By Christopher Calderhead · Welcome to the Letter Arts Review Annual Juried Issue. As always, it is a pleasure to present this selection of outstanding lettering art from around the world. The jurors this year were Paul Shaw and Judy Kastin. They have written responses to the experience of jurying this year’s selection. I have added some comments of my own after their remarks.

By Paul Shaw · This is the first time that I have been a judge for the annual Letter Arts Review competition. Although I have been doing calligraphy for over fifty years, I have not been closely involved in the calligraphy world since the 1990s, focusing more of my time since then on type and graphic design. One reason that I became less and less interested in the calligraphy world was its increasing emphasis on calligraphy as art. I prefer calligraphy as craft. There is nothing shameful or less worthy about letters simply written out—if they are done well. Letters as shapes fascinate me, and I enjoy seeing them naked, unencumbered by illustrations and free from layering, collage, and other distractions. This does not mean that I don’t enjoy more complex calligraphic works, only that I hold them to a high standard. Artistic techniques and tricks can’t be used to distract from or disguise mediocre calligraphy. The letters are still the thing.

I say all this upfront to let Letter Arts Review readers know the biases that I brought to the judging. The calligraphy-as-art trend dominated the entries, and, despite my prejudices, I voted for several such pieces. I particularly liked those by Lawrence Wheeler (pp. 12, 14, 49) as well as Suchen und Finden by Birgit Nass (p. 6) and Brume by Marco Chioini (p. 37).

Another big trend was the prominence of funky lettering, which reflects what is happening in the larger world of graphic design. Randall Slaughter submitted two strong pieces in this direction (pp. 27, 28), and Thomas Hoyer’s interpretation of a T.S. Eliot poem (p. 29) is also worthy of mention. Surprisingly, there were a large number of Blackletter entries, almost all of them of exceptional quality. Peter Noth’s Fraktur alphabets are particularly notable (pp. 32, 34).
Linda Turner writes: “This work was inspired by both my love of textile patterns and the beauty of the Rustic Alphabet. I wanted this series of work to look old—to appear ancient—as if each sheet of writing had been newly found on a forgotten street in Pompeii. I aged the paper by staining it in such a way that it takes on a bronzed patina, becoming almost translucent and possessing the slightest sheen when held up to the light.”
Liesbet Boudens
To Be
Acrylic on canvas
100 × 100 centimeters

Julie Wildman
Niente Senza Gioia
Watercolor on paper
12 × 12 inches
The text is an Italian saying: “Nothing without joy.”
VARIETIES OF GOTHIC

Kevin Horvath
Circle Blackletter
Hand lettering, scanned and digitized
7 × 7 inches

Opposite:
Chisato Asaoka
Love
Graphite and white pencil on paper
51.5 × 36.4 centimeters
The text is from La Prisonnière, in Volume V of À la recherche du temps perdu by Marcel Proust.
The passage in French reads: “L’amour, c’est l’espace et le temps rendus sensibles au coeur.”

Peter Noth
Gothic roundel with Medieval Cross
Gouache, sumi ink, and gold on paper
18 × 18 inches
Kai-Uwe Pleban  
*KUP*  
Carved limestone  
18.3 x 18.3 x 15.3 centimeters

A single sculpture reveals the three initials of the artist’s name depending on how it is turned or how light is shined on it to cast a shadow.

The artist writes: “With this sculpture, I realized a long-cherished plan to leave behind the two-dimensionality of lettering. The sculpture by itself allows you to only guess which letters it contains, until you view it from the correct angles. I made the sculpture in Provence, France, using the local shell limestone from Les Baux, which gives the warm, light color and the pleasantly rough surface.”
FLOWERS have spoken to me more than I can tell in written words. They are the hieroglyphics of angels loved by all men for the beauty of their character, though few can decipher even fragments of their meaning.

Lydia M. Child