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CoRReLAtION  
M a T *R* | X  
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CONTEMPORARY

LETTERPRESS

ART

BY

VIDA

SACIC

&

DAVID

WOLSKE



CATALOGUE NUMBER

16—006

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WITH THE EXHIBITION:*

# **CORRELATION MATRIX**

**CONTEMPORARY LETTERPRESS ART  
BY VIDA SACIC & DAVID WOLSKE**

**AUGUST 22 - NOVEMBER 6, 2016**

**Artists**

Vida Sacic

David Wolske

**Writer**

Martha Chiplis

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**Museum Director**

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T Y P E  
& F E T t E B  
O R M S

Essay by  
MARTHA CHIPLIS

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Graphic designers are trained to look at type, observe the forms of the letters, to assess their abstract qualities. Digital letters have no tactile quality, they are made of zeros and ones, and appear flat on the screen. Letterpress printers can touch three-dimensional metal and wood type, learning about it in a haptic manner, adding that understanding to the visual. The brain accesses and retrieves information in one way using visual perception; and in a different way using multiple senses.

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THE FIRST MOVABLE TYPE CREATED BY GUTENBERG imitated hand-drawn letters as closely as possible. His success relied on his ability to create a representation of the ideal manuscript that the viewer, his readers, would accept and appreciate. As the technology of type changed over time, type design has changed to accommodate it, or in response to it. Now it is often based on other models, for example, carved Roman letters instead of hand drawn. Letters are constructed out of vectors, dots and pixels to make them readable by our computers, in addition to our human brains. Our brains, as soon as we learn to read, accept the machine-inflected forms of digital type without question.



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## Weather Prophets #2

Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2014*

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# W O P D t Y P E

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DARIUS WELLS ISSUED THE FIRST WOOD TYPE CATALOG in 1828. Wood type, intended for printing advertising posters, at first imitated sign painting to some extent—large audacious wood letters designed to make printing and reading easy. The industry expanded throughout the 19th century when a fantastic variety of designs were created, each more novel than the next.

We are lucky to still have some wood type today. Copious amounts of it were tossed into the trash in the 1960s, after it fell out of favor. Wood type now is desirable again not only by printers, but by non-printers for its decorative quality. New wood type, fueled by the demand, is being made again. Much of the old wood type that survived is battered; it shows its age, with dents and dings, even broken into pieces.

Old wood type is printed with all its dings, and appreciated for them. This “wood type aesthetic” is rampant in graphic design. New digital fonts have been created with digital “dings.” The aesthetic is seen in advertisements on train platforms in Chicago, on every bus shelter. The wood type aesthetic is hard to resist, like a vintage car with distressed matte black paint and perfect red pinstripes painted over it.

Letterpress printing since Gutenberg has required craftsmanship: in type design, manufacture of materials, page design, and in the printing itself. When we exhibit letterpress prints in a gallery, the implication is that they are not only prints with good craftsmanship, they are art.



**Electric Biology #48**

Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2014*





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STUTTER No. 1

DAVID WOLSKE

**Stutter No. 1**

David Wolske

*Relief, Letterpress, 2014*

# "ORIGINAL ART" & LETTERPRESS

HISTORICALLY, LETTERPRESS HAS BEEN CLASSIFIED as "reproductive," not "original." "Printmaking," that is etching, lithography, woodcut, or linoleum cut, is what we call printing when it is original art.

The American Print Alliance, a consortium of non-profit printmakers' councils in the United States and Canada, accepts as "original" only prints for which the artist designed and created the matrix, permitting electric tools and even photographic techniques, but no copyists—though others could print with the artist's supervision. (<http://www.printalliance.org/resources/reprintspolitics.html>)

Vida Sacic and David Wolske's work is original art. The idea of using existing materials to make a print or a piece of art began with Picasso and Braque: it is called collage. Taking the tools and materials of a technology made largely obsolete by the onset of offset lithography and now digital printing, Sacic and Wolske repurpose them in a letterpress printed collage, making the tools and found matrices their own in ways that were not anticipated by the manufacturers.

They each print with a Vandercook proof press, like drawing with a pencil, or painting with a brush. Each existing block, plate or letter is moved, printed, rearranged, and printed again. The result has even the most informed viewer wondering—how was it done? In the letterpress process, everything that is printed from, every matrix, must be type high, .918", and everything about the process is designed to work with the grid. In Sacic and Wolske's work the laws of letterpress printing are rewritten—the grid is transcended, letters disappear, and new and beautiful things are brought forth. The resulting work is sometimes strongly rational, in other cases emotionally resonant.

