

C & C Press Artists' Book: *Rites Rituals Ruminations – Faces That Speak* Photography By Stephen Verona

Winner of more than one hundred awards, Stephen Verona is a renowned artist, photographer, writer, director and producer of films.

“All of us are connected emotionally. This had become very clear to me during the study of people, my life’s work. As an artist, I wanted to expand on this idea. I wanted to create a new way of looking at this connection and portray it photographically... What I had done previously as a painter on canvas, I was now doing photographically. The result is what you see before you – my vision of “photographic paintings.” -Stephen Verona

Stephen Verona’s photographic series in the book, RRR-FTS, draws focus to human subjects and creates appealing narratives through clever and calculated juxtapositions of the human figure. The subjects were photographed over a 35-year period, and are now transformed through modern digital capabilities. This action addresses their lives by bringing their history into a present day setting: the digital landscape. Verona refers to these “photographic paintings” as ‘vistas’, which documents the history of a wide range of cultures, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. Some of the ‘vistas’ contain historical images apposed with contemporary ones while others document cross-cultural history.

Both the size of the photographs as well as the digital composition of the images were pre-determined by Verona. Using his ‘vistas’ as subject matter, C & C Press sought a way to both functionally and conceptually enhance the images through choices of typography, structure, page design, print methods and materials. The choice to produce a contemporary artists’ book in which all of these elements are firmly rooted in the history of the book, echoes the interaction between historical and contemporary human subjects apparent in Verona’s photographs.

One of the primary means for enhancing Verona’s subject matter was through typography. The first typographic decision involved the title and author’s name on the cover of the box. For these elements, C & C Press chose to design and print a ‘Scanotype’, a high-resolution scanned image of type that is flipped digitally and printed. The ‘Scanotype’ is conceptually compatible with Verona’s ‘vistas’ in three ways:

First, wood type is regarded as uniquely expressionistic. When wood type is used for traditional printing, it is known for producing printed letterforms full of character and personality. By presenting a high-resolution image of the body of wood type itself, the personality of each letter is further revealed. When wood type is scanned at high resolution the personality of each individual piece of type itself is highlighted. Similarly, Verona’s photographs highlight the human condition by capturing a depth of character and personality.

Second, the “Scanotype” features wooden typefaces in a humanistic, portrait-like, framed setting. The ‘humanism of type’ is a current topic that has been discussed amongst printers and bookmakers since the origins of type design. Many 15th and 16th century typefaces, like those designed by 16th century type designer Geofroy Tory, were based on the ideal human figure. Developing from this origin, terminology was assigned to the different physical attributes of a piece of type. These terms were named according to the physical features of the human body. Thus, type was given a body, a face, two shoulders, a beard and a foot. The C & C Press ‘Scanotypes’ express most lucidly the humanism of type by guiding the reader’s attention to the body of the type, as opposed to type’s productive result, the printed page. This

'humanistic' quality of wood type operates in cohesive harmony with the human condition highlighted in Verona's photographs.

Third, a piece of wood type wears and exhibits its history on its body in the form of colored ink, breaks, cracks and wear. This is analogous to the human subjects in Verona's photographs, who also carry their history on their bodies through their clothing and skin.

The next typographical decision involved the information on the back of each page. Continuing with the theme of humanism, in alignment with the subjects of Verona's photographs, a humanist typeface had been considered. Ultimately, the decision to use a Gothic wood typeface versus a humanist typeface was made for two reasons. First, the oversized format of RRR-FTS (4"H x 6"D x 32"W) required a larger sized typeface. Because humanist typefaces were designed to be printed and read at smaller sizes, they were not functionally appropriate. Second, we wanted to display the printed result of the wood type featured in the 'Scanotypes'. The 'Scanotypes' display the body of the type, and the back of each page reveals the type's voice. Through a single block of wood type one can trace the evolution of printing from moveable type. Beginning from clay and wooden surfaces in East Asia, continuing with hot metal type in Europe and more directly the invention of wood type in the United States. The spread of the invention of printing from moveable type from Asia, to Europe, to the United States echoes the order of the photographs in the book.

The earliest surviving examples of the unbound book are Sumerian Clay Tablets, which date back to around 3500 B.C. (Epic of Gilgamesh). In creating a series of unbound pages for RRR-FTS, a continuum relating back to these origins is realized. In making contemporary design decisions based on the history of the book as form, the interplay between past and present, between history and the contemporary is emphasized.

In RRR-FTS, the long, narrow, page format is strikingly similar to the ancient format of Indian and Tibetan palm leaf books. According to David Diringer in his book, *The Book Before Printing: Ancient, Medieval and Oriental*, "The Palmyra and Talipat palm leaves, which are thick, but long and narrow, were the only writing material for books in ancient Odra as in other parts of the coastal provinces of Southern India; they were also used to some extent in Ceylon, Burma, and Siam, and in Northern India." (42)

To push the interplay between past and present even further, the numbering and title at the top on the back of each photograph reflect the titling and numbering system of the oldest unbound books: the Sumerian tablets. Diringer writes: "...but all the tablets of a series were numbered. The number of the tablet and the "name" of the book to which it belonged were written on each tablet. Examples of this are the seven tablets of the *Epic of Creation*... This book begins with the words, "In the beginning that which is above was not called the 'sky'; on every tablet of this book this sentence is inscribed, followed by 'No. 1, No. 2', and so on..." (84-86)

To further the theme of linking past to present, both traditional and non-traditional print methods were employed, mirroring Verona's action of apposing historical and contemporary images. In RRR-FTS, the text on the back of each page was first letterpress printed. Then, each letterpress printed word was scanned into the computer at high resolution. Clipping paths in Adobe Photoshop were created to cut the negative space away from the scanned letters, allowing them to be composed digitally. The pages were printed offset from these digital files. The sequence of letterpress printing, scanning, digital manipulation and offset printing creates a dynamic interaction between the technology of printing's letterpress origin

and those of present day digital era. This interaction echoes Verona's idea of the interplay between past and present.

Along with the traditional choices of materials of book cloth, board and glue, hand carved wood clasps from India made of Halu Wood were used. This choice adds to the multicultural flavor of the project. Also, the similar pronunciation of the words, 'Halu wood' & 'Hollywood' was too fitting, given that Stephen Verona made his reputation as a writer, director and producer in Hollywood, CA.

A limited edition of 200 copies were printed offset on French's Smart White paper. Issued in a custom handmade box.

Book Size: 32" x 6" x 4.25"

Box Size: 32.5" x 6.5" x 4.875"

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