were to be written in a brown procion dye to contrast with the dense velvety black of the audience comments. The dye began to build up at the bottom of strokes, break surface tension and run down the paper as I was finishing the first wall with a nice comment about the brewer's 'dark glass' made in reaction to a speaker's² comment about Beatrice Warde's crystal goblet. I gave my brush a rinse and went to get some lunch. I also wandered back to my hotel and had a short doze to compensate for the late night. It was around this time, when separated from the work, that I began to feel nagging doubts about what I was doing. I decided that nobody was interested in it, the letterforms were terrible and I wasn't going to get anywhere near enough text to fill the space. I also decided it wasn't really worth doing if one didn't feel nagging doubts.

When I got back to the *Accademia*, I was relieved to see that the

letters weren't as awful as I'd imagined, there was a nice pile of post-lunch submissions building and a steady stream of visitors behaving slightly like sightseers: stopping, staring, taking photographs. It was time to start the text on the wall proper. I was now at the top of the ladder and could write about four to five words before I had to get down and move it. I didn't like this. It would have been much better if I could have gone up and down on a wire like a martial arts film star or Jon Bon Jovi, but there just wasn't the budget. If somebody came in and showed interest, I would descend the ladder and evangelise to them, supplicating for content; it usually worked and was a great way to make friends. I began to enjoy the ladder rhythm; find content, ascend, dip/write/dip/write, descend, chat with strangers, repeat.

By the end of the first day, I was beginning to feel good about the work but there was still opportunity for a little worrying; the slow start meant that I had not completed a third of the text, so I was going to have to work faster tomorrow. We still didn't have enough paper to cover the entire wall, although I was assured that more was on its way, and though there had been a steady rate of submission throughout the afternoon, was this the best of it and would it dry up on the second day?

I arrived for work on day two with a good feeling but I knew it was now 'make-it-or-break-it'. I settled nicely into the ladder rhythm, even remembering to set the video tape before I started, only to be taken away shortly afterwards by Donald Beekman of TypeRadio³. They wanted to interview me – gosh! Of course, I forgot to stop the camera and got a sixty-minute recording of an empty room⁴. When I returned to work, I had the rare pleasure of writing Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch, Irish, Estonian, Persian⁵, Hebrew and even Latin comments on a variety of subjects from typography to sexual politics, Comic Sans to sex. Luckily the comments were challenging but not unpleasant. My student helpers continued to be charming and supportive as well as being a bloody good laugh; they and the constant stream of free espresso kept me going.

On the third day, I was off the ladder and on the floor, so the speed of the writing increased dramatically. This also affected the forms of the letters as, I think, did the cosmopolitan influence of the content and the positive feedback from the conference. I felt encouraged and emboldened to constantly experiment with the forms and word shapes as I progressed. I took a break to listen to James Mosley's enjoyable lecture in which he lamented the devoteism of the Johnstones and the ubiquity of Carol Twombly's tasteful Trajan, and championed the honest vulgarity and swelling lines of an earlier English tradition. I was delighted and further emboldened later to receive James' compliments on the robust vulgarity of my own forms.

The work was completed, on time and on budget. I didn't fall off the ladder, there were only two spelling mistakes and one whole comment was repeated. The paper was taken down and divided up for people to take away at the end of the conference and I was gratified to observe quite a hubbub, which almost descended into violence, as people were dividing the spoils. It was so popular I even gave away the bit I'd kept for myself. That evening, Professor Carlo Branzaglia, who had been so concerned that I did not stain the walls with my ink, told me that he had been walking around earlier in the day with one of the directors of the *Accademia*. When he showed him the work, he was impressed. 'Why didn't you just let him write on the walls?' he said.

¹ <http://www.typevents.com>

² I can't tell you who said this as anonymity was guaranteed to all.

³ <http://www.typeradio.org>

⁴ Although it did capture a couple of indiscretions.

⁵ I was told it looked quite authentic.

Tim produced 'Spinal Flat' during the Hay Festival in May, and plans 'Pangram Wall' for the ATypI conference in Brighton in September. Details of these and Tim's other 'Big-writing' projects can be seen on his website: <http://www.timothydonaldson.com>

Ramblings

Pat Kahn is out and about

At the movies

1 By the time you read this perhaps you will have seen, or might still be able to see, *Helvetica*, Gary Hustwit's feature-length documentary.* Is this a first, a movie about a typeface? It coincides with Helvetica's fiftieth anniversary this year. Shown at sell-out screenings in Europe and the US since the spring, it's had acclaim on design blogs and has rated mention in newspapers too. I saw it at the Thessaloniki typography conference in June. It's a talking-heads piece, enjoyable if not deep. The talking heads are in their studios – interesting – and are a pretty good range: they include designers Massimo Vignelli, Paula Scher, Stefan Sagmeister; type designers Matthew Carter, Erik Spiekermann, Jonathan Hoefler and Tobias Frere-Jones; Mergenthaler Linotype type director Mike Parker; design writer Rick Poyner; publisher Lars Muller. Hustwit's background is producing music documentaries so it zips along nicely, though I could have sworn I saw some Standards amidst the Helveticas in the street scenes. He made the film to explore the ubiquity of the typeface and to foreground the work designers do, usually hidden from public view. We're familiar with the landscape thanks to Letter Exchange's cumulatively-excellent lecture series, but there's probably something here to tickle even the typo-literati. I would have liked more about Swiss typography's context and aftermath... maybe someone Robin-Kinross-inclined will do a sequel.

2 More surprising to me were the sketches in *Sketches of Frank Gehry*, Sydney Pollack's film about the architect. I don't remember ever having seen drawing so beautifully presented in a movie. This wasn't a formally groundbreaking documentary either, nor was it any more critical than *Helvetica* – something which, in this case, the critics noticed. But the drawings were stunningly shot and then thrillingly magicked up into scrunpled-up paper constructions by his colleague while Gehry thought aloud, moving to more refined models through computer rendering to finished buildings – the Guggenheim Bilbao and the Disney Centre in LA. Available on DVD, and recommended to markmakers all.

3 On a summer Sunday too hot for Bergman, I went to see *Teen Kanya (Two Daughters)* by Satyajit Ray, made in 1961 in black and white, from two stories by Rabindranath Tagore. Sorry if I sound like a swot, but the cinema was airconditioned and Ray is a genius. The first story, *The Postmaster*, turned out to be a completely heart-touching portrayal of coming-to-literacy and had the best scenes of writing – doing it and what's it's for – I've ever seen. The story is simple. A new postmaster arrives in a tiny rural village. The servant who comes with the two-room post office and residence is a young girl, an orphan. She cooks and cleans for him. He longs for the Calcutta he's left, reads and writes poetry, writes to and gets letters from his mother. These he reads to the girl, and she, shy but tenacious, asks him to teach her to read and write. She starts on a small chalkboard, later achingly diligently writing in pencil in a notebook. She tends him through a bout of malaria; he gets fed up with the backwater and leaves; she's bereft. That's all. Wonderful.

4 Ok, ok. *Harry Potter 5*. I understand the letterforms in the Hogwarts newspaper change form while it's being read. Read Jessica Helfand's entertaining account on *Design Observer*;

she and her commenters link to other titling and graphics sequences in movies. 'Harry Potter and the enchanted letterforms' www.designobserver.com/archives/026935.html

Shopping: upscale craft fairs

The Chelsea Crafts Fair has transmuted into two even yummier events: *Origin* (2-14 October, Somerset House) and the seriously upscale *Collect* (25-28 January at the V&A). There are always interesting textiles, ceramics and jewellery – some with lettering – along with furniture, glasswork and more – always lots of ideas, colours and textures...

At last year's *Origin* I enjoyed the graphic work of:

Rachel Hazell, a book artist from Edinburgh, who makes book pictures and sculptural objects, and was last year an artist-in-residence on a Navy ship to Antarctica (www.hazelldesignsbooks.co.uk).

Julie Haslam, from Manchester, who has her 'domestic bliss' range of teatowels, napkins and aprons with images from her grandmother's handwritten recipe books; great calligraphy and yellowed-papers-on-cloth (www.juliehaslam.co.uk).

Su Blackwell who makes book-cut sculptures, delicate free-standing fairytale popups and dioramas from old books; her website says she's doing the Harvey Nicks windows this Christmas (www.sublackwell.co.uk).

Windowshopping in London W1

Sam Fogg is a dealer in Asian, Islamic and medieval art. There are always gorgeous books in the windows. 15D Clifford Street, at the corner of Cork Street.

Two fancy shops in Wigmore Street are also worth a look.

Margaret Howell sells handsome clothing and homewares, but also features 50s design: Rye pottery and Utility furniture, but also exhibitions in the past year on Erno Goldfinger's Balfron Tower and HA Rothholz's public information posters.

Vitsoe, a supersleek furniture outfit, had an exhibition of Otl Aichler's posters for the 1972 Olympics to coincide with Markus Rathgeb's Phaidon monograph; images on the Vitsoe website under contact>press.

Spirit and life

The summer exhibition at the **Ismaili Centre** in London of 160 highlights from the Aga Khan's collection – religious and princely, from all over the Muslim world from the ninth through the nineteenth centuries – was amazing. The objects were exquisite, and many had calligraphy of exceptional beauty – the Blue Koran, gold on lapis-lazuli-dyed paper; a woven koranic text; a pilgrimage certificate; some wonderful maps; musical instruments; tiles, ceramic and carved wooden lettering; manuscripts. The work will have a permanent home in Toronto because the Aga Khan couldn't acquire a London site for his museum. The beautiful calm of the display was a reminder to savour places we can enjoy on a more extended basis: the Jameel gallery at the V&A, the British Museum and more.