## Homograph No. 6

David Wolske

*Relief, Letterpress, 2014*



1/5

*HOMOGRAPH No. 6*

*DAVID WOLSKE*

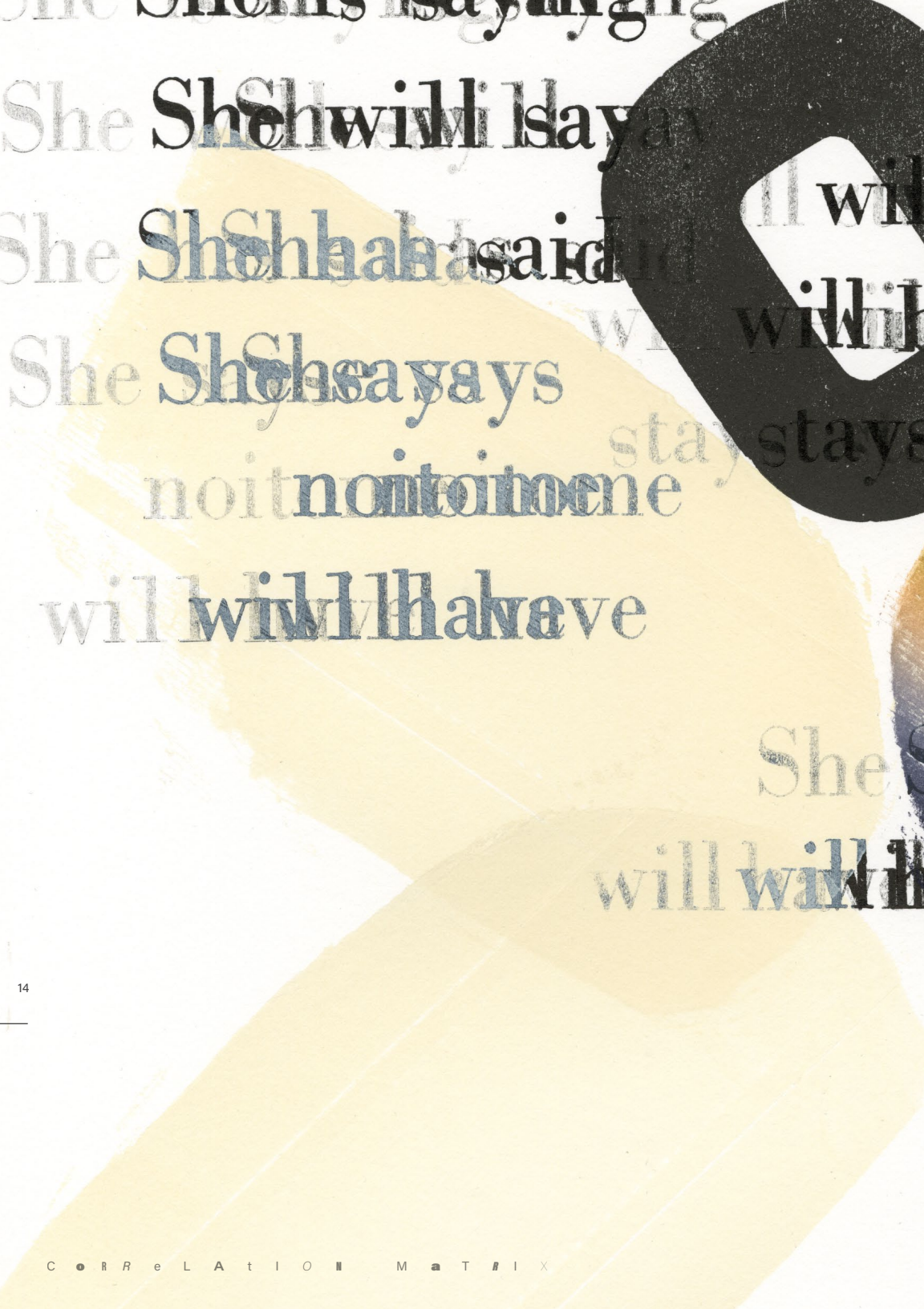
V i D A

Click-click of the press as it  
trips, fingers grip the handle,  
cylinder rolls down the bed. Feet  
clad in black tennis shoes step  
forward and back. Metal type,  
48 point at least, is arranged and  
rearranged. Stories of family,  
connections. Hand-inked with  
pink and yellow, irregular ovals,  
black screens overlapping.

Trusting that being in the studio will lead to something. Standing in front of the Vandercook SP20, gazing off to the corner of the shop to see the Columbian there. The lightbulb moment finally comes: frisket and stencil inform each other. Deciding to use the letters WORD, but make it different every time. The realization that “I could do this forever.”

These moments and hours in the letterpress studio are what drive the work of Vida Sacic and David Wolske. Individually and together, they are expanding the definition of letterpress printed work, beyond the world of graphic design and fine press printing, into fine art. ■

**D** a **V** i d





**Body In Motion**

Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2015*

stay in  
in motion  
in motion

She said  
have emotion

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# Vida S: i A C i C

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Vida Sacic describes her first exposure to letterpress as a graduate student at Indiana University with Professor Paul Brown, the award-winning graphic designer and long-time letterpress printer. “I remember being alone in the type shop on a lazy warm Sunday afternoon and spreading the oozing ink on the mixing glass, admiring the texture. The process of mixing ink still feels to me like painting, a medium I associate with my early childhood and growing up with artists.”

