

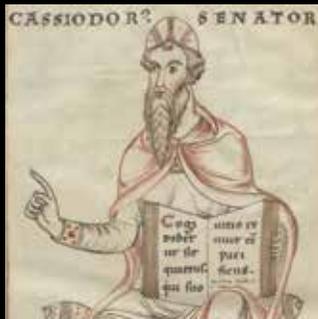
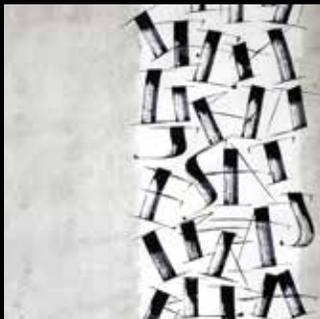
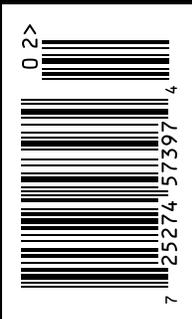
Letter Arts Review

LETTER ARTS REVIEW 32:2 · The artists' collective Scripta grows out of Monica Dengo's classes
Rediscovering Cassiodorus and his Vivarium · A series of letter-based paintings by Susan Richardson



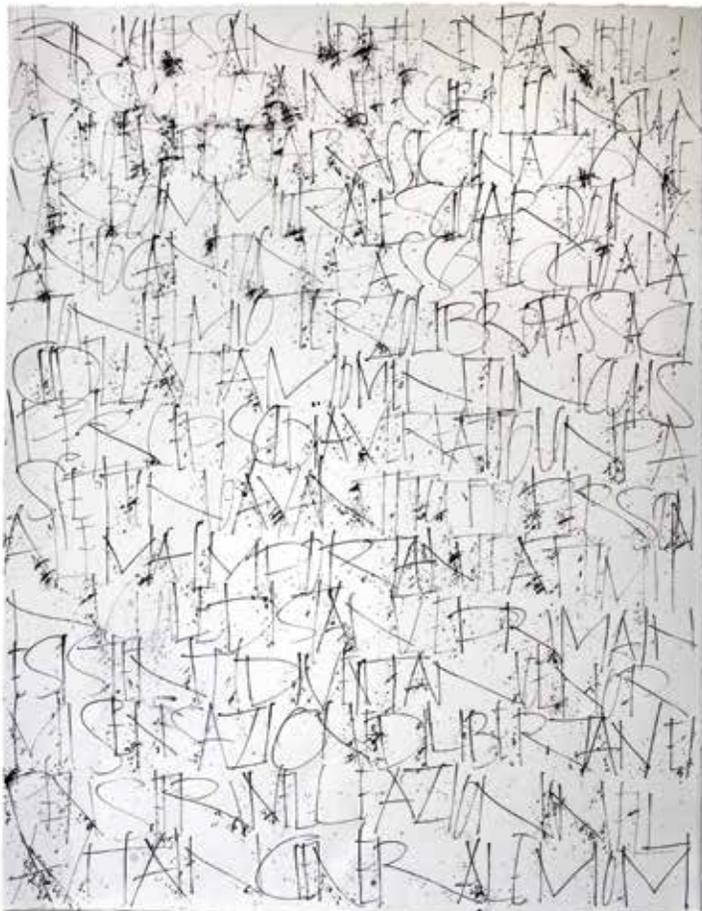
FOUND / RECOVERED · Radha Pandey and Cheryl Jacobsen

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Letter Arts Review
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A piece from the series Voci di Donne by the artists' collective Scripta. This work was made by Caterina Giannotti. See Monica Dengo's article, beginning on page 14.

OPPOSITE:
Found / Recovered
Manuscript book
15 × 9 inches, open
The author of the text
is the Johnson County
Sheriff's Office.

THIS PAGE:
Reassemble / Recover
Assemblage in mixed
media
15 × 9.25 inches
This piece was one
of the works created
by the artists for the
Confluence exhibit.

FOLLOWING SPREAD:
Found / Recovered
Two more openings from
the manuscript.

Our cover features the manuscript book *Found / Recovered*. It is a collaborative work by the papermaker Radha Pandey and the calligrapher Cheryl Jacobsen. It was created for a show entitled *Confluence: Twelve Collaborations*.

By Radha Pandey · I heard about *Confluence* during the Fall of 2015. An invitation to participate in the exhibition was sent out to twelve artists who made paper. These twelve papermakers were each asked to pick an artist to make a collaborative piece with. The resultant piece could take any form, as long as it was created with handmade paper and made specifically for the exhibition.

