

an vanhentenrijk - working for exhibition

Having been busy since 1996 as a professional calligrapher, teaching and working on commissions, I decided to cut down on teaching so I could have more time for personal calligraphy work.

At first it was not my intention to exhibit my work, but as time went by, I found I had four exhibitions in 14 months to produce work for. Two were solo exhibitions and two were group exhibitions.

So for the last two years I've been very busy with these preparations. All this required a large commitment, determination and a good sense of planning. But this has been a very satisfying and rewarding time for me. It was delightful to do my own work and I enjoyed being in my studio.

I started brainstorming in the autumn of 2017 on what and how to produce. I tried to describe, to myself, the story I wanted to tell. It had to be a personal, recognisable and an evocative story that touched and moved the viewer. The rhythm of a heartbeat; painful subjects such as dementia; war and human rights; but also positive words and texts with a necessary vitality. I was looking for suitable words in song lyrics, quotes, poems, books and stories by writer Marlies Verdoodt. Architectural and interior design magazines inspired me because of the ideas, objects, colours, words and compositions that are used in contemporary design. I collected everything in a road book.

In October 2017 I spend a weekend in London. I was inspired by the architecture of the many neoclassical buildings with their geometric forms, based on a circle and square, on the one hand, and by a visit to the Contemporary Ceramic Centre to see the organic work of ceramacist Fenella Elms, on the other hand.

Back home I tried to translate the architectural and ceramic forms calligraphically. There were weeks when I started on Monday morning with calligraphy and continued uninterrupted until Friday. By being busy, my ideas grew and developed more and more. Each calligraphic work had to be a new challenge for me. I found experimenting very important. I loved the process of searching, even when frustration set in, but persevering and finally finding the solution.

I like change. That's why I rarely do many works in the same style. Sometimes technically perfect, sometimes impulsive and inattentive. Sometimes two or three-dimensional work.

Legible or abstract. Starting from the content of the text or just textures and lines, shapes and symbols. Beautiful or not just beautiful. Yin and Yang. Authenticity was always important.

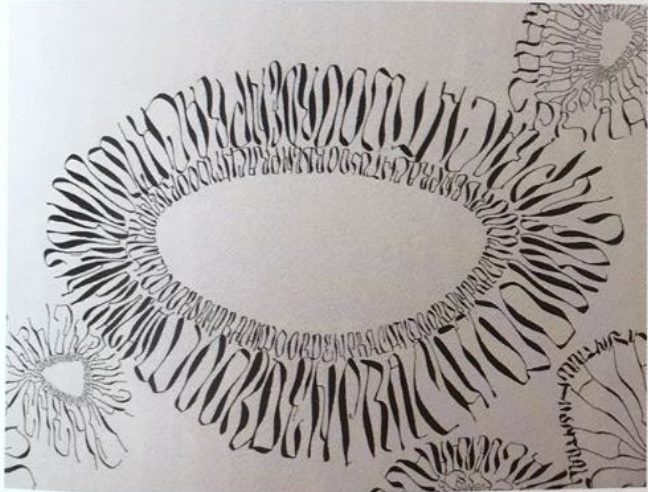
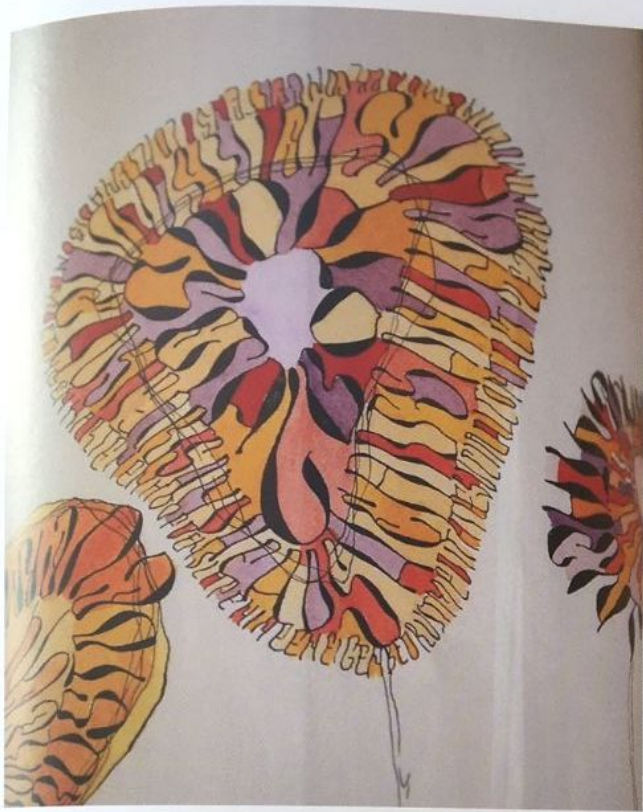
However, I could not do this every week because I was still teaching and doing commissions.

I chose a sober colour palette, mostly black and white, sometimes with a red accent, a combination of silver, bronze and gold, or some brown/green earth tones. White Zerkall paper and Arches de Velin black paper were my favourites. I used mostly gouache, sumi ink and Pébéo graphic ink. I experimented with different writing instruments. With several pointed nibs I wrote my 'kalliandra' letters and I searched for alternative letter shapes with pressure and no pressure. First, organic letters and compositions but also some tight and geometric letterforms. When using a rigid 'balloon pen' (Gilbert & Blanzly no. 1172) I discovered that while writing with the pen upside down I achieved a surprising result of raw and expressive characters. The Mitchell pen (no. 0133) lent itself perfectly to the calligraphy of precise Roman capitals with finely written serifs and the not-too-perfect Ben Shahn letters.

Black Arches Velin paper was the most suitable for writing with flat brush, colapen and Mitchell nib with white gouache. With the folded pen and colapen I could write my kalliandra letters more roughly and more expressively. (I will explain more about this letterform later.)

The practical side of the four exhibitions took a lot of preparation too. From creating and enforcing proper arrangements; making decisions about the framing; putting together a price list with a description of each work; the careful packing, unpacking and assembling; to making a successful display and creating publicity through letters, interviews and social media. I even decided to compile photo

'Los van elkaar maar toch verbonden' ('Separately but still connected') 2019. zerkall paper, sumi ink, folded pen



Kalliandra details: every oval is built up with words from the text 2017/2018



Ceramics - Fenella Elms