



Oded Ezer – experimental Hebrew typography	שם המאמר:
Uleshka	כותב המאמר:
עודד עזר, טיפוגרפיה	מושא המאמר:
ראיון עם עזר עודד	הנושא:
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ראיון אישי עם עזר עודד כתיפוגרפ ומעצב. הראיון מספק דוגמאות מתוך אוסף עבודותיו.	המלצות: תקציר:

Oded Ezer - experimental Hebrew typography

Category: [Features](#), [Worldwide](#), [Graphics](#) 20 Jan 2006



Typography by Oded Ezer

Oded Ezer is an Israeli typographer, type designer and lecturer. Finding his work on the internet was a real revelation: I just *had* to interview him! Gazing at these stunning shapes of letters climbing up walls, a foreign *alephbet* that got caught in a wire, or single letters literally being transformed into insects, I was touched by Oded Ezer's powerful and emotional experimental works.

This article is the essence of a very vivid and poetic discussion about typography in the Hebrew speaking world, and his strong desire to challenge the borders of typographic conventions.

written by Uleshka



Poster for Oded Ezer's typo art project: Rooms

Oded, you make commercial design on the one hand, but also spend a lot of time on

[typographic experiments](#), which have collected a [long list of prizes](#) (amongst them the [Tokyo Type Designers Club](#) and the Gold prize at the [Nagoya International design competition](#) just to point out some Japanese ones). How much of your time do you spend on commercial work and how much on free work?



Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, CCafe logo mark and Oded teaching

I try to make it 50/50, but first of all I must say, that I try *not* to call my design activity “work”. When I [design fonts](#), I just forget myself and after I finish a piece of work, it often feels like I wake up from a dream without really being able to remember how I made this certain font. It almost feels like some sort of meditation for me.



font design from Oded Ezer



Now - A typographic homage to the work of the Israeli visual communicator David Tartakover

What is the purpose of your experiments?

My first purpose is to have fun. Experimenting for me means playing a game as seriously as a six-year-old boy would. However, I feel that when I really succeed in making something fun, I often manage to surprise myself with something new and unexpected. The hidden purpose of it all is to find fresh ideas for treating typography, words and single letters.



the Hebrew letter "Zadik", detail from the typo art project - Rooms

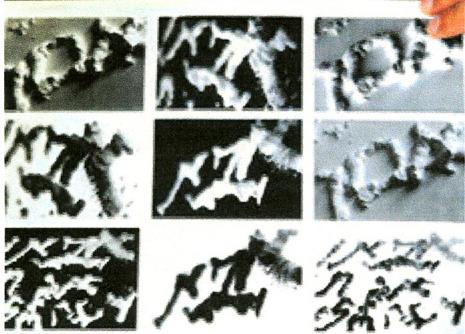


Image from Oded Ezer's typo art sketchbook

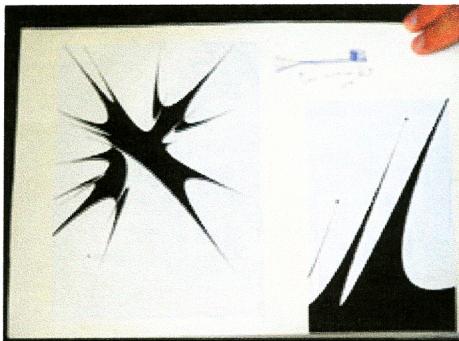


Image from Oded Ezer's typo art sketchbook



Image from Oded Ezer's typo art sketchbook

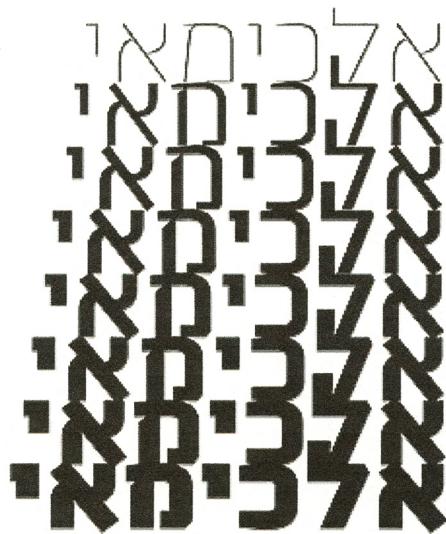
What are these letters for you then? Why letters?

