



Thesis No. 501 MO055632NC

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PAUL PETER PIECH Art of Expression

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO: THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & C.S IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF DESIGN

DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS

by

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March 1988

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS	4
INTRODUCTION	7

CHAPTER:

	1	PAUL PETER PIECH AND THE TAURUS PRESS	11
	2	MARTIN LUTHER KING'S "DREAM" BROUGHT TO LIFE	23
	3	PIECH AND PRACTICALITY	34
	4	COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC	43
	5	POSTER POEMS	49
	6	GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM	61
	7	BEN SHAHN	67
	8	COMPARISON/CONTRAST TO OTHER ILLUSTRATORS	85
	9	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	97
• • •	•••••		
BIBLIOGRAPHY			

ILLUSTRATIONS

NO.		Page
1.	Design for Manuscript book by Rudolf Koch	9
2.	Taurus Press Colophon by Paul Peter Piech	12
3.	Harvard Student poster	13
4.	Martin Luther King/ <u>A Doctrine</u> by Piech	13
5.	<u>U.S.A. 200</u> by Piech	16
6.	America Beware by Piech	16
7.	Dante/Peace is just Understanding by Piech	17
8.	Martin Luther King/We are tied Together by Piech	17
9.	War and Misery by Piech	19
10.	Robert Burns/ <u>Red Rose</u> by Piech	19
11.	William Blake/Tyger, Tyger by Piech	20
12.	John Gohorry/ <u>The Buzzard</u> by Piech	22
13.	Martin Luther King/Brotherhood by Piech	25
14.	Martin Luther King/ <u>If We Don't</u> by Piech	27
15.	Martin Luther King/Wars are Poor Chisels by Piech	27
16.	Martin Luther King/ <u>I understand</u> by Piech	28
17.	Martin Luther King/I am Convinced by Piech	28
18.	Martin Luther King/ <u>I now Believe</u> by Piech	30
19.	Martin Luther King/The Atomic Bomb by Piech	30
20.	Martin Luther King/The Policy Makers by Piech	32
21.	Martin Luther King/Hunger and Plenty by Piech	32
22.	Martin Luther King/I have a Dream by Piech	33
23.	My Country Tis of Thee Sweet Land of Liberty! by Piech.	36
24.	Cruise SS20 by Piech	36
25a.	NO to Cruise by Piech	37
25Ъ.	NO to Cruise by Piech	37
26.	Let's Talk Peace by Piech	37
27.	In Memorium by Piech	39
28.	Storm Troops Advance Under Gas Mask by Otto Dix	39
29.	America Declare Peace by Piech	40
30.	Don't Crucify Humanity by Piech	40
31.	Northern Ireland by Piech	41
32.	Twentieth Century Crucifixion by Piech	42

No.		Pag
33.	I'm No Crook by Piech	46
34.	El Salvador by Piech	46
35.	Daddy what are you doing by Piech	47
36.	Daddy what did you do by Saville Lumley	47
37.	Big Trolley Calavera by Jose Gaudalupe Posada	47
38.	Martyr of Freedom by Piech	48
39.	Paul Klee/Art does not imitate reality by Piech	5
40.	William Wordsworth/My Heart Leaps Up by Piech	52
41.	Quadi Lyad/Fields of grain by Piech	52
42.	Pablo Neruda/Book Let Me Go by Piech	51
43.	Pablo Neruda/Religion in the East by Piech	51
44.	Indigo Jones by Piech	55
45.	Shakespeare/As You Like It by Piech	55
46.	Shakespeare/The Evil that Men Do by Piech	55
47.	Song of the Creatures by Irene Wellington	51
48.	Summer is Icumen In by Hella Basu	51
49.	Earth and Heaven by Anne Hechle	58
50.	Calligraphy by David Jones	60
51.	O'Liberty by Piech	60
52.	Die Ballade Vam Zuchthaus Zu Reading by Erich Heckel	6
53.	Das Striftsfrulein by Ludwig Kirchner	6
54.	Umbra Vitae by Kirchner	6
55.	Die Aktion Title Page by Conrad Felixmuller	6
56.	Die Kundung by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff	6
57.	Menchen by Conrad Felixmuller	66
58.	Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti by Ben Shahn	69
59.	Say No to the No Sayer by Shahn	7
60.	I Think Continually of Those Who are Great by Shahn	73
61.	McCarthy Peace by Shahn	71
62.	Psalm 132 by Shahn	75
63.	Thou shalt not Stand Idly By by Shahn	75
64.	Who is God? by Shahn	71
65.	A Partridge in a Pear Tree by Shahn	77
66.	Alphabet of Creation by Shahn	78
67.	Your Public Library by Piech	80

No.		Page
68.	Maximus of Tyre by Shahn	81
69.	Hebrew Hallelujah by Shahn	81
70.	Credo by Shahn	83
71.	Stop the H Bomb Tests by Shahn	84
72.	John Donne/ <u>No Man is an Island</u> by Piech	87
73.	Self Portrait by Leonard Baskin	87
74.	Moses by Leonard Baskin	87
75.	Office of the Salt Merchant by Michael Kane	88
76.	Danish Exhibition Poster by Paul Peter Piech and	
	Thomas Kruse	88
77.	Carl Scharnberg Quotation by Thomas Kruse	91
78.	Spectrum by Hap Grieshaber	91
79.	Ponies by Hap Grieshaber	93
80.	Stations of the Polish Way of the Cross by Grieshaber .	94
81.	Stations of the Cross by Piech	95
82.	Der Kreuzweg Jesu Christ by Piech	95

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INTRODUCTION

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A discussion of the methods and objectives of Paul Peter Piech an American born graphic artist, living in England, who expresses his profound humanism with a gouge. His posters are a trenchant combination of words and images, the text often having greater importance than his simplified graphics.

This thesis will begin with a slight introduction to calligraphy and proceed to discuss Piech's motivation in expressing his concern for humanity, particularly the words of the black Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King. His approach will be investigated in the realm of the Die Brucke artists and the American artist Ben Shahn, who have displayed a creative use of lettering this century.

The uses of artists lettering are legion. Presentation scrolls and memorial books are at the least imaginative end of the range. Much more interesting effects are attainable from the composition of poems and amphorisms. Piech's work mirrors or sometimes counterpoints the emotional meaning of words with great sensitivity to create pieces which are really concrete poetry. His poster poems with their handcut lettering mechanically reproduced shows that the arrangement and form of words can be a work of art in its own right.

Traditionally, the skill of lettering could be regarded as an art to the extent that the craftsman treated the letters as shapes. Roman inscriptions and Renaissance scripts show perfection and harmony, where skill has been acquired. Roman letter-cutters were concerned with degree of excellence rather than idea. The art of calligraphy lay in its regularity. However, there are the illuminated manuscripts which show a degree of creativity in decorative initials and where the design as a whole is composed of text. These are works of creativity where words are conveyed in a certain material in a personally chosen style. This gives a whole new dimension to the word calligraphy. Letters become abstract forms open to limitless experimentation. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the printing press had taken over much written material that was formerly done by

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hand, through letters, ceremonial documents and similar items continued to be hand-written. Text and images were taken over by printers rules.

It was William Morris who first awakened general interest in calligraphy, in the mid-nineteenth century. When the Great Exhibition was held in 1851 during the Industrial Revolution, Morris who was then quite young, was appalled by the poor standard of products in the Exhibition. He later established through hand craftsmanship, high standards of visual and functional design. His Kelmscott Press resulted in the hand production of books with beautiful type and well proportioned margins. He regarded the quality of the paper, the ink and the binding as vital factors in the construction of the book. His ideal was the decorated book and decoration meant woodcuts.¹

Edward Johnston (1872-1944), seeing what Morris had achieved set out to re-establish a living tradition of calligraphy. He wanted "to make letters with a formal pen".² He used lettering in a more imaginative way than that which was possible in hand printing. While teaching at the Central School of Arts & Crafts he together with his students, published a book on calligraphic forms entitled <u>Writing Illuminating and Lettering</u>, in 1906, which inspired many young calligraphers. He instigated the possibility of the marriage of words and form.

A new approach to lettering was developing rapidly at the beginning of this century. Among the most influential were Rudolph Von Larisch in Vienna and Rudolph Koch in Offenbach. Von Larisch (1856-1934) was very much interested in the use of lettering on materials such as glass, metal, wood and textiles, believing that the pattern of letters should express harmony. Rudolph Koch (1874-1934) who taught lettering at the School of Arts & crafts in Offenbach, formed a community known as the Offenbach Penman, which later became a workshop community which concentrated on crafts including lettering and woodcutting. Koch was one of the first to experiment with letter

forms. His design for a manuscript book (ill.1) shows his ability to produce work of original quality. In his first handbook entitled: <u>Das Schreiben als Kunstgertigkeit</u>, published in 1921, he stated "Our intention is to express ourselves in a new Way and work as we see fit because we have our own and independent views on how to go about it".³ This attitude paved the way for a whole new world of lettering.

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111. 1

Chapter 1 PAUL PETER PIECH AND THE TAURUS PRESS

Paul Peter Piech (b.1920) is a native of Brooklyn, working in England. He studied at the Cooper Union School of Art in New York. He first went to England as a service-man in the Eighth Air Force during World War II, liked it there and stayed on to study printing at the Chelsea School of Art. His career began in advertising in 1945, but despite his success, he had a strong desire to convey his own ideas deciding to go freelance in 1968. He also taught at numerous schools and colleges throughout the country. In 1959 he had established his own private press, the Taurus Press of Willow Dene. It consisted of a Gem Thompson proofing press which was over 100 years old and two letterpress machines.

The Taurus Press at his home in Bushey Heath, Hertfordshire, is one of the most remarkable of the contemporary Private Presses. Private Presses are where new ideas in typography are often experimented upon. They print in small editions which ensures high standards using processes such as screen-printing and wood-block printing. Some have a few staff but they are often run by a single person privately owned, each is different in origin and in means of expression.

Piech's woodcuts and linocuts reveal the forcefulness of his beliefs and his strong desire to share his ideas with others. This justifies his creation of the Taurus Press. The Press name originates from the zodiac sign and its aim is to stimulate interest in humanity. His first printed ephemera described the Taurus Press as "the Private Press of Paul Peter Piech which was started in 1953 with a 10 x 12 Victor book press, for experimental printing. In 1955 acquired a 10 x 14 Adana foot-treadle press. The press's credo is aggressive with no recognition of deadlines to create enduring pieces of printing that will embody the best knowledge of the art of typography."⁴

The image of the bull on the Taurus Colophon, (ill.2) certainly appears 'aggressive'. But it may also be described as forceful. Most of Piech's work shows a great degree of strength in his deepest thoughts.

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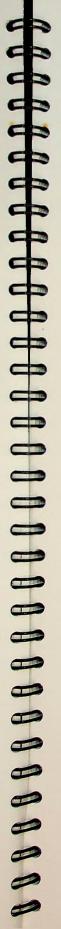
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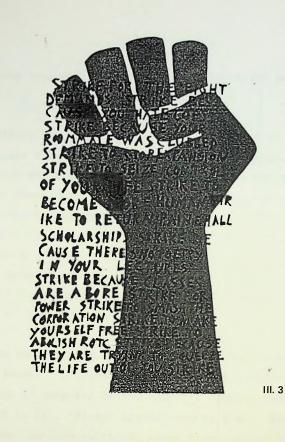
Simplicity of method plays an important part in Piech's graphic style. The words and images are cut in lino or wood and printed in a small range of colours.

