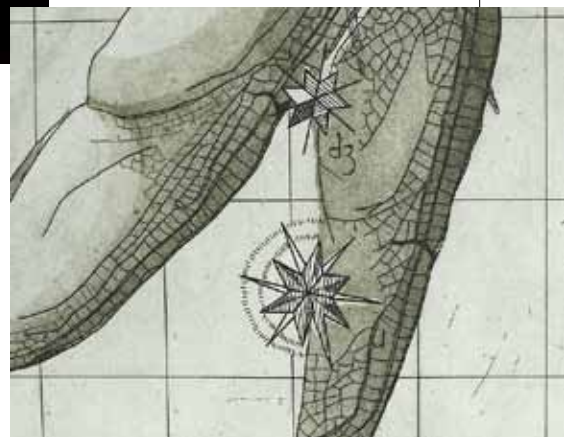
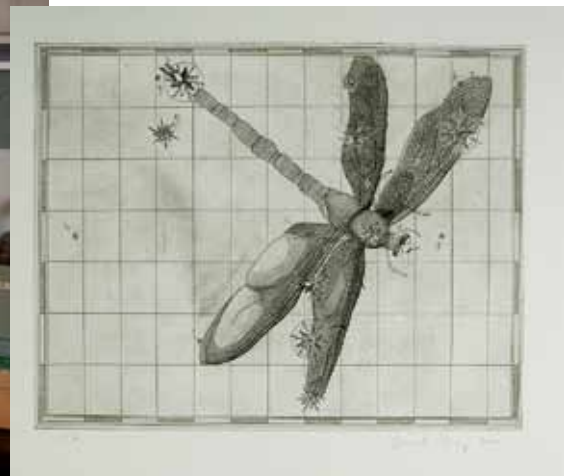


Montage

Art, books, diverse creations



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Worth a Thousand Words

A printmaker plays with the hidden patterns of language and art.

by SAMANTHA MALDONADO

DESPITE ITS MUTED color palettes and simple shapes and lines, the art of Sarah Hulsey '01 has a lot to say. Nearly every piece—each screen print, relief print, etching, or artist's book—features letterpress text of some kind. It's not prose, nor is it poetry, and its presence can be confusing. Though the visuals may be mystifying at first, patterns start to emerge, reminiscent of famil-

iar objects: road maps, line graphs, or the periodic table of elements. Hulsey's graphic images are characterized by a sense of careful handcraft: boxes may not be perfect squares, but they are aligned. Recent sources of inspiration include audio recordings of ocean floor maps and Copernicus's drawings of heliocentric solar systems: diagrams, charts, and objects she describes as "really gorgeous, graphical things, apart from what-

Hulsey in her studio, with letterpress machines behind her; and a print (with detail below) charting the consonants from a 1603 star atlas and connecting them in their own, dragonfly-shaped constellation, from her series *Stellar Nomenclature* (2015).



Detail and full view of *In the Words of Tharp* (2014), inspired by an historic map of the North Atlantic Ocean's floor; Marie Tharp's geological research provided key evidence for the theories of plate tectonics and continental drift.

ever they're conveying." The same could be said of Hulsey's own pieces—but knowing what information they convey, and her meticulous intellectual approach, makes them all the more captivating.

Hulsey can detail the concepts behind her artwork, but she struggles to describe its aesthetics. "I don't fully speak the same language as people who are more scholarly in the art world," she says. Instead, her vocabulary stems from linguistics itself. The systems and components that make up language and art draw her to both disciplines. Language is composed of parts that fit together in a particular manner: words are ordered in certain ways to form sentences; roots, prefixes, and suffixes fit together to form words. Likewise, movable type on a letterpress must be arranged in a particular manner; books are structured into groupings of lines, pages, chapters, volumes, editions, and series. By appropriating the visual style of diagrams, maps, and charts, Hulsey's pieces marry the craft and rigor of conceptual art with the graphic pop of information design, to edge toward fresh takes on communication it-

O P E N B O O K

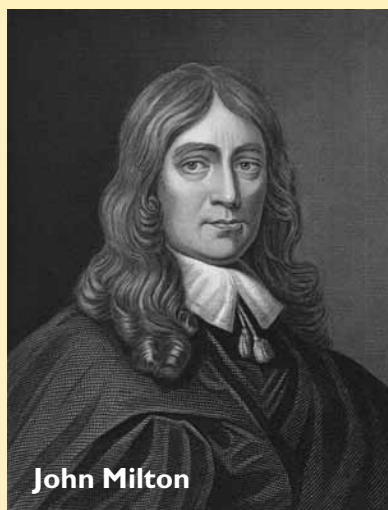
The Civilizing Art

In committing *The Poetry of John Milton* (Harvard, \$39.95), an enormous new book of criticism, professor of English Gordon Teskey begins with a bracing definition of his discipline. He has honed it previously in such capacities as editing the Norton Critical Edition of *Paradise Lost*. From the preface:

The present book

is an exercise in the art of literary criticism, which I take to be the appreciation of quality, of excellence, in art made with words. Literary criticism is not science: it does not prove and discover; it persuades and reveals. But the chances of a work of literary criticism being worth reading outside expert scholarly circles are much increased if it first meets their standards, which often do involve proof and discovery. Philology, in the broad sense of the word, is where criticism starts from, but not where it ends.