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AT THE TIME, SACIC SAYS, SHE DID NOT INTEND to continue printing. But when she joined the faculty at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU), a Vandercook SP15 abandoned on campus was brought to her attention and called out to her. Sacic felt that she “had no choice but to restore the press.” It needed to be brought back into operation, and she needed to be the one to make it happen.

As she learned about the equipment and met the Chicago print community, she felt the pull of the medium. It is important that Sacic refers to “the print community” and not “the letterpress community” in Chicago. She names her contemporaries as her strongest influences: graphic designers and printers of different types. In Chicago, there is Jen Farrell of Starshaped Press (letterpress printer), Nadine Nakanishi and Nick Butcher of Sonnenzimmer (screenprinters and designers), Alexander Valentine (offset printer), and Chad Kouri (screenprinter and designer).

**Murmur**

Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2014*





STRAWberry

murmur

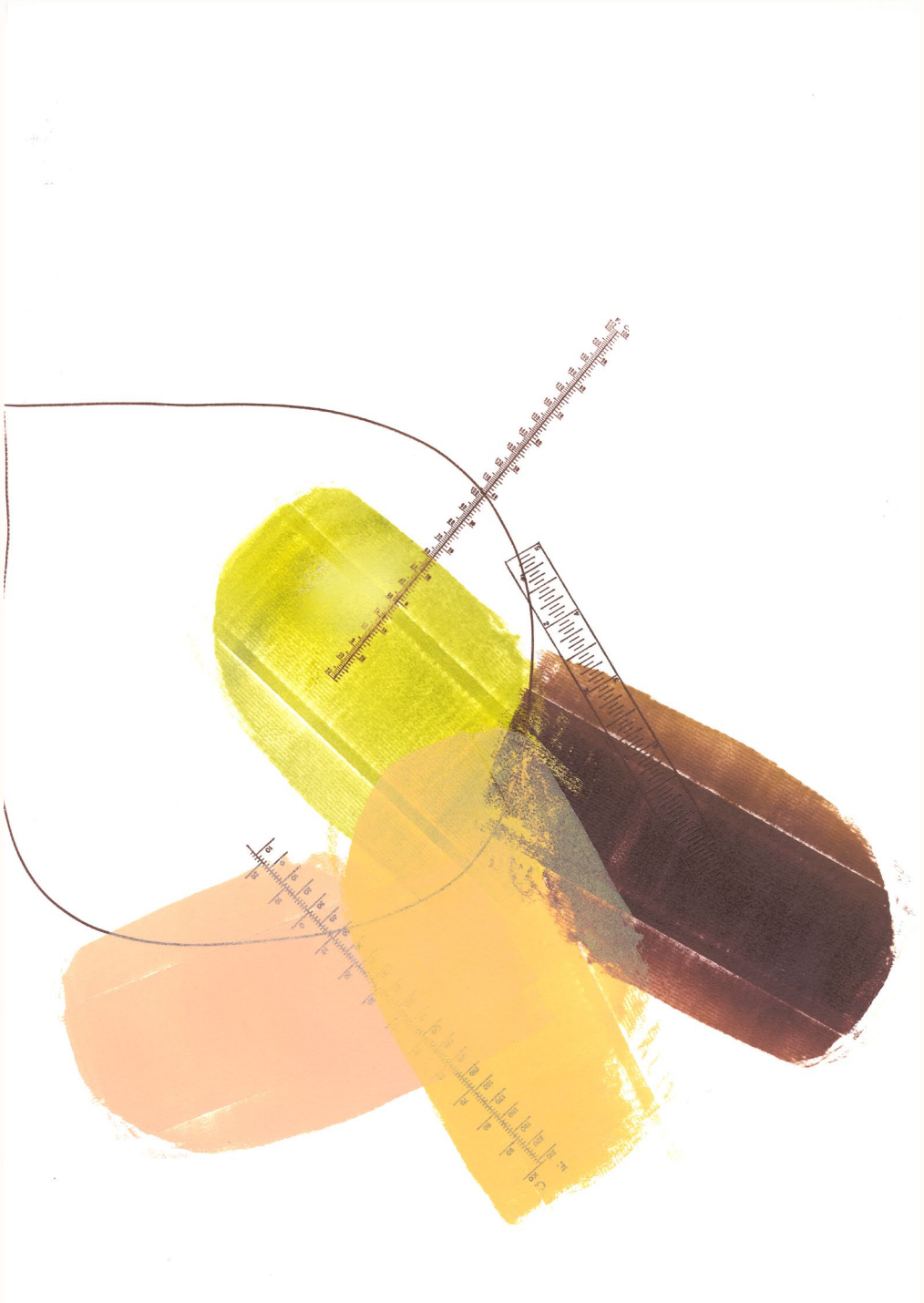
Other influences include Bauhaus philosophy: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, who taught at the Bauhaus and came to Chicago to found a school based on it, later known as the Institute of Design; the writing of Anni Albers, a textile artist, and the spouse of Josef Albers; and the letterpress prints of Nancy Spero. Spero was a feminist, a graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and is included with her husband, painter Leon Golub, in the Chicago group, the Monster Roster.