* *Helvetica* is at the ICA in London 7-27 September; due out on DVD in October. Details from www.helveticafilm.com. Steven Heller interview with Gary Hustwit: www.aiga.org/content.cfm/lights-camera-helvetica.

New members

Liesbet Boudens

From an early age I enjoyed drawing and the act of writing. Growing up with a calligrapher father and an art teacher mother made rhythm and beauty attractive to me. As a teenager, long before I got involved in 'lettering' (that was in my thirties), I liked to write with a technical drawing pen and developed an elegant arabesque-like handwriting. The first person who inspired me in the field of lettering was my father. Then there was John Skelton, who showed me that lettering could be playful. But it is with the work of David Jones that I feel the deepest affinity.

I studied painting with the Belgian artist Dan Van Severen. Among other things, he taught me the simple but important fact that a painting is a well-organised plane where even the smallest detail must be right in relation with the whole.

After a short period of formal broad pen calligraphy, I began to draw built-up letters on paper. Somehow I remained hungry for more than beautiful counter shapes. I wanted to exploit that relationship between letter and background. I coloured my paper, used tinted sheets. Neither gave real satisfaction. That's when I began to break away from the classical roman capital and calligraphic writing and began to find that canvas, panel or wall were less constraining 'arenas' for my work than paper in standard sizes. It's the word, sentence or whole text that imposes shape and colour on my lettering. There are always two intricately intertwined pairings in my work. First, foreground and background must have equal importance. Secondly, shape and colour get equal attention. I want to enjoy the interplay of colours and shapes which grow from the feeling I want to reproduce. The atmosphere to be rendered is quintessential.

Although I prefer lettering to be legible, I look at letters as shapes or signs. This means my work isn't necessarily legible at first glance, but I do want it to become recognisable after a while. I don't like special effects. Simplicity has absolute priority for me.

Liesbet was born in Bruges, Belgium, in 1957. She combines freelance lettering with teaching art at a secondary school in Bruges. You can read an interview with her in Forum 6 (2003), and she and her brother Kristoffel are featured in the current Letter Arts Review.

Leiselestraat 22, 8200 Brugge, Belgium. 0032 50 393027 liesbet.boudens@telenet.be

Susie Leiper

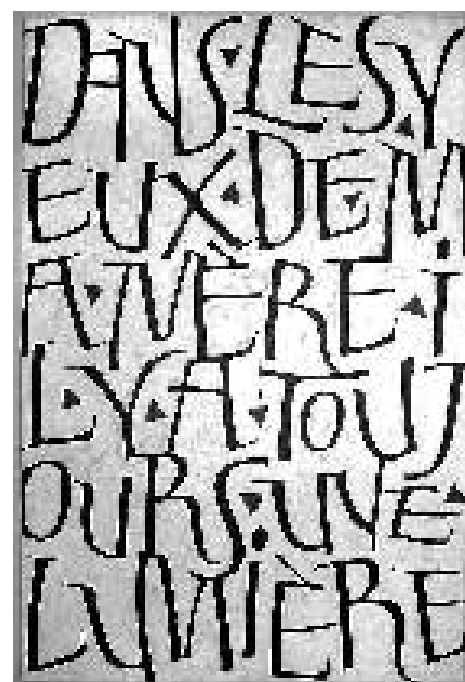
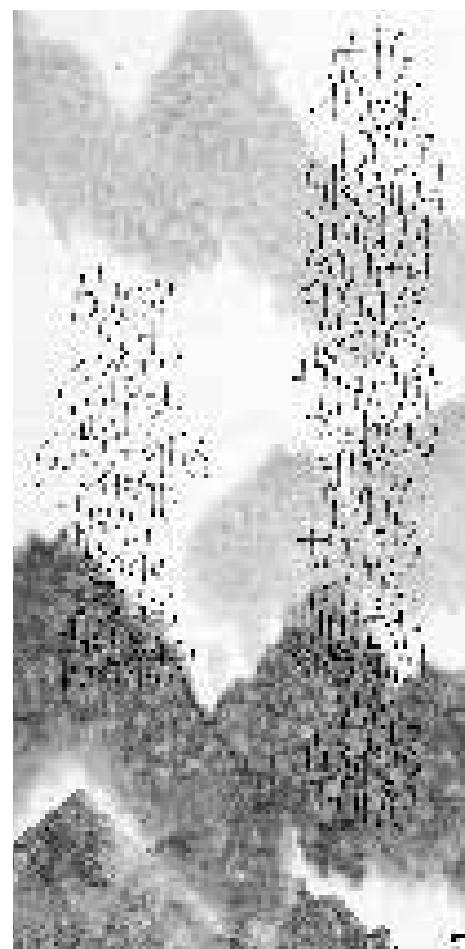
Books have always been my passion. The change from editing books to actually making my own was one of the greatest excitements of my life. This happened in 1996 when I was commissioned to write a book about Scots and the China trade, to mark the handover of Hong Kong to China. Not only did I realise how wonderful it was to be able to write my own words, and gather pictures, after years and years of editing the tomes of British Museum authors, but also I was convinced of the importance of the 'Chinese side' to my life – I had lived and worked in Hong Kong in the eighties and fallen in love with Chinese culture.

So, in my calligraphic work, which had always been rumbling along amateurly behind the editing, I started to look at Chinese books, and then taught myself – with the help of books – how to make them. I loved it, the wholeness of it, making the pages, the endpapers, the covers, the slipcase, and holding the completed work in my hand.

The *Great Book of Gaelic* in 2001-2 was my introduction to collaborating on a large calligraphic project: one hundred visual artists and eight calligraphers brought to life 150 Gaelic poems that span fifteen centuries. No sooner had I finished work on this book than I had THE call from Donald Jackson's Scriptorium in Wales, which was to be the turning point in my calligraphic career. All those pages and pages of tiny writing in the St John's Bible, the biggest book of all, taught me far more than just writing: the strict discipline of following a master, and the deep sensation of becoming completely absorbed in the act of writing gave me the freedom and confidence to write almost anything, and to develop my painting too, to believe in what I really wanted to do myself.

I have no formal training – evening classes in Hong Kong with Derick Pao, then at Edinburgh College of Art with David Lang and Michael Ashley, then the SSI's ATS scheme, good workshops, and the Bible (which was really formal training of the most inspirational kind). But I believe that each of us needs to do our own thing. For me that is to pursue the aim of elevating calligraphy to the position of reverence accorded it by the Chinese, alongside its fellow partners of poetry and painting.

55 Great King Street, Edinburgh EH3 6RP
0131 558 1405 susieleiper@hotmail.com

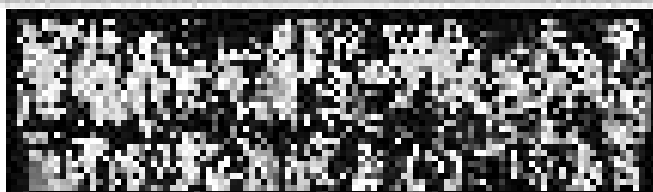


Top: Susie Leiper 'Beinn Airidh Charr' (detail), text by Kenneth White, ink marbling, Chinese ink, colours and pencil on Chinese xuan paper, 2002

Above: Liesbet Boudens, 'Dans les Yeux de ma Mère', acrylic on canvas 20 x 48 in

Left above: Liesbet Boudens, quote from Oscar Wilde translated into Welsh by David Andrews: *Medraf wrthsefyll popeth ond temtasiwn*.

Left below: Susie Leiper 'These great cathedrals of the earth', John Ruskin, ink and silver leaf on wallpaper lining paper, 2006



Welsh slate: an update

Blue-grey Welsh slate has for several decades been a staple material for lettercutters as far afield as New England, but recent changes in the Welsh slate industry have affected the supply. The mine at Aberllefenni, near Machynlleth, used to produce the material which was by common consent the most congenial to carve and the most consistent in appearance. This was reputedly the oldest continuously working slate mine in the world until it closed a couple of years ago. The owners, Wincilate, continue to operate the adjoining mill, supplying small sizes from residual stocks of Aberllefenni slate, and larger pieces from material bought in from elsewhere.

The 'big boys' of the Welsh slate industry are Alfred McAlpine, trading as Welsh Slate, whose main quarries have been at Blaenau Ffestiniog (mainly roofing slate), Penrhyn (roofing and heather-coloured architectural/monumental), and Cwt-y-Bugail (architectural/monumental), at the end of a winding mountain road high on the eastern slopes of Manod Mawr. This quarry, under its old name Manod, was where the National Gallery's art treasures were stored during the Second World War. Earlier this year, following the revelation of accounting irregularities in their Welsh Slate operation, McAlpines announced the mothballing of Cwt-y-Bugail, but leaving open the possibility of leasing or even selling it to another operator. At the time of writing (late August) I understand a short-term lease agreement *may* be signed in early September with a firm in Trawsfynydd, in which case sawn/shaped/rubbed Cwt-y-Bugail slate would continue to be available for the time being through the same outlets as of late.

However, the material has its drawbacks. Ieuan Rees writes:

'It is a bit lighter in colour than Aberllefenni slate. Some of you might remember Wally, the former foreman at Wincilate. He was adamant that it was unsafe to use Cwt-y-Bugail slate out of doors above 2½" thick. He felt that since it was not as compressed as Aberllefenni slate, there was a chance that at 3" thick or more, it could open and split, especially since it often has 'wind shakes' in it. The markings are best seen if you wet the slate with a sponge. Most of the pieces have subtle sedimentary watery bands of different shades of grey running through them, which I personally like, but not all clients will accept them. At worst some of the markings are eye-catching, light coloured, toothpasty-looking bands. Some too contain fool's gold (iron pyrites). The edge of the letters tend to chip a bit if you are not careful. I have found that this problem is a bit worse on cold and damp days: warming the surface with a hair dryer or electric paint stripper first thing in the morning helps enormously.'

