



News and views from the School

Twice termly: Issue no 17

Welcome to Issue No. 17



Have a look at [Schoolinsight](#) for an interesting report on this summer's Economics and Law Week. Also see a wonderful perspective of South Africa by Professor Jansen.

I hope you will read the two excellent articles here, both in their different ways, about attention to fine work.

Lily is the 14 week-old addition to our household and very cute too. Yes, our lives have changed. I think I'm living in a different city – everyone has a smile and a kind word for the puppy and we've made so many new friends.

Very best wishes for the holidays,
Christine Lambie, editor



For many years in the School, calligraphy has been practised for developing the power of attention.

Deirdre is one of a few people who has taken it to heart and made it her profession.

Calligraphy Deirdre Hassed, Melbourne

Writing out a formal citation requires systematic and disciplined planning, but there is a different approach when fulfilling a request for a more creative artwork. It begins with reading the words and letting them soak into my being.

Then there may be a couple of thumbnail sketches drawn as a starting point, but very often it begins by just sitting in front of a blank piece of paper or canvas and seeing what presents itself. It is an intuitive response, and hard to describe, but each step usually flashes in the mind which I just have to follow. I have learnt to trust this process, even when completion deadlines are

imminent. It makes the work effortless and utterly engaging.

Beginnings

It all began as an 11 year old when I had just started attending Philosophy classes in Auckland, NZ. Calligraphy was offered as an exercise in giving attention. I remember watching amazed as the black glossy ink flowed from my pen onto the paper - it was beautiful. For years after that I used the simple round-hand Roman script that I learnt then, for making cards and writing letters. I later learnt that through a more disciplined study and understanding of letterforms, rhythm and uniformity could be achieved.

Drawn to calligraphy

After completing an English degree at Auckland University, in 1984, I saw the work of calligrapher and graphic designer, Dave Wood. His 'word pictures' brought texts to life, full of colour and innovative design. I signed up for a ten-week course with him. One calligraphic encounter led to the next and I had a real taste of being 'silently drawn by the strange pull' of something I really loved.

Doors kept opening and in 1985 I was accepted into a full-time Calligraphy & Bookbinding course at London's Roehampton Institute. This was the formal part of my early training under the tutelage of some of England's renowned scribes. It was just the start of the journey, but it provided a firm foundation for my future work.

By 1987, I was back in NZ working as a professional calligrapher. This was when I really started to learn, when confronted by the various commissions coming my way. I accepted every request and then tried to find a way to bring it about. In those early days I discovered much about ingenuity and self-reliance, as by that stage Dave Wood had moved to Australia, and there was no longer a teacher or 'expert' to ask. How could one write on wood, wax or stone? How did one prepare lettering design for the stained glass window of a modern church or produce a formal citation complete with heraldry? There was so much to discover.

Slow connection

Calligraphy draws on the tradition of writing across the centuries. People come to it for different reasons. Some admire the visual beauty, or the meaning embodied in the art form, and others are drawn by the meditative quality that comes with participating in an activity that demands your full and undivided attention. In this mass-produced, artificial, fast, superficial and processed world, calligraphy stands out as being human, creative, slow, natural and spontaneous. It is original. It reveals connection and self-expression. As people increasingly feel the disconnection that comes with this modern world there is a natural desire to connect. Something as simple as receiving a beautifully addressed envelope in the mail can bring joy to people. It can take a very short time to execute, but that envelope or card may sit on someone's desk or mantelpiece for years. As a lettering artist, calligraphy gives me that opportunity, and I believe, the people who commission work from me have a taste of that too.

The creative process

It is easy to think that calligraphy is only for the artistically inclined. Many people say, "I have shocking handwriting. Calligraphy is not for me." But when novices pluck up the courage to come to a workshop, what they find often surprises them. The magic of connection between eye, hand, pen, ink and paper draws their attention more deeply into the moment. They start to enjoy the creative process unfolding before them and the quietness of the mind that comes with being in the present moment.

Within a short space of time, with a little instruction on basic letterforms, participants soon realise that they are capable of more beautiful writing than they gave themselves credit for. Simple adjustments to pen-hold, writing-rhythm & slope, letter shapes and spacing can make all the difference. Most people discover that their writing can vastly improve as the areas of the brain required for writing are awoken and retrained.

Inspiring

I find the copperplate scripts that were used in day-to-day writing by generations past awe-inspiring. Unfortunately, these days many people are dissatisfied with their handwriting and try to avoid it. If we increasingly ignore our handwriting, it may become a lost art. Potentially we seriously reduce our ability to communicate, not just our words, but also our nature and personality.

