



Ann Hechle: Calligraphy as experiment, expression and vocation

by Sophie Heath, 2004

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Ann Hechle and calligraphy in the Crafts Study Centre collection

Ann Hechle is a major figure in contemporary British calligraphy. The Crafts Study Centre holds significant examples of her work, building on a strong collection of the pioneering calligraphic work of Edward Johnston and Irene Wellington from the early part of the 20th century.¹ In fact Ann Hechle was taught by Irene Wellington, who was taught by Edward Johnston, so a direct educational inheritance links these three important practitioners. The contrasts and continuities between Hechle's craft and that of her predecessors illustrate some of the pressures and convictions of a calligraphic career in the present.

The Headley Trust Project run at the Crafts Study Centre (CSC) has brought significant further works by Hechle into the collection. This initiative has been exceptional in also collecting a body of digital images; these document items which relate to and illuminate the gifted work yet which remain in the maker's possession. Ann Hechle made available especially suites of preparatory works – drafts, sketches, technical trials, and time-sheets recording hours spent on the work (**see Fig. 1**). So these objects now virtually brought into the CSC's remit enrich our understanding of the context and creation of the finished works physically held at the Centre or which are otherwise available to the public.

The project has benefited enormously from the extremely well-documented nature of the commissions completed by Hechle: dates, dimensions, tools and materials have all been scrupulously recorded. The calligrapher speaks articulately on the meaning and intentions of creative work. Her reflections, recorded in various sources, provide another strand of evidence linking the crafted objects to wider ideas and patterns that Hechle perceives in her own work.

The CSC now possesses a substantial gift of Ann Hechle's calligraphy spanning her early experiments with the panel format, a major public commission (**see Fig. 2**), and the extensive private research projects of her mature

work. The concrete objects accessioned in the collection are supported by a unique digital archive of material and circumstantial detail. This constellation of craft and its context includes several works which Hechle identifies as watersheds in her career. So while not comprehensive, this material allows important themes and revelations in Hechle's practice to be drawn out.

| Date | Hours | Task |
|----------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| Jan 2 | 3 | Unusual map |
| Jan 3 | 5 1/2 | on this island |
| Jan 4 | 5 | |
| Jan 5 | 4 1/2 | |
| Jan 8 | 3 1/2 | sluggish sea (2) |
| Jan 9 | 3 1/2 | |
| Jan 10 | 3 1/2 | |
| Jan 12 | 3 | start of the stone part of answer |
| Jan 15 | 2 1/2 | two is just of answer (2) |
| Jan 16 | 3 1/2 | roughing Chinese poem (answer) |
| Jan 17 | 3 1/2 | |
| Jan 22 | 3 1/2 | Chinese poem |
| Jan 23 | 3 1/2 | Chinese poem |
| Feb 5 | 3 | Chinese poem |
| Feb 6 | 3 1/2 | |
| Feb 7 | 3 | |
| Mar 12 | 4 | Make the stone |
| Mar 13 | 6 | |
| Mar 14 | 4 | |
| March 12 | 1 1/2 | Make the stone |

Fig. 1: Timesheet for St. Mary's Hospital commission

Biro on A4 paper
21 x 29.5cm(h)

AH37.1-2

Ann Hechle frequently keeps a log of the hours spent on drafting and making good copies of her large projects. In this case the time is apportioned between different parts of what was a very large commission comprising 19 panels in all (see AH15-41); see Fig. 2 for one example and also under section heading *Calligraphy writ large* for a fuller discussion of this major work. Note that this total for hours of labour does not include time for physical preparation of the materials: mixing watercolour, readying tools and paper, etc.

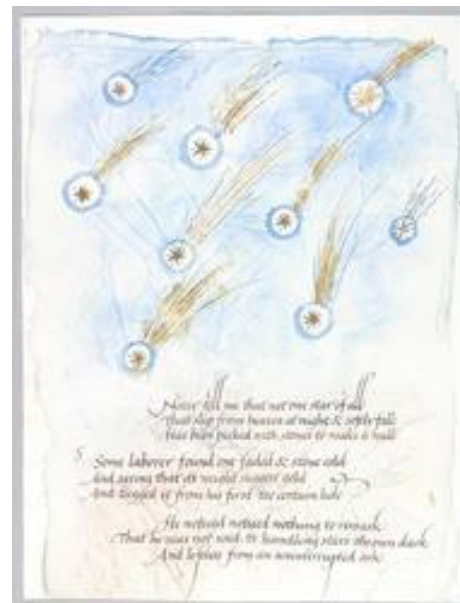
Fig.2: First draft for panel 'A star in a stone boat' by Robert Frost

Watercolour on handmade Arches paper; gilding transfer gold bonded on gum ammoniac; text using steel nibs

38.5 x 51 cm(h)

AH20

This draft panel is a one of a group of three transcribing Frost's poem within the larger commission of 19; this triptych was designed for a cluster of consulting or examination rooms in the Hospital. Ann Hechle was expressly seeking a strong graphic impact in these compositions as well as a suitable sentiment in the text. See Figs. 9.1-3 for further drafts of this panel and the section below *Calligraphy writ large* for a fuller consideration of this project.



The art of formal lettering and the questioning of tradition

Ann Hechle studied calligraphy at the Central School of Art and Crafts in London in the late 1950s. This institution, now Central St. Martins College of Art and Design, maintained a strong commitment to the school of Edward Johnston, through the tutelage of Irene Wellington.² Johnston is renowned for his reinvigoration of hand-lettering using a broad-edged pen which gives a characteristic alternation between thick and thin strokes in the letterforms (see Fig. 3).³ This reclamation of fine penmanship was aligned with the late 19th century Art and Crafts endeavour to imbue the everyday world of objects and production with meaning and beauty. In his early career Johnston was supported by W. R. Lethaby and Sydney Cockerell, both major figures in the movement. The Arts and Crafts predilection for medieval models is echoed in Johnston's calligraphic revival where standard materials included vellum and quills and techniques like gilding and illumination were fostered.⁴



Fig. 3: Teaching exemplar created by Edward Johnston

Winchester formal writing sheet

Printed in red and black ink on handmade paper

22.5 x 28.5cm(h)

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

© Andrew and Angela Johnston/Crafts Study Centre 2001

C.94.5.a

This is one of a series of exemplars prepared by Edward Johnston and published by Douglas Pepler. They were called 'Winchester sheets' after the Anglo-Saxon model Johnston used as a basis for the scripts (Winchester ms, c.975 AD). The first large-scale block of text is constructed in Johnston's foundational hand, a handwriting based on a round letter (ie. where 'o' is a perfect circle). The paragraph below is written in italic, based on a slanted and oval letterform. Explanatory notes by Johnston appear beneath in red. The comparative classification of the scripts and the choice of Latin for the text itself suggests the formal framework within which calligraphy was disseminated.

Ann Hechle was trained in this recent orthodoxy where a formal repertoire of alphabets was taught by rehearsal, letters were formed in a carefully prescribed sequence of strokes with the pen held at a particular angle. The ideals of this movement were firmly grounded in an historical canon of texts and cultures: Johnston looked back to Roman monumental inscriptions for the proportions of some of his scripts and he took the script found in a 10th century Anglo-Saxon manuscript as the basis of his 'foundational hand', a sort of model training hand.⁵ This weight of history informed the early 20th century use of calligraphy for quite solemn and civic purposes rendering literary or religious texts and official documents such as rolls of honour for military personnel.⁶ It is partly in light of this charismatic craft tradition that valued apprenticeship and the continuities of unselfconscious hand-based skill that we have to consider Ann Hechle's passion for experimentation, and her pursuit of highly personal goals and calligraphic expressions.

Hechle was at the Central School from 1958 to 1960; Irene Wellington stopped teaching in 1959 shortly before calligraphy was dropped from the art school syllabus as out-of-step with the industrial priorities of modern design.⁷ Hechle clearly remembers a sense of tension between tradition and innovation in the lettering studio where calligraphers worked alongside typographers and graphic designers.⁸ The speed and technological processes of these colleagues contrasted with the slowness and the accumulation of hand skill emphasised as the source of good art by Hechle's tutors.

Hechle's craft practice shows a clear debt to the Johnstonian school: she is fluent in all the classic formal pen hands, she tempers her own goose quills in hot sand, and has often worked on vellum which she prepares and stretches herself.⁹ Yet, impulses to unconventionality have characterised much of Hechle's calligraphic production which has traversed a huge range of media, scale, and subject-matter.

The quintessential realisation of Ann Hechle's creative challenge to ritualised technique and stylistic orthodoxy comes in a series of four vellum panels entitled Aspects of language (1981) which are in the CSC collection (C.95.8.i-iv). Each of these large panels takes a topic in language (rhythm, narrative, sound, and rhyme) and playfully explores alternative expressions of this title-quality by writing out an array of different passages in different ways.¹⁰

There are no illustrations though colour is used, the manipulation of the effect is done entirely through calligraphic properties: different styles of script, different arrangements of the text, shifts in size, spacing of the words, or weights of the letters are used to give a different character to each passage (see Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Panel from Aspects of language project

Aspects of language : Rhythm

Chinese stick ink and blue watercolour on vellum, text using quills and steel nibs

68 x 58.5cm(h)

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

C.95.8.3

This panel well-illustrates the juxtaposition of blocks of text extracted from various sources that Ann Hechle has adopted in this series. Many of the passages have 'marginal notes', explanatory digressions added in much smaller script which make a point about the text the Hechle is trying to highlight calligraphically. Notably in this panel the two substantial passages flanking the central verse are intercepted by several bars of musical notation, on the left Swinburne's poetry is matched with Mozart's music; Hechle argues there is an expressive character in musical phrasing which we can recognise in poetry. Of course in music there is a way of indicating rhythm and timing. Looked at as a whole Hechle has varied the style, hue, weight, and size of her calligraphy to produce a successful overall composition, yet these variations are used deliberately for emphasis within each text.



Hechle's approach immediately confronts a formulaic association of particular styles of writing with certain purposes that has pervaded the teaching of calligraphy – Roman capitals with statements of authority, flourished italic for lyrical prose.¹¹ The reader is made self-conscious of stereotypical assumptions. In the panel concerned with narrative Hechle uses Gothic script to render Humpty Dumpty in German (see Fig. 5). This plays on our association of Gothic style with the Germanic whether this implies the grandeur of medieval architecture or a cosy cake shop. It is the very abstract and often whimsical nature of these essays in content and style that prompt us to recognise that the formal properties of text are not universal but are wrapped up in a web of subjective associations. The humour of many of the extracts, a proportion of which are nursery rhymes, breaks up the sense of sober self-importance that can attach to calligraphy. Hechle states this selection was chosen because she felt such folkloric verses were a collective form of literature which would stand up to manipulation.¹² She rejected my suggestion that it was also a more widely accessible genre than poetry. Nevertheless the very act of mixing up nursery rhymes with poetic verses and presenting them as equivalent parts in a composition, as Hechle does here, confronts our sense of how things are read and what deserves attention.