In addition to single sheet prints, Sacic has editioned a book titled *Cityscapes* (with a companion app available free at the Apple App Store) and also made several animations (with stop motion photography and cut out prints). All of these are strongly tied together thematically. She writes the stories included in each—some are like prose poems, others are poetic word fragments—with images intrinsically intertwined.

Sacic states, *Cityscapes* “is linked to my print work as it investigates the ties between my native country and my current place of residence. This is a topic I return to again and again in my prints...[It] is a confession of sorts, as is most of my work...I am committed to [...] capturing personal narratives through both abstraction and figuration. Ultimately I am interested in storytelling.”

Her print series *Electric Biology* is inspired by her experience as a brain tumor survivor. She sees the dynamic abstract compositions functioning as visions of firing synapses and the signaling of neurons. #00 (2015) from the series is printed on white paper, like almost all of her prints. The same irregular shape, like an ink swatch, or drawdown, repeats in orange-pink, pink, green and brown. A curving line loops around, three rulers appear at three different angles, covered over in parts. The composition is sparse but not empty; like synapses full of electro-chemical activity,

20 nothing more is needed.





**Electric Biology #36**

Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2014*





CLOCKWISE

**Electric Biology #36**

Vida Sacic

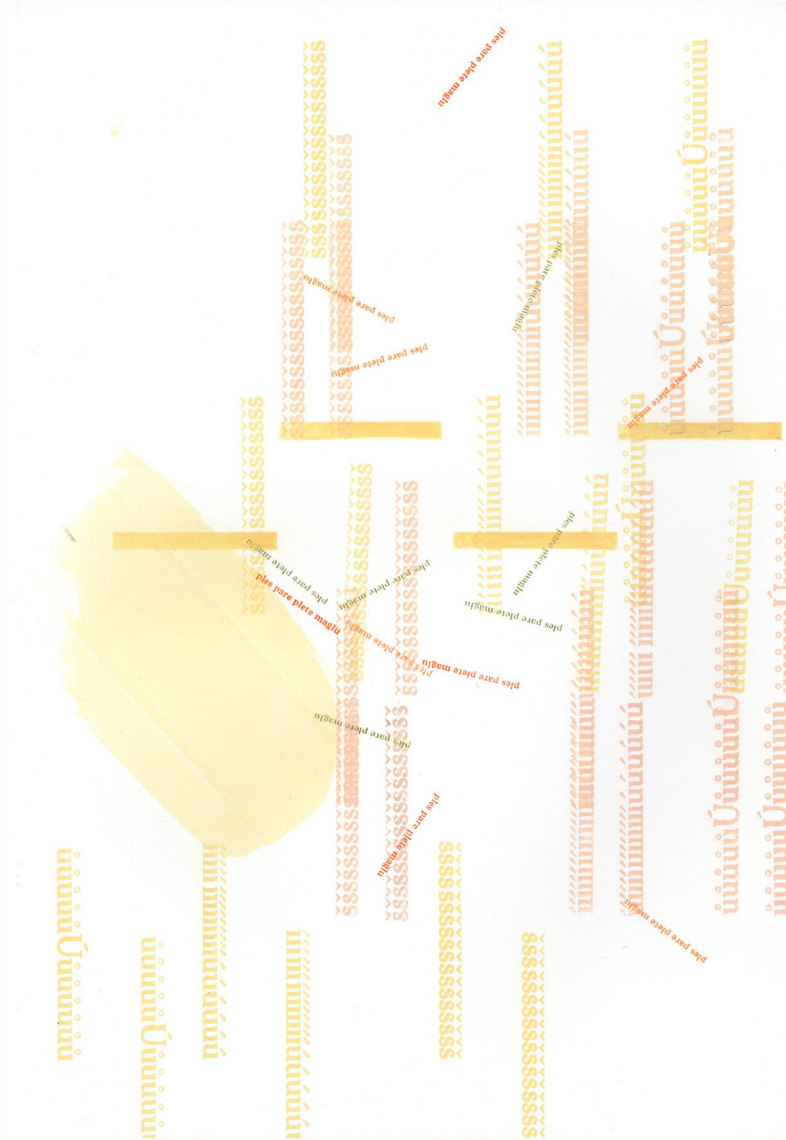
*Letterpress, 2014*

**Electric Biology #38**

*Letterpress, 2014*

**Electric Biology #43**

*Letterpress, 2014*



**Ples Magle**

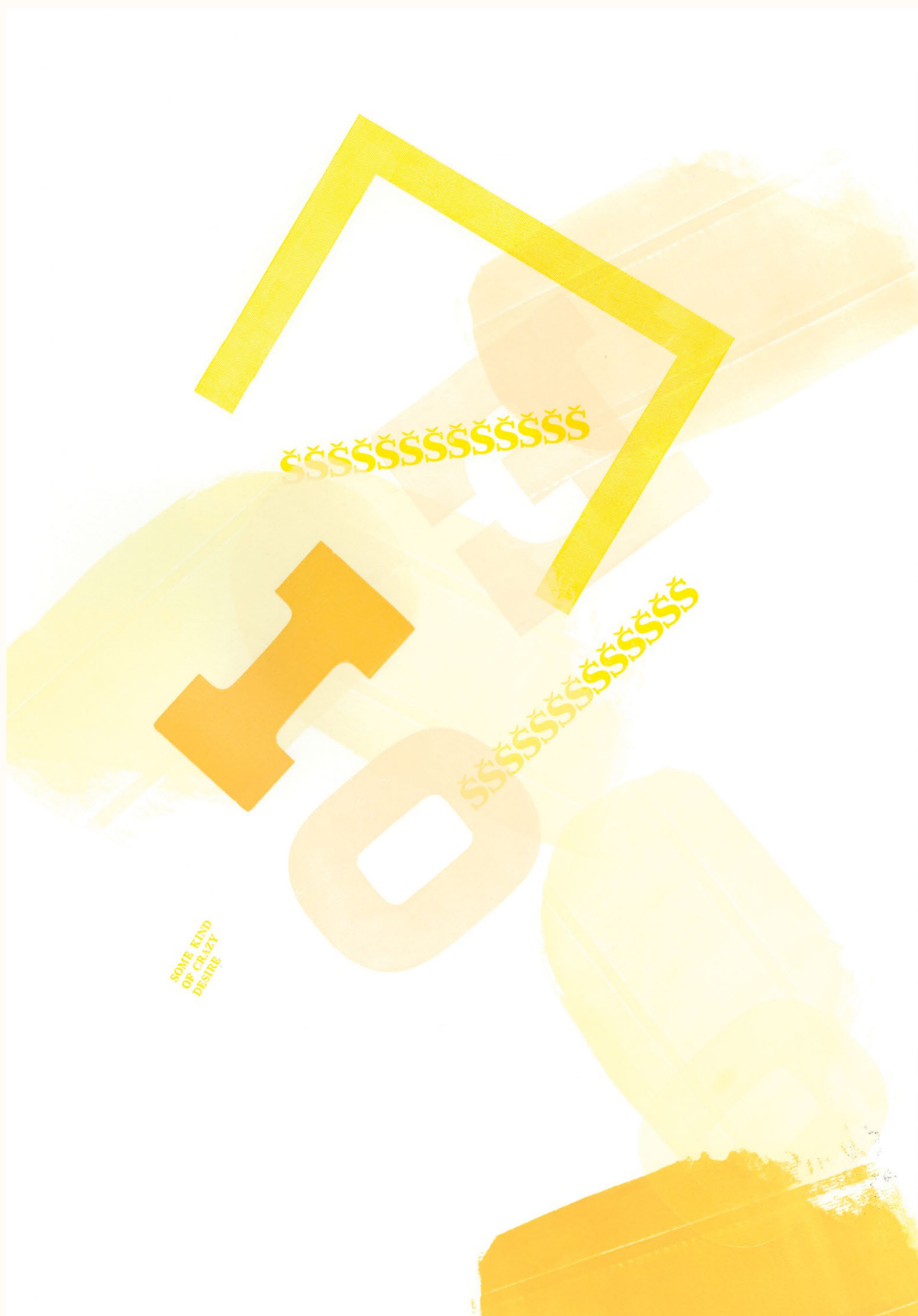
Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2014*

In #42 (2014) (page 27) from the same series, her found screens overlay each other, forming a moiré pattern in black and grey. Moiré is the usually undesired artifact that occurs when two or more repeating patterns overlay each other; here Sacic intentionally causes it to happen. The swatch/drawdown shape appears three times. Pale pink, printed in a gradation, a faded wood type E, an I's slab serif (or an l?), and a red rectangle bleeding off, is visible. The placement of each element is additive, organic, in a lush painterly color palette, overprinted screens reveal traces of the process.

While the prints in the Electric Biology series have no readable words and are all titled with a number, for her Myth series the titles are lyrical, addressing language itself. The series is about the boundary between history and myth, storytelling and memory. In *Grace* (page 28), the words "Singing Grace with our mouths full" appear above a cascade of overlapping screens, the moiré pattern created fills a third of the picture, beside a small swatch of pale yellow and a spilled-looking orange. (The phrase has a double meaning—"our mouths" could be full of praise for God—or it could be referring to that childhood moment when you just took a bite of food at dinner, then were required to recite a prayer.)