A letter is something that came up from culture, it is an artificial sign for something which has a meaning and long history behind it. What I'm trying to do is to understand this process of creating and re-shaping this cultural element.

You mainly design Hebrew, but also some Latin fonts. What do you prefer?

When I was in Japan in 2000, I went to see an exhibition by Japanese students, but most of their designs used English. I remember asking one of the students: "Why?" and he said: "Japanese is boring." I was shocked, because I think Japanese is really beautiful.

In the last 20 years, and especially in the early 90s when the internet became so important in our lives, English became *so strong!* Strong to such an extend that speakers of other languages often feel that their own language is not enough. I believe in the contrary, though! I think English is boring and other languages and writing systems are utterly important for the mainstream - which is English now - because they bring some fresh air!



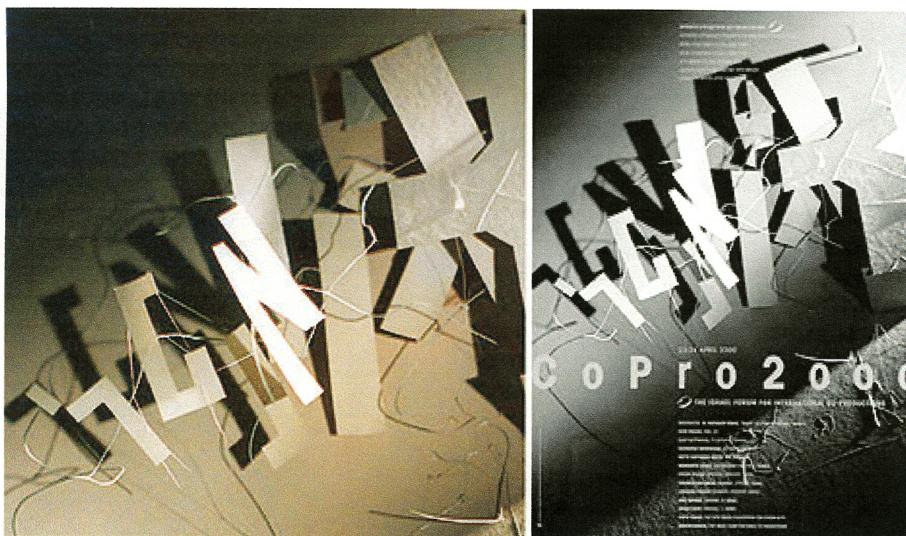
fonts and typo art experiments

Keeping and experimenting in my own language is one of the most important things I can bring into the mainstream. But of course there are parts where English is unavoidable.

Actually, I am always surprised how refreshing I find it - due to Unicode - to be able to see all these different ways of writing. What do you think will happen to non-mainstream writing systems in the future, then?

I think in the long run, people will be tired of English. I think the trend will move back from English to the local languages.

Some brief questions about Hebrew: you write from right to left... what do you do if there is an English word or name in the middle of the text like "Michael Jackson" ?



CoPro 2000 poster

Yes, that is a good one! We jump from *right to left* to *left to right* and back again. It is especially funny if it's a longer text with a line break, than the whole thing *really* starts to look weird, but people in Israel are so used to it... There are more and more advertisements in English - just like everywhere else in the world. I'm sure Europe or Japan are no exception. It's like a disease.

Are there any rules or guidelines of *how* to design a Hebrew font?

There are a few *genres* in Hebrew font design: one is to be influenced by the history of Hebrew writing. There are ancient books, ancient calligraphies which are beautifully done. This is the first way of designing fonts: revivals or new fonts which come up straight from history.



Frankröhlya, a Hebrew typeface based on traditional Hebrew writing

The second genre is to be influenced by Latin fonts. e.g. taking Helvetica and then designing something that has similar features looking like the Hebrew version of it.

אַבְגָּדָהוֹזְחֶטִּיכְלָמְנָסְעַפְצָהָרָשָׁת
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Latin influenced font from Oded Ezer: Impacta&Anemia

The third way is something I am very interested in: being influenced by a different, detached field e.g. by nature, science or architecture.



