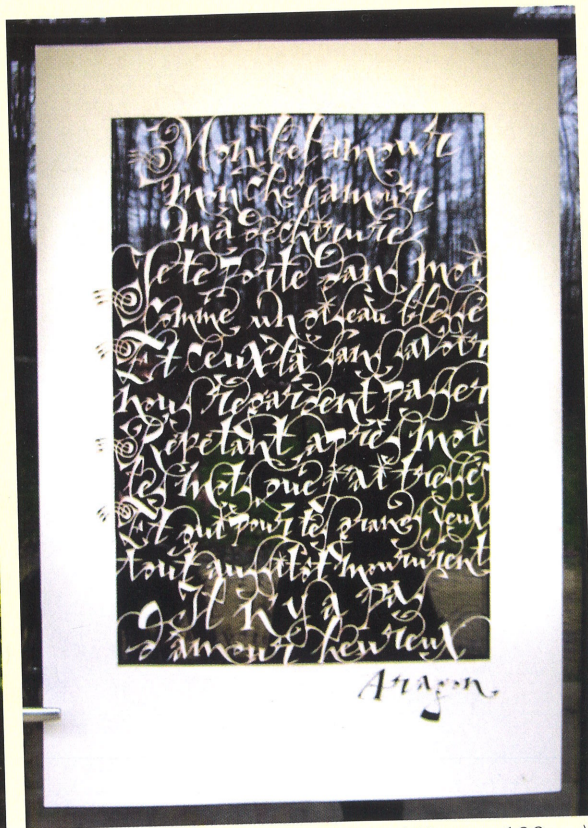


2011. Catherine Baptiste (30cm x 30cm).  
All photos this page by Carole Vidal.



2013. Louis Aragon (70cm x 100cm).

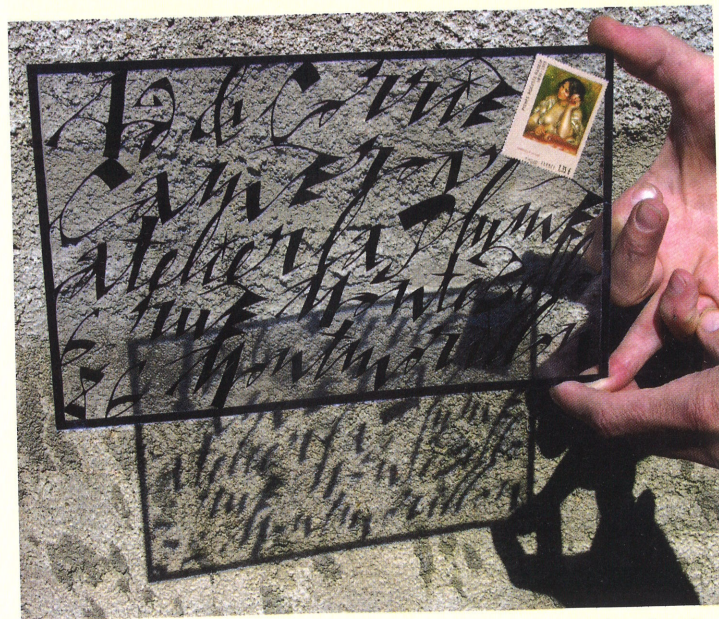
# PABLO DUGAZ

## PAPER-CUT CALLIGRAPHIST

BY CORRIE CAMERON

*Among the envelopes of the “Mail Art Across the World” project, one drew immediate attention. The sender: Pablo Dugaz. The text on the envelope was not written in ink or gouache, and it was not a collage. Instead, Pablo cuts, and he not only cuts short texts, but also complete poems – in one piece. He calls himself a papercut calligraphist. (And you thought there was nothing new under the sun!) Here is a virtuoso at work.*