As a one-man enterprise, Piech decided on using old techniques of printing. Initially he used the woodcut, whose tradition as a medium of social protest dates from its use in medieval times. Later, lino became Piech's preferred technique. This was due to the fact that lino is a perfect material for very fast and easy cutting. Many of Piech's ideas come on the spur of the moment, perhaps after reading a statement which he is able to turn into a graphic statement. He uses lino as an artist would a sketchbook; he carries it everywhere with him. This shows his desire to react spontaneously on political events from his own experience.

Lino suits Piech's temperament and expressiveness by its simplicity of technique and adaptability. He treats the medium with such compelling force that the lino seems to cry out, expressing his horror at man's inhumanity to man.

His simplicity of style to a certain extent echoes the graphics of the second World War. A remarkable number of artists during the war were using graphic art as a policital weapon. In this respect their posters were intense in tone and simple in content. They showed concern for the basic human desire to shout aloud which they achieved by reducing ideologies to slogans. The images are reduced to symbols which are conventional in detail. A Harvard student poster (ill.3) done during the 1960's shows the extent of forcefulness that could be achieved. The motives for striking which are boldly hand-lettered are dramatised by the red fist stamped over the text. Piech uses this same primitive image in his protest for humanity. To dramatise the words of Martin Luther King (ill.4) he has used the striking symbol of the clenched fist. His image is a direct translation of the quotation "A doctrine of Black Supremacy is as evil as a doctrine of White Supremacy". The use







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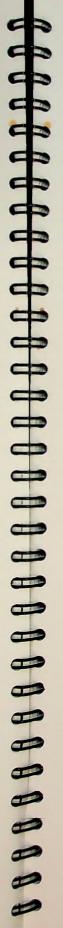
of the colour contrast in the hand gives increased power to the poster.

Piech's letters are all hand cut with the passion of a protesting artist to give a sense of the urgency to the message, the printing is made rough and the paper cheap. The text is cut backwards thus it involves sheer physical strength. He approaches his lettering without previous planning. The letters are cut very quickly. He begins by blocking in areas, planning out lines and counting of his characters. There is no preliminary design of the letter shapes but rather does he creates the letters in the act of the cutting. Occasionally he misses a letter in his speed, misspells or cuts an n, u, a or s in reverse.

There is the odd occasion where he makes deliberate mistakes to focus on a point. In a poster to celebrate the bicentenary of America (ill.5) which is composed of 200 names of 'people who have made America what it is', 'Nixon' appears upside down. With Nixon's return on the American political scene Piech warned in his poster "America beware the return of Nixon" (ill.6). The punch is made through a play in the lettering, the X being substituted for a swastica.

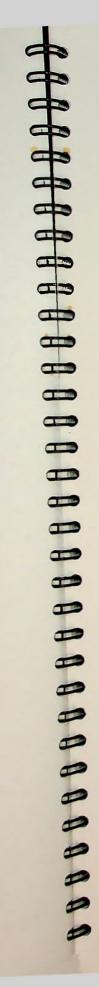
Originally his letters took the form of free distorted capitals. He later developed more sophisticated forms of the lower case letter. In Martin Luther King's 'Dante' quotation (ill.7) for instance, his lettering style in the word 'Peace' resembles that of printing on canal barges or fairground furniture. This friendly style of type complements the amoeba-like shapes of the heads linked together by hands.

Interrelated hands are a common theme throughout Piech's posters. In Martin Luther King's "We are tied together" quotation (ill.8) he has cut the hands from lino so that the cutting has gone right through the backing. Both pieces have then been printed separately

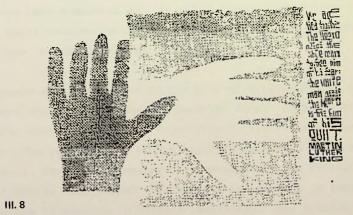




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resulting in a white hand shaped space into which the black hand would fit exactly. The message is 'the negro needs the white man to free him of fear - the white man needs the negro to free him of his guilt'.

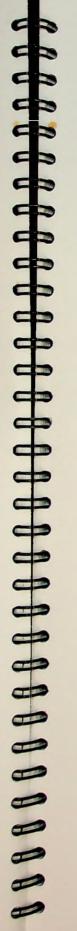
The hand is probably Piech's most commonly used symbol. He used the image of the hand tortured by barbed wire on the cover of his first published booklet, <u>War & Misery</u> (ill.9) which dates from 1959. This collection of woodcuts, as stated in the foreword, is a record of thoughts and feelings on "the horrors, miseries and degradations of man's ignoble acts towards his fellow man" and "a potent reminder that man must be brother to his fellow man, otherwise hope for a better world is abstract."⁵ Although this booklet does not show any great degree of technical skill, it did contain ideas which were to develop in strength in the following years.

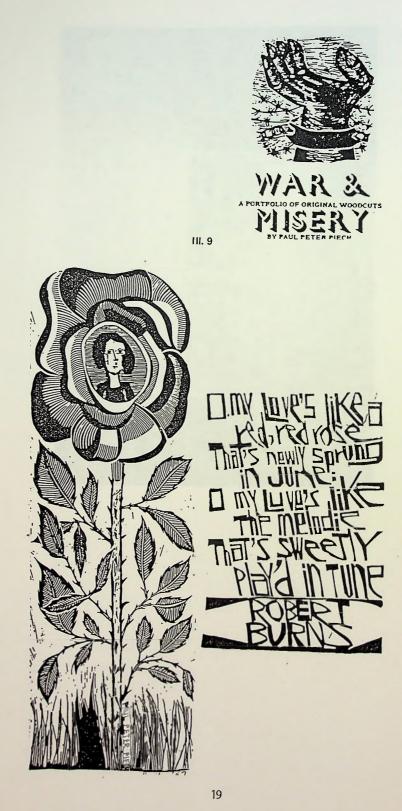
Throughout the 1960's Piech illustrated a great number of short poems which he converted into poster-poems. In these simple posters Piech has juxtaposed images with words as they came to his mind. In Robert Burn's poem (ill.10)

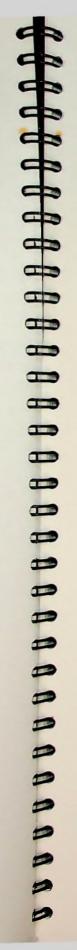
"O my love's like a red, red rose, that's newly sprung in June; O my love's like the melodie that's sweetly play'd in tune."

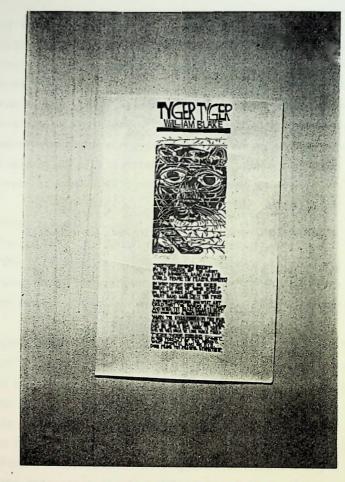
The usual flow of the printed words enliven the poem. The letters themselves have a musical quality. The finely carved line of the rose is quite uncharacteristic of Piech's work. The rigidness is perhaps due to the woodcut technique.

Piech became especially fond of the work of William Blake, illustrating many poems which he published in pamphlet form. Probably his most successful poster is Blake's "Tyger Tyger" (ill.11) which he illustrated in 1979. The superb image of the tiger is supported - top and bottom by the text, forming a symmetrical composition. The ferocious animal behind tendrils like barbed wire appears to be about to leap out. Piech became interested in Blake's imaginings. His treatment of the tiger is not only visually striking, but echoes the complete spirit









III. 11

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of the poem. The means by which the creation of the tiger is described are of harsh manufacture "And what shoulder and what art, could twist the sinews of thy heart?" The large staring eyes echo the second stanza. "In what distant deeps or skies, burnt the fire of thine eyes?" The fire of the tiger's eyes is the essence of the tiger. The violence and harshness of the tiger's manufacture are mirrored in the creation, which seems to be inhuman, as if a monster were being created "And when thy heart began to beat/What dread hand and what dread feet?"

Other posters on poems by Blake include, "London", "Auguries of Innocence", "Ah' Sunflower", "My Pretty Rose Tree", "The Fly", "The Sick Rose" and "The Divine Image". His imagery is strong: faces which echo poverty and hunger. Piech's interest in Blake extends to other writers with the same social concern.

Piech's text takes on the form of solid blocks, usually rich and sometimes even difficult to read. It is not really important in some instances for us to read the words. The words are part of the medium. What Piech is communicating through the medium is his reaction to and his understanding of these words which he expresses in the manner in which they are cut from the lino. These words are often set off against an image, as in John Gahorry's poem entitled 'The Buzzard' (ill.12) - "The Buzzard floats from his telegraph pole and rolls, questioning the roadside " Below the powerful bird image the text is set in a typical chunk of rich, almost unreadable lettering. He has echoed the bird in flight through the horizontal lines which divide the line of text. Its dive is suggested by sway of type. The word 'Buzzard' forms a continuous curve with the dipped beak. The variation or letter height in the bottom line of text reflect the words "How fiercely the black shape drops on its definite victim, then rides high again spoilt in its talons".



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Chapter 2 MARTIN LUTHER KING'S 'DREAM' BROUGHT TO LIFE

Piech uses all his strength, all the talent he possesses to promote peace in the world. All the work which he produces is a graphic expression of his concern with social issues, racial equality, freedom of the individual and other liberal causes. These are all subjects in which he has had a deep interest. His expression often takes the form of illustrated quotations from politicians, poets and thinkers. Be it through the words of Martin Luther King the black civil rights leader, the thoughts of Ghandi, Shakespeare or Goethe, poems of Neruda or a piece from the Bible, each shows Piech's universal concern.

The Martin Luther King posters appear to have had special importance for Piech. King was a hero in his campaign for injustice and his assasination made him an important image in the fight for humanity. Over one hundred posters have been designed by Piech to commemorate his death. He has been deeply affected by his discovery of King's ideas and says "Look at the words on the posters and you will get a better idea of his importance and of how many of his utterances can still be applied to our violent and turbulent times. They are still potent in teaching men to believe in true brotherhood". A superb example is his poster on the 'Brotherhood of Man' (ill.13). "I cannot forget that the nobel prize for peace was also a commission, a commission to work harder than I had ever worked before for the 'Brotherhood of Man'." By an enlargement of letter size Piech has emphasised the words 'Brotherhood of Man'. Although his lettering style quite often appears the same, there is always something intriguing which compels us to read it. Here he has echoed the powerful words by imitating the way they were spoken. In order to slow down our reading pace he has substituted two letters in the space of one. King's slow pronunciation of the word is echoed by the placement of the 'T' and 'O' directly beneath each other. This effective block of type is reinforced by the overwhelming image above. The symbol of hands again has been employed here as a symbol of unity, in the protection of humanity. His figures usually appear as puny creatures, with large accusing eyes in a skull head. The power of expression in his characters is evident in the image of

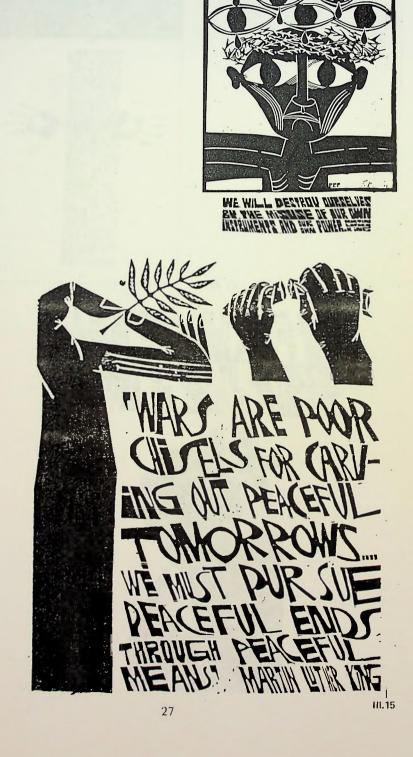


Christ in King's quotation, "If we don't have goodwill toward men in this world, we will destroy ourselves by the misuse of our own instruments and our own power" (ill.14). The importance of these words is emphasised through the use of red ink, while the image is black on a cream paper. The large accusing eyes of the victim is enhanced by the many eyes above inundated by tears. A basically similar type of character appears throughout with varying effects.

