

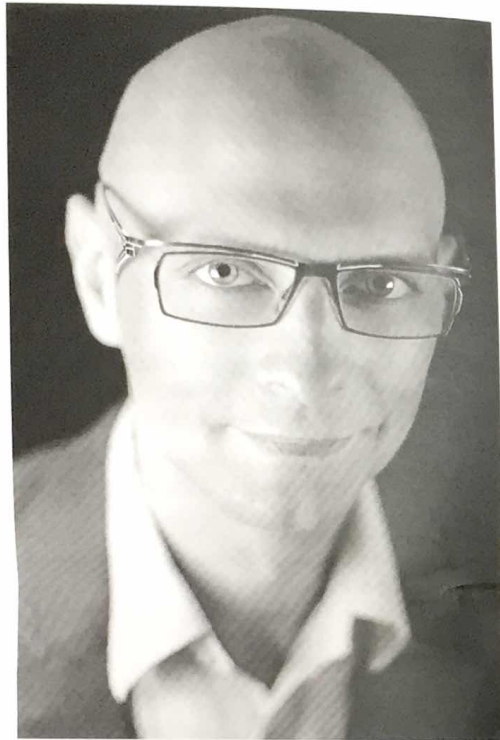
Conversation with... Jim Davies

Artwork and text by Jim Davies, article facilitated by Madeleine Rousseau

Jim Davies is a Canadian calligrapher based in Ottawa. I did not know Jim much before this article, but I remember Jim's enthusiastic and generous demonstration of Chinese calligraphy using a superb set of brushes at a member's meeting. I am glad that Jim readily accepted the invitation to participate in this interview so that we learn about Jim's calligraphic journey. Thanks for sharing Jim!

Q: How did calligraphy come into your life?

When I was in university, I did a year-long study abroad in Beijing, to study Chinese language and culture. While I was there, I took a class in traditional Chinese calligraphy and really enjoyed it. I also bought a book about contemporary Chinese calligraphy, which really opened my eyes. Characters were blown up, stretched, shared components with other characters. I loved it, and it dawned on me that these kinds of manipulations could be done with English letters, too. Around 2003 I started playing with it, and created a style of writing that I now call "thunderwords." Years later, when I was living in Ottawa, I tried to make contact with the graffiti and calligraphy communities. The calligraphy society was much more welcoming, and I've been a member ever since.

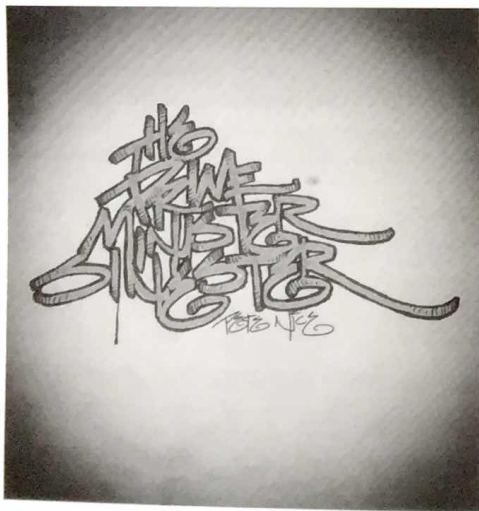


Q: What inspires you for your calligraphic projects?

I doodle frequently, and occasionally come up with something that I want to make into a bigger project. Other times I will find some text I really want to showcase, such as lyrics, or something inspirational. In terms of other calligraphers, I take great inspiration from graffiti artists, and sometimes from black and white pieces from more traditional calligraphers.

Q: Do you have a routine and a special space for doing calligraphy?

I keep a fountain pen and index cards in my pockets at all times, so I can practice writing or sketching at any time. I also keep Pilot Parallel Pens handy at the table at home and at my desk at work, so it's easy to pick them up and practice. I believe that engineering



your environment so that you can easily practice or jot down ideas is very important for an artist. When I work on a project, I have a bin of calligraphy supplies. I struggle to keep all my supplies to one bin! I pull it out and work from the dining room table.

Q: Do you have a preferred script?

My favourite is my own, followed by wild style graffiti. Of the traditional calligraphic hands, my favourite is Gothicized italic. I really like gestural work.

Q: What are your preferred tools (e.g. nibs, writing liquids, papers, reference book/magazine, website, blog)?

I use Chinese brushes, Pilot Parallel Pens, ruling pens, markers, and fountain pens. I usually work in black and white, with my Chinese "chop" as a red color accent. I don't think about ink and paper brands very much, but I always use white paper.

Q: What workshop or instructor has had the most impact on you as an artist?

Rick Draffin has been incredibly generous with his time and advice, and every workshop I've taken has been very helpful in expanding my skills.



Q: Can you share a tip or advice from your experience?

If you practice anything for 20 minutes a day, in nine months you'll be surprisingly good at it. If calligraphy is important to you, make it easy to practice it, and schedule time to do it.

Make a lot of crappy, terrible experiments. Think of it like playing the violin--nobody expects you to be any good the first time you pick it up. This is true for beginner calligraphers, as well as experienced ones trying something new to them.

• CAPITAL LETTERS •