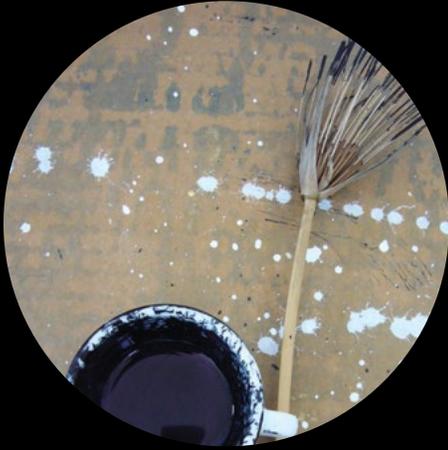


Letter Arts Review

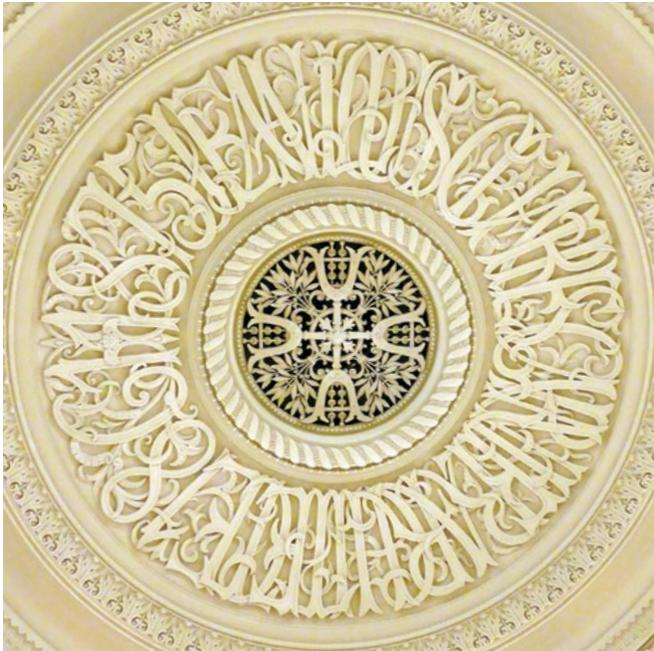
LETTER ARTS REVIEW 29:2 · The Process Issue



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Letter Arts Review

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An inscription at the Paris Opera House functions as the signature of the architect of the building—one of many inspirations for Carl Rohrs' project that is described on pages 3-9.

The Process Issue

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By Christopher Calderhead

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cc: Carl Rohrs' project is one of those rare commissions that brings the lettering arts into conversation with other art forms. The text here has been adapted from the pdf he sent me.

CARL ROHRS: Here's a little—what should I call it?—documentary about this cool project that I luckily got involved with this past summer and fall. A former student in my classes at Cabrillo College ended up as an assistant art museum curator, and he thought of me as a participant for this interesting exhibit.

The project itself was like something out of a dream. As a nod to their 45th anniversary, the San Jose Museum of Art invited ten artists from different, less-common mediums (whom they referred to as “interveners” and “disrupters”) to react to a piece of their choice from a selection of works from the museum's permanent collection.

We were given a computer file containing the artworks to choose from. As I was looking at the list with my girlfriend, Robin, we came across a drawing by Susan Manchester, titled *Solstice*, showing a woman standing next to a wooden chair. And Robin casually said, “I have eight of those chairs down in the garage.” They're bent beechwood chairs from the famous Thonet furniture company. I went down, took one look, and immediately thought, “I could do something with one of those chairs.”

But the list had other provocative choices — there was an Andy Goldsworthy piece, as well as a piece by Sister Corita Kent, and as a brush calligrapher, it was hard for me to resist her. In the end, the serendipity of access to the chair won out.



Carl Rohrs's sculpture and the drawing by Susan Manchester that inspired it.

Susan Manchester
Solstice
Conté crayon, pastel,
and graphite on
Rising Stonehenge paper
78 × 48 inches

A papercut and its template, for the chair seat.



cc: An ambitious sculpture in metal entitled Between the Clouds and the Waves has pushed Brody Neuenschwander to the edges of his technical abilities. Sixteen feet long, it will hang across a space in the lobby of a new building. Made of four sheets of stainless steel, it was laser-cut and then forced against an armature to create a fully three-dimensional shape of letterforms suspended in space.