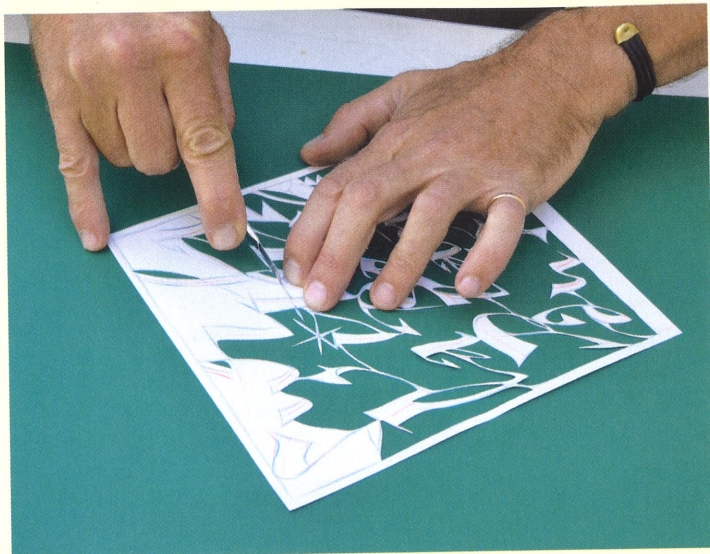
My first notice of Pablo’s work was a picture of a Mail Art submission mailed to me by Emmanuel Spaeth, a well-known promoter of letter art in France. (Pablo Dugaz is from Poitiers in west-central France). I met Pablo and saw his work first-hand in March of 2011. Since then I have been a fan, and I’m not alone. During Penna 2011 and Penna 2012, the International Week of Calligraphy in Montmorillon (France), Pablo gave several demonstrations.



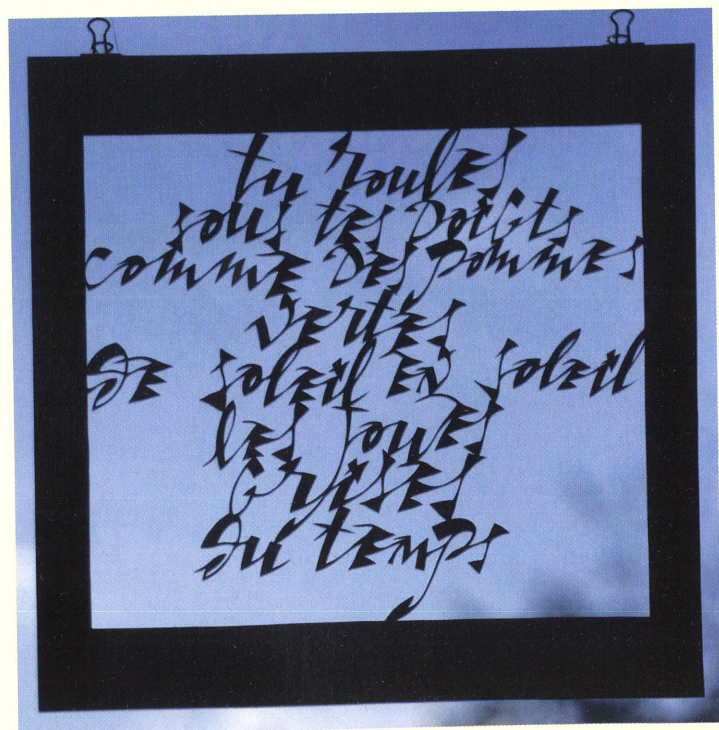
Papercut mail from Pablo. It came in the mail shortly after I wrote to him after seeing his similar MAAW entry.

## From Fun to Passion

Pablo has cut letters since 1998 (with a blade, not with scissors). First there were names and other short texts for family and friends – done spontaneously and just for fun. His enthusiasm, enriched with technical expertise over the years, became a true passion, cutting entire poems of Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine into integrated works. Not many papercut artists are known to do that. His papercutting colleagues see themselves as specialized illustrators and not as letter (text) artists.



