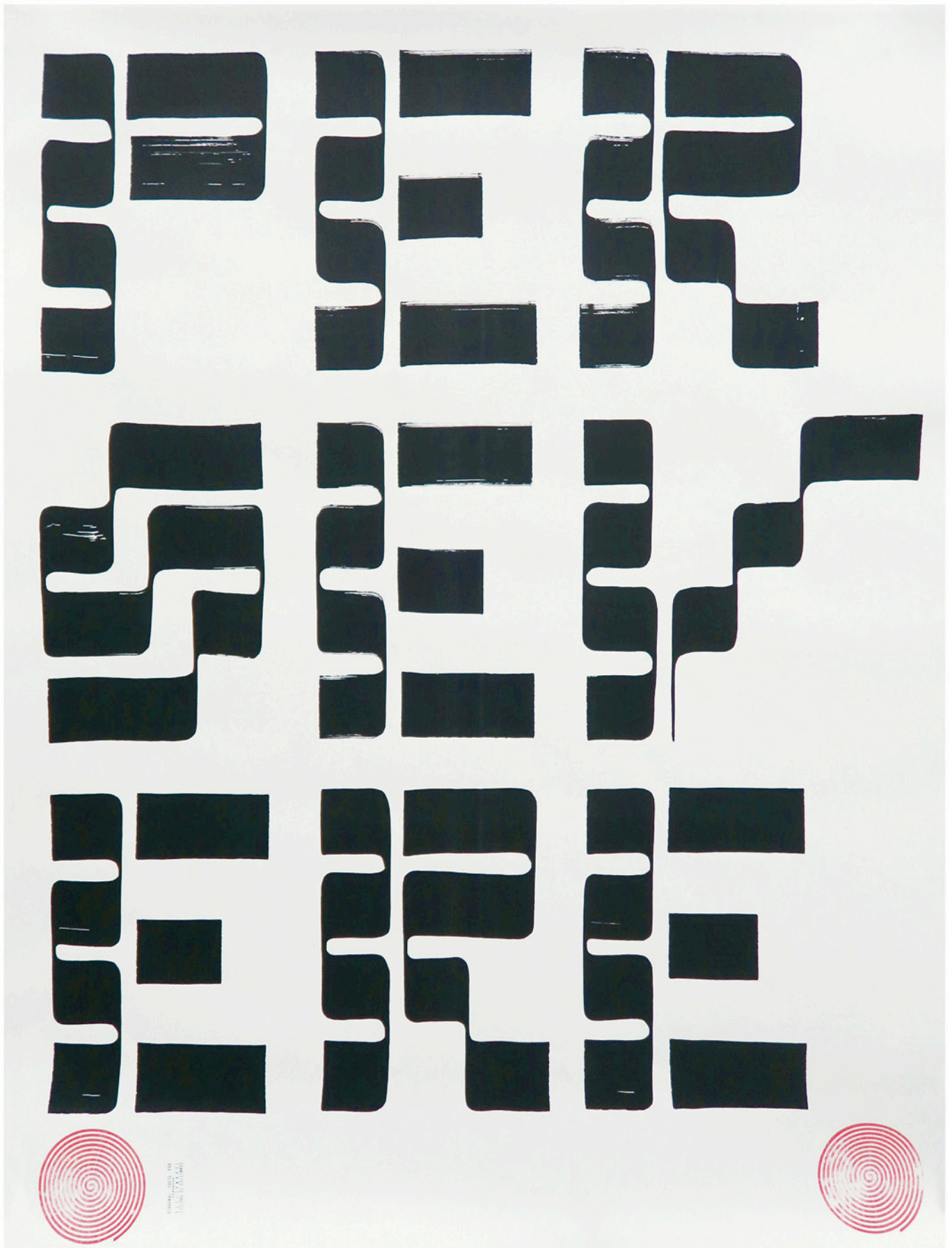


This bulletin appears in lieu of an op-ed solicited by the paper of record, which the author couldn't quite bring herself to write at the time (November 2016), but didn't intend to ignore, for reasons she has since come to understand through the material fact of writing itself.

All posters: laser print and rubber stamps, 48 × 36 in., 2017, available to purchase from www.diagonalpress.com.

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Cover: ORGANIZE I, calligraphy poster to support 8 BALL COMMUNITY.



