

Portfolio: WERNER SCHNEIDER

I first saw Werner Schneider's work in 1980 at the opening of the "International Calligraphy Today" exhibition at the ITC Center. Upon entering the gallery, one of the first pieces one saw on display was an expressive white-on-black rendition of three simple words: *Tanz Ballett Pantomime* (opposite). The calligraphy, executed for a sheet music cover, was stunning in its simplicity and directness.

Each word was rendered in a different rhythm. With nothing else in the design to distract from these three words, the entire focus was on the sense of movement and immediacy present in the act of writing. The writing was not formal calligraphy; there was no recognizable alphabet or hand. Yet, the words sang. I later discovered that they were written with a ruling pen, a tool not well-known in the United States at the time.

This piece alone would have been enough for me to remember Schneider's name. But there was a second piece in the exhibition by Schneider. It was a quotation from John F. Kennedy rendered in elegant roman capitals—clearly modelled on the Trajan inscription but made personal and thus modern—arranged asymmetrically. Once again, there were no other elements to distract from the text. Thus, the focus was on the letters and what they said; and, ultimately, on the mastery of the calligrapher. The Kennedy quotation displayed a firm control of letterform structure, proportion, spacing and, above all, arrangement. In its quiet simplicity and severe restraint it was the complete antithesis of *Tanz Ballett Pantomime*. It was abundantly clear that Werner Schneider, whoever he might be, was a calligrapher of the first rank, in a league with Friedrich Poppl and Hermann Zapf.

In the next few years my admiration for Werner Schneider grew as I began corresponding with him and as he submitted work to the Calligraphy in the Graphic Arts competitions sponsored by the Society of Scribes at the Master Eagle Gallery. Not surprisingly, his works were always chosen and often they were among the highlights of each show. For the ninth and last show I had the privilege of commissioning Werner to design the poster

for the call for entries. Although not one of Schneider's best works, it was notable as an advance showing of Schneider Antiqua, released a year later by Berthold. Only the capitals were used on the poster, but from the moment I saw them I was eager to buy the typeface.

A decade after the *International Calligraphy Today* exhibition I finally had my first opportunity to meet Werner Schneider. It was at *Type 90* in Oxford. Unfortunately, he did not speak English and I do not speak German so our conversations were short and stilted. I met him again, by accident, five years later at an exhibition of calligraphy in stone, paper and glass in The Hague. Several examples of his work were on display. In a show that included excellent work by Brody Neuenschwander, Claude Mediavilla, Goedele Soeteway, Elmo van Slingerland and others, Schneider's compositions still stood out. In that setting it was easy to see how strongly he has influenced these other outstanding calligraphers.

In The Hague Werner and I were finally able to talk because he now spoke English. Not perfect English by any means, but certainly better than my non-existent German. It was then that I began scheming to bring him to New York. My eagerness to bring Schneider here grew when I heard that Letter Exchange had scheduled a workshop with him in London. Obviously, language was no longer a barrier to learning from this outstanding calligrapher. With the encouragement of Michael Clark, another longtime Schneider booster, and the hard work of Mary Anne Wolfe as Workshop Chairman for the Society and now President, arrangements were finally made for Werner to teach in New York in 1999.

Zeit
Seite
Anfang

Breitkopf & Härtel · Wiesbaden

My dream was to have Schneider teach a week-long workshop that would begin with formal roman capitals and end with spontaneous writing with brushes and ruling pens. But financial and logistical constraints made this impossible. Instead, Schneider taught a three-day workshop on roman capitals. It was not only his first workshop in this country, but also his first trip to the United States. Since his health had been problematic for the past year and a half, this workshop may have been the only chance any of us will have had to study in person with this great calligrapher without traveling to Germany.

Werner Schneider studied with Friedrich Poppl from 1956 to 1958 at the Werkkunstschule Wiesbaden. Poppl was at home with the full range of calligraphic forms—from classical roman capitals to wild expressionistic writing—and that influence is reflected in Schneider's work. Schneider was invited to be Poppl's assistant after he won the Rudo Spemann Award from the city of Offenbach. As Poppl's assistant, he participated in projects for ministries, government authorities, advertising agencies and design studios. Poppl forced him to work hard on his formal lettering. He also introduced Schneider to the wonders of the ruling pen as a scribal tool. In 1959 Schneider briefly joined his mentor in teaching graphic design at the Werkkunstschule Wiesbaden. The close relationship between the two men lasted until Poppl's death in 1982.

