

Alphabet becomes artwork

"Alphabet" and "A to Z,"

Lump Gallery, 505 S. Blount St., Raleigh, through Aug. 28. Gallery hours are Saturday and Sunday 1 to 5 p.m., and by appointment. For information, call 821-9999.

Separate a letter of the alphabet from its context of words or typography and it becomes a shape, an abstract symbol. Once we learn the alphabet, we never think about it again. We bury it deep into our subconscious, pulling it out constantly as a means to read and write. We use it but fail to recognize the miracle of each and every letter.

This month at Lump Gallery in Raleigh, the letters of the alphabet have been dissected, parsed, vulgarized, generalized, constructed and deconstructed into artistic compositions that require more than a bit of time to enjoy. In two separate shows, "A to Z," organized by Richmond's The Drama Magazine, and "Alphabet," organized by the Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts, of Baltimore, Md., the alphabet is the theme.



Blue Greenberg

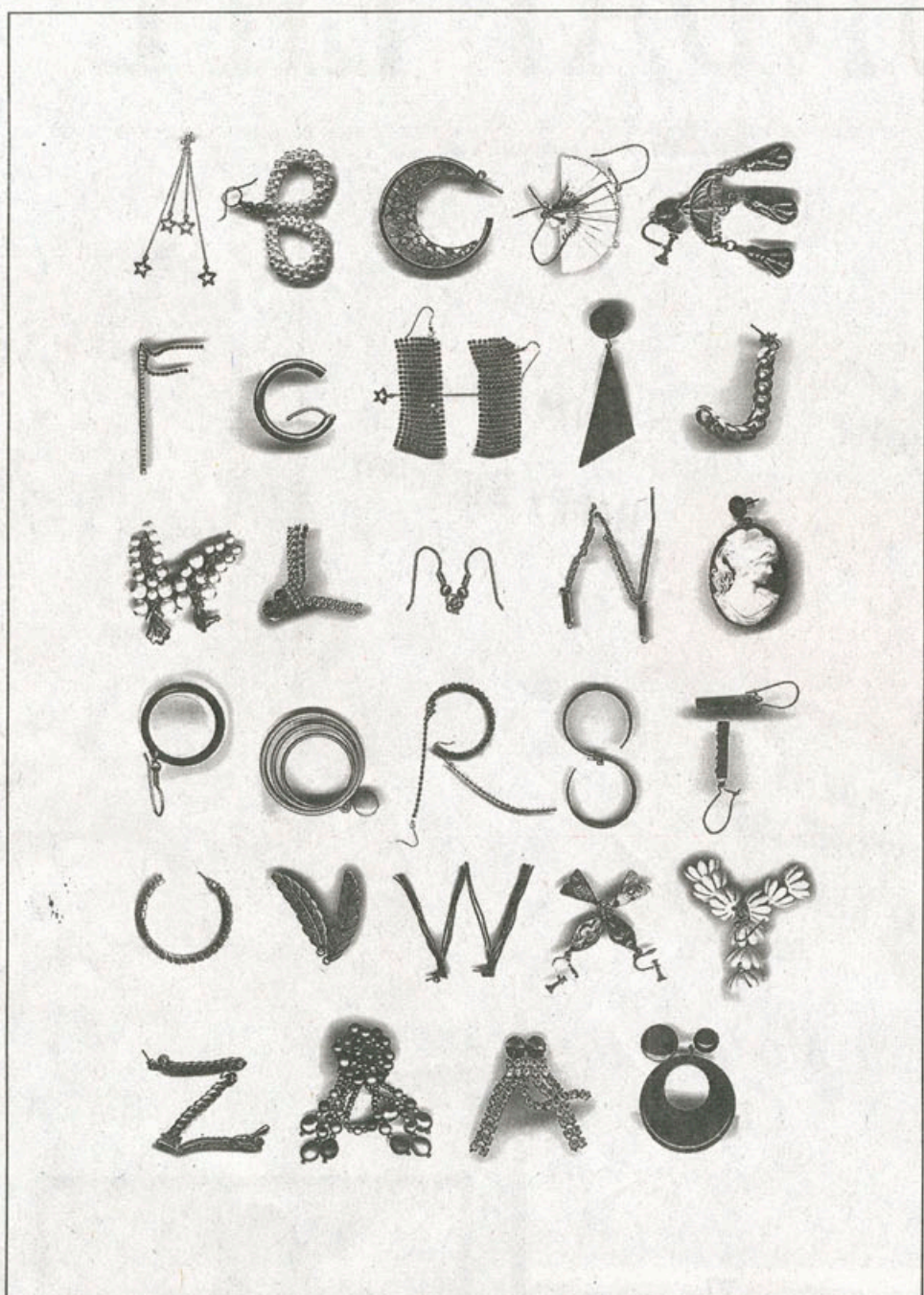
In the Richmond show, a single letter is infused with meaning by individual artists. In "Alphabet," each letter becomes part of a recognizable system that dictates visual relationships between the symbols. While the Roman alphabet and, by implication, language, is the subject of these shows, an underlying theme is that design has its own language and is worldwide.

