AN EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF

VICTOR HAMMER

THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO • 108 GOODSPEED HALL

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A Short Biography

VICTOR HAMMER was born in Vienna on December 9, 1882. He ascribes many of the characteristics of his later art to childhood impressions received from the picturesque old section of Vienna in which he grew up. Early in his school days he was more interested in drawing than in his home work. At the age of fifteen years he entered the class of Camillo Sitte at the Industrial Arts School in Vienna. He transferred to the Academy of Fine Arts in 1898, where he studied under the painters, C. Griepenkerl and H. Lefler, and the sculptors, Hellmer, Bitterlich, and Hanak. He left the Academy in 1908 with a government travelling fellowship, and went to Munich and Paris. In 1910 he became active in Vienna, primarily as a portrait painter. He gave exhibitions in Berlin, Munich, and Vienna. Within a few years later, in 1913, he became a member of the Viennese Secession. War claimed his services in 1914, his first four months in combat service, but followed with the remainder years as war artist, at times in Constantinople. From 1917 to 1918 Mr. Hammer took on new studies in Vienna under the architect, Heinrich Tessinow. In 1922 he settled at Florence where, besides his activities as painter, he began printing books in an uncial type which he designed in 1928 (Stamparia del Santuccio). Further activities took him on trips to London and to the United States, in 1932. In 1933 he went to Paris.
He transferred his press in 1934 to Kolbsheim in Alsace, where he built and completely furnished a chapel. He became director of the Schule für Freie und Strengen Künste, at Grundsee in Austria, in 1936. Two years later, Victor Hammer joined the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna as Professor, and in 1939 became Professor of Fine Arts at Wells College, Aurora-on-Cayuga, New York, where he founded the Wells College Press. He became a citizen of the United States. Recently the Austrian Government has invited him to return to the Academy in Vienna.

His pictures and drawings are mostly owned by his patrons. A number are in public collections, as in the Neue Pinakothek in Munich, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Albertina in Vienna, the Printroom in Dresden, and others.

For further information see: Thieme and Becker, Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler, Vol. XV, Leipzig, 1922, p. 507, and Victor Hammer (Autobiography), Graz, Oesterreichische Blätter, 1936. In the latter a representative selection of his works is reproduced.
8 MME. HUNI, NÉE MIRABAUD, PARIS
tempera and oil
9 VERONIKA HAMMER, THE ARTIST'S DAUGHTER, 1933, FLORENCE, ITALY
10 SANTA NOTBURGA, 1940, AURORA, NEW YORK
tempera and oil
11 COUNTESS H. I. REVENTLOW, 1940, AURORA, NEW YORK
oil and tempera
12 KONRAD MAUTNER, 1914, VIENNA, AUSTRIA
oil
13 ANNA MAUTNER, 1917, VIENNA, AUSTRIA
oil
14 AESOPUS AND RHODOPIS, 1948
egg tempera
15 PORTRAIT OF MRS. ROBERT HUNTER MIDDLETON, 1946, AURORA, NEW YORK
tempera and oil
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hunter Middleton
16 CHRIST AND THE ADULTRESS
tempera and oil
lent by Mr. Edgar J. Kaufmann, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
17 PORTRAIT OF MR. E. J. KAUFMANN
tempera and oil
lent by Mr. Edgar J. Kaufmann, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

DRAWINGS

18 MOUSI
19 JACOB
20 MISS RUTH TEMPLE

21 AUSTRIAN PEASANT GIRL, MARIE HÖBER
22 EDMÉE GARTENBURG
23 LITTLE ROSEMARY MIZE
24 NUDE, LONDON
25 NUDE, VIENNA
26 H. I. REVENTLOW
27 RENATA VON BETHMAN-HOLLWEG
28 LITTLE GURLIT
29 THEA RUYTER, DEN HAAG
30 MARTHA TAUSS, GRAZ
31 MME. HUNI, NÉE MIRABAUD, PARIS
32 CHRIST, CROWNATION OF THE VIRGIN
33 AUSTRIAN PEASANT GIRL, FLORA SCHLÖMMER
34 JANET LAUDERDALE
35 DRAPEY, CONSILARIUS
36 DRAWING FOR PORTRAIT OF MRS. MIDDLETON
charcoal
lent by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hunter Middleton
37 PORTRAIT OF ANNE KREDEL, 1926
pencil
lent by Mr. Fritz Kredel, New York City
38 PORTRAIT OF FRITZ KREDEL, 1945
pencil
lent by Mr. Fritz Kredel, New York City
39 PORTRAIT OF MRS. V. HINDENBURG
silverpoint
lent by Mr. Fritz Kredel, New York City
MEZZOTINTS