Werner's professional friendship with Poppl was a special experience for him that not only affected his letterforms, but his teaching. Poppl analyzed his work in a "benevolent and collegial, but inexorably critical" way. When, after Poppl's death, Schneider turned his hand to type design he followed his teacher's lead and submitted his work to H. Berthold AG. There he found in art director

Günter Gerhard Lange a critic equally as tough. In his type designs Schneider has tried to maintain the high quality that Poppl established in his own work and that Lange has enforced for all Berthold typefaces. The results so far have been two typefaces, Schneider Antiqua and Schneider Libretto.

Schneider's small output as a type designer is in keeping with his emphasis on quality and his deep knowledge of the fundamental letterforms of our culture. His first design, Schneider Antiqua (1987), is an antiqua or humanist roman derived from his own elegant calligraphic interpretations of the Trajan capitals with a harmonious set of minuscules. Schneider Libretto (1995), a modern or neoclassical roman, is similarly rooted in his calligraphic work. Together they define the roman letter as made with both a broad-edged pen and a pointed pen.

For Schneider the value of Poppl's style was its remove from the modern trends of the late 1950s (*i.e.*, the Swiss International style associated with the Kunstgewerbeschule Basel). Directly after finishing his studies in 1958, Schneider became the house designer for Breitkopf & Hartel, the oldest publisher in Europe. He also freelanced for advertising agencies, civic authorities and other publishers. He continues to work for the same range of clients today, as long as they demand a high level of creativity and individuality in letter design. His favorite area is logo design, though he also enjoys working on cultural projects. Werner prefers projects concerned with durability rather than those that are simply riding a trend. He finds that his "free artistic work" (work done for himself) gives him the best grounding for his commercial work as a designer.

In Schneider's view, calligraphy is an essential basis for the creation of a "human" typography. He describes the work of Gutenberg, Zapf and Frutiger as examples of human typography. Schneider's own type designs are grounded in his calligraphy. Computers "play an insignificant role in the layout process, [but] an important role in the technical creation" of his fonts. Today, he sees the role of calligraphy in design as the expressive, individualistic, spontaneous element that acts in contrast to the precision of typography. This tension is evident in much of his own design work and underscores his confidence with both classical roman capitals and personal scripts.

The practical experience Schneider gained working freelance was applied to his teaching. After his brief stint at the Werkkunstschule Wiesbaden in 1959 he did not return to teaching until 1973. He taught communication design (with an emphasis on lettering and typography) at the Fachhochschule Wiesbaden for the next twenty-four years. Since his retirement he keeps in close contact with the

New Year's Card (inside)
"Music and the Art of Writing
during the Baroque Period"
1985, 11 11/16" x 16 1/2" (opened)
metal broad pen