For headstone-size pieces to go out of doors, the only other Welsh option is the heather (purple)-coloured slate from McAlpine's Penrhyn quarry. For smaller pieces or those going indoors, the field is wider, and sources include McAlpine's Blaenau Ffestiniog quarry, Greaves quarry over the road (slate from both of these frequently contains pyrites and has to be selected carefully), or Berwyn slate, from the Horseshoe Pass above Llangollen. Berwyn, like

Wincilate, have been buying Cwt-y-Bugail slate from McAlpine but also have their own material which is nicer to carve, but unsuitable for headstones owing to the tendency for thicker pieces to delaminate out of doors. It should be fine for indoor plaques.

Other suppliers who buy and saw/shape Cwt-y-Bugail slate include Gwyn Williams at Trawsfynydd. Meanwhile alternatives include Cumbrian blue-black (harder and more 'gritty'), or Delabole from Cornwall (rather more limited availability and expensive). Imported slate is of course available, and although some of this may be fine and nice to carve, the difficulty of establishing its long-term colour-fastness and durability makes it hard to recommend to clients, not to mention other objections to the trade on environmental grounds.

The Editor

Piece of Cwt-y-Bugail slate with pronounced banding



Digitising letters and painting inscriptions

Nicholas Sloan offers a couple of useful suggestions relating to computers and paint. He writes:

'This first suggestion will only be of interest to those of you who use Adobe Illustrator for drawing. Illustrator is probably the best application for producing subtle curves on the computer, but it has always suffered from a number of limitations. For one thing, it is difficult to make accurate measurements without zooming in close, and for another, manipulation of control handles has always been somewhat hit-and-miss. I have found two plug-ins from Nineblock Software to be very useful in addressing these problems.

SnapMeasure provides a replacement for the Measure tool, which enables you to see when you are exactly over a line, and gives you a clear readout near the cursor instead of making you squint at the small type in the info palette. It will optionally give you lots of feedback about curve radii and tangents

as well, which is useful if you really want to understand what is going on in your curves.

BetterHandles provides an alternative to the Direct Selection tool which gives you far more control over control handles than is possible with the native tools. Tops for me is the ability, by option-dragging, to change the length of a handle without upsetting the angle, but there is a wealth of other possibilities, best understood by studying the QuickStart document which comes with the download.

Both plug-ins are available for Mac and Windows, and for all recent versions of Illustrator. They are relatively cheap as plug-ins go, and can be found at www.nineblock.com/products.html.

The Editor contacted Andy Benedek, who has been using Illustrator for digitising fonts since it first appeared in 1986, for his opinion. He says: 'If, for example, I want to adjust a curve without changing the angle of the control handles, I just select the line with the direct selection tool and then use the cursor keys (→) to move the line as needed. The precision can be varied to suit by amending the value in the preferences for the cursor keys. As regards the manipulation of control handles, I have not found this aspect of Illustrator wanting, nor do I use the rulers, as there are more intuitive ways of moving lines and objects and measuring distances. I do have the plug-ins Nick mentions, and I am not saying that they are a waste of time. If their method of working suits you, then buy them. It is just that I have not found the need for them.'

Nick's second suggestion concerns paint for stone-cut inscriptions:

'Some people frown on painted letters as a matter of principle, but to others the problem is simply the durability of the paint, or lack of it. I have recently started experimenting with Keim Granital (www.keimpaints.co.uk/development/products.php?cID=30). This is a vapour-permeable silicate paint which is supposed to form a 'microcrystalline bond' with the stone surface. It comes in a limited variety of natural colours, and first indications are that it goes on well and looks good. I find that it works best on a rougher and/or porous surface. It has been successful on granite and portland, but not so good on slate, though this may have been partly due to differences in the opacity of the colours used.

The disadvantages are that it is recommended to be applied in two coats, is sold in minimum quantities of 5 litres, and has a rated shelf life of one year! In practice I think that Keim can be persuaded to provide smaller quantities, and they seem willing to offer initial samples for testing. (Order a colour chart first, so that you can choose your sample colours.) The shelf life issue has to do with pigments falling out of suspension, and with subtle colour changes due to 'over-wetting'. I suspect that if bottles were rotated like Champagne, the first problem would not arise, and that the second may not be so serious.

Granital is only one of a range of silicate paints made by Keim. Their Dekor and Mural paints are based on a nineteenth century formulation, and are available in smaller sizes, but are supposedly less durable. David Pratt at Keim is very informative on the technical details. Telephone 01746 714543.'

Forthcoming Events

The second exhibition of the **Scottish Lettercutters Association**, *Chased, Chopped, Stabbed & Blasted 2007* continues at Stacy Marks Gallery, Auchtenny, Path of Condie, Forgandenny, Perthshire. until 22 Sep, 01577 830744



Eric Gill and Ditchling: the Workshop Tradition continues at Ditchling Museum until 7 Oct. www.ditchling-museum.com

Katharina Pieper & Jean Larcher's exhibition *Texturen des Herzens* continues at the Herzzentrum Dresden, Universitätsklinik, Fetscherstraße 76, 01307 Dresden until 11 Nov (See review of catalogue in *Forum* 11). Contact Katharina on kallidoc@aol.com

The exhibition programme at the **Klingspor Museum**, Offenbach, Germany includes: until 14 Oct *Eigensinn macht Spass – Hermann Hesse*

14 Sep - 21 Oct: *Notebook*

24 Oct - 18 Nov: *Bernhard Jäger: Buch- und Druckkunst*

30 Nov - 10 Feb: *Kinderwelten* – International children's books

www.klingspor-museum.de

Memorial Arts Charity lettercarving courses: 10-14 Sep (beg/int): Holmfirth, W Yorks with Celia Kilner

5-9 Oct (int/adv): Ammanford, S Wales, drawing and design with Ieuan Rees

22-26 Oct (int/adv): Birmingham, lower case letters with John Neilson clare@memorialartscharity.org.uk

01728 688393. More planned next year

12-16 September **ATypI conference**, University of Brighton. Speakers include Letter Exchange members Phil Baines, Catherine Dixon, Michael Harvey, Richard Kindersley and Ieuan Rees. www.atypi.org

18-19 Sep: **Non-Latin Type Design**; 2-day conference at St Bride Library, London and Dept of Typography, University of Reading. www.stbride.org

The **Musée de l'imprimerie** in Lyon, France, has a programme of exhibitions, lectures and events about printing, typography, calligraphy and more. You can download the programme from their website www.imprimerie.lyon.fr

Designer Bookbinders lectures:

2 Oct: Lester Capon *Extreme Bookbinding – Preserving a manuscript in Ethiopia*.

6 Nov: Danny Flynn *Laser Cutting & Letterpress*.

4 Dec: Carolyn Trant, Parvenu Press

Books and STUFF – the Quiddity of Artists' Books

Lectures on Tues at The Art Workers Guild, 6 Queen Square, London WC2 at 6.30 pm.

£2.50 students, £5 members, £7 non-members.

lectures@designerbookbinders.org.uk or

phone Rachel on 01273 486718

South London Lettering Association lectures:

9 Oct: Discussion/talk with exhibitors at the Annual Exhibition in the Exhibition Room, St Bride Institute

13 Nov: AGM plus John Neilson, lettercutter, *Receding Hairlines*

8 Jan: *A Useful Technique* (tips & ideas)

12 Feb: Frances Binnington, glass gilder, on her work and techniques

11 Mar: Rosella Garavaglia, calligrapher

8 Apr (tbc): Dr Teresa Webber (Cambridge University), historian & palaeographer

13 May: Interactive evening with members

10 Jun: Ruth Bruckner FSSI, calligrapher

Lectures on Tuesdays at St Bride Institute, Bride Lane, London, in Camera Room on

top floor (unless otherwise indicated),

7.15-9.30 pm. Phone Jacqui on 020 8785 2780.

Annual exhibition at St Brides 1-12 October,

10am-5pm Mon-Fri, late opening Wednesday

Two autumn artists' book fairs in London:

Small Publishers Fair, 12-13 October in Conway Hall, WC1, see www.rgap.co.uk/spf.php

London Artists' Book Fair 23-25 Nov at ICA, SW1, see www.marcuscampbell.co.uk/lab07.html

Plus international design festival *Moving Type*

17-21 October, Birmingham. 01923 800425,

conference@youplusus.net

Monnow Valley Arts Centre, Herefordshire:

David Jones 1895-1974, Paintings, drawings

and engravings from the Stadlen Collection

18 Oct - 1 Dec. Monnow Valley Arts Centre, Walterstone, Hereford HR2 0DY, 01873 860429, info@monnowvalleyarts.org

North London Lettering Association annual

exhibition 23 Oct - 3 Nov, Chipping Barnet

Library, Stapylton Rd, Barnet. Workshop on

half uncials by Jan Pickett 3 Nov.