Hechle's treatment of text in this work also reveals in the personal, expressive sensibility that that emerges in creating particular 'performances' of a passage. In the panel Sound the top-centre passage beginning 'Earth and Heaven ...' from the poem March by Edward Thomas, the vowel combination 'ea' is rendered very differently in each word (see Fig. 6). This visualisation impels us to think of the different emphasis placed on the syllable in the successive words and hence the dramatic delivery of the line.¹³ Note that the added inflection or a suggested change in tempo is applied at the calligrapher's discretion, creating a very individual reading.

Fig. 5: Panel from Aspects of language project

Aspects of language : Narrative

Chinese stick ink and red watercolour on vellum, text using quills and steel nibs

68 x 58.5cm(h)

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

C.95.8.i

In the centre-top of this panel the German version of Humpty Dumpty is written in heavy black Gothic script; the traditional English translation is interleaved with these lines in much smaller block capitals in red. This structure itself makes a comment on reading and conveying information. An aside by Ann Hechle added at the left of this block of text says 'Interleaving writing for translations or alternative versions; if scale is different enough the eye does not confuse.' Hechle has a long-standing interest in perception and mark-making - she explores the difference between an aesthetic pattern and a meaningful sign in an episode of *In the making* made for the BBC in 1978 (copy held in Crafts Council Resource Centre). See also the line of continuously-joined letters dividing the Rhythm panel horizontally where the cursive strokes are sometimes recognisable letters, sometimes just running shapes



Fig. 6: Panel from Aspects of language project

Aspects of language : Sound

Chinese stick ink and blue, brown, and green watercolour on vellum, text using quills and steel nibs

68 x 58.5cm(h)

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

C.95.8.ii

The centre-top passage is an extract from the poem *March* by Edward Thomas. The scale of the letters in 'Earth and Heaven' is meant to indicate emphasis as the appended notes state 'Sound is fairly evenly distributed round "V" [of Heaven]'. The style of the script used in all three extracts across the top of this poster is versals or 'built-up capitals'. These are made using a drawn outline which is 'flooded' or coloured-in, giving them a very individual and flexible character. Versals do have antecedents in historical manuscripts and but they have become a hallmark of contemporary experimental calligraphy (in the work of Alison Urwick for example) and they are ubiquitous in Hechle's work (See Stan Knight's 'Versals redefined'(1995) in *Letter Arts Review* Vol. 12, no. 1, p.30).



The whole series *Aspects of language* is exceptional for foregrounding this interpretive power of calligraphy in shaping a text. This is subversive in as far as the traditional ethic of the calligrapher's discipline has been to choose the script most appropriate to transmit the inherent sense of the text.¹⁴ Here the role of calligraphic style

is conceived as a transparent representation subordinate to meaning, a vehicle, whereas in Hechle's panels the exhaustive enumeration of possibilities for calligraphic rendering implies not system and principle but infinite variation. The philosophy of intuitive fit between script and sentiment is disrupted by Hechle's thorough dissection of the application of lettering-style to substance and its corresponding impact. In this latter vision calligraphy becomes a tool in the service of the letterer's individual creativity, manipulated for effect, where the only discrimination that can be applied is personal and arbitrary; the standard of history and good taste is submerged in a sea of equal options.¹⁵

The corollary of this challenge to making calligraphy is questioning how to read it. Hechle's *Aspects of language* also forces us to consider our own perception of (and possible manipulation via) the calligraphic text. The composition itself where blocks of text are juxtaposed as laboured comparative examples presents them more like the mangled exercises of school grammar lessons than as fluid triumphs of human expression. There is a sense of the didactic and the lesson about these panels where iconic texts from vernacular rhymes to romantic poetry appear as exemplars for conceptual exercises rather than as transcendent verses. We are not permitted the loss of self-consciousness in the automatic act of reading the page format where text runs left to right in orderly lines. In the panel dealing with Narrative a series of familiar nursery rhymes are transcribed with the text arranged in different graphic shapes which echo the path of the storyline, winding up into a spiral for example (see Fig. 7). This requires a visual and mental effort to assimilate, the rhyme's action affects us in a physical way as we move our heads to follow the line of the words.

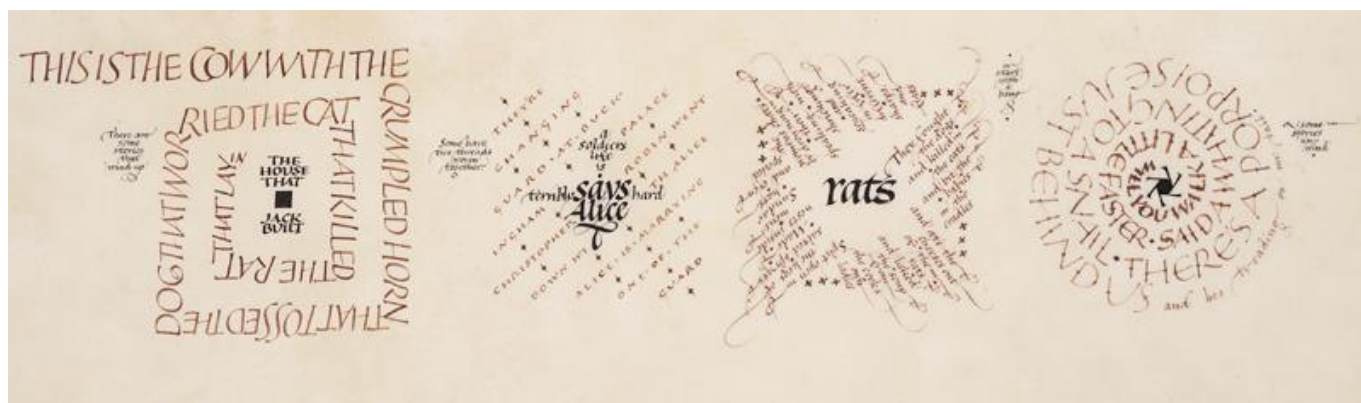


Fig. 7: Panel from *Aspects of language* project

Aspects of language : Narrative - detail

Chinese stick ink and watercolour on vellum, text using quills and steel nibs

68 x 58.5cm(h)

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

C.95.8.ii

In the bottom register of this panel several well-known verses and nursery rhymes are arranged in a geometric structure intended to resonate with the pace of the plot therein rather than in a conventional page left-to-right format. So on the far left a line from the accumulative verse 'This is the house that Jack built' is written in a sort of a half-Greek key formation - describing a square spiral moving in towards the centre; this has the annotation 'There are some stories that "wind up"'. While next to it is a more static, squarish poem construction setting out a verse about Christopher Robin where the two voices in the rhyme are arranged at different angles - 'Some have two threads woven together'.

The medium of the panel itself is important and interesting. The large-scale work intended for the wall constructs a more public and dramatic type of communication than the private sequential reading of a text. It has a visual presence as a whole composition presented on a different level from the beauty of the script itself. Moreover, this work as a four-part series moves beyond the immediate scale of the crafted object and into the realm of cycles and series of work associated with an avant-garde and intellectualised type of creative practice.¹⁶ An unusual aspect of this project was that while a finished version on vellum was made (in CSC's collection), an important part of this work's life was its reproduction as a poster on paper. This was available for sale, so the work could be owned by many people as a record of Hechle's endeavour. Hechle saw this commercial reproduction as a source of revenue which subsidised the introspective pursuit of the creative work.¹⁷ This

approach runs counter to the doctrine of the vital immediacy of the hand in imbuing production with value as promoted in Arts and Crafts philosophies of craft. These poster runs have become a feature of Hechle's making of large panels and challenge the exclusivity of the artistic work which is also an attribute of 20th century craft. It also takes a step towards laying bare the often obscured relationship between making craft and its economic underpinning in the current world.

In Aspects of language there is a tendency to ambiguity of meaning and self-conscious examination of process that could be termed deconstruction. As such this work can be considered to be very much of its time in terms of the British studio crafts. The Crafts Council was established in the late 1970s (initially the Crafts Advisory Committee) and as part of a commitment to supporting craft as a professional and modern vocation, they promoted practices and makers who displayed innovation, challenged utilitarian function, and claimed individualism. This generated a fierce debate between proponents of traditional values of wholesome and genuine usefulness coupled with exceptional skill, and this new vision of craft that spoke to contemporary experience and the consumption of objects, where skill was suspect as tradition-bound. Aspects of language clearly expresses themes that were emerging in other disciplines such as ceramics, jewellery, and textiles.¹⁸ Nevertheless, considering Hechle's oeuvre and ambitions broadly it is not clear that this oppositional model of the new tigers of craft fits the development of her work neatly as she does not reject her antecedents nor deny the practice of the past.

Calligraphy writ large – handwriting in unusual places



Fig. 8: Panel for St. Mary's Hospital commission
Alternative final version for 'Be not a'fear'd, the isle is full of noises' from The Tempest by William Shakespeare

*Pink and lavender watercolour on handmade paper;
text using steel nibs
32x 45cm(h)*

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

2004.31.4

This poster is a finished quality run-through of the composition that was rejected in favour of the one sent to St. Mary's (see also AH34). It is one of the stand-alone panels intended for treatment rooms in the Hospital - a potentially very vulnerable situation - and the lines from Shakespeare's play refer to the confusion and fear in the party shipwrecked on Prospero's enchanted isle when they are assailed by uncanny noises and teasing spirits during the night. A selection of sketches and drafts for this poster has been digitised (AH29-33). The colour-schemes of the panels for the St. Mary's commission were kept in the spectrum of pinks, blues, and greens; Ann Hechle noted that the specification was NO red.

A further manifestation of Ann Hechle's broad-minded approach to the craft of hand-lettering is the unexpected context or destination of some of her calligraphy. One such unusual achievement is the major commission Hechle completed in 1990 for St. Mary's Hospital, Newport, on the Isle of Wight. This was a large-scale installation comprising 19 wall panels some of which functioned in groups as in Aspects of language (see under section 'The art of formal lettering and the questioning of tradition'). St. Mary's was a new building which was designed to be energy efficient in its construction, and welcoming in its environment.¹⁹ There was a well-funded arts budget for both capital projects and ongoing workshops. Hechle's panels were commissioned for consulting, examination, and treatment rooms in the Hospital and were intended to reach out to people in a vulnerable state and make a crisis space more human and empathetic (see Fig. 8). In Hechle's readiness to take on a public art project on this

scale, with a socially inclusive agenda, she has extended calligraphy beyond its customary bounds. While carved inscriptions on buildings have brought formal lettering into public spaces for thousands of years, this project developed illustrated hand-lettering on paper on an architectural scale (see **Figs. 9.1, 2, 3**). The colourful and fluid qualities of calligraphy are more usually associated with the intimate dimensions of book art or the heraldic ceremony of official documents. Undoubtedly Hechle's extensive exploration of the panel format enabled her to take on this challenge of generating a wall-sized graphic impact.