Although many of King's quotations are quite familiar to us presented forcefully by Piech, their strength is increased. King's great moving words never cease to resound in our ears when looking at Piech's posters. The most famous quotation (ill.15) "Wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows, we must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means", has been given a wondrously fresh meaning by the sheer force of the letters which Piech has carved. The sharpness of letter form counterpoints the emotional meaning of the words. This is just one of over a hundred quotations. There is a strong sense of unity about the series as a whole, but there is also great variety of composition balance and density. The meaning of the words interacting with the visual pattern they create adds tension to the poster. Quite a different composition has been employed in King's message (ill. 16) on the blasphemy of segregation. A long narrow block of red lettering is centred on the large white area. This block forms the pillar of the cross whose horizontals are formed by the two hands printed in black. This time the hands are real. This powerful effect is accompanied by a photograph of the artist himself above. As already mentioned, it is a common trait of Piech to use hands as symbols but in most other cases he uses lino. The message, the metaphor, the hands and the symbol are a compelling unity. Crucified hands seem to feature quite regularly as in posters of the '20th Century Crucifixion', which will be dealt with in a later chapter.

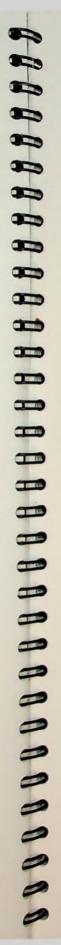
On other occasions the hand is used as a symbol of power (ill.17).

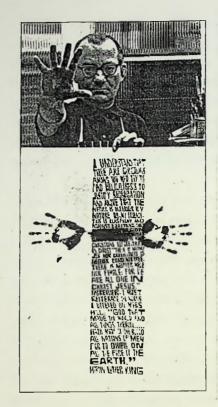
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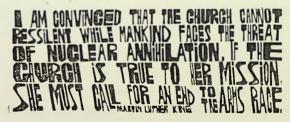


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IF WE DAN'T HAVE GOLDWILL.







111. 16



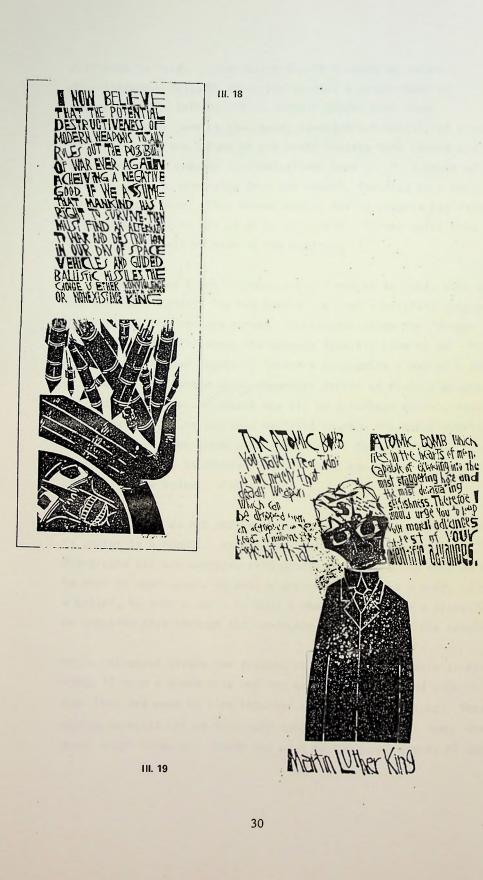
HI. 17

"I am convinced that the Church cannot resilient while mankind faces the threat of nuclear annihilation, if the Church is true to her mission, she must call for an end to the arms race." Piech has shown the Church's dedication by the strong domineering hand clutching the crucifix. The threatening war hovering in the background is indicated by the war plane.

It is evident that Piech has chosen a certain set of symbols which he uses extensively throughout his posters. In themes related to the arms race, the war plane is used as a threatening device. (ill.18) King's words in themselves are powerful. "I now believe that the potential destructiveness of modern weapons totally outrules the possibility of war again achieving a negative good. If we assume that mankind has a right to survive, then he must find an alternative to war and destruction, in our day of space vehicles and guided ballistic missiles, the choice is either non-violence or non-existence." The war planes directly below act as arrows which leads our eye downwards to the defending hand. There is a hint of non-existence by the manner in which the head is crushed down and drops of the bottom of the poster.

Piech's text evokes the same cruelty as the images he presents. Its harshness echoes the violence of his imagery. An effective integration of type and image is a compelling factor in another of King's quotations on the effect of war on humanity (ill.19). "The atomic bomb you have to fear today is not merely that deadly weapon which can be dropped from an aeroplane on the heads of millions of people, but that atomic bomb which lies in the heart of men ..." The ruggedness of the type and its composition seems to rip the figure apart. The column on the right is attached to the face by the 'S' to make it appear as if the head is being ripped off. The crown of barbed wire on the head re-inforces the message.

Piech's type has great pattern forming qualities which he uses to great advantage. Very often it is so visually rich that it is quite



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difficult to read. Illustrating King's protest on racial discrimination (ill.20) Piech has created a large chunk of rich text. The letters are so densely packed that they actually become part of the image, adopting the quality of a stoned wall. "The policy makers of the white society have caused the darkness. They created discrimination, they" A chunk of text appears to be missing from the centre, focusing on a head behind prison bars. This barred window device compels the viewer to read the text to see if it is all there. It has split into two columns to either side of the window.

In most occasions Piech's graphics are found to be bold, startling and extremely direct. He has chosen the most simplified images in order to get the message across. His illustrations for 'Hunger and Plenty' (ill.21) sends the message directly home to us. "In our society, its murder, physical butchery to deprive a man of a job or by income ..." Humour is an important aspect of Piech's graphics. His imagery in some occasions may be, to a certain extent, naive. A contrasting device has been employed to show the discrimination between races. The black man, withdrawn in face, clutching his empty bowl is put in contrast to the white man below, a piggish like head, stuffing himself with food.

Piech's posters do not inform, they shout. As he lectured to students "A poster is a shout... is a plea....is graffiti on paper..."⁷ Piech puts all his energies into producing posters "to echo an anger to echo an aggression, to echo a grievance, to echo a need, to echo a belief, to echo a hurt, to echo a reaction, to echo a spirit".⁸ He achieves this through the crudeness and urgency of his graphics.

Man's universal desire for freedom is summed up concisely in King's words "I have a dream that one day men will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers." (ill.22) This quotation still has as much relevance today as it ever had; the dream still lives on. Piech has gone to the inner depths of these

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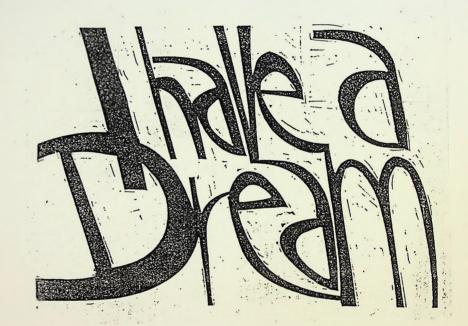
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III. 21

words and embroidered them in such a manner that echoes their power. The marks left by the hacked lino create a feeling of tremendous energy radiating from the words.



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Chapter 3

PIECH AND PRACTICALITY

Piech's belief in the moral effect of King's words may be regarded as a kind of idealism, however, on the practical side he is involved in the International Peace movement. As well as producing posters for the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament he has also been involved with the German campaign of the 'Krefelder Appell' - an attempt to stop the stationing of arms in West Germany. In many of these posters he shows the agony of humanity suffering death and terrorism by war in the most striking and dramatic way. His graphic imagery is so strong that in some cases it can aggravate. In 1979 the American Embassy protested about a poster in which the stripes on the American flag were turned sideways to represent prison bars. (ill.23)

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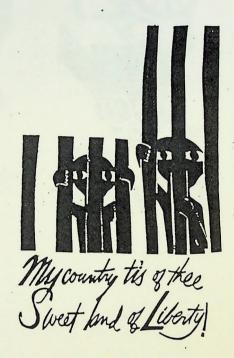
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He shares the same belief as Albert Einstein who has stated "Mere praise of peace is easy, but ineffective. What is needed is active participation in the fight against war and everything that leads to it."⁹ Through his posters, Piech has shown that peace is a 'task and not a talk'. His poster showing 'Cruise SS20' (ill.24) with the caption "If Jesus Christ were here today, he would join the CND" shows Piech to be an individual task force. His strong protest against the stationing of cruise missiles in Britain was carried through to postcards. Stark, rough images of skeleton heads are juxtaposed with the caption "No to Cruise". (ill.25a and b)

The effectiveness of these posters probably lies in the brief captions. His message is relayed very directly through the caption "Lets talk peace not war" (ill.26). He illustrates the positive and negative aspect by using the traditional symbols of the dove for peace and the skeleton head for war. The words are even more impressive than the simplified images. The delicacy of the letters in the upper part allow breathing space. They flow into each other and integrate harmoniously with the image. The curve of the 'C' is echoed by the form of the peace dove. A contrasting effect is achieved below. The sharp rigid letters in the word 'War' transmit a feeling of threat, which is reinforced by the cross mark formed by two war planes. Even more threatening is his 'In Memorium' poster (ill.27).



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The message is interrelated very effectively with the image. Jutting out from a horrifying skeleton head is a cross on which the message is inscribed 'Rest in Peace, in memorium, dedicated to the silent majority who never protested against the nuclear arms race". This image is reminiscent of Otto Dix's (1891-1969) etchings, who also used the skeleton to symbolise the dark forces of destruction. Dix was a German artist much involved in war themes. His threatening imagery in 'Storm Troops advance under Gas Mask' (ill.28) is clearly reminiscent of Piech's skeleton heads. A strong implication of the horrors of war is evident through the large cavaties of the eyes.

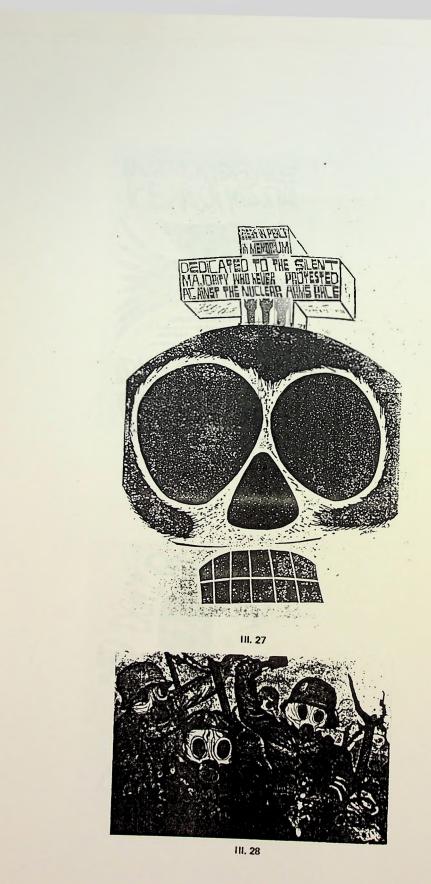
Protesting against the Nuclear Arms build up of the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. Piech produced a series of posters, which were used in an election campaign in West Germany. A large peace dove is the unifying factor in symbolising America and Russia and the plea for peace. The upper wing forms the American flag, reinforcing to the caption 'America declare peace on Russia' (ill.29). Below 'Russia declare peace on America' is likewise echoed by the Russian flag on the lower wing. This means of symbolism shows that peace always needs both sides. If one wing refuses to move forward, the peace dove will crash down. The poster as a whole shows a perfect balance of composition.

