

## Hidden Semantics: Visual Forms of Written Language Case studies from Artists and Designers



*Heart Attack* Ed Ruscha 1967

Written forms of language are a part of contemporary art scene, with various approaches they take, worth to be examined in depth (by “contemporary,” I would like to specify the term as times after the 60s). These forms are not merely means to convey meanings in a language but much more as they transform into artworks such as sculpture, painting, personal record, a part of collection, installation and so on. As abstract art does, letters and words can be separated from their referential duties and become liberated through different visual treatments. Different media, sizes, typefaces, contextualizations and presentations of the language change, complicate, supplement and even become independent from what the written words communicate and this aspect is directly comparable to practices in typography. Even a single letter can convey countless nuances and connotations through such variants. These artworks speak without statements.



*The Bastard Punctuation* Fiona Banner 2006-07

Type designers essentially concern with shapes of letters, pure curves and lines. The way they converse about typefaces and smallest units that decide the overall quality of a typeface might seem absurd to others who are less concerned with such esoteric issues but this passion and obsession are not far from that of artists (excuse the generic stereotype of artists) trying to get the right color in their paintings per se. This will be the one of rudimentary and even outdated analogies one can make between type designers and artists. “Rudimentary and outdated” because medium is no longer limited to paintings and sculptures in making art. In abundance of expanded possibilities of mediums, various artists who deal with languages as their key substance intrinsically ponder on similar subjects regarding languages, especially written forms of those, as designers do.



*Diario No 1 Año 1* Mirtha Dermisache 1972

This memoir constantly compares and juxtaposes practices of graphic designers and artists. Contemporary examples will be more discussed here to explore the overlap and contrast between their attitudes on how they use and present written language. To spare the panic of ending up with endless informations on different writing systems and applications of those, Roman alphabets will be the focus, with an exception of asemic writing, which is not specific to a certain language.