Proposal II: The Information Spiral....

Project Materials: ceramic, wood, metal, silk-screened plexiglass, found objects, resin, LED strip, and electric lights.

Project Team: Margie Hughto, artist (team Leader)
Shawn Rommevaux, currently S.U. staff, admissions office, BFA Ceramics Degree S.U.
Shawn O'Connor, 2nd year grad student, ceramics
Randy Jones, 2nd year grad student
2 ischool graduate students (to be selected) to assist with research and info for the chosen images, symbols and words.

Idea/Inspiration for this site-specific work

After attending the information session on April 2, I immediately thought about incorporating a ceramic tile format into part of this project. Images of the Aztec Calendar, cave walls, and Rossetta Stone could be used. The Phaistos Disc in which sights were pressed into the wet clay and then baked was, as I remember, referred to as the first typewritten document. Hieroglyphs, script, alphabets, pictograms could all be used for other elements to bring in further texture and drawing. All of this could really work on the concrete wall. Further elements relating to billboards, street signs and LED information strips would add further details, and some could be free standing in the space. The window sill on the outside of the windows could appear to be extended and have on it “found objects,” (possibly encased in resin) relating to information, such as phones, calculators, books etc. And finally some text could be silk-screened onto the windows, possibly in a grid pattern. Some outdoor lighting would add additional drama to this artwork.
Creating and Installing the Work

Special ceramic tile areas for the concrete wall would be produced by myself and Shawn Rommevaux, Shawn O’Connor, and Randy Jones. Although I have a general idea of the drawing and configuration of the artwork for the wall, I really look forward to working with ischool students to choose the “information” incorporated into the final artwork. (see attached sketch) Free standing “signs” placed on the gravel floor would be constructed of metal and silk-screened plexiglass. An extended outdoor window sill could have a number of “found objects” placed on it. And finally some silk-screened text would appear in a pattern on the windows.

Cost of Materials:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stoneware Clay, glazes and adhesives</td>
<td>$900.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paint and tools suitable for concrete wall</td>
<td>$300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood for window sills</td>
<td>$200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal—some fabrication</td>
<td>$500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resin</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plexiglass</td>
<td>$300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found objects</td>
<td>$200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LED lights</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$2,500.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Credits for the “team members”  S.U. staff member, Shawn Rommevaux and the two ceramic grad students would greatly benefit from the 3 credits in order to complete their education. Possibly 2 ischool students.

Next Step:  If this project goes forward a detailed model could be presented showing all the colors, and textures, materials and ceramic artworks included in this site specific artwork. The committee would also meet the project team.
ON THE WINDOWS 2
Pictography

Common sense suggests that many written symbols began life as pictures, and a consensus among scholars supports this idea. What could be easier to ‘read’ than a pictogram of a person, a cow, a snake or a tree? In fact, pictograms are not as simple as they appear. Here are twelve early Chinese pictograms, dating to 1200–1045 BC, and eighteen Sumerian pictograms from c. 3000 BC. Try to guess their meanings before reading the answers below.

![Pictograms]

**Tripod**
**Opening/mouth**
**Elephant**
**Fish**
**Sheep/ram**
**Moon/month**
**Basket**
**Horse**
**Pelt**
**Field**
**Woman**
**Turtle**

**Hand**
**Pig**
**Head**
**Day**
**Orchard**
**Walk, stand**
**Cow**
**Bird**
**Fish**
**Eat**
**Reed**
**Barley**
**Pot**
**Donkey**
**Ox**
**Well**
**Date-palm**
**Water**

Drawing of a shaman, Tungus, Manchuria.

Prehistoric rock carving, Camonica Valley, northern Italy.

The roots of writing are to be found in earlier ‘symbolic’ codes, generally with pictures but also with simple lines, notations, etc. Commonly known as ‘notational’ systems, these have become known as **‘hieroglyphics’**. M. C. J. P. M. van Berkel, a fascinating archaeologist, has argued that these notations were more symbolic than they first appear and could be read with the same ease as modern symbols.

