



D A N I E L L E
F E L I C I A N O

If I believe anything about my craft it is that a good book is a symbiote of the tactile, the emotional, and the intellectual, not simply a mash up of paper, pictures, and words. Each of these three elements must be handled carefully in its turn so that they compliment one another and enhance the prose for which they were designed. A good book seems to always have existed. It is timeless, unaffected by the tide of trends, but rooted in the traditions of excellence.

This year, I have been exploring the book as a way to reconcile my love of image making and typesetting. The book provides a fertile environment for playing with this interaction between language and image. The works I am presenting here play with how the dominance of one element (type or image) can affect meaning. Clearly expressing content is something vitally important to both illustrators and graphic designers. I fall somewhere in between the two professions, but find this desire for clear communication to be key to my practice. That is not to say an image should always be overtly straightforward but that all the elements should be present for the willing viewer to untangle. Consequentially the study of Semiotics has played an important role in much of the work. I am very interested in the arbitrary qualities of the written language and have spent some time playing with letterforms as purely visual elements.

A second theme in my work, much related to the first, is the idea of duality. The idea of opposing forces: modern or antiquated, busy or sparse, definite or mysterious is something that I am constantly thinking about. Often I am torn between the gratifying drive to ornament and the noble ambition to streamline. I am looking to achieve balance and some works are more lavish in material and image style while others have a quieter presence and thrive on negative space. There is also an important play between modern and antiquated techniques in my work.

I am wholly unable (and unwilling) to abandon the mystique of the handmade object - in spite to the fact that many designers and illustrators have embraced the shift. I count myself among those who embrace the return to craft and seek to be a new old masters. I believe a skillful handling of medium facilitates a deeper relationship with content. One should not simply repeat the past through rote, empty creations, but instead innovates by re-interpreting and revitalizing past ideas and habits. Our ties to history are not shackles, they are roots from which unlimited new and vibrant life can spring.

I have been learning that fine book design begins with the blank page. The typography and images that follow will be guided by the negative space created during this stage. I believe that designing the shape of the page is of equal importance to designing the type and images that will fill it. I revel in the creativity that can blossom within a restricted format like the book page. Unique details

like handmade paper, silk cloth, and gilding provide ways to create focus in the text and invite the reader to explore. In my practice I am drawn to more decadent materials. I prefer those with historic significance and those that retain the natural variations of animal skins or artifacts from the hand of the maker. The feeling of the materials allows the reader to have a tactile interaction with the words and images within.

Typography, I am told, is an invisible art. When practiced with exceptional skill it is felt rather than seen. My studies in calligraphic writing and letterpress printing have been the gateway to a deeper relationship with letterforms. Where illustrations speak to emotion, and book bindings to the visceral, type speaks to the intellect. Typesetting is perhaps the most conservative of these three arts and consequentially the most affected by tradition. Typefaces are like tribes, each has its own history, customs, and dress and so they must be treated with great cultural sensitivity. Understanding the qualities that differentiate a Baroque English typeface from a Post-modern German one and how these qualities define their applications is one of typography's many subtleties.

The third element to bookmaking is the image. While not all books have or need images, my book work puts an emphasis on the visual as a mode for storytelling. I believe the image provides the opportunity to say something the text does not. Images should enhance the overall product by giving the reader a space to contemplate without waking him/her from the fictive dream. Illustration is perhaps the most obvious place to play with Semiotic's three types of signs: the icon, index, and symbol. I have tried to push my illustration to a new level by merging it with type in unexpected ways. In these works I don't want to sit an image beside type like an appendage. I want the image to feel as vital as the words.

This year has been a vital proving ground for my work and habits. I have sought to challenge myself both technically and conceptually so that I can evolve beyond the canon of simply "pretty images". As the year progresses I hope to deepen the allegory of my work and refine my technical skills simultaneously by continuing to traverse the world of print.