



Johanna Drucker

Ken Fandell

The Franks

Brad Freeman

Diana Guerrero-Maciá

Kurt Hauert

Dennis Ichiyama

Cary S. Leibowitz

Clifton Meador

Carol Padberg

Jason Pickleman

Kay Rosen

Lawrence Weiner

Katharine Wolff



“Whence did the mystic art arise of painting speech and speaking to the eyes that we by tracing magic lines are taught how to color and embody thought.”

The Origin and Progress of English Letters
William Massey, London 1763

Based on our own human experience, most of us would probably agree that of all forms of communication the sense of smell is primal, second is taste, and sound or auditory signals run a close third. Surprisingly, of the part of the brain's cortex devoted to tactile sensitivity the thumb rules! And what is most striking indeed is the massive amount of brain that contributes to the sense of vision. Aided by advanced medical scanning techniques since the beginning of the 20th century, science furthermore shows that this huge region of the brain is particularly active under the conditions of seeing, reading and – imagining.¹

Almost one decade ago in November 2000, I read an article in *GEO* magazine that described a group of scientists in Australia and in New York who were investigating gut feelings. Quite literally, and more precisely, their studies defined the intestines as our second brain, operating parallel to, or in unison with our brain at the top. Although this may seem a strange way to begin an essay about typographic pictures, such research may lend credence to intuition, the power of association, and *aesthetic* thinking.

In other words, beauty counts.

Since the middle of the 19th century, however, our species has been headed toward – in spite of, or perhaps due to, accelerating technological achievements – anarchy and oblivion. The artist and his work have become commodities, and even as an ally to business, the role of the graphic designer has become marginal. In his book *A Designer's Art*, Paul Rand wrote in 1985: “In asking the artist to have courage we must ask the same of industry. The impetus to conform, so widespread today, will, if not checked, kill all forms of creativity.”

For more than 30 years I have been witness to hundreds of students in art and design schools who come and go, in and out of institutions of higher learning, who will eventually forsake their talents as an idealistic dream. It is my opinion, more than ever, that the single most important function in a design education today is to restore the art of it.

For example, irrespective of typestyle the lowercase a-shape expresses – soft, round, vulnerability – in comparison to the capitals.

mama MAMA mama MAMA

Set in capitals the word-picture communicates less than what is read. David Sacks may offer an explanation: “Three or four thousand years ago, our first letter didn’t say ‘ah’ because like every other vowel in our alphabet A began life as a consonant. The meaning of A as *first rate* is ingrained in us as children, to recur in our Adult lives. Like the fair-haired son of a wealthy family, A emanates quality.”² ... and Authority.

What could be more simple than the shape of a letter itself, and simultaneously, more evocative when that same shape is used as a sign? It is my guess that the individuals whose work is featured in *TypO* have a provocative, childlike curiosity in common. In support of these artists and for the benefit of those who are new to the history of visual art, I would like to dispel possible assumptions about the divergent aims of design and fine art. I will mention only a few important interdisciplinary and cross-cultural influences among professionals in the fields of art and design – actually a long-standing boomerang effect between America and Europe that intensified at the beginning of the 1920s. What has become almost lost in our overspecialized society is *unity*, a holistic way of thinking about design as *artistic endeavor*. Shortly before 1900 the situation was reversed. Creative artists in several parts of Europe were seized by restlessness. They turned their backs on pure art and began to devote themselves to the applied arts. There were a number of reasons for this change.

Opposite page left:
Cary S. Leibowitz,
Finally Something to Complain About!
\$8 Show, 1997,
Automatic, Chicago, IL,
bag, buttons,
postcards, signage
and more

Design could be taught as a matter of play. One of the first things I remember learning as a very young child was to recognize the shapes of our letters, the capital letters. What fascinated me was the variety of horizontals, verticals, diagonals and rounds, and how these elements could be recombined to form another letter. An alphabet enjoys one major advantage over any other writing system: It needs fewer symbols. Pragmatically, this means it’s easy to learn and speeds up literacy. It also means that a set group of pieces is available for visual games.

