

a history of visual text art

is a gargantuan overview of visual poetry and text art from visual poet karl kempton, who draws on a vast/curious knowledge of the marks made by humans on stone, parchment, paper, canvas, in neon, onscreen... through millennia.

karl kempton's *a history of visual text* is one of the very few overarching views of a fascinating terrain: art as language, poems for the eye. His account begins with newly-available prehistoric evidence, finds paths through complex clusters of religious and political influence across the globe and then moves into a long review of the 20th and 21st Centuries, from the Russian Avant Garde to the Stieglitz Circle, Concrete Poets to Conceptual Art, Word Painting and Iconographic Painting, and beyond.

The book is unusual for its insistence on thoroughly re-looking, to find nuances and practitioners who had been ignored. So we have Barzun's story, more than Apollinaire, we have Theosophy and Platonism in the lineage, alongside Mallarmé, we have the seers aligned with the art stars and scholars.

Crucially, kempton tilts his perspective throughout to include non-Western narratives, and details the affect of spiritual practices — particularly Buddhist Ch'an and Zen, Sufism and from American First People — on the gestation of language arts. He follows complex bloodlines from rock art to religious texts to temple murals to individual enlightenment. He embraces the work of ancient and contemporary Arabic word painters and First Peoples' Iconographics, their relation to other spiritual traditions and to artmaking.

In doing this, kempton allows us to re-see ourselves; familiar shapes become new again. For example, his own deep involvement in Vendanta, bhakti yoga and other disciplines, in the USA, means his account of the Beats and the visual poetry and art that emerged as a result of Patchen, Ginsberg, Snyder, et al is given fresh detail and depth.

A sequence of visual poetic works from contemporary practitioners illuminates the book — works from Liz Collini, Philip Davenport, Steve Giasson, Ali Haider, Bruno Neiva, Bin Qulander and Dawn Nelson Wardrope. A sequence of letters from the poet and iconographic artist Márton Kóppany interrogates the book and its ideas. The book contains over 1000 hot links to a wide spectrum of online examples.

The book is also illustrated by a parallel blog, Synapse International, which gathers works from visual poets and text artists across the globe.

This ebook is published by Apple Pie Editions, as a prequel to The Dark Would anthology of language art published by Apple Pie in 2013. The PDF version is a free virtual "object" and we would be very happy for you to share it with anyone you think might welcome such a thing, especially as an educational or research tool...

Further information

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Review Quotes

"In this breathtaking volume, Karl Kempton encompasses and articulates the lineage of visual forms and their attached meanings as they maneuver through human history into the texts and textual elements we commonly understand today. His exhaustive and extensive research finds us all connected in time to the visual language that we both create and interpret daily. The work herein unearths the thread of inclinations that humanity has tugged at to achieve a documented expression and finally the ability to communicate. A tour de force is simply not enough of a descriptive for this volume. Kempton's life project arrives here to fill that wanting space on your library."

Nico Vassilakis, Editor *The Last Vispo Anthology*

"This generous book is a mighty stockpile of information acquired over karl's lifetime as a practitioner, insisting on placing visual poetry in a profound historical context of world religions and cultural traditions. He wisely states on p22 that the subject is 'beyond the grasp of one individual.' It is so vast that I believe it could take two generations to achieve another such complete overview... evidence of the multi-dimensionality and inter-connectedness of human awareness."

Paula Claire, visual poet

"karl kempton's *a history of visual text* walks us through a beautiful and esoteric history returning to ancient origins, tracking global achievements including rock-art, iconography, hieroglyphics, symbols, mandalas, calligraphy, mathematics, science, music, concrete, visual, and conceptual forms, plus, key movements and manifestos, insightfully shifting from ancient to contemporary innovators across the far East, West, and Middle-East providing profound perceptions with unparalleled depths of research and illumination. *a history of visual text* is an enlightened and invaluable tracing of the spirit of linguistic liberation!"

Dr Karl Jirgens, Editor, *Rampike*

"You are one the very few people alive who really understands that the Nature of the origin of language is rooted in profound archetypes which are genuinely cosmological. Add to that your perspecacious knowledge of the use of language in art and experimental literature and it puts you in a unique position with few, if any, peers (I don't know any)."

Michael Winkler, writer and visual text artist

"This probing, carefully and globally researched rethinking of the lineage of visual poetry is both overdue and instructive in its links and reorientation. The place of pre-alphabetic glyphs and rock art, along with focusing on textually defined visual artists in the history of the visual word and letter reflects my understandings. Karl's critical inquiries and annotations usefully sharpen and concretize the connections and relationships. Well organized in terms of affinities and chronology. Marvelous!"

Joel Lipman, Founder of ABRACADABRA Studio of Visual Poetics

"...you are cordially invited to a rule-ignoring, barrier-breaking, wedding & feast by the bride, language & groom, art, i hope your mind/heart/eyes/hands are inspired by these international works..."

Andrew Topel, visual poet, Editor of *Renegade*

"The most encompassing history yet. Congratulations"

Richard Kostelanetz, artist, author and critic

"It's a WOW!"

Marvin Sackner, Founder of the Sackner Archive