Crucially, the St. Mary's commission sought to engage emotionally with the Hospital's population, quite unlike the civic agenda of most monumental public texts. The possibly high-brow associations of calligraphy as an aesthetic or official refinement must be broken down in this environment which aspires to be accessible to all. The finished works are all in situ at St. Mary's. A selection of drafts, technical trials, and supporting documentation has been digitised for the Headley Trust Project. These include the drafts for a group of three related panels 'Bless the Lord' featuring an uplifting devotional text from the Old Testament (**AH15-17**). In fact the CSC owns a set of alternative finished versions for this group (see **Figs. 10.1, 2, 3**).²⁰ In this triptych each panel bears a stanza beginning 'Bless the Lord ...' but with different second lines eg. 'all those that swim in the sea'. This symmetrical form with variations demonstrates Hechle's solution to the scale of her task: works which stand alone yet which are related in a group sharing design and source text. This trio was intended for a complex of three consulting/examining rooms which are separate but grouped together. The other 16 panels included three other triptychs, one group of four designed as a sequence for a long corridor, and three unique panels. This multi-partite design enables the calligraphic panels to be an active and unifying element of the floor-plan of the department – creating panels in series responds to the challenge of making a meaningful impression in a complex space that people circulate through.

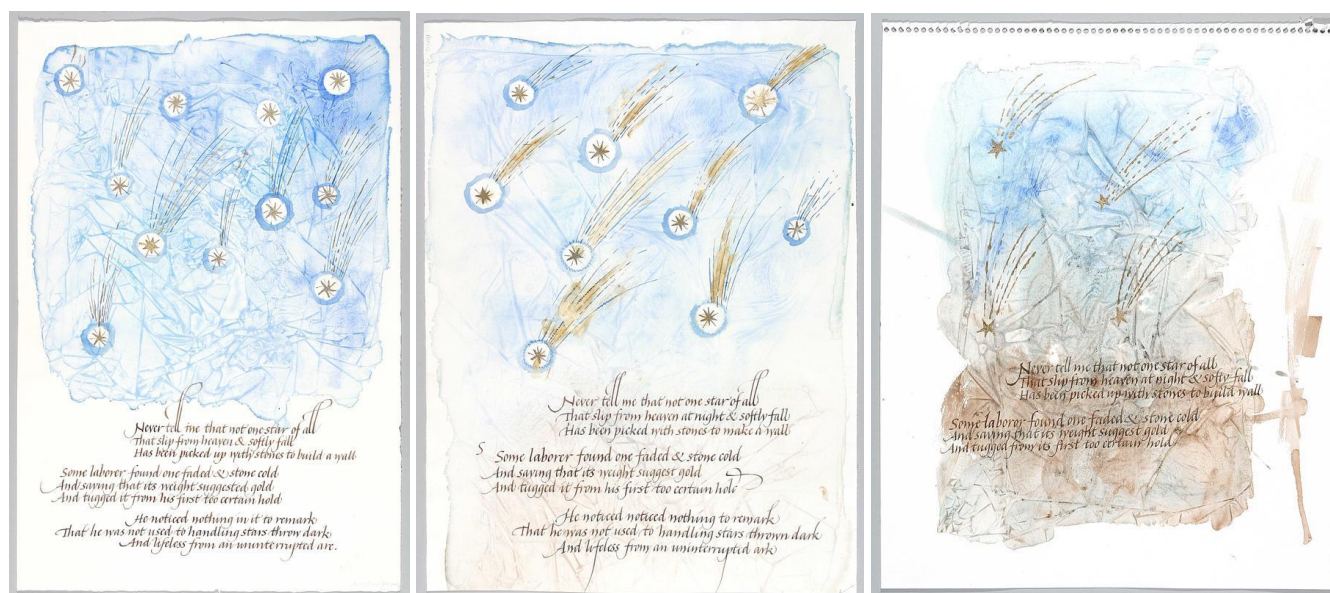


Fig. 9.1, 9.2, 9.3: Panels for St. Mary's Hospital commission

Drafts for panel 'A star in a stone boat' by Robert Frost - details

Watercolour on handmade papers; gilding transfer-gold bonded on gum ammoniac; text using steel nibs

48 x 80cm(h)

AH19,20,21

Ann Hechle completed three rough drafts of this poster on different types of paper (Fabriano, Arches, and 'not pressed' watercolour paper respectively) to test the appearance of the watercolour sketching and the gilded shooting stars for the final version. The variegated appearance of the blue background for the sky was achieved by pressing clingfilm into the watercolour wash while it was still wet and then peeling it off when the paint was dry (See AH18 for a purely technical trial). This technique was completely new to Hechle but she notes that she was deliberately looking for fresh and experimental methods to match the spirit of the commission as a whole.



Fig. 10.1, 10.2, 10.3: Posters for St. Mary's Hospital commission

Alternative final versions for 3 panels 'Bless the Lord' from the Benedicite

Blue and green watercolour on handmade paper; text using steel nibs, design using stencils

42 x 57cm(h)

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

2004.31.1,2,3

These three panels are alternative final versions of the triptych sent to St. Mary's for a group of consulting and examination rooms (see also digitised drafts **AH15, 16, 17**). Each bears a stanza from the Benedicite Omnia Opera, verses found in the Book of Common Prayer; all three feature the same opening line 'Bless the Lord.' in large letters. This inscription is surrounded/infilled by stenciled motifs from the natural world reflecting the second line of each verse: wind and birds ('birds of the air'), leaves and stems ('all that grow in the ground'), and water and fish ('all that swim in the sea') respectively. The symmetry and difference between these panels is also worked out in their colour schemes. The texts settled on for the 19 panels of the St. Mary's commission were chosen from suggestions made both by the calligrapher and the Arts Administrator managing the project (Guy Eades).

Some fascinating material regarding the visualisation of the commission was exchanged between Ann Hechle and the Arts Administrator, Guy Eades, who managed the entire programme. For instance a floorplan marked up with the locations intended for Hechle's works (see **Fig. 11**). Also a letter with cut-out samples of paint cards attached is minutely annotated with the exact shades of paint decided on for walls, doorframes, consulting rooms, treatment rooms, and so on (see **Fig. 12**). This demonstrates how the calligrapher sought to take the larger environment into consideration in planning the cycle of works.



Fig. 11: Supporting material for St. Mary's Hospital commission

Floorplan of Hospital, annotated

Photocopied sheet A4, with pen additions

21 x 29.5cm(h)

AH38

This sheet is part of the correspondence exchanged between Ann Hechle and the Arts Administrator for St. Mary's, Guy Eades, in working out the delivery of the commission. It is a photocopied floorplan of the ward in question with the anticipated locations of Hechle's calligraphic panels highlighted. This demonstrates the conscious planning and integration of the commission into the architectural and therapeutic space as well as illustrating the distribution of themed groups of panels.

Further draft material illustrates Hechle's preparation of technical trials for various aspects of the final illustrated panels. For another group of three 'Full Moon', a translation of a poem by Tu Fu from the Chinese, Hechle completed a number of trials for the goldwork. In this composition the text itself was partly gilded below a central motif of a gilded, rising, full moon (see Fig. 13.1). On a sample of the Japanese hand-made paper used for the final work the effect of burnished gold leaf versus powder gold or transfer gold was compared (see Fig. 13.2). Hechle also experimented with several methods of fixing the gilding at this stage to ensure durability in the final work.



Fig. 12: Supporting material for St. Mary's Hospital commission

Letter with paint sample cards, annotated Photocopied sheet A4, with pen additions 21 x 29.5cm(h)

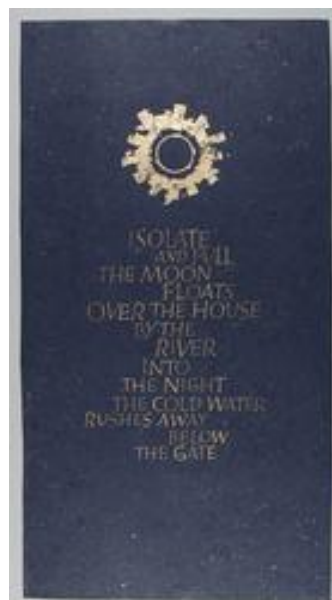
AH39

This sheet is part of the correspondence exchanged between Ann Hechle and the Arts Administrator for St. Mary's, Guy Eades, in working out the delivery of the commission. It is a letter originally from Ann Hechle to the Arts Administrator asking for clarification of the paint hues that are to be used on different internal structures in St. Mary's. This has been returned to the calligrapher with detailed annotations specifying the exact usage of the different shades - door frames, walls, etc. This is clear evidence of Ann Hechle's consciousness of the relativity of perception and the interaction of the work with its surroundings, especially in terms of colour relationships. It also confirms the holistic consideration of the environment in the construction of St. Mary's generally.

Fig. 13.1: Panel for St. Mary's Hospital commission (AH15-41) Draft for panel Full moon by Tu Fu, translated by Kenneth Rexroth
Dark blue Japanese handmade paper with silver flecks; letters done in a combination of yellow watercolour, powder gold, and transfer gold on gum ammoniac; text made using quills and steel nibs, 38 x 72cm(h)

AH28

This draft panel is a one of a group of three transcribing Tu Fu's poem within the larger commission of 19; this triptych was designed for a cluster of consulting or examination rooms in the Hospital. See Fig. 13.2 for an investigation of the suitable methods of gilding for the work.



There are other arenas where Ann Hechle has practised calligraphy in heterodox ways. A notable experience was her participation in an event called The makers held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1976. This was a public programme which drew crowds to see craftspeople demonstrating their practice in the gallery of the Museum which matched their medium (Hechle was just outside the National Art Library).²¹ Hechle found this spontaneous performance of her craft and the immediacy of interacting with the public both exciting and inspiring. Her

exhilaration and involvement was made more intense through being commissioned to work on an accompanying publication which juxtaposed a series of black and white images with poems written by Edward Lucie-Smith and rendered calligraphically by Hechle.²² The calligrapher recalls that this publication was conceived late in the day and completed under pressure. A courier would bring over Lucie-Smith's poem at the end of the day and Hechle would have to send off the calligraphic presentation of it the next day! Hechle recalls how she revelled in the spontaneity and the creative dialogue demanded by this task and believes it propelled her into a freer approach to her work.²³



Fig. 13.2: Panel for St. Mary's Hospital
 commission Technical trials for panel Full moon by Tu Fu, translated by Kenneth Rexroth
 Dark blue Japanese handmade paper with silver flecks; various forms of gold - powder, leaf, and transfer; various binders: glair, gum ammoniac
 Larger samples approximately 20 x 20cm
AH25,26,27

These technical samples illustrate Ann Hechle's exploration of the physical potential of her materials. The Japanese handmade paper used as a substrate for this set of panels has a fairly coarse fibre structure, known as 'having some tooth', which means the thin gold leaf has considerable grip on the surface even when just burnished (rubbed) on. Hechle has also experimented with using 'glair' (a preparation of egg-white) as a binder to improve the durability of the gilding.