May 20, 2017

My favorite exercise in Daniel T. Ames's *Compendium of Practical and Ornamental Penmanship* shows the word "persevere" written in lower-case script. Each letter is surrounded by a loop, similar to the "a" in the @ symbol. The loops are all the same, but the letters are different, so the exercise teaches you to maintain a rhythm amidst otherwise varying circumstances.



About a year ago I moved studios, which prompted me to go through all the work I'd made as an adult—or at least the drafts and margins of projects that had remained in my possession. I was horrified to discover (amongst many other things) that I had, at some point, stopped drawing. Growing up and into my early 20s, I would have been drawing any time I was sitting. For three years I worked in a sign shop called New Bohemia Signs, and I was proud that we did everything by hand the old fashioned way. I swore it would never happen, but I guess eventually I got seduced by the speed of my computer like everyone else.

Last summer, in an effort to revive my hand, I started doing a daily calligraphy practice. I may have been a decent sign painter at one point, but I was never a very good calligrapher. It was frustrating in the extreme. I quickly developed a habit of doing Ames's persevere exercise at the end of every session, because by that point it was a message I badly needed to hear.

Slowly, this word took over my calligraphy sessions. It changed shape and scale, and the rhythm of the loops transformed into some kind of omnipresent oscillation. As I wrote, I'd imagine saying the word to various people I both knew and didn't know. The pen whispered along with me in a conspiratorial voice. I never mastered Ames's exercise, but I made up many more of my own. Each one built on the last, leaving me with mountains of new "fonts." Six months into my calligraphy habit, when the election happened, both the word and the practice took on a new meaning.



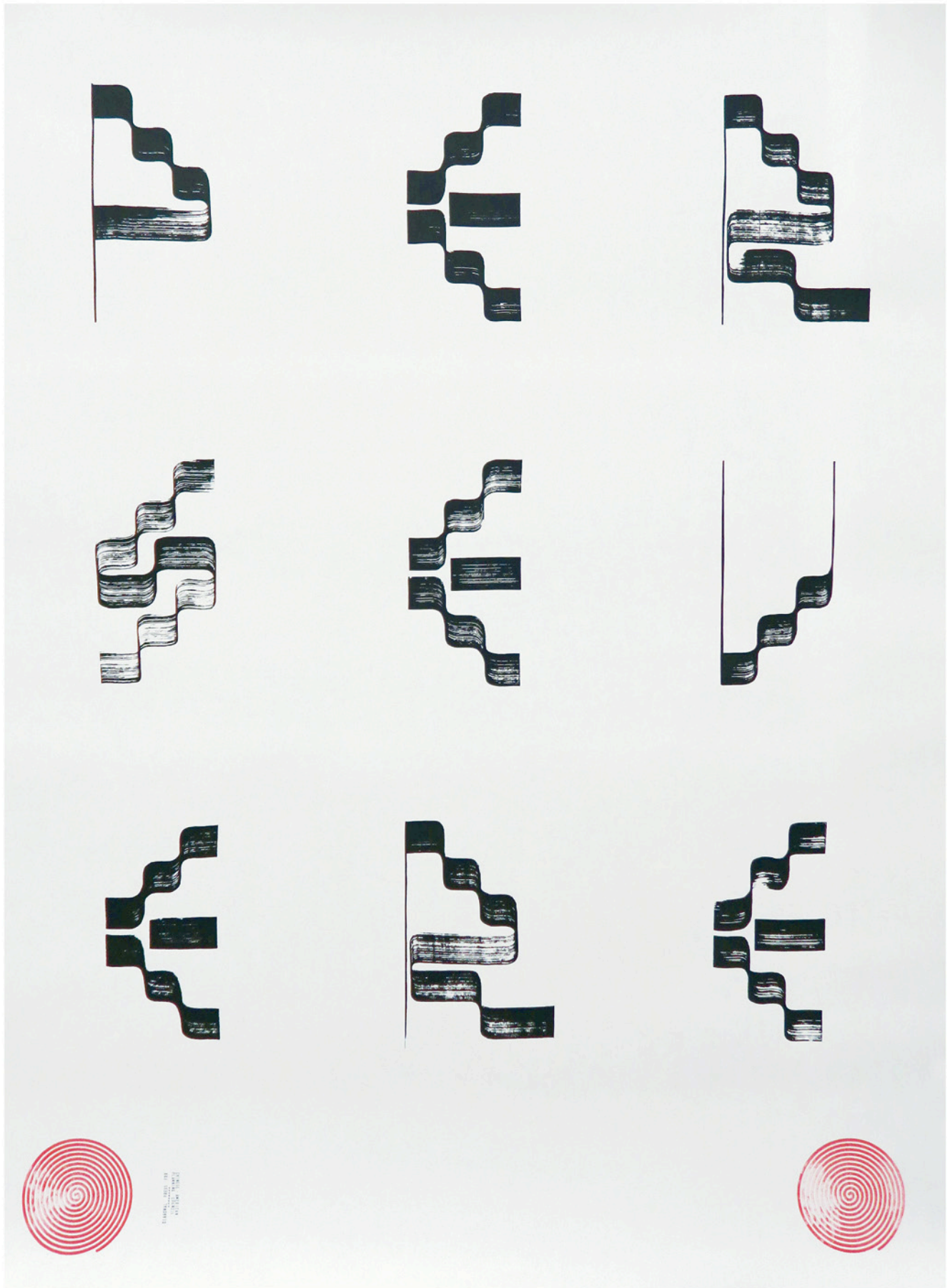
PERSEVERE II, Calligraphy poster to support GEMS (Girls Education and Mentoring Services)