The sculpture was to have been mounted in place by mid-April, but unforeseen delays have postponed the final hanging. We report here on the project through the stages of its construction and assembly.

THE INTERVIEW

cc: Tell me about the client and the commission.

BRODY NEUENSCHWANDER: The work is a commission by a large transportation company called Mattheeuws. They have just built a new office

to get a 3-D form (or what seemed like one; getting it to work as a real 3-D shape was hell), which I inserted into a photo of the space to create a mock-up for my client, Beatrice Mattheeuws.

She was immediately sold on the work and allocated a very generous budget. But that was two full years ago. I had no idea it would be so difficult to make.

One little detail. When I hit the snags that made me think it could never be done, and I suggested some other sculpture to Beatrice, she said, "NO NO NO! I want THAT one." She had paid a hefty deposit. I spent the money. I had to do it. There was no way back. That is a great way to push yourself into new territory.

cc: Your initial sketch in Photoshop for the client approval was a gestural rendering. So how did you actually create the 3-D form?

BN: The client approved the Photoshop rendering, which was a flat gestural drawing done

Opposite, above: An initial sketch for the project. This was warmly received by the client, but it was far too complex to be laser-cut from metal sheets.



Left and opposite, below: Computer sketches approximating the twisted forms of the sculpture in space.

building in the Belgian coastal town of Veurne and wanted a work for their foyer, which is a large, light, open space with an immense wall of glass on one side facing the sea (in the distance, if you squint). The company specializes in the transport of scrap metals, especially high value metals like copper and stainless steel.

I spent a lot of time sitting in the foyer, just looking at the space and dreaming of what might be a striking work in the context. I chanced to see piles of transport documents, the daily grind of the company. I took some of these, redrawing and simplifying the basic grid to create my first concept. I then twisted the drawing in Photoshop

with a stylus on a Wacom tablet and twisted in Photoshop, then placed on a photo of building. That so-called 3-D twist had no real 3-D form, and this later caused many problems. I tried everything, from paper strips to metal wires to plaster, in order to actually realize what the 3-D form was (or might be). Then I found a young sculptor, Nick Ervinck, who makes very complex monumental sculptures, and thought he could make a tight rendering for me. I showed him my drawing, and he said it would be very, very difficult. But he did some 3-D imaging of the drawing, so I finally saw what it might look like from all angles, twisting the shape in virtual space.



Yukimi Annand | A PAINTING

CC: In the wake of the 2011 tsunami in Japan, NHK, the Japanese national broadcasting company, produced a song entitled “Flowers Will Bloom,” (“Hana wa Saku”). With lyrics by Shunji Iwai and music by Yoko Kanno, the song was used to raise money for the recovery effort. Yukimi Annand created a complex, layered painting inspired by the song.

THE INTERVIEW

CC: How does this piece relate to the song? Although the piece includes many gestural marks, it does not appear to include any actual text.

YUKIMI ANNAND: “Flowers Will Bloom” has been broadcast by NHK every day since the disaster. Hearing it repeatedly, I conjured imaginary scenes in my mind. I tried to visualize these with calligraphic marks. All the gestural marks on the piece are my interpretation of the lyrics and my thoughts, so they actually are text. As I worked on the piece, I often heard the song in my mind, so I’m sure I was influenced by the musical composition as well.

CC: In a rather abstract piece like this, how do you know when you are finished? Do you have a clear idea that you are aiming for, or do you let the piece itself guide your decisions?

YA: I started this piece in March 2014; I am still not sure if this piece is completely finished. I’ve had some disappointing experiences trying to complete pieces, mostly by overdoing, by including too much. So now I leave roughly ten percent of any abstract piece incomplete, to ensure that I won’t include more than I want to. It actually makes the piece more attractive because it leaves more to the viewer’s imagination.

I used to make sure to have a clear idea of what the final product should look like, but not anymore. I often follow my feeling and let the piece itself guide my decisions. As a calligrapher, I always ask myself if I should add more legible text at the end of the process. I’ve been avoiding legible text in my abstract pieces and finding out how audiences react to seeing my pieces.