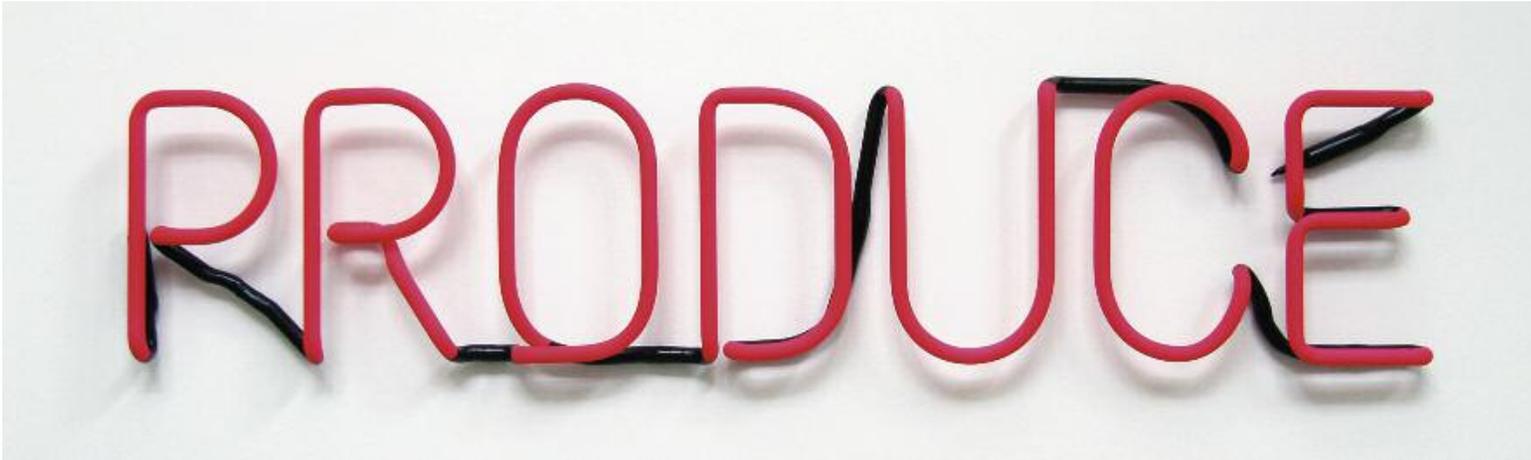
Opposite page right:
Carol Padberg,
Franklins, Two, 2009,
commercially printed
fleece, 12’ x 5’

Try to pronounce this text, this string of glyphs, out loud or not, depending on where you are:

aaaaaaaaaaaaammmmaaaaaammmmmmaaaa
aammmmaaaaaaaaammmmaaaaa

Adrian Frutiger, perhaps the most notable type designer of the last century, gave a lecture in Bern, Switzerland, in 1996. At the beginning of his talk he claimed that this sound was the most universal sound among all cultures, fundamental to all human speech. The mid-20th-century linguist and alphabet scholar David Diringer calls it “the purest and simplest vocalic sound, as uttered by opening the air passage of the throat to its fullest extent. It is regarded as the most primitive vowel sound and is the first sound uttered by a baby.” A shape, in this case the lowercase a, has intrinsic content.





The Franks,
PRODUCE, 2008,
enamel, glass, acrylic,
8" x 38" x 1.5"

The romantic ideal of inspired craftsmanship as glorified by William Morris in England and the Arts and Crafts Movement instigated a new concept of form – movement – which did not aim at utility. Lettering became painterly or turned into a structure of rhythmically ordered lines. Around 1915 Rudolf von Larisch, professor at the School of Arts and Crafts in Vienna, focused his teaching methods on achieving these graphic qualities, which related to the lettering of Toulouse-Lautrec and the gothic-type alphabets of Melchior Lechter. The new style stimulated German type designers like Rudolf Koch and F.H. Ehmcke to experiment with decorative faces and influenced future generations of European artists, type designers and craftsmen to rediscover letterform in combination with illustration, which in turn rekindled the interest in woodcuts and the artist's book, not to mention the influence of Peter Behrens, who defined the concept of corporate identity. His colleague, Anna Simons (one of the few women in the history of typography), translated Edward Johnston's writings from English into

German, resulting ultimately in an international revival of interest in western calligraphy. She was the conduit that led to the initial exchange between England and Switzerland, the link to Alfred Willmann and Ernst Keller, both teachers of Adrian Frutiger, Armin Hofmann and Emil Ruder, to name only three of this generation who since the 1950s have decidedly influenced American graphic design: type designer, graphic designer and typographer, respectively.