Lecture series includes:

20 Nov: Susie Leiper

Jan: Mark l'Argent

Feb: Sylvie Gokulsing

Mar: Roger Hobdell

Apr: Cherrell Avery

Contact cherrellavery@tiscali.co.uk

Fine Press Book Fair, 3-4 Nov, Oxford Brookes

University. www.fpba.com

Edward Johnston Foundation annual interna-

tional seminar, Ditchling, Sussex, 30 May - 1 Jun

2008. Book early! See www.ejf.org

For Letter Exchange lectures see back page

From the Chairman

This issue of *Forum* continues with an international flavour: articles featuring Susan Skarsgard from the USA, Italian calligrapher Anna Ronchi, German scribe Rudo Spemann and reviews of books by Hermamm Zapf, Gerard Unger, and Jan Middendorp and Erik Spiekermann. I say 'continues', as the most recent issues have also had articles featuring Seamus Murphy, Pieter Boudens and Françoise Berserik, and articles by Paul Shaw and Eiichi Kono. Checking back – I don't get out too often, and someone's got to do it – our lecturers for the previous season and the forthcoming series also include contributions from letterers worldwide. This year we have Nick Benson from the USA – when did we last have an American lecturer? And Brody Neuenschwander (USA via Belgium) and Mourad Boutros from the Lebanon are among the nine presentations taking us into 2008, the twentieth anniversary of Letter Exchange.

As I'm on a roll of statistics, and it is the season to choose your dream football team, it is noticeable and very welcome that amongst the previous seven lectures, four were presented by women and six this season will be of that gender. This may of course have a little to do with our Italian manager, Rosella Garavaglia, who imported her countrywoman Anna Ronchi last season.

I'm sure members were delighted to have received *Magazine Q* during the summer: as usual, an excellent reflection of the work, and in many cases the the lifestyle and the humour of our fellows. We shall be calling for submissions for the next issue early in the new year, but if you can't wait until then, please contact Gary Breeze who will be overseeing the next production.

Lastly, I'd like to mention the outing to Ditchling and thank Gerald Fleuss for organising our visit. More than twenty members had a fantastic day in June; it threatened to rain but it didn't. Obviously, Johnston and Gill houses and artefacts were most prominent, along with circumnavigating headstones and enjoying the museum. And of course, the fish and chips.

Dave Farey



Nick Benson (right) with assistants Hugh Grace and Cristine DeMarco outside the John Stevens Shop, Newport, Rhode Island in 2002. Nick talks to Letter Exchange in September.

Book reviews

The Art of Letter Carving in Stone

Tom Perkins

Crowood Press 2007

ISBN 971 1 86126 879 2

Hardback 192pp 11½ x 8¾ in. Full colour £25

I should say at the outset that anyone with £25* to spare, and a serious interest in lettercutting, would be crazy not to buy this book for the illustrations alone. The majority are naturally of Tom's own work, but he has very generously leavened these with a huge range of examples from contemporaries, not to mention the usual recent historical suspects, the cumulative effect of which is to make me feel somewhat humbled by the breadth of skill and inventiveness around.

The primary aim of the book is to instruct beginners and amateurs, and experienced lettercutters may want to skip quite a lot of the 'carving from A to D and from E to F' stuff, but even someone who has been hacking away for thirty years can find things to learn: I have personally rethought a few details of drawing as a direct result of this book. I would certainly recommend it to a beginner, though at times it looks better than it reads: while the diagrams and the model alphabets are helpful, there is

a tendency in the text to make the simplest actions sound complicated. There are also one or two supplementary pieces of information that I might have included. Tom assumes an understanding among his readers that, for carving, hand-drawn letters are preferable to fonts, but this needs to be spelled out, especially to people such as architects who ought to know better. On the other hand, no mention at all is made of computer drawing, which may not be Tom's thing, but which many people are finding a valuable adjunct to paper and pencil. This could have been another instance of 'I do it like this, but there are other valid ways'. And while there is a wealth of practical advice about most things, there is no warning about the increasing difficulty in obtaining good stone.

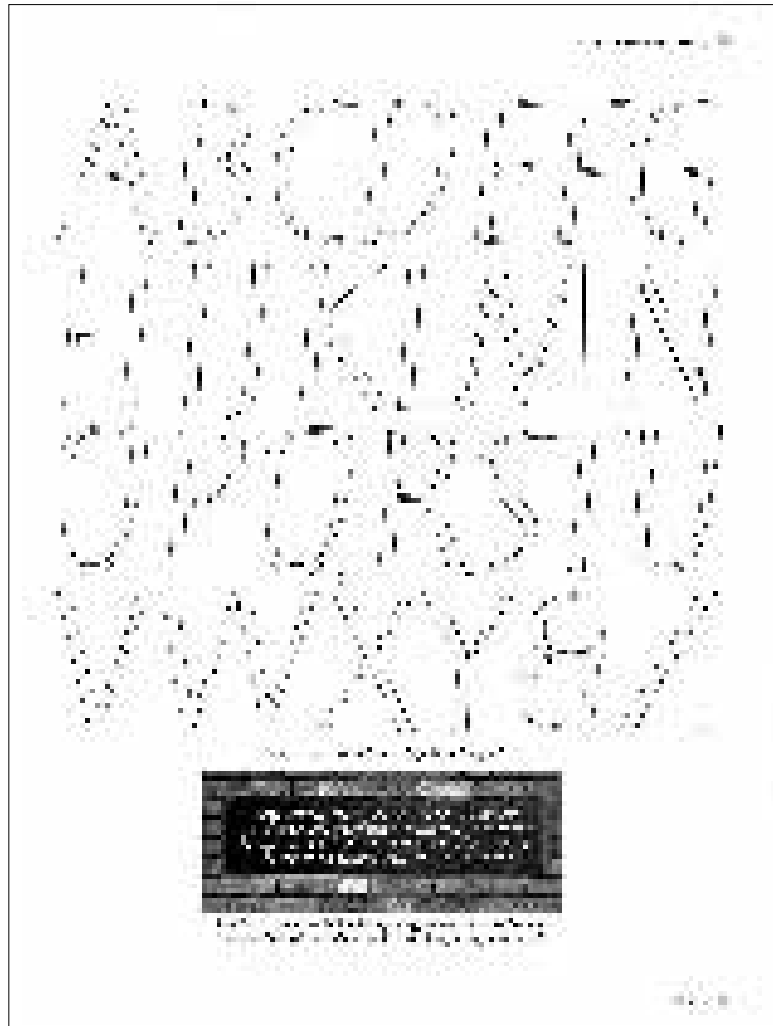
Opinions may vary about the concentration on systems of proportion as an aid to drawing letters. I can see that this has been a subject of fascination to Tom (and to others), but my own view is that the training of the eye and instinct is paramount, and that constant measuring may work against this. And anyone looking for the secret of the poise of Tom's own letters is going to be disappointed. This is not and was never intended to be a book

of inner musings on aesthetics, but a purely didactic instruction manual: how, not why. For deeper insights you have to look at the photos.

It would have been nice if the quality and thoughtfulness of the work illustrated had been reflected in the design of the book, which is respectable rather than distinguished. This cannot be laid at Tom's door however: he was approached by the publishers, and given free rein as to content, but no control over the design. One thing that really makes me want to spit is the occurrence of little grey squares alongside every running title and page number. Redundant page clutter like this brings out all the Tunbridge Wells in me. The colour is disappointingly wayward too, though printers in Malaysia cannot perhaps be expected to know what Welsh slate looks like. These carps aside, the book should unquestionably be added to the short list of essential sources for lettercutting: Harvey, Kindersley, Grasby and Jacob/Leicher, all of which are helpfully listed in the bibliography.

Nicholas Sloan

* Currently £16.25 from Amazon



Page from
*The Art of
Letter
Carving in
Stone*

Alphabet Stories

Hermann Zapf

Mergenthaler Edition/Linotype 2007

ISBN 3-9810319-6-2

Hardback 154pp 11x7½ in.

Many colour illustrations £25

Also published in German as *Alphabetgeschichten*

At 79 the world's best-known lettering artist is showing no sign of flagging. Along with recent revamps of and additions to the Optima and Palatino type families, Zapf has written this retrospect. Subtitled *A Chronicle of Technical Developments*, it amounts to a potted autobiography. The text alternates between Zapf's reminiscences and explanations (set in Palatino Nova) and quotes (set in Palatino Sans) from previously published material, sometimes written by Zapf, sometimes by others. Thus Zapf fans, especially those who have read *Hermann Zapf and His Design Philosophy* or *ABC-XYZapf* should not expect any new revelations. But Zapf's remarkable six-decade career is summarised clearly and with touches of gentle humour. He was born in the last days of the First World War, and the political turmoil and physical privations of the Weimar Republic were the background to his childhood, culminating in the rise of the Nazis. Yet Zapf's account remains deceptively gentle even here: '...for us children, these were very exciting days'. From an early age Zapf was inventive (interesting parallel with Johnston here), devising secret codes, rigging up an alarm system to warn the children of the approach of their parents, making a crystal radio set. He tells of his aborted apprenticeship as a photo-retoucher, and of his first encounter with calligraphy in an

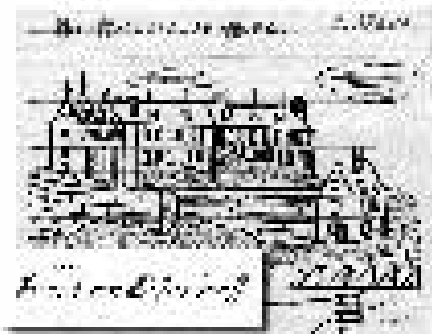
exhibition of the work of Rudolf Koch a year after his death, following which Zapf bought both Koch's *Das Schreiben als Kunstfertigkeit* and Johnston's *Writing & Illuminating, & Lettering*. During the Second World War Zapf worked as a cartographer, and tells of how his ability to paint letters one millimetre high saved him being sent into action. After the war the type designs began in earnest. Zapf gives concise descriptions of many of these projects. His career, of course, spanned three very different typesetting technologies and Zapf was always intensely interested in these 'technical developments'. His recent work for Linotype with Akiro Kobayashi – an 'expert in the handling of the Macintosh' – recalled his close collaboration in the early years with the master punchcutter August Rosenberger. He also describes several experimental typesetting projects he was involved in, such as early applications of computer technology to phototypesetting or the 'hz' composition programme which aimed at perfectly even justified setting. Frustrations and disappointments are not glossed over, such as 'Zapf Dingbats' (done in too much of a hurry) or the problems of typeface piracy, from which Zapf's designs have suffered severely. However the overall tone is mild and factual: don't expect any heated rants.