Artists' invitational

"A to Z" is an invitational with an international group of illustrators, painters, comic strip artists, designers and photographers. The assignment to each was to react to one specific letter of the alphabet. The 26 images were then published in The Drama Magazine's fifth issue. The originals make up a modest exhibition at Lump. The results differ widely, from Californian James Jean's "S is for Secret" with its softly drawn female sleeping in a cocoon of feathers, to North Carolinian Lump Lipshitz's graphic line drawing of four bald men, sending rays toward the words, "B is for Baldness."

Other letters include New York's Eddie Martinez' "X is for X Men," a group of comic book super soldiers who save the world on a regular basis, and "R is for Radiation," Italian Mauro Gatti's cartoon strip about the bomb.

Katsuo Design, a group from California, focuses on imagination for the letter "I." Swiss-born Helge Reumann depicts a jet plane for the letter "J" and mask-like fig-



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Hjarta Smarta borrowed items from his friends to create "Earring Alphabet," which is on display at Lump Gallery in Raleigh through Aug. 28.

ures mark "C is for Children" by Danish Henrik Drescher.

Obviously, another group of artists on another day would find different themes for each specific letter. The show was an invitation to focus on originality, with no limits on design and meaning, and, in most cases, the artists achieved that goal.

60 views of an alphabet

The "Alphabet" exhibition, which takes up the main part of the gallery, includes 60 versions of a coherent alphabet by 47 graphic designers and painters, who were chosen from a large field of entries. The images are black and white prints of the originals.

The range of ideas is enormous and the amount of time and thought each represents is unbelievable. For example, Andrew Byrom commissioned Joel Wolter to fabricate a set of 26 table and chair frames from steel tubing to form a lowercase alphabet. Kyle Bravo's offering is a functional maze with only one path from A to Z.

Among the other examples are the jewelry alphabet created by Hjarta Smarta with earrings borrowed from friends, and the forms that Nancy Guifagossian found in architectural elements she photographed while wandering the streets of Montreal. Other alphabets are Roman Jaster's stuffed toys to make his system of letters and the one Theo Rosen-

blum rebuilt out of foods he enjoys that start with that letter. Paul Clark made his characters out of black, elongated latex balloons. Andrew Liang made a penis font for his alphabet and Toby Wright used breasts. On a pegboard grid Apirat Infahsaeng wrapped rubber bands around the pegs, shaping them into his "Elastic" alphabet.

You do not have to be a computer specialist or a calligrapher to enjoy this show; it has something for everyone.

Lump is in downtown Raleigh on Blount Street, two blocks south of Artspace, in a well-maintained, small, old building. According to Bill Thelen, the gallery director, Lump will be entering its 10th year in September and will celebrate by featuring a special exhibition each month.

Connected, but separate from the gallery, is Team Lump, a group of artists that work together as a collective. In the past few years the team has had some significant successes. Their work has been included in the Basle Expo in Miami, a current show at Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, and this September their work will be at The District of Columbia Arts Center in Washington, D.C.

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