In the future days which we seek to make secure we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want—everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear—everywhere in the world. That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation.
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By Elinor Holland - Introducing the Hilya Sharif, a wonderful composition of traditional text that is a delight to the eyes and a treasure trove of cultural, historical and technical information. The word hilya is from Arabic and signifies a description with overtones of a beautiful or ornamental portrayal. It is actually a form of literature, in its own style, that describes a highly esteemed and honored person. In the history of Islamic literature there are hilyas that describe prophets, saints (literally “friends of God” in Arabic), or other exemplary characters. In fact, there are pre-Islamic hilyas from Christian literature that date before the advent of Islam.

The hilya we are looking at, rendered by Mohamed Zakariya, is a description of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn Abdullah. It is formally called the Hilya Sharif, the Noble Hilya. Illuminated calligraphic versions of the hilya of the Prophet Muhammad are by far the most popular hilyas, and there are several different traditional texts used for them. In early Islamic history the texts were memorized and recited, but by the time the Ottomans reached their height as calligraphers, the hilya had developed into a visual composition of calligraphy and illumination. Hâfiz Osman, a seventeenth century calligraphy master, is reported to have written the first Hilya Sharif. Since that time, the Hilya Sharif has become a true classical form of art and is a popular text of choice for calligraphers in the Muslim world.

The composition chosen by Zakariya is a widely-used format that can be recognized by its layout even without knowing the language. The form gives it away instantly. He has written the text in three different Arabic scripts: Muhaqqaq, Thuluth, and Naskh. The artist cuts each pen used in the piece from a reed or bamboo.

The composition of this hilya is comprised of the three calligraphic components:

The upper band of larger text, written in Muhaqqaq style lettering, is called the “head inscription.” As is commonplace for Arabic calligraphy, vowels are included in the writing. The marks made with a smaller pen around the heavier-weight letters are vowels. In Muhaqqaq we also see some marks in lightweight pen that appear with the vowels, but these are used in this context to balance space and have no linguistic value at all.

The head inscription can be transliterated as Bismillahi Rahmani Raheem, which means “In the name of God, the All Merciful, the All Compassionate.”

The smaller text, in Naskh style lettering, in
An interview with Marina Soria

The work of Marina Soria will be familiar to many readers of Letter Arts Review, as it is regularly featured in our Annual Juried Issue. Based in Argentina, she is a prolific lettering artist who continues to experiment with new letterforms and techniques. We interviewed her this past May. The interview was conducted by e-mail. It has been edited in collaboration with the artist.

CHRISTOPHER CALDERHEAD: You had an extensive training in graphic design and education courses before you became a calligrapher. How has that earlier training affected your work as a calligrapher?

MARINA SORIA: My first education was in the fine arts field (five years of study) and later on in the graphic design field (three years of study). I then became a teacher at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). I will be forever thankful for my experience at the university, because while I was teaching graphic design there I discovered calligraphy.

At the university, I started as a teacher in the graphic design department and taught for four years. Later on, I went into the editorial design department for another three years, and after that I quit. I had two babies by that time and I was working in my own studio, so teaching was too much for me to handle. Some years later, in 1998, I was called by the typography department at UBA, and they offered me a position as an associate professor of typography. I accepted even though I was pregnant with my third daughter. I set just one condition for accepting their offer: in the first four-month period I wanted to teach calligraphy. Since the director was desperate to find a professor, he said yes! I think this was the very first time that the Foundational Hand was taught at a university in Argentina.

It was a big challenge for me, since I had 150 students in my class. I had to think of many different ways in which to encourage my students by doing projects like designing a new logotype. My mind was definitely broadened with the exercise of correcting 150 different projects. I would say this was my best training, as the class tried to find as many different solutions as they could to solve the same problem.

While I was teaching, I worked as a graphic designer for almost 28 years. That taught me the importance of interpreting my clients’ desires.

You once said to me in an e-mail: “Because calligraphy is practically unknown in Argentina, my work keeps on developing in order to be able

Marina Soria divides the work shown in this article into three categories. The symbols below are used in the captions to indicate the category for each work:

- Space / Counterspace
- Calligraphy in Blossom
- Textile Art.
By Pamela Paulsrud

Everyone has a tree story. I’m convinced of it. Do you remember as a child running to a tree for safe base when playing a game of tag? Do you remember plucking ruby-red apples straight off a tree on a crisp fall day? Tree forts that felt larger than life are where secrets were shared and stories were created. Many memories of climbing a tree with friends—if only to see who could climb the highest—flutter past our minds’ eyes. Cascading branches provided refuge from a surprise rain or grateful shade during a high noon walk. Dreams were woven amid the mist rising from the forest floor on a cool morning while rays of light filtered through the branches making you believe in fairy dust.

Just as the rings in a tree embody the stories of that tree, so too do we carry stories within ourselves. These memories of our experiences with trees inspire us to renew our sense of wonder. They connect us to one another and deepen our understanding with nature. Many of us have discovered that trees listen quite well, and some may even speak to those who listen closely. Have you spoken to a tree lately? Did you ever speculate—if you were a tree—what kind of a tree you would be?

Treewhispers

Treewhispers is an invitation to celebrate and share tree stories. It is an evolving international collaboration of handmade paper, art, poetry, and stories relating to trees. It is a gentle awakening of the memories.

From professionals to wee ones, participants are encouraged to make handmade paper on which to share their own tree stories. Through my experiences as an artist and teacher, I’ve witnessed something magical about the physical act of making paper. I have found that the process of making paper by hand encourages creativity. Your hands are wet from the process and you make something—it is something you know, you did it, you have it, and you are amazed!

The handmade paper contributions are round like tree rings, honoring a tree or the spirit of...
INTRODUCTION

By Christopher Calderhead

I recently heard that Nicholas Benson was in New York, executing a carved inscription on the Franklin Delano Roosevelt memorial on Roosevelt Island. Nick Benson is a third-generation stonemason. His grandfather, John Howard Benson, took over the John Stevens shop in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1927. The shop, which was founded in 1705, specializes in finely lettered inscriptions. His father, John Everett “Fud” Benson, ran the shop from 1956 until he retired in 1993. Nick has been the owner and artistic director of the shop since then.

I was intrigued to talk to Nick about the Roosevelt inscription, not only because it would give an insight into how a large monumental inscription is made, but also because the monument itself has such a long, and rather tortured, history.

Roosevelt Island lies in the middle of New York City’s East River. For more than a hundred years, it was used by the city as a place to isolate specific groups of people from the rest of the population. The island was the site of a penitentiary, a workhouse for the indigent poor, an insane asylum, and several hospitals. By the middle of the 1960s, many of these institutions had been closed or moved elsewhere. Only two chronic care hospitals remained, leaving the rest of the island derelict and abandoned.

In 1968 New York’s Mayor, John Lindsay, formed a commission to rebuild the island and create a vibrant mixed-income neighborhood. The master plan for the island was created by the architect Philip Johnson. Construction began...