Calligraphy is indeed an unusual 'profession' and there are many superb lettering artists worldwide. As long as people find inspiration and beauty in the written word it will continue to flourish as a craft or art. Daily, I feel blessed that my work is actually 'play'. Francis C. Roles expressed it beautifully for us all:

'Everyone at sometime wants to create something original, something of their own. We all have innate in us some special aptitude of self-expression, something each of us could do and a way to do it which is entirely our own. To find it, and use it, gives self-realization its full meaning.'

See Deirdre's website: Go to [DHassed](#)

More photos



Thich Nhat Hanh quote



Deirdre at work at Art in Action



Top Tips

Items recommended by readers

TED Talk: Physician Gary Slutkin spent a decade fighting tuberculosis, cholera and AIDS epidemics in Africa. When he returned to the United States, he began to look more carefully at gun violence, noting that its spread followed the patterns of infectious diseases. Go to [TEDSlutkin](#).

2. New career: Ray Sinclair, philosophy student in Brisbane, participated in a Shakespeare play which led to a change of career. Go to [UTubeSinclair](#).

3. NY School 50 years. To celebrate half a century of philosophy classes, the New York School is offering Part 1 as a gift to all comers in January. Find your way to 12 East 79th Street. Go to [GiftofHappiness](#).

4. Land Value Tax. In the Financial Times, Merryn Somerset Webb argues for LVT. Go to [FTWebb](#).

5. Distance Learning. Now available for iPads, iPhones and PCs.



After leaving school, Andy trained as a quantity surveyor, but preferred brick-laying. He has gone on to become one of the world's leading figures in ship-carving and recently won a prestigious contract to carve the figurehead of a French ship – see lion photo below. In November he published the definitive work on the decoration of ships from 1630-1780.

Working with Attention Andy Peters, London

I must have been born with a love of the sea and sailing ships, as I can't remember a time when I wasn't drawn to them. From a very early age I was making model pond yachts, which I sailed on our local lake. Their construction required a degree of carving skill to create the hull shapes, which led to my second big interest of wood-carving.

Having no one to teach me, I used my stubborn determination (which according to my mother was already well developed) to recreate things I had seen and thanks to a very understanding father, who patiently saw his tools ruined as I struggled to master them, I slowly learnt to understand the nature of this wonderful material.

My father, perhaps in seeing some potential in my efforts, or maybe to take the pressure off his own tools, bought for my 11th birthday, my first set of carving tools. In the same year I also progressed to 'real boats' having learnt to sail and after what seemed an eternity of saving money from part time jobs, bought my first sailing boat at 14.

Brick-laying

I was lucky to attend what was then called a Technical Modern school for boys, where the intention was to teach us a trade. This suited me perfectly, and I left at 16 eager to start work, having acquired O levels in building construction, building drawing and my favourite, brick-laying. This had already come in handy doing small jobs for neighbours, providing ready cash during my boat fund-raising period.

As any one who has worked on a building site will know, these brick-layers, mainly gritty down-to-earth characters, work hard; what they earn is totally dependent upon the hard graft they put in each day. For a brick-layer, if it snows, or pours with rain you earn nothing. If you have a labourer who can't keep pace supplying you with bricks and mortar, your production and therefore pay, goes down. But when it goes well, and the work is flying, there is nothing more satisfying than ending the day over a pint with your mates, stiff and sore, knowing that you have earned your pay.

Joining the School

One such gritty character introduced me to the School. Despite the initial shock of being greeted by the suits and long skirts, I was struck by the generosity of spirit from people who didn't just spout out words but opened a real spirit of enquiry. To discover that knowledge is not owned by the educated but is within us all, really struck a chord, in fact it was less of a discovery than an affirmation of what is known to be true,

something I had known but could not have put into words when learning how to carve.

In my work, the key not only to working efficiently, but also to actually enjoying work, is being here, ie not listening to an iPod or dreams in the head, but engaging fully. Not rocket science, but what I experienced with my labourer whenever we worked well together.

Work with attention

When I started bricklaying I was pretty pleased with myself to lay 250 bricks a day, till I was on site with someone who could lay 500. Given the challenge and a good labourer I matched him and many pints were sunk. Upon reflection there were moments when I was not in control, when being so totally in the moment, thinking disappeared and there was a direct connection with every fibre of every element at work and 'I' wasn't even there. For me this has become the most important aspect of philosophical work, where the attention is placed at the precise point where a trowel picks up mortar, a hand is placed on a brick, no thought, no desire, no finer moment. That led to laying 1,200 bricks a day.

I rarely lay bricks these days, but have chosen to follow what has been unlocked in my heart, to create in wood what are visions given to me. At times, after reflecting or meditating, or simply being so totally lost to the present moment, a form that expresses some aspect of what unites humanity is seen clearly. Then my job is simply to manifest the form, to let it pass through me untainted by claim or desire - the only work involved is to keep out of the way. Not easy. But by returning again to the point where the working surfaces meet, the barriers (my barriers) hopefully allow that pure vision to manifest.

