

Statement about my art:

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It seems my involvement in art, stems from experiencing dyslexia. In 1961 little was known about this phenomenon and from the given explanation, I (mistakenly) assumed it had to do with a 'defect' in the focus point of the eye lens. In a misguided effort to find a 'cure' I reflected on a school book graphic as shown here (Figure A). In doing so I started to wonder about the point of convergence and (subconsciously) about symmetry axes. Gradually I became interested in symmetry in its widest range, as I find it in patterns, buildings, objects, behavior, scenarios, expressions, philosophic ideas and so on.

Around the same time, I also familiarized myself with the jargon and techniques of graphics and printing; as my elder brother was the proprietor of a print shop. Thus I learned about what is called a 'stereotype' or 'blind pressure', a mold in paper into which lead is poured to create the type, used for the actual printing. Already intrigued by the mirrored image of letters in the printing process, this 'stereotype' provided guidance for my thoughts on symmetry. In particular I learned about the etymology of the word 'stereotype' which stands apparently for steadfast, enduring, permanent, constant, lasting and much more. So in my view, this object had literally the ambiguous characteristics of a focus point. Figuratively it referred to nothing else than itself, which I considered to be a feature of indivisibility. Encouraged by this finding, I felt the challenge to try and both compress and reduce the focus point to a graphic level.

Since I was unable to put my thoughts into words, I started to attend art school in an attempt to depict them. Moreover, in this day and age, with disarray and trouble going on, it almost seems like a mission to me, to uncover and promote simple concepts that have to do with symmetry, convergence, dynamic equilibrium, compromise, the intermediate, middle ground, consent, sharing, linking, joining, bridging and so on. All these concepts are at the core of my art work, as I continue to experiment with many different techniques and materials. Following are two examples.

1_ Around 1977 I learned to work with liquid rubber, as used in mold making. Later I developed a technique to turn engravings, found in the bark of beech trees, into 3-D replicas made of thin sheets of papier mâché. I managed over time to collect dozens of these 'graffiti' replicas and I had my first show at the Natuurhistorisch Museum Rotterdam in the Netherlands in 2007.^[1] Initially conceived as a link with the stereotype (basic) concept, the focus of this artwork obviously moved towards showing the uniqueness and aesthetics of the engravings. However by framing replica and mold together, there remains a reference to this basic idea. (Figure B).

The show was well received and since I was intrigued by the archetypal character of the engravings, I started to enjoy playing with the associated graphic design. Thus I saw a link with the representations on Tarot cards and as I was given a book (in Dutch) 'Tarot in de Herstelde Orde' ('Tarot in Revised Order')^[2] in which the underlying geometry of Tarot is revealed, I thought of a way to link the beech tree graphics with my alphabet 'ZenArt'. (See next section for full explanation.)

One chapter in the book talks about 24 permutations of the (Zenzar) word 'TARO', each referring to a card of 'the great

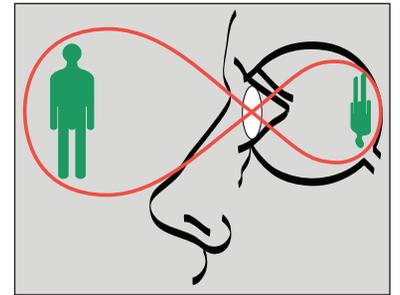


Figure A



Figure B

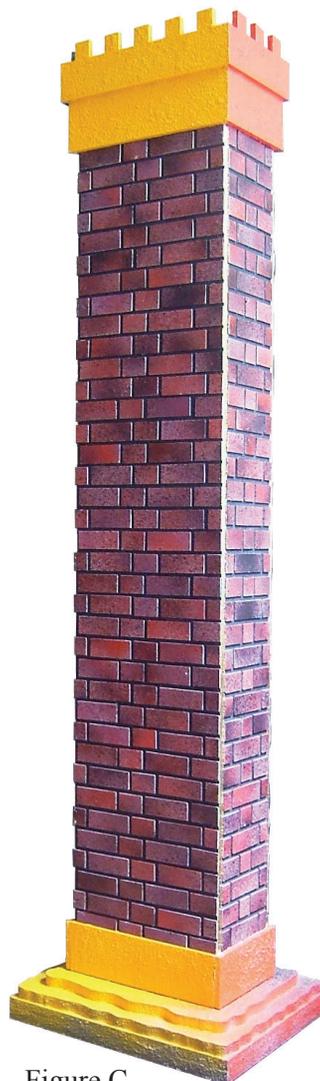


Figure C



Figure D

arcana', and I found it challenging to design these permutations by means of my alphabet which incidentally, before reading the book, I named 'Stereon'. However, in this case I thought of a way to involve 'coincidence' into my art work.

