

A fountain of fonts

PCA&D exhibit shows off some unusual interpretations of the alphabet

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For most of us, it's the words that matter, not the letters.

But in "Alphabet," a traveling exhibit at Pennsylvania College of Art & Design, our ABCs are the stars.

"Alphabet" is solely focused on those 26 symbols most of us take for granted — and what those symbols can say when not cluttered into the context of words.

These are not your average letters.

About 60 artists reconstructed the alphabet for this "Exhibition of Hand-Drawn Lettering & Experimental Typography" without regard for legibility or practicality — and oh, what they've done for our ABCs.

"This is good for our college students because it shows them how many different voices there are out there," said PCAD gallery director Heidi Leitzke. "Everyone can relate to the alphabet. It's very accessible."

The designs run the gamut from risqué to robotic to ruffled and were collected by Post Typography, an agency self-described as "a design sleeper cell located in Baltimore" and specializing in graphic design, typography and custom lettering/illustration. Each "Alphabet" design falls into one of five lettering themes: typographic, illustrative, conceptual, concrete and geometric/modular.

The most whimsical of the alphabets were created using the illustrative theme, which compromises legibility for style, humor or ornamentation.

New York City artist Theo Rosenblum created each letter of his "Eating Through the Alphabet" from tiny drawings of foods he likes. His "D" is formed by a date, dill, a duck, a dumpling, a deviled egg and several other foods that begin with "D."

Also in this style is Tory Wright's "Alphabreast," an alphabet completely configured out of (what else?) breasts.

The concrete-themed alphabets are constructed or based on other physical objects. Andrew Byrom made 26 steel-frame chairs and tables that,



"Interiors," by Andrew Byrom

angles, resemble a lowercase alphabet.

Typographic text is meant to be consistent and easily read. Compared with the other artists' works in "Alphabet," these appear most conventional. In a computerized era, making script appear free-flowing and hand-painted means reducing the process so it can be digitally applied.

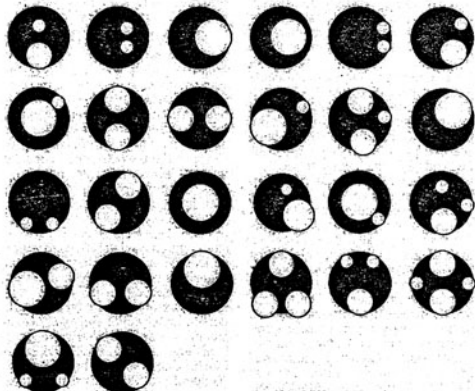
That's what letterer and type designer Ken Barber's "Brush Script" font is. Reminiscent of lettering one might see on a 1950s hat box, Barber worked to make the free-flowing style of hand-painted lettering work in a digital environment where everything is created with computers.

Michael Stout created five

DETAILS

"Alphabet: An Exhibition of Hand-Drawn Lettering & Experimental Typography," reception today 5-8 p.m., Pennsylvania College of Art & Design, 204 N. Prince St., gallery hours Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., 396-7833.

alphabets called "Imageability" for this show, all conceptual in theme — meaning they rely on a viewer's intellect to fill in the form not given by the artist. Stout reduced his letters to the minimum elements that form each shape and calls on the viewer's mind to use negative space and imagination to see each familiar icon.



"Whimcircle," by Tore Terrasi

To see an example of the geometric/modular theme, check out Tore Terrasi's "Whimcircle," in which each letter is composed entirely of circles arranged to most resemble the shape. This theme uses a specific palette of shapes or other visual ele-

ments to form the font.

Also fun in "Alphabet" is Seth Labenz and Roy Rub's raunchy "IType," which pokes more than just fun at our passion for iPods by parodying Apple's ad campaigns. The result is a sort of X-rated Greek themed alphabet.