40 M. TAUS, STYRIAN COSTUME
41 HEINRICH SCHENKER, MUSICIAN
42 OSKAR STRACKER, SURGEON
43 SELF PORTRAIT
lent by Mr. Fritz Kredel, New York City

BOOKS, TYPE, TYPOGRAPHY, ILLUSTRATIONS

44 TWO PROOFS FOR THE INITIAL OF THE DIALOGUE ON THE UNCIAL
metal engraving
lent by Mr. Ulrich Middeldorf

45 TITLE PAGE OF HÖLDERLIN POEMS (in process of printing)

46 EINE REDENDE BLUME—Preparative cut for the Pindar type

47 BALADE DE BON CONSEYL—Samson type

48 2 SHEETS OF PROSPECTUS FOR SAMSON

49 G. LEOPARDI—Canto Notturno, Samson type

50 METALCUT OF FRONTPIECE TO T. TASSO AND WOODCUT FOR
TAUERNREISE

51 CH. PÉGUY—prospectus and drawing for it and trial proof of the
metalcut

52 TRIAL CUT OF UNCIAL FOR A.T.F. 14 PT., OPPOSITE: SAME TEXT
IN SPIRAL 14 PT.

53 WALTER VON DER VOGELWEIDE, Samson type UNIQUE

54 LE CENTAURE, 2 copies—No. 2, 49 PINDARYTYPE

55 SAMSON AGONISTES—No. 47, Red Morocco—Samson type

56 SAMSON AGONISTES—Waste Copy, parchment wrapper—Samson
type

57 T. TASSO 24 SONETTI, Pindar type, Red Morocco
58 LOIZE, LABÉ, 24 SONNETS, Pindar type, Red Morocco
59 MAX MELL, DAS PARADEISPIEL, Pindar type
60 HÖLDERLIN, FRAGMENTE AUS PINDAR, Pindar type
61 OTTO REICHER, TAUERNREISE, Samson type
62 OTTO REICHER, TAUERNREISE, Pindar type with woodcut on title
page
63 OTTO REICHER, FASCHINGRENNEN, Pindar type
64 BACON’S ESSAYS, Samson type
65 FRITZ KREDEL: BLUTIGER KEHRRAUS, 1918, Review copy,
Hammerpresse
66 CH. PÉGUY: LE MYSTERE DELLA CHARITÉ DE JEANNE D’ARC,
Panthéon Books
67 2 COPIES OF JANET LEWIS, THE EARTH-BOUND
68 HOFMANNSTHAL—EBERLEIN, THE LITTLE THEATER OF THE
WORLD
69 2 COPIES, JAMES FEEBLEMAN: JOURNEY TO THE COASTAL MARSH,
Cummington Press
Printed by Jacob Hammer, Aurora, New York
70 2 SPECIMEN SHEETS OF AMERICAN UNCIAL
71 2 COPIES OF BEGEGNUNG MIT STEFAN GEORGE, 2. Auflage,
Hammerpresse
72 2 COPIES OF KONRAD FIEDLER: NINE APHORISMS FROM THE
NOTEBOOKS OF K. F.
73 ROCHESTER: MANKIND, FOR NEW DIRECTIONS
74 7 ISSUES OF AURORA: STEINER, LEGER, WILDER, GUILLÉN,
MALLARMÉ, C. M. DOUGHTY
75 RILKE, BRIEFE AN EINE FREUNDIN, AURORA, No. VI.
76 CHRIST AND THE MONEY CHANGERS—Progressive proofs of
Dotted Print engraved on metal. For the Rochester Print Club.
Victor Hammer on His Art