The culmination of this experience was a commission from the Victoria and Albert Museum. Hechle took her demonstration sheets from the The makers workshop as the basis for this work – Calligraphic Sampler (1979).²⁴ As the title suggests it is a compilation on a panel scale of examples of all the different formal scripts written in black and red ink in a sort of acrostic arrangement where text runs vertically as well as horizontally. In her demonstrations Hechle had adopted a strategy of literally illustrating calligraphic principles, for example writing 'uncials flat pen angle' in uncial script. It is this conceit which is worked out in the Sampler generating an educational primer quality where samples of scripts are 'stitched' together as an exemplar.²⁵ It was working on this commission that gave rise to Hechle's subsequent project Aspects of language which really extends this comparative anatomy of styles as well as taking on the issue of a more popular appreciation of calligraphy. Hechle continues to think laterally in terms of her calligraphic endeavour, her current project is also an unusual venture on a large scale. The Edward Johnston Foundation has commissioned the calligrapher to produce a hand-written journal which addresses the creative process. Hechle has chosen to compile her explorations in Sacred Geometry which have absorbed her for several years (see Fig. 14), in a work called Figures of speech.²⁶ This is a system of thought which proposes simultaneity between the fundamental workings of the universe and mathematical relationships expressed in geometrical diagrams;²⁷ for instance the regular expansion of a spiral can be expressed mathematically and is a natural principle that governs the sprouting of leaves from a plant stem. The very drawing out of the diagrams can be a microcosm of processes of development we experience in the larger world. So the discipline is both performative and metaphysical.

Hechle is now looking beyond the completion of the journal which sets out her investigations of the topic in two dimensions (using text and line diagrams on the page). She has a vision that these principles really resonate in at least three dimensions and is keen to attempt to explore this creatively through construction – weaving and carving objects. She envisages her practice moving towards boxes and three-dimensional puzzles rather than panels and books.

How can we reconcile this metaphysical departure in Hechle's creative life? Is it still calligraphy? Is it still craft? Does it matter? I think it would be a mistake to draw a line under Hechle's career as a calligrapher because she

may have stopped writing text. There is a temptation to divide Hechle's philosophical and indeed spiritual ruminations from her trade and practice as a hand-letterer but her testimony and the evidence of the works themselves is that this would be a deliberate blindness to their co-existence and interdependence. A profound and experimental spiritual sensibility has been a prominent handmaiden for much innovation in British studio craft.²⁸ I will expand on the spiritual in Hechle's practice in the section below 'Deeper meanings or spirituality and transformation in handwork'. It is worth noting here Edward Johnston's experience regarding his protracted endeavour to write a second book on the art of calligraphy at the end of his career: his daughter relates his comment that where the first had been a 'congenial task', the second was 'not a task but a quest ... an absorbing quest' which set out 'to tell, if it be possible, some beliefs and hopes'.²⁹

Fig. 14: Panel on the topic of Sacred Geometry

The harmony of the spheres

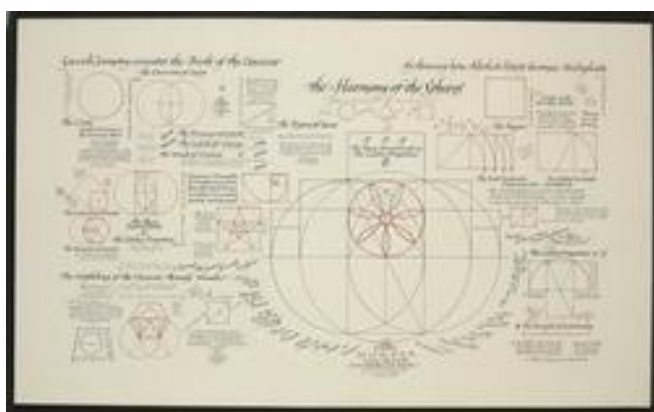
Red and black watercolour on vellum, stretched and mounted on board

61 x 36.8 (h)

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

2004.35

This panel is subtitled 'Sacred geometry creates the birth of the universe by showing how Absolute Unity becomes Multiplicity'. As in the majority of Ann Hechle's later work the script used on this panel is a cursive italic - employed for its properties as a swift, clearly legible handwriting. The reduction of the colour scheme to a few colours generates a spare aesthetic, pared down to essentials, and communicates a concern with principles rather than elaboration. See also the drafts for this work (2004.35.2-4)



Personal expression and the craft vocation

The adventurousness of Ann Hechle's mature calligraphy is self-evident yet interestingly this does not entail a rejection of the strictures of her early training. Hechle sees her work as building very clearly on the achievements of the early 20th century calligraphers.³⁰ In her own assessment Edward Johnston and his contemporaries, such as Graily Hewitt who revived gilding, rediscovered how to do it – recovering methods and establishing techniques.³¹ Then with Irene Wellington the craft was able to move beyond method alone towards sensitive and individual expression, students were able to differentiate and pursue their own inspiration. Hechle sees herself and Donald Jackson, also a graduate of the Central School from the same era, as the beneficiaries of this recognition of the personally meaningful and idiosyncratic vocation. They have been free to follow their own paths with all the technical tools on hand.³² Hechle identifies a possible divide between herself and the next generation as her commitment to legibility – maintaining the integrity of the text as writing where contemporary work may use letters in a more painterly way.³³

It is in this spirit of necessary evolutionary leaps in a craft that Hechle speaks of not being interested in teaching calligraphy in a prescriptive, abc's type of way. Hechle is exceptional among craftspeople of her generation in not using a teaching salary as a way of supporting her practice.³⁴ In the 1980s and 90s she frequently taught workshops here and in America but Hechle now seeks to mentor people who already have a technical grasp of lettering but are groping for what their purpose might be.³⁵ This pedagogical aspiration takes an holistic view of what a calligraphic vocation might entail.

Ann Hechle is frank and unreserved in attributing her sense of what a calligrapher could be to the mentorship of Irene Wellington during her art school days. Wellington had a very personalised, intimate, but challenging tutoring style. Hechle recalls her tutor's passion for penmanship and for the texts it mediated. This was inspiring, as was Wellington's impatience with anything that was less than total commitment - she was always pushing for a personal investment on the part of her students, asking for their work to have a private worth.³⁶

The relationship between tutor and student is manifested in an exciting piece of student work made as a collaboration between Irene Wellington and Ann Hechle (see Fig. 15). This was a set exercise, designed by Wellington for Hechle to make concrete. It is a panel 60 by 56 centimetres, juxtaposing extracts of verse on the subject of Autumn written in several different styles and disposing them around a central naturalistic watercolour illustration. These characteristics well-represent a style that Irene Wellington made her own in private works and that was pioneering in the formal, stilted context of much hand-lettering of the period.

Fig. 15: Student work, set by Irene Wellington for Ann Hechle

Collaged panel Autumn from The Land by Vita Sackville West

Watercolour and handmade coloured papers on heavy paper, various sections collaged onto larger sheet
1958-59

60 x 56cm(h)

AH57

Ann Hechle recalls this task as a very ambitious project suggested for her by her tutor Irene Wellington who sketched the design in pencil and proposed a collage technique. The passages are extracts regarding Autumn, mainly drawn from The Land by Vita Sackville West which is an extended lyrical description of the English landscape and its weather through the seasons (see also Figs. 17, 18-21 for further works by Hechle drawing on this source). The collaged compilation of different sections allows for mistakes to be corrected without impairing the whole composition.



She compiled complex panels that combined charmingly drawn motifs with playful rhymes or passages with personal significance into what could be described as calligraphic samplers (see Fig. 16) Such works resonate with Hechle's later exploration of the potential of the panel format and her utilisation of a juxtaposition of script styles and graphic effects. Generally Hechle has pursued an abstracted conceptual elaboration of these themes rather than an emotional one. Nevertheless Irene Wellington's conviction that the worth of espousing calligraphy lay in distilling a very personal and uniquely felt approach that would sustain the work has been influential for Hechle, as was her eclectic approach to sources.³⁷

Another experience worth considering in coming to an understanding of the radical course of Hechle's career is the break between her early practice, when she was teaching in art schools in the South East (during the early to mid 1960s), and when she came back to calligraphy seriously (in the mid-1970s). This substantial break was partly provoked when the Sutton and Cheam Art College where Hechle had been working closed down. Through some contacts the calligrapher got herself included on an archaeological dig going out to Iraq.³⁸ She spent the next five years going out every digging season associated with a British-American team, mainly to Iran, to draw the finds. Towards the end of this period Hechle found herself very keen to practise calligraphy again and settled back in London in 1975.

One of the first works she made after this physical and psychic adventure was a panel, 62 by 38 centimetres, with a compilation of extracts from Vita Sackville West's lyrical prose poem The Land arrayed across it (see Fig. 17).³⁹ The separate passages are written in different scripts, with different weights, different sizes, and different spacings, so that each block of text viewed from a distance appears a different gray.

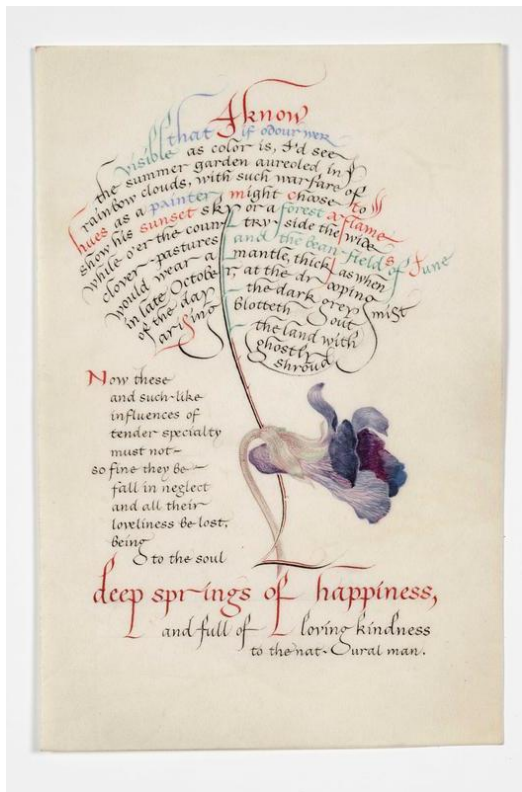


Fig. 16: Vellum fold made by Irene Wellington Violet (deep springs of happiness) from *The testament of beauty* by Robert Bridges
Watercolour and ink on folded vellum
9 x 14cm(h) (dimensions of folded work)
Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

© The Irene Wellington Trust/Crafts Study Centre
2001

C.84.42.a

This is an example of Irene Wellington's talent for unusual and delicate dispositions of calligraphy and illustration. Wellington noted privately that she would not recommend to her students the combination of brush illustration with calligraphy (rather than pen/quill drawing). The work was made for the birthday of a close friend Charlotte Wellington and suggests the very personal nature of this genre for Wellington. Her publicly commissioned work shows comparable delicacy and effective composition but it is in this private and domestic context that she allowed herself emotional and idiosyncratic expression.