I had been working for a while on a recipe for paper made of fermented hemp, and I was tinkering with burnishing methods and the sizing to make the paper suitable for calligraphy. I thought it was the perfect opportunity to collaborate with someone who used calligraphy as the focus of their artistic practice.

Naturally, I reached out to Cheryl Jacobsen. We decided to work on a book together, as well as a couple of wall pieces that I would color using natural dyes. For these wall pieces, I used logwood and cochineal in combination with alum and iron mordants to create the final papers.

By Cheryl Jacobsen · I was excited to work with Radha. I knew she was aware of the demands a calligrapher makes on paper. She sent me several samples of what she was working on for me to test. The first sheets were a little absorbent for writing, so she adjusted her process a bit and sent me new sheets to work on. I created two assemblages using the paper and found objects. Then I set out to create this one-of-a-kind book.

The text for the book *Found / Recovered* is taken from a public notice, 9 × 12 inches, printed in the *Iowa Press Citizen* on February 29th, 2016. It ran down the left edge of the newspaper and listed all the unclaimed items held by the Johnson County Sheriff's Office. It was heavy on weapons and video games, but also included a United States mailbag, a saddle club trophy, and other strange items. As I read, I tried to imagine the mindset of the thieves who had stolen such things.

I found it fascinating, not only in the diversity of the items listed, but also in the visual presentation of the text running scroll-like down the page.



In my art, I like to highlight odd objects and graphic statements and to call attention to unusual connections. The content lent itself well to the tumbling visual chaos of the letters that created the visual narrative of the book. I had only a limited amount of paper, and we were under a tight deadline to be ready for the show, so the pressure was on. I folded the sheets into sections and started to write, creating the design of the page as I went along. I love the humor and seeming incongruity of honoring these mundane objects with the labor

of beautiful handmade paper and lettering that in the past has been used to record more sacred words. ♦

SCRIPTA



A GROUP OF MONICA DENGO'S STUDENTS

COALESCE INTO A PROLIFIC ARTISTS' COLLECTIVE

By Monica Dengo · Over the last decade, I have been privileged to work with a group of dedicated students who have gradually transformed themselves into a collaborative team of exhibiting artists. Our classes have been based in Italy, but the group itself is international, both in its membership and in the scope of its ambitions. Having exhibited several times as a group, they have now adopted the name Scripta. The genesis of this group of international artists and its approach to calligraphic work traces back to the earliest courses I developed while living in the United States.

DEVELOPING A TEACHING TECHNIQUE

Over the years, I have experimented with different ways of teaching calligraphy. The approach I prefer mixes gestural experimentation and historical study.

I moved to the United States from Padua, Italy, in 1993. In 2000, I was invited by the Academy of Art University in San Francisco to teach a new undergraduate calligraphy class. This was the first time an experimental calligraphy course was offered at AAU. The course proved to be popular, and the following year, I was given the opportunity to lead classes for both undergraduate and

graduate students. At that time, Mary Scott was the head of the graphic design undergraduate department, and Jana Anderson was the head of the graduate graphic design department. Both Mary and Jana were extremely encouraging and allowed me to push the boundaries of calligraphic expression in my classes. The open environment that was created in the classes became fertile ground for experimentation with calligraphic form.

Students in those early classes came from all around the world: the United States, Asia, Europe, South America, Africa, India, and the Middle East. Considering the diverse backgrounds of the students, I thought the best place for them to begin was with what was already familiar to each of them—their own handwriting. Each participant had their own style of handwriting based on their own cultural and personal backgrounds, but despite these differences, we all could find a common point of departure in the handwritten Latin capital. From this initial letterform, the class began its research in the creation of texture and in variety of form. Eventually, the study of a specific hand—a cursive Italic—was also introduced. All of this work was undertaken with the use of tools like ruling pens, wood sticks, and brushes. In the end, the course that developed

OPPOSITE:

Lino Ganci makes spattered, expressionistic lettering.

THIS PAGE:

Students at work in the Palazzo Minotto in Venice, where Monica Dengo's classes are held.

THROUGHOUT THIS ARTICLE:

*The full-page illustrations that appear on each spread are from the series *Voci di Donne*, produced by the artist collective Scripta. The name of the artist is given next to their work.*

I N · S E A R C H · O F

CASSIO
DORUS

*In the twilight of Roman civilization, Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus
established a monastery in southern Italy—Vivarium—that ensured
ancient texts and learning would be preserved.*

The illustrations in this article, unless otherwise noted, are by Christopher Calderhead.