After World War I (1914–1918), architects, designers, typographers, artists and writers all succumbed to the chaos of social upheaval, an invitation for "hotheads" like Theo van Doesburg and Piet Zwart to turn the world of the traditional typographer upside down. Schools like the Bauhaus would become the breeding ground for opposing theories. For whom should the world be built anew and how should it look? Was the machine friend or foe of the arts? Is design for the masses and art for the elite? Less is more, says Mies van der Rohe! Less is a bore, says Robert Venturi!

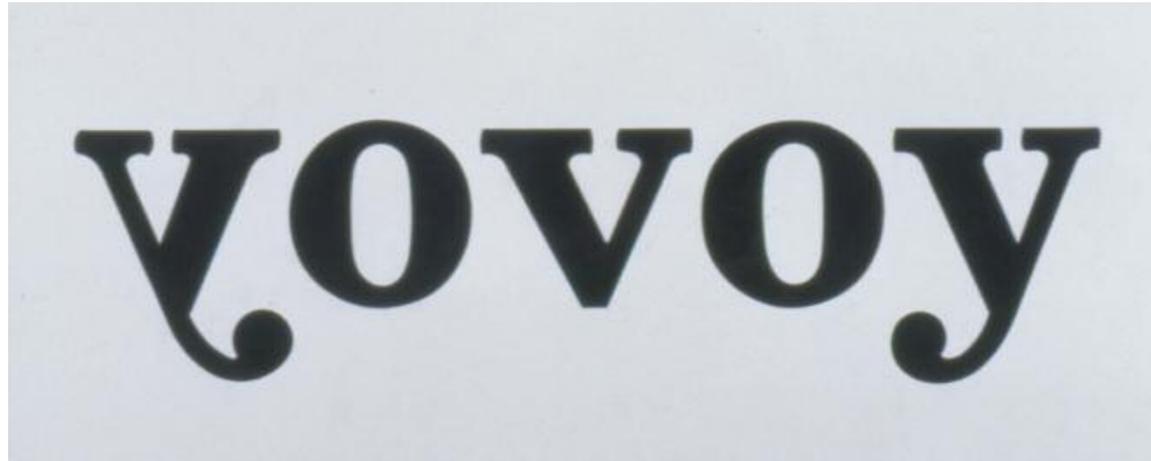


Residual arguments about “content versus form” or “design versus art” should be moot by now, but typographers still bear the brunt of these debates, or are themselves guilty of postulating such polarizing dictates. I regard this tendency as a forced sort of intellectualism to be noted among academicians or tired traditional practitioners, although it may have started in 1896 with the American architect Louis Sullivan and his edict *form follows function*. Who knows for sure? It doesn’t really matter. With the Roaring ‘20s thus begins what art historians call the Modern Movement in painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, dance and what design historians call the beginning of graphic design.³

As prelude to what does matter about the movement and what is emphatically relevant today, the Dutch painter, Piet Mondrian, attempts to describe his theories about art in 1914: “I construct lines and color combinations on a flat surface in order to express general beauty with the utmost awareness. Nature (or, that which I see) inspires me, puts me, as with

Above:
Ken Fandell,
Detail of model for
*A Proposed Monument
to the Need for a
Psychic Breakthrough
to Reach Our True
Potential*, 2010,
extruded acrylic, size
and installation vary

Left:
Dennis Ichiyama,
Type Rules No. 2, 2008,
20" x 13"