IT IS DIFFICULT to give a fair idea of any artist and his work within the narrow compass of such an introduction, and it is particularly difficult in the case of Victor Hammer, whose personality is unusually complex and whose activity has ranged over many different fields. The writer of the present pages would never have dared to make such an attempt, if familiarity of long standing with the artist had not given him the advantage of gathering his information from the very best source, namely, the artist himself. In the following it is attempted to have Victor Hammer portrayed in his own words, as gathered from conversations, letters, and a variety of occasional writings. The share of the writer in this composition is mainly that of a redactor, who has tried to weld into a tolerable unity scattered remarks and divers arguments, while attempting, at the same time, to preserve their original freshness of formulation. On the other hand, the writer could not very well avoid some expression of his admiration and enthusiasm for the artist, his work, and his views. He hopes that the blend of the artist's words and his own paraphrasing, generalizing, and commenting will make for not unpleasant reading. The writer welcomed the chance to help formulate some thoughts which, he thinks, are of great actuality; and he is glad to see them here expressed as the results of long, practical experience and endorsed by an authority to which he himself could never aspire.

Some time ago, the writer took a friend down to Aurora, New York, to meet Hammer. We wanted to discuss the printing of a book of German verse. My friend had never heard of Hammer the painter, but was familiar with him as a printer and knew his typefaces since he had seen his books in various places. In entering Hammer's house he found the walls covered with pictures (unsold as the artist pointed out), portraits mostly, and religious subjects painted in tempera on gold ground. He was speechless; for a long while he couldn't connect the painter and the printer, and he still shook his head when we bade goodbye. He felt as if he had encountered a number of artists instead of only one. Still, the unmistakable hallmark of a single individuality seemed impressed upon all these works, however much they might differ in medium, in technique, or in purpose. Certainly, a strong and distinct personality was responsible for all this production and somehow the variety of expression seemed to be one of its main characteristics. The various techniques were all handled with mastery; and despite the most serious and painstaking striving for perfection, which was obvious in each single work, there was in evidence an output large enough to make a less conscientious artist envious. Moreover, each work had an air of serenity and case which suggested that the artist never was wearied by the tediousness and length of work, but that his enthusiasm of creation was supported by an interminable, good-tempered patience which helped him to see each piece of work through to its happiest possible completion without serious lagging. Strength of character and balance of mind seemed to be indicated by the artist's disdain for fashions, particularly those which forever claim to be the latest ones, and by his total disregard for the salability of his products. That this attitude does not seem from a lack of social responsibility, as often in artists, we shall see later.

The easiest way of labeling and pigeonholing Victor Hammer, of course, would be to call him a genius. I think, however, that we
would meet strong contradiction from some quarters, and, doubtless, the artist could expect from us a better and more adequate treatment. To call somebody a genius says nothing about him. There are better ways of understanding a man and his work. Proceeding in a more analytical fashion we should try to group the artist's work according to the different media used. We ought to find out why a certain medium is preferred, either at a given period, or for a particular group of works, or for an individual work. We should describe in more detail those techniques which the artist retained in the course of experimentation and finally mastered, while he discarded others. The guiding or misguiding influence of the patron, the influence of the surroundings in which a work was conceived, from which it grew, or for which it was created also would have to be weighed and assessed. We should examine the effects of success or failure and watch their influence on the amount of work produced, and we ought to investigate to what kind of self-criticism both led. We would have to evaluate the importance of the impressions of the environment in which the artist grew up; which ones, for instance, he antagonistically rejected. It would be important to try to understand the how and why of the basic quality of the artist's expression, namely the graphic character which is a constant in all of his varied work. Few other artists would lend themselves like Victor Hammer to such a psychological study. His reactions to the problems which he faced in life were strong, and the solutions which he found were clearcut and consistent. The very personal art which he developed seems to have grown directly from the various fundamental decisions which he made during his career: its crystalline clarity could not stem from any other ground than that of such a forthright mind. Unfortunately, an exhaustive analysis along these lines would far surpass the amount of space allotted to us. We shall have to limit ourselves to letting the artist talk briefly and concretely about the various arts which he practiced. It will not be too difficult for the reader to glance into the psychological background of Hammer's art with the help of the statements recorded on these pages. Supplementary evidence can easily be gathered from the artist's own writings, particularly a lively, short autobiography written about ten years ago; from articles about him, from the chronology of his pictures and typefaces, and from other such materials and information.

