

ZenArt: Graphic Geometrical Modules

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Abstract

I explain the design of a set of graphic geometrical modules - based on the letters of the (Dutch) alphabet - with which various patterns can be drawn. The matrix used as a basis for the (this) design, also determines the guidelines for composing these patterns. From an artistic point of view, the patterns illustrate a view on interconnectivity.

1. Introduction

Around 1975, inspired by the slogan of Marshall McLuhan: ‘The medium is the message’[1], and by a trend known by the name of ‘Minimal Art’[2] (in which the fewest and barest essentials or elements in the arts, literature, or design are used in order to relate to the environment), I began to experiment with letters taken from the Dutch alphabet, as a basis for creating a set of graphic geometrical modules. This choice ensures consistency of the various shapes within the set, and it limits their number.

Along with that, I tried to eliminate any reference to optical or subjective components that shape a module, reducing it to its essential geometrical form. With the traces of emotive charge removed, these modules were meant to stand on their own, as meaningless objects. In contrast as for instance in the case of the alphabet ‘Azart’ by Belgian artists Rombouts & Droste[3], they keep the basic characteristics of the Latin alphabet.

2. Drawing the alphabet.

I drew the alphabet on the bases of four geometrical figures, which can be regarded to as being universal: **square**, **cross**, **diagonal** and **circle** (and/or **dot**) (Figure 1). Placing these figures on top of each other they form a grid like matrix, which is shown here by means of dotted lines (Figure 2).

I use these lines as guides for drawing each letter. Square and cross, turned into guides help to draw horizontal and vertical letter strokes. Diagonal and circle are used to draw diagonal and circular letter strokes. 25 dots, matching the thickness of a letter stroke, help shaping the joints and endings of each letter. Each letter may use one or more elements of the four geometrical figures.

In the example the letter ‘R’ is being drawn: of the **square**, the left and left half of the upper stroke are used, followed by the curve of the **circle**, followed by the horizontal stroke of the **cross** and finally by the downward stroke of the **diagonal**. (Figure 3).

3. Rules for composition, derived from the matrix.

As figures 4 and 5 show, the matrix also determines the way with which the letters are drawn on a sur-



Figure 1: Universal, geometrical figures: square, cross, diagonal and circle (and/or dot).

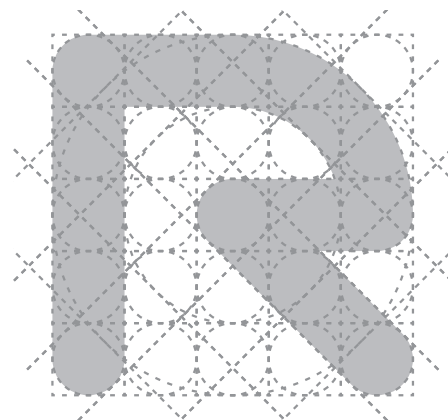


Figure 2: The letter ‘R’ drawn onto the matrix.



Figure 3: The letter ‘R’ drawn using parts of the matrix.

face. Figure 4 indicates directions of possible horizontal, vertical and diagonal moves. Figure 5 shows the possibilities for turning, rotating and mirroring of the letters. In case letters are placed next to one and other, the preferred distance in between equals the thickness of a letter stroke. (Figure 6) In case a letter overlaps another, the overlap should be no less than the thickness of a letter stroke. More precisely, it should at least overlap one of the 25 circular dots as can be found within the matrix. (Figure 7)

4. Composition.

Since the dimensions of the letters match each other, this provides an outline with which compositions can be made. Likewise the rules by which they can be turned, rotated, mirrored, moved and placed separated from each other or overlapping.

Conclusion

It is possible to turn letters of an alphabet into meaningless symbols, but as an ultimate consequence there is no need for them to exist at all. Changing the (minimalist) view on the concept of geometry, in favor of a holistic approach, vast opportunities emerge to produce various works of art.

Given this viewpoint, the challenge is to create patterns within the boundaries of the mentioned composition rules, and yet to make a design that is as powerful and attractive as possible.

This is to be done by the use of color, dimension, and material, and not by choosing words derived from the sources of inspiration as a starting point in creating patterns.

Incidentally, the set was given the name 'ZenArt', a reference to a mystic language 'Zenzar' and to Zen philosophy. Also it refers to the mentioned alphabet 'Azart' of the artists Rombouts & Droste.

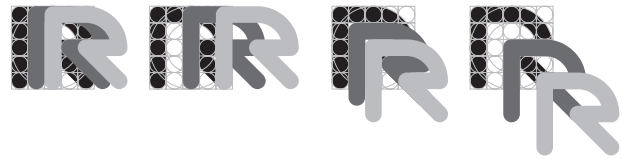


Figure 4: The letter 'R' moved in different ways according to the restrictions of the matrix.

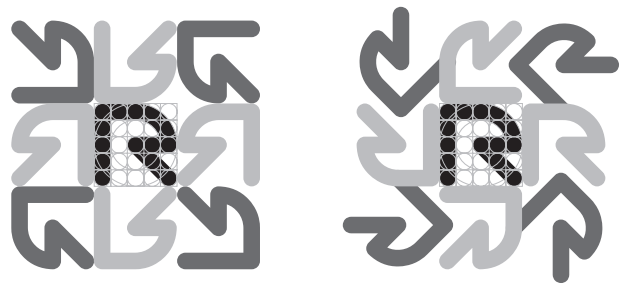


Figure 5: The letter 'R' turned, rotated and mirrored according to the restrictions of the matrix.



Figure 6: The alphabet (lower case only), placed with a space in between that equals the thickness of a letterstroke.



Figure 7: A composition with letters that form the word 'BRIDGES' showing overlapping letters.

References

- [1] Marshall McLuhan, 'Understanding Media', Routledge, London. Originally published in 1964 by Mentor, New York; reissued 1994, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts with an introduction by Lewis Lapham
- [2] Gregory Battcock, Anne Middleton Wagner 'Minimal art: a critical anthology'. Published by University of California Press, 1995
- [3] Guy Rombouts, Antwerp, Belgium, 2004-2008, www.azart.be/azhelp.htm (accessed April 22, 2009).

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