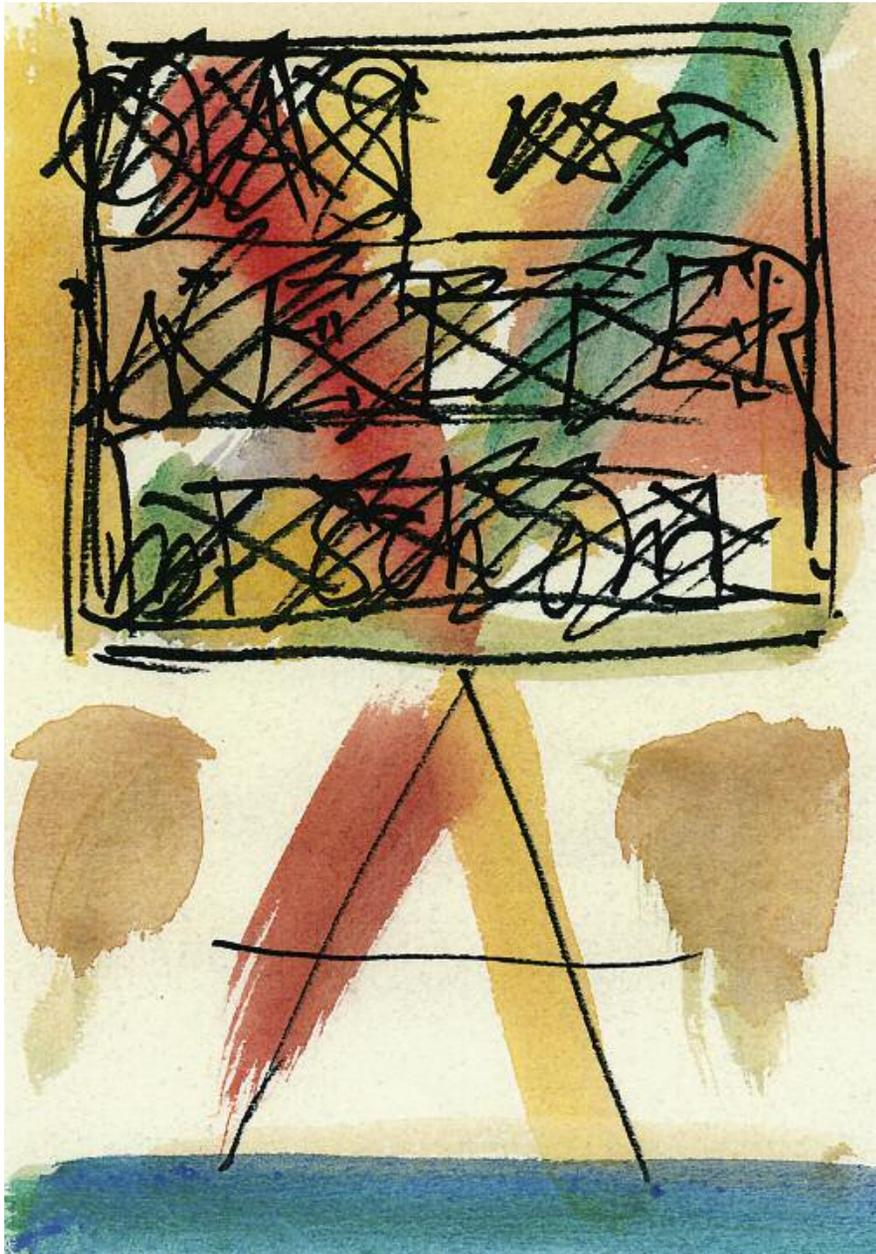


Kay Rosen,
I'm Going, I'm Going,
1996, graphite on paper,
11.875" x 21.625"

any painter, in an emotional state so that an urge comes about to make something, but I want to come as close as possible to the truth and abstract everything from that, until I reach the foundation (still just an external foundation!) of things ... I believe it is possible that, through horizontal and vertical lines constructed with awareness, but not with calculation, led by high intuition, and brought to harmony and rhythm, these basic forms of beauty, supplemented if necessary by other direct lines or curves, can become a work of art, as strong as it is true."

And this is what's exciting about all of the work exhibited. As early as 1915 the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein of Vienna demonstrated how language, signs and symbols can change their meaning, and how far our dependence on language can help or hinder creative thought: "Rather, when investigating meaning, the philosopher must look and see the variety of uses to which the word is put." So different was this new perspective that Wittgenstein repeats: "Don't think but look!"⁴

It seems as though almost every human profession has taken a whack at trying to quantify how we perceive the world around us. Sigmund Freud published his first psychoanalytic work in 1895, while the artists of the Viennese Secession like Klimt, Kokoschka and Schiele explored the boundaries between dream and reality, the expression of which culminated in the work of the Russian painter Kandinsky and his well-known treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Various paradigms of perception and language were interesting to behavioral scientists, such as Skinner and Pavlov, who believed that chained conditioning would explain all learned behavior. Gestalt psychology of the 1920s was a controversial school emphasizing dynamics and "holism." In my beginning design class all of us were more puzzled by these theories than we were edified. "The whole is greater than the sum of the parts." Even if we did understand this statement, how it would function in our work was inconceivable. By contrast the insights of C.G. Jung, the great psychologist