Plastica sketches and 3D Hebrew letter “Alef” standing on it’s own foot



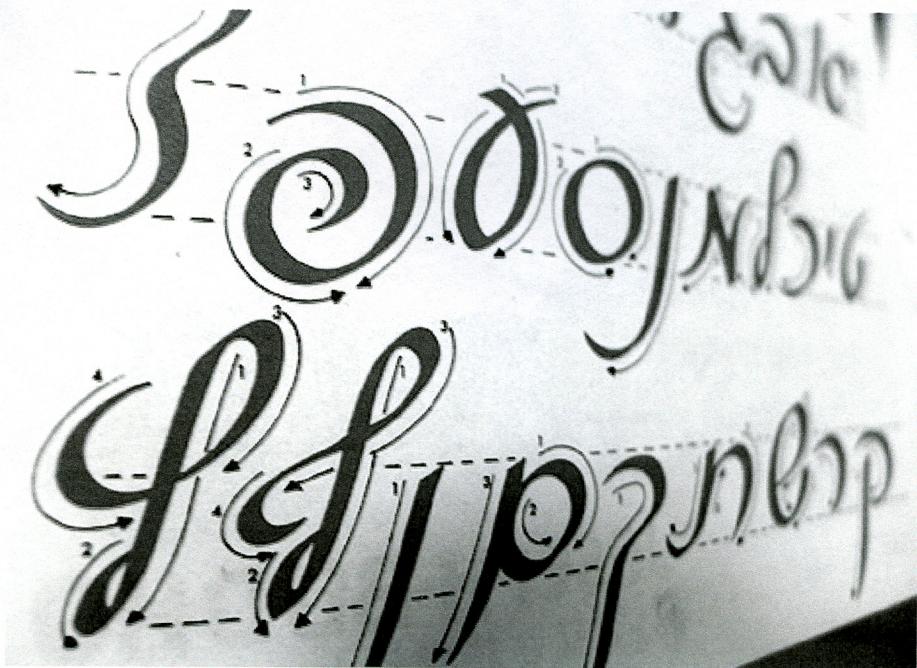
Plastica, 3D letters

Is there anything you can only do with Hebrew fonts?

You can make coffee with Hebrew fonts. Haha - just kidding! There are no caps in Hebrew, only x-height letters, but we have two different ways of writing: one called print (for printed matters, obviously) and handwriting.

I have never seen designs for the handwritten ones! Are there any?

Of course! Actually it's interesting that you are asking, because I've received so many emails recently from people asking me to design handwritten fonts The only problem with handwriting is, that it usually comes out very “sweet”, *too* “sweet”, I think. Time to think about a fresh solution for that!



example of Hebrew handwriting

Are there any good examples of Hebrew and Latin fonts working well together?

A friend of mine and Italian font designer [Fabrizio Schiavi](#) designed a typeface called “Sys” and sent me the light version. I decided to design a 5 weight Hebrew version based on “Sys”, called it “Systea” and sent it back. He called me, totally amazed, and said: “I cannot believe that you solved this problem for me about how to turn this light weight into a good, solid heavy weight!”. The design process here worked as a perfect dialog, which was a really good study case for both of us.

Sys & Systea

אָבָגָדְהַוְזְחִתְיכְלִמְנָסֶן
פְּצָקְרָשָׁתְרָסְנוֹפָאָנָה
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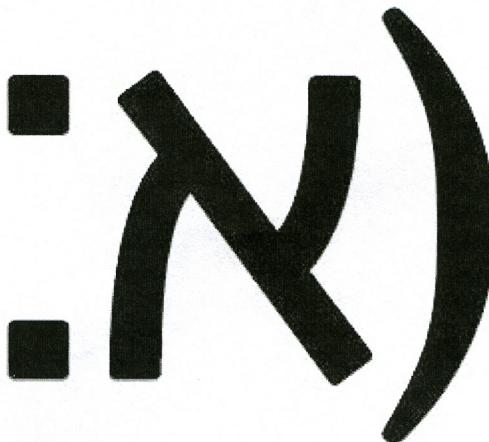
Sys and Systea

Another example, maybe, is the “yes” designs for television. I was asked to design a typeface that would take the elements of the Latin logo and make it into a Hebrew typeface. So this was a question

of how much to touch the Hebrew to make it match the Latin.

