

Caroline Gillin



May 12 - Monday
5:30 - 9:00 PM

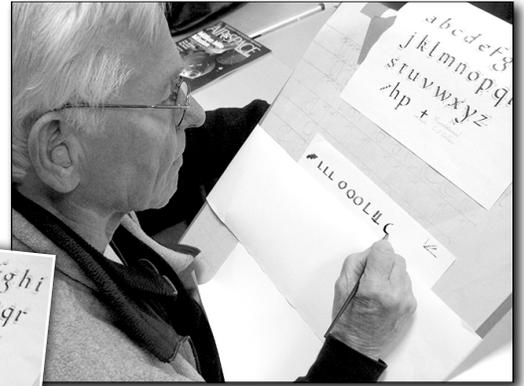
S. Dillon Ripley Center
Washington, D.C.

Smithsonian Resident Associate Program
<http://www.smithsonianassociates.org/>

During most of her 75 years, *Caroline Gillin* has been involved with education in some form. It has been a natural calling for her, one that she immensely enjoys and is thankful for. Her career began with a degree in statistics. Then she became an assistant principal in the junior high school system. She eventually taught college-level statistics, and progressed into being a statistician (before computers were mainstream) for the U.S. Department of Education as a branch chief in the Teacher Core Program in Washington, D.C. She was a regional commissioner for educational programs in region IX (San Francisco), and a deputy to the secretary's regional representative in region V (Chicago). She returned to D.C. to be the director of the Title III programs of the Higher Education Act.

Now as a calligraphy instructor, she allows for personal one-on-one time with her students and prepares them by imparting rather nifty and useful tips to them. One involves learning Foundational, which is based on circles. If you have a circle template, use the 5/8" size to draw out rows of circles, and you'll find it is the perfect guide for using a Speedball C-3 or a Mitchell #2 nib to letter the minuscules. Another tip involves handling oversized paper at your desk (when working on a Quaker marriage document or a family tree, for example). The idea is to roll the bottom edge gently around a tube such as one from giftwrap paper or a mailing tube. Rolling as you work prevents paper creasing and damaged edges, and allows you to work comfortably on the project from a seated position. Caroline advises on how to make a lapboard by taking a 24" x 18" sized plywood or masonite board and taping down 3-4 sheets of newsprint for a slightly padded surface to write upon. Finish it off by attaching a guardsheet of firmer white paper (newsprint will not work due to its softness and tendency to tear). She also has her students cut holes into sponges just the right size to fit bottles of ink to prevent spills and slipping.





Left to right:

Students Carrie Flinchbaugh, Peter Harkins, and Hal Vorhies, working on Foundational.

Below:

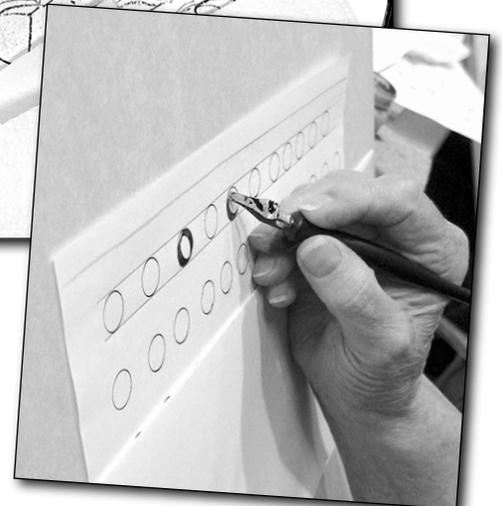
Results of using double-pencils for practice and a circle template as a guide for lettering Foundational minuscules. Note use of a guardsheet to keep skin oils and dirt away from the worksheet.

This wealth of information results from several decades of study, travel, and freelance experience. Caroline has studied with and credits Linda Levine (her first instructor), Sheila Waters*, Ann Hechle, and Donald Jackson, as major calligraphic influences.

Caroline began her calligraphic teaching career at the Torpedo Factory Art Center† in Alexandria, Virginia. She taught there for nine years, with six of those years overlapping and serving as her transition into teaching currently for the Resident Associate Program at the Smithsonian. Her curriculum offers beginner classes covering Foundational and Uncial, with her intermediate classes including Italic, Compressed Foundational, and Gothic.

