

Evoking the Muse with Betty Locke

by Lindley McDougall

As we began our two days of eclectic assignments with Betty, she remarked that she felt very much at home with BVCG members, and that this high degree of familiarity would give her freedom to use us as “guinea pigs” in her endless quest to expand our horizons and her own.

There followed a series of exercises that included drawing, writing, painting and thinking. Some of these seemed simple but were nevertheless challenging to execute. Others were in the form of sequential operations that we would return to repeatedly over the weekend.

We began with a drawing challenge, using pencil to draw the shapes of Roman typeface letters that we observed upside down. It helps to concentrate more on counterspaces than on the outline of the letters.

Betty handed out pieces of cover stock that we used to make a greeting card. We divided up the face of the card into rectangles, squares, circles, borders and other various shapes. Then, using a number as our primary subject, we devised as many



interpretations of it as we could: as digits, text, Roman numerals etc. Stretch or compress them, outline or overlay them, introduce texture and graphic marks. Then we coloured and painted and enhanced each small illustration. The results of this project, which we developed over the course of two days, were lively and colourful indeed!

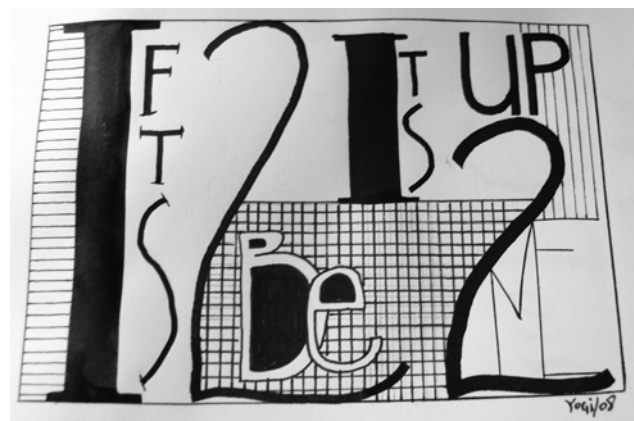
The half-inch flat brush is one of Betty’s favourite tools, and one that she uses with great dexterity

and delicacy for both lettering and illustration.

She demonstrated a series of simple brushstrokes that can be used to build up abstract, geometric or floral images. We used these graceful strokes to create a delightful circular composition.



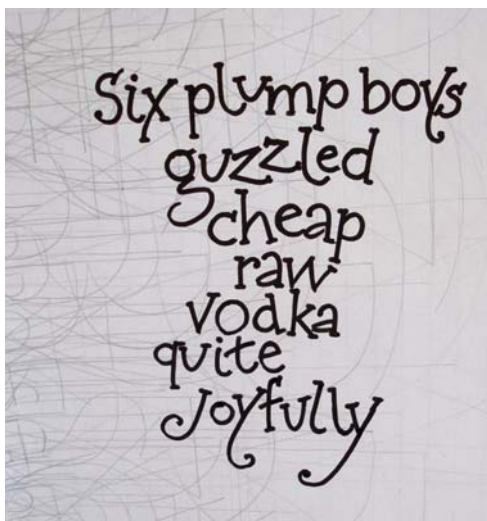
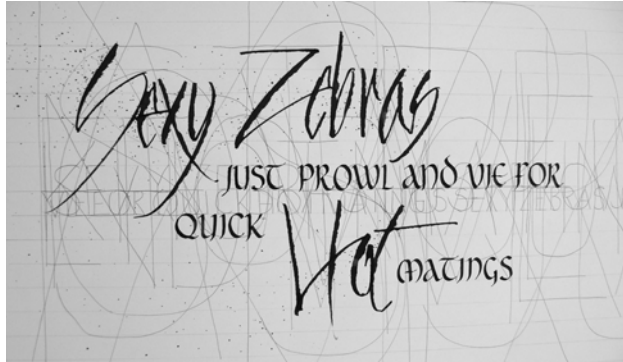
Here’s a tricky quote: IF IT IS TO BE, IT IS UP TO ME. Ten words, each with only two letters. A calligrapher’s nightmare! We were told to “fill the page” and also to create a focal point within the composition. There were many different approaches to this, and many strong solutions.



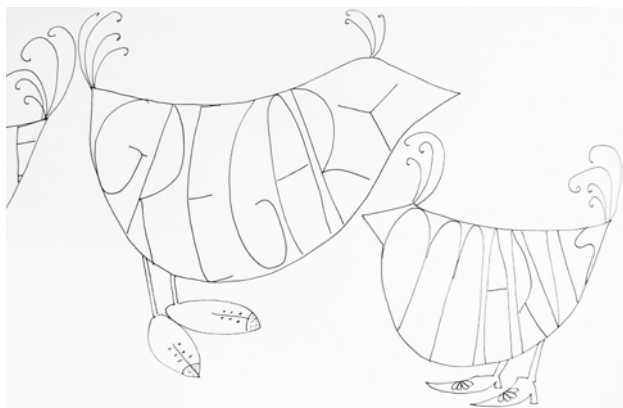
Other quickie assignments, which took between ten and thirty minutes, included a passage of *boustrophedon* writing. This Greek word means “as the ox plows the field” and each line of alternates between our accustomed left-right direction and the reverse, in which the letters themselves must be written mirror-image.



In another exercise, we used elasticized monoline pencil caps to write a pangram (alphabet sentence) with ever-decreasing body height until we got a “stew” of illegible lettering that resulted in an interesting and unpredictable texture. We overlaid this background with a calligraphic pen writing of the original pangram.



Betty shared with us her whimsical invention, a cute cartoon bird that could be customized with a name written into its body. This would be a colourful and charming card or decoration.



Our most complex task was to create a series of four small panels. These were six-inch squares of watercolour paper on which we did a series of operations, each of which related to or built on what went before.

- ♦ Using a small cosmetic sponge, daub nearly dry watercolour onto each panel.
- ♦ With monoline pen, add straight and curved lines to divide up the surface.
- ♦ Use masking and further daubing to add more depth to the base colour.
- ♦ Select an image from a design source (provided by Betty) and incorporate it, or elements of it, as a pencil drawing.
- ♦ With monoline pen, add alphabetic elements.
- ♦ Create a stencil, perhaps based on your drawing source, and add that image repeatedly.
- ♦ Continue to add depth and detail with further masking, daubing, letters and graphic lines.
- ♦ Add a calligraphic letter to each panel.
- ♦ Finally, use a contrasting colour to add a “jewel” to each square.



The completed quatrain of panels, each an echo of the others, could be arranged in a variety of ways. Each contains the same colours and design elements, but has its own unique rhythm and detail.

Our final assignment was to produce an evocative writing of an Inuit lullaby: *The owl of sleep calls to you from his tree of dreams*. This seemed like a sensitive and relaxing way to end our two-day workshop, and there were many thoughtful interpretations of the quote.

I think each of us made some discoveries over the weekend, and we felt challenged and stimulated as Betty led us along with encouragement, enthusiasm and humour.