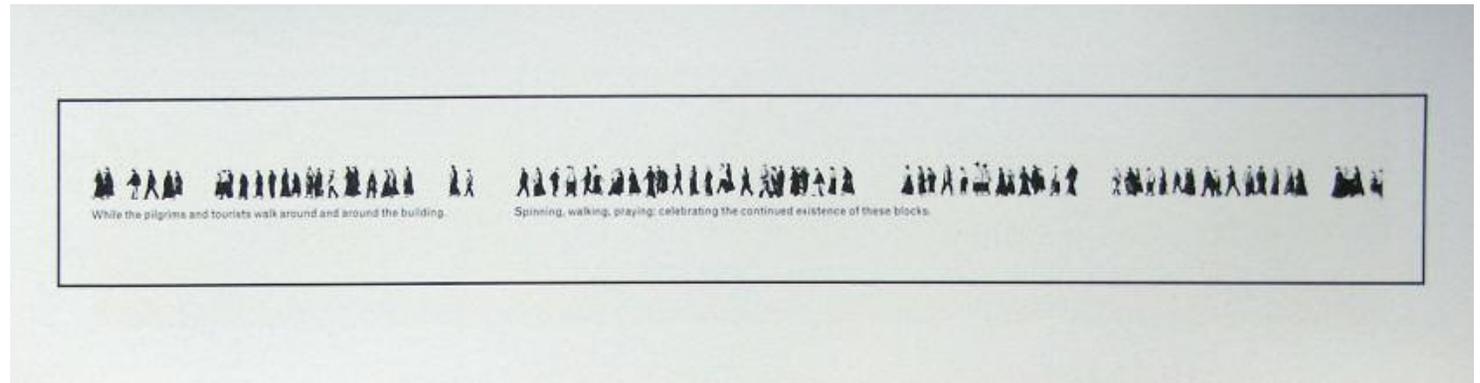


and psychiatrist, were instructive, highlighting art from all ages to explain the nature of man and his archetypes. In *Man and His Symbols*, Jung writes: "In order to communicate a human being uses the spoken or written word. His language is full of symbols, but in order to describe that which is conceptually more complicated, signs or pictures, like the abbreviations UN, UNICEF or UNESCO are invented according to need."

Meanwhile, the chemists and physicists were also busy in their laboratories trying to understand how we perceive color, devising prisms and naming effects like simultaneous contrast, visual mix and saturation, enabling color reproduction for printing technology. Painters' investigations or experiments often foreshadow those of science. Seurat, for example, dabbed color in tiny points on his canvas; his pictorial motif a beach scene, but his real interest was light. The effect of his brushwork resembles and optically functions like the dot in photolithography, the triad in color television and the pixel in digital imaging. Robert Delaunay in his paintings of the new "flying machines" began to analyze color relationships by separating colors into concentric rings and applied the effects to show whirling propellers. Fernand Léger transformed Cézanne's use of cones, spheres and volumes to represent nature into the visual language of the urbanite. Inspired by the new "automobile" traffic in New York, he abandoned traditional perspective and orchestrated graphic landscapes that integrated letters, signs and pictograms as dynamic contrasts within two-dimensional space.

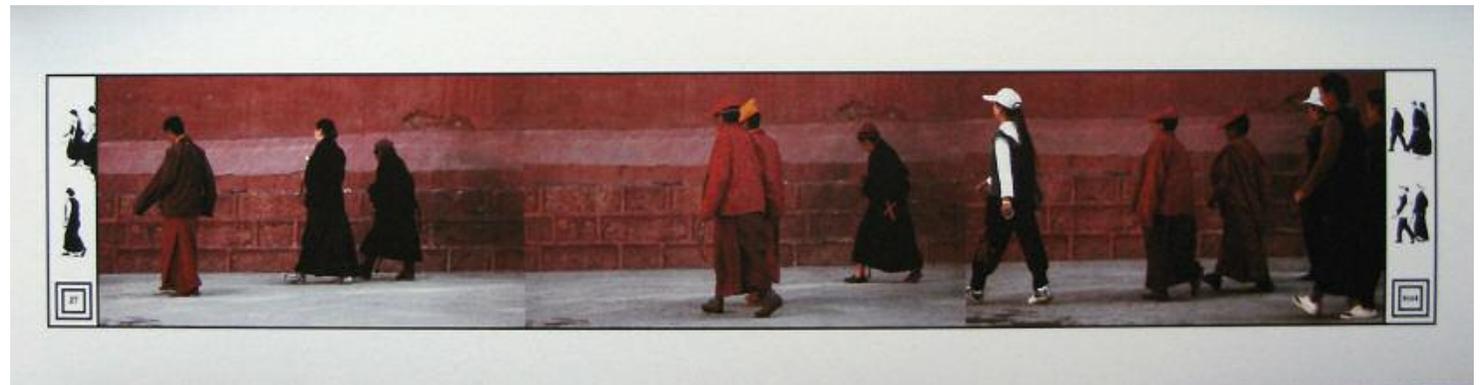
With layer upon layer upon layer of social changes, it's no wonder that collage became a favored medium of the Cubists. Everyday objects were treated as

