Correction

In the last Annual Juried Issue (LAR 25:2), the wrong caption accompanied this work by Nancy Leavitt, and her collaborator was not credited. We deeply regret the error. The correct caption appears here.

Nancy Leavitt
Maine
Hanabi, in Black and White
Origami
3 × 6 × 2.75 inches

The Japanese word ‘hanabi’ means flower fire. Japanese artist, Yami Yamauchi, invented this origami structure, which creates a three-dimensional moveable ring. This collaborative project made of pages of practice lettering, calligraphic marks, and lace pattern pages by the artist were folded and assembled by Kathy Schilmoeller. Hanabi modeled by the artist’s dog, Bix.
There has been an intimate link between calligraphy and the carving of characters throughout the history of calligraphy in East Asia. Originally characters were inscribed on tortoise scapula three thousand years ago. Stone monuments from the beginning of the first millennium bear administrative and imperial inscriptions. Early printing was dependent on the skill and labor of wood engravers, and seals were used for the authorization of imperial edicts and government texts. Seals have played important roles in the business and cultural worlds in both China and Japan and are still necessary for legal transactions in Japan.

In the art world, the seal has traditionally been an intrinsic part of a piece of calligraphy or ink painting, and in its most basic role it signifies authorship of the artwork. However, with the development of contemporary forms of these arts, the role of the seal has been brought into question. Many artists now sign their works and feel the seal is outdated. In contrast, among the general public, there is currently a lively interest in carving ‘fun seals’, often motifs or mascot figures, to personalize letters, postcards, and notebooks. Given this situation, what contemporary role may there be for the seal as an art form? This article gives an overview of the art and craft of seal carving and introduces three seal carvers who have gone some way to finding a new role for their art.

As a calligraphic art form, seal carving has a long and distinguished history in China and Japan. As early as the turn of the first millennium, when seals still had a purely functional use, there was a consciousness of creating an aesthetically pleasing seal. At that time seals were impressed onto small pieces of clay which fastened a cord around a roll of bamboo or wooden slats, the precursors of paper and silk. By the Ming Dynasty in China (1368 – 1644 AD), seal carving had become established as one of the four arts of the scholar and was called ‘the art of the iron brush’. The other three arts were calligraphy, painting, and poetry. Stone seals became more common at that time, replacing bronze or jade. Stone was easier to carve and allowed a wider range of aesthetic possibilities.

Seals first entered Japan at the beginning of the 8th century, but it was not until the 17th century that scholars, artists and tea masters began to be interested in their artistic potential. Since the late 19th century, Japanese have used an official seal for their legal requirements and a private seal (mitome in 認印) for their personal use on paintings and writings. At that time...
By Elinor Holland - Wissam Shawkat is an Iraqi artist who lives in Dubai. Wissam has many talents, but we know him as a calligrapher of Arabic script as well as a designer. His first New York show, *Letters of Love*, was on exhibit at Reed Space on the Lower East Side of Manhattan from February until April 2011.

I had the good fortune to meet Wissam on his first trip to the United States. We met first in Washington DC and then several times in New York City. I interviewed him and we discussed his views on his work, the state of the art of calligraphy in both Latin and Arabic scripts and his own personal history as an artist. He was truly a pleasure to hang out with! Not only is he easygoing, he likes to look at any and all sorts of art and discuss all aspects of his experience as a calligrapher. We met at the Frick Collection one day, the New York Public Library’s “Three Faiths” exhibit another day, and NY Central Art Supply on yet another occasion. Our discussion about techniques was as far-reaching as it could be given the limited time we had together. Wissam believes that we need to be able to use the materials that we find around us in the 21st century in addition to the tools that have been used for millennia. I bought a Chinese brush with a bamboo handle and watched Wissam cut it with a lightweight NT Cutter knife as I sipped my latte in a coffee shop on Second Avenue. The reeds and pen knives needed to cut them into pens, available at supply shops in the Middle East, are just not available in the US, even in Manhattan. So we have to be more resourceful here. Wissam even suggested the long handled ice scraper in my car be used a pen nib!

Many modern day calligraphers of Arabic script find themselves between two worlds. These worlds need not oppose each other, and in fact they enhance our options and opportunities. We calligraphers have Photoshop and bamboo and everything in between at our fingertips. The field of options is quite wide at this point in history. While we in “The West” may know little of the tradition of calligraphy in the Middle East, and