

A slightly different version of the text in this bulletin was originally published as an extended caption for a large-format lithographic print by Dexter Sinister in a portfolio titled "W.A.S.T.E. Proof Prints" (2009).

Cover: One of László Moholy-Nagy's "Telephone Paintings," *Em 3*, enamel on steel, 24 × 15 cm, 1922 (reproduction, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin, copyright Hattula Moholy-Nagy); and then a heraldic color translation of the same on the last page.

In 1922, you ordered by telephone from a sign factory five paintings in porcelain enamel. Years later, describing the situation in some detail, you said:

I had the factory's color chart before me and I sketched my paintings on graph paper. At the other end of the telephone the factory supervisor had the same kind of paper, divided into squares. He took down the dictated shapes in the correct position.

Originally titled *The Enamels (Emaill)*, these are much better known today as the “Telephone Paintings.” There is even considerable doubt in some academic circles whether this story is true—but never mind that. Curtly summarizing the act you said:

(It was like playing chess by correspondence.)

I've found these paintings in more than one museum. Most recently I saw them hanging together at Tate Modern a couple of years ago. At different sizes and marked by different manufacturing ticks, each painting appears primarily (or at least equally) as a pointer back to the original telephone call. In order to fit the message that describes and forms the paintings through the thin wire of a telephone line, the message was transmitted through your words and decoded on the other end using a shared graph paper cipher. It was like visual morse code, form telegraphed as language and language re-channeled in blocks on a two-dimensional grid. From one set of instructions and multiple phone calls, five paintings were industrially produced—each distinct from the other but with no one any more or less accurate.

The words always come first. This is nothing new.

Click.

Heraldry is a graphic language evolved from around 1130 AD to identify families, states, and other social groups. Specific visual forms yield specific meanings, and these forms may be combined in an intricate syntax of meaning and representation. Any heraldic device is described

by both a written description and its corresponding graphic form. The set of *a priori* written instructions is called a BLAZON—to give it form is to EMBLAZON.

In order to ensure that the pictures drawn from the descriptions are accurate and reasonably alike, blazons follow a strict set of rules and share a unique vocabulary. Objects, such as animals and shapes, are called charges; colors are renamed, such as “argent” for silver or “or” for gold; and divisions are described in terms such as “dexter” (“right” in Latin) and “sinister” (“left”).

A given heraldic form may be drawn in many alternative ways, all considered equivalent, just as the letter “A” may be printed in a variety of fonts. The shape of a badge, for example, is immaterial and different artists may depict the same blazon in slightly different ways.

The blazon is, then, a beginning. It is a compressed (written) form entrusted to the herald, an officer of arms tasked with delivering these instructions to a remote location in order to produce the coat-of-arms. Over a distance, words traveled more economically than drawings. The blazon might even travel disembodied from its herald, passing through a relay network of soldiers and travelers en route to its destination where it would be emblazoned into its physical form of gold, silver, wood, and paint.

(Again, the words came first.)

Click.

By 1638, an alternate heraldic coding system appeared. Coincident with the rise of moveable type printing, there was a need to illustrate coats-of-arms in uncolored reproductions including books, wax seals, and coins. In order to communicate the multiple colors and various materials of the shield in meager black and white, a one-color hatching system was developed in the low countries by copperplate engraver, publisher, typographer, and bookseller Jan Baptist Zangrius in 1600. Further refinements were offered by printers including De la



black



red



blue



violet



green



yellow/gold



blood



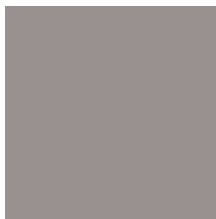
tawny



maroon

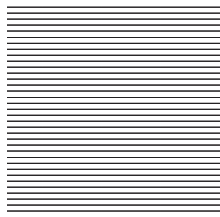


bronze

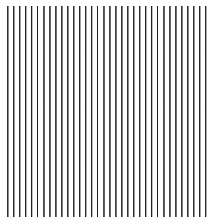


grey

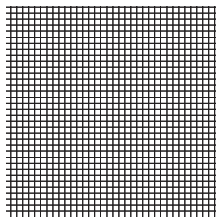
silver/white



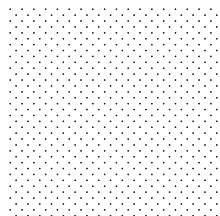
azure



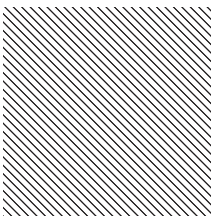
gules



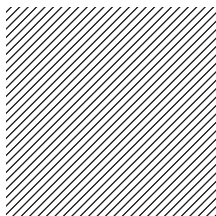
sable



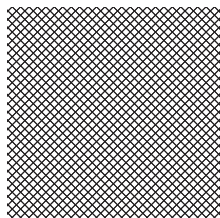
or



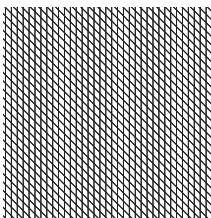
vert



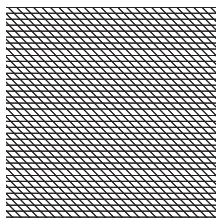
purpure



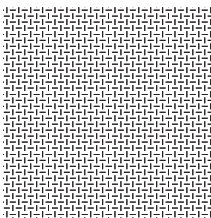
murrey



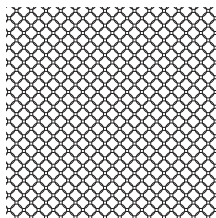
tenné



sanguine



argent



bronzé

cendrée

Colombière and Petra Sancta, growing from a difficulty of accurately representing color shades through etching. The hatchings were a direct response to the technical limitation of these distribution channels and Sancta's heraldic hatching conventions are still followed today.

The coded crosshatches each represent one of the heraldic colors, properly known as tinctures, using a distinctive vocabulary. For example, repeating diagonal lines top right and bottom left means vert (green) or a precise horizontal-vertical grid depicts sable (black). You'll notice in this print that your original colors have been conveniently re-coded — gules, sable, and or are refigured as lines, grids, and dots.

On the back cover of this bulletin we have reprinted your painting using only black ink and substituted the heraldic hatchings for your paint colors. We have otherwise tried to remain as faithful to your original intention as possible.

So, we offer this proof back to you, Lázló—as, perhaps, a backwards-blazon. It is a set of instructions working in reverse from the final forms to the words that came first.

The words always came first. This is nothing new.

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