Victor Hammer started painting as early as he could hold a pencil. He drew, and soon drew with great care the faces of those who were willing to pose for him. Later on, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna he quickly passed from drawings after plaster casts to oil paintings of a dashing and broad execution. This period of his activity is characterized by life-size portraits, most of them finished in a few sittings, which made him known while still in school, as some were shown in a public exhibition with the consent of his teacher. He left school with the award of a Prix de Rome for one year. During his eight years of undergraduate and graduate work he spent a semester in the modeling class and took private lessons in stone cutting. He showed a marble bust of his brother in one of the exhibitions of the "Secession." Then he married and spent his year abroad, and finally returned to Vienna to make a living by his art. As he soon realized that a bourgeois society which was to give him commissions so that he might support himself, could not have much practical use for "state" portraits two or more square yards big, he resolutely reduced the size of his panels in order to make them more suitable to present-day apartments. Soon he had a number of patrons and he was never without commissions until he came to the U. S. A. in 1939. His last exhibition at Berlin, which was held at the Salon Gurlitt a month before he sailed for America, netted him a number of orders which had to follow him across the water, because it was not known that he had left Austria secretly and for good. As professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, that is, as a civil servant, he was not allowed to leave the country without governmental permission, which he omitted to procure.

What meaning does painting have for Hammer? With ease he converses and writes on questions like this, as he is one of the philosophical artists who are articulate also in the medium of the word. Take, for
instance, what he has to say about the history of one of his latest pictures, *Aeolus and Rhodopis*. "I started it by making a drawing for an illustration of one of Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*. The story of the two slaves is presented by Landor in rather a melodramatic fashion. Eventually I abandoned the idea of the illustration, but I could not rid myself of the vision of these two talking with each other, the hunchback and the girl. I painted a picture but was dissatisfied with it — the story was too thin. So I looked up the story in Herodotus, where I found more details, particularly the episode of the eagle, who carries away her slipper with the result that later she marries the king of Egypt. I started a new picture with a pyramid in the background. That is the way I have left it; I have done with it now. Of course, behind each of my paintings there is a definite geometrical design (abstract, cubist or what not). Claude Berger has said that one is reminded of Mondrian by my pictures. But, how sweet it is to tell a story, tell it in these cold geometrical terms, of which the listener (in my case the spectator) is not aware! I am engrossed in the abstract design; he is engrossed in the story told. No compromise, but a perfect understanding. Why shouldn't I paint a portrait as if were a triangle and, at the same time, give it likeness? The likeness will always suffer a little by the geometrical design underlying it, but not so much that the customer will not recognize it and feel satisfied. On the other hand, I shall be accused of heroizing my models. Such is life when critics are around; it cannot be helped."

It is one particular pattern which dominates all Victor Hammer's works. "When I could work fairly independently and when I was not hampered by disgust or by unfavorable circumstances, I could not do without this one compelling pattern. The last three large self-portraits are particularly convincing proof of this. A kind of landscape takes shape almost as if by necessity. Below, at the foot of the picture, at its basis, forms are gathering; one overlaps the other, and the eye, carefully guided, feels its way from one to the other along into the distance toward the horizon. Among all these small shapes stands a great mountain; well-articulated it arises; its form begins to silhouet itself against the sky toward the middle of its height, leaving all competition below. The apex in the two self-portraits stands out sharply against the air or the clouds. High up there the eye commands the widest space. Everything has to be tangible; depth must be clearly suggested in all parts of the representation. The purpose of the picture is scarcely remembered any longer. Since we are dealing with a portrait we do not want to neglect likeness; it can do no harm, but it is only one requirement among many others. Clothes, accessories and background are chosen according to other principles than the sitter may have had in mind. The individuality of the sitter is investigated in many preparatory studies; it forms the starting point for the composition. But the composition itself always remains the same. We try to create always the same work of art, according to the same law; it is only its external appearance which is new each time. *Semper idem, sed non eodem modo.*"