Kurt Hauert,
*Lesebuchlein/Little
Reading Book*, 2008,
watercolor on paper,
8.25" x 6"



Clifton Meador,
Kora, (detail), 2007,
artist book with
loose pages, cloth
covered boards, silver
screen print

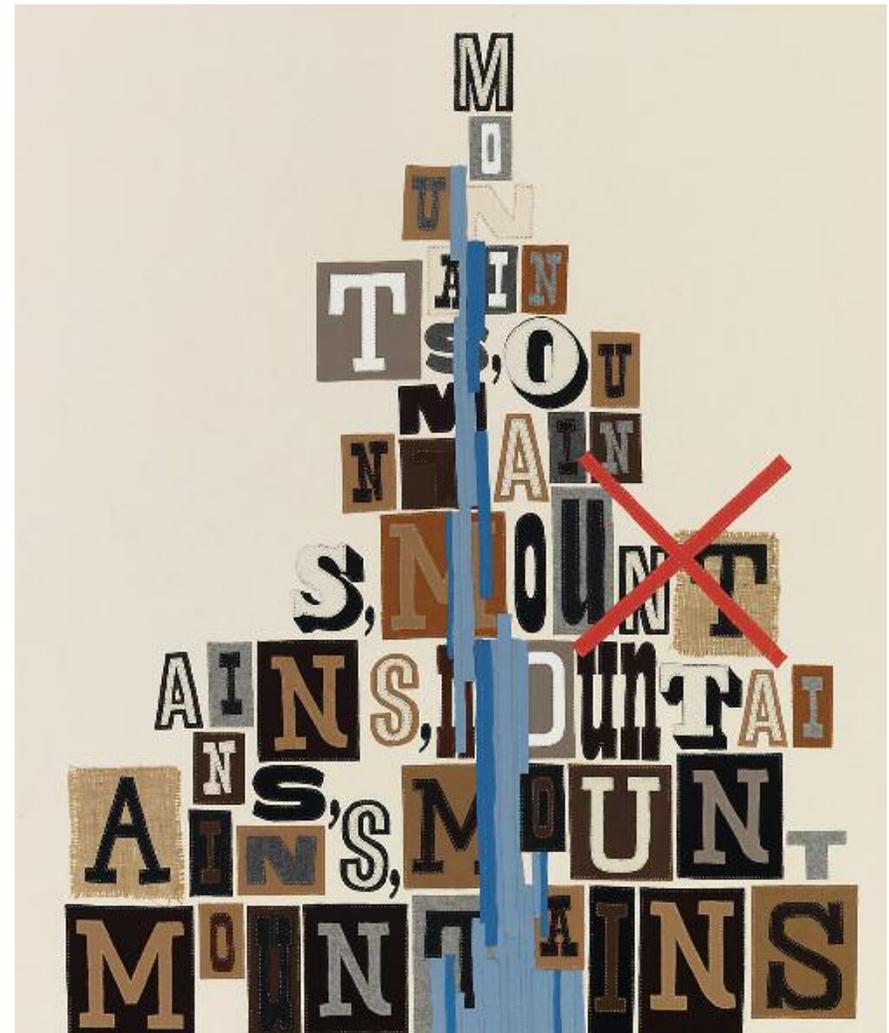
Opposite page left:
Katharine Wolff,
Untitled, 2008,
gouache on junk mail,
11.75" x 8.25"



shape: circles, straight lines, diagonals, segments and combinations. Letters, fragments of them or scraps of text, glued or painted into pictures, heralded the trend toward abstraction, which until today remains unbroken.

