Don't judge iconographer by exhibit

By Lauren Viera
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If you've ever used the font Gill Sans, keep reading.

That famous typeface and the graphic legacy of Eric Gill, the British typographer, iconographer, writer and printer, are commonly associated with a clique of art and crafts icons of the early 20th century. Add "artist" to that list of titles and Gill is a step closer to describing the side of Gill that is presented at the Loyola University Museum of Art, in a show called "Eric Gill Iconographer," which was shown in 2009 at the University of San Francisco's Mary and Carter Thacher Gallery.

The collection of works, which spans two rooms of LUMA's vast rotating exhibition space, does good toward presenting Gill as a talented illustrator and letterer. Having trained for a handful of years as an architect before crossing over into calligraphy and masonry, Gill is that rarity in graphic design who was seemingly concerned with the finished product of his work as the process used in designing it. This is evident in some of the earliest works presented in this collection, many of which are minuscule woodcuts, which we can presume Gill might have created as bookplates or illustrations for friends or colleagues. (Most of these works lack even basic information on why or for whom they were created, which is frustrating.) Dating to the 1910s and combining language and illustration, Gill's earliest works are testament to his appreciation for both his art and his penmanship for balancing the two in a single work.

In the 1920s, Gill's work began to get a bit more interesting as his personal life, though any evidence of the latter is absent in this exhibition. "The Plait," a portrait of the artist's daughter Petra from 1922, was the subject of Gill's attention to balance and composition. The lines of a ribbon-tied braid falling to her chin. Her expression is stoic, resembling ancient Egyptian art in its simplicity, but there is something about Gill's work that defies the conventional norms of art history. Perhaps the exhibit is religious after all.

"De Humanum: The Collages of Balint Zsako"

Collage is hot. So hot, in fact, it doesn't quite matter what is being collaged, or who is doing the collaging. It will be exhibited; it will be admired; it will sell. Whether it will be collected seriously has yet to be seen. But if you're looking for a form of art that is somehow -- even vaguely -- religious in nature, Best I can tell from the work here, Zsako isn't the God-fearing sort. Rather, he uses his cutting edge to poke fun at humanity. The collages here are large, mounted on very, very old pages ripped from "modern" anatomy books which Zsako has happily defaced on Harris' dime. Yellowed pages of gorgeous skeletons are covered with feathers and leaves; red, ribbed muscles are chomped and glued into colorful composite expressions.

We're told in advance that the works are meant to be funny and absurd. Instead, they reek of an artist having a little too much fun or a patron playing God, sacrificing vintage manuscripts for his own good. Perhaps the exhibit is religious after all.

"Eric Gill Iconographer" and "De Humanum: The Collages of Balint Zsako" will be on display at Loyola University through May 1.

Humbert: The Collages of Balint Zsako, top, by Eric Gill, and a series of collages by Balint Zsako will be on display at Loyola University.

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