

Celebrating letters

Extol celebrates lettering and typography through the work of designer and Central Saint Martins Professor Emeritus Phil Baines. The exhibition gathers research, notes, ephemera, and published work to explore the material culture from which Baines has drawn inspiration and his idiosyncratic and instructive approach to the handling of language within design.

Phil Baines (b.1958, Kendal, Westmorland) studied at Ushaw College in Durham for the Roman Catholic priesthood, before switching to graphic design. From 1982–85 he studied at St Martin's School of Art (before its amalgamation with the Central School of Art & Design). During this period his experimental typography work was heavily influenced by medieval manuscripts and by the writings of Marshall McLuhan and George Steiner.

After graduating with an MA from the Royal College of Art in 1987, Baines began a freelance practice, working from home, either alone or with one assistant designer. In 1991 he began teaching at Central Saint Martins, and was made Professor of Typography in 2006.

At the heart of all of Baines's work is language: its meanings, syntax, and orthography, and the chasm between its spoken and written forms. Patterns that might be latent in a given text are emphasized, the unseen structures exposed. This focus goes hand-in-hand with Baines's distrust of 'neatminded' graphic design approaches that favour rigid grid systems and standardization over an intelligent, responsive interpretation of the message being conveyed.

Baines's work evidences the essentially collaborative nature of design, with key working relationships established by Baines across disciplinary boundaries. His understanding of how letters function beyond the page is combined with a sensibility for their shaping allowing for architectural outcomes to emerge rather than be imposed.

In its celebration of the potential of lettering, *Extol* presents a body of work that offers unique insights into ways of practicing and signposts for future research into lettering, typography, and graphic design.