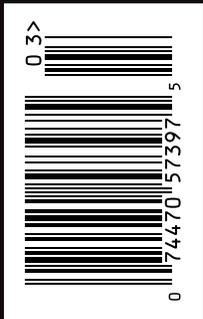


# Letter Arts Review

LETTER ARTS REVIEW 23:3 · Luca Barcellona shatters the boundaries as he blends his street sensibility with fine penmanship · Ghost Ranch, the ultimate calligraphers' retreat · Tsubasa Kimura points to new directions in Japanese calligraphy



CALIPH'S PEONS · Laura Wait



\$ 14.50



# Letter Arts Review

## Letter Arts Review

Volume 23 Number 3  
Summer 2009

## Columns

- 2 The editor's letter :  
The calligraphic line  
By Christopher Calderhead
- 4 Cover artist :  
Laura Wait  
By the artist
- 7 Briefly noted :  
Words & healing  
By Anna Pinto
- 10 Projects :  
An alphabet stone for the  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
By Nick Benson
- 58 Closing shot :  
A Chinese book  
By Christopher Calderhead

## Features

- 14 An interview with Luca Barcellona  
By Christopher Calderhead
- 32 Ghost Ranch  
By Sharon Zeugin
- 48 Tsubasa Kimura  
By Christine Flint Sato

Cover artist · Laura Wait

Right:  
“Chessmen”  
Encaustic on paper,  
copper, brass (detail).  
2008.

Below:  
“Chessmen”  
Encaustic on paper,  
copper, brass.  
2008.

By the artist · Word shapes, large writing, and chess imagery are my current obsession in art. Words as image are a central part of my recent series of encaustics, titled “Middlegame,” referring to the middle part of the chess game where nothing is certain, in life as in war.

Checkerboards have appeared in my art for about 20 years, featured in paintings of kitchens, gardens, and abstractions. Since I seem to have an innate connection with the black and white squares, I decided to pursue this with an investigation into the game of chess, and linked this study to the idea and strategy of war. I will perhaps connect this work to the writing of Sun Tzu, (who the Chinese say invented chess). The game of chess is fascinating, revolving around

from beeswax as a medium, damar resin (a tree sap) for hardening, with pigment added. It is heated, and applied in molten form. The name comes from the Greek word *encaustikos*, meaning “to burn in.”

Many people like to make encaustic paint very smooth, with a shiny surface, but I prefer the ancient, destroyed look that reminds me of old walls that have many layers of graffiti or posters showing in various stages of destruction. It appeals to my scratchy writing and layering technique, and the paint layers can be scraped away, revealing covered writing or color, or incised with lines that are rubbed with oil stick to make new imaginary figures or handwriting. Transparency of layers, and



social life, empires, kings, soldiers, mathematics, and the general organization of wars essential to its nature, since its development into “modern” chess about 500 AD in the Persian Empire.

I work with lists of words, including alternate names for each piece such as *king*, *caliph*, and *emperor* and war words such as *barricade*, *crusade* and *battlefield*. These words are incorporated as layers into the encaustic paint, and are as important as the checkerboard and the chess pieces.

The chess pieces are inspired by science fiction, traditional medieval pieces and a book about an exhibition of chess sets designed by artists in the 1940’s called “The Imagery of Chess Revisited.”

Encaustic is an ancient form of paint made

writing through thick paint are important elements in creating all of my work.

I started these “Middlegame” paintings by writing words and drawing imaginary chess men on pieces of Japanese Chiri or Kozo paper, using black ink with wide brushes and a selection of pointed and flat pens. I tore up the paper into pieces and dipped them in warm encaustic medium and applied them to wood panels. After fusing the layer with a heat gun, further layers of encaustic paint cover these papers, sometimes transparent, sometimes obscuring. I also use hot metal stylus or needles to write or draw in the encaustic directly, and rub the lines with oil stick to add dimension and detail to these paintings. I like the way the white on black looks like an old chalkboard.

Opposite page, below:  
The artist’s studio.

I often think  
that the night  
is more alive  
and more richly  
coloured than  
the day. *Vincent Van Gogh.*

Quote from Vincent Van Gogh. Brushpen on paper.

*Interview by Christopher Calderhead* · **Energy** and the **virtuosity** are two words that come immediately to mind when I see the work of Luca Barcellona. There are few lettering artists working today with such an artistic range and light, easy control of their tools. Luca manages to straddle two worlds—formal, calligraphic lettering and the street-savvy demi-monde of graffiti—and to work expertly in both.

Luca agreed to be interviewed for Letter Arts Review by e-mail. The interview was conducted in English. Together we have edited his answers for grammar and clarity.