Caroline's methodology involves mentioning a hand's historical origin, then starting the students off using double-pencils‡ for two weeks while learning its letterforms. It is not until after this initiation that using ink and nib is introduced. For a thoroughly explanatory and beneficial resource, she recommends Sheila Waters' series of articles that appeared in *Letter Arts Review*§ from 1995 to 2000. These articles are now available in book form entitled *Foundations of Calligraphy*. In Caroline's courses, students must learn about slant, maintaining even pressure, and proper nib-

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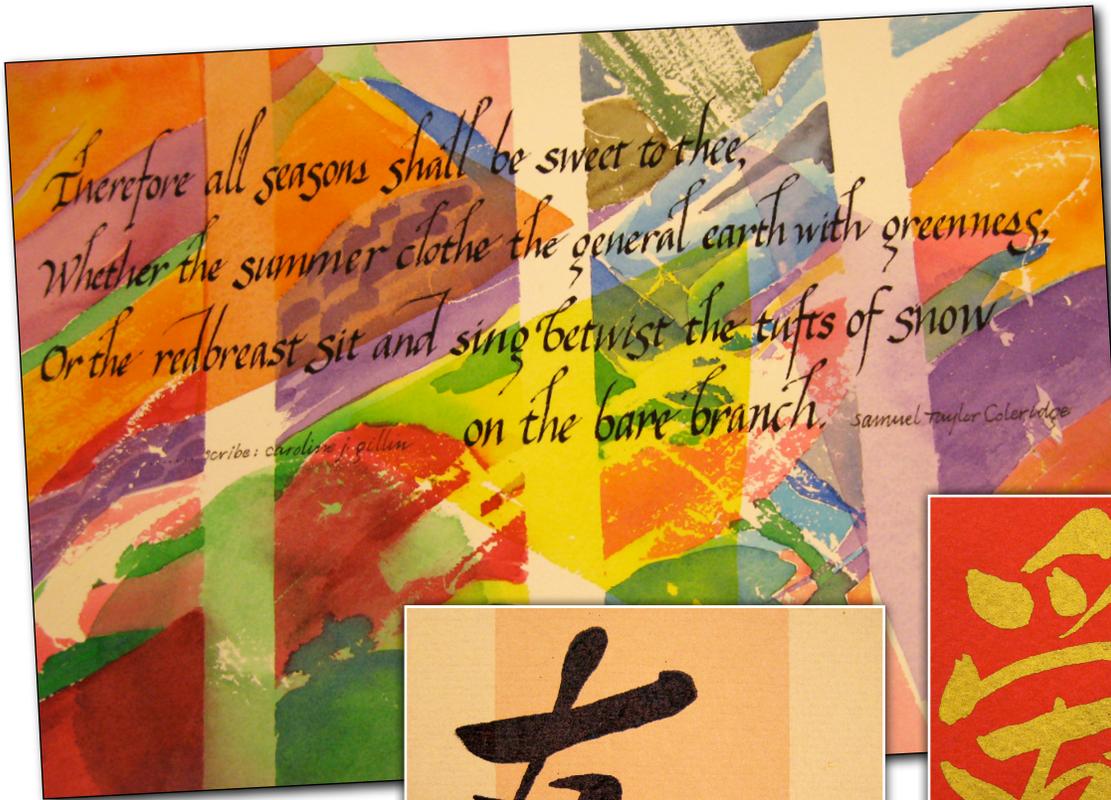


* Special gratitude to her for inaugurating the calligraphic course program at the Smithsonian.

† Formerly a torpedo factory, this center has three floors of open studios and six galleries to observe artists and purchase original artwork. It also hosts The Art League School and the Alexandria Archaeology Museum. Visit www.torpedofactory.org for details.

‡ Two pencils taped together to create a double-mark that simulates the stroke-width of a broad-edged nib. This allows working at a larger scale, too, which is easier for beginners.

§ *Letter Arts Review* is a quarterly journal on calligraphy and the lettering arts, published by John Neal, Bookseller. For subscription information visit www.johnnealbooks.com.