First I created a wooden 'Tarot Tower' (Figure C), also one of the 24 cards of the great arcana (Figure D) and which is basically a shaft, height 1.60 m, in which four paper letters T, A, R, O are dropped (per permutation). Next I project this letter composition (Figure E) onto a sheet of papier mâché with a beech tree texture. Next, similar to the mnemo-technique used to distinct constellations, I use the location of each letter as a marker to anthropomorphize the composition. Using charcoal (to enhance the link with paper, bark, wood and tree) I start with connecting the letters with straight lines that are in their prolongation (see the associated issue on composition by means of the matrix in my paper). Next I use this pattern of straight lines to help visualize a figure. The experiment is to see, to what extent this figure relates to the Zenzar word that was initially dropped down the Tarot Tower. Finally each sheet of paper is pasted on a wooden tablet (beech tree), the letters are gilded and the drawing is finalized with pigment and various drawing techniques.

2 In the year 2000, leafing through a book on Dutch artist M.C. Escher, I became intrigued by the white space in the center of his lithography 'Print Gallery' I started to wonder what the landscape would look like underneath that space. So I filled it in using Photoshop, and found out there was nothing special about that landscape. Next I started to wonder why the artist did not do what I had done. After all, it was not a great effort. Then I came up with a theory, which of course only M.C. Escher himself is to judge its value, and I filled in the white space with a 'Droste effect'. I simply added a twin version of M.C. Escher into the center, holding the print itself. (Figure F and G) (See also the animation on my website [3])

On behalf of the Bridges Conference 2008 in Leeuwarden, I wrote a paper on my findings on 'Print Gallery' and though the prominent 'Droste effect' is generally seen as the focus point, my paper is about a mental point of convergence. In this case in the perception of an altered 'Print Gallery'. In short the paper is about the effect of 'The emperor's new clothes', referring to the tale by Hans C. Andersen. [4]

[1] <http://www.nmr.nl> (accessed April 30, 2009).

[2] 'Tarot in de Herstelde Orde'
http://www.boekenstand.nl/products/De_Tarot_in_de_herstelde_orde-8368.html (accessed April 30, 2009).

[3] <http://www.escher.be> (accessed April 30, 2009).

[4] H.C. Andersen, retold by Andrew Matthews, The emperor's new clothes, Orchard, London, 2000.



Figure E

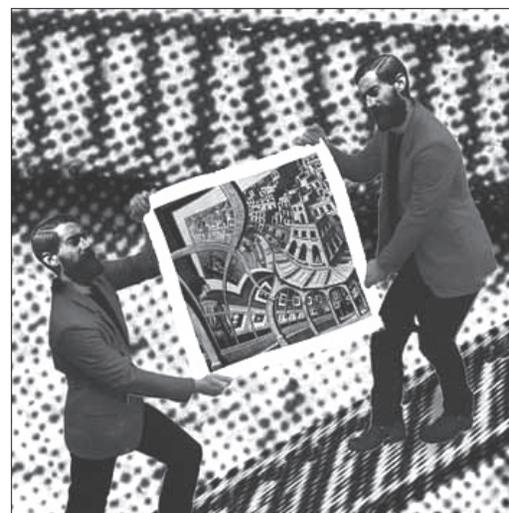
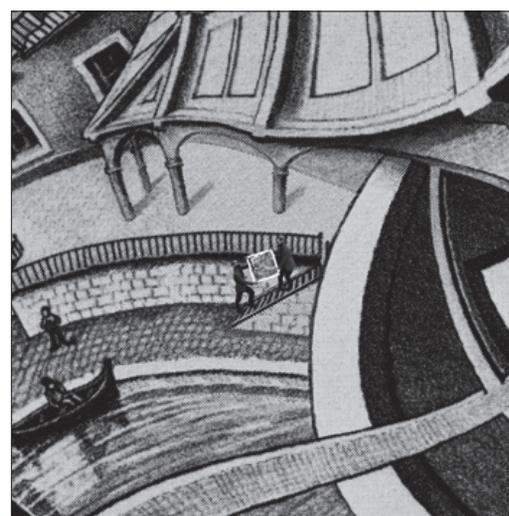


Figure F and G (Detail)

ZenArt: Graphic Geometrical Modules

Around 1975, inspired by the slogan of Marshall McLuhan: 'The medium is the message', and by a trend known by the name of 'Minimal Art' (in which the fewest and barest essentials or elements in the arts, literature, or design are used in order to relate to the environment), I began to experiment with letters of the (Dutch) alphabet as a basis for creating a set of graphic geometrical modules. This choice ensures consistency of the various shapes within the set, and it limits their number.