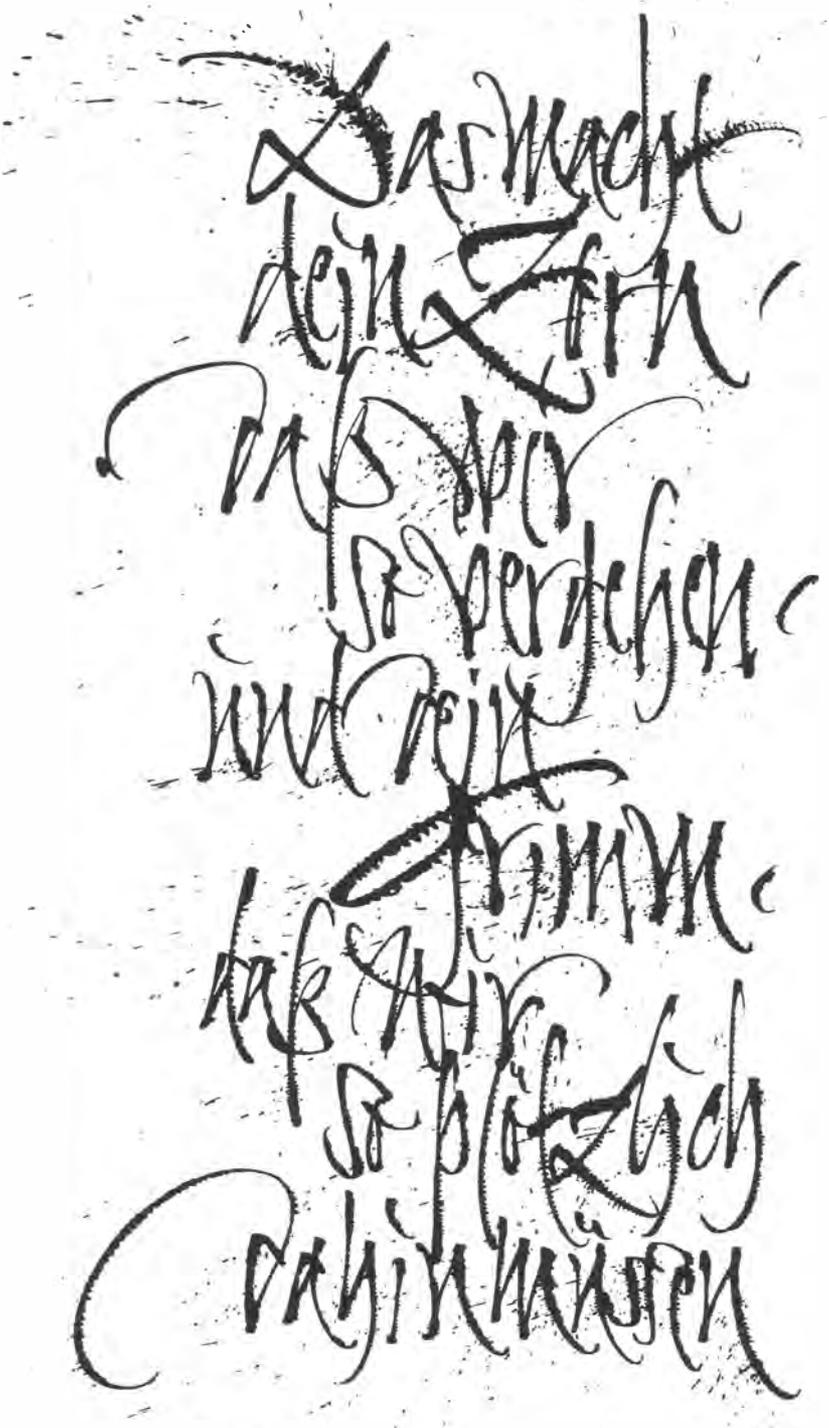


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WAS WIR GEMEINSAM
FÜR DIE FREIHEIT
DER MENSCHEN
TUN KÖNNEN

JOHN F. KENNEDY



Text above: "So we are brought to an end by thy anger and silenced by thy wrath!" (Psalm 90:7)

school, designing diplomas and keeping track of student work.

"I agree with Adrian Frutiger," says Werner, "that the written letter is definitely the best basis for the study of all letterforms: it provides training of the eye and the hand. For an understanding of form there is only this sequence: writing and drawing as a means of sensitizing the eye, followed by work on the computer." Schneider

teaches his students the form and function of letters based on historical models. "There is no reason to ignore fundamental criteria in the future because lettering remains a sensitive medium," he states. He believes in copying historical models and in developing modern variants. Schneider begins his classes with a study of roman capitals, carolingian minuscules and the *cancellaresca corsiva*. He contrasts these calligraphic forms with the rigidity and predictability of type. Werner believes that spreading high standards in lettering does as much good for our civilization as any artwork in our museums. He is currently working on a book on letter design, *Studienbuch der Schrift: Schule des Sehens* (H. Schmidt Verlag, Mainz) that is scheduled for publication in 2001. It will be part of a celebration honoring 600 years of Gutenberg.

Schneider's influences extend beyond Friedrich Poppl to include the anonymous scriptor of the Trajan inscription, Hermann Zapf, Herb Lubalin and Günter Gerhard Lange. It is a small, but select circle.

Over the years I have seen a number of Schneider's calligraphic works. There are posters similar to the Kennedy quotation with its spare, yet graceful and heartbreakingly beautiful roman capitals. Other posters are rendered in a neoclassical roman that is just as stunning. (These letters reappear in Schneider Libretto, but the typeface is no match for the calligraphy. The delicate spring and subtle liveliness of the letters has been lost in the inevitable compromises type design requires). And of course, there are many broadsides and music covers full of visually exciting ruling pen writing, full of verve and power. But the two pieces that I return to again and again are a music cover for Breitkopf & Hartel which uses a roman bookhand and italic that are forerunners of Schneider Antiqua, and a Christmas card for the Bach tricentennial in 1985 written in a deft mix of *fraktur* and *kanzlei*. The music cover is not only a skillful display of calligraphy, but its layout is absolute perfection. I often use it to discuss hierarchy, color and form in my typography classes. Thus, it is not a surprise that Schneider developed a typeface from the cover's calligraphy. The Bach celebration Christmas card is small, but astounding for Schneider's command of the German blackletter hands and his subtle use of swashes to tie the whole design together. It is another perfect lesson in design; and evidence that the best calligraphy is more than a collection of beautifully-crafted letters.

