

The Art of Typewriting

by Marvin Sackner and Ruth Sackner. Thames and Hudson, October 2015. 352 p. Ill. ISBN 9780500241493 (cl.), \$70.00

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The Art of Typewriting is a big book--the pages include introductory and bibliographic notes, but are most notably rife with artworks that are lush and beautiful in their own flatly typographic way. Design legends Steve Heller and John Maeda each offer up brief prefatory texts that touch on the physical and cultural history of the typewriter. More lengthy essays focus on Ruth and Marvin Sackner's joyously voracious collecting strategies, as well as the deeper histories of both artistic typewriting and concrete/visual poetry. These long-form writings are important primers for appreciating the scope of works included in the volume. Reading about Raoul Hausmann's sound poetry and Julius Nelson's complicated constructed alphabets shows the vast possibilities of the typewriter-as-artmaker and how technology often pushes artists to reinterpret their visions as new tools

become available. Learning about the evolution of the typewriter from an implement of the business world into a device that helped produce an explosion of visual artworks by the likes of Emmett Williams and Dieter Roth is revelatory. This slice of art history feels at once obvious and yet completely surprising. Of course someone would make these things, but why didn't more of us know about it already?

Thankfully, this book features perhaps one of the most comprehensive published arrays of typographic art to date. And clearly, the strongest draw of this volume is the work itself, which is reproduced quite handsomely. Subject and styles range from portraits, alphabetical texts, and geometric shapes, to erotica, household objects, and kinetic texts. The artists also encompass a broad spectrum: Carl Andre, Cozette de Charmoy, Geof Huth, Françoise Mairey, Dom Sylvester Houédard. This is an undeniably rich and plentiful repository of creativity. A selection of illustrated artist biographies appended near the end of the book gives helpful

historical context, but the book's organizational system--arranged thematically, instead of by artist or time period--is the real star here, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the intricate structures of this art with a minimum of clutter on each page.

The Sackners pieced their collection together over the course of more than thirty years by asking curators an endless stream of questions, by poking into the corners and back rooms of galleries, by clearing off the dusty top shelves of rare book shops, and by letting their passion blossom over time. Often, the stories of collectors are studded with immense wealth and undercurrents of greed. But Ruth and Marvin simply love this stuff on every level from process to product and this book seeks to share that excitement with a wider audience. There's much to explore here for art historians, poets, linguists, book artists, and those simply curious about the multiplicity of ways that text can take on fascinating forms.