

In Brief

Russian-born French artist and designer, Erté (Romain de Tirtoff, 1892–1990) designed a lavish and sinuous alphabet that typifies the apogee of Art Deco. Erté recalls that he started this project in 'my habitual optimism' in 1927, hoping to have completed it by the following year; it would be 40 years later when he finished the last one. Each letter is formed by combination of entwined bodies, draped in flimsy veils, holding leashed leopards and other such fancies, against a dark background. They were later published as screenprints in 1976, but the original paintings are now on show at London's Grosvenor Gallery, whose founders Eric and Salome Estorick first met Erté 50 years ago, and remained his dealers and close friends until the artist's death in 1990. www.grosvenorgallery.com



The Skylark (2016) by Karen Keogh, etching, 187 x 150 mm, edition 30, publisher Eames Fine Art

Talking of alphabets, PT deeply admired the mixed media installation by Carlos Amorales for the Mexican pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2017. Amorales has created an illegible language, one that resembles rough-hewn chips of flint from a prehistoric tool factory, with a font and script that encompass numbers and punctuation. The font is used within a series of beautifully printed wall pieces, some on lined musical paper; many resembling the instructions for a dance or a film, and also cast into 3D as unlikely musical instruments. Each 3D instrument is an ocarina, which, when blown, makes a specific note. While seemingly oblique, the very nature of the illegibility was intended 'to preserve contents that would be silenced if they were in legible form.' As 'Metaphors of a generalized crisis that we need to discuss,' Amorales' installation is a comment to a global audience on the nature of violence. <https://bienaldevenecia.mx/en/biennale-arte/2017/>

Pushing the envelope

The Nordic Letterpress Collaboration (NLC) launched in Autumn 2017 at the Bergen Artist Book Fair. This book art project was titled POSTED/ UNPOSTED and invited 24 artists from the Nordic countries to create an edition of 40 works that would fit in a C5 envelope (162 x 229 mm) and include an element of letterpress. The final set plays with themes such as space and privacy, the materiality of envelopes, the public nature of communication, concrete poetry and graphic elements, with a coincidental and unifying clean aesthetic. *Printmaking Today* interviews curators Imi Maufe (Norway) and Lina Nordenstrom (Sweden) to find out more.



A selection of the works from the first Nordic Letterpress Collaboration

PT: *Are many of the works in a Nordic language, and what does that say about the affinity to culture, place and language?*

IM: There are participants from Iceland and Finland as well as Sweden, Denmark and Norway, so we did not have a common language apart from English in which to communicate. If there had just been participants from Norway, Sweden and Denmark it may have

been different as these languages are understood by each other.

PT: *Were many artists influenced by each other, or a common school of thought?*

LN: The purpose of the project was to create a network between those who work in this technique who do not know about others in the field. Of the invited artists, poets and designers there is a big variety in all aspects of their work. We received work from a concrete poet Ottar Ormstad, who has never worked with letterpress before, alongside Richard Årlin, who has been digging deep into the history of letterpress and has worked with it all his life, since he left art school in the early 1980s. I would say that what characterizes the final set is its wide perspective on the technique.

PT: *Why do you think Nordic letterpress has been overlooked in the past?*

IM: It was not until nearly two hundred years after Caxton brought a printing press to England (1476) that Norway established its first press in Oslo (1644), which went out of business after just one year. In 1811 there were still only three presses in Oslo. So because of this there is not a surplus of equipment and type available to the artistic community, and sadly not that many retired printmakers to pass on the knowledge.

LN: ...and on the other hand, that could be explained by the fact that artists' books as a genre has not strong, long tradition in the Nordic countries. Our growing interest for publishing and books within the art scene in the last 10–15 years has been influenced by artists working conceptually or with photography, rather than working with print. Most artists' books produced are digitally printed or offset printed. Luckily artists and graphic designers have recently started to show an interest in all analogue techniques, including letterpress, which gave us strong encouragement to run this project. Hopefully the project can inspire more artists, poets and designers to further develop this field in the North.

Master inspiration

British artist and visionary, Samuel Palmer (1805–1881), was a close friend of William Blake, and well known for his romantic depiction of the English land. Moonscapes and starry skies, burgeoning wheatfields, soaring larks, spreading oaks and sleeping shepherds abound in his rich and densely drawn etchings. The artist and collector Edward Twohig has been slowly amassing a huge collection of prints and letters by Samuel Palmer since his early twenties: now, in partnership with Eames Fine Art, he has created a project called *Palmer and Me*.

Twohig has brought Palmer's prints into a contemporary context by selecting a group of professional printmakers and inviting them to choose one of the prints from his collection to borrow for a while. This was an opportunity for deeper contemplation and connection, which resulted in a print made in response to the original work.

The video shows a wide range of artist printmakers, working in a wonderful variety of printmaking studios, each talking about how the work touched them, and then making their images. There is a nice balance of conversation between Twohig and the artists, and a natural flow of broader themes of environment, landscape, politics, idyllic utopia and national identity. As with all projects, the balance between artistic voice and inspiration is varied, and some outcomes are more profound than others. All the artists champion printmaking, which lends an expert view to the appreciation of the Palmer prints.

The quote at the end of the film sums up the joy and passion of printmaking that Samuel Palmer experienced: 'The great peculiarity of etching seems to be its difficulties: an elegant mixture of the manual, chemical and



Folding the Last Sheep (After Palmer) (2016) by John Crossley, hand coloured relief print, 200 x 200 mm, edition 30, publisher Eames Fine Art

calculative. It raises and keeps alive a speculative curiosity. It has something of the excitement of gambling, without the guilt of its ruin.' Judging from the intense concentration of the artists who participated in the project, printmaking remains an exciting and addictive pursuit.

The *Palmer and Me* DVD is available to purchase from Eames Fine Art Gallery for £10 (running time: 56 minutes), info@eamesfineart.com