In *A Body in Motion* (2015) (page 14) the words "she is saying she will say" are legible, while the phrase "A Body in motion" is clear and set at an angle. A black wood type O perches on the recurring swatch shape, this time looking like a fingernail. The colors blend into each other in a rainbow roll, changing from blue-black to pink-beige to green. The swatch, or fingernail, shape appears in pale yellow twice, then again with orange down its center, the color of a frozen popsicle. Perhaps the speaker ("she") isn't always sure what to say—but meanwhile—she continues at the printing press, walking forward and back, standing, mixing ink, a body in motion. ■





**Electric Biology #39**

Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2014*

**Electric Biology #42**

Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2014*



Singing Grace  
with our mouths full

**Grace**

Vida Sacic

*Letterpress, 2015*



DETAIL

**Bad At Maths No 4**

David Wolske

*Relief, Letterpress from  
Wood and Metal Types,  
and Rule, 2016*







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David Wolske was struck by “letterpress lightning” in 2001 when he was working in Indianapolis as a web designer. He visited a gallery/ad agency for an AIGA (the professional association for design) event where Hatch Show Print Director/printer Jim Sherraden was speaking. When Wolske saw the Hatch prints, letterpress show posters printed from historic blocks and wood type, he knew that this is what he was supposed to do. At the same event, James Reidhaar, a professor from Indiana University, announced a summer letterpress workshop at IU. After weighing his options (Hatch intern or graduate school at IU?) Wolske decided to apply to graduate school so that he could study letterpress.

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D  
W

# Paul Wolske

IN 2002, AT IU WITH PROFESSOR PAUL BROWN AS HIS mentor, Wolske read and was influenced by many books—especially Wolfgang Weingart's book, *My Way to Typography* (2000). Wolske visited print shops, and went every week to Dave Churchman's legendary Boutique de Junque, a warehouse of letterpress equipment in Indianapolis.

In 2004, he traveled to Wells College in Aurora, New York, for a type event, where he met Richard Zauft. Zauft, instrumental in setting up the printing area of the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, invited him to the museum for its fifth anniversary. Surprised by the invitation, Wolske decided to go. The visit proved pivotal, and Wolske subsequently went on to teach his own workshops at Hamilton, and spread the word about the museum to everyone he knew.

His work evolved. "I was printing—doing typography," he says. Wolske knew that he wanted to preserve the wood type he was printing with by handling it gently, and by printing it with the least amount of pressure, or impression, that he could. He wanted to deconstruct the letters using masks, without damaging the type. This eventually led to the "kiss" impression he uses today—where the impression of the type in the paper verges on none.





1/5

BAD AT MATHS No.1

DAVID WOLSKÉ



1/5

*BAD AT MATHS No. 2*

*DAVID WOLSKE*

**Bad At Maths No 1**

David Wolske

*Relief, Letterpress from Wood  
and Metal Types, and Rule, 2016***Bad At Maths No 2**

David Wolske

*Relief, Letterpress from  
Wood Type, 2016*OPPOSITE PAGE,  
CLOCKWISE**Cadence No 1**

David Wolske

*Collage, Relief,  
Letterpress, 2014***Vessels No 6***Relief, Letterpress, 2015***Cadence No 9***Relief, Letterpress, 2014*

One of the jobs Wolske had before being exposed to letterpress involved cutting out vinyl stencils with a plotter for a company that made housings for ATM machines. This experience proved crucial to his later innovations in printing with wood type.

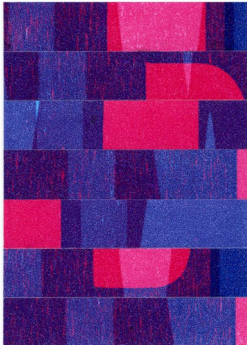
He was invited in 2012 to participate in a print exchange, the *Vista Sans Wood Type Project*, in which each participant printed with wood type based on the digital typeface Vista Sans. As the participants shared their progress with each other, Wolske felt challenged. He decided to put his recent ideas to the test. He had been thinking about masking since 2006, and as he worked as the creative director of the Book Arts Program and Red Butte Press at the University of Utah, he helped print on a Columbian hand press. The masking system used on the hand press, called a frisket, gave him an idea, which led to the solution he sought.

In the print *Vessels No. 6* (opposite page), wood type letters are printed in three transparent process colors—cyan, magenta, and yellow—their masked shapes overlapping. Some areas are solid color, others show the grain of the wood and small imperfections. Counters, the negative spaces of the letters, are holes cut through, their symmetrical curves forming new shapes. Hard edges of letters are framed by a wispy, cottony outer edge, residue of the paper mask. Viewing the print is a visual game: the viewer can revel in its crisp shapes, but is challenged to decipher the letters—is that a U, an R and a D?—while still seeing the overall composition.

There is so much prep work in Wolske's system of masks, friskets, drawsheets, custom tympan, that while preparing for an exhibit of his work in 2013, he looked at the stacks of trim ends of his prints and thought, why waste that? I can make something with those. So he began his collage series. "My interest is in using existing material. I like to use things in ways they weren't intended to be used."

36 Each of his collages is unique. He reuses his print fragments, the edges of his previous prints, and enjoys the fun of the process. (Later he began to print exclusively for the purpose of collage.) There is a directness to the collages; the small pieces of paper, layered and glued, with color combinations that do not occur in his editioned prints. In them, he reaches abstraction through layering. "I think of it as abstract typography—typographic art."