Calligraphy has become the time during which I reflect on what's happening in the world, what's at stake, and what I'm willing to do about it. Maybe I've just needed something to do with my hands while I think. Until now, my politics have manifested mostly via quotidian, domestic choices like being vegan, composting, and riding a bike. (Feel free to roll your eyes.) I support a few organizations. Big deal. I've always spoken my mind but probably too politely. Besides, all of these choices are luxuries, and none of them register as sacrifices because they actually make my life more enjoyable. Clearly, they are also not sufficient.

While doing calligraphy I've listened to a lot of speeches made by historians and philosophers. I've frequently asked myself if revolutionary change can take place without violence, and I've heard many sound arguments for why it cannot. Nonetheless, I remain certain that violence = no change, and that it is a doomed methodology. In my view, violent means not only don't justify but also don't result in peaceful ends, because the notion of an "end" is flawed. Now is the end, every moment is the end. Civilization will always be in a state of becoming, so how we become what we want to be is what we are.

Historically, I've sought transformation through catharsis, through a firm or even forceful touch. I've preferred a hard massage to a light one, an intense sprint to a long jog. My belief system around force—as I conceived of it—was upended when I tried Qigong two years ago. It was so gentle, but it changed so much, not only in my body but in my being. It caused energy to move, spin, pulse, enter through my pores, radiate from my spine. I used to conflate discipline with punishment and associate it with deprivation, but this practice has shown me how generous and, at times, buoyant discipline can be. Qigong resources power with sensitivity, patience, and perseverance. It is seemingly gentle but not at all faint.

Calligraphy and Qigong have several things in common, aside from offering a slow but bright burn. In both, I've found myself negotiating a sweet spot between speed and precision. Go too fast, and you deviate from the line or the gesture. Go too slowly, and your movement gets sticky and loses grace. Both are exercises in tuning to various rhythms, initiating action at certain times from one's center and at other times from the periphery.



