The Whimsical Works of W. A. Dwiggins

A Peek into the Elusive World of Dwiggins

By Amanda Nelson

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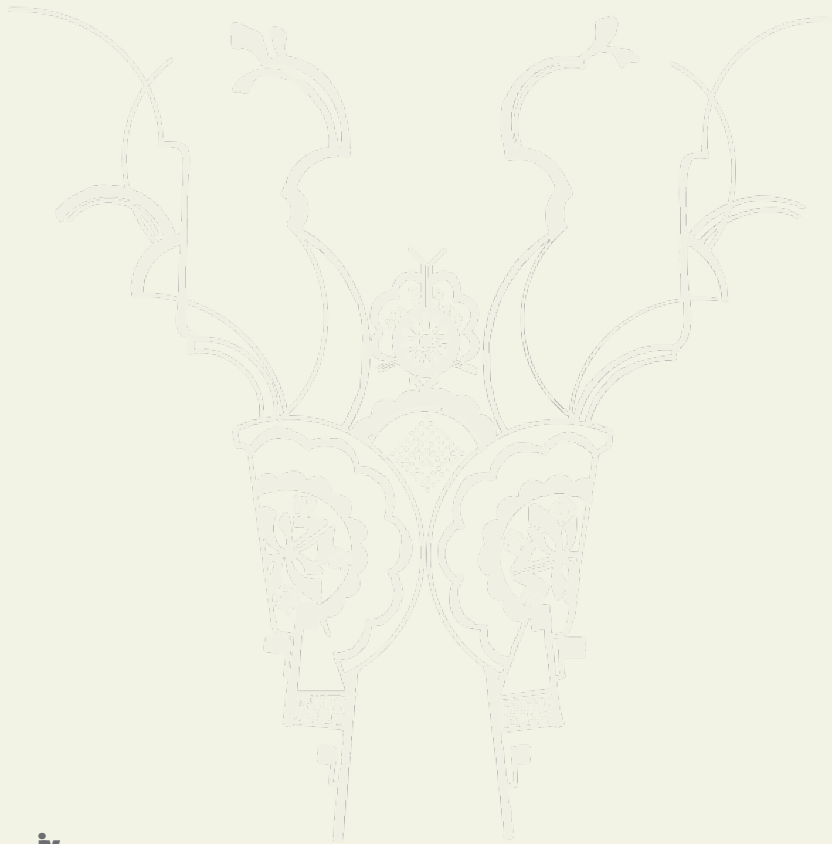# TABLE OF CONTENTS

An Introduction To W. A. Dwiggins

William Addison Dwiggins, born in Martinsville, Ohio, in 1880, was a prominent figure in graphic design, typography and book design. Dwiggins was a multi-hyphenate artist. He was an illustrator, writer, and marionette maker. Dwiggins began his artistic journey by studying under Frederic William Goudy at the Frank Holme School of Illustration in Chicago, where he honed his skills in typography and design. Frederic W. Goudy was an American type designer, artist and printer, creating over 100 typefaces including Copperplate Gothic, Goudy Old Style, and Kennerly. In 1906 Dwiggins followed Goudy to Hingham, Massachusetts, where he would remain for the rest of his career. In Massachusetts, where he designed advertising and lettering, a field that would help shape his future contributions to graphic design. He was acting director of Harvard University Press from 1917 to 1918 before he became a book designer. He worked for Mergenthaler Linotype Company, Yale University
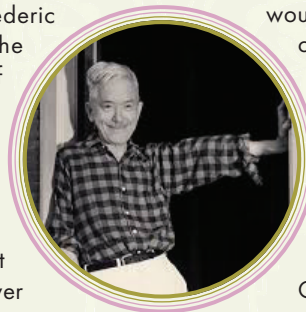
Press, and the Knopf publishing firm. Dwiggins established himself as a book designer in the 1920s and began work with Alfred Knopf, transforming their designs for trade books and setting a new standard for the industry. Each of


the Knopf books he designed included a brief note on the history of the type he used in the book. He tried to use contemporary typographic decoration, and his popular bindings used designs made of repeated decorative units like early printers' fleurons. A fleuron is a typographic element used either as a punctuation mark or as an ornament for typographic compositions. In