A more violent image accompanies the caption 'Don't Crucify humanity... End nuclear arms race' (ill.30). This is one of Piech's stronger pieces of graphics. This type of image appears quite regularly throughout his posters, using the crucifixion to reflect the destructive powers of the war. A large war plane forms the cross in the crucifixion on which a figure hangs. Even the nails through the hands and feet are echoed in the small war planes, bearing the words 'U.S.A.' and 'U.S.S.R'. The image is extremely threatening and proves Piech's point that 'the poster can invite a profound and provocative opening of the minds, hearts and spirits, to the ends of the earth'. 11

Piech's religious inclinations are probably due to his background

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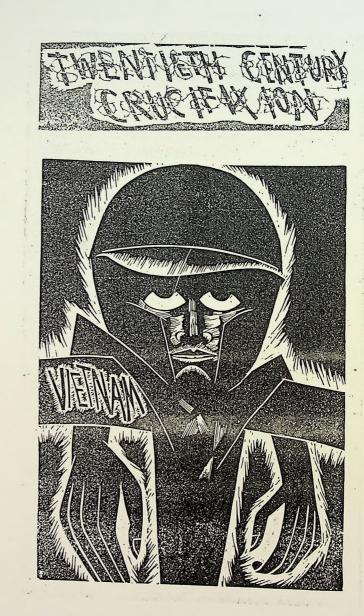
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since he is of Greek Orthodox origin, his family coming from the Ukraine. The crucifixion and the image of the suffering Christ are used as a symbol of humanity, threatened by war and social injustice. The crucifixion image was used effectively by Piech in a poster created for the women's movement of peace in Northern Ireland (ill.31). The figures in the foreground are merely outlined against a silouette, rather in the style of Picaso drawings. The urgency of the message 'Break the Silence' is indicated by its overprinting on the image, like a stamp mark. Piech's variations on the theme of war convey contemporary violence and death. Violence is implied through the barbed wire twisted

and death. Violence is implied through the barbed wire twisted through the words 'Twentieth Century Crucifixion' (ill.32). There is a strong expression of fear in the image of the oppressed face, with large, starring eyes.



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Chapter 4 COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

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Direct communication with the public is Piech's one major concern. He developed his ability to put a message on a poster through his career in advertising in both America and Britain. This, combined with his Brooklyn-born idealism and his experience through serving in the war, has resulted in his desire to communicate with the public.

His strong bold style of illustration shows that he is not shy to put forward his beliefs. At first the British were embarrassed by his naked images. Piech proclaims "It is hard to get them to put their feelings on the wall, they are too modest, posters could get rid of peoples pent up emotions."¹² He believes 'One should be constantly ready to break new ground for the sake of communicating ideas'.¹³ He reacts spontaneously, aiming to communicate with as many people as possible. Since the lino prints are cheap, he can communicate with the ordinary people.

"I want to make people aware that there are things in the world that they should know about, things they can't rely on newspapers for."¹⁴ He feels that posters are more visual and striking than articles in journals, poems in books or speeches. By taking poems and portions of articles and speeches, Piech has re-inforced their impact through his poster art. These posters are of international reputation. Some of the countries in which his posters have appeared are Czechoslovakia, England, Finland, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Ireland Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Scotland, South Africa, Switzerland, U.S.A., Wales and West Germany. He believes that posters should "influence permanently and deeply ... they must never leave the beholder indifferent, whether on religion, political or social issues. Many times they must be pungent, sharp and spikey, if necessary."¹⁵

The satirical side of Piech is strongly exposed in his caricatures of political leaders. With the growing threat of war in the United States, with new strategies for winning a nuclear war, Piech has shown his concern by producing posters of a more critical and satirical nature. As already mentioned, he regarded Richard Nixon

as a threat. A caricature of Nixon the 'Dictator' (ill.33) with a sly look, bearing the caption 'I'm no Crook', was intended to force him out of the White House in 1978.

Another poster caricaturises Ronald Reagan in all his glory (ill.34) symbolising the power of the government. He turns a deaf ear and a blind eye to humanity's plea for justice, as he crushes the figures beneath him. Their demands are presented through the placards which they hold upon both sides of Reagan. This acuteness is strengthened by the caption 'El Salvador, Reagan's Vietnam?'

The influence of the Second World War posters on Piech has been quite evident in the posters dealt with earlier. A more direct deriviation is to be seen in his anti-war poster showing a skeleton-like child asking its father, "Daddy what are you doing to stop the next war?" (ill.35). Here he echoes the first world war poster by Savile Lumley, "Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?" (ill.36) question put to the father of a little girl who sits on his knee, while his son plays with toy soldiers and cannon on the carpet. This world war II poster suggested that men were cowardly if they didn't join the war. In echoing this famous British war poster, Piech suggests that war can be avoided provided everyone is co-operative. The skeleton image appears very frequent throughout Piech's posters on the theme of war. He has admitted to the influence of the Mexican graphic artist Jose Gaudalupe Posada (1852-1913). This poster in particular is reminiscent of Posada's Calveras engravings depicting skeletons miming human activities. This was traditional art for 'All Souls Day' in Mexico but Posada used it as an instrument of social and political satire, as in "Big Trolley Calavera" (ill.37) - he has depicted a cemetry overflowing with victims of the then relatively new electrical transport system.

Piech's imagery on certain occasions is too simple for his complex subjects. The African style characters are so familiar to the South Africans that they may tend to loose some of their impact.

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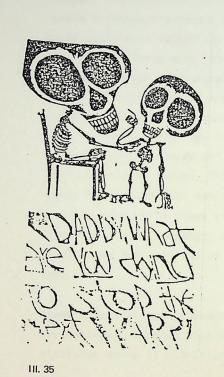


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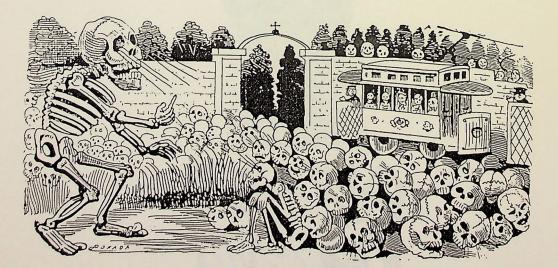


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However, his presentation of the words of Martin Luther King create tremendous interest among South-Africans. Upon viewing these posters on exhibition in 1979 the posters reminded them in many ways of Steve Biko, the black South African who died in prison.¹⁶ Piech, therefore, created a poster of Biko (ill.38) in the following year to capitalise on this impact. This is a poster with life and tension. 'Steve Biko lives on' is echoed in the sheer power of the technique. The words are given meaning by their flowing energy and enlivened by the cut markes left by the lino cutting tools. This tension is carried through to the image. A potent image of Biko behind bars is superimposed in an arm with clenched fist which rises in protest. Biko is depicted as a real person with real feelings, with his concern for humanity reflected in his deep set eyes and by his hands which pull on the prison bars.

Piech's work always provokes attention, comment and no doubt irritations. It also stimulates interest in certain human attitudes which it clarifies quite brashly and in start simplicity.



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Chapter 5 POSTER POEMS

In most of the work examined so far, it would be true to say that the type appears rather crude. It is very often chisled in the same fashion as the images themselves. However, Piech can achieve elegance where it is appropriate. In quotations from artists and poets whom he admired, he has echoed their thoughts through the style of lettering he has chosen. The extent to which he could achieve pure delicacy is undoubtedly shown in the treatment of the Paul Klee quotation "Art does not imitate reality, it reveals reality". (ill.39) These words have been formed into a piece of calligraphy, rather like handwriting. The quotation harmonises beautifully with the small reproduction of Klee's work, in its pure simplicity and abstration.

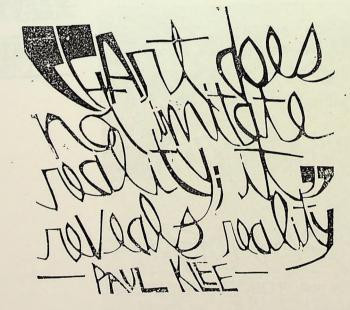
Many of these poster poems show quite a contrast in style to the posters dealt with earlier. "My Heart Leaps Up", by William Wordsworth (ill.40) reflects Piech's relaxed personality. He has echoed the words of the poet, his thoughts on childhood, by underlining the text with even rule marks. The staggered lettering fitting neatly into the lines resembles that of a child. The title of the poem is reflected in the character of the lettering. Enclosed by large brackets, the words seem to leap up themselves. They pull up into the roof tops arched by a rainbow.

On a more sophisticated level, however, is his treatment of the verses of contemporary poets. Quadi Lyad's 'Fields of Grain' (ill.41) bend with the wind. Even the letters themselves echo the words of the poem, through the inconsistency of letter height which forms a wave-like pattern. The left ward swerve of the word 'Fields' in loosely joint letters appear also to be affected by the gentle breeze. Although the words are dense and difficult to read that is the most compelling part. It is necessary to focus on the letter forms before we can read what they say. If the text was simple and bold we would pay less attention to the inner message.

Piech uses poetry as a means of extending his thoughts. The words of the famous Chilean writer, Pablo Neruda provide him with the

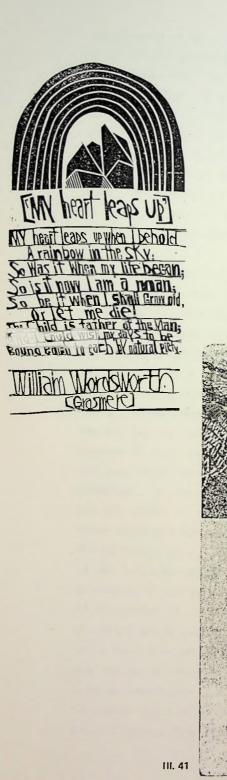






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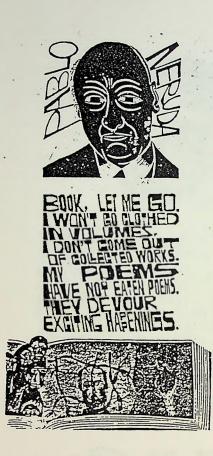


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opportunity to do so. 'Book let me go, I won't go clothed in volumes I don't come out of collected works. My poems have not eaten poems. They devour exciting happenings." (ill.42) These words are echoed below by a book flicking open with images leaping out. "Religion in the East" (ill.43) another of Neruda's poems is a visual creation that springs from shared thoughts with the poet. Piech has selected it because he supports the theme. He has recomposed the dynamic flow of emotion through the integration of imagery and text. He says "I'm trying to approach the expression of poetry in a new way so that people can live with poems on their walls as strong visual statements".¹⁷

In examining the wisdom of the past, Piech has chosen to quote the words of Inigo Jones (ill.44) which are 300 years old. He is not concerned with the legibility of the words, but has succeeded in transmitting their richness. The words have been written in a manner which echoes the language of Jones and the writing style of the period and form a dense beautifully rich piece of calligraphy. In a quotation from Shakespeare's play "As you like it" (ill.45) the words and image form a compelling unity. "The world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." The stage effect is created by surrounding the image completely by the text. Piech has used this quotation as an expression of contemporary and social problems. The main image is the conventional symbol of the cross and the symbol of scales is used in regard to racial equality. Other Shakespearean quotations have stirred emotion such as the Julius Caesar line, 'the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interned with their bones' (ill.46). The stick like treatment of the letters transmits a morbid feel. Piech's power of expression is far removed from the general calligraphic treatment of poetry among his contemporaries in Britain. Anne Hechle and Hella Basu are among the many who are producing manuscript of quality and originality in pen and brush. Irene Wellington was a great importance in the development of calligraphy this century. As a past pupil of Edward Johnston, she extended the whole concept of calligraphy from his teaching to the freedom of personal expression.

