

What's Your Type?

In today's information age, e-mails, advertisements, and yes, even artwork use lettering in ever-widening and more expressive forms. See how artists from ancient Egypt to the present have incorporated typography into their work.



RYERSON AND BURNHAM LIBRARIES (NOT ON VIEW ON SUNDAYS)

***Facile: Poems* (1935) by Paul Eluard, photography by Man Ray**

A true alliance of word and art, this book of love poems by Surrealist poet Paul Eluard is filled with odes to Nusch, the poet's wife and muse, and is illustrated by Man Ray's nude photographs of her. Nusch inspired not only these two artists; the former circus performer and small-time actress also served as a model for Picasso. Here, Nusch's beauty is reserved for the book's interior, while the cover focuses on the monumentality of type. With individual letterforms of movable type creating the book's title and credit lines, the words and letters themselves are glorified. Each letter rises off the page, casting a long and impressive shadow behind it.



GUNSAULUS HALL

***Pause* (2004) by 2x4 for Knoll Textiles**

Anyone who has deliberated over ending a sentence with a period or exclamation point recognizes that, even when removed from their linguistic context, punctuation marks communicate on an emotional and aesthetic level. With its wallpaper *Pause*, the design studio 2x4 explores the expressive power of these familiar signs by amplifying them to an enormous scale. The oversized commas and periods invite their audience into a conversation; the viewer just has to supply his or her own words.



GALLERY 173

***Rack Picture for Dr. Nones* (1879)**

Many people nowadays would probably not see their life's history reflected in the mail or ephemera that piles up at their home or office. But that was exactly the purpose of this spectacular trompe-l'oeil painting of an old-fashioned bulletin board. The collection of various text-based memorabilia—letters, postcards, tickets, and newspaper cuttings—was to serve as a biographical portrait of Dr. Samuel Smith Nones. A prominent Philadelphia dentist, Dr. Nones must have thought these documents provided an ample likeness as he himself commissioned the piece from an unknown artist.



GALLERY 154A

Wall Fragment from the Tomb of Amenemhet and His Wife Hemet (c. 1991–1784 B.C.), Egypt

Because of the Egyptian hieroglyph's descriptive quality, it is often hard for our modern eyes to distinguish hieroglyphic characters from the images that surround them. In this wall fragment, stacks of food surround Amenemhet and his wife. Nestled in this funerary feast, intended to sustain the pair in the afterlife, are several hieroglyphic phrases that are set apart from the vertical and horizontal inscriptions that run along the relief's edges. The images between the two figures spell Hemet's name and that of her mother. Those to the right of Amenemhet's raised arm indicate the name of his father, and the four characters in front of his left leg say "funeral meal."



GALLERY 234B

The Ancestors of Tehamana OR Tehamana Has Many Parents (Merahi metua no Tehamana) (1893) by Paul Gauguin

Set against a background laden with symbols of Tahiti's past, this portrait of Tehamana demystifies the exoticism of this tropical island by surrounding the 13-year-old with the symbols of her culture. Heightening the power of Tehamana's ancestry, Gauguin includes two rows of yellow glyphs that were inspired by tablets discovered in 1864 at Easter Island. The inscriptions on these tablets—the only known traces of written language in Polynesia—remain indecipherable.



GALLERY 136

Untitled (1989–present) by Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Where else have you seen words or dates decorating the uppermost regions of a wall? That's right, just before you entered the Art Institute, where the names of famous artists are chiseled around the exterior of the Allerton Building. This commemorative form, dating back to temples of antiquity, is usually used for institutional purposes. Artist Gonzalez-Torres, however, co-opts this public representational technique to record his own life amidst major world events. Unlike a painting or sculpture, this self-portrait in words and dates can evolve with every installation as new events occur. In this way, Gonzalez-Torres grants himself and his work a perpetually renewable life.



GALLERY 3

Standard Station (1966) by Ed Ruscha

For Ruscha the clean lines and flat color typical of screenprinting were well suited to his cool, aggressive Pop Art compositions, such as the *Standard Station* series of screenprints on view in this gallery. For the dominant pictorial feature—the crisp, clean lettering of the oil company signage—Ruscha used his own source photograph of a Standard Oil station in Amarillo, Texas. This photograph is on view in Gallery 1. *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, Ruscha's first photographic book and an exercise in graphic design itself, is on view in Gallery 2.

Edward Ruscha. *Standard Station*, 1966. The Art Institute of Chicago, Harold Joachim Purchase Fund. © Ed Ruscha.