1917, Dwiggins became acting director of Harvard University Press, where he contributed to the development of its visual identity and design. His career flourished as he worked with

notable companies and institutions, including the Mergenthaler Linotype Company, Yale University Press, and Alfred Knopf. William Addison

Dwiggins was a significant figure in early 20th century American type design and graphic arts, known for his
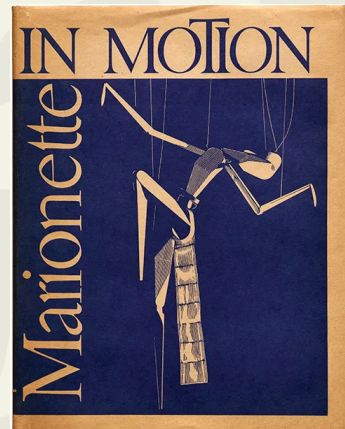
pioneering work in book design and typeface creation. His professional life spanned many facets of graphic design, but he is most celebrated for his contributions to typography and font design, which remain influential today.

Electra
Aa Kk Pp
Aa Kk Pp
Aa Kk Pp

Püterschein

abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

Electra

Electra (1935)

a notable typeface designed by Dwiggins. Created for the Ludlow Typograph Company, Electra is a serif typeface that exemplifies the transitional style, bridging the gap between the Old Style and Modern typefaces. Electra was designed with fine details, offering excellent legibility while maintaining a graceful appearance, making it suitable for body text in books and newspapers. Dwiggins's meticulous attention to proportions and spacing resulted in a typeface that was not only aesthetically pleasing but also highly functional for printed works.

Caledonia (1938)

also created by Dwiggins. The typeface was intended as a revamp of the traditional Scotch Roman style. Caledonia was one of the first types designed specifically for the emerging needs of the American printing industry in the mid-20th century. Dwiggins' skill as a type designer was his ability to take classical principles of type design and adapt them to modern needs.

plex
offli
ade
ngtu

WILLIAM A DWIGGINS ‹1939›

Joaquin Phoenix was *gazed* by MTV **for luck!**

— NEW —
CALEDONIA

Caledonia
Aa Qq Rr
Aa Qq Rr

Weweantic

abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

CALEDONIA
Regular *Italic* Semibold *Semibold Italic*
Bold ***Bold Italic*** **Black** ***Black Italic***

C
ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklm
nopqrstuvwxyz
1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 0 ?!#

Metro (1929)

