



Catherine Zask: Rhythms, Echoes, Latent Spaces, Posters and Doodles

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Exhibition opening on 13 June 2006 at 7.30 p.m., Design Centre CR, Radnická 2
until 17 September 2006

EXHIBITION CONCEPT AND DESIGN

Karel Kobosil

EXHIBITION CURATORS

Marta Sylvestrová, Dagmar Koudelková

The winner of the Grand Prix of the Brno Biennale 2002 is a member of this year's international jury. In addition, as the winner of the last Biennale dedicated to poster, Catherine Zask is also represented by a solo exhibition. Let us note here that in 2000 the Grand Prix was awarded to Stefan Sagmeister, who exhibited in the Design Centre within the Brno Biennale 2004.

Catherine Zask's retrospective at the Design Centre of the Czech Republic, Brno, a result of collaboration between the Moravian Gallery in Brno and the artist, provides an insight into the basic artistic principles of Zask's typography. A major part of the show's exhibits and catalogues have been passed on by the Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich.

It is certainly worthy of note that the Grand Prix of the Brno Biennale 2002, awarded to the artist for her *Rain* poster for the L'Hippodrome theatre in Douai, anticipated the surge of international interest in Catherine Zask's typographical poster designs. Until then, Zask had not even considered herself a "true" poster artist. She first entered her theatre posters in an international competition at the Brno Biennale four years ago. Before that, her career had been firmly based in visual style design for cultural institutions.

On her journey home from Brno to Paris, Catherine Zask bought a map of Prague, a city that she felt had put its spell on her, and transferred a schematic of it to the opening page of her internet portal; Prague as a threshold for learning who is Zask.

Catherine Zask associates her first important experimentation into letter shapes with time spent studying in the Villa Medici, Rome, in 1993. For example, while creating shapes for the letter "R", she worked in Indian ink with rhythmical brushstrokes, layering the "R's" and subsequently cutting them into four parts (= Roma). In this way, the artist progressed to a principle of stratification and decomposition. In the cut black brush-lines and loops of the "R" fragments, in their connection and division, Zask perceives an original rhythm of brushstrokes resembling that of breathing.

Upon her return to Paris, Zask systemized an alphabet rooted in the principle she had discovered in Rome. She called the new alphabet *Alfabetempo*, and first employed it in her artistic profile in the *Jardin des Modes* magazine.

The floodgates of potential for the new font lifted when Zask loaded the decomposed shapes derived from brushed letters into a computer. She further explored the limits of type composition by the transparent layering of scraps of letter shapes into a cube, thus achieving merging and overlapping lines. In the transparent compositions, she revealed a principle involving the "echoes" of shape which she used

in her *pour félicité* New Year card for 1997, with a quote from the Talmud: “Dreams that are not interpreted are like letters that are not read.”

While working on the visual identity folio for SCAM (La Société civile des auteurs multimedia /The Civil Society of Multimedia Artists), Zask turned to the latent empty spaces between words and marked them in colour. She went on to employ the principle of latent spaces to highlight performance titles in theatre programmes, and named the series *Albiciades*, after a dialogue between Alcibiades (an ambitious youth) and Socrates. The artist found rhythm in these inter-spaces and began to explore their independent existence in terms of positive and negative meaning. In designs for SCAM, she used latent space structures to draw attention to certain information.

A pile of drawings on her desk once led Catherine Zask to wonder: “If a body can leave traces, why can’t the mind?” She assembled her drawings into *Gribook* (2001), which also included a series called *Radiographies de pensées* [X-rays of Thoughts]. The illustrations in the book are “doodles”, *gribouillis* in French, actual size as well as enlarged, interwoven with text-gaps. The texts do not explain the drawings; the drawings do not illustrate the texts. On www.catherinezask.com the artist’s drawings come to life as animations, forming an aura around her figure.

In the contemporary visual environment, the visual message in poster form is forced into battle with hordes of commercial billboards, urban signs and advertisements. For Catherine Zask, the aesthetics of a poster message have symbolic meaning. She is able to employ the illustrative character of letter shapes to express the metaphor intrinsic in, for example, a theatre performance. The title for *Macbeth*, one of her favourite posters, grows out of a single black block embodying the dark obsession with power; its placement at the top signifies dominance, the large black area expresses the hunger for power and its foul character. In the *Rain* poster, the lines change direction as they pass through the filter of words, like human life itself, made up of the crossings and experiences that transform us. Inner space is an important part of Catherine Zask’s theatre posters, achieved by various means and forms, sometimes those present in the echoes of letter shapes, sometimes produced by letter deformations or by crossing lines.

In Catherine Zask’s opinion, clarity is crucial; it is a precondition for beauty. And beauty is about creating meaning, enriching the message as well as the end-user.

More at www.pixelcreation.fr

Marta Sylvestrová
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