The second section of the book contains illustrations connected with the narrative: showings of typefaces, but also some calligraphy and early drafts, such as pencil sketches of Florentine gravestone lettering which later informed Optima. There's also a photo of Zapf's experimental electrical kit and instruction manual which he devised at the age of fourteen.

Of type design, Zapf says 'scarcely any other creative activity has such world-wide dissemination'. Few have engaged in that creative activity with such a potent combination of native ability and dogged, disciplined application. Though this account is relatively brief and factual, Zapf manages both to delight in his own achievements and to sound modest while doing so.

The book represents the first showings of 'Palatino Nova' and the completely new 'Palatino Sans' and is also designed by the author.

John Neilson



Nuremberg Castle drawn from memory by a seven-year-old Hermann Zapf. From *Alphabet Stories*

Edward Johnston: Lettering and Life

Ewan Clayton

with essays by Ewan Clayton and Phil Baines
Ditchling Museum 2007
ISBN 0-9516224-8-X
Paperback 96pp 10½ x 8 in. Many colour illustrations
£17

This publication arose from the exhibition *With Pen, Ink and Paper: Being Edward Johnston* held at Ditchling Museum last year to mark the centenary of the first publication of *Writing & Illuminating, & Lettering*. It illustrates many of the items shown in that exhibition, and contains two new essays by Ewan Clayton (who also curated the show) and Phil Baines.

Baines's short essay puts Johnston in the context of the Arts and Crafts movement and then sketches his influence in two specific areas: the revival of the Trajan capital (principally in carved lettering and signwriting), and the effect in the type world of his London Underground sans serif letter and its younger cousin Gill Sans. There is much more to be said about both these themes, but the five pages provide a useful summary for the general reader.

Clayton outlines the main events of Johnston's life, familiar to readers of Priscilla Johnston's biography of her father. His focus is, however, on how these events affected Johnston's work. Johnston's own calligraphy would develop, from the open, classical style of his early maturity, to a more compressed, heavier and eventually Gothic-tinged script. Clayton links these changes to events in Johnston's life such as the end of the close friendship between Johnston, Gill and Pepler culminating in Gill's move to Capel-y-Ffin. He suggests that Johnston's apparent lifelong lack of energy may have been some kind of a coping mechanism developed during his unusual childhood: he was brought up mainly by his mother and aunt, who tended to be over-protective of the children's health and confine them indoors for long periods.

Clayton claims the time is right for a 'reassessment of the life and work of Edward Johnston'. In truth, rather than a radical reassessment, this essay marks more of a shift in emphasis. The impression in some quarters of Johnston as a recluse who produced relatively little work is shown to be accurate only for the last few years of his life after his wife's death. For quite long periods he was active in several fields and relatively vigorous: never more so than during the expedition across the USA to Canada with his cousin Neil MacInnes (see photo). It was, of course, while in London preparing for this trip that the fateful meeting with Lethaby took place, without which, as Clayton says, 'the whole development of calligraphy, typography and letter-cutting in Britain might well have followed a different path'. Likewise, during the early years in Ditchling Johnston managed to work on an italic typeface, two journals, the London Underground type, several manuscript commissions, and to teach once a week in London.



Looking after the Post Office on Spring Island, Vancouver, during the trip to Canada. Edward Johnston on left.

Clayton usefully debunks the idea that Johnston single-handedly rediscovered calligraphy and the broad-edge pen, pointing out Morris's pen lettering (which Johnston studied closely), the use of the broad nib by legal clerks, EF Strange's *Alphabets, A Manual of Lettering...* of 1895 with its broad-pen exemplars. Instead he stresses how Johnston's *Writing & Illuminating, & Lettering* brought all the lettering crafts together, causing them to be 'seen for the first time as a whole', how the book allows us to 'replicate [Johnston's] method of study and teaching', and how Johnston's later work for his planned book *Formal Penmanship* (not published in his lifetime) provides a method of analysis for western calligraphy which, in Clayton's view, 'ranks with the achievement of Ibn Muqla in the Arabic tradition'. Clayton acknowledges that after the publication of his first book, 'rules of thumb [became] orthodoxies' and some of Johnston's teaching became institutionalised and ossified in the work of his followers. In fact, life and energy on the page are far more characteristic features of Johnston's work than formal perfection – something which can't be said for many of his successors.

The photographs follow more or less the same partly chronological, partly thematic arrangement as the exhibition, and contain some familiar material already reproduced elsewhere, but also plenty not seen in print before. Most fascinating are the twenty-eight photos in the section 'A Photograph Album'. These show Johnston with his family, in fancy dress, and camping off Vancouver Island in 1898. They further dispel the tweedy, serious, somewhat solitary image suggested by the few previously published photographs, and which has tended to prevail in spite of his daughter's many recollections of his playful side in her biography.

Ewan Clayton, of course, grew up in Ditchling and was a member of the Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic, set up by Gill and Pepler after they joined the Catholic church. The elegant design of the book is his work, and it was printed by the Ditchling Press which, though now a commercial firm located in Burgess Hill, is the direct successor to Pepler's St Dominic's Press.

Ewan summarised some of his main themes in a short piece in *Forum* 13.

John Neilson

Made with FontFont: Type for independent minds

Jan Middendorp & Eric Spiekermann (Eds)

Mark Batty Publisher
ISBN 0-9779850-4-0 & 0-9779850-4-3
Hardback 351pp 11¼ x 8½ in
\$65.00

One of the most appealing aspects of *Made with FontFont* is that it is a work in progress. FontFont(s) are a continuing series of original digital typefaces which began in 1990 as a small selection marketed by the digital foundry Font Shop. Erik Spiekermann and Neville Brody had the idea for FontFont. Both had extensive international connections with graphic designers and typographers. Spiekermann, who founded Font Shop International with his wife Joan in 1989, regularly crossed the Atlantic with a shopping list from European typographers for newly released American fonts (in those days, on floppy disks) from the emerging digital foundries, such as Emigré. In establishing FontFont as European innovators, their slogan was 'by designers for designers'.

The book is an illustrated story of the first fifteen years, with the collected works of around fifty designers of fonts—not all of them traditional 'type designers'. It seems as if FontFont has been with us longer, so established are the familiar black and yellow catalogues, and the tall, slim, colour-coded font booklets.

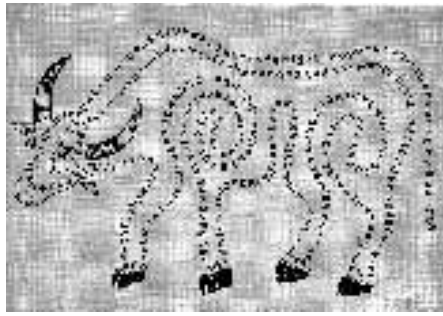
Spiekermann self-deprecatingly says that when FontFont was 'created' (a word he hates, calling it the 'c-word') there was 'no budget, no timetable, no business plan – not a spreadsheet in sight'. If the exceptional record of 3524 FontFonts (and counting) has grown organically and without any deliberate structure, then its success is all the more miraculous.

The book tells the story with contributions from a large cast. After an introduction by joint editor Jan Middendorp, the five chapters begin with a series of twenty essays on and critiques of the most notable FF typefaces, which delve into their inception, construction and application. The second chapter is a collection of five in-depth interviews with international designers on their relationship with type, and their philosophy and thoughts on type design, which are all thoroughly engaging and informative.

In the next two chapters designers describe their motives, methods and sources, and, in a collection of over forty FF font specimens, explain and demonstrate their craft. These two chapters are a panoramic feast of typographic application, using every category of typeface design and graphic style, including information graphics, nostalgic images and, not to be missed, the insane page spreads of Alessio Leonardi.

The concluding chapter has examples and brief descriptions of all FontFont designs, and biographies in alphabetical order of the type designers who have contributed to the quality and quantity of the FontFont range during the past fifteen years. Long may they continue to do so. The book is at once historical, biographical and an excellent design reference. In keeping with the sub-title 'Type for independent minds', it is considerably designed and thoughtfully edited.

Dave Farey



From *Made with FontFont*: a graphic example designed by Yang Liu, based upon a well known Asian calligram, showing FF Tronic by the Korean designer Hyon Cho, 2003.

While You're Reading

Gerard Unger

translated from the Dutch by Harry Lake
Mark Batty Publisher
ISBN 0-9762245-1-8 & 978-0-9762245-1-8
Hardback with dust jacket 240pp 6¼ x 9½ in
£19.95

There is a wealth of books on type design and typography, but none quite like this one. It's a highly personal book, as if he is saying 'Look, this is what I've discovered and learnt; I'd like to share it with you'. The style is beguilingly conversational, and the subject is the ultimate one for a type designer and typographer: how we read. But there are many highways, byways and diversions along the way.

