

Drawing Letter Forms and Lines (Cambridge, 19 Jun–21 Nov 17)

CRASSH, University of Cambridge, Jun 19–Nov 21, 2017

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Drawing Letter Forms and Lines

This is a series of meetings organized by Sachiko Kusakawa and Alexander Marr in conversation with Paul Antonio. We are interested in gathering scholars of early modern culture, science and art interested in letter forms, line and flourishes as part of their research. We are fortunate that Paul Antonio, a professional scribe with a deep familiarity with historical letter forms (for his work, please see (<http://paulantonioscribe.com/>; <https://www.instagram.com/pascribe/?hl=en>), has kindly agreed to work with Cambridge scholars in a series of meetings among his busy schedule.

What kind of manual dexterity and expertise are involved in letter forms? to what extent were the seemingly effortless 'flourishes' carefully planned and produced by a 'disciplined' hand? is it possible to speak of 'individual styles', when students were urged to trace and learn the lines from 'copybooks', especially in relation to 'character'? what were the cultural cues and significance of particular letter forms, lines, curves and flourishes? did line-making and letter forms affect modes of thought? These are some of the questions we'd like to think through with Paul. To this end, we've organized two meetings: in the first meeting, we gather together to find a common ground of discussion and generate some specific questions, to which we will return with concrete examples, in a second meeting. We hope that these two meetings will lead to a colloquium on early modern script.

Meeting 1: 19 June (Monday) 2 to 5 pm (CRASSH, University of Cambridge)

Methodological and historiographic discussion.

Readings: M. Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), chapter 6, 'The period eye', Tim Ingold, *Lines : A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), chapter 5, 'Drawing, writing and calligraphy'.

Using these well-known studies as a spring-board, we will discuss various positions among historians about script and 'linearity' as a historical source, and how Paul's perspective as a practitioner can be integrated to current interest in 'reconstruction' methods, visual culture and the history of material texts. We hope to generate specific questions that we can return to in the next meeting.

Meeting 2: 21 November (Tuesday) 2-5 pm:

Study Day with Paul Antonio.

Preparation: identification of specific historical cases that are of interest to scholars.

These will be commentary sessions, where scholars will present their working assumptions about

particular scripts and why they consider them historically significant. We will then ask Paul Antonio to demonstrate how those scripts are formed, and reflect with him how our assumptions have been changed or challenged. This in turn will help us formulate new research questions.

Colloquium on Early Modern Script (TBC Spring/Early Summer 2018)

This would be a colloquium for scholars working on script, integrating demonstration and commentary by Paul Antonio, and hopefully also a professional engraver who knows what is involved in transforming letter-forms into print.

If you would like to participate in the June meeting, please RSVP to Judith Weik: jw571@cam.ac.uk

Reference:

ANN: Drawing Letter Forms and Lines (Cambridge, 19 Jun-21 Nov 17). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 13, 2017 (accessed Oct 19, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/15794>>.