Maritima

The love of the sea has not gone away, and is the basis of my current business, allowing those earliest of desires to manifest. At one time every ship-building port would have had a 'ship's carver' to create the wealth of ornamentation that adorned the warships and merchantmen of each nation. Such decoration displayed to the world the political and religious ideology of the nation, and as such, was of immense importance, attracting the greatest artists in the land.

In 1990 I set up Maritima Wood Carving with the intention to keep alive the art of the ship's carver, providing historical research for replica ship projects. One such project was a 1738 Swedish East India ship where I was employed for 5 years initially to compile historical research, and then to create the carved work for the ship. Restoration work for maritime museums has provided the opportunity to accurately replicate period styles. Commissions for the modern super yacht industry, based in the Netherlands, have allowed me to keep this ancient craft alive, by providing contemporary sculptures for the interior of today's yachts and maritime environments.

The process of researching and carving earlier art forms I find immensely useful in discovering the underlying principles of design. These principles don't change, allowing the possibility to present images in a form that appeals to the viewer of today, whilst maintaining the unaltered inner beauty that lifts the spirit and fills the heart with joy.

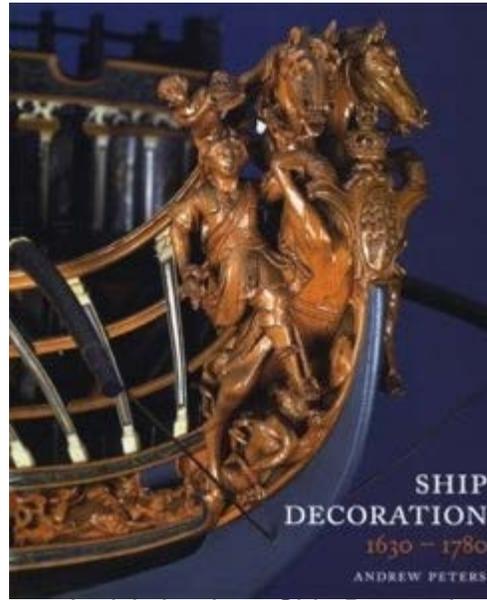
The headmaster's summing up on my last school report was that 'He will go far when he realises there is more to life than brickwork and sailing' Well for me that realisation is working with attention. But wasn't that there all along? Of course, it just took a little study of philosophy to realise it.

See website [maritimawoodcarving](http://maritimawoodcarving.com). See Andy on TV: go to [PetersBBC](http://PetersBBC.com) - available until 15 Dec.

Some of Andy Peters' work



Lion figurehead



Andy's book on Ship Decoration

Reader Feedback



I've just finished reading the latest edition of insight and just have to write and say how inspiring I found it. The article on Warwick Jessup was so informative, and has reminded me of the power and value of Sanskrit. It's also great to know the background of the people in London whom we at the far-flung reaches of the empire only know from a distance. The article on Kate Ntuli was gobsmacking. I'll be sharing it with many of my friends. What an inspiration she is.

*I would also like to share both articles with our parents at Erasmus School. I think they will feel thoroughly spoiled when they realise what these two people have been through in their different ways to make a difference for the children. How blessed we are. With much gratitude for your efforts in producing this quality offering. **Melbourne***

*What a beautiful film from Australia...full of good reminders for me! **London***

*Thank you very much for the recent newsletter which provided some lovely articles and insights into the Leaders' Residentials and the Sanskrit in particular. It was a JOY to serve and we were happy for the opportunity to do so. **Trinidad***

New Alpine Plant

Adrian Young, London,

Adrian has been working for over 40 years with the small alpine flowering Saxifrages. Sometimes known as 'rock diamonds' for their architectural shape, Adrian was captivated by these plants in 1972 when he first started volunteering at Waterperry gardens. In his words: Mr MacLaren told me that these were



special plants and that I should look after them. Adrian has made countless trips to examine these plants in their native habitat and discover what they need to flourish in cultivation.

He also manages the national collection of Kabschia Saxifrages at Waterperry Gardens, where over six hundred of these beautiful plants can be seen. This is the largest collection grown out doors in the world. Waterperry has recently been awarded National Collection status for Silver Saxifrages, these are mainly larger alpines that flower in May and June. Recently a new wild hybrid was discovered; Adrian has published and named it, *S.x cottianensis* commemorating the Cottian Alps, part of the French Alps near the Italian border. His article was published in the Journal of the Alpine Garden Society.

See short video about these plants and Adrian on Saxifrage

Thanks for reading

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Please keep that feedback coming. I need all your suggestions of personal stories, insights, links, articles, cartoons, video clips – anything that will be of interest to our philosophy community. Do you know someone in the School who has an interesting story to tell? E-mail me at: editor@seslondon.org. Thanks again for reading, CL

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