The laws of Hammer's art are not so entirely abstract as at least parts of the quoted statements might suggest. "From this day on (when his drawing teacher had pointed out to him that he had failed to do justice to the articulation of a hand) I slowly began to understand the fundamental laws of beauty in organic forms. I recognized that nothing in them is due to chance. I learned to pay attention to the rhythmical course of their silhouettes, understanding those in turn as representing the surfaces of interpenetrating plastic forms which are shaped by an internal, perhaps a spiritual force."

Thought like this does not come unbidden, without much thinking and working. And works of art created in accordance with such thought are not created easily, without much anguish. Not always does the attempt succeed; failure is even more frequent than success. An artist cannot be too severe toward himself. It is indeed a satisfaction of a quite special kind for him to eliminate from the ranks of his works anything that is weak or half-baked and to destroy it mercilessly. "Can someone who has failed as often as I did, expect to be called a master?" The answer to this
is that only he has any claim to this title, who so frankly acknowledges his failures which no one can avoid, and who is willing to draw the consequences, in a negative way, by resolutely severing himself from any failure, even a cherished one, and in a positive way, by never accepting defeat and by tackling a problem again and again until failure has finally turned into success.

In the early days of his career Hammer tried his hand at woodcut and etching but gave up after a few unsuccessful attempts. Particularly etching did not suit him. Already here in his school days we come across a characteristic dislike of what Hammer calls the "wet" techniques. His predilection for "dry" techniques made him abandon etching right from the start. Years later he discovered the almost lost art of mezzotint, the technique of which he soon mastered. The dozen or so plates which he executed are mostly portraits, quite definite in character, and not to be confused with reproductions from paintings. A few of them were commissions by clients. Equally infrequent nowadays is another sort of print, which the artist primarily employs to decorate a titlepage or initial letters in his books. The technique is similar to that of the "dotted" prints of the fifteenth century; the effect is totally of our time. Progressive proofs which exist of some of these plates allow us closely to follow the deliberate and careful procedure by which they are carried out. Since they are cut in metal, they have a natural affinity to the letter-press and blend beautifully with it. On the other hand, sometimes the possible delicacy of this technique is so far developed, that the prints become as subtle and soft as the artist's pictures, drawings and mezzotints. The portrait of Hölderlin on a titlepage of a volume just now in process of printing stands out against the type like a delicately modeled relief.

In Victor Hammer’s opinion, his mezzotints, though only in black and white, betray more feeling for color than his paintings, particularly his earlier ones; however that may be, the subject of Hammer’s color theory is too complicated here to be dealt with at all adequately. His views on color are logical and ought to be known better than they are; their outline can be found in his autobiography. Only one aspect of it should be mentioned, as it leads closely to the fundamentals of all Hammer’s art. To him form, that is drawn and modeled form, is the foundation of art. He wrote once: "Form and order are not only artistic but moral principles. Form is born from chaos; light emerges from darkness; form always remains akin to the amorphous, light to darkness. Form and light as active creative energies are interdependent upon each other. Form is the most essential, the most comprehensive, the all-embracing stabilizing force, not only in the arts, but also in life, in the intercourse of men with each other and with God. Formulas, however, are the certain sign of corruption. Architecture, sculpture, and painting cannot exist without form, neither can music or poetry. It is true that painting cannot be imagined without color, as little as music without sound. Yet, color is not the constructive element, because it cannot suggest three-dimensionality. Unsupported by light and shadow and by line which describes shapes and constructs perspective, color remains shapeless, lacks three dimensional form, at best is decorative, in short, is purely sensuous. Form takes the first rank in art; it alone is creative; it repeats the miracle of the creation of the universe. An age which values nothing but sensuality of color is effeminate."