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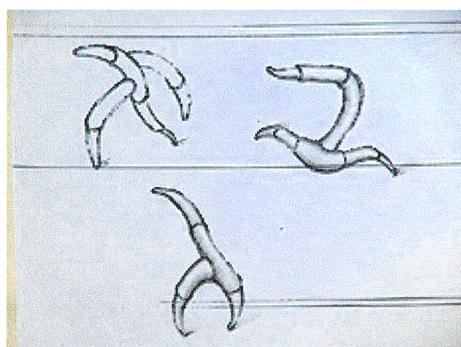
פונט yes



yes logo and Hebrew typeface

Going back to your experimental projects; one of the newest series you just worked on is called Biotypography. Small typo creatures are made of black polymer clay ([Fimo](#)), black sponge and plastic. How did this project come up?

When I saw an ant on the floor of my studio, I started to imagine what would happen if this was a creature half ant and half letter. Wouldn't it be wonderful if nature had invented letters? And then maybe different letter-ants could gather, create words and communicate with us!? I kept on fantasizing and loved the idea so much that I immediately had to do something with it - and so I did!



Biotypography sketches



Biotypography creature



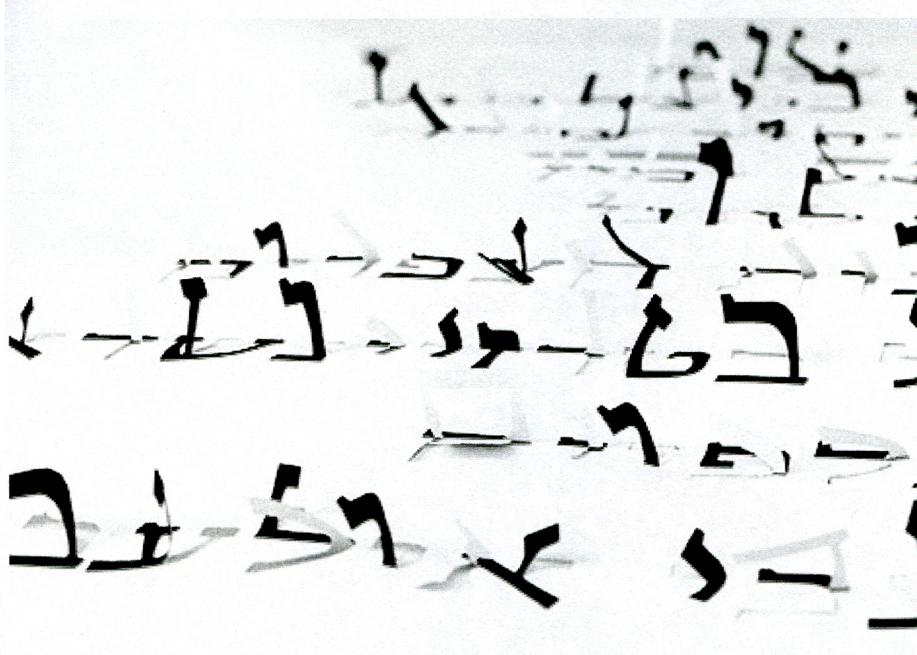
Biotypography creatures

The initial sketches were ideas only, but they changed and developed when they became real. I hoped to create live, almost cinematic situations where these typo creatures “act” and “behave”. The most difficult thing while working on the project was the “balance” issue: where to draw the line between the insect and the letter.

You manipulate letters, set them up as if acting on a stage, and turn type into 3D objects. How important is readability for you, then? How much needs to remain recognizable?

You need a very deep understanding of how people recognize letters in order to strip them down to the very essence of each one. I am just learning by playing myself. Generally speaking, readability is not so important for my experiments, because I believe that the first emotional message that gets to your heart by looking at those letters is more important, than the message you actually read.

This immediate emotional understanding might apply especially to your poster designs, such as “The Message”, which I like a lot! What made you cut up the letters for this particular design?