Werner Schneider's work is a reminder of the timeless quality and value of the roman capitals, the *cancellaresca corsiva* and the other alphabets in our standard repertoire. Yet, at the same time, his work also shows how important it is to keep the tradi-

DIE GEOMETRIE
 KANN LESBARE BUCHSTABEN
 HERVORBRINGEN,
Geometry can produce
legible letters but art alone makes them beautiful. ABER EINZIG
 DIE KUNST
 VERLEIHT IHNEN SCHOENHEIT.
 DIE KUNST
Art begins
 BEGINNT, *where geometry ends, imparts to letters a character,*
transcending mere measurement.
 WO DIE
 GEOMETRIE AUFHOERT UND
 VERLEIHT DEN BUCHSTABEN
 EINEN CHARAKTER,
Paul Standard DER NICHT MEHR
 MESSBAR IST

*Ich habe selber ausprobiert, daß es recht nützlich
 ist, nachts im Bett in der Dunkelheit die
 Hauptlinien der Formen, die man studiert hat,
 oder andere bemerkenswerte Überlegungen in
 Gedanken nochmals durchzugehen: Es
 zu tun ist empfehlenswert und geeignet, Dinge
 im Gedächtnis zu festigen.*

tion alive not simply by copying the past, but by imbuing it with a new modern spirit. And this can only be done by deeply understanding these letters, absorbing them into our blood and our fingers and muscles. Only then can we create new interpretations that will in turn be the classics for the future. And only then can we have the confidence to challenge the standards of the past through new explorations of tools and the scripts that reside within each of us. The scripts represent the personal aspect of calligraphy while the roman

capitals and other historic hands represent the communal aspect of this art. Together they remind us that the art of letters is unique in its role as both personal expression and cultural communication.

Paul Shaw is a calligrapher, type designer, graphic designer and author. He curated the 1999 Werner Schneider exhibition at Fordham University and subsequently wrote articles on Mr. Schneider for both Baseline and Print magazines. He is currently editor of Alphabet for the Friends of Calligraphy.

WOHLAN / MEIN FREUND /

WIE STEHT ES MIT DER DIKTATUR? IST ES NICHT SO, DASS SICH DIE DEMOKRATIE SELBER AUFLÖST DURCH EINE GEWISSE UNERSÄTTLICHKEIT IN DER FREIHEIT?

WENN SICH DIE VÄTER DARAN GEWÖHNEN, IHRE KINDER EINFACH GEWÄHREN UND LAUFEN ZU LASSEN, WIE SIE WOLLEN, UND SICH VOR IHREN ERWACHSENEN KINDERN GERADEZU FÜRCHTEN, EIN WORT ZU REDEN, ODER WENN DIE SÖHNE SCHON SO SEIN WOLLEN, WIE DIE VÄTER, ALSO IHRE ELTERN WEDER SCHEUEN, NOCH SICH UM IHRE WORTE KÜMMERN, SICH NICHTS MEHR SAGEN LASSEN WOLLEN, UM JA RECHT ERWACHSEN UND SELBSTÄNDIG ZU ERSCHEINEN.

UND AUCH DIE LEHRER ZITTERN BEI SOLCHEN VERHÄLTNISSEN VOR IHREN SCHÜLERN UND SCHMEICHELN IHNEN LIEBER, STATT SIE SICHER UND MIT STARKER HAND AUF EINEN GERADEN WEG ZU FÜHREN, SO DASS DIE SCHÜLER SICH NICHTS MEHR AUS IHREN LEHRERN MACHEN.

ÜBERHAUPT SIND WIR SCHON SO WEIT, DASS SICH DIE JÜNGEREN DEN ÄLTEREN GLEICHSTELLEN, JA GEGEN SIE AUFTRETEN IN WORT UND TAT, DIE ALTEN ABER SETZEN SICH UNTER DIE JUNGEN UND SUCHEN SICH IHNEN GEFÄLLIG ZU MACHEN, INDEM SIE IHRE ALBERNHEITEN UND UNGEHÖRIGKEITEN ÜBERSEHEN ODER GAR DARAN TEILNEHMEN, DAMIT SIE JA NICHT DEN ANSCHEIN ERWECKEN, ALS SEIEN SIE SPIELVERDERBER ODER GAR AUF AUTORITÄT VERSESSEN.

AUF DIESE WEISE WERDEN DIE SEELE UND DIE WIDERSTANDSKRAFT ALLER JUNGEN ALLMÄHLICH MÜRBE. SIE WERDEN AUFSÄSSIG UND KÖNNEN ES SCHLIESSLICH NICHT MEHR ERTRAGEN, WENN MAN NUR EIN KLEIN WENIG UNTERORDNUNG VON IHNEN VERLANGT. AM ENDE VERACHTEN SIE DANN AUCH DIE GESETZE, WEIL SIE NIEMAND UND NICHTS MEHR ALS HERR ÜBER SICH ANERKENNEN WOLLEN, UND DAS IST DER SCHÖNE, JUGENDFROHE ANFANG DER TYRANNEI! PLATO

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Typefaces from left to right, top to bottom: Schneider Antiqua Light, Schneider Antiqua Light Italic, Schneider Libretto Light, Schneider Libretto Light Italic