The aim of typography, Unger asserts, is legibility. But what is legibility? Eminent sources are quoted saying why legibility is important but, frustratingly, failing to define it. Walter Tracy, in *Letters of Credit* (1986) defines legibility as the ease with which letters can be distinguished from one another, and gives readability a 'comfort' definition: being able to read for long periods of time without strain or difficulty. But up until now there have not been any rules, not even general guidelines, for assisting a type designer in this area. Beatrice Warde's metaphor of typography as a window 'not coming between author and reader' – 'invisible typography' – is purely subjective, a vain attempt to catch smoke.

Unger's approach is to ask the question from the other end: 'what happens when we read?' The retina contains a layer of light-sensitive receptors, a mixture of rods and cones. In the middle of the retina is a small pit called the

fovea, which is the area of the eye we use for reading. Reading is essentially a series of jumps, known as 'saccades', as the eye travels along lines, and any pauses in movement are called 'fixations'. The greater the proportion of 'saccades' to 'fixations', the smoother the reading. The brain interprets messages from the eye but doesn't actually need all the information, due to memory traces of familiar shapes known as 'engrams'. Engrams are altered and replaced through new learning experiences, but are generally automatic and do not like visual distraction. We tend to recognise combinations of letters rather than single letters: the 'word-superiority effect.' We do tolerate new or exotic letter forms in short pieces of text, but for continuous text, when speed is required, we rely upon word-superiority and familiar letterforms.

Unger explores the implications of this scientific research in many more areas of interest to typographers, such as why serif faces seem better than sans serif in continuous text. Written with humour and insight, this is a book for typographers who are only vaguely aware of how the end product of their craft works.

The author confesses that as a type designer who is also a keen reader, he had read about twelve pages of a new book, Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, before realising he had read nothing at all—he had been looking at the type (Sem Hartz's *Juliana*, 1958), and had to start all over again. A question perhaps, of not knowing his engrams from his elbow.

Dave Farey

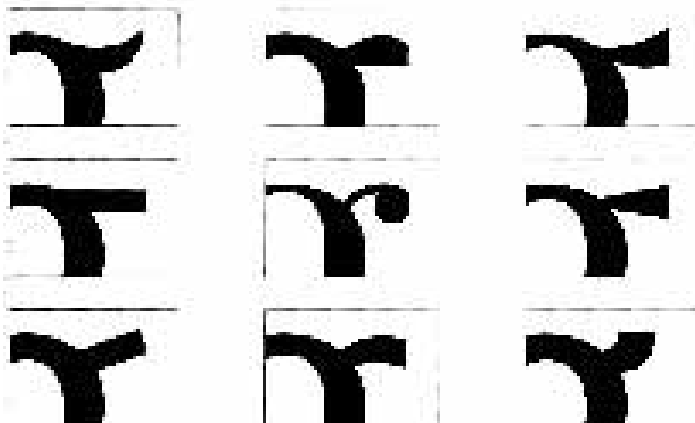
Also noted

Active Literature: Jan Tschichold and New Typography

Christopher Burke

Hyphen Press
ISBN 978-0-907259-32-9
Hardback 336pp 11 x 8½ in

Christopher Burke's major study of Tschichold's work and ideas concentrates on the first half of the career of this complex character, before he renounced the tenets of 'New Typography'. The book is profusely illustrated. A review will appear in a future *Forum*.

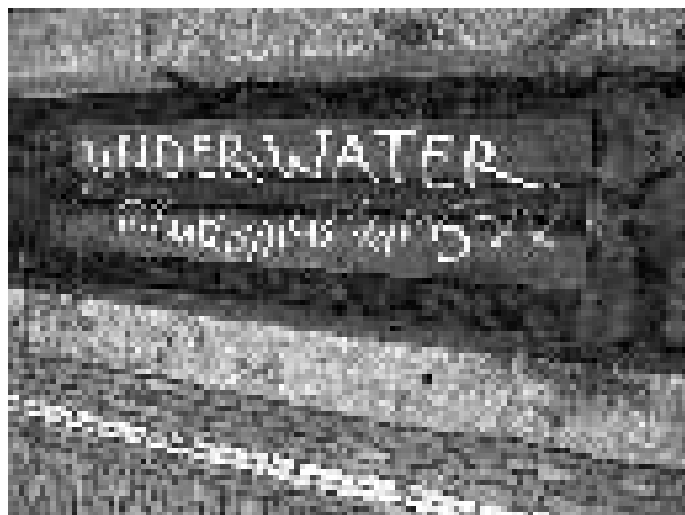


Type people tend to get hot under the collar about the shape of the ears on the letter g. The Dutch call them 'flags'. Illustration from *While You're Reading*

Clippings

Rosalind Wyatt has had work published in a new book *Art Textiles of the World: Volume 3, Great Britain*, by Matthew Koumis, published by Telos: ISBN 9781902015-16-3.

Wolfgang Jakob says that the exhibition of sculpture in the *Bächle* – water channels alongside streets – in Freiburg in July was a success. The only lettered piece was by Pieter Boudens and is pictured below. It reads UNDER WATER ALL EMPTY BOTTLES ARE FULL.



Celia Kilner writes that in May 2008 there will be an exhibition in Holmfirth, Yorkshire, of illuminated letters, grotesques, drolleries and miniatures writ large (ie 1m square). Those involved include members of Calderdale Calligraphers, Northumbrian Scribes and York Scribes who are all painting the images. They aim to have the whole alphabet plus any miniatures or monsters that catch the eye. Provisionally it is called *An A-Z of Massive Miniatures*. Celia's own *Angels* exhibition has now gone to Staveley near Knaresborough, and continues up to Jarrow next year.

Ieuan Rees has been teaching in Switzerland: 'The workshop was mainly aimed at students of typography. Originally it was for twelve students, but when I got there there were twenty-six and only four of them could speak and understand English, let alone Welsh. I taught with the help of an interpreter, and thank goodness that I have always taught using a lot of imagery on the blackboard. I am glad to say that the workshop went well. What was most interesting was how seriously the Swiss take their typography. That was wonderful, but I felt that however keen their interests were, their approach was a bit too structured and blinkered. I encouraged them to try and understand the letters not only from their usual approach but by questioning, reasoning, looking and observing, and to consider the part the arm and wrist had in the development of the letters as well as the brush and chisel. I encouraged them to see letters as another form of drawing and to have faith in their own judgements. I showed them how aspects of architecture, the tips of holly leaves, the Beetle car, the beaks of birds of prey, and

many more visual things all around me, had helped me to understand so much about letters. All this seemed unorthodox to them but they simply loved it and responded with huge enthusiasm. I think the workshop must have been a success as I came back with twenty-six bars of Swiss chocolate, a Swiss army knife, huge bags of Swiss biscuits and an offer to come back again next year. It was a pleasure to share my love of letters with such enthusiastic and appreciative students.

While I was there I attended a one-day seminar on type design in Zurich, with a number of eminent designers giving talks. It was fascinating and an eye-opener. But I could not help but feel that the technicalities of bézier curves and other computer constraints were influencing the development of letters too much. I felt that today's younger type designers will sooner or later get stuck if

they do not go back to some degree of formal training. I am wondering if it may become another case of the tail wagging the dog. Not once did I hear anybody refer to the negative shapes, the body of the letters and the importance of the white on the page. It is after all the reflection of light from the white of the printed page that the eyes see, and yet so little importance seems to be given to it. I feel that many modern type designers are more interested in the clothes, which is the black or letterform, than the white body that holds them up and gives them shape and form, and there seems to be a lack of awareness that it's the space around and within the letters that allows us to see them.'

Ros Pritchard, for many years Hon Secretary of Letter Exchange, sends us the sad news that her husband Gary died on June 18th, only five months after he was found to have cancer. He was 63. She writes: 'As we were happily married for 36 years, readjusting will probably take me a while. We had sold up in Bath and were staying with friends, in the thick of searching for a self-build site, when we got the diagnosis of advanced cancer in 3 places. At my sister's kind invitation we lived in her house in Sidmouth for the duration of Gary's illness, but now I must find a place to live, and eventually I hope to get back to lettering again.'

Phil Surey has been painting directional signs and seat numbers directly onto walls, doors, seats etc. at the Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. The building is Grade 1 listed, owned by the National Trust and due to re-open in September after a two-year

restoration. He also has another painted lettering project for a new build: The Lightbox is a gallery and museum in Woking, Surrey. The commission involves directional signs and a list of donors currently estimated at 4500 letters and counting... The letterform here is much more contemporary, again applied direct to the fabric of the building.

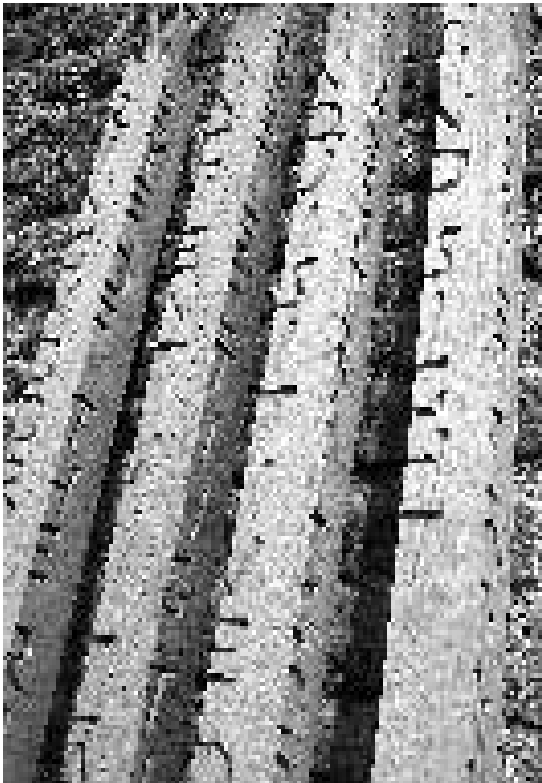
Annet Stirling tells of her frustration with the prescriptive style of royal inscriptions – 'HRH-whoever having to be on one line' – and how this works against producing a good design. She wonders if readers share her annoyance and if anything can be done about it. Please let *Forum* have your thoughts!

