

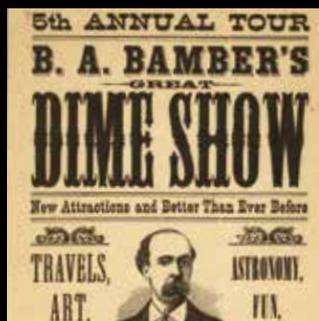
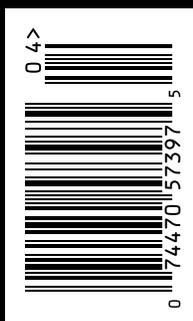
# Letter Arts Review

LETTER ARTS REVIEW 29:4 · How should we present our work to the public? · A reflection on gender in calligraphy and lettering  
Archivio: a collection of Italian documents and handwriting · A visit with Patricia Buttice



DIAMOND SUTRA · Mike Gold

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## Letter Arts Review

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TOP: An illustration from the sketchbook of Amity Parks. See the article that begins on page 22.

LEFT: An envelope from early twentieth-century Italy. See the article that begins on page 34.

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Note that the editor's letter does not appear in this issue; the editor has instead expanded it into the first feature article.

*By the artist* · The pieces on the cover and on these pages represent a small but important part of the lettering art I do. Most of my working hours are spent doing commercial lettering and design for American Greetings. It's kind of a Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde kind of existence. The Dr. Jekyll side sees and makes letters that have a job to do, which is to convey emotion and warmth and a message to be read. The Mr. Hyde side sees and makes letters that are design elements—line and form—that do not necessarily have to be legible and can be

Mr. Hyde benefits from the hand skills developed from 35 years of daily commercial lettering and design practice. The commercial work is probably also a big reason I pursue the opposite of that in my own artwork. Here I'm reminded of the artist Eva Aschoff (1900-1969), whose work I saw when I visited the Klingspor Museum in Offenbach, Germany, a mecca for many calligraphers. She spent her days doing lettering for books and maps and used her spare time doing more abstract work. The downside, and it's a big

RIGHT:  
Mike Gold  
Smile  
The text is by Thich Nhat Hanh and is from Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life (Bantam, 1991).

FRONT COVER:  
Mike Gold  
Diamond Sutra  
The text is from A. F. Price's translation, available in The Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Hui-Neng (Shambhala, 2005).



one in my opinion, is that it's difficult to build a mature and more complete personal vision without full-time devotion. But that's just me complaining. I imagine many commercial artists feel the same, and there are probably many fine artists who wish they had a day job so they could have a more balanced, secure life.

One of the hardest things for me is to turn off the calligrapher and greeting card artist in me to get to a place where the Picasso in me can take over. One can easily see the greeting card influ-

ence in the *Smile* piece on this page. In the pieces *Diamond Sutra* (front cover) and *Hallelujah* (back cover), I still feel the compositions are tighter and less raw than they might be if I spent more time developing a series of works. And there's the rub. Much of my personal work is done in fits and starts, and I've learned to produce in a short amount of time. That is probably helped along by working to deadlines all my life, but also by my working method, which has evolved from a painstaking, tightly planned *modus operandi*,

composed according to a personal vision. For better or worse, the two sides have to coexist. Dr. Jekyll benefits the most. He gets more time (at least 40 hours a week), and the practice of making readable letters is helped along by the personal work, I believe, because of the experimentation with different tools, materials, and styles and the experience of composing and drawing. Also, the gestural nature of the lettering, as seen in the cover pieces, informs much of my commercial lettering.

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Liesbet Boudens / Hermann Zapf  
Brody Neuenschwander / Matthew Carter

The list fascinated me because he paired major lettering artists from our community with lettering artists who have found success in the standard world of graphic design. It reflected a bold, non-parochial vision of the whole range of lettering. I could suddenly see what such a museum might look like, and I could begin to sense the kind of buzz it might create.

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I'm not particularly interested in debating the merits—or the mechanics—of John's proposal. It's clear to me that if someone had the drive to create such a museum, and if they could raise the cash, it would become a major venue in which we could showcase our work. It's a grand vision.

What interests me more is the way such an institution would reposition our work within the world of the visual arts. And this is where Jerry Kelly should weigh in. In his recent speech at the Rochester Institute of Technology, he made an

impassioned plea that the lettering arts should be viewed as “art,” full stop.