Fig. 17: Panel described by Hechle as 'calligraphic landscape'

Panel 'Then broke the Spring' extracts from *The Land* by Vita Sackville West
Black ink on Green's handmade paper
62 x 38cm(h)

AH56

Sackville West's *The Land* was a favourite text of Irene Wellington's. This makes it a significant choice as the source text at this pivotal time when Ann Hechle was trying to find her way back into calligraphy after a lengthy time abroad. Hechle believes there is a resonance between the austere planes of this 'calligraphic vista' and the extended periods of time she spent in the Middle East between 1967 and 1975.



Hechle speaks of her growing awareness of the rhythm of the calligraphic strokes as recognising a 'textural' quality in the text and describes the works themselves as 'calligraphic landscapes'. This term asserts that writing text on the white sheet is also a pictorial act. From this time onwards in Hechle's work composition carries a sense of vista, the textural dimension of the passages is exploited, generating different densities of text and suggesting depth as well as two-dimensional structure. Hechle points to her archaeological sojourn in this connection where she made nearly 250 pencil drawings a month, working swiftly in monochrome. Through this she had built up appreciable experience and fluency in drawing which Hechle believes fed into this new calligraphic sensibility. Furthermore, Hechle suggests that the abstract, haunting nature of the landscapes she had encountered in the Middle East may have been in her mind at this time. We could compare the desiccated formal qualities of her black and white calligraphic landscapes with the grandeur, and subtle variation of the rocky, desert landscapes of Iran. The constituent blocks of poetic sentiment of the former echo the Romantic poetical associations of the latter. Vita Sackville West's *The Land* is an extended essay weaving together close observation of the English landscape with the unfolding of the seasons so the metaphor resounds further as the text itself is digested. This exploration of building up a vista from lettering was an experiment that Ann Hechle

very much lived with at this time: that year (1973) she wrote extracts from the same work by Sackville West across the breadth of a wall in her London flat.⁴⁰



Fig. 18: Material for commission *The Seasons*, extracts from *The Land* by Vita Sackville West

Example of reproduction poster

Printed sheet

Completed 1986

61.5 x 45cm(h)

AH10

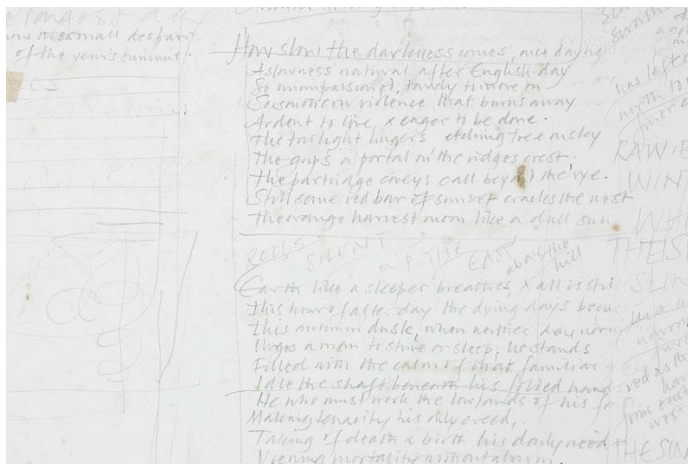
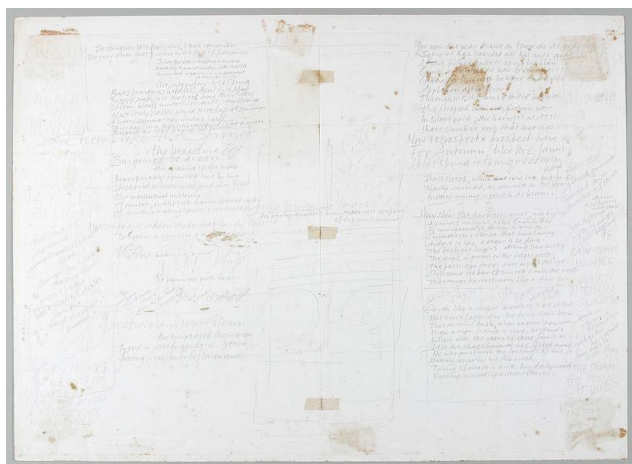
This is one of the print-run of posters produced in association with the unique final work (the commission itself was made using colour on vellum). In this case the poster is generated from a photograph made of the final draft. The original of the final draft also serves as the reference guide for the production of the finished copy.

An important aspect of Hechle's preoccupation with the large-scale composition is her sense of the relativity of design – the way the appearance of things is influenced and adjusted by the elements around them. This consciousness of the comparative nature of perception seems to have shaped Hechle's process of working out the lay-out of her calligraphic panels which tend to be complex. A sequence of drafts for a commission completed in 1986 demonstrates this procedure (see Fig. 18).⁴¹ A client had specifically requested a panel featuring a strong textural quality and Hechle came back to *The Land* as a source text. The initial pencil sketch already indicates the passages which have been selected and serves to rough out their placement on the sheet and the shape of the overall design (see Fig. 19.1). Hechle has spoken of conceiving an idea as a gestalt experience where the inspiration arrives as a whole concept including shape and content.⁴² It is then a process of 'sharpening' or 'focussing' this initial vision through a series of drafts. We can see this in a detail of this sketch (see Fig. 19.2), where the outer columns of text are already set out with the scrolling line that is so distinctive in the final composition (see Fig. 19.1). This vision is then refined using a further draft compiled as a collage (see Fig. 20). Here the actual extracts have been penned on slips of paper which can then be arranged and adjusted on the large sheet to settle the best relationship. This is a powerful strategy since it allows one part of the design to be altered without doing an entire redrafting of the panel.⁴³ In fact the draft material includes a set of different versions of one inscription on different pieces of paper which could be trialled with the general composition to test their impact (see Fig. 21). This collage method gives the calligrapher the potential to manage very elaborate compositions and it makes possible some of Hechle's later panels which arise from extended research projects and orchestrate a vast amount of content.⁴⁴

The final version of *The Seasons* was completed in colour on vellum. This introduced another variable attribute which must be managed over the whole composition. Hechle's notes on the commission specify that all of the colours used were derived from five watercolour pigments only: Alizarin crimson, Cerulean blue, Naples yellow, Lemon yellow, and white. This approach is a further application of the principle of relativity that Hechle sees as pervading the calligraphic panel. By generating all the hues used from a small set of colours Hechle hopes to gain a family of colours that are related to one another and thereby maintain an overall harmony.⁴⁵ She is wary of using a disparate rainbow of colours that might obscure the underlying structure of the composition.⁴⁶ A practical working out of this idea can be seen in a colour square prepared in the course of the St. Mary's commission (see Fig. 22). Here all the colours are drawn through one another in a grid so that a spectrum of all the combinations is achieved.

These eight aspects can be represented by diagrams called trigrams composed of three lines, one on top of the other, where each may be either whole or broken (written as two dashes). In Hechle's panel this underlying structure is set out in detail in the top-left hand section. If you set out to draw all the possibilities for three lines where each may be either straight or dashed you will end up with eight (in probability notation $2 \times 2 \times 2 = 8$).⁴⁷ Thus

the system, as a cosmology can be thought of as complementary parts which add up to the whole. A number of systematic associations are used to elucidate the significance of the trigrams. Most obvious is the attribution of a natural feature or weather phenomenon such as the mountain or water which has linked properties. In Hechle's representation this aspect is illustrated with schematic motifs. Another description often applied makes each trigram one member of a cosmic family: mother, father, and children. Li or fire is also called the middle daughter while Ken, the mountain, is thought of as the youngest son. This adds another layer of custom, inter-relationship, and interpretation.



Figs. 19.1 and 19.2: Material for commission The Seasons, extracts from The Land by Vita Sackville West

First draft of the panel
Pencil sketch on layout paper
61 x 44.5cm(h)

AH9

Fig. 19.1: The first draft for this commission roughing out the overall location and content of the passages.

Fig. 19.2: Note the early anticipation of the scrolling arrangement of the passages in the side-columns which corresponds to the final composition (see Fig. 18).



Fig. 20: Material for commission The Seasons, extracts from The Land by Vita Sackville West

Collaged draft setting out final composition
Black watercolour on paper
70 x 50.5cm(h)

AH12

The final draft for this commission demonstrating the method of working out the composition with passages written out on slips of paper collaged onto the larger sheet.

Deeper meanings or spirituality and transformation in handwork

A tour-de-force example of Ann Hechle's mature orchestration of elaborate content in the calligraphic panel is the Image of Grace panel (See Fig. 23.1). Every inch of this panel telescopes into myriad detail and the possible inter-relationships of meaning and composition approach infinity. This is appropriate as its subject-matter is the universe itself, as mediated by the vocabulary of the I Ching – a philosophical system based on ancient Taoist cosmology. The most familiar of the ideas that Hechle invokes is probably that of Yin and Yang, the complementary opposite principles that are visualised as feminine and masculine, passive and active, and so on. The I Ching rests on this idea of creative duality but identifies a more complex level of eight qualities of energy

which are symbolised by association with things in nature, for example thunder (male, arousing, dynamic), or wind (female, gentle, permeating).

