

Camp Cheerio with John Stevens
The Attitudes of Letters/Letters with a Voice

April 29 – May 1, 2002

Workshop Review by Pam Bennett

John Stevens explained that “workshops are about process, not results. Quell the judge and be open to experience.” These workshops were paths to discovery, wherein the experience of the week added new perspective to our calligraphic endeavors.

John began our workshop with a review of his collected handouts. John challenged each of us not to leave the workshop without 1) grasping the content (therefore ask questions, and work through the problem), and 2) knowing how we plan to pursue the process ongoing.

The temptation with anything new is to over do it. Subtle movement creates energy while too much movement merely draws attention to itself. Not all movement is equal. Tension and dynamics are hard to teach. They are not measurable, yet enhance the effect. Structure of letterforms is primary. Making good letters and arranging them well is the ongoing challenge. Our assignments worked with traditional Roman letters, using the automatic pen.

An early exercise utilized compression. All letters touching, writing without pre-planning to see what happens. “Diamonds are created by pressure and time.” The letters were thick and tight, although everyone’s efforts were different as we were not given specifics to x-height. We also eliminated line spacing.

The second day’s assignments began to explore rhythm in the letterforms. John gave us prescribed sequence patterns such as “ABCD...” and “EMBE...” then “EMBE...”. “Rhythm brings order out of chaos”. Our exercises were created with and without a grid. Our goal was to create a woven texture on the page.

The dilemma of structure and chaos is finding the balance. Create confrontation and the resolution of positive and negative space within a page. Present a drama and a resolution. Letterforms themselves are their own best ornament. “Practice makes permanent” can apply to reinforcing the good or the bad. John encouraged us to find a balance between speed and craftsmanship, not over-engineering each letterform, yet staying true to the underlying structure. Own control over discipline, use the workshop as a time to disregard self consciousness in our work.

Most people develop a theory, then look for things to fit it. Instead look for what doesn’t fit. Results that are neither expected nor hoped for are OK. The *Critic* is not conducive to creativity, but merely a downer. In contrast, a critique is about information and ideas. Remember that practice trials are not “failures” and instead look for the energy. Seek the aspects that *are* working. Capture the good stuff!

Camp Cheerio with Thomas Ingmire
Writing and Drawing – Putting Them Together Again

May 1 – 3, 2002

Workshop Review by Pam Bennett

Thomas’s class began by discussing how language has become more precise. Brody Neuenschwander was quoted “we [calligraphers] tend to become manual typographers”. Thomas began by having us each take our signature and write it out larger than usual, then varying letter size and style within. We continued with variations

of spacing within and between the letterforms. Thomas didn't restrict our selection of tools or media used during his workshop. He supplied us each with reeds he had hand cut for us, and on Friday morning showed us how to create our own folded pen from cutting apart an aluminum soda can piece into the approximate shape of a spade and taping it to a chopstick handle.

On our second day with Thomas we developed our own "code" alphabet. We were encouraged to make the symbols disparate in form and style. Many of us began with a theme, often from nature in developing our system. Thomas demonstrated on the chalk board, using the game of golf as the basis for a code system: using the various physical golf elements to generate divergent marks. Once our codes were organized, we began assembling them into words, manipulating them along the way rather than using them as static symbols.

In writing words with our codes, we also explored layout options, writing bottom to top, left to right rather than just as in our accustomed horizontal format. As one student during critique explained: "Here's my name in "Roman"... , Here's my name in "Thomas". " During the day we explored strengthening shapes and redefining margins, creating an organic flow to the page. By the end of the workshop we were using the white of the page to create a dynamic layout. Connections were made between the shapes, contrasts emphasized, and word units developed from the code shapes. After working with our personal code, many of us found that we knew many of the symbols well enough to write out words without referring back to our decoder map. We also discovered misspellings in our early writings, and opportunities to amend our base code to better suit the resulting writings.

Working with our codes allowed us to worry less about our calligraphic training and explore page layout, relationship of shapes, and many of the same dynamics explored in John's class.

* * *

The week at Cheerio was truly an absorbing calligraphic retreat. We would often be so engrossed in our explorations, that we lost track of time and were late for meals. In the evenings we had the option to continue working as late as we wished as the studio is always open. John and Thomas each gave a slide presentation during the week, showing other works they've done as well as works presented for our consideration. Other students brought items for "show and tell", including Izzy Pludwinski's display of his hand crafted book and Hebrew typeface. Towards the end of the week, we each created a page of thanks for each of our teachers. On Thursday night the pages were bound in a collaborative effort by two classmates into a concertina book for each instructor.

My third visit to Cheerio in eight years was calligraphically fabulous and physically relaxing. The YMCA camp that hosts us has a fantastic view from it's mountain top location in the Smokies. The studio space is spacious and well lit. The dorms are what one would expect (although there are semi-private and private "Hotel" rooms next door to the dorms). The camp staff prepare 15 meals of traditional camp food, although they accommodate us with vegetarian burgers and a nice salad bar at every lunch and dinner. There is plenty of fresh fruit supplied in the studio and dining room, and we've learned to bring our own chocolate.

This Fall Camp Cheerio will host Denis Brown and Rob Leuschke from September 29th – October 4th, 2002. Denis will explore "Experimental Gilding with Copper and Brass" and Rob will address commercial letter applications "From Pen to

Polish”. Each student will have 2.5 days with each instructor. More information and registration information at www.calligraphycentre.com.

The illustrator *tells* the author’s intent,
the artist interprets it.

Art is passion with discipline;
Science is discipline with passion.