*First, give me a really brief bio—just so I have a sense of where you grew up and how you got involved in the lettering arts.*

I'm an Italian, thirty-year-old artist and calligrapher. My artistic career set off in 1994, as a graffiti writer. My main focus has been on the study and on the evolving aspect of lettering. Apart from my graphic schooling, I also studied typographic design. In 2000, I began my studies in calligraphy at the Associazione Calligrafica Italiana (ACI). In 2003, together with Francesca Gandolfi, Rae Martini and Marco Klefisch, I created the Rebel Ink Project; this was the beginning of our live exhibition of calligraphy, writing and illustration. I teach, and I'm an active member of the ACI.

At present I work in Milan as a graphic artist and freelance calligrapher. I have collaborated with other artists and underground

photographers, as well as the biggest fashion and advertising companies. My last exhibitions were held at the Auditorium Music Park in Rome and at the international happening Names Fest in Prague.

My works have been published in many specialized magazines and books, like Ivana Tubaro's "Delle Lettere," edited by Hoepli.

Currently, I'm busy with miniaturist Klaus-Peter Scaffel in a big work in Switzerland, doing the calligraphy of the reproduction of an old big globe from the fifteen hundreds.

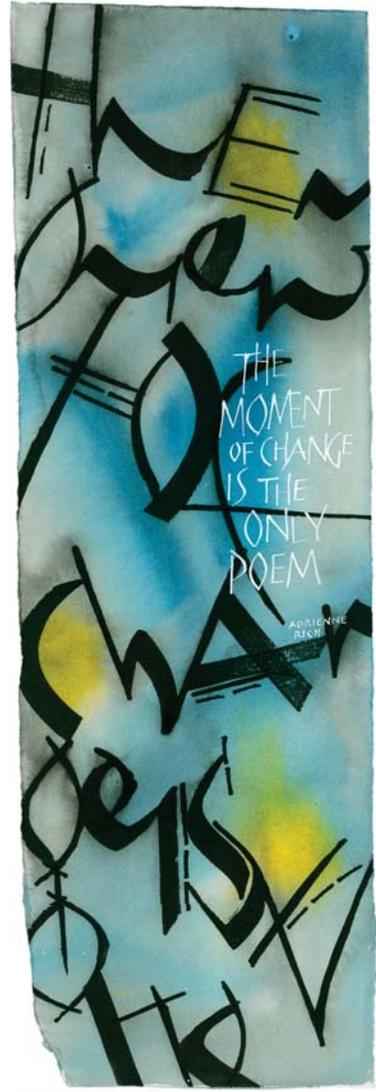
I always try to express concepts with letters, whether the intention is of a commercial or social purpose.

*In your work, you often combine graffiti and traditional calligraphy styles. You blend them together so artfully. How do you think the two ways*

*The previous spread and the image on the left show Luca Barcellona in his studio. Photos by Andrea Boscardin.*



Above: Chimney Rock



Right: Two pieces made by Sherrie Lovler in Judy Melvin's class.



Upper Pavilion, 1996

By Sharon Zeugin · Twenty-nine years ago I received a flyer about a new calligraphy program called “Literally Letters” sponsored by Ghost Ranch, New Mexico. Alice Blue was listed as the director, and there were three or four classes offered during a two week period in June. Helen, my boyfriends’ mother, who sent me the flyer, told me she was signing up for an Italic class and had thought of me because she knew I liked to do calligraphy. I had a vague idea about where Ghost Ranch might be—somewhere near Santa Fe and something to do with Georgia O’Keeffe—but as a college student in Los Angeles, I wasn’t in a position to attend classes in New Mexico. So I put the flyer aside and forgot about it.

Fast forward eleven years when I made my first solo trip to Ghost Ranch in the Summer of 1991. Living in Austin, Texas, I was new to the calligraphy scene, hungry for serious study, and finally had the opportunity to follow up on that 1980 flyer I had received. This trek turned out to be life-changing: not only did I fall in love with the Northern New Mexico Landscape which would become inspiration for so much of my art, I discovered a welcoming calligraphic community in the Literally Letters program—part of the larger Ghost Ranch community—to which I return yearly.

“Georgia O’Keefe called Ghost Ranch the most beautiful place on earth. It is possible to walk or hike just 15 minutes and find yourself alone surrounded by a breathtaking landscape” writes Nancy Culmone, Coordinator of the Ghost Ranch Literally Letters program. Located off the beaten path on Highway 84 some fifty miles north of Santa Fe, the 21-thousand-acre Ranch is part of a red-rock, cactus and sage-strewn landscape formed underwater millions of years ago.

The unique beauty of the place in large part accounts for the popularity of the Ghost Ranch. The Presbyterian Church received the ranch as a gift from the Pack family in 1955, and have since been good stewards, sustaining its rustic grace while providing affordable, family-friendly ecumenical programs throughout the year. Nancy Culmone points out that the Ranch “includes an adult study center that can accommodate up to 400 people; and colleges and universities hold classes there in fine and applied arts and earth sciences.” Paleontology is another draw, as Ghost Ranch boasts its own museum and resident full-time paleontologist, who leads volunteer participants on digs in a nearby quarry. Among the myriad workshops offered on the Ranch is the Literally Letters calligraphy program which convenes for two weeks each summer.