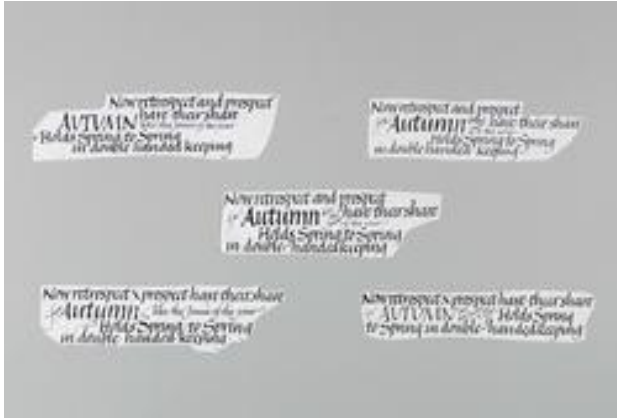


Fig. 21: Material for commission The Seasons, extracts from The Land by Vita Sackville West
Slips with alternative renderings of one passage
Black watercolour on paper

Completed 1986

Extracts approximately 18cm across

AH14

A selection of possible layouts and calligraphic emphases for one extract in the panel allowing these options to be visualised with the whole composition

Fig. 22: Supporting material for St. Mary's Hospital commission

Colour grid for panels 'A star in a stone boat' by

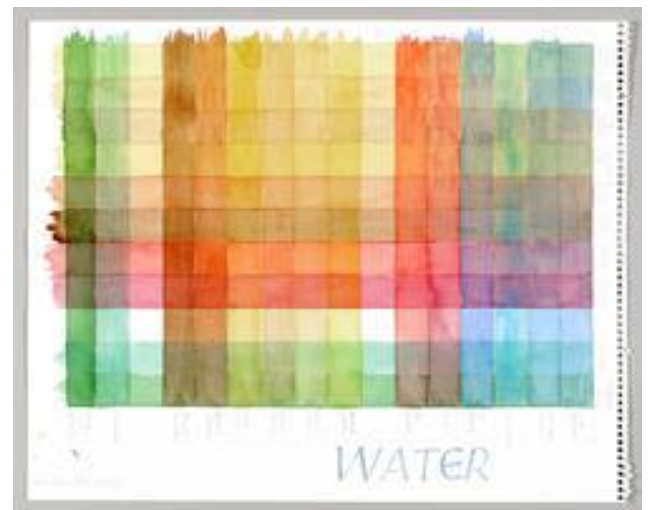
Robert Frost

Watercolour on paper

46 x 37cm(h)

AH23

Here a limited range of watercolour hues are drawn through one another using a systematic grid arrangement where each square represents a mix of two pigments. This colour square constitutes a spectrum of all the shades that can be generated from the starting colours. The intensity of each mixture may be shifted by altering the proportions. Ann Hechle is also interested in the texture of the stained pigments here.



In practice the I Ching is used as a method of fortune-telling at a yet further level of complexity - a six-line diagram is built up by throwing coins (originally yarrow stalks) to indicate a straight or a broken line (basically heads or tails). The hexagram generated, such as that in the centre of Hechle's panel, is one of 64 possibilities. Each of these can be thought of as a combination of trigrams which interact, possibly reinforcing or conflicting with one another to represent a situation and a course of action. These 64 hexagrams have established commentaries (interpretations or meditations) which are used to shed light on the situation and hopefully suggest a solution.⁴⁸ The subject of Ann Hechle's panel is the hexagram no. 22, Pi, or Grace, which is associated with the imaginative arts and it is used by Hechle as a medium for exploring the nature of the creative process.

Not only is this a point at which spiritual and metaphysical matters become explicit topics in Ann Hechle's work, this project is also a stage in Hechle's self-narrative where the personal inner state of the calligrapher becomes pivotal in her calligraphic production.

Some time ago I reached a stage in my work where I was completely stuck. I'd been working through a series of ideas, and had come to the end of them and didn't know what to do next. I had tried to backtrack and bring to life variations on old ideas, but that didn't work, as my heart wasn't in it. So I decided to consult the I Ching, the Chinese Book of Changes, which I have done from time to time, when I have found myself at a dead end.⁴⁹

In fact this is more than opening up about the emotional dimension of artistic work; this is a raw admission of the bane of a creative life – lack of inspiration. This juncture is quite unlike the positive, incremental, developments of style and expression we have observed between Hechle's work and her commentary so far; this is a crisis point in

life as well as art, an experience of existential vulnerability. In the lecture notes Hechle goes on to describe intimately the dialogue between her questions to the universe about what she should pursue in her work and the messages of the oracle (to follow a totally new idea). In throwing herself into understanding the reading Hechle became fascinated with the underlying philosophy of the system and, out of this initial blankness, formulated the idea of a panel exploring hexagram no. 22, the imaginative arts. That is, Hechle adopts the vocabulary of the I Ching as a vehicle for investigating the nature of creative work. Clearly, given the psychic circumstances of this endeavour, the Image of Grace panel is not merely an illuminated explanation of an esoteric topic. Hechle is attempting to draw out insights into the circumstances, tribulations, and reconciliations of the creative process (as encapsulated in hexagram No. 22) exactly as she seeks to re-engage herself with that elusive, transformative state. The entire cycle of drafts for this work have been digitised (AH1-5) offering a through record of the resolution of the composition but also of this awkward stage in Hechle's vocation.

Fig. 23: Material for the Image of Grace project: an exploration of hexagram no. 22 in the I Ching

Final panel Image of Grace

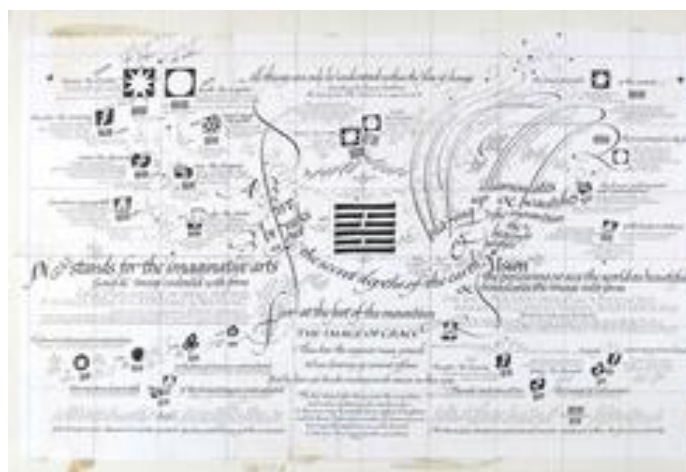
Watercolour and ink on vellum; powder gold and raised and burnished gold leaf, text written with quills and steel nibs

Completed 1991

95.5 x 67.5cm(h) (framed dimensions)

2004.201

The I Ching arose in ancient China, parts of it were formalised as far back as 1 100 BC. The actual practice of it - constructing diagrams and consulting learned commentaries is focussed on its divinatory or fortune-telling function. However all the insights and processes of the I Ching grow out of the prevailing philosophy of the era. In many ancient societies divination was an indispensable technology for synchronising human lives with the rhythms of the universe, not a fanciful or eccentric diversion. The principles of yang and yin are illustrated directly above the central diagram in the panel: as a set of three solid lines and three dashed lines respectively; this compositional arrangement indicates their role as progenitors, fundamental creative forces of the universe.



The first draft envisages the core of composition (See Fig. 24). The hexagram is drawn large and centrally in black and wrapped by the swirling first line of the classical commentary (from the Wilhelm translation) in red: 'a fire that breaks out of the secret depths of the earth, and blazing up, illuminates and beautifies the mountain, the heavenly heights'. This sets out the heart of the matter, and its mystery, with the symbolic potential of the hexagram and the initial enigmatic phrase. The remainder of the interpretation is transcribed below in black.

In the second draft the left-hand side of the panel has been developed in detail (See Fig. 25). I have already mentioned Hechle's summary of the eight basic trigrams in the top-left of the final panel which can already be seen in this version. In the bottom-left Hechle has illustrated a method of interpreting the hexagram by 'unpacking' it into a series of component trigrams producing a similarly densely informative section. At this stage, taken as a whole, the panel is very unbalanced with a proliferation of detail and explanation on the left side, whereas the right-hand side appears narrow and empty with the red letters of the commentary leaning into it. In talking through the process of drafting the panel Hechle was very conscious of this bias and she was concerned to develop and enrich the content to rebalance the composition.⁵⁰

Fig. 24: Material for the Image of Grace project: an exploration of hexagram no. 22 in the I Ching

First sketch for panel Image of Grace
Black and red watercolour on layout paper
59.5 x 42cm(h)

AH2

'A fire that breaks out of the secret depths of the earth, and blazing up, illuminates and beautifies the mountain, the heavenly heights.' This first line of the commentary partly refers to the structure of hexagram no. 22 which comprises Li (fire) at the bottom and Ken (mountain) at the top; the hexagrams are traditionally read from the bottom up. Hence the notion of fire on the mountain. The respective energies of these trigrams convey a sense of the force and impetus of fire (which can be interpreted as perception) acting on the inertia and grandeur of matter, a potentially suitable metaphor for the creative arts. Of course the commentary goes on to say a lot more. Ann Hechle noted that the swirling red ascenders of the line as transcribed on the panel are meant to suggest the flickering action of flames.

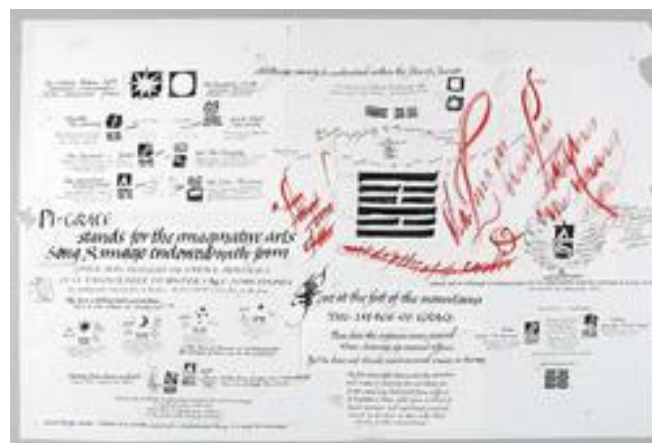


Fig. 25: Material for the Image of Grace project: an exploration of hexagram no. 22 in the I Ching

Second sketch for panel Image of Grace
Black and red watercolour on layout paper with collaged pieces
74 x 49cm(h)

AH3

The section at the bottom-left demonstrates that the six-line hexagram is only simplistically thought of as composed of two trigrams (top and bottom). In fact four component trigrams can be systematically unpicked: the first three lines, then lines 2, 3, and 4, then lines 3, 4, and 5, then the top three lines. All of these make a contribution to the reading of the hexagram. It demonstrates the way that the geometric and symbolic properties of the six-line diagram can be manipulated and recombined in multiple ways to generate increasingly elaborate and subtle perspectives.



The third draft displays a much more even arrangement (See Fig. 26.1). Without going into intricate detail there are further ways of interpreting the central diagram suggested by the I Ching which Hechle has worked through at the top-right and bottom-righthand side. These are particularly concerned with the dynamism or potential for change inherent in a dilemma and the surmounting of obstacles. Thus it can be argued that the graphic challenge of achieving a satisfactory arrangement of material has been paralleled here by achieving a further level of insight into the material. On the lefthand side the fundamental energies that are the building blocks are laid out while on the righthand side there is a consideration of the elements that stand between inspiration and realisation, and the compromises that enable actually making something.