Along with that, I tried to eliminate any reference to optical or subjective components that shape a module, reducing it to its essential geometrical form. With the traces of emotive charge removed, these modules were meant to stand on their own, as meaningless objects. In contrast as for instance in the case of the alphabet 'Azart' by Belgian artists Rombouts & Droste, they keep the basic characteristics of the Latin alphabet.

Drawing the alphabet.

I drew the alphabet on the bases of four geometrical figures, which can be regarded to as being universal: square, cross, diagonal and circle (and/or dot). (Figure 1) Placing these figures on top of each other they form a grid like matrix, which is shown here by means of dotted lines. (Figure 2)

I use these lines as guides for drawing each letter. Square and cross, turned into guides help to draw horizontal and vertical letter strokes. Diagonal and circle are used to draw diagonal and circular letter strokes. 25 dots, matching the thickness of a letter stroke, help shaping the joints and endings of each letter. Each letter may use one or more elements of the four geometrical figures.

In the example the letter 'R' is being drawn: of the square, the left and left half of the upper stroke are used, followed by the curve of the circle, followed by the horizontal stroke of the cross and finally by the downward stroke of the diagonal. (Figure 3)

Rules for composition, derived from the matrix.

As figures 4 and 5 show, the matrix also determines the way with which the letters are drawn on a surface. Figure 4 indicates directions of possible horizontal, vertical and diagonal moves. Figure 5 shows the possibilities for turning, rotating and mirroring of the letters. In case letters are placed next to one and other, the preferred distance in between equals the thickness of a letter stroke. (Figure 6) In case a letter overlaps another, the overlap should be no less than the thickness of a letter stroke. More precisely, it should at least overlap one of the 25 circular dots as can be found within the matrix. (Figure 7)

Composition.

Since the dimensions of the letters match each other, this provides an outline with which compositions can be made. Likewise the rules by which they can be turned, rotated, mirrored, moved and placed separated from each other or overlapping.

Figure 1: Universal geometrical figures: square, cross, diagonal en circle (and/or point).



Figure 2: The letter 'R' drawn onto the matrix.

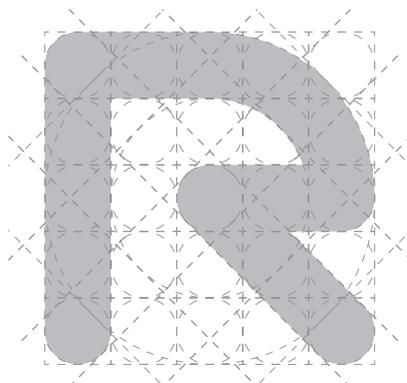


Figure 3: The letter 'R' drawn using elements of the matrix.



Figure 4: The letter 'R' moved, guided by the matrix.

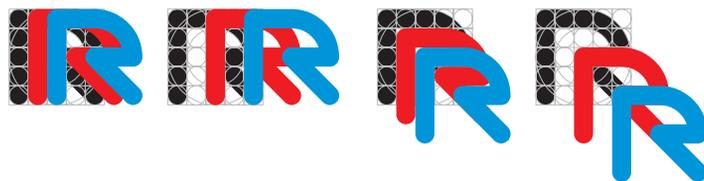


Figure 5: Turning, rotating and mirroring, guided by the matrix.

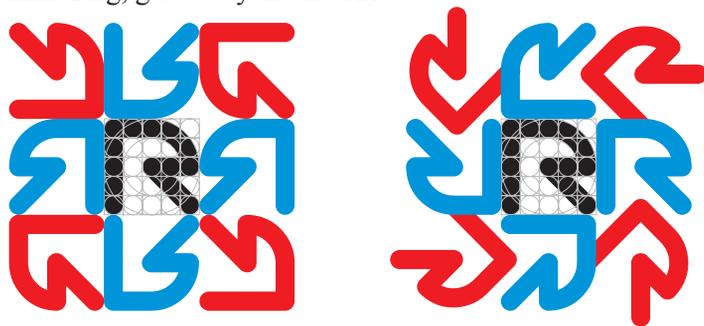


Figure 6: The alphabet (upper case only), placed with a space in between that equals the thickness of a letterstroke.



Figure 7: A composition with letters that form the word 'BRIDGES' showing overlapping letters.





Photo montage: subway station 'Hermann Debroux'



Photo montage: subway station 'Kruidtuin'



Photo montage: subway station 'Tomberg'



Photo montage: subway station 'Park'



Photo montage: subway station 'Petillon'



Photo montage: subway station 'Rogier'



Photo montage: the word 'agreement' in Dutch, Chinese, Arabic and Russian.



Photo montage: the Dutch word 'welkom' ('welcome') at the entrance of a museum.