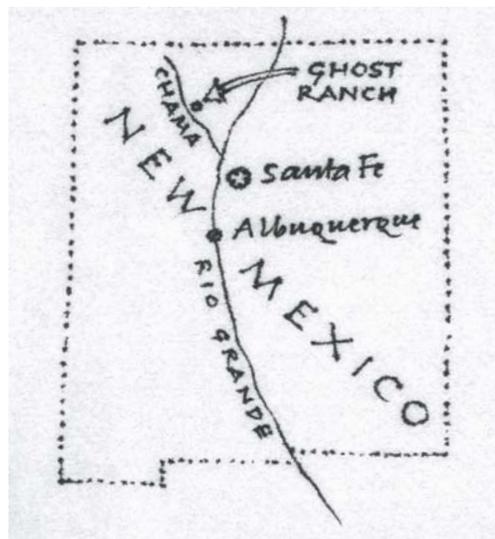
However beautiful and unique, getting to Ghost Ranch involves planning, patience and fortitude. For distance travelers, one flies into Albuquerque airport and can catch a shuttle



*Students at work in the Upper Pavilion, 2006. The blue tarps stretched across the window protect the room from the sun.*

service offered by the Ranch to Plaza Resolona, the Ghost Ranch Center in Santa Fe. From here, Another shuttle takes the Abiquiu conference participants the hour or so long drive on Highway 84 North to the Ranch. Jan Wallace, a Houston native and veteran Ghost Ranch calligraphy participant sums up the experience as follows:

“As one leaves Santa Fe and heads to Ghost Ranch certain delightful sights come into view. First there is Camel Rock. Further down the way the majestic flat-top mountain Pedernal appears. A bit later there is a quick glimpse of Georgia O’Keefe’s museum in Abiquiu. Then on the right is the gorgeous red rock formation of Ship’s Rock and on the left is Abiquiu Lake and Dam. Quickly the Ghost Ranch gate appears.”



I still catch my breath at my first glimpse of Pedernal, or when the sight of the majestic Chimney Rock pops into view as I head down that last long stretch of highway before arriving at a simple cattle-skull marked sign announcing the turnoff to Ghost Ranch. Although “at first the Ranch seems somewhat bland,” Jan Wallace notes, “but then like layers of an onion, the different wonderful areas of the ranch become familiar: inviting hiking trails the arroyo, the



# TSUBASA KIMURA

*By Christine Flint Sato* · Tsubasa Kimura is unique in the Japanese calligraphic world. In 2008, at the age of 30, she celebrated the tenth anniversary of her calligraphic career. In this relatively short period of time she has demonstrated that calligraphy is a powerful artistic vehicle which can speak to her generation. It is a watershed year for her as it marks the divide between her life as a struggling up-and-coming calligrapher and her current more stable position affiliated to a design firm in Osaka who are her sponsors.

Kimura began calligraphy (*shuji* or hand-writing), like so many Japanese, when she was seven at the beginning of elementary school. At high school she first studied the ancient texts written by the Chinese masters and began producing her own work. She joined a calligraphy group which was part of the conservative Yomiuri Calligraphy Organization and continued studying with them throughout university. She participated in many group exhibitions and regularly won awards for her work. In an attempt to widen her calligraphic practice and work more freely she also joined an avant-garde calligraphy group only to be disillusioned by their orthodoxy! She was expected to produce work in their style. She was unable to explore her own calligraphic interests from within either school.

While her calligraphic studies were an important part of her life at university, they

were conducted at private schools, and were not part of her degree course. Kimura majored in Buddhist studies from Ryukoku University in Kyoto (a Buddhist university). She went on to an MA at Kyoto Education University, in which her focus was *Bokuseki*, or the calligraphy of Buddhist monks.

Kimura's first solo exhibition was in 2004 when she was 25. She had graduated from university by then, had left both calligraphy schools and had a part time job using her calligraphy at a temple in Kyoto. For the exhibition Kimura had crudely drawn a whale and filled it with a collage of torn works including those which had won her awards at the Yomiuri exhibitions. She says of this work that calligraphically it was not so important, but psychologically it was pivotal. She symbolically tore herself from the authority of the calligraphy organizations. In choosing a whale she wanted to express the feeling that she could only grasp hold of a small part of something much greater than herself, which she could not see. Perhaps for her, at that point, calligraphy was one such world. Unable to make sense of the conflicting ideologies of the calligraphy schools, and as yet unclear about her own future or calligraphic style she projected this disquiet into the work. Surrounding the whale, she wrote her ideas for the future, and a discussion about calligraphy

*Tsubasa Kimura in a 2008 calligraphic performance on the closing night of her exhibition "Forest of Calligraphy" at the Hyogo Prefecture Art Museum.*