He observed: *When a practitioner of painting or music has a significant positive effect, there is no doubt that they are worthy of the appellation “artist,” but when it comes to calligraphy and type design, that is not considered to be the case.*

*When it comes to contemporary calligraphy, no major contemporary museum of art would ever consider including it, yet lettering would never be left out of museum exhibitions of Asian art[, for instance].*

*I have seen major shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, without a doubt one of the top museums in the world, of Ancient Greek art, Medieval art, Chinese art, and Persian art, all of which prominently featured calligraphy and stone-cut letters, but never has this fine institution exhibited contemporary calligraphic art. When it comes to contemporary art, calligraphy is taboo to the so-called fine art establishment, yet mediocre lettering by “name” modern artists is often exhibited.*

And there is the rub: Our work does not have a clear and recognized place within the arts

*continued on page 11 >*

ABOVE: The letter arts—and calligraphy in particular—have often been used for occasional or ephemeral work. How does this kind of work relate to more formal pieces that are intended to last? Does occasional work fit into our idea of “art”? The painting above shows writing tools and various beautifully lettered pieces of ephemera.

Edwaert Colyer (Dutch, late 17th century)  
Still Life  
Oil on canvas  
19.125 × 24.25 inches  
Image courtesy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art

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# “Though womens Workes by some is Disrespected”

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## CALLIGRAPHY AND GENDER IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD AND TODAY

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By Laura Capp · In 1688, one Mary Serjant, fifteen at the time, dedicated an elaborate manuscript exercise book to her teacher, Elizabeth Beane, mistress in the “Art of Writing and Arithmetick.” This manuscript, held today at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, is one of three extant manuscripts dedicated to this teacher. Sarah Cole produced one in 1685, a few years prior to Serjant (held at the Folger Shakespeare Library), and Anna Dowe produced another in 1689, a year following (sold Sotheby’s, 1972, location unknown). While three manuscripts produced over three hundred years ago cannot afford us perfect knowledge of women’s education or calligraphic instruction in the early modern period, they can provide a partial view of the ways in which the study and practice of lettering have long been gendered.

The early modern period, stretching from the late-fifteenth to the late-eighteenth centuries, gave rise to the heyday of the writing master, a profession that was dominated by male figures: George Bickham, Edward Cocker, Martin Billingsley. And whereas attention to hand lettering is flagging in our school systems today, writing instruction was, at the time, central to every school’s curriculum. As Richard Dury explains in *Studies in Late Modern English Correspondence*, “Large schools had a writing master on the staff, and Christ’s Hospital School in London had a separate ‘Writing School’ funded by benefactors, its writing master (often a well-known calligrapher) having a salary only

inferior to that of the headmaster.” Such schools, however, were not where someone like Mary Serjant—namely to say, a woman—learned lettering. “During the early modern period, formal schooling was reserved for boys,” Emily Bowles Smith clarifies; “girls rarely had access to an institutional education” (from “‘Let them Completely Learn’: Manuscript Clues about Early Modern Women’s Educational Practices”).

Mary Serjant’s exercise book was produced, we can surmise, through private instruction in a domestic space. As Heather Wolfe explains in “Women’s Handwriting” in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women’s Writing*, “Girls usually learned to write, if they learned at all, at the age of seven, after learning how to read and embroider. They might be taught at home or in a relative’s household, by family members, tutors, governesses, or writing masters or mistresses.” This is not to say that girls’ access to instruction was always or necessarily inferior to what boys were given. There were, Wolfe notes, “smaller private writing schools that charged tuition, as well as private tutors who offered their services”—tutors such as Elizabeth Beane. But it is to say that the educational opportunities for and expectations of boys were always more public, more social, and by extension, likely more competitive than was true for girls.

Despite the fact that we find ourselves, today, in a much different situation in the letter arts, with a field populated by a majority of both

OPPOSITE:  
*The title page of the exercise book of Mary Serjant, written in England in 1688.*

Mary Serjant her book scholler to Eliz Bean Mrs. in the art of writing and arithmetick  
171 folios  
32 x 21 centimeters  
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

All the full-page illustrations in this article come from the Serjant manuscript.

The illustrations that punctuate the text were provided by Amity Parks (half-tone pencil renderings) and Cheryl Jacobsen (solid black-and-white artwork).



Holly Cohen and Christopher Calderhead

paid a visit to the Long Island studio of

Pat Buttice. On her desk, photographs and

photocopies of Renaissance Italic manuscripts

bespoke a calligrapher with a deep commitment

to the tradition of fine writing and a passion

for making beautiful letterforms.

non erit assumptis: non commisti-  
onem passus neqz diuisionem. ad  
magnificat et ad Nunc dimittis an-  
tiph **M**agnum hereditatis mysteri-  
um: templum dei factus est uterus  
nesciens uirum. non est pollutus ex  
ea carnem assumens. omnes gentes  
uenient dicentes **M**aria tibi Dñe

Nota, a uesperis sabbati sancti usqz  
ad ascensionem dici officium beate  
Mariæ sicut ante aduentum: nisi  
qd' ad benedictus: ad magnificat: &  
nunc dimittis dicitur antiphona  
**R**egina celi letari: alleluia: quia  
quem meruisti portare alleluia: re-  
surrexit sicut dixit alleluia. Ora:  
pro nobis Deum  
alleluia

A D M I S S A M.

Hours of Blessed Virgin Mary

# A visit with Patricia Buttice