is Dwiggins' most renowned work in typography began in the 1920s. He created many original typefaces, the most famous of which being Metro. Developed for the Mergenthaler Linotype Company, Metro is a modernist sans-serif typeface that became highly popular in the 1930s. It was clean, geometric, and functional, embodying the modernist aesthetics of the time. Metro remains a cornerstone of early 20th-century American typography and has seen numerous revivals since its creation. Dwiggins' skill in balancing functionality with elegance allowed him to develop a versatile typeface suitable for text and display use.
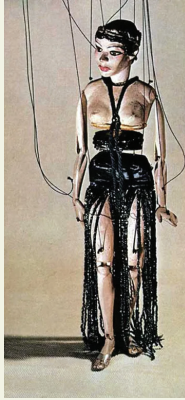
Jack of all Trades
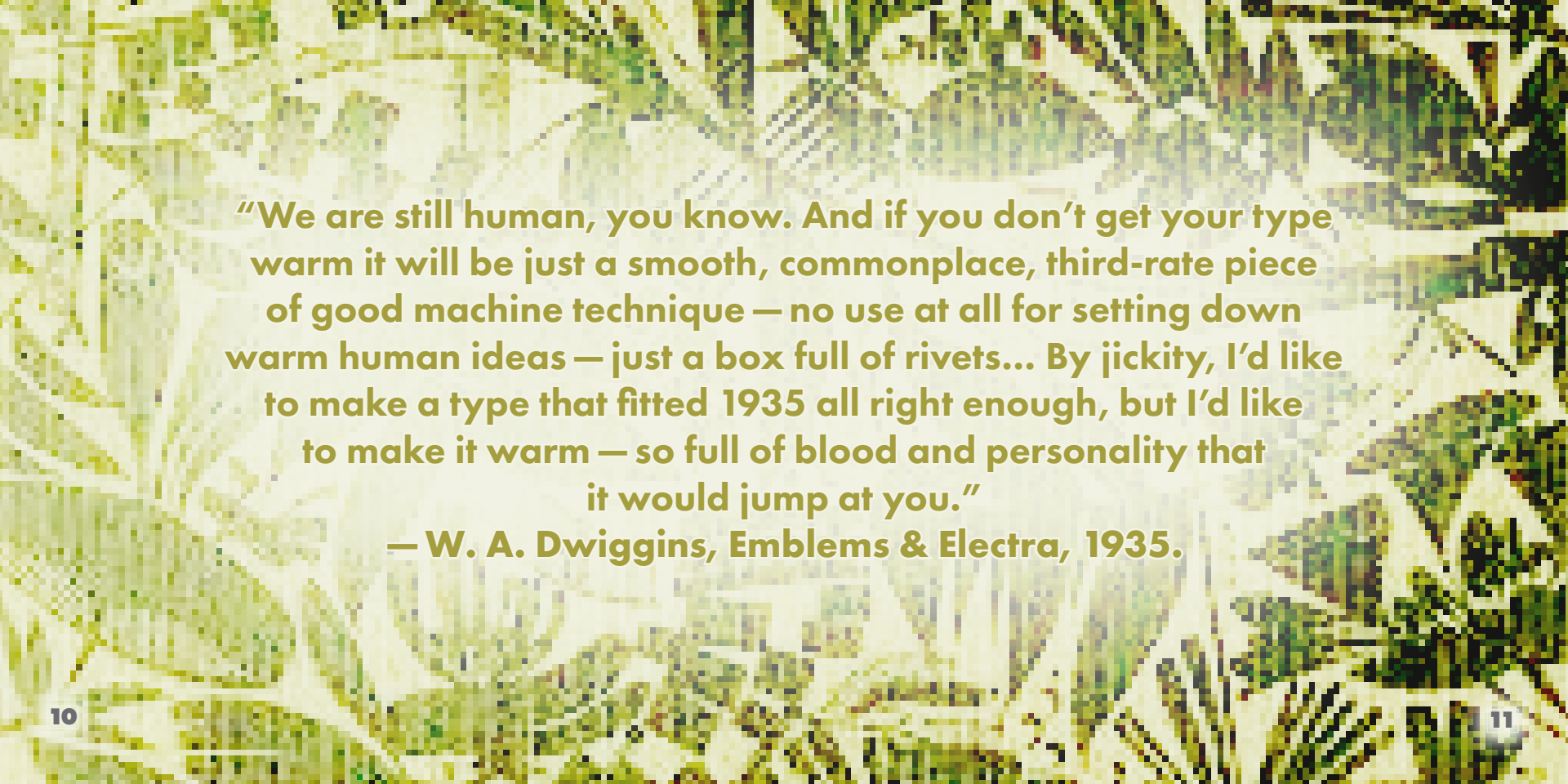
Dwiggins' other talents

Dwiggins' love of wood carving led to his creation of a marionette theatre in a garage at 5 Irving Street, which was behind his home at 30 Leavitt Street in Hingham, Massachusetts. He also created a

puppet group named the Püterschein Authority. In 1933 he performed his first show there, "The Mystery of the Blind Beggarman." Dwiggins built his second theatre under his studio at 45 Irving Street. Further productions of the Püterschein Authority included "Prelude to Eden," "Brother Jeromy," "Millennium 1," and "The Princess Primrose of Shahaban in Persia." Most of his marionettes were twelve inches tall. The marionettes were donated to the three-room Dwiggins Collection at the Boston Public Library in 1967.

"We are still human, you know. And if you don't get your type warm it will be just a smooth, commonplace, third-rate piece of good machine technique — no use at all for setting down warm human ideas — just a box full of rivets... By jickity, I'd like to make a type that fitted 1935 all right enough, but I'd like to make it warm — so full of blood and personality that it would jump at you."
— W. A. Dwiggins, Emblems & Electra, 1935.

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