This double sense of a psychological journey as well as a calligraphic exercise has a sort of culmination in a personal insight of Ann Hechle's included in the panel in a prominent position and expressed in her own words. Whereas the majority of the text inscribed on Image of Grace comprises quotes from the published commentaries on the I Ching, there is a passage in the centre-righthand side beginning 'Vision, the perceiving eye sees the world as beautiful and translates the image into form ...' which is the calligrapher's own comment on the nature of perception and the artist's transmutation of inspiration into matter (See Fig. 26.2). It is a key element of this work. Hechle has inserted her personal journey and an individual declaration into a work which deals with the broadest philosophical questions of being.⁵¹ Yet without the maker's own testimony this passage melds into the calligraphic fabric of the panel, it is the subjective experience of the work that causes it to stand out. Hechle has frankly exposed the uncertainty and soul-searching that accompanied this project but she also speaks of encountering a metaphysical sensation of at-one-ment while working through it.⁵² It is in bringing this level of philosophical engagement to her work that Hechle feels her practical vocation has come into alignment with her life's work. This is a theme that very clearly leads into her current occupation with the journal *Figures of speech*; sacred geometry provides an even more spare graphic vocabulary for exploring the micro/macro-cosmic relationships distinguished by Hechle in her investigation of the I Ching (see Fig. 14).

Fig. 26.1: Material for the Image of Grace project: an exploration of hexagram no. 22 in the I Ching

Third draft for panel Image of Grace

Watercolour on layout paper

78.5 x 51.5cm(h)

AH4

Hechle works out colour in this draft. In throwing coins or yarrow stalks to build up the divinatory hexagram it is a bit more complicated than heads or tails; three coins are strewn and the two faces carry different numerical values - 2 or 3, thus the sum of these may be 6, 7, 8, or 9. The even numbers denote a broken (or yin) line and the odd indicate a solid (yang) line. However, a broken line caused by a 6 is called 'changing' while an 8 is considered stable and 'unchanging' (likewise for the solid lines). This sets up the possibility for the hexagram constructed from the thrown values of the coins to change into another hexagram where the unstable lines are transformed into their opposite, solid becomes broken and vice versa. In this way the destiny indicated by I Ching contains the idea that circumstances are dynamic and a situation may have momentum. It is this property of hexagram no. 22 that Hechle investigates on the righthand side of the panel.



Fig. 26.2: Material for the Image of Grace project: an exploration of hexagram no. 22 in the I Ching

Third draft for panel Image of Grace - detail

Watercolour on layout paper

78.5 x 51.5cm(h)

AH4

Hechle's own reflection on the creative process: 'Vision, the perceiving eye sees the world as beautiful and translates the image into form; the eye perceives images in the outside world, the inner eye clarifies them and creates new forms; beauty lies in the eye of the beholder; the outer world perceived as being beautiful shapes and beautifies mans inner world.'



Fig. 14: Panel on the topic of Sacred Geometry

The harmony of the spheres

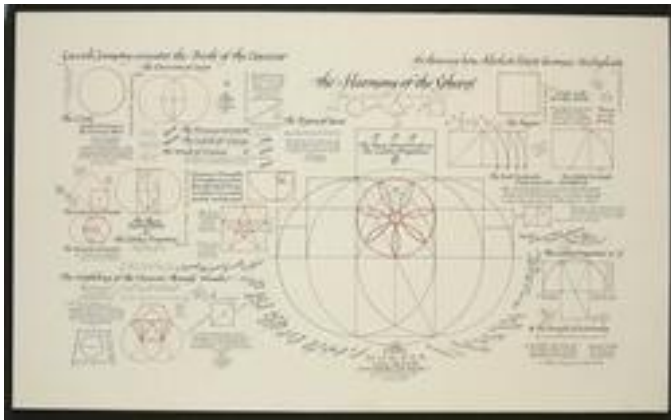
Red and black watercolour on vellum, stretched and mounted on board

61 x 36.8 (h)

Crafts Study Centre, Farnham

2004.35

This panel is subtitled 'Sacred geometry creates the birth of the universe by showing how Absolute Unity becomes Multiplicity'. As in the majority of Ann Hechle's later work the script used on this panel is a cursive italic - employed for its properties as a swift, clearly legible handwriting. The reduction of the colour scheme to a few colours generates a spare aesthetic, pared down to essentials, and communicates a concern with principles rather than elaboration. See also the drafts for this work (2004.35.2-4)



Hechle's attestation that in creating such work she glimpses the resonance between a universal order of things and her calligraphic aspirations introduces the idea of the work itself as an instrumental agent in influencing the maker. We could consider the Image of Grace panel to be simply an illustration, the evidence of Hechle's extensive research into the I Ching, a culmination of many progressive trends in her work. Yet the maker's self-revelatory narrative should discourage us to take this panel as just another item in Hechle's oeuvre. The potential of the sequence of drafts and the richness of Hechle's reflection on them asserts the significance of this work as a project, a process rather than an endpoint. It is possible to see the Image of Grace project as a catalyst, a metamorphic endeavour that has shaped the calligrapher and her ambitions rather than as an inert physical imprint of the artist's inspiration; certainly Hechle herself does not regard it in the latter way. This may enable us to take seriously the profundity of the concepts and experience Hechle invokes in relation to this work. This perspective is supported when we consider the technical procedure of finalising the composition. As investigated for the calligraphic panel *The Seasons* (1986) (See Fig. 18) the final adjustment of the proportions and placements of all the passages was settled by the collaging method where extracts were written out onto separate pieces of paper and compiled into the final whole (See Fig. 28). This final resolved draft was the actual 'original' for the monochrome reproduction poster. The collaged draft's relationship to the final vellum version is interesting and brings out further dimensions of Hechle's method. The Image of Grace panel is an exemplary demonstration of the labour involved in resolving a work of such complexity, the collaged draft itself attests to the effort invested in the disposition and fine adjustment of parts.



Fig. 27: Material for the Image of Grace project: an exploration of hexagram no. 22 in the I Ching

Reference draft squared up to provide guide for finished work

Photocopy of collaged final draft with superimposed grid

81 x 56cm(h)

AH1

This is a copy of the final collaged draft with a reference grid superimposed and used as a guide for the finished copy made on vellum.

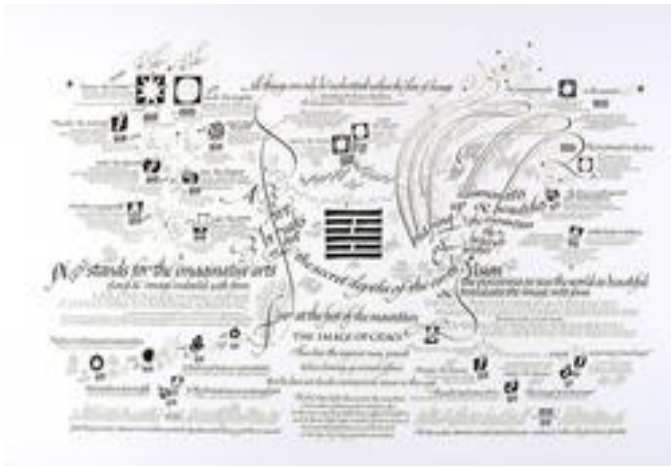


Fig. 28: Material for the Image of Grace project: an exploration of hexagram no. 22 in the I Ching
 Collaged monochrome draft
 Black watercolour on slips of paper, collaged onto larger sheet (card)
 91.5 x 55cm(h)
AH5
 Collaged final draft used as the basis for the reproduction poster of the panel as well as being the original for the reference draft with grid used in preparing the finished version.

Yet when Hechle describes the production of the finished work she speaks of working as quickly as possible to maintain the prized quality of spontaneity and freshness.⁵³ She highlights the importance of not copying the draft. The vellum panel is lightly traced with a grid to correspond with the grid laid out on the final draft (**See Fig. 27**), yet this must only serve as a guide. Hechle asserts that the inter-relationships of the finished version must be wholly internally adjusted, self-referential, not an approximation of the inter-relationships in the draft.⁵⁴ In making this distinction Hechle is arguing that the final copy is a gestalt statement of the work, an act imbued with inspiration and vision, not a scribal copying exercise. A suitable analogy might be a performance of a concert or a play after all the rehearsals – each run-through must interpret the score or script and aspires to greatness. This raises the interesting question of where the work itself lies. Craft is conventionally appreciated and critiqued as being fundamentally embodied and bound by the concrete object while what constitutes the work in the case of a concerto (the score?) is less certainly located. Hechle's later works which tend to grow out of extended periods of research and reflection possess something of this ephemerality. The calligraphic panel becomes a trace rather than a trophy. Hechle's production of a poster-run accompanying most of her exquisite panels contributes to this dissemination of the force of the crafted object beyond the object itself. Interestingly, so does the digitisation here of a selection of material in the calligrapher's private possession.

Lessons for craft?

Ann Hechle's commitment to the craft of calligraphy has been equalled by her readiness to see and make connections with other fields of creative endeavour. Whether this is elucidating the difference between the evanescent physical choreography of a dance performance and the legible trace of the hand-written script,⁵⁵ or speculating on the three and more-dimensional possibilities of book-binding, this eclectic enthusiasm has given her experimentation with handwriting a strength and an honesty that is more than reactive difference. Ewan Clayton has recently argued that British calligraphy has suffered in the 20th century for having not engaged in cross-fertilisation with contemporary art and radical theory;⁵⁶ Ann Hechle's work demonstrates the unlikely and salutary objects that can come out of a craftsman reflecting on the nature of perception.

Also important in a broad consideration of 20th century craft production and appreciation is Ann Hechle's ability and drive to articulate her intention in, and experience of making. Craft can tend to prize the mute, the tacit, and the intuitive. These are important qualities of objects which defy our obsession with the wordy yet Hechle's enthusiasm for prizing out the reasoning and the public and private significance of her vocation is a valuable endeavour. It allows us to give weight to things in the work that might otherwise be obscure such as the pictorial aspiration of the textured 'calligraphic landscapes'. Moreover, Hechle's elaboration of her intent with explanation enables us to see the extreme complexity behind much of her work which may be disguised in the virtuosity of the final version.

In light of the polarised positions that grew up to defend hand-crafts in the 1970s and 80s it is refreshing to see Hechle's willingness to embrace her pedagogical inheritance whilst being contradictory in her own work. Schisms persist in the grounding of craft practice which do not aid critical reflection and Hechle's exploitation of fertile ground betwixt and between provides a useful perspective.

Finally, the explicit profession of the metaphysical in Ann Hechle's calligraphy calls on us to investigate an important aspect of craft practice. A strong positive sense of holding together or remaking some kind of fabric between the ordinary and the uplifting and worthwhile has pervaded the 20th century making of craft in contrast to the trend towards disintegration, confrontation, and nihilism in the contemporary practice of fine art. While there are important and legitimate exceptions to this it is nevertheless one of the most intriguing and indeed radical dimensions of craft practice in our prevalently sceptical society.

¹ See H. Child *More than fine writing: Irene Wellington, calligrapher (1904-84)* (1986) which illustrates a lot of material from the Crafts Study Centre collection, and J. Howes *Edward Johnston: a catalogue of the Crafts Study Centre collection and archive* (1987).

² In fact Johnston started his influential teaching career at the Central School in 1898 though he went on to teach for many years at the Royal College of Art where he tutored Irene Wellington.