Part-time lettercarving at the **City & Guilds** in London has been a victim of success: recruitment for the full-time 2- and 3-year Architectural Stonecarving and Woodcarving courses that contain a lettering module has very successful. Owing to restricted drawing and carving space, and the difficulty of teaching so many students, part-time places have been suspended until it becomes clear how the new full-time intake settle in. James Salisbury, one of the tutors, writes: 'There is every possibility that 'part-time' will recommence at a later date, and I will encourage this, as I see those Thursdays as a lifeline for all sorts of people to turn an interest into a passion. It all comes down to space in the end and I can only suggest that anyone interested in lettering might stay in touch with the college to find out if and when the situation improves'. Contact City & Guilds of London Art School: 124 Kennington Park Road, Kennington, SE11 4DJ, 020 7735 2306.

From October this year **Gary Breeze** will be Artist in Residence for ten months at the Department of Archaeology at the University of Southampton. The staff are keen to gain a more practical understanding of carving and lettering, as well as looking at artefacts from a maker's perspective. Gary is hoping for a lively exchange of ideas about motivation and content that he can feed back to Letter Exchange in due course.

John Randle has sent a hastily snapped photo (below) of some new lettering on the Trumpet Inn at Trumpet, Herefordshire, which replaces the previous 'chocolate-box Gothic'. It seems a very imaginative use of capitals in the 'english vernacular' style. The pub say it was done through the brewery, Wadsworth's.





Andrew Whittle has recently finished the first half of a commission for Artsreach in Dorset: four green oak posts (pictured above), located on the Wessex Ridgeway Trail. Couplets by James Crowden are cut on the edge of the wood. Andrew says: 'I have always wanted to do something like this since seeing the runic alphabet Futhoric. It seemed a remarkable economy to use the arris as a main stroke whilst also solving the problem of unfortunate coincidences of wide and narrow letters often found in vertical lettering. I am pleased that the end result, rather than being lettered posts, appears to be posts invaded by lettering.'

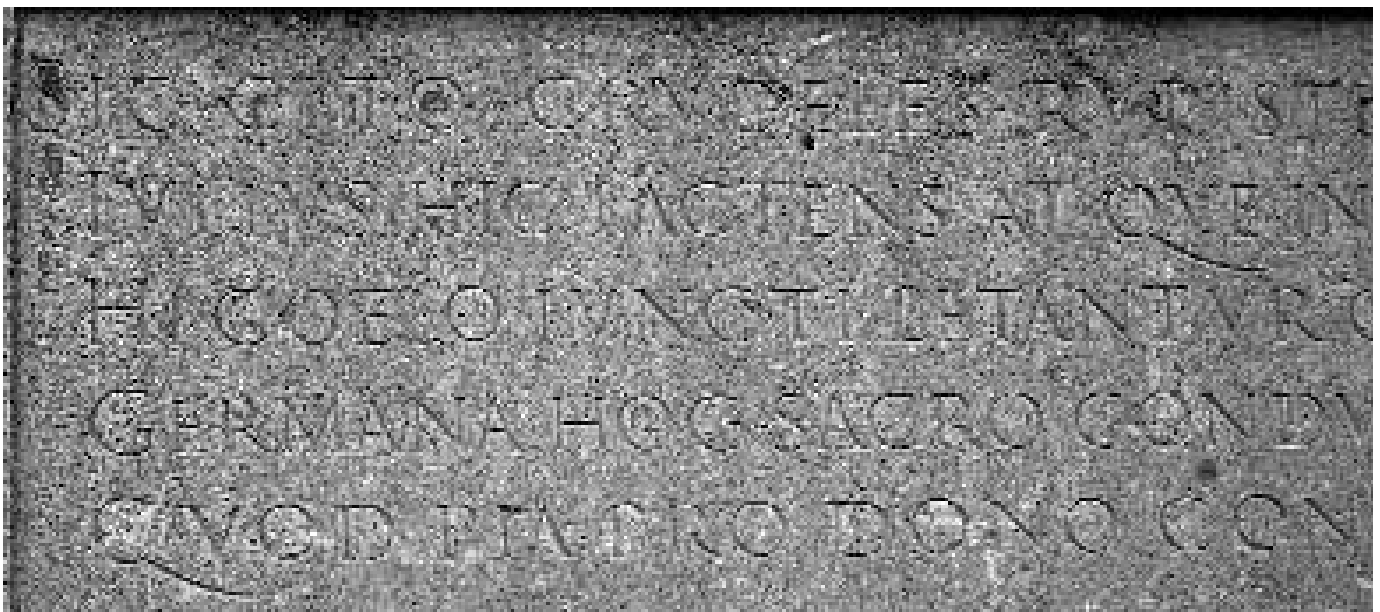
Changes are afoot at the **St Bride Library** in London. After the failure earlier this year of funding applications to the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Library has drawn up revised plans. These include the development of a new reading room which is both more accessible and nearer to the items users request most often. £5,000 has been given by the Friends of St Bride towards the cost of installing new rolling shelves in the Library which will further reduce the delay in supplying requested items. The new reading room is expected to open later in the year following the closure for the time being of the old and much-loved Victorian one in September. The St Bride Foundation is also planning a permanent display about the Library, one of the most important collections on printing and related matters in the world, and is investigating other ways of raising money. For more information, contact St Bride Foundation: info@stbridefoundation.org, <http://www.stbridefoundation.org/reachus.html>.

A profile of **Paul Shaw** by Christopher Gray in his column *Streetscapes* appeared in the New York Times on 29 April. Paul says: 'I think Christopher did a better than usual job of explaining the subtleties of letters and their interest to professionals.'

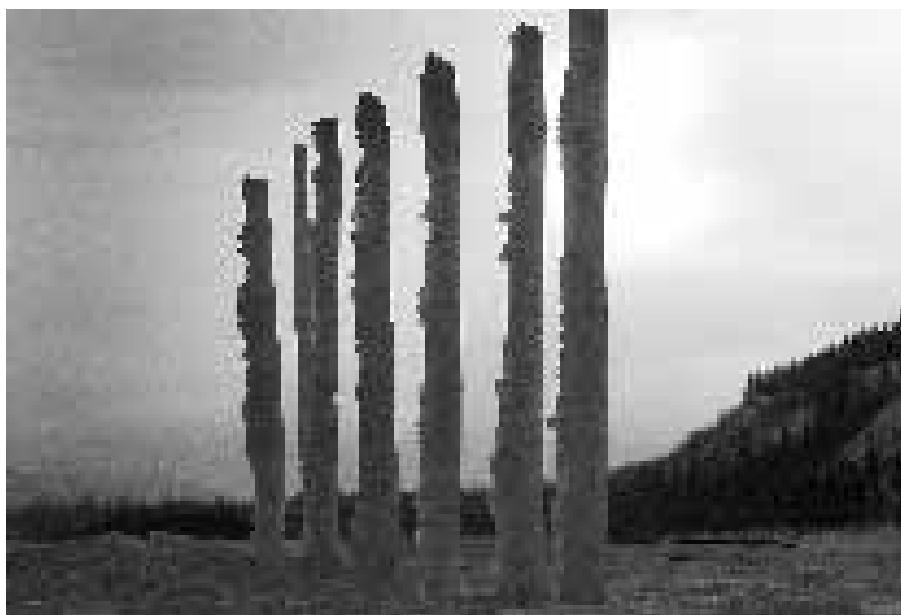
Paul sends a photo (below) of a particularly fine fifteenth-century inscription he has found in Lombardy, Italy.

The **Memorial Arts Charity's** plans for founding a National Collection of Contemporary Memorial Art continue apace. The Charity hopes to commission and exhibit sixty-five new works in the

gardens of West Dean in Sussex from March to November 2009. Thereafter they will move to permanent public sites around Britain: Birmingham (University Botanic Gardens), Canterbury (the Memorial Garden, Canterbury Cathedral), Sussex (West Dean Gardens), East Anglia, Scotland (Blair Castle) and on the Wales/England border (the Monnow Valley Art Centre). The works will not be memorials as such, except in the sense that they engage with the universal themes of transience and the passage of time. Harriet Frazer writes: 'The selected designs bring together the traditional components of British memorial making, above all fine lettering, with the fresh interpretative vision of sixty-five different makers. The designs range widely, from the traditional to the very contemporary. They include works in stone, slate, wood and other materials in the form of standing stones, headstones, lettered steps, sculptures, an arched gate, a bird bath, words cut into chalk on a hill, a fountain and a folly. The ability of such works to comfort, move and inspire the public, and the necessity of founding a permanent collection of Memorial Art, were borne out by the overwhelming response to our first exhibition, *The Art of Remembering*, at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, in 1998. We have launched an appeal, and need to raise £600,000 in total, with £360,000 of this for the commissioning of the sixty-five new works. So far we have raised approximately £193,000 in total from grants and individuals, including funds donated from the auction of lettered works, paintings and 'other fine and interesting lots' we held in May.' Anyone considering making a donation, and who would like a copy of the *Art & Memory* appeal brochure and/or the first *Working Drawings* booklet, should contact harriet@memorialartscharity.org.uk, 01728 688393 or coestreicher@clara.co.uk, 020 7354 9562. There will be another auction in London on the evening of 29 November at the St Bride Foundation. The lots will consist mainly of lettered works on paper, stone and wood. A third auction will be held in Sussex in 2008.