CADENCE No. 1

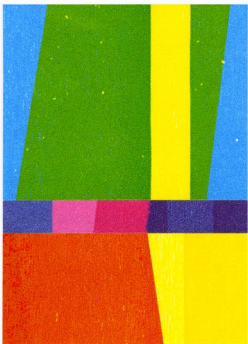
DAVID WOLSKÉ



KISTEL

No. 6

DAVID WOLSKÉ

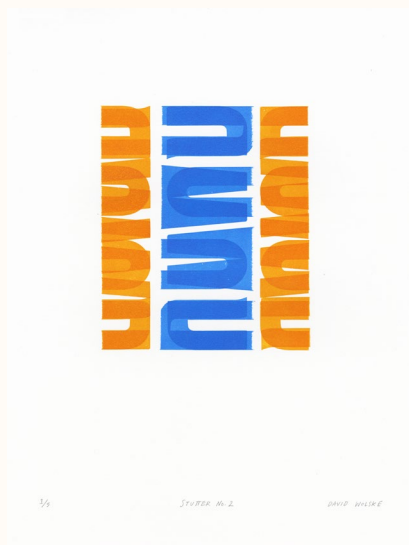


CADENCE No. 9

DAVID WOLSKÉ

**Stutter No 2**  
David Wolske  
*Relief,*  
*Letterpress, 2014*

**Stutter No 3**  
David Wolske  
*Relief,*  
*Letterpress, 2014*





**Stutter No 4**

David Wolske

*Relief,*

*Letterpress, 2014*

**Stutter No 5**

David Wolske

*Relief,*

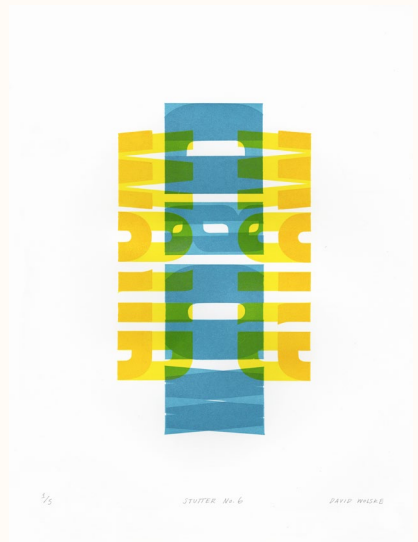
*Letterpress, 2014*

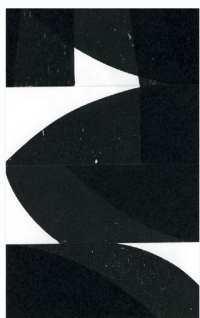
**Stutter No 6**

David Wolske

*Relief,*

*Letterpress, 2014*





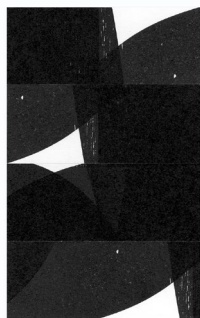
PARTICLE No.2

DAVID WOLSKE



PARTICLE No.3

DAVID WOLSKE



PARTICLE No.7

DAVID WOLSKE

The piece Particle No. 7 (opposite page) is made up of four strips of paper, printed from wood type. The black and white composition addresses issues of contrast of color and scale, focusing on positive and negative space. The collage, and the series it is part of, refers to abstract expressionism and minimalism, specifically the black and white paintings of Franz Kline (who also trained as a designer) and the 1950's collage studies of Ellsworth Kelly. (Kelly had a 1964 print series for the magazine *Derrière le Miroir* that is reminiscent of the curved shapes in Wolske's Vessel series.) The diminutive composition of the collage is sculptural, made up of crashing forms, the letter shapes monumental within a tiny space. ■