There are two more aspects of Hammer’s art which have to be mentioned: his typography and his architecture. As to the latter, it depends upon which sense we use the term architecture. Hammer built only one thing, a chapel in Alsace, and that he built as a craftsman, not as an engineer. A vivid account of his methods of work is found in his article, "A Chapel is Built." Here, as always in his writing, he is more allusive than explicit. He doesn’t expound a theory, and if we understand him rightly, a building means more to him than shelter or enclosure, and much more than an aesthetic experiment. Walls for him are symbols of growth, of rising from the earth which has furnished their substance. Against the gravitational pull, which so powerfully works toward the destruction of man-made form and shape, he invokes the spiritual gesture.
of the unifying ornament. For Victor Hammer the conflict between function and ornament, between usefulness and beauty, does not exist; he never surrendered, as so many others today, to any of the extreme slogans of modern art theory. When he tries his hand on a thing primarily meant for practical use (and he produced metal-work and furniture besides this building) he does not treat it in any other way than one of his pictures or any other work of so-called “pure” art. He knows that both are fundamentally the same thing. Here is one explanation for the coherence of his manifold œuvre.

An independent mind like his that accepts conclusions from premises, but rejects the influence of current wishes and trends, soon must find itself in open or silent contradiction to large sections of the world around him and consequently will meet neglect and disappointment. Of course, this happens to all of us, and we are told that nature doesn’t mind laying creative forces idle, however sorry we might be for the individual case.

About his aims as a typographer and as a punch-cutter, or as we say today, a letter-designer, Hammer has written several times. His views on the matter are stated most clearly in his Dialogue on the Uncia-Between a Paleographer and a Printer. He chose the form of the dialogue for artistic reasons, because he hates the long drawn-out lecture form of so many treatises, which rarely is mastered even by good writers. It is interesting to note that in the dialogue he attributes his success in type-design ultimately to the use of the trial-and-error method in preference to analytical procedure. His leaning toward this typical American method should procure his success on a broad basis in this country. His concept of counter-acting the centrifugal forces of specialized mechanical education by the moral forces inherent in the working methods of the crafts, his scorn for vague and empty theorizing would fit him into many a new experiment of revitalizing artistic education. Minds and skills like his are rare nowadays and should be used to best advantage. His short-lived experiment of the Schule für Freie und Strenge Künste in Styria would deserve a continuation in this country.

Hammer tells about his first conscious contact with the world of letters: "I don’t remember my writing lessons in grade school. I learned writing and reading from my father. Years later, in college, while browsing in the library, my eyes fell on an old volume bound in parchment. The title on its back was written in a good hand. It struck me as well composed and harmonious, so I copied it immediately on a scrap of paper. It was in Italian and read: La...something...di Cesare Ripa. It must still be among my old papers somewhere in Austria. Why is it that cords on instruments respond harmoniously when a concordant sound is struck somewhere? That happened to me. From that time letters assumed a meaning for me beyond their function of conveying reading matter. As walls mean more to me than shelter, so letters became the still living messengers of a very distant past.” Here we touch on the very foundations of Hammer’s art, the heritage of the classical tradition which soaked into him unconsciously but deeply from the beautiful architectural surroundings of his early childhood.

Sound craftsmanship is one of Hammer’s greatest assets in whatever he undertakes. That means, that for everything that he makes, perfectly or imperfectly, he assumes full responsibility. He rarely signs his work with his name, but he stands for it. It is natural that he thinks the craftsmen’s methods most important. For him they represent a sound attitude toward man’s main pursuit to which he ought to attend as a free and responsible being. He has no use for division of labor in the sense that industry has developed it, he has no use for industry.