To underline this, he points out that the notations do not mean anything in themselves but are generally used to signify any of many things, such as, for example, the ‘waist’ or the ‘waistcoat’ (WC). Such cursory reading of the ‘barlows’ is akin to looking at the kind of tables and plans that children learn from at school. As they learn, they become able to read the meaning of the symbols and use them to communicate meanings from one to another.

Significance of Pictograms

Pictograms are symbols, and often provided the design for cave paintings and rock carvings. They could represent a person, an animal, a plant, a plant part, a place, an object, an action, or an event. They were used in ancient cultures as a means of communication and were often accompanied by other symbols or drawings. Pictograms are a form of visual language and are often considered to be the precursor to writing. They are found in a variety of cultures, including Chinese, Egyptian, and Sumerian, and are often used in the study of human evolution and communication development.
In measuring time, the Maya began by combining the numerals 1 to 13 with 20 named days. We can visualize this with two interlocking wheels; the days are on the upper wheel, with their glyphs and their names in Yucatec Mayan. The date shown is:

- 1 Imix
  (earth being, world, crocodile)

In 4 days’ time the date will be (revolve the wheels in your mind):

- 5 Chicchan
  (snake)

In 13 days’ time the lower wheel will have completely revolved and the date will be:

- 1 Ix
  (jaguar)

In 20 days’ time, the upper wheel will have completely revolved and the date will be:

- 8 Imix

The Dresden Codex is full of dates like these, as we shall see shortly.
Babylon, King of the whole country of Amurru, King of Sumer and Akkad, King of the Four Quarters of the World; and he promised that if his laws were obeyed, then all his people would benefit. ‘Writing’, wrote H. G. Wells in his *Short History of the World*, ‘put agreements, laws, commandments on record. It made the growth of states larger than the old city states possible. The command of the priest or king and his seal could go far beyond his sight and voice and could survive his death.’

Yes, regrettably, Babylonian and Assyrian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Mayan glyphs of Central America, carved on palace and temple walls, were used much as Stalin used posters about Lenin in the Soviet Union: to remind the people who was the boss, how great were his triumphs, how firmly based in the most high was his authority. At Karnak, in Egypt, on the outer wall of a temple, there are carved representations of the battle at Kadesh fought by Ramesses II against the Hittites, around 1285 BC. Hieroglyphs recount a peace treaty between the pharaoh and the Hittite king, and celebrate a great Egyptian victory. But another version of the same treaty found at the Hittite capital Boghazköy turns the battle into a win for the Hittites!

The urge for immortality has always been of the first importance to writers. Most of the thousands of known fragments written by the Etruscans, for instance, are funerary inscriptions. We can read the name, date and place of death because they are written in an adaptation of the Greek alphabet; but that is about all we know of the enigmatic language of this important people, who borrowed the alphabet from Greece, handed it on to the Romans, who in turn gave it to the rest of Europe. Decipherment of the Etruscan language is like trying to learn English by reading nothing but gravestones.

Another purpose for writing was to predict the future. All ancient societies were obsessed with what was to come. Writing allowed them to codify their worries. Among the Maya it took the form of bark-paper books elaborately painted in colour and bound in jaguar skin; the prognostications were based on a written calendrical system so
The Phaistos Disc

The Phaistos disc. It is about 6\(\text{in} (16 \text{cm})\) in diameter and about \(\frac{1}{4}\) in \((1.2 \text{cm})\) thick. There is a total of 242 signs either stamped or punched on the two faces, arranged into 61 groups demarcated into boxes by lines. It appears that the signs were written from the outer edge, and spiral inwards in a clockwise direction.