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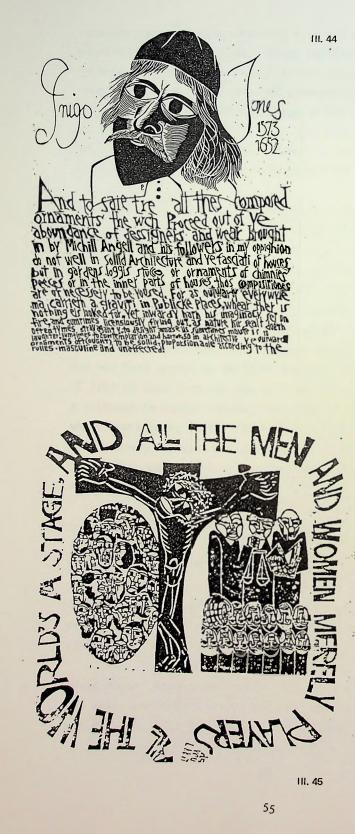
THERE IN RANGEN I REALISED THAT THE GODS WERE ENEMIES. JUST LIKE EDD. DF THE POOR HUMAN BEING. IN ALREASTER EXTENDED LIKE WAITE WHALES. GODS CILDED LIKE SPIKES. SERFENT GODS ENTWINING

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THE CRIME OF CONTRACT AND AND CLEGENT ENDERN. NAKED AND ELEGENT ENDERNS SMILLING AT THE COCATALL PARTY OF EMPTY ETEBNIT LIKE CRISTON ING NORTHER NERVEN. ALL OF THEM CAPABLE OF ANY THING. OF THE TART ON US THEIR WERVEN. ALL WITH TORTURE OR PISTOL TO PURCHASE PIETY & BURN OT BLOOD. FIERGE GODS MADE BY MEN TO CONSERL THEIR COMMANDICE. AND THERE IT WAS ALL LAE THAT. THE WADLE EARTH RENING & HEAVEN. AND HERVENLY MERCHINDISE





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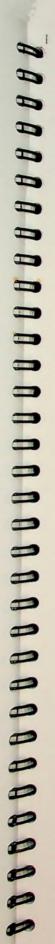
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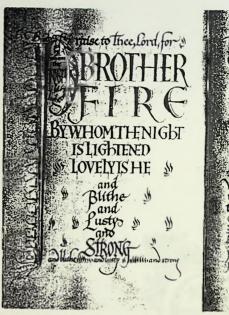
Johnston had been more concerned with the structure and perfection of letter forms. Irene Wellington recognised the potential of calligraphy to unite the visual and literary impact of a word. Her personal interpretion of the words is evident in her book entitled 'Song of the Creatures' (ill. 47) which was published in 1943. In carefully arranging the words and images and by subtle changes of colour, weight and style of letters she created a mood which reflected her own inner feelings on the text.

Concern with the expressive qualities of calligraphy is evident in the work of Hella Basu. Her calligramme of the old English poem 'Summer is icumen in' (ill.48) could be a wall hanging to be viewed, in the manner of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy, as a painting. The contrast between different types of letters and their abstract and expressive implications is crucial. Her type of treatment of letters has a decorative intent. She has aimed to re-examine the role of an ancient craft in a contemporary world. She has been quoted by Geoffrey Bensusan in 'Penrose' annual. "I like to take from our age as I see it, an element of freedom a richness in colour scheme, independance from horizontal alignment while maintaining on the other hand enough connections with the past through recognisable letter forms to preserve my reverence for the continuous element which connects the beautiful things of all ages."¹⁸

Anne Hechle, who also used lettering in a similar fashion in the layout of poems and aphorisms, concerns herself with the emotional pattern of words. Her quotation taken from 'March' by Edward Thomas (ill.49) reflects the sound as well as the meaning of the words. In this respect, her intent was close to that of Piech, however her words are still quite consciously composed and purely decorative.

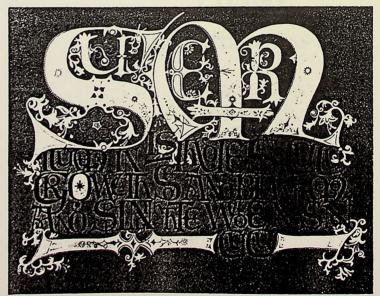
David Jones' poetic compositions are on a more serious level. His texts are almost all quotations, some from the Bible or from Latin hymns. They have been done privately, for himself, or



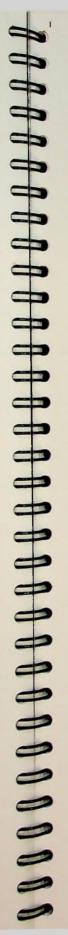


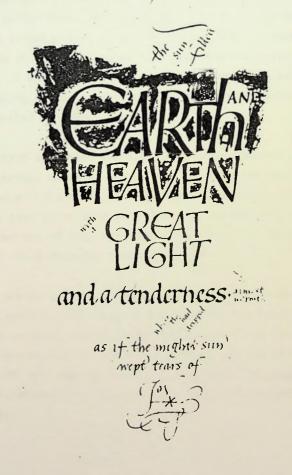


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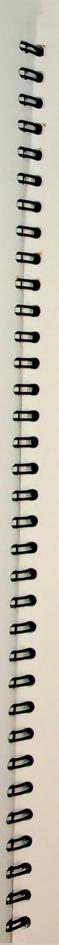




sometimes as Christmas greetings. The words are very personal reflecting his Welsh heritage and our continuing Roman history, his desire to create poetry and his involvement in Christianity. It is not only the words he aims to communicate but also his understanding of the words expressed through the medium. Each inscription is different with variation of texture of paper, colour and quality of print. Mood is expressed through colour and composition more so than variation of letter structure. Jones was more a painter than a calligrapher. His inscriptions have been painted on a ground of Chinese White, which enabled him to refine details. His letter forms were mostly uncial, miniscule and from early medieval inscriptions, as seemed appropriate. A change of colour in words of significance is a common characteristic of his work (ill.50). A more notable characteristic, however, is the very close spacing of the letters and closely packed lines, with the words separated by dots.

Piech has employed a similar technique of colour contrast to draw attention to certain words as may be seen in his fight for freedom poster "O'Liberty, Liberty, What crimes are Commited in Your Name" (ill.51). The text is in blue with 'Liberty' to whom he is addressing signified by the use of red, relating directly to the image of 'Liberty' with tears dripping down her cheeks.

On the whole, however, Piech's poster poems possess a much greater expressionist quality. In choosing the lino cut medium as opposed to ink or paint, he has given the letter forms free reign. They are continuously alive, almost leaping out at the observer. He always carves very rapidly working freely with the gouges, and has developed a distinctive 'Piech' style which is recognised internationally.



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Chapter 6

GERMAN EXPESSIONISM

There is no doubt that Piech's graphic style is strongly reminiscent of German Expressionism. The potential of the woodcut as a means of artistic expression was first exploited by Gauguin and Munch in the late nineteenth century. It achieved its highest degree of expression in the word of the Die Brucke during the Expressionist period in Germany in the early 1900's. In the search for the most direct formal means of expressing the essence of a subject, it became the characteristic medium of such artists as Kirchner, Heckel and Schmidt-Rottluff. It provided them with the opportunity to integrate text and illustration or a title page design.

The first to display this creative approach was Erich Heckel, in a woodcut title-page to <u>Die Ballade Vom Zuchthaus Zu Reading</u> (The Ballad of Reading Gaol) (ill.52) by Oscar Wilde. Heckel resembles Piech in the manner in which he reflects the general mood of the poem, as opposed to illustrating specific passages of the text. Thus, he successfully conveys the mood of the ballad.

In 1913 Kirchner designed a title page for Alfred Doblin's novella Das Striftsfraulein und der Tod ('The Canoness and Death') (ill.53) taking full advantage of the power of the woodcut medium. He referred to the woodcut as 'the most graphic of all graphic techniques'.¹⁹ His hacking technique results in the raw quality of the image. His best example of woodcut lettering is no doubt to be found in George Heym's book 'Umbra Vitae' (ill.54). Just as Piech became interested in Blake, Kirchner found his means of expression through Heym's poetry. The rawness of the letter forms creates a visual pattern of words which mingle together. The text reflects the atmospheric quality of the poem and is complemented by interrelated images referring to the subject. This integration of image and lettering echoes the spirit of the early illuminated book. These artists created an artistic unity of text and an expressionist style of illustration forming the basis of an excellent art.





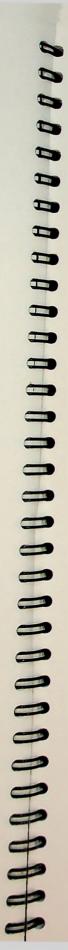
A number of periodicals published between 1910 and 1921 were created to communicate these new ideas of the Expressionists. The artists involved showed their deepest concern for humanity. Many shared the same ideas as Ludwig Meidner who proclaimed in Der Anbruch in 1919 "No longer shall the vast majority be forced to live in the most wretched, undignified and dishonourable conditions, while a tiny minority guzzles at an overloaded table. We must opt for socialism for a universal and progressive socialization of the means of production that gives every human being work, leisure, bread, a home and the sense of a higher goal. Socialism must be our New Creed!"²⁰ Die Aktion displays the extensive talent of the expressionists especially Conrad Felixmuller. This periodical contained predominantly anti-war images. It was directed towards a specific group of people, therefore the title page was given special attention, designed on the same basis as a poster, as may be seen in volume \overline{X} published in 1920 (ill.55). Felixmuller often used bold, startling imagery accompanied by a caption as a kind of introduction to the article.

Wilhelm Niemeyer's Die Kundung also played an important role in the development of creative typographic ideas. Although the journal was printed in Roman and Fraktur type which created disharmony with the expressionist style of illustration, woodcut lettering was employed on the covers and the first page. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff combined woodcut illustration and woodcut text forming a decorative page (ill.56) that is rich in contrasts. The covers display a very creative use of the medium in lettering, each number recognised by the use of a different colour of ink. He has used formal means of angular shapes and irregular alignment of letters. These journals were more collectors items than a political medium. The Dresden journal Menchen however, aimed at a universal brotherhood of man. the artists involved being idealists whose main concerns were anti-national socialism. The most important among these was Felixmuller, who designed the title page (ill.57) and numerous plates. These journals have a lingering influence due to the suggestive power of their design, through their urgency and



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forcefulness. This trait comes through very strongly in Piech's work. From his early student days, he was brought up on German Expressionism and the works of the great Latin-American wood-engraving artists. Also, many of his teachers of art in the Cooper Union College were Germans, late of the Bauhaus School. 21



FELIX STIEMER VERLAG DRESDEN

FELIX MÜLLER NUMMER Werbeblatt

tür die Felixmüller-Mappe (Felix Stiemer Verlag)

Fighteitig von der Nenet Kunst gepacht. erkaunte ich in ihr meinen Weg. Studierte schooll am m restalten, was mich bewegte Und gedrangt the meinem unsufriedenen Chatakter, gelangte ich hald zo den Kesultaten, die ich bier als meine Graphit seier. Eine kitschige Café Bans-Gaslampe, Schönbergs Pierrot Lunaire, the eckigenDichtungen Jacob van Soddia. die liken meiner Freunde, schautgerade Strassen die Evas von Lukas Granach und kleine Hågel in der Lundschaft sind die Entafinder meiner Exaltationers. Die Arlarit geschieht hastig. -aber unfat überstürzt. Erwärtet den Moment der Krife, um /u sherrn, und swingt mit felzoentent das Etichte - Gefühlte - Darchdachte mit bluger Hand Jum Nederschlag. - Nech ale war eine Kunst "der Kunst so nabe als die Now-Feinestir.