As he tells in one of his papers, when he was young he wanted well-printed books; great texts done with devotion and skill in good type on good paper. He could not afford to buy books which were up to that standard since he was too poor to be a collector of such things, besides not having a collector’s mind. So he decided to make such books and then have them. The deeper he delved into the complexities of his self-imposed task, the more clearly he understood that few of the available
raw materials and half-products would meet his standards of perfection. He tackled one difficulty after another. He cut his own typefaces and had them cast in a hand-mould in his shop. Presses were built, and the texts, composed by hand, were printed on hand-made paper which was dampened for the process of printing. The ink was prepared afresh every day; Morris and others have done this before him and quite as masterly. But during his self-education as a scribe, Hammer discovered that language played an important role in letter design. Not only did he realize that the different languages demand each its own typographical garment, but he saw himself confronted with a still more exacting demand which language seems to make on the type designer. While meditating about the relation of poetical language to that of every-day life, he found that, while the latter is responsible for the continuous changes of language, the former, "the sacred language, or the language of the poet, defines these changes and registers them. It is this language, indeed, that determines the change of the visual form of the written or, in our day, printed word. Here, as I see it, the type designer's work begins. It is not the reader and his demand that I wish to satisfy any more than it is the writer. It is my conviction that the type designer should do his work in the service of the language." In trying to serve the cause of language, while in its most exalted state, Hammer was facing a difficult task which he had to solve single-handed, with trends and habits strongly against him. Once, his friend Rudolf Koch, after a long discussion on the relation between language and letter design, said to him: "You are fortunate, Victor, that you are an outsider and not a professional. I cannot do what you do. I must meet the demands of our customers and sometimes even those of the market. We professionals have to stick to one line, and can only ill afford to look right or left."

With all this on his mind and shoulders, Hammer had no income except what he earned through portrait painting. But he always had friends who helped him when times were hard. He speaks with gratitude and devotion of Edgar Kaufmann, both father and son, who unselfishly have extended their help to him for long stretches of time. Incidentally, this story belongs here: Young Edgar Kaufmann once wrote in a letter: "Of all the books you have printed, your first one seems to me by far the best." Hammer answered: "That is quite understandable; great part of its sober richness and restrained opulence is due to your generous help, which is in the book too, and which one can see and feel, though it is nowhere recorded or stated." This indicates the soil on which crafts can flourish. The intelligent and creative patron, howsoever humble or even poor, can kindle the imagination of the artist or the craftsman so that he is willing to give his very best and is able to do so, whereas the masses can only buy what is manufactured for them. Art for the masses by its very nature lacks this life-giving inspiration.

Who gets acquainted with the books and printings which Victor Hammer published under the imprint of the Stamperia del Santuccio, cannot fail to notice two recurring facts. One, that in the colophon neither his name nor those of his co-workers are mentioned; the other, that at the end of all of his books appear the mysterious letters A. M. D. G. Also the name of the press is somewhat puzzling. Stamperia means "press" in Italian, but what exactly is the meaning of Santuccio? We asked him occasionally why on the prospectus of Sanson Agonistes he gave such elaborate account of the working procedure, while in the book itself he did not honor his co-workers and himself by recording his and their names in the colophon. He answered: "As you gather from the prospectus there were four boys who worked on the book. A fifth wrote the prospectus; that was Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., who was studying painting with me. All lived in our house and this piece of work at the time was the central event. When the last section was ready for the press, the question arose how the colophon should be worded. The accepted or standard text would have required a detailed and precise statement of every individual's contribution, also particulars about paper, ink, binding, and so forth. Several drafts were made, changed and rejected. The problem was discussed for days. One day I remembered something that
I have seen probably very early in my life, namely the inscription on the front of the Jesuits' Church in Vienna: *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*. I gathered the boys at tea time, telling them that I believed to have found a solution. When they were ready to listen I said that it would always be difficult to record everyone's merits properly in the colophon, and whether, therefore, it wouldn't be wiser to throw all our merits in the lap of Him from whom we have received them as an act of grace. Their consent was immediate and unanimous; they understood the spirit in which the work was conducted and thought that it found its proper expression in an act of offering."

This is quite a revelation. It is not too far-fetched to suspect a religious principle as the guiding force of such serious art as that of Victor Hammer. Still, we do well continually to test his works by this touchstone in order to understand their full meaning. Unless art, or as far as that goes, any activity of man wants to limit itself to the merely utilitarian or trivial, God enters as a third contracting party into the compact between the artist and his patrons. It is always uncertain whether we can satisfy men: customers, superiors, family, servants, and so on. It is easier to satisfy God, provided one does his best and strives toward perfection as far as that is possible for mortals. If this is not true for everybody and under all circumstances, it at least is true for an artist and his work.