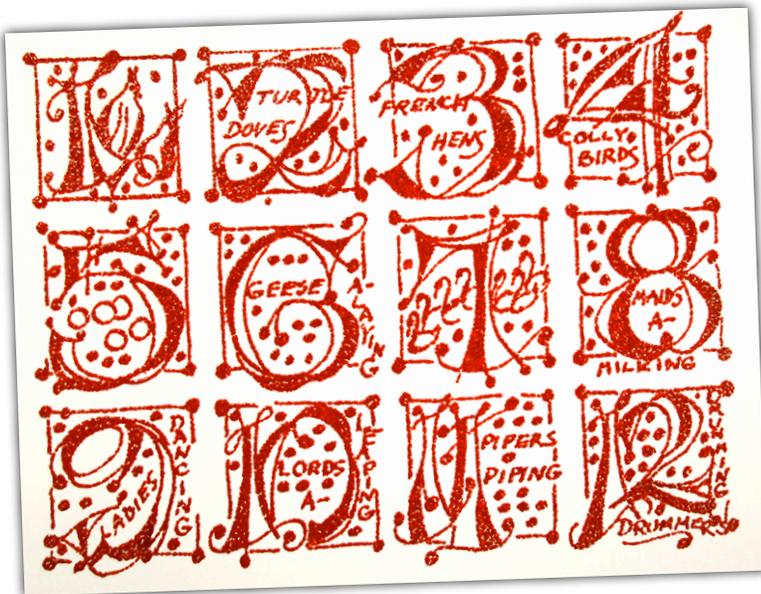
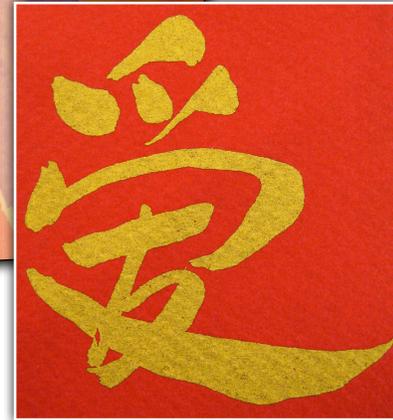


Left:

Caroline's use of vivid washes and frisketing/masking techniques in watercolor.

Below:

Caroline has undergone studies in both Chinese and Japanese lettering (Chinese characters shown here). She finds the operations of using a brush and grinding the ink stick upon the stone very calming.

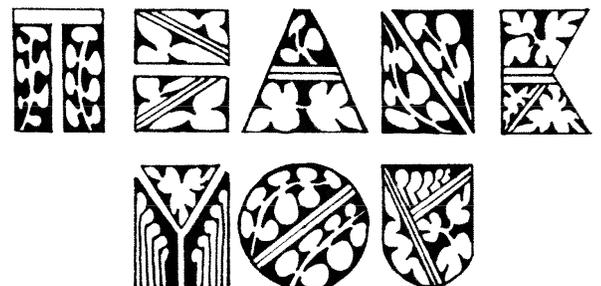


Group above and right:

Samples of Caroline's application of embossing powders and screening inks with the RISO Gocco printer to create these various cards.

For more information on the Gocco printer, visit www.squidoo.com/printgocco.

Caroline exhibits versatility, both in the range of styles, as well as the patterning she instills in her letterforms. She underscores a majority of her work with the concept of negative space and how attention to it can augment the lettering.



Right:

Caroline did this piece in response to her mother's death. For her, doing the calligraphy was a cathartic and therapeutic coping mechanism. It kept her focused and functional in a positive way.

Interesting to note is how she shifted some of the letters' baselines in order to inject both visual interest as well as emphasize the meaning of certain words. She has used darker and lighter shades of the same ink, and placed the text into columns to evoke this sort of "call and response" feel. The result is a subtle mirroring effect occurring within these verses from *Jeremias 4*.