The greatest puzzle among the scripts of ancient Crete is the unique Phaistos disc. It was discovered in 1908 by an Italian excavator in the ruins of a palace at Phaistos in southern Crete, in an archaeological context suggesting that the date of the disc was not later than about 1700 B.C. — in other words contemporary with Linear A. It is made of baked clay and on either side is an inscription, which consists of signs impressed on the wet clay with a punch or stamp. The Phaistos disc is therefore ‘the world’s first typewritten document’, in the words of John Chadwick, the collaborator of Michael Ventris.

But why should anyone have bothered to produce a punch/stamp, rather than inscribing each sign afresh as in Linear A and B? If it was to ‘print’ many copies of documents, then why have no other documents in this script been found in over 80 years of excavation? And why do the signs on the Phaistos disc fail to resemble any of the signs of the ‘hieroglyphic’ script, Linear A or Linear B? Could the disc have been imported into Crete? Could it be a fake? There are very few clues as to the meaning of the script, and no reliable answers. The signs themselves are of little help since they resemble no other Minoan signs, are few in number and enigmatic in appearance; and the language behind the signs is a total unknown. The context of discovery is of no help either, since only one sample of the script exists. The only hope of a decipherment is for a cache of similar inscriptions to be found. Until then, the frequent attempts at decipherment (many of them cranky) are pointless, says Chadwick. ‘We must curb our impatience, and admit that if King Minos himself were to reveal to someone in a dream the true interpretation, it would be quite impossible for him to convince anyone else that his was the one and only possible solution.’
Chapter 1  Reading the Rosetta Stone

The Rosetta Stone, key to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs.
Champollion Breaks the Egyptian Code

The full decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs is the work of Jean-François Champollion, who announced it in 1823. Born in 1790 during the French Revolution, he was unable to attend early school. Instead, he received private tuition in Greek and Latin, and by the age of nine, it is said, he could read Homer and Virgil. Moving to Grenoble to attend the Lycée, he came into contact with the mathematician and physicist Fourier, who had been secretary of Napoleon’s Egyptian mission. It was Fourier who launched the young Champollion into Egyptology. In 1807, aged not yet seventeen, Champollion presented a paper on the Coptic etymology of Egyptian place-names preserved in the works of Greek and Latin authors. Three years later, after studying oriental languages in Paris in addition to Coptic, Champollion returned to Grenoble and began serious study of Pharaonic Egypt.

In 1819, Thomas Young published his ideas on the Egyptian script in a *Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (4th edition). He had already communicated them by letter to Champollion. But Champollion at first ignored them and continued to believe that the hieroglyphs were entirely non-phonetic; in 1821 he published an article to this effect. He and Young were undoubtedly rivals, and there is still doubt as to how much Champollion was influenced by Young’s work; he certainly took pains to dismiss it in his chief book on Egyptian writing. However, there can be no question about Champollion’s originality and rigour, which was based on a knowledge of Egypt and its languages far superior to Young’s.

This obelisk was excavated at Philae by William Bankes, who took it back home to Britain, where it now stands at Kingston Lacy in Dorset. In 1822, it provided Champollion with a crucial clue.

Four cartouches drawn by Champollion:
(1) Ptolemy (Rosetta Stone);
(2) Ptolemy with royal title (Rosetta Stone);
(3) Ptolemy (Philae obelisk);
(4) Cleopatra (Philae obelisk).
signs, I see ... clearly that it is to the interest of the Republic of Letters and especially of students, that learned men should reach agreement on signs.

There is today a general (if obscure) wish to view logographic writing as 'holistic', rather than 'reductionist' like alphabetic writing; as the writing of the colonized rather than the colonizer, the virtues of which have been overlooked; and as being capable of expressing thoughts more subtly, humanly and mercurially than phonographic symbols, which are seen as artificial, even inherently authoritarian. Pure logography thus becomes a kind of Utopia, in which language barriers no longer exist and we all fraternally communicate through universal symbols. (Ironically, the existence of two fundamental writing systems is regarded by its advocates as better than
might be summarized as ‘only dissect’.