Undated plaque commemorating the death of an infant named Giulio (no surname) immured in the facade of SS Pietro e Paolo in Osteno (Como), Italy. The letters are 14mm with initials of 17mm and 19mm (S in line 1). **Paul Shaw** points out that they are very similar to letters found on several tombs in Rome executed between 1479 and 1486 which have been attributed to the workshop of Andrea Bregno and whose inscriptions may have been designed by Bartolomeo Sanvito, the Paduan calligrapher. Paul thinks that it may be the work of Bregno and Sanvito and date to the mid-1480s.



Owen Williams, *I: The Multiplied Letter*

Owen Williams's project *I: The Multiplied Letter*, mentioned in *Forum 13*, is now finished and the photograph above shows the ice monoliths Owen made. The project took place while Owen was Artist in Residence at the Klondike Institute for Art and Culture, Dawson City, Yukon, Canada.

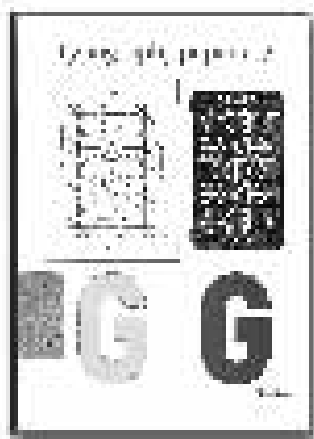
Jason Smith and Phil Garnham have designed a new set of four typeface families designed for headline/display work. They are available in a package called Icon Volume 1 and can be viewed at <http://www.fontsmith.com/fonts.php?collection=Icon+Volume+1>. For more details contact Jason Smith 020 7401 8886, Jason@fontsmith.com.



Earlier this year John Neilson completed a 35-ft long inscription (pictured above) leading from the pavement into the church of St Michael and St Paul, Bath, carved into the sandstone floor slabs with help from Malcolm Sier and Tim Mansell.

Charles Smith has been commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland to make two plaques for the new natural science-themed garden at the Hugh Miller Museum, Cromarty. Hugh Miller was a nineteenth-century geologist and writer.

Typography Papers 7 is now available, published by Hyphen Press. Its 152 A4 pages contain articles on a wide variety of subjects including roman types made in sixteenth-century Paris, letter design in eighteenth-century Europe, a nineteenth-century Parisian geometric sans, early twentieth-century English typefaces for children, and the Graphic Information Research Unit. ISBN: 978-0-907259-33-6 www.hyphenpress.co.uk.



Rupert Otten and Hanneke van der Werf have set up the **Monnow Valley Arts Centre** in South Herefordshire. The centre is constituted as a foundation and has three initial trustees – Richard Kindersley, Esther de Waal and Julian Barnard. Based at Middle Hunt House, Walterstone, Hereford, it overlooks the Black Mountains and is set in thirteen acres of land, two of which are currently in use by the centre with plans for sculpture trails in the rest to come later. The centre will specialise in landscape painting and sculpture, with an emphasis on carved lettering. Plans in the pipeline include a David Jones exhibition later this year (see *Forthcoming Events*, p21), a one-man show by John Shaw next Spring, Tom Perkins in 2009 and a major touring show of ten stones taking texts from the Rule of St. Benedict to be

supplemented by interpretations in calligraphy. The Centre is also earmarked as one of the locations for the Memorial Arts Charity's permanent collection of memorial art proposed for 2009. Contact Monnow Valley Arts Centre, Walterstone, Hereford HR2 ODY, 01873 860429, info@monnowvalleyarts.org.

On 1 August **Typevents'** UK office relocated to: 1st Floor, Toll House, 180-182 Fazeley Street, Birmingham B5 5SE. Their Watford address will be retained. The Typevents European office now operates from Via A. Piccard, 18, 42100 Reggio Emilia, Italy. Details of Typevents' activities can be seen at www.typevents.com.



Two small examples of the perils of **DIY typesetting** from a large notice and a small advert. Readers will no doubt have more which they might care to send in... In fact (says the Editor plaintively from his remote hovel in the Welsh hills), you can always write to *Forum* on any appropriate subject. It would be nice to have a Letter to the Editor once in a while.

Forum needs your news! Please send contributions for the next issue to the editor (see back page) by 15 January 2008.

Footnote

No 9 in our series of edifying observations on the lettering arts



Eric Gill painted a precursor to Gill Sans on signs to repel ramblers from his small fiefdom at Capel-y-Ffin, so it's nice to see successors to those letterforms being used to encourage access by similar means elsewhere.



Brody Neuschwander 'Means of Expression' (detail), collage of rice paper on wooden panels with whitewash and Chinese ink, 2002. Brody talks to Letter Exchange on 21 November.

Letter Exchange...

...is a society founded in 1988 for professionals involved in the lettering arts, from calligraphy and lettercutting, through design for print, type and book design, to architectural lettering and signage.

Full membership is by election, and applications are always welcome. Please contact the Hon Secretary.

Associate membership is open to all at £30 per year. Benefits include reduced entry charges to lectures, *Forum* twice a year, occasional email updates on interesting events and other occasional items like the recent *Love Letters* DVD. For more information please contact the Honorary Secretary Michael Rust, Sycamore Cottage, Tamley Lane, Hastingleigh, Ashford, Kent TN25 5HW, UK 01233 750363, letterexchange@studiorust.co.uk.

Alternatively, you can just subscribe to *Forum*. Current rates including postage are:

	UK	EU	other
1 year (2 issues)	£14	£15	£16
2 years (4 issues)	£26	£28	£30

Please send payment with a note stating whether you'd like to start with this issue (14) or the next (15) to Phil Surey (*Forum* subscription), 8 Kings Grove, London SE15 2NB, UK 020 7635 6359, phil@psurey.freereserve.co.uk.

Cheques payable to Letter Exchange. We cannot as yet take card payments. Payment from outside the UK must be made in pounds sterling drawn on a UK bank, for example by International Banker's Draft.



For sale!

The acclaimed Letter Exchange DVD *Love Letters* is available for £5 including postage from Secretary Michael Rust (see above), who also has copies of the **10th** and **15th anniversary exhibition catalogues**.

For past copies of *Forum* please contact Phil Surey (above).

Letter Exchange lectures 2007-8

Everyone is welcome, including non-members.

Lectures are on Wednesdays at 6.30pm prompt, at The Art Workers Guild, 6 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AR.

This is just off Southampton Row.

Nearest tubes: Holborn and Russell Square.

After the lecture there is always the chance to meet and chat with colleagues over a glass of wine or a coffee.

Lectures: £5 members, £7 non-members, £3 students, payable at door.

Please see poster and fliers for fuller details.

Lectures below the red line should be considered provisional at time of printing: please check before travelling!

12 September Nick Benson

Lettering at the John Stevens Shop

17 October Crissie Charlton & Vicky Fullick

Working in a thin space

21 November Brody Neuschwander

Textasy. The interface of calligraphy and contemporary art

12 December Phil Baines & Catherine Dixon

When in Rome...

2008

16 January Mourad Boutros and Susie Leiper

New members showcase

13 February Una Sullivan

Words and letters: some preoccupations

12 March Manny Ling

Calligraphy Crossing Boundaries

16 April Sarah More

21 May Timothy Noad

Herald, painter and scrivener

18 June Visit to Cambridge

Hosted by Eric Marland

Letter Exchange committee 2007-8

Chairman

Dave Farey
HouseStyle Graphics Ltd,
27 Chestnut Drive, Bexleyheath
Kent DA7 4EW
020 8303 0820
dave@housestylegraphics.com

Hon. Secretary

Michael Rust
Sycamore Cottage, Tamley Lane,
Hastingleigh, Ashford, Kent
TN25 5HW
t/fx: 01233 750363
letterexchange@studiorust.co.uk

Hon. Treasurer

Una Sullivan
7 Stanford Road, Lymington,
Hants SO41 9GF
01590 679142

Executive Committee

Gary Breeze

5 Beehive Yard, Denmark St, Diss,
Norfolk IP22 4LQ
t/f: 01379 644103
beehiveyard@tiscali.co.uk

Catherine Dixon

58 Blanche Lane, South Mimms,
Herts EN6 3PD
t/f: 01707 643697, m: 07947 070972
mail@catherinedixon.co.uk

Chris Elsey

1 Hampstead Road, Dorking, Surrey
RH4 3AF
01306 883764

Rosella Garavaglia

11 Horsford Road, London SW2 5BW
020 7274 7516
rosella.garavaglia@btopenworld.com

Phil Surey

8 Kings Grove, London SE15 2NB
020 7635 6359
phil@psurey.freereserve.co.uk

Please address general enquiries and correspondence to the Hon. Secretary (see above)

Letter Exchange website:
www.letterexchange.org

Publisher Letter Exchange

c/o Hon. Secretary Michael Rust
(see above)

Editor/layout John Neilson

Printing WPG, Welshpool, Powys
The *Forum* masthead was lettered
by Rachel Yallop

Comments, letters for publication, news and ideas for articles are welcome.

Please contact the Editor:

John Neilson
Pentrecwn, Llansilin, Oswestry,
Powys, Wales SY10 7QF
01691 791403
jvneilson@lineone.net

The views expressed in individual articles are not necessarily those of the Editor or of Letter Exchange.

No part of *Forum* may be reproduced in any form without permission.

The copyright on articles and images remains with the authors and artists/photographers/suppliers.

ISSN 1472-0604