

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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No. 127

FOR RELEASE:

Tuesday, Nov. 6, 1962

PRESS PREVIEW:

Monday, Nov. 5, 1962

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Lettering by Hand, an exhibition of letter forms written, drawn and painted by artists and graphic designers, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art from November 6 through January 6. More than 50 examples dating from 1900 to the present have been selected by Mildred Constantine, Associate Curator of Graphic Design. Included are posters, books, bookjackets, advertisements, prints and drawings, as well as paintings and sculptural interpretations of letter forms.

The exhibition demonstrates the break with standardization in twentieth-century writing. As Miss Constantine says in the introductory wall label, "Handwriting now tends to be an intensely personal expression often related to the visual arts. Indeed, modern painting, drawing and sculpture have sometimes made the handwritten or drawn letter a major element of composition."

This development is shown in such examples as the rhythmic calligraphic lines of Henri Matisse in pages from "Poemes de Charles d'Orleans;" the doodles and scratchings of Winfred Gaul in his "poemes visibles" and Saul Steinberg in his cartoons; the careless strength of Le Corbusier's "La Poeme de L'Angle Droit;" the rounded thicks and thins of Miro's letters as contrasted with the angularity of Shahn's; Hans Schmidt's use of ligature as a decorative element in his woodcuts; and the plaited letters and overlapping colors in James Valkus' posters. Sometimes legible and often illegible, the forms range from geometrical shapes to random patterns of line.

"In the 16th and 17th centuries" Miss Constantine says, "there existed a quasi-universal hand which was adapted for private and public use. Certain approved and customary letter forms were available for ecclesiastical, legal and commercial writing, as well as for private correspondence.

"With the advent of printing, literacy increased. Complicated decoration was eliminated and words were more easily read. Wood and cast metal type faces, with their limited range of forms, eventually influenced the shapes of handwritten letters." The examples in this exhibition illustrate the reactions against this discipline toward free and highly imaginative letter forms."

The exhibition was selected from the Museum collections as well as private collections and galleries. Several works were loaned by the artists.

Photographs and additional information available from Nancy Reed, Assistant Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York 19, N.Y. Circle 5-8900.