The increasing visual bias of 20th-century culture reinforces the seductiveness. In the industrialized world we are surrounded by powerful imagery. We depend on the word, whether spoken or printed, much less than previous generations. Cinema, not literature, has been the art form of the century. Cinema’s capacity to engage mass audiences worldwide subliminally suggests that a language of images is feasible and natural. We tend to forget how important words actually are to movies.

There is a parallel between the development of cinema and of writing systems. In order to tell a story, most silent movies were periodically compelled to insert caption cards, printed or hand-written; the images alone could not cope. And of course once ‘talkies’ were introduced, the silent cinema quickly perished. Even the greatest film artists did not feel a need to eschew sound in the interests of cinematic purity. Jean Renoir wrote of sound: ‘I didn’t know how to see until about 1930 when the obligation of writing dialogue brought me down to earth, and established a real contact between the people I had to make talk and myself.’ As for the audience, it immediately embraced talkies. Today, to watch a silent film – even one of the most imaginative – is to feel that something is missing. The same is true, a fortiori, of our reaction to one of the early Sumerian tablets from Uruk or a series of unknown pictograms such as those on page 210. They lack a dimension. The introduction of sound revolutionized cinema; the introduction of phonography turned proto-writing into full writing.

The Evolution of Writing

If this is a valid parallel, in what sense can we speak of modern writing having ‘evolved’ from ancient writing? Until the last few decades it was universally agreed that over centuries western civilization had tried to make writing a closer and closer representation of speech. The alphabet was naturally regarded as the pinnacle of this conscious search: the Chinese script, conversely, was generally thought of as hopelessly defective. The corollary was the belief that as the alphabet spread through the world, so eventually would mass literacy and democracy. Scholars – at least western scholars – thus had a clear conception of writing progressing from cumbersome
Modern ‘Hieroglyphs’
Are the huge claims made for the efficiency of the alphabet then perhaps misguided? Maybe writing and reading would work best if alphabetic scripts contained more logograms standing for whole words, as in Chinese and Japanese writing and (less so) in Egyptian hieroglyphs? Why is it necessarily desirable to have a sound-based script? What, after all, has sound got to do with the actual process of writing and reading?

We have only to look around us to see that ‘hieroglyphs’ are striking back – beside highways, at airports, on maps, in weather forecasts, on clothes labels, on computer screens and on electronic goods including the keyboard of one’s word processor. Instead of ‘move cursor to right’, there is a simple ⇨. The hieroglyphs tell us where we must not overtake, where the nearest telephone is, which road is a motorway, whether it is likely to rain tomorrow, how we should (and should not) clean a garment, and how we should rewind a tape. Some people, beginning with the philosopher and mathematician Leibniz in the 17th century, even like to imagine that we can invent an entire written language for universal communication. It would aim to be independent of any of the spoken languages of the world, dependent only upon the concepts essential to high-level philosophical, political and scientific communication. If music and mathematics can achieve it, so the thought goes – why not more generally?

This book shows why that dream, appealing as it is, can never become a reality. Writing and reading are intimately and inextricably bound to speech, whether or not we move our lips. Chinese characters do not speak directly to the mind without the intervention of sound, despite centuries of claims to the contrary by the Chinese and by many western scholars. Nor do Egyptian hieroglyphs, notwithstanding the beauty of their symbols and the fact that we can recognize people, animals, objects and the natural world depicted in them.

Aristotle called the basic unit of language – by which he meant both spoken and written language – ‘gramma’. Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of modern linguistics, said of language that it might be compared to a sheet of paper. ‘Thought is one side of the sheet and sound the reverse side. Just as it is impossible to take a pair of scissors and cut one side of the paper without at the same time cutting the other, so it is impossible in a language to isolate sound from thought, or thought from sound.’ We have just begun to understand the mental processes in speaking, we understand still less about those in reading and writing, but we may be sure of this: full writing cannot be divorced from speech; words, and the scripts that employ words, involve both sounds and signs.
温州