# The Making of Typo Safari

Gergő Tamás Farkas, Hungarian University of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary, farkasgergo@gmail.com

Abstract: The project is a plan of a fictional exhibition which would show my experimental typographical animal drawings and typo sculptures in a guided tour taking place in the Zoo of Antwerp. The 2D compositions are made of Herman Zapf's Zapfino. For the spatial structures I designed a 3D typeface, which also has a calligraphic nature like Zapfino. It is based upon the same logical system, but I turned the dynamically changing lines of the characters into perscpective. The result is a letterset which shows the writing method of the characters in 3D. Each parts of the whole project builds on the previous one, therefore the elements are closely related to each other.

Keywords: *Experimental typography, font design, 3D modeling, calligraphy, anamorphosis, exhibition design, drawing*

## 1. Introduction

Typo Safari was my BA3 diploma project during my studies at the Royal Academy of fine Arts in Antwerp from 2014 February till the middle of June. The main criterion were that it don't be totally complete, but it had to show that it was feasible and it had a well built structure.

## 2. Antecedents

Years back I started to play with the Zapfino set elements. I transformed, rotated, and reflected the characters to make a composition of them. In turn I started to see in parts of an existing animal. From that moment I began to create my first readable drawings in a more conscious way. Then I decided that I would use a certain typeface for all of my compositions. I knew how important the dynamic sketch-like appearance was and that was the reason why I've chosen Zapfino.

## 2. Figure



Figure. My first typo animal: Lion

## 3. Printmaking

## 3.1 Sketches

For the very first step I've been made some exploration about the zoo, which group of animal famous there, and the result was the apes. I went to the zoo to get inspired by it's atmosphere and to do some sketches about the monkeys and apes. Thereafter I transferred the chosen sketch to the lithography stone. That drawing was the first part of my final composition and the starting point of Typo Safari.

## 3.1 Figure



Figure. Sketch on lithography stone

## 3.2 Way of thinking

The print shows the process of making the letter-animal. The first step is an energetic draft that illustrates the animal with its unique movement. The second step takes place within my brain. This time a misty picture forms about how I transform the lines into letters or into a relationship of letters, and about what letters are needed to create the animal. The 3rd part of the print shows the completed letter-animal.

## 3.2 Figure

Figure. The gorilla, Print No. 1/3

## 4. Designing the font

### 4.1 Paper trials

I tried to experiment with paper stripes. I tried to move around so that they form a rather exotic and exciting 3D construction and that they form an actual letter from a certain point of view. To demonstrate the process I created the cube with the letter „A" within it.

### 4.1 Figure


Figure. Paper trial, letter: "a"

### 4.2 Digital creating

After the paper stripes experiments, I could easily create the virtual copy of the letters. The big advantage of the program is that the material of the letter can be anything from a rigid paper to a flexible rubber. As it can be seen it is basically the same as the real world mock-up but it visualizes the letters more precisely than the original model.

**4.2 Figure**



 Figure. 3D letter: "a"

**4.3 Concept**

My goal was to create a 3D calligraphic font that appears before our eyes as an actual font only from a certain point of view, whereas from other views it is just a dynamically rotating tape. The base of my idea comes from how the calligraphic stripes in plain extend in space. I did nothing but translated the stripes of the plain into stripes in space. When the writing tool is pressed harder it creates a thicker line, this means it is closer to us in space, when it turns it twists and when we create the line with a smaller pressure it is thinner so it appears to us as farther away in space. In the design process form and function were equally important. This is why each of the letters can be understood as an abstract stand alone sculpture, and the text picture as an abstract composition. Although it is an experimental type, it works the same way from above as any other 2 dimensional letter.
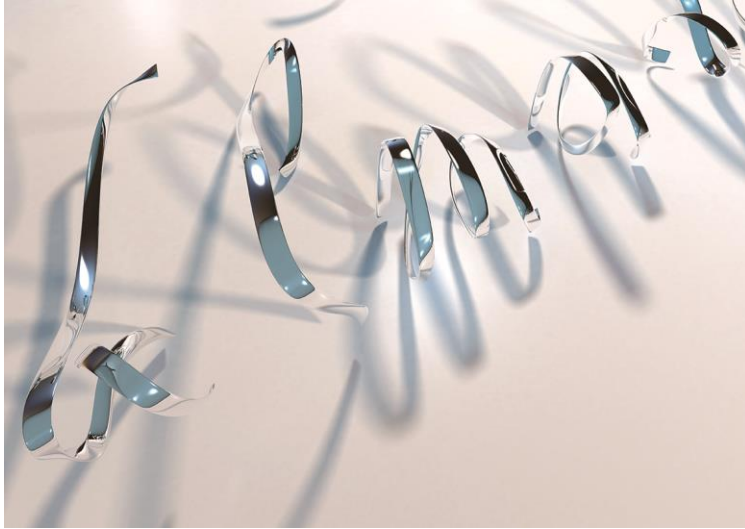
**4.3 Figure**