**Particle No 2**

David Wolske

*Collage, Relief,  
Letterpress, 2015*

**Particle No 3**

David Wolske

*Collage, Relief,  
Letterpress, 2015*

**Particle No 7**

David Wolske

*Collage, Relief,  
Letterpress, 2015*



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DIAGRAM No. 1

DAVID WALSH



3/5

DIAGRAM No. 2

DAVID WALSH



3/5

DIAGRAM No. 3

DAVID WALSH



3/5

DIAGRAM No. 4

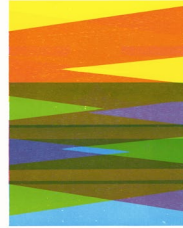
DAVID WALSH



3/8

ANAGRAM No. 1

DAVID WOLSKE



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ANAGRAM No. 2

DAVID WOLSKE



5/5

ANAGRAM No. 3

DAVID WOLSKE

TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT

**Anagram 1**

David Wolske

*Relief, Letterpress, 2015*

**Anagram 2**

*Relief, Letterpress, 2015*

**Anagram 3**

*Relief, Letterpress, 2015*

**Anagram 4**

*Relief, Letterpress, 2015*

**Anagram 5**

*Relief, Letterpress, 2015*

**Anagram 6**

*Relief, Letterpress, 2015*

**Anagram 7**

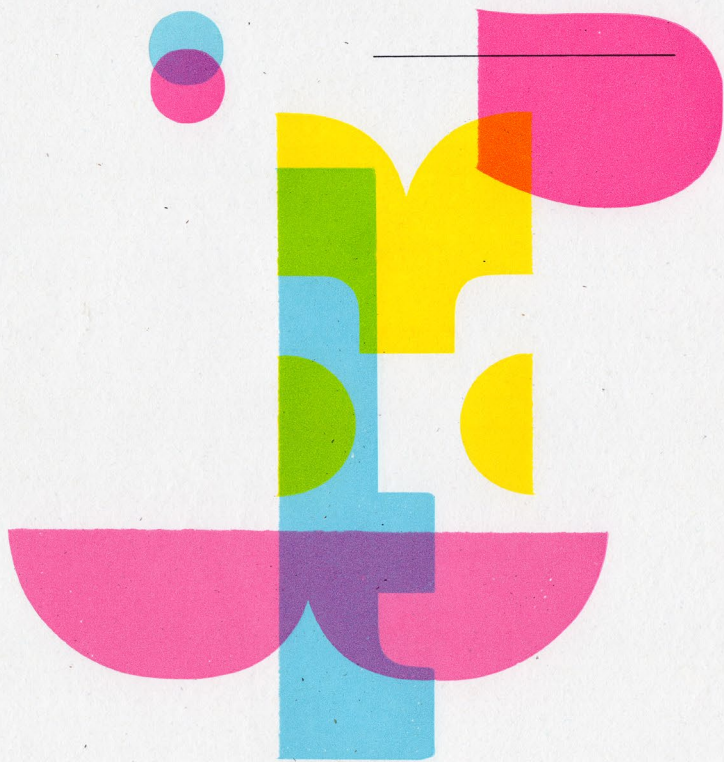
*Relief, Letterpress, 2015*

**Bad At Maths No 3**

David Wolske

*Letterpress from  
Wood Types and  
Metal Rules, 2016*





1/5

*BAD AT MATHS No.3*

*DAVID WOLSKE*

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# M O R E I N F L U E N C E S

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## WERKMAN

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H.N. Werkman, a Dutch artist (1882–1945), printed abstract letterpress compositions in the 1920s–1940s. His work has become more widely known in the U.S. since 2004, when a book was published in English written by Alston W. Purvis for Yale University Press. “I produce designs during the course of printing,” Werkman said. Purvis writes, “Treating the letterpress as a painting tool and ink like paint on a palette, [Werkman] freely seized upon whatever was needed to achieve a desired result.”

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## WOLFGANG WEINGART

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Wolfgang Weingart, a German designer born in 1941 and educated in the Basel School of Design, influenced many designers with his practice. In his 2000 book, he goes into detail about his time in the letterpress shop when he was in school, describing exercises and solutions that later proved seminal for his work. Weingart initially escaped to the type shop because he could not sit still, drawing lines and dots, for an entire class. In the type shop, says Weingart, he can play with real things until he understands them.

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## WILLIAM MORRIS

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Letterpress printing in the U.S. today is still influenced by William Morris. “During the 1890s William Morris—the famous Victorian Pre-Raphaelite, socialist, and intellectual—decided to print books as they had been done during the first years of printing, that is, with type cast by hand, paper made by hand, and blocks of wood cut by hand. His efforts resulted in the establishment of the Kelmescott Press, and he thus became the founder of a fine press movement that has lasted more than one hundred years.”

<http://sites.lib.byu.edu/worldhistory/printing/>

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## HATCH SHOW PRINT

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Hatch Show Print in Nashville, Tennessee, is a major influence on contemporary letterpress printing through its legacy of show posters. In continuous operation since 1879, and now housed in the Country Music Hall of Fame Museum, Hatch takes on interns who design and print posters with historic type and blocks, as well as carving their own new blocks for its varied clients from start to finish, in an entirely analog process. When their internships are over, these intrepid letterpress printers go on to found their own letterpress shops, to carry on the Hatch aesthetic into the future.

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## FINE PRESS PRINTING TODAY

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Mark Dimunation, chief of Rare Books and Special Collections at the Library of Congress, spoke about the fine press book movement in the 20th and 21st centuries in April 2016. “Beginning with Frederic Goudy and his early 20th century peers, contemporary press work treats type as image and object in its own right. Letterforms and the physical (wood or metal) type itself are explored in letterpress printing. [...] sometimes, it feels that we’re somewhere between the traditional codex and art on the wall.”

<http://www.typographher.com/blog/2016/4/9/what-is-fine-printing-today>



The DeVos Art Museum, founded in 1975, is located on the campus of Northern Michigan University in Marquette. The museum is part of the School of Art and Design and serves as a regional art museum for the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The mission of the DeVos Art Museum is to provide the university and local communities the opportunity to experience original works of art and to foster educational opportunities for all audiences through exhibitions, programs and publications. Through the vast academic resources at Northern Michigan University, the museum aims to become an artistic learning laboratory for NMU, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and the Upper Midwest region.



**NORTHERN MICHIGAN  
UNIVERSITY**





**DEVOSART  
MUSEUM**