This essay has barely tapped the roots of modern design. There are many books available on this vast subject with representative examples of DeStijl, Constructivism, the Bauhaus teachers, such as Josef Albers, Walter Gropius, Paul Klee, and the

revolutionary work of the avant-garde, El Lissitzky, Kurt Schwitters, Moholy-Nagy, Lyonel Feiniger or Man Ray. This essay has also not followed the path of modern abstract expressionists represented by Jackson Pollock, Mark Tobey or Robert Motherwell who found new rhythms of contrast in written or brushed form – the dynamic of eastern calligraphy. A final reference that does deserve mention, however, encompasses all visual arts of the last century; and that is, the contribution of the Japanese print toward asymmetrical composition.



Above:
Diana Guerrero-Maciá,
The Bigger Picture,
2008, wool, vinyl,
leather, burlap on
canvas, 72" x 64"

The exhibitors in *TypO* are people who have chosen to represent their complex aesthetic feelings through simple, universal arbiters of shape and color – letters and signs. These are the experiments with type that I have observed in their work:

1. pattern and ornament
2. visual–verbal irony
3. revived interest in craft and materials
4. reduction and abstraction
5. form as content
6. experimental syntax (rules of grammar)
7. experimental semantics (meanings of symbols)

Opposite page left:
**Brad Freeman and
Johanna Drucker,**
Nova Reperta, (detail),
1999, offset printed
artist's book, 66 pages,
20.125" x 16.625"

Opposite page right:
Lawrence Weiner,
Written in the Sand,
1997, offset ink on
paper, 40" x 28"

Sometimes, to try out my own “theories” about perception with the students, I might administer a brief visual quiz like this: I show a Mondrian painting that has been rotated 90, 180 and 270 degrees and present all four possible orientations at once. I then ask them to guess which way Mondrian actually painted his canvas. Ruling out the ingrained habit and influence of reading direction, most of the students, regardless of culture, are able to eliminate two options at once: It was painted upright. Then a deeper visual judgment is required: Of the remaining two possibilities, what is top and what is bottom? I encourage them to answer quickly and spontaneously! My survey is then complete, and roughly three out of four students will have invariably guessed correctly. What I find interesting, almost amazing, is how *do* they “know” then? When I ask them to explain their correct answers, most of them cannot ... or they point, or say complicated things, or make motions in the air with their hands. But I am happy that they cannot yet cloud what they feel with a sophisticated vocabulary. Because the answer is so simple: The big red is pushed up by the little yellow – in defiance of – gravity.

— Katharine Wolff

Katharine Wolff was born in the Chicago area in 1952. She began her studies of art and design at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, graduating with a B.F.A. in 1975 with a double major in painting and graphic design. After working as a designer in packaging and corporate communications, she attended the two-year graduate program for graphic design in Basel, Switzerland, the original Weiterbildungsklasse, where her varied interests in drawing, color, letterform and typography were developed and combined.

