

REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEW

Finding the Flow: A Calligraphic Journey

by Gina Jonas

Published by the author, 2006

Comb-bound, 82 pp., black and white with some color illustrations, 8.5 x 11 inches

Calligraphy has been described as a marriage of architecture and music—that is, shape and movement; form and flow. Seattle calligrapher Gina Jonas has fully explored both aspects of calligraphy and has brought the best of both to her book, *Finding the Flow: A Calligraphic Journey*.

For example, her description of pen hold is precise as a minuet: “The index finger drives the drawing of a vertical stroke by pushing down upon the staff and, simultaneously, pushes the nib, in alliance with the shoulder-arm, into

awareness of cause and effect. The student is challenged to give his or her practice enough time for preliminary play and exploration as a springboard for finished work. She uses the example of a musician or dancer, noting that a musician’s scales and exercises and a dancer’s bar and floor work are unquestioned ways to improve skill. Dozens of enticing examples of the author’s play are included to whet the student’s appetite for his or her own play-time. The joy of writing comes out in every illustration, and is always tempered by the author’s well-explained technical description of how each effect is achieved.

Jonas begins the book with the chapter “Pencil Exercises” which guides the student in warming up the brain, arm and hand without having to be con-



The word “arabesque” from an illustration of invented script and pen scale experiments

one; this time done with a pen. In drawing interlaced loops, an awareness to pressure exerted by the arm helps transform motion into “emotion.” Stroke properties—rhythm, direction, gesture and mood—are thoroughly examined as an interaction between body and mind.

The final chapter, “Pen Principles & Techniques,” continues the how-to instruction from the second chapter, but here the discussion of pen angle and scale addresses the expressive element of weight (value), as a way of communicating meaning through the letters and strokes. More advanced topics in technique—pen turning and partial edge—offer sequenced exercises for cultivating the manual dexterity and sensitivity needed to gain mastery.

Jonas’s approach, like that of Ewan Clayton and others, sees calligraphy less as a catalogue of skills and more as a practice which involves the whole person; a practice that springs from giving a work-session enough time to allow for the nervous system to calm down and to bring one’s total attention to the act of writing. This kind of preparation allows the scribe to write with a minimum of fear and distraction. The result—well, that’s the point—the scribe becomes less concerned with result than with deep engagement in the process.



contact with the paper:” yet she has no trouble mentally taking off her shoes and dancing around in her socks as she describes “movement as the raw data of rhythm” or when addressing “the tensile elasticity of line.”

For Jonas, working toward free-looking strokes involves total engagement of the intellect and the body, and keen

cerned with the mechanics of pen and ink. The next chapter, “The Edged Pen,” minutely addresses ink flow, paper surface, body position, pen hold and the varieties of marks a broad pen can make.

Once familiar with these basics, the reader is introduced to “Pen Stroke Exercises” which revisit and expand the pencil-movement play from chapter

Gina Jonas has gone a long way toward articulating this fresh approach. While questioning some traditional broad-pen thinking (she suggests rotating the nib counterclockwise past 90 degrees for certain effects), she keeps the student grounded in a good understanding of the technical aspects which give solidity and strength to discovering anew the life of line and letterform.

This book will be useful to all skill levels. Although the writing is clear, it also dense, and may be more useful to a beginner in the context of a class.

—Rose Folsom