

JF: You've been doing calligraphy professionally for 35 years. Is it just a technique you've mastered or are there aspects to it that have influenced other areas of your life and art?

SZ: Even during the first 10 years when I was completely immersed in calligraphy, I still was doing fine art and graphic design alongside. This has always been the case.

I think the effects of being a calligrapher all this time have to do primarily with my training. The positive side is that it awakened in me a deep love of materials, craftsmanship, and a respect for the long calligraphic tradition. But my university education in calligraphy demanded perfection in copying ten foundational scripts. This emphasis on technique eventually led to stagnation creatively; and it took 20 years and a serendipitous meeting with Dutch calligrapher Evert van Dijk to free my calligraphy from traditional constraints.

For me now, it isn't necessarily about making perfect letters, but about finding my own writing; being able to detect the 'breathing in the writing'. I have saved scraps of writing by people with certain afflictions the shaky letters of an 82 year old man, the incredibly dynamic letters of a spastic child. They all carry the inimitable imprint of the hand and person that made them. I hope my letters can be true in the same way that theirs are.

JF. Today almost all visual communication is produced using the computer. Mailing and short messages have nearly driven away handwritten products all over the globe. Is it still possible to generate a personal expression using technology?

SZ: Your question is difficult. It is so tempting, as a craftsperson and artist, to fall into absolute statements about why craft is desirable and computer design can never replace it. But of course it is more subtle than that. I think partnership with technology is fine, but I am concerned that craft sensibilities are being lost. In their work, craftsmen developed patience and a deep understanding of materials and creative processes. As we lose this way of life, we lose these qualities which used to flow out into the society through quality craft work. A pre-formed computer font can convey some meaning but it doesn't touch my soul. It doesn't tell me a story or engage my senses. I think we humans need stories and involvement to feel nourished.

And that is why an email can't compare with a handwritten letter. In your letter I see the writing, its rhythm, the pressure of the pen on the paper, I pick up all kinds of signals behind the words which tell me how you were feeling and what you are saying. Art contains surprises and imperfection. This is its charm, and as humans we are the same. The computer technology is unrelentingly uniform and ultimately impersonal; it is brain-centred as opposed to being heart-centred. I think our world needs more heart- rather than head based sensibilities. Connection, enchantment, amazement, unpredictability, mystery and the sacred are all communicated by craft and culture, two primary expressions of being human.

JF: Apart from your work in fine arts you began to use arts as a creative medium in social fields such as dementia care. Why?

SZ: I felt isolated in my studio, I was looking for a whole new way to be an artist. In the traditional artist's life I missed having a recognizable function in society, I wanted to be more

connected to the mainstream and do something that mattered to me and made a difference to others. I'm not saying that an artist/craft person working alone in her studio doesn't have a clear function. But I was dissatisfied with the channels open to me in the art world, where I felt art was either commercialized as a product or marginalized as a luxury. The arts are not limited to either of these and can be a powerful force for social change. They belong in the centre, not the margins of everyday life.

**JF: And can you say something about your experiences in this connection?**

SZ: Ten years ago I began working with a nonprofit organisation here in Holland, [Beter Gezelschap](#), roughly translated as The(Get)Better Association. We create large celebratory art events in hospitals and nursing homes where music, art, story-telling, massage, and theatre are brought into the hyper-technical medical environment. From the first moment I entered a hospital carrying my art materials, I knew I had found my calling.

In the course of this work, I was drawn to older people with dementia. There seemed to be so little done for this group. I found that years of working with the creative process had given me skills which were useful in communicating and drawing out the potentials in people. I feel that my part of my work as an artist is to bring these skills into the society for the benefit of others. Not everybody is an artist, but everybody can learn to think more creatively.

„If you are awakening ordinary people to their own creativity they are going to become better citizens, better parents, better educators, more imaginative solvers of human problems and conditions...the work world and neighbourhoods and homes that we live in will be recreated.“

Matthew Fox

***Sarah Zoutewelle-Morris,***  
*born in Ireland, raised in the USA, now living in the Netherlands, married to cabinet-maker and photographer Rende Zoutewelle.*

*BFA in Graphic-Design and Calligraphy from Carnegie-Mellon University (USA); free lance artist, graphic-designer, calligrapher and healthcare worker in the Netherlands.*

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[kontakt@achtundblau.de](mailto:kontakt@achtundblau.de),

[www.achtundblau.de](http://www.achtundblau.de)

Interview: Jörg Fricke, achtundblau

Schrift: The Sans von Lucas de Groot

Fotos: Sandra van den Berg