Figure. Morph-o-type

**5. Typo Sculpture**

**5.1 Assembling**

As a pre-study I used the gorilla that I had perviously made from Zapfino font characters. It helped me to prescind away from the usual lines of the drawing. The spatial location of each elements of the composition depends on what part of the gorilla is closer or farther away in space.
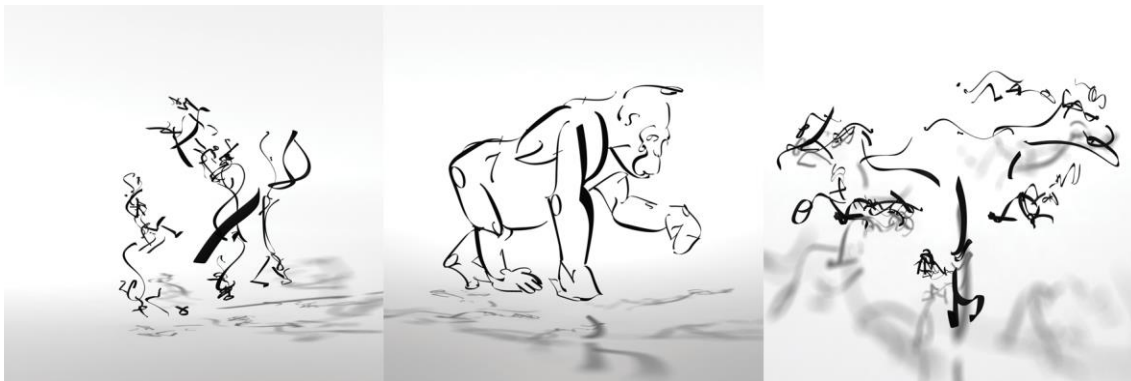
**5.1 Figure**


Figure. Gorilla sculpture (side, front, top view)

**5.2 The research**

The 3D planning from the creation of the letters to the sculpture is based on the idea that the creature should work equally well as its virtual representation. In order to accomplish this, I had to work with a camera setting throughout the whole planning and implementation that is the closest in result as to what the human eye would see. This focal length value is not an exact number because it varies from one person to another (usually between 20 to 50 mm). For this reason I choose to use the 35 mm average focal length value.

## 6. The exhibition

### 6.1 Renewing the old logo

In the first version of the Typo Zoo logo the letter "Z" of the Zapfino fonts was used. This font is used in the 2D animals. I used the same logic for creating the new logo. Because I was using a new to the create the gorilla, I had to renew the Typo Zoo logo as well. The idea of the logo was a clean and grotesque combination of two fonts's letter "Z", the Futura and the morph-o-type. This allowed me to stay with the original idea but with a more current form. Because spatial letters also appear in the logo, it naturally led to the creation of a 3D-render as well.
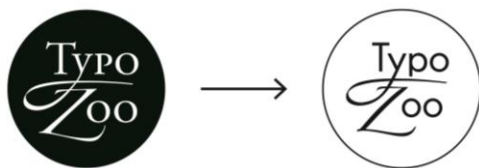
### 6.1 Figure



Figure. The old and the new logo

### 6.2 The title of the exhibition

Because the elements of the Typo Zoo pieces would be displayed, it was logical to use the prefix Typo in the name of the exhibition's title. The Zoo is an artificial safari space, this is why I gave the title 'Typo Safari' to the exhibition.

### 6.3 The idea of the exhibition

The Typo Safari would be an exhibition taking place in the Antwerp Zoo. Pictures and sculptures would be scattered around the entire zoo. Visitors would be taken, besides the real safari to the visual world of the Typo Zoo (animal drawings made of characters from Herman Zapf's Zapfino font) as a unifying event that connects two different dimensions in one place in one event.

### 6.4 Typo sculptures

These so-called letter-sculptures form an actual animal only from one specific view, whereas form any other views they seem as a vertiginous multitude of abstract lines that may be understood as spatial representations of gestures and intricate binds of the jungle. These spatial characters (which are made of my own designed 3D calligraphic typeface called morph-o-type) would be hung in a white wireframe cube in their appropriate positions. In front of this wireframe would be a special pair of glasses through which the animal would be seen. The relating information of the sculpture could be seen by using a QR code.

### 6.4 Figure



Figure. Gorilla typo sculpture

### 6.5 Prints on stand

Most of the exhibits would be pictures, in a size of 100 x 70 cm, displayed on stands at the actual animal's enclosure. There would be a QR code in the middle at the bottom of each print, through which visitors could reach the whole set of the font and also the ones used to create the actual animal.

## 6.5 Figure



Figure. Tiger print on stand

## 6.6 Glass cube

The original idea about displaying the sculptures was to cast the characters into a translucent material, but considering the size it would be too expensive - it is more realistic in a smaller size. Then came the idea that a miniature model of the sculptures could also be sold as souvenirs, which could also be available at the souvenir shop of the Zoo. They would be exact copies of the original sculpture, and the title of the exhibition would appear at the bottom when viewing from above.

## 6.6 Figure



Figure. Glass cube

## 7. Conclusion

Planar font compositions have a special interpretation due to their components. I used characters instead of lines to emphasize their graphical features. With this technique, the viewer sees the animal first, its components / actual structure are only visible when they take a closer look at the composition. Due to the many visual layers, the actual interpretation process takes longer. The dinamics of traditional calligraphy on paper can be seen as a mapping of space. This inspired me to construct a font that realizes my idea. The spatial construction of moprh-o-type characters / fonts has all the characteristics of its former 2D-versions, providing a novel, interactive interpretation process based on anamorphosis. Single characters / fonts, as well as the whole composition is recognizable only form a specific point of view. The viewer has to find this specific point of view so that the abstract set of calligraphic gestures turn into a 3D "font sculpture" composition. Latin letters has always been meaningful scribbles. Unlike in non-letter-based Eastern calligraphy, in western characters we cannot really find the direct references to actual things. Western letterforms are abstract signs. They were altered and simplified at times according to new needs but they have never ceased to be less attached to the meaning they stand for. All I do is to deprive latin letters of their primary function.  While I'm putting them into a new context they take the forms of something unexpected in an equally unexpected way. The method that works so well in 2D can produce even more visual excitement to the beholder when it is extended in the three dimensional space.