The Message, typographic homage to the music of the Israeli composer Arye Shapira

The original idea for this poster was a design for Arye Shapira's CD cover. He was one of the first Israeli - and maybe even worldwide - composers in the classic field to work with computers. He took politicians' speeches, cut them into pieces and composed music out of it. So the music sounds really hard, almost broken... What I then did, was to take the names of the music titles and cut up the individual letters. My intention was: how would the letters behave, if they were this music? The final result was completely unreadable, but those broken letters actually created this really strong visual.

Your posters are very simple, beautiful photos of your typography objects. Why handmade typography? Is there a reason to exclude the use of computers from your experiments?

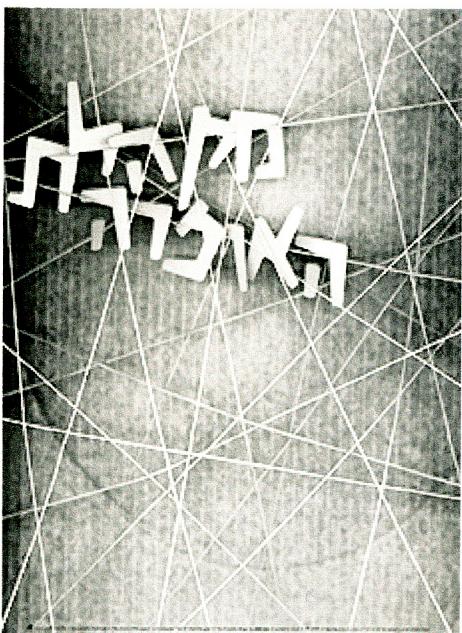


Stami Veklumi (Unimportant & Nothing), a typographic homage to the Israeli poet Yona Volach

I love computers. The only problem I see is that when I design something with a certain program, it will look similar to what everybody else does, since we are using the same tools. I feel more free and original when doing something with my own hands, so for the experiments computers are only used as reproduction tools.

Another poster I really like is the “Chorus of the Opera”. Do you usually have total freedom to design whatever you want?

I was asked to do the poster design for this documentary film “Chorus of the Opera”, which was a very sad film. When I offered them a sad design, they turned it down, because they thought they could do better with a happy poster. Then, half a year later, they came back to me and asked me to take the poster to a festival in Berlin because they realized that the poster got a lot of attention at exhibitions etc.



Chorus of the Opera, typographic poster for a documentary film

This whole situation made me really angry, and I then decided that I don't need to try and force my experiments to be commercial. That was quite a relief!

Now I feel like in that story of the old man, who holds a flower in one hand, and a piece of bread in the other. When people ask him, why? he answers: the bread is to live and the flower is something to live for.

Thank you so much, Oded! It was a pleasure diving into your experimental typography.

10 Comments

1. Experiments: If there's money, there's no need of purpose.

Posted by: [Francisco](#) on January 20th, 2006 at 7:22 pm

2. Wow, that's some really awesome looking stuff! Big fan of typography and such, Oded's work looks amazing and innovative.

3. i love your fonts. great art work!

Posted by: [amihai yacobbi](#) on January 21st, 2006 at 1:30 am

4. "My first purpose is to have fun" - Oded

That's the key of almost all the works: enjoy, have fun with the job, with the work, freedom of creativity in the media era. :)

Posted by: [Yorch](#) on January 21st, 2006 at 3:36 pm

5. Marvelous! To be able to see something in our minds and then create it with our hands is a great gift.

Posted by: Jeanne on January 22nd, 2006 at 3:51 am

6. Great work! It looks so fantastic...

Posted by: Pansea on January 23rd, 2006 at 3:59 am

7. i just finished a class with him (actually an hour ago) being his student was a great honor and a real eye-opener.

Posted by: [NishMa](#) on January 27th, 2006 at 1:56 am

8. Proud of you!

Call me.

Posted by: [Gezer](#) on February 1st, 2006 at 12:58 am

9. [...] [...]

Posted by: [1 + 1 = 1 » buchstäblich fliegen](#) on February 13th, 2006 at 5:02 am

10. [...] Oded Ezer [...]