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Chapter 7

BEN SHAHN

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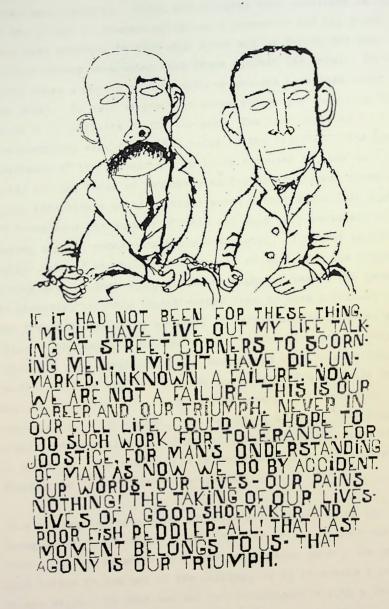
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Piech's admiration of the work of the American artist Ben Shahn seems to have influenced him to quite an extent. They share much in common in their concern for humanity. Shahn's political posters of the Second World War vivify his passions of the period. He also painted in a realist style depicting the social reality of America, during the depression, racial discrimination and unemployment. His social concern created the need to express his thoughts graphically.

Shahn used lettering in a directly expressive means as opposed to the unique personal messages of Die Bruke artists. It is this characteristic which puts him in direct comparison to Piech. Shahn chose a similar style of lettering with the intent of communicating clearly without sophistication. He created an individual style which did not appear consciously composed. The choppy line of his images is carried through to his letters resulting in complete harmony of both.

Shahn's folk alphabet, which is an integral part of his work, was acquired from close study and much practise. During the thirties he became interested in the hand lettered signs which he had seen along the highways. They appealed to him because they defied all the rules of lettering and balance which he had learned during a former apprenticeship. From an examination of the qualities which he found attractive, he then utilised these qualities in his alphabet in an appealing manner. The amateur letterers ignored the importance of the thick and thin elements in a letter, where a letter should be thick it was thin and vice versa. This characteristic is elaborated upon in Shan's 'Folk Alphabet', resulting in a naive appearance. The text as a whole creates an interesting pattern with blank streams flowing through his passages.

Consistency of lettering is an aspect which Shahn perfected. He used the same basic style throughout his text, a thin angular round with a broad horizontal. He has achieved a very personal effect in the use of his 'folk alphabet' in 'Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti' (ill.58). He shows his deep concern for social injustice



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since he has chosen to illustrate the immortal words of Bartolemeo Vanzetti, Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted in 1921 of the murder in Massachusettes of a paymaster and his guard. They were executed in 1927 when Shahn was in Europe and many demonstrations were being held there against the trial. In 1930 Shahn began a series of twenty-three gouache paintings based on the trial. In 1958 he produced three serigraphs combining Vanzetti's words with portraits of the two men. The text is based on a transcription made during the trial by the reporter. The peculiar treatment of the grammar and spelling are used to show that these words are the words of Vanzetti, an Italian immigrant himself. Shahn effectively combined these words with his own folk alphabet. "I first used the amateur of folk alphabet very seriously in making a print concerning Sacco & Vanzetti. I wanted to use the entire text of the historic statement of Vanzetti, the tragic words ending with ... that agony is our triumph. I wanted the words to be pictorial in their impact rather than to have a printed look. And I wanted them to be serious. The folk alphabet seemed appropriate to the halting English as well as the eloquent meaning of the words."²² The structure of the characters tend to slow down our reading ability but also enhance the effect of Vanzetti's broken English. Concentration on manner of speech is a recurring characteristic throughout. The resulting style of lettering is simple and beautiful but, above all, it is a potent image that remains in our mind. The simple type is complemented by the choppy style of drawing and the distorted characters.

This potency is reminiscent of Piech's presentation of the thoughts of Martin Luther King. However, Piech is much more intriguing as he works on a more spontaneous level. He creates each letter in the act of the cutting, so as to create a totally unique style. He does not set out intentionally with a letter-form in mind, but rather lets the medium speak for itself.

Although Shahn has used the same basic letter style throughout, his letters retain an urgency which a uniform type could not convey. "Say no to the No-Sayer" (ill.59), produced in 1964, shows the forceful





HE SAYS NO TO CIVILIZATION AND SURVIVAL HE VOTED AGAINST NUCLEAR TEST BAN CIVIL RIGHTS ACT TAX REDUCTION MEDICAL CARE FOR THE AGED MINIMUM WAGE LEGISLATION

SAY NO TO THE NO-SAYER VOTE JOHNSON Ben Shahn

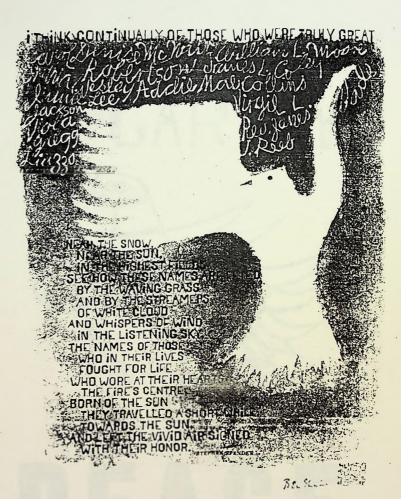
III. 59

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effect of the 'folk alphabet'. It is evident that Shahn was concerned with legibility to a greater extent than Piech.

During the 1960's Shahn expressed his concern for civil rights. He pays tribute to the ten civil rights martyrs in "I think continually of those who were Truly Great" (ill. 60). Written in a childlike letter style across the sky, the names appear as a visible pattern left by the dove in flight. There is a hint here of the youth and innocence of the victims. The ghostly effect which these names create, contrasts with the more formal style of lettering below. Shahn was also quite conventional in his imagery. The peace dove is a recurring trait used to greatest effect in his 1968 poster in support of Senator Eugene McCarthy entitled 'McCarthy Peace' (ill.61). McCarthy who opposed the war was favoured by many young people. Shahn was aiming to attract the attention of this section of the public through the colourful strips of the dove like bird. The lettering again is very simple 'McCarthy' written in Shahn's own folk alphabet in black, with the word 'Peace' below in a strong bold uniform typeface in blue. In viewing Shahn's work we can see that he shared much in common with Piech. In Psalm 133, (ill.62) he described his motivation as a'hopeless pleading for people to get together'.²³ It consists of a beautiful poem on the theme of brotherly love. The hand written style of lettering is harmonised by two doves; symbolising peace. By depicting one black and one white, Shahn echoes the struggle for racial equality through the words of the psalm. His concern for injustice derives from his Jewish background. He witnessed a period when millions of Jewish people were being exterminated. With his lingering sympathy he proclaimed, "I hate injustice, I guess that's about the only thing I really do hate."24 'Thou shalt not stand Idly By' (ill.63) testifies his deep commitment to the cause of racial justice. The title is taken from Leviticus 19:16: 'Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people; neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor.' The interlocking hands are employed as a symbol of unity and peace, quite in the same respect as Piech's "We are Tied Together" (ill. 8). This wiry line and light colour wash is a common characteristic of his illustration.





III. 60

MECARTHY





111.61

了空 Ĩ, Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for treathron to dwell together in unity: It is like the preciou ointment 13 upon the head that ran down For Zion: for there the Even life forevermore לא תעמד על-דם לעך "THOU SHALT NOT STAND IDLY BY." 114 認認 REn Shahn 111.63 75

However, Shahn has experimented with variations of style. His approach to each work depends on the type of subject as opposed to following any certain style. His economy of line reflects his extremely personal point of view. When commissioned to design a holiday card to complement a phonograph recording called 'Christmas in New York' (ill.64) Shahn used his 'folk alphabet' in a more stylised manner, by adding fish tales. The text is therefore recognisable as being less serious through the delicacy and refinement of the letter forms. The recording consisted of the children's thoughts on Christmas. He has complemented their words with the image of a little angel-like boy asking the question 'Who is God?'. He employed this same letter style in illuminating Christmas carols, such as 'A partridge in a pear tree' (ill.65).

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In 1954 Shahn redesigned and lettered a book, a colourful Hebrew legend entitled the Alphabet of Creation (ill.66). With a dislike of the current Hebrew style of lettering, he turned to the aramic form. The result is of a very effective and completely original arrangement of calligraphic forms, combining twenty-two letters of the alphabet. It has been used as an illustration in his book 'Love and Joy about Letters' and on the book's slipcases printed on the reverse. In this book, Shahn traces back his interest in calligraphy. "All letters of course were once pictures. Can one still discern the head of an ox in Adelph and Alpha & A? Can one see the horse in Beth and Beta and in B? Why does every Greek letter so resemble the Hebrew equivalent in its name - was that its origin? Have they a common origin? All this while the whole painstakingly almost painfully, the lip fixed between the teeth, contemplating, wondering about the mysterious the mystic relationship of the letters growing under one's hands."25 In 1960 Shahn had a seal made of a modified version of his alphabet. It forms a very attractive design when stamped in the traditional oriental orange colour. It is this pattern forming quality of the letters that puts Shahn in comparison to Piech.

Piech's love of letters and words has been expressed in poster form. The wonders of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet is expressed

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IND IS GOD?*WELL IT IS AN INVISIBLE PERSON AND HE LIVES 2P IN HEAVEN* I GUESS 2P IN OUTER SPACE HE MADE THE EATH AND THE HEAVEN & THE STARS AND THE SUN AND THE PEOPLE*HE MADE LIGHT HE MADE DAY HE MADE NIGHT*HE HAS SUCH POWER-FUL EYES HE DOESN'T HAVE MILLIONS AND THOUSANDS AND BILLIONS AND HE CAN STILL SEE US WHEN WE'RE BAD* HE STATED ALL THE PLANTS GROWING TO ME I THINK OF HIM WHO MAKES FLOWERS & GREEN GRASS & THE BLUE SKY & THE YELLOW SUN*GOD IS EVERYWHERE & I DON'T KNOW HOW HE GUID DO IT



111.64

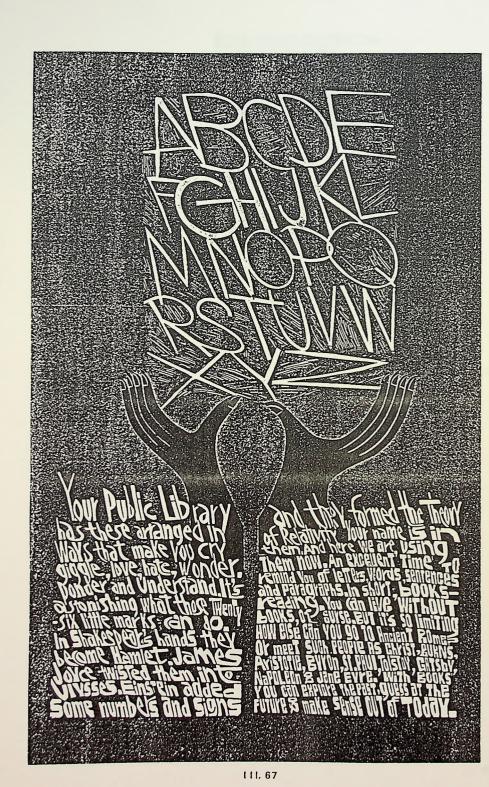
ON THE SEVENTH DAY OF CHRIST-MAS MY TRIE LOVE GAVE TO ME SEVEN SWANS ASWIMMING, SIX GEESE A-LAYING, FIVE GOLDEN RINGS, FOR COLLIE BIRDS, THREE FRENCH HENS, WO TIRTLE DOVES AND A PARTRIDGE IN A PEAR TREE



III. 66

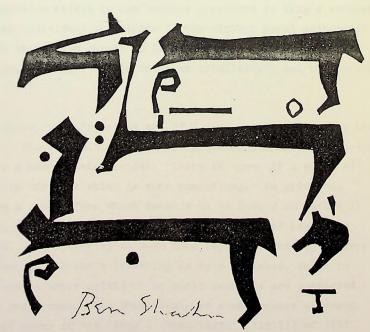
vividly by creating a block of letters encomposed by hands. (ill 67) In these hands the alphabet is open to endless potential. Piech has created a marvelous piece of text in which he states the importance of these letters - "Your public library has these arranged in ways that make you cry, giggle, love, hate, wonder, ponder and understand. It's astonishing what those twenty-six little marks can do. In Shakespeare's hands they become Hamlet. James Joyce twisted them into Ulysses. Einstein added some numbers and signs and they formed the theory of relativity. Your name is in them and here we are using them now, an excellent time to remind you of letters, words, sentences and paragraphs. In short, books - reading. You can live without books of course but it is so limiting how else can you go to ancient Rome ..." This love of letters has always been with Piech. While still at Junior School he used to do all the lettering for the information texts and other events, developing his love for letter forms. He did not receive any early training in typography, but developed his fluency with letters through much experimentation at the Taurus Press. Shahn's introduction to poetry and music was through the Old Testament's prayers and psalms, since his education consisted most of bible studies. The lettering used in copies of the old Testament was the basis of his first attempts at lettering. It is probably as a result that most of his letter forms are so consistant.