The explanation of the word *Santuccio* shares in the same mood. The ending *uccio* is deprecative, though at the same time caressing and slightly consoling. A *Santuccio* is a small Saint of little interceding power. But still he is a Saint. Hammer loved the idea, the human touch in it. Perhaps he wanted to hint at his own role as a printer as he foresaw it. The plain fact is that the house in which he lived in Florence and where the press was installed, had above one of its doors a niche with the statuette of a monk in it. Hence the name for the house "*Il Santuccio,*** and hence the name for the press.

A few words should be said about Hammer's Uncial. Type design since Gutenberg had its ups and downs. Beauty and perfection of execution played their role, and the historical importance of certain typefaces is well vindicated by critics. However, the differences between the written letter forms and, later on, the typefaces of the various alphabeters derived from the Roman capitals are never basic. All these alphabeters, without exception can be traced back to the original capitals as found in fine Roman inscriptions. The most beautiful so-called national hand or typeface simply is a variation of this theme. So are the most atrocious inventions and distortions of the late nineteenth century and all the fantastically arranged initials since the time of the early scribes. Every one of these initials is reminiscent of the original letter. In order to pass judgment on the worth of all these hundreds of variations one must know and understand the theme. We know the theme, but do we always understand it?

Hammer never gets tired pointing out that the individual Roman letter has shed all resemblance to natural objects and has become purely abstract. "The original oxehead, underlying the first letter in the alphabet, 'A' is entirely effaced, though it can easily be reconstructed and seen even in this abstraction. The constructive elements of the Roman capital letters are as follows:

The Vertical, the Horizontal, the Circle, in addition two directions deviating from the vertical and the horizontal and, consequently, also from the right angle, which are represented by the letter X. Nevertheless, none of these oblique strokes alone can form a letter; they only serve when they connect verticals, as in N, when they are symmetrically combined as in M and A, or crossed as in X, with the result that the vertical axis is emphasized as in the other letters.

Within this order none of the signs can ever be mistaken for another. They are akin to each other but totally different from each other." Hammer considers the Roman letter as one of the oldest and strongest
foundations of our culture, because it was and still is the vehicle of Western thought.

The Gothic, or "black letter," which Gutenberg used is so far removed from the Roman capitals in appearance that both seem to bear no resemblance to each other, and yet, each Gothic letter can be traced back to its model. Such changes obviously are of historical importance. In the same sense, Hammer's Uncial is a real contribution. When Klingspor produced the Hammer Unziade twenty years ago, he was justified in expressing his doubts as to the permanent value of the experiment. Today, as we see the interest in the new American Uncial steadily grow, despite the absolute lack of publicity, we may predict a longer life for it. Since this typeface is capable of undergoing changes without losing its characteristics, it can be taken by future designers and remodeled into new varieties. In Europe the Hammer Unziade was scarcely used, the various prejudices for national letters obstructing its progress. The longest text set and printed in it is Elmer Adler's classic, "Beowulf," which was printed in the United States. A number of printers in this country used it for display. Is this a sign that we are not yet prejudiced for any particular "national" letter? We shall hope, however, that the Uncial will be spared the fate of petrifying into another "national" typeface.

Let us conclude with a few generalizations suggested by Victor Hammer's work as well as by his theoretical utterances. He states emphatically that he never starts anything from the center of interest in order to work toward the edges of his canvas or piece of paper or toward the margin of his book-page. Always right from the outset, he takes into account the general shape of his work as defined by its outer border. Within this microcosmos he disposes his forms and brings them into relation to each other by assigning the best place to the most important part. The "best" place, of course, is only relatively the best, but it is so chosen that the eyes of the onlooker understand it as the most important one within the given context. Such two-or-three-
"They would be able to enjoy their work more thoroughly and would be willing to spend its due time on it. They might gain peace and at the end perhaps even security."

Ulrich Middeldorf

April, 1948

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