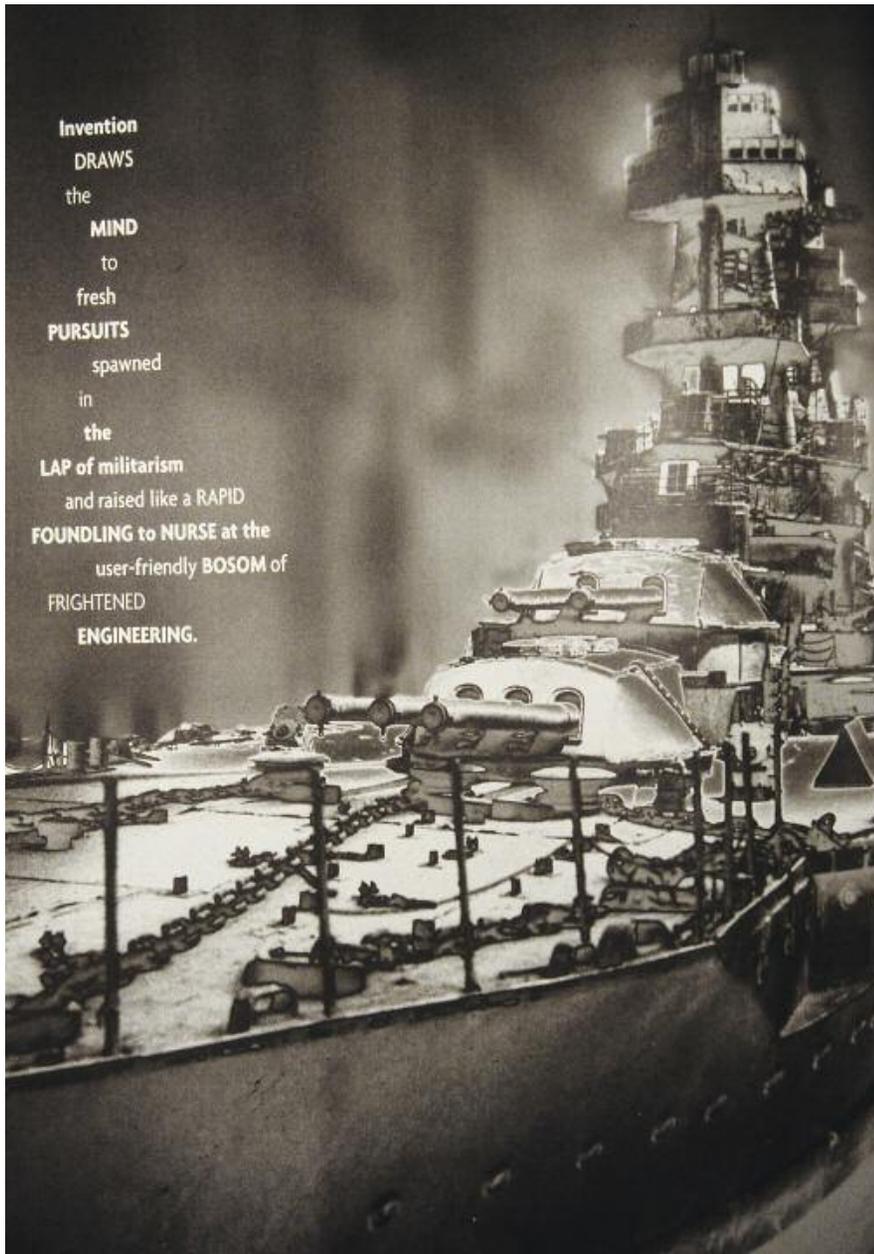
Wolff began teaching in 1980–81 at the Institute of Design in Chicago and for the next 10 years at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She moved to Basel in 1992. Courses and international workshops about themes related to the fundamentals of art and design, typography, letterform, calligraphy and drawing are the special areas of her work, study and teaching. She currently teaches type design and calligraphy in Basel and in Zürich.

¹ Richard L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain, the Psychology of Seeing*, Princeton University Press, 5th Ed. 1997 (1966).

² David Sacks, *Letter Perfect, the Marvelous History of Our Alphabet from A to Z*, Broadway Books, 2003.

³ William Addison Dwiggins is credited for having coined the term *graphic design* in 1922. Yale University was the first school in the USA to offer a graduate program in graphic design in 1950. Max Bill renamed this area of study *Visuelle Kommunikation* as director of the Ulm School in the 1950s.

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* was first published in German in 1921, translated by C.K. Ogden with F.P. Ramsey's help, published 1922 in English.



Invention
DRAWS
the
MIND
to
fresh
PURSUITS
spawned
in
the
LAP of militarism
and raised like a RAPID
FOUNDLING to NURSE at the
user-friendly BOSOM of
FRIGHTENED
ENGINEERING.

WRITTEN IN THE SAND

& READ

& READ

IN THE

IN THE

SUMMER

FALL

& READ

& READ

IN THE

IN THE

WINTER

SPRING

WRITTEN ON

THE WIND

Gahlberg Gallery

TypO

Thursday, March 4 to Saturday, April 10, 2010

Curated by Jean Bevier and Barbara Wiesen

Artists include:

Johanna Drucker, Ken Fandell, The Franks,
Brad Freeman, Diana Guerrero-Maciá, Kurt Hauert,
Dennis Ichiyama, Cary S. Leibowitz, Clifton Meador,
Carol Padberg, Jason Pickleman, Kay Rosen,
Lawrence Weiner, Katharine Wolff

Opposite page:

Jason Pickleman,
Light Poem Redux,
2008, glass tubes,
neon, transformers,
26" x 40" x 3"

The Gahlberg Gallery/McAninch Arts Center would like to thank all the artists and writer Katharine Wolff for their contributions to this project. And a special thank you to Jean Bevier for co-curating this exhibition.

Barbara Wiesen
Director and Curator
Gahlberg Gallery



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