In his books, Shahn has used some passage of poetry or literature that he especially liked such as the passage from a Greek philosopher 'Maximus of Tyre', which he entitled '<u>On Dispute of</u> <u>Images</u> '(ill.68). The small book is composed totally of lettering and it shows the great freedom of letters that was to be found in his work. The image of the unpraised arm appears frequently in Shahn's work also, as a symbol of freedom. The seal appears at the bottom right-hand corner, forming an integral part of Shahn's signature. He liked his alphabet signature so much that he always took great consideration of the design as a whole in deciding where to position it. His love of calligraphy is evident in 'Hebrew Hallelujah' (ill.69). He had put aside his religious traditions



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111. 69

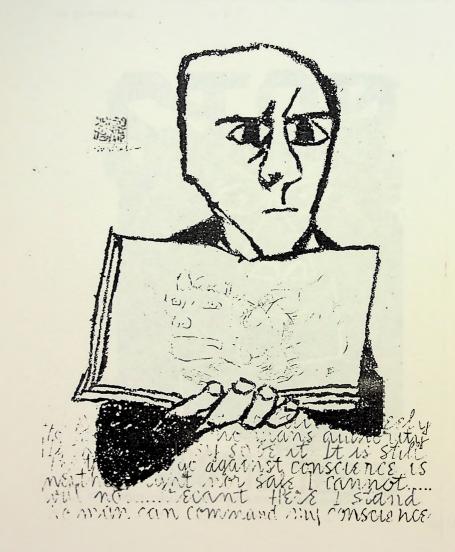
when he began his career to concentrate on his social concerns. Just before he died, he returned to this theme of religion in a new light, free from any moral ties. This arrangement of hebrew characters as in his '<u>Alphabet of Creation</u>', displays his love of letters.

A deep interest in the quotations of Martin Luther King has inspired Shahn to produce 'credos'. In his first 'credo' he incorporated a statement made by King at the Diet of Worms, in which he defended his beliefs. This is combined with the image of a fire beast that Shahn had developed previously to illustrate a fire tragedy. It is not quite clear what association the fire beast has with King. Perhaps it symbolises the burning at the stake, that threatened him. Six years later in 1966 he continued this theme depicting an angular man, holding a book bearing the image of the fire beast (ill.70) This is superimposed on the earlier 'Credo' quotation. The handwritten letter style relates directly to the image. The folk alphabet would in this case have appeared too ethnic. Its quality echoes the essence of the person portrayed. This quotation refers to the concept presented in King's manifesto that 'the individual conscience is the highest moral authority'. The fact that Shahn choose to illustrate these words of Martin Luther King show him to be an intellectual and philosophical artist.

On the whole, Shahn's prints are of a more controlled beauty than Piech's. His compositions usually appear consciously worked out. Piech is a much brasher artist. There is more of a sense of urgency in his work which is more compelling. He gives his messages a visual form which demands to be looked at before it is read, and expresses forcefully the character of his inner thoughts. His lettering is much more impulsive and his imagery more dramatic. Shahn's lettering is more polished, which is a distraction where political or moral messages are concerned. Only on one occasion has Shahn achieved such dynamic strength. The devil masks in his 'Stop H. Bomb Tests' (ill.71) of 1967

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suggests the evil threat imposed by hydrogen bomb tests. The word 'Stop' stamped over the black mask in red forms a visual barrier between the viewer and the mask, suggesting that evil can be prevented.

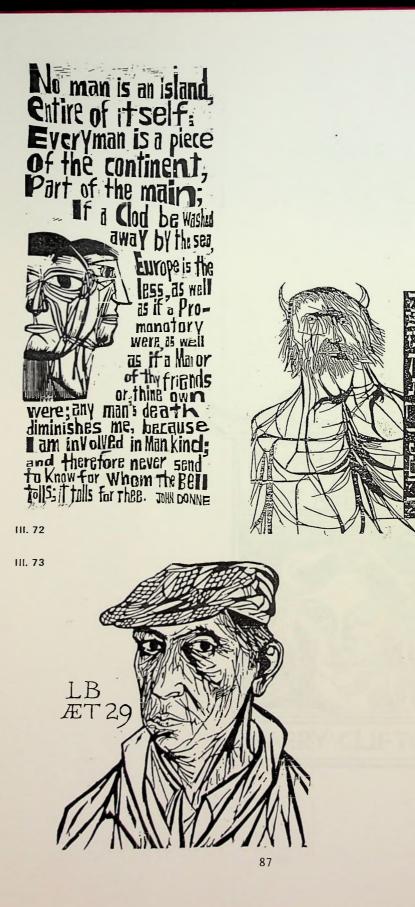


Chapter 8 COMPARISON/CONTRAST TO OTHER ILLUSTRATORS

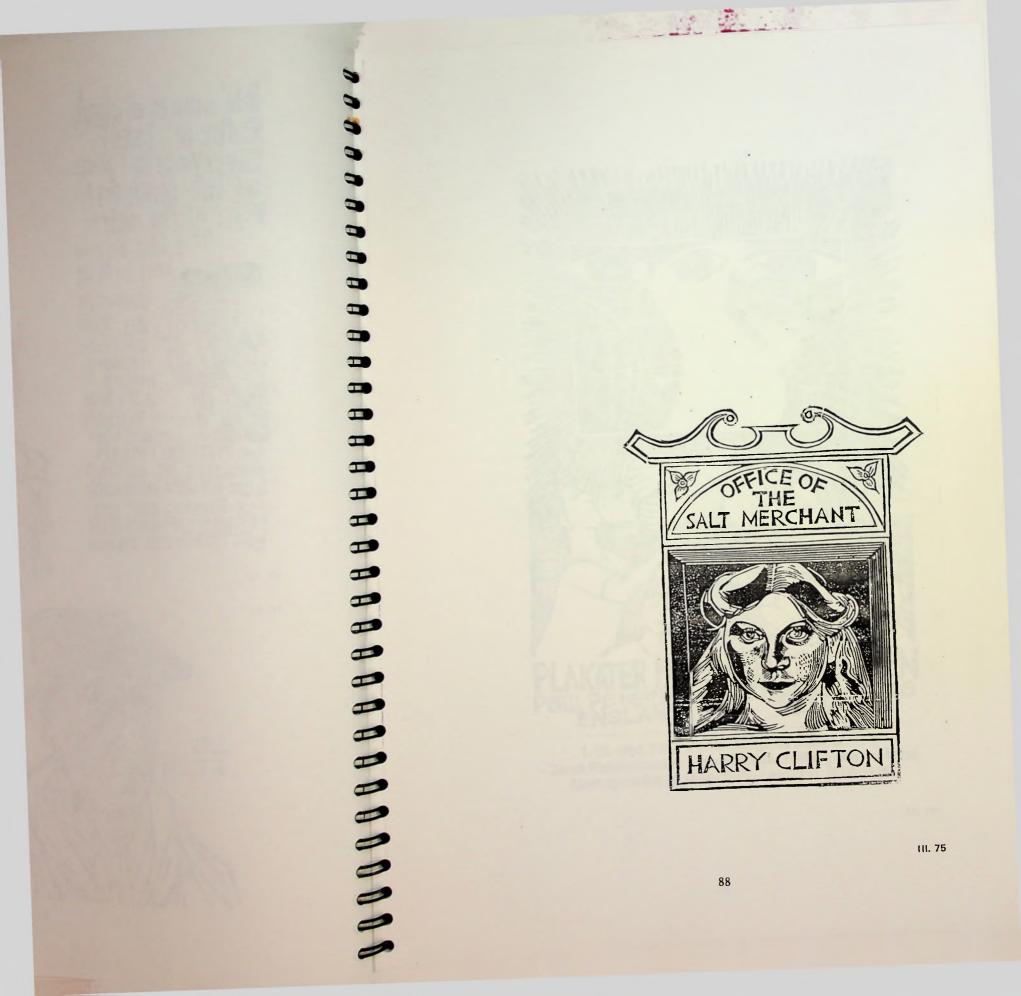
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Although Piech has treated many of his images in silhouette form, he also does experiment with different techniques. In rendering John Donne's poem "No Man is an Island" (ill.72) he treates the image in a linear fashion. The face is composed of lines suggesting the muscle beneath the skin. This intensification is slightly reminiscent of Leonard Baskin's self-portrait made in 1951 (ill.73). Baskin is also a sculptor and draughtsman and these skills show through in his graphic style. His figures are composed of a network of lines suggesting muscle and create a tense dramatic rhythm of form. The boldness of his lines create powerful striking images. His exploration of images and forms is carried out in woodcuts. Baskin has described the woodcut medium as "The most technically demanding of all graphic media other than mezzotint ... The wood engraving's vital quality lies in the complex of lines, wondrously fine and sharp and blazing in blackness on the white ground."²⁶ Concentrating on the theme of man and his condition, his images are more violent than Piech's. His woodcuts show his sensitivity to the medium and overwhelming power. A startling, sinister feeling characterises his work. His images are on a much more personal level, concentrating mainly on the horrors of humanity. His style has been heavily influenced by the Hebrew script. A composition of Hebrew letters has been used to create a very striking visual pattern in his woodcut entitled 'Moses' (ill.74). The spiky line unite both illustration and type.

In the work of both Baskin and Piech, it is the sheer violence of technique that composes the message. In contrast there is a lifelessness in the woodcuts of Michael Kane and Thomas Kruse. Kane may be seen in 'Office of the Salt Merchant' (ill.75). Thomas Kruse, a Danish artist, has concerned himself with some of the same themes as Piech, such as love and peace. They exhibited together in Denmark in September 1987. Kruse's work is much less sophisticated, his images treated in a more picturesque manner. An image from each artist was combined to form the advertising poster for the exhibition (ill.76). Piech's powerful image is domineering. His elegant dove in white silhouette against red, merges so gracefully between two faces. Its power is strengthened by the rays of hope



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1.-26. sept. 1987 - Peder Stougårds plakatsamling »Dansk Plakatmuseum« - Åby bibliotek - Feilbergsvej 7 - Åbyhøj Mandag-fredag kl. 14.00-20.00 - Lørdag kl. 10.00-14.00

beaming outwards. Kruse's image is much less intriguing. In an extremely representational style, he depicts a family united in the peace dove. His lettering is much less creative. There is very little to intrigue us to actually read his posters. In quoting Carl Scharnberg (ill.77) for instance, he is more concerned with a narrative illustration than with the words. He has not strayed from normal typographic rules. His compositions are more consciously composed and the text is given a definite baseline with a consistancy in letter size.