³ For an essay by Edward Johnston on the principles of writing with a straight-edged pen see chapter one 'Formal writing and the broad-nibbed pen' in H. Child (ed.) *Formal penmanship and other papers* (1971). This book brings together passages from Johnston's unfinished final work on calligraphy along with other writing; the chapter cited is a reproduction of an article published in short-lived lettering journal *Imprint* around 1915.

⁴ Edward Johnston is also well-known as the designer of the sans-serif alphabet for London Underground, see J. Howes *Johnston's Underground type* (2000). This commission is exceptional in its modernity and seeming break with historicist models. However, Johnston placed an emphasis in all his carefully constructed alphabets on ease of writing and legibility. This asserts a direct relationship between form and function which resonates with later Modernist inclinations.

⁵ See N. Gray *A history of lettering: creative experiment and letter identity* (1986), chapters 13 and 14.

⁶ An example of the latter is Irene Wellington's Wykehamist's Roll of Honour 1939-45 completed for Winchester School in 1948, illustrated in H. Child *More than fine writing: Irene Wellington, calligrapher (1904-84)* (1986).

⁷ Ewan Clayton notes that this national trend followed the model of the Royal College of Art restructuring under Robin Darwin in the 1950s (E. Clayton 'Calligraphy and lettering in the UK' in *Crafts Study Centre: essays for the opening* [2004]). In this essay Clayton reflects on the impact of this educational reform for British calligraphy.

⁸ See the transcript of an interview with Ann Hechle by Bridget Wilkins published in S. Backemeyer *Making their mark: art, craft and design at the Central School, 1896-1966* (2000).

⁹ An episode of the BBC series *In the making* (1979) focussed on Ann Hechle and her craft which includes footage of the calligrapher demonstrating hardening quills in a saucepan of hot sand on the kitchen cooker. A copy is available for viewing in the Crafts Council Resource Centre, Pentonville Road (reference: CT2HEC).

¹⁰ There was a fifth panel dealing with the evocation of imagery and use of metaphor in language but Hechle was unsatisfied with the overall design and it was never worked up as a finished piece on vellum.

¹¹ Johnston writes on the fitness of scripts for their purpose in 'The choice of letter forms and the simple arrangements of letters' originally published in the journal *Imprint* and reproduced as chapter five in H. Child (ed.) *Formal penmanship and other papers* (1971).

¹² Personal communication.

¹³ Ann Hechle is very interested in the sound qualities of poetry – in conversation she highlighted the character of different models for versifying such as the iambic pentameter and spoke about the fascination of poets such as Gerard Manley-Hopkins with the distinctiveness of local dialects. Nicolette Gray compares Hechle's work to the preoccupations of the concrete poets who sought to shape impact through the layout of the words on the page (N. Gray *A history of lettering: creative experiment and letter identity* [1986], chapter 14). Although this was principally expressed through a typographical medium rather than handwriting Gray here aligns Hechle's work with an avant-garde impulse (concrete poetry was radical in Britain in the 1960s).

¹⁴ See H. Child *Calligraphy today* (1976) where in the introduction Child describes a new awareness of the challenge facing calligraphers to be expressive rather than taking legibility as their top priority.

¹⁵ This reading of Aspects of language could be framed in semiotic terms where the arbitrariness of the link between the sign and the signified is emphasised. The insights of this theoretical approach are similar – the freeing of calligraphic renderings or 'readings' from some essential message loaded in the text, the complexifying of the artifice or technique involved in interpreting/lettering, and the emphasis on the agency of the audience in extracting and crystallising meaning. This resonance with literary theory is partly so clear because of the textual nature of the craft of calligraphy.

¹⁶ Another substantial and important work in which Hechle explored issues of working in series and on an installation scale is *Lavender's blue: variations on a nursery rhyme* (1987). The work was commissioned by rare book dealer Michael Taylor for an exhibition in his gallery and takes one text written out calligraphically in a whole series of variations as a vehicle for exploring the thoughts behind stylistic choices and the process of working a concept through. Hechle's intentions and experiences in making it are described in depth in *Lavender's blue dilly dilly* (1988) by the calligrapher. In this essay there is a level of personal exposure in coming to grips with the creative task that prefigures the themes of Hechle's later projects, see the discussion of Image of Grace in the section below entitled 'Deeper Meanings or spirituality and transformation in handwork'.

¹⁷ Personal communication.

¹⁸ P. Dormer *The new ceramics: trends and traditions* (1988)

¹⁹ See item AH41, a press-release about the Hospital, and see http://europaphe.aphp.org/en/f_uni_new.html a general resource site for hospital architecture with a page devoted to St. Mary's, Newport. Also an account by Ann Hechle 'The healing arts' in *The Scribe* (Spring 1991).

²⁰ Hechle quite often completes a full-scale version using best materials as part of her preparation for delivering a commission, perhaps analogous to a full-dress rehearsal, see the commission *The Seasons* (1986) under section heading 'Personal expression and the craft vocation'.

²¹ See *Your guide to man-made: artist/craftsmen at work, who they are and where they are* (1976) the leaflet accompanying the event which is a map of the galleries with an index of the craftspeople stationed therein; a copy is held in the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

²² See E. Lucie-Smith *The makers* (1976)

²³ Personal communication.

²⁴ This work on vellum, along with three preparatory drafts on paper, is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum and can be viewed by submitting a special collections request to the National Art Library: accession number MSL/1980/182/1 (drafts MSL/1980/182/2-4; and pressmark PC1/1 no.s 1-3).

²⁵ Calligraphic sampler is illustrated in black and white in J. Whalley and V. Kaden *The universal penman: a survey of western calligraphy from the Roman period to 1980* (1980), fig. 236, p.124 (this is the catalogue for an exhibition of the same name held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1980 where Hechle's work was included).

²⁶ See Ann Hechle's own remarks on this departure in her work in 'Harmony in geometry, design and nature' in the *newsletter of the Society of Scribes and Illuminators*, issue 73 (2001), and 'Figures of speech: the study and practice of contemplative geometry' in *Letter Arts Review*, vol. 15 (1999). For a discussion of the commission set up by the Edward Johnston Foundation see the article 'Two journals' by Sally Teague in T. Wilcox and E. Clayton *Lettering today and tomorrow: handwriting, everyone's art* (1999) which also describes the second recipient – David Howell's approach to the task.

²⁷ For a summary of the field see N. Pennick *Sacred geometry: symbolism and purpose in religious structures* (1980) and R. Lawlor *Sacred geometry: philosophy and practice* (1982).

²⁸ Tanya Harrod in *The crafts in Britain in the 20th century* (1999) discusses at length the importance of philosophical inspiration for Bernard Leach's radical vision of crafted pottery, in particular the reflections of his friend Soetsu Yanagi on Zen Buddhist conceptions of sublimated ego and honesty in creative work. Harrod also notes the connection of craft philanthropists Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst with Indian commentators Ananda Coomaraswamy and Rabindranath Tagore who promoted the symbiosis of tradition and spirituality with handwork (see chapter four).

²⁹ Quoted in the foreword to H. Child (ed.) *Formal penmanship and other papers* (1971), the posthumously published collation of drafts for this unfinished final work.

³⁰ Personal communication.

³¹ As set out in their respective treatises: E. Johnston *Writing and illuminating and lettering* (1906) and G. Hewitt *Lettering for students and craftsmen* (1930).

³² Donald Jackson has formulated a very personal expressionist style of calligraphy which uses a gestural hand and heavy use of gilding to generate an intense emotional quality, see J. Ullian *The calligraphy of Donald Jackson: painting with words* (1988).

back to essay.

³³ An example of this is the calligraphy of Thomas Ingmire who produces very gestural, layered lettering compositions where the text is often obscured and approaches illegibility.

³⁴ Hechle did teach early on in her career, working part-time directly after graduation at Epsom School of Art and then at Sutton and Cheam School of Art from 1962-66 while also working on private commissions.

³⁵ Personal communication.

³⁶ See Hechle's recollection in 'Irene Wellington as a teacher' in H. Child *More than fine writing: Irene Wellington, calligrapher (1904-84)* (1986).

³⁷ Hechle recalls being encouraged to look at Indian miniatures as well as read widely (interview privately recorded with Tanya Harrod).

³⁸ Information included on a summary CV provided by Ann Hechle.

³⁹ The Land has been a recurring source text for Hechle, it was a favourite work of Irene Wellington's which makes its choice at this juncture more significant.

⁴⁰ A photograph of Hechle in front of this wall is illustrated in T. Harrod *The crafts in Britain in the 20th century* (1999). Hechle started this installation on Jan 1st with one extract and carried on across the wall.

⁴¹ The final version was completed in coloured inks on vellum.

⁴² Personal communication.

⁴³ It is apparent that Irene Wellington worked with tracings of different elements to compile her posters, see essay on Wellington's methods by Donald Jackson in H. Child *More than fine writing: Irene Wellington, calligrapher (1904-84)* (1986).

⁴⁴ See the discussion of *Image of Grace* (1991) in the section below entitled 'Deeper Meanings or spirituality and transformation in handwork'. Another example is the vellum panel *In the beginning* (1984) which works with biblical passages commissioned by the University of Minnesota Library, Minneapolis, see R. Aris 'In the Beginning' in *Calligraphy Idea Exchange* (USA) (Spring 1987).

⁴⁵ In Hechle's technical notes on the composition she notes that there was only meant to be one yellow pigment but the Naples yellow was not sharp enough to balance the whole palette, so she introduced the Lemon yellow.

⁴⁶ Personal communication.

⁴⁷ In the sense in which the binary simplicity of probability (positive or negative) generates a linear diagram which can theoretically encapsulate all possible outcomes – the hexagrams encompass all human experience – the I Ching offers an insight into the universe similar to that of Sacred geometry, Ann Hechle's next project, where mathematical relationships echo the macrocosm.

⁴⁸ These are set out in the *Book of changes*, the most respected English version is Cary F. Baynes translation (1950) of Richard Wilhelm's German translation (1923). Wilhelm was a German missionary and talented linguist who developed a great sympathy for the philosophy and spirituality of China while pursuing his calling there.

⁴⁹ This passage is part of the introduction to a lecture written by Hechle about the project and its significance.

⁵⁰ Personal communication.

⁵¹ In her subsequent work, notably the journal on sacred geometry *Figures of speech*, Hechle has incorporated much more of her own paraphrasing and reflections on topics alongside direct quotations.

⁵² Notes for lecture written at close of project.

⁵³ Note that quickness is a relative term here, completing the final version 'all in one go' means over several weeks, working about five hours a day (to maintain concentration).

⁵⁴ Personal communication.

⁵⁵ In H. Child *More than fine writing: Irene Wellington, calligrapher (1904-84)* (1986).

⁵⁶ E. Clayton 'Calligrapher and lettering in the UK' in *Crafts Study Centre: essays for the opening* (2004).