Found Wisdom

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"There is no work of art that has ever been made that is absolutely truthful about life."

— Richard Foreman

Found Wisdom
A series of eight manipulated images by Paul Young

The story:

"Recently, I started to notice that the state of public vandalism has risen to new heights. Instead of just random graffiti signatures, I began noticing profound messages being written in public places. Who are these messages intended for? And what do they mean? Is this poetry? Or is it art? To date, I have recorded probably 40 or more sightings like these in the U.S. and in Europe. Was this an organized effort or a spontaneous explosion? Is there a message here or is this just mischievous fun?"

Typography from around the world

Graphic designers love type. So when we travel, we're constantly looking at examples of typography. Sometimes, what I see is creative and inspirational. Sometimes, it's appealing in its simple charm.

I often wonder how designers in other cultures think about type. As a designer who works with type daily, I'm dazzled by the infinite possibilities of expression that typography offers. However, type is not just visual. Put the letters together and they form words and sentences. Read the words and sentences and one receives a message. And sometimes, the message is profoundly changed by the type or its context. This is the power of type.

Here are some examples of typography from my collection of travel photos. This was the starting point of fabricating the "story."

Dublin

Makhachkala

Glasgow

Salisbury

Warsaw

Derbent

Moscow

Bath

Inspiration

In fabricating the "story," I needed words, phrases and perhaps poetry. These five artists provided the inspiration for the text in this series.

First, there is Richard Foreman, one of my favorite theatre directors. Based in New York, Foreman's Ontological Hysterical Theatre consistently produced the most innovative theatre in the city. His stream-of-consciousness dialog is simply genius. Example: *"Is this language spoke flying? It does fly. My face wiped itself with language. Round like a moving rock."*

Then there is Jenny Holzer whose controversial text-based public art reflected the contradictions of modern society.

Advertising art director Barbara Kruger's contradictory word-and-image pieces were also an inspiration. Her pieces looked like advertising but read like social commentary.

Another inspiration was Ron English, a painter who is best known for "liberating" billboards illegally and then posting his own messages on them. An expert craftsman and prankster, his billboards look like professionally-designed advertising messages, but instead they contain his own political attacks targeting corporations and the government.

Finally, there is Scotte Hardin, a poet who is currently a copywriter for the boutique agency Core in St. Louis. Her "copy" consistently elevates advertising to a higher level.

Jenny Holzer (1986)

Barbara Kruger (1990)

Ron English (2005)

Scotte Hardin (copywriter) (2005)

"Painting" the signs

In this series of eight images, I am using type to convey information, but not the kind of information one expects in these contexts. If there's a message here, it's a reflective one — a personal view of an unbalanced world as seen through the fog of global conflict.

It would be great fun to place these messages in the most unexpected places to arouse the curiosity of the masses. But since this prank would be highly illegal (and I'm too chicken to be a guerrilla artist), the next best thing would be to make digital replicas of some of these ideas.

The process involved choosing images that contained enough room for the message I had in mind. Sometimes, the image itself inspired a new message. The chosen photograph was imported into Adobe Photoshop and any unwanted type was digitally removed.

New type was added, usually using the same font as in the original sign. The type was further manipulated to imitate the look of the original through distortion, painting and blurring.
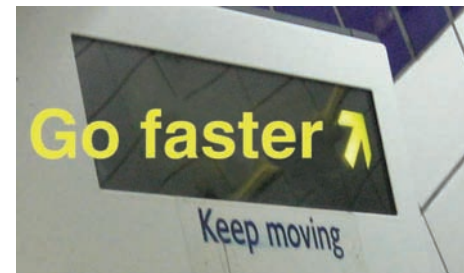
Each image was cropped to evoke the "spontaneity" of a snapshot. The final print was imaged at Walgreens on Bloomington Road.
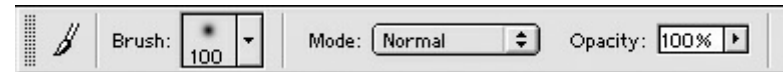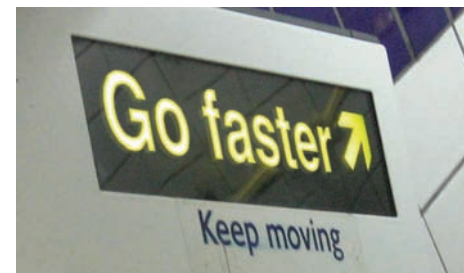
The original image (detail)

The original type is digitally removed using Photoshop's "rubber stamp" tool

New type is added on a separate layer

The type is further manipulated to look like the original

The original pictures

The background images were selected mostly from travel snapshots taken with a digital camera. Some pictures were taken specifically to be painted on at a later date.

To make the "story" more believable, somewhat unfamiliar foreign locations were chosen.

Edinburgh

Salisbury

London

Tobermory, Isle of Mull

London

Edinburgh

Glasgow

London