That is because criticism has a higher aim, which may be described as moral and humanizing. Literary criticism is the appreciation of verbal art as a power that elevates our ordinary experience in almost every way. Literature cultivates wisdom, courage, generosity, breadth of outlook, intellectual and moral judgment, a reflective passion for justice, and, not the least of these things, pleasure, civilized pleasure as opposed to



John Milton

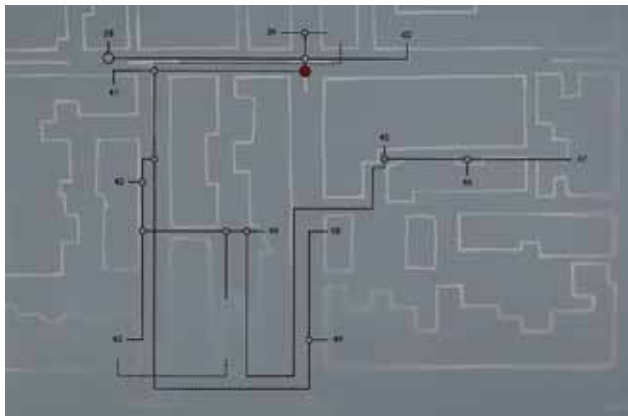
brutal or trivial pleasures. But literature also enhances our capacity for sympathizing with others, or at least for understanding them, by allowing us to travel into different moral worlds, such as that of Homer, or the authors of *Genesis*, or the author of *Paradise Lost*. Literary criticism strives to show why certain works of literature

are good, why they have enduring quality, and, however different their values are from our own, why they are not only civilized but civilizing. I should add that I use the word *civilizing* and *civil*, *civilis* "of the city," with the intention of including politics, concern with the *polis*, the polity. For it seems to me—I say this as someone who cares for all the arts—that literature comes first among them because it is made with our political instrument, language. Certainly John Milton put literature—which for him meant *poetry*—first among the civilizing arts, and I have written this book in agreement with his judgment on the matter.

self. Language, she explains, "is this really elaborate structure that speakers are, for all intents and purposes, totally unaware of"—and her work explores the subtle intricacies that make speech make sense.

When she first pursued printmaking, Hulsey considered it a side interest, completely separate from her academic studies. A linguistics concentrator at Harvard, she worked at the Fogg Art Museum as an art handler under print curator Mar-

jorie Cohn, took a screen-printing class, and learned letterpress at Bow and Arrow Press in Adams House. After graduation, she attended workshops and courses on letterpress printing, papermaking, and bookbinding. While earning her Ph.D. in linguistics at MIT, she kept a studio in nearby Somerville to pursue her hobby. Ten years and one M.F.A. from the University of the Arts (in Philadelphia) later, she has left the world of academic linguistics



Cover and interior pages of *The Space of Poetics* (2015), printed in an edition of 20

one of a kind or printed in small editions) made with woodcut and letterpress. It diagrams a paragraph from French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's treatise *The Poetics of Space*, a work that considers how people

inhabit physical spaces, and how that affects their experiences and memories. To show the syntactical relationships in the excerpt, Hulsey uses imagery gleaned from the 32-volume *Sanborn Fire Insurance Atlas of Philadelphia* of 1916, which collects grid plans of all the city's blocks, color-coded by building material, updated by hand over the years. Just as syntax connects the words in Bachelard's writing, rooms are linked in electrical wiring diagrams and blueprints.

Hulsey's process may sound intimidating, and her subject matter esoteric. Yet the resulting prints are playful, prompting creative interpretation from viewers whether or not they understand the linguistic underpinnings. But unlike traditional maps, or the infographics pervasive in today's media, her art does not merely communicate data points in a pleasing way. Instead, as she puts it, "The former linguist in me hopes that as a body, the work will inspire a little bit of awe at how elaborate and complicated the linguistics system is." By visually investigating elements of language, Hulsey's art compels viewers to look harder, listen better, and notice more. A picture is worth a thousand words, but her works speak in their own way.

but still works in the same studio, pursuing her intellectual interests through artistic practice.

Currently, Hulsey is mapping the words in seventeenth-century astronomy books brought to her attention by a curator at the Huntington Library in Los Angeles. Her creative process has three parts: "There's the aesthetic, visual place where it starts, and then the conceptual part of it is largely analytical, and then there's the manual, craft production of it." Typically, she begins with a visual inspiration, like a star chart, that guides the graphic identity

or overarching style of the piece. She then examines an accompanying text to figure out how its language follows rules and exhibits patterns, whether of word frequency, pitch of sound, or lexical relations. Finally, she depicts her linguistic analyses in the same visual vein as the original diagram—in this series, by using intaglio printing (in which an image is etched onto a plate and the incision holds the ink) in the fashion of the star charts, which map constellations, that appear in the books.

Her recent work *The Space of Poetics* is an artist's book (a handmade art object,

The Lion's Share

Benjamin Scheuer takes his life story out on the road.

by LAURA LEVIS

THE ONLY PROPS in *The Lion*, the critically acclaimed musical by Benjamin Scheuer '04, are the chair he sits on and six gorgeous guitars. Among them, there's a gentle 1929 Martin,

an electric Gibson that growls, and a stylin' Froggy Bottom H-12, which Scheuer got as a thirtieth birthday present.

But the two most important instruments Scheuer has ever played are not on

stage with him. The first is a toy banjo that his lawyer father made for him out of the lid of a cookie tin, some rubber bands, and an old necktie for the strap. Scheuer played it alongside his father on the front porch, mimicking his finger strokes. The second instrument is the guitar his father played, which the teenage Scheuer inherited after a sudden brain aneurysm killed his father and sent his world into chaos.

Told mostly through whimsical and poignant songs, *The Lion* traces Scheuer's quest