

Artist Statement

The Big Bang: Art of War & Poly-Glyphs – Steve Woodbury

Creating the destruction that creates the creation

For over 30 years, I have been researching, experiencing and creating art in the lineage of the great calligraphers of centuries ago. Rather than simply using calligraphy as a style, I have researched the most ancient beginnings – which were carved into wood, bamboo and Oracle Bone before ink, paper and the brush were even invented; through to the Zen influence and Samurai artists; through to the contemporary blending of Eastern Calligraphic and Western Abstraction.

For a niche within the Calligraphic lineage from the T'ang Dynasty to today's contemporary 'Ink Artists' the core of calligraphy is actually in the doing, or as a verb. It is the gesture that is more important than simply beautiful writing of letters or characters. These 'POLY-GLYPH' and 'ART OF WAR' series satisfy both lineages of Calligraphy and add my own unique take on that mix.

The basis of calligraphy is text, and the basis of text is the line. These works use the QWERTY line that I developed as information transfer, whilst incorporating the Ancient material of gunpowder fused with contemporary substrates. Gunpowder has a duality in that it was initially created as a medicine, to heal; but is better known for its powers of destruction. I see these as the ultimate Zen moment, where embodied gesture meets unseen Alchemy. Here the ancient and new conflate Eastern and Western concerns to make artwork that satisfies Calligraphy's long and complex history of reabsorbing the new, whilst honouring ancient Traditions.

Before the invention of paper, ink and brush, carving transferred information through carving Oracle Bones and timber. This makes carving—that is, the removing of material—the most ancient calligraphic tradition. These 'POLY-GLYPH' works create surfaces of carved symbols through a process of removing material. The QWERTY gestural line is carved into the modern material of polystyrene, adding content via a process of removal. Ancient material meets digital content, created with an embodied gesture.

The 'ART OF WAR' include ancient text taken from Sun Tzu's 'Art of War' then transform it into the digital QWERTY line. Material is added (like with ink and paint), then the unseen universal forces remove material in the ultimate Zen-moment, leaving a trace of the artist's touch – marking something that is no longer there.

History informs these artworks where I incorporate the ancient material of gunpowder fused into contemporary substrates. Using painting traditions from over 1500 years re: 'ART OF WAR'; and over 3000 years ago for the 'POLY-GLYPHS', I combine a surprising mix of material, while moving beyond the brush to create these unique works.