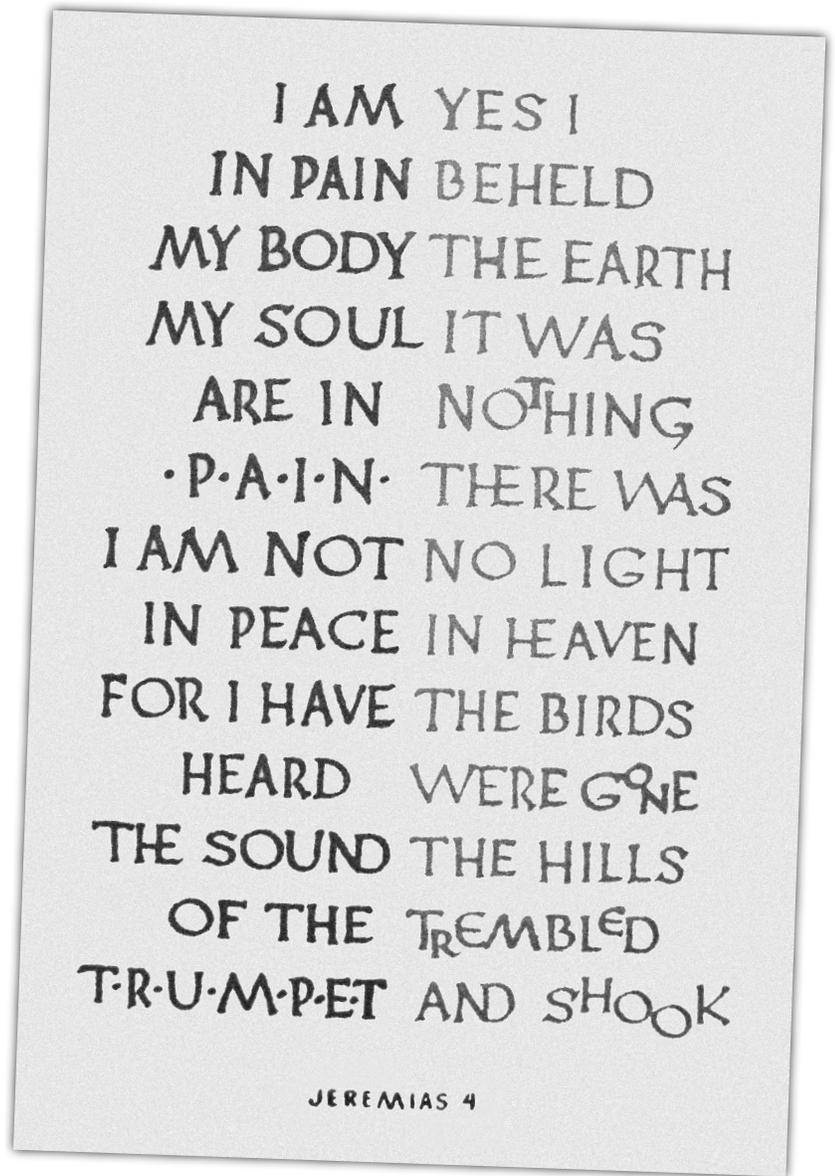
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height proportions for each style of writing. In her opinion, students shouldn't take shortcuts, for "every rule is important." This is especially true when a student is trying to grasp a hand of calligraphy for the very first time. Having certain boundaries and processes in place help to keep the student on track, not floundering in the wrong direction, learning the construction of a style in a haphazard fashion.

Personally for Caroline, calligraphy is, at its core, a creative means of sharing and expression as well as a very manual process. Like the crocheting that she also does, calligraphy gives her hands something to physically do. It provides a rhythm and a choreography for her hands to follow. Because of this very nature, she finds doing calligraphy relaxing, somewhat meditative, and ultimately therapeutic.

Caroline is currently returning to her initial interest in drawing and watercolor painting. She is exploring doing background washes on paper in order to write calligraphy upon them. She enjoys using tapes and other masking materials to create abstract patterns. It also gives her an opportunity to incorporate vivid colors into her pieces. When lettering, she prefers Speedball and Tape nibs, and using bottled Higgins Eternal Black and Ziller inks for their lightfast and waterproof qualities.

When I visited Caroline's beginners class, I noticed that a couple of her students were longtime ones, having studied with her before. They treat this course as a refresher in order to get some practice in or work on a specific piece, especially if they've been out of touch in doing their calligraphy for a while.



These students urged her to tell me a particular anecdote from her freelancing experience. The late Charlton Heston was a returning client of hers for several years. Each year, he would give art pieces to select friends. And so, he and his staff would commission her to calligraph several of his favorite Shakespearean Sonnets. Perhaps indicative of typical behavior from a majority of clients, usually she would be contacted at last moment's notice. These pieces were often executed under a rushed deadline. But, Caroline maintains that these pieces were often her favorite ones to complete.

It goes to show that this world is a small one, and you better be prepared for whatever comes your way. You can never truly know who will request calligraphy to be done or the underlying personal reasons why. >