PERSEVERE III, Calligraphy poster to support CHINESE AMERICAN PLANNING COUNCIL

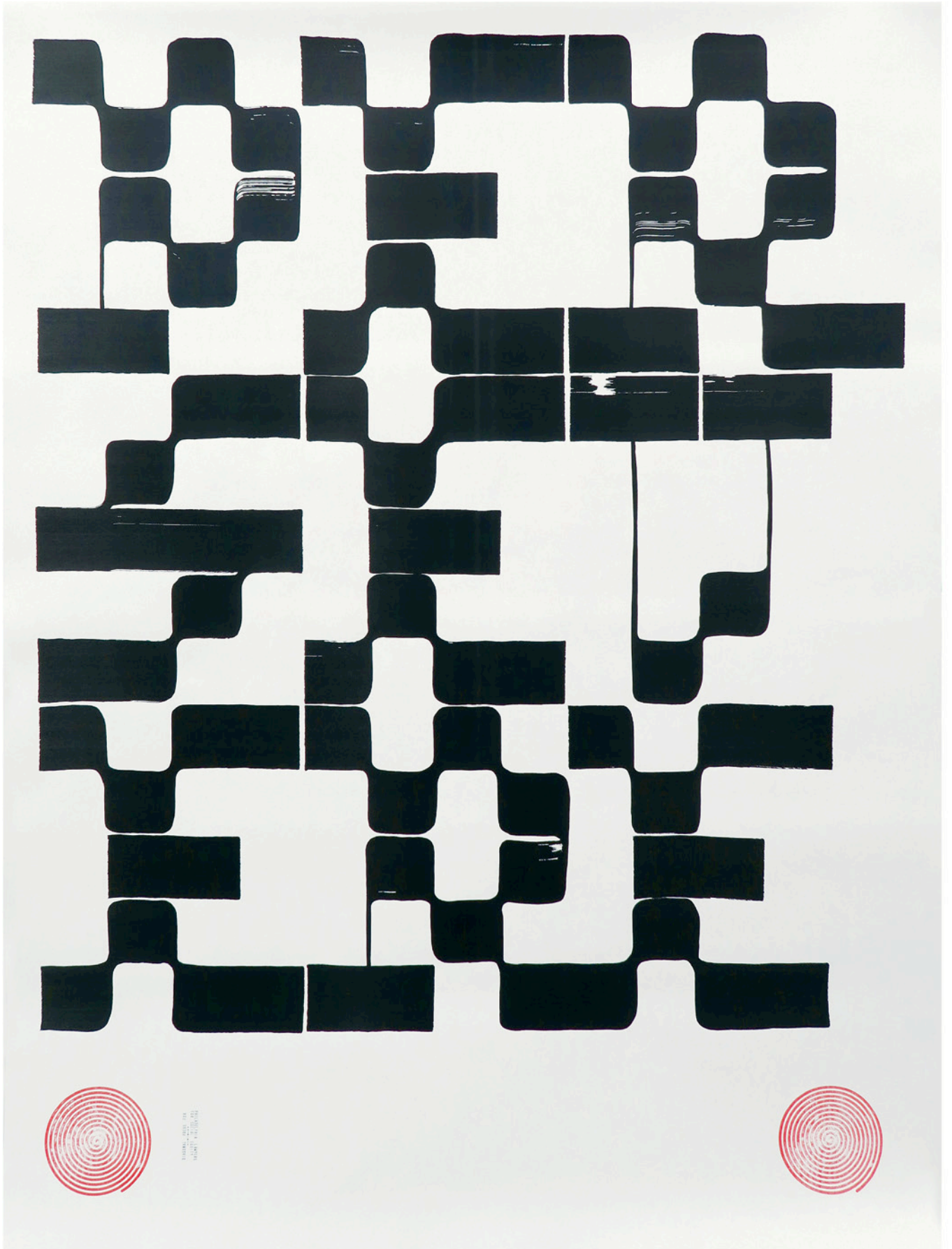
I want to speak for the endurance race, to draw attention to the rhythm that lies beneath the ballistic pulse of the news cycle, of bills and bombings and even of elections. There is a more plodding, concurrent tempo at the scale of time in which plants manage to grow through concrete. There is power in this rhythm if we tend to it.

This is not an endorsement of gentleness in the sense I used to think of it, nor of passivity in any sense. It's an affirmation of relentless steadiness, of maintaining a rhythm — for a less obvious strength. Maybe this is a more “female” incarnation of force, one drawing on ingenuity and perseverance over brute muscle.

I want to spend time in this less flashy realm, at least as much as in the realm of catharsis. Here, people seem to come up with responses rather than reactions and concern themselves with advancing a conversation more than winning an argument. I want us to come at the present obstacles from all sides — top, bottom, and inside, not just the front. If you need evidence that this is a realm in which meaningful change can occur, I refer you not only to the plant but to my piles of quasi-calligraphy. Over the last few months, I've probably written the word “persevere” thousands of times in hundreds of ways. The progress is obvious but also quite different from what I expected.

*

Taub Auerbach: (P)(E)(R)(S)(E)(V)(E)(R)(E)



PERSEVERE IV, calligraphy poster to support PHILADELPHIA LAWYERS FOR SOCIAL EQUITY