The woodcuts of the German artist Hap Grieshaber bear a much closer relationship to Piech's in terms of primitive force. The most commonly shared characteristic is their expressive intent and force which raises the human aspect above aesthetic consideration. This expressive quality is typically German. Both, use their prints to convey a similar message to the public, that of humanity. This is perhaps due to their war time experiences, since both served in World War II. Due to the National Socialist takeover in Germany Grieshaber was compelled to use his art as a weapon to defend humanity. His first prints in the form of old one side prints and block books were forceful statements expressing his concern for his country's freedom. His work is devoted to 'critical comments on abuses of our time'.²⁷ He has presented the woodcut print in a renewed form. There is a sence of poetic realism in his fascination with man. His human messages derive from images of plants, animals and men. He protests against the evils of the world, such as pollution, injustice and the torture of political prisoners.

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Both artists create compelling images, however, Grieshaber's woodcuts are intended to be 'indirectly, not directly, effective'.²⁸ He believes that art is either magic or politics, in the former case it is enough for it to be there and secondly, it must be displayed.²⁹ He did many woodcuts for <u>Spectrum</u> (ill.78), a Swiss magazine containing poetry, prose and graphic illustrations. His style is extremely reminiscent of Piech. The clenched fists



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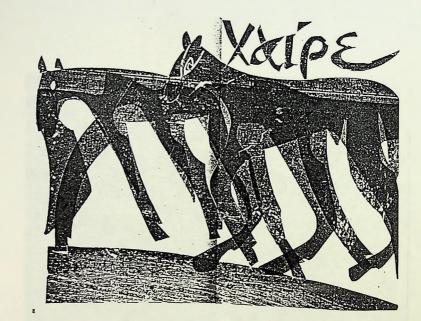
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protest in the same fashion as Piech's "Martyr of Freedom" (ill.36). His treatment of the medium is somewhat more ruthless. He is more temperamental in the way he handles the wood in such an unorthodox manner. This fierceness shows through in the scratch marks left by the wood cutting tools. His great urge to express is evident even in the way he makes use of the wood's texture, which creates a striking visual effect in an illustration of a publication for Martin Heidegger's 70th birthday entitled 'Ponies' (ill.79). The effect of motion enhanced by the overlapping of colours, blue-gray on yellow. Grieshaber has tackled the lettering with the same curvature as the image itself. These rhythmic letterforms appear as swift brushmarks. The act of cutting the wood provides him with great pleasure, "wood which often enough faced the hand to follow the moods of nature or to overcome them by an effort of the spirit"³⁰ It is the aesthetic quality of his work more than the images themselves that is most appealing. He employs colour as a vehicle of personal expression. "A splash of colour on a hoarding perhaps in the chaos of the cities, a felicity that is unexpectedly vouchsafed by the eye. This red or that blue, a sudden green is like a draught of fresh water administered to one perishing of thirst."³¹ He overprints his colours in an extensive range as may be seen in his "Stations of the Polish Way of the Cross" (ill.80). The woodblocks are faced with gold leaf and coloured white with a roller. Piech has seldom used such a combination of colours. Originally, for him 'Black was Beautiful', 32 the imposing effect he aimed to achieve was heightened by the dominant use of black . Piech's colour range is quite restricted, sometimes extended by the use of coloured papers. In more recent works, however, he has experimented with texture and wider range of colours achieving a more subtle effect. His most spectacular use of colour is probably the "Stations of the Cross" (ill.81) which he designed for the Catholic Church of Emmerich-am-Rhein, in West Germany. Piech printed these in the technique of Picasso, cutting an image printing it, then cutting away more and printing over and over again. The colours which he has chosen and the way in which he has used them, results in an interesting effect. Yet they are slightly confusing due to the fact that no single colour predominates. It is

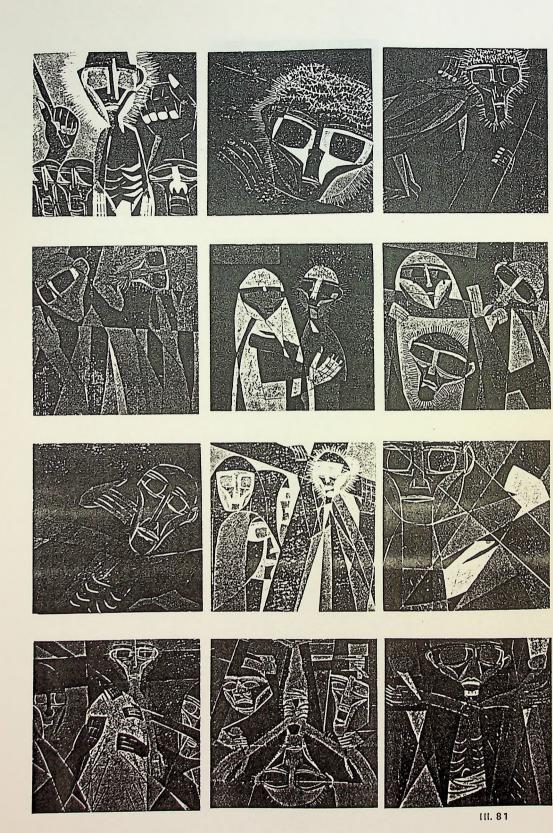
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the shades of colour which seem to be the unifying factor employed. The colours themselves are used as symbols. Black appears as a symbol of darkness and death, blue and green are signs of hope brown and ochre as nature and a bright orange as truth. Piech employs this striking tonal device to refer to the areas between hope and death, truth and darkness. This is a very direct and powerful approach to the Way of the Cross. The first station of the cross shows how his device worked. Christ is depicted, glowing in orange to symbolise truth, surrounded by blackened faces, symbolising evil. Piech and Grieshaber are seen to share much in common, not only in style but also motivation. Their desire to communicate their

concerns for humanity is extremely impulsive. In protesting against violence, they treat the medium with a compelling force.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

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The disturbing factor of Piech's work may be reminiscent of Hap Grieshaber on the basis of profound humanism. But the strength of his posters lies not alone in the bold, striking imagery, but even more compelling in his impulsive lettering which surpasses that of Ben Shahn. The reality in his impetus makes his manifestos unforgetable.

Piech is a man of many talents - artist, designer, craftsman and painter. He uses these skills, linking words and images to create a unique visual language. His work shows his mastery over his material bending each out of the tool of his own will. He not only shows concern with social and political issues but also his excitement with the actual process. "Starting with a clear sheet of paper", he says "and putting ink on it, that gives me the biggest thrill. I never get used to it."³³

Posters are often regarded as illustrations in which the images should complement the text. In contrast to skilled typographers Piech does not concern himself with usual rules of proportion and clarity. His text and illustrations relate not harmoniously but dramatically with tension built in. In this case, Piech does not encounter the problems of poster design which Felix Beltran a Cuban painter and poster designer pointed out: "The text is what makes the other images in the poster comprehensible and yet is often considered to be of secondary visual importance. In such cases what would clarify the image from a conceptual point of view in fact detracts from it because of size, positioning or form of the text. Such a divorce carries the poster closer to painting and away from its direct function, that of communication."

Although Piech's rigid and stylised form of lettering is reminiscent of the Die Brucke artists, his interest lies not so much in poetry but in his desire to stir emotions through comments

on social and political problems. This is particularly true in respect of Martin Luther King's quotations. Although many of these words are familiar, they are presented by Piech. They resound in our ears and have tremendous impact. Although his messages or his sophisticated messages may not appeal to everyone depicted in such a simple manner, one cannot excape the compelling force of his images and the unusual lettering.

He is quite selective in what style of lettering he uses for either prose or poetical works. With regard to political and social comments, most appear forceful with rather bold and emphatic letterforms.

Considered to a certain extent as political posters, they may be regarded as a propaganda. The question lies, therefore, will they lose significance with the passing of the occasion for which they were designed. No doubt, just as William Blake's work lives on, so to, will Piech's. The quality of his words and images will continue to live on. He is a continuing influence on contemporary designers. He exclaims "As an artist who now devotes all ones energies into social and political themes, I think my work plays a very important part in the recording of contemporary world events through graphics and the poster medium. And while commercial poster graphics still dominate the scene, this work that I do has a great influence on the younger generation of graphic artists and no doubt, will be an encouraging factor towards a greater awareness of the powerful force of future social graphics."³²

An archive of Piech's work is at present in the Victoria and Albert museum in London.

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¹ Heather Child, <u>More than Just Fine Writing</u> , (London: Pelham Press, 1986) p.14.
² Edward Johnston, <u>Writing & Illuminating & Lettering</u> (Bath: Pitman Press, 1977) p.10.
³ Berthold Wolpe, <u>Lessons in Formal Writing</u> , London: Lund Humphries Publishers Ltd. 1986 p.75.
⁴ Paul Peter Piech 'Taurus Press Comes to Wales'. <u>Oriel No. 2</u> (Autumn 1987) p.11.
⁵ Kenneth Hardacre, 'The Private Press of Paul Peter Piech', <u>Small Printer</u> (England, May 1987) p.119.
⁶ David Hale 'An artful tribute to Dr. King' <u>The Fresno Bee</u> (Sunday Jan, 8, 1984) p. J4.
7 Robert Frauenglas, 'Paul Piech picks a peck of posters' <u>Canarsie Digest</u> (April 25th 1983) p.5.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Dr. C. S. Chan Sandhu, 'The Real Holocaust', <u>Idea Magazine</u> (Japan, November 1983).
¹⁰ Ibid.
11 Frauenglas
¹² Gareth Davies, 'The Writings on the Wall says Paul' <u>Post Echo</u> (Monday, February 28th 1979)
¹³ C.S. Chan Sandhu
14 Davies
15 Frauenglas
16 Davies
17 Davies 'The Queen' <u>Observer Magazine</u> (June 24 1979)
¹⁸ Geoffrey Bensusan 'Calligraphic Capers' <u>Penrose Annual</u> Vol. 72 (London 1980) p.60.

¹⁹ Lothar Lang, <u>Expressionist Book Illustration</u>, London Thomas G. Hudson, 1976, p.41.

²⁰ Ibid p.72.

21 In questionnaire correspondence with Paul Peter Piech, Feb. 11 1988.

22 John D. Morse, <u>Ben Shahn</u>, London: Secker & Warburg 1972, p.162.

²³ Kenneth W. Prescott, <u>Prints and Posters of Beh Shah</u>n, New York Dover Publications 1982, p.18.

24 Ibid p.19.

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²⁵ Morse p.145.

²⁶ Alan Fern and Judith O'Sullivan, <u>The Complete Prints of</u> <u>Leonard Baskin</u> (New York: Little, Brown & Company 1930) p.8.

H. Baumeister, <u>Novum Gebrauchsgraphik</u>, Vol 46 (GFR Oct 1975) p.55.

²⁸ Hap Grieshaber, 'Hap Grieshaber' <u>Graphics</u> No. 173 Vol. 36 (1974-1975) p.256.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Hardacre p.123.

³³ Piech, 'What immortal Hand and Eye could frame thy fearful Symmetry' <u>Printing World</u>, May 14, 1978

³⁴ Reiner Diederick, 'Signs on the Wall' <u>Idea International Advert-</u> <u>ising</u> Art Vol. 31 No. 179 (Nov. 1983)

³⁵ Questionnaire correspondence with Piech (February 11th 1988).

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