The lettering of the title above is loosely based on a sixth-century Italian manuscript from the British Library—Harley ms. 1775. The manuscript is reproduced in Stan Knight's Historical Scripts.

By Marlene Chan · Where do you come from? This is a question often followed by another question: How far back do you want me to go? When these questions are asked of calligraphers, the profusion of different responses is indicative of the long history of writing in a wide range of cultures around the world. The heritage of calligraphy is vast and is now complicated by increasing globalization and technological advancement. Contemporary experimentation often escapes categorization by traditions, and it defies borders.

Yet, much can be learned about the past that can inform, and even inspire, the present and the future of calligraphy. In this regard, it can be revealing on many levels to investigate the life of Cassiodorus, who lived through the transition from the Late Antique period to the early Middle Ages in Europe—when oral transmission was as important as written texts. Perhaps his experience at this transitional point in Western history can speak to our own time, when ways of reading and transmitting text are changing so rapidly.

The long life of Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator (ca. 485–585) is not celebrated as widely as it might be by calligraphers, book artists, book historians, and modern society generally. This is a pity, given his contribution to the cultural and intellectual life of Western

civilization through the preservation of knowledge and learning, particularly of that which has come down to us from Antiquity and the Middle Ages. He was an active participant in government administration as a major figure in the power structure of his day, and he created a pivotal publishing center, scriptorium, and library at his monastery named Vivarium.

Unfortunately, only a few of the many books produced at Vivarium have survived, and those that may come from the monastery are of disputed provenance. Its library is gone. What ruins we have of his monastery are scant. We know him mostly from his writings, which have endured through the efforts of later copyists. Without verified artifacts to examine, we are forced to mine the textual evidence of his achievements. Fortunately, these are quite rich, and he should be better known as an important part of our inheritance from ages past.

Other figures who shaped Western writing and scholarship hold important roles in our understanding of the history of writing in the West. For example, Gutenberg's notoriety and posterity overshadows that of Cassiodorus. Through his invention of the printing press, Gutenberg is often credited with playing a key role in the development of the Renaissance, the



A Matter of Infinite Hope

By Susan Richardson · In recent years, my intention as an artist has been to express the complexity and many-layered experience of 21st-century life. I am probably very similar to many people in this age of accelerating, nonstop, multimedia information. And yet, I sense a beauty and a harmony that underlies it all. So, my work has many layers. Some are bold, machine made, and geometric, while some are delicate, ephemeral, and hand-made. I cover over some layers and peel back others to reveal deeper layers. I seek unexpected and untraditional harmony in this messy richness.

In the past several years, certain themes have captured my imagination, and I've explored each of them in a series. As a result, my relationships to both the concepts I explore and my work itself have deepened. I've also increased the size of my canvases, and I've been working on pieces that range from 36 × 24 inches, at the small end, to 60 × 84 inches, at the large end. Working at this large scale has brought out a greater boldness and a stronger sense of composition. You can't hide a weak mark when it's seven feet long! The larger sizes have also forced me to look, quite literally, at the big picture, thus improving my sense of composition.

As I've developed my voice as an artist, I have often wanted to express a concept, but not

necessarily with legible text. While printed texts and hand-lettering are present in my work, reading the text is not essential to these pieces. Those who enjoy the mystery of finding words and phrases will find them. Those who come to art as a more visual experience will find a piece that speaks a visual language.

The pieces in my series *2020 Jazz* began as I walked through New York City on a visit there in 2016. I explored the city from the fanciest to the, well, unfanciest parts—from the Ritz-Carlton to areas of poverty and homelessness. Because I love typography and lettering of all kinds, I was struck by how the style of the addresses on buildings seemed to shout out each building's place in the socioeconomic hierarchy—from elegant golden numbers mounted proudly on large, highly polished doors to spray-painted numbers quickly scrawled on boarded-up doorways, and everything in between. Of course, in the hustle-bustle of a city like New York, street art on the walls is shouting from the subway stations to Fifth Avenue. Nothing stays in neat boxes. The high and low rub shoulders on every street, creating a multi-textured, living collage. This was the inspiration for *2020 Jazz*, a series that explores beautiful and elegant typographic numbers that sing harmonies with passages that reference street

This article's title comes from the first chapter of The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

OPPOSITE:
On the Pleasant Shore of the French Riviera
Mixed media on wood panel
36 × 24 inches
The title of this work is from F. Scott Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night: "On the Pleasant Shore of the French Riviera ... stands a large, proud, rose-colored hotel." In the book, fashionable people gather to chat and laugh and have lavish parties. They tell each other stories about themselves and try to find out who they are.
From the series of paintings collectively entitled For Gatsby.