2012. Photo by Jean-Michel Caille.



2011. René-Guy Cadou (40cm x 40cm).  
Photo by Philippe Lebesconte.

## Philosophy of Yin and Yang

The Chinese are masters in the art of papercutting, following the principles of yin and yang. Yin is when the characters are cut and fall out of the paper, one by one, and do not connect together. Work according the principle of yang is more complicated and more interesting. Here, the space between the characters or letters is cut away, after which the text remains in the sheet of paper. The essence (key) here is to create a design where the text parts connect to each other as subtly as is possible. You connect letters into words and the words to each other, making use of ascenders and descenders, flourishes, and other protrusions. In a carefully designed and cut text block, nothing will hang down when a final inspection is made holding the sheet horizontally.

For years Pablo followed the yang method as he worked. Lately, his focus is on a combination of both styles in the same piece. He continues to create designs where more and more paper is excised while the text is kept completely intact as one piece.



2012. René-Guy Cadou (30cm x 40cm).  
Photo by Carole Vidal.

## His Letterforms

Pablo is not a calligrapher who has specialized in hands such as Italic or Uncial. Instead he has used his ordinary handwriting, adding ornamental elements. He looks to add contrasts to create a more interesting picture – especially contrasts between thick and thin, but also in the layout as a whole. The yang technique involves cutting the thinnest of lines, often a matter of millimeters and less. A successful piece of work for Pablo is an integral carved poem, wherein the thin lines are as filigree and in a certain light optically disappear, as when the work is against a window. You will see the thicker text parts as if they are floating in air, and you do not understand how this is possible without them being connected together (which of course they are).

## Catching Wind and Light

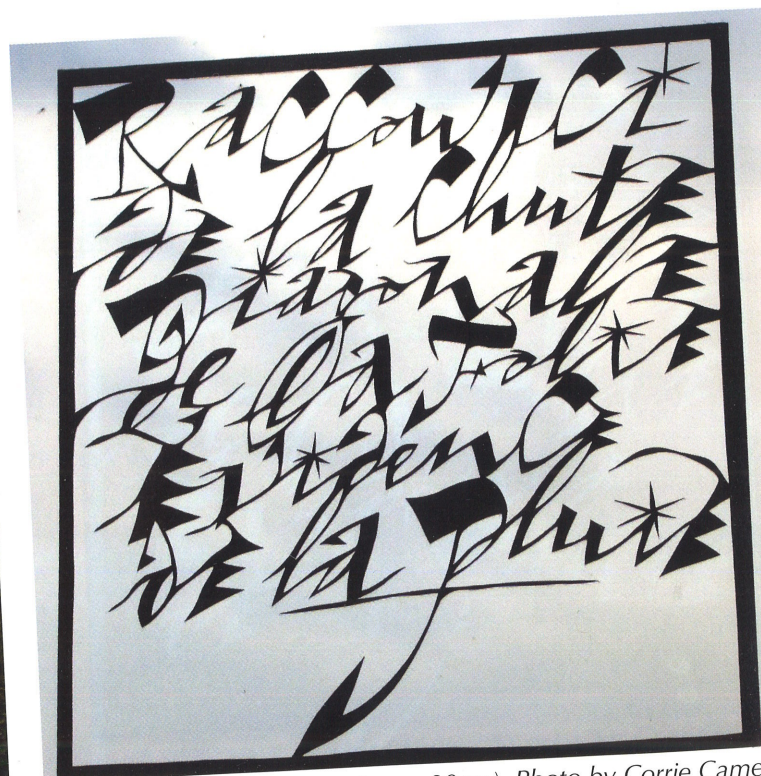
Various exhibitions have been adorned with Pablo's letter art. They are hung vertically before or up against windows, usually fastened with very fine, almost invisible wires. Viewers can thus well see, and possibly feel, how fragile the carving is: delicate and vulnerable as a cobweb. As a breeze moves ones of his creations, one can see even better how the poem floats and dances. Sometimes the sun or other light source projects the shadow of the text on the walls or on the floor. Pablo enjoys seeing how wind and light are caught in the trap he has made and how they interact with his cut texts.



2012. Voltaire (20cm x 30cm).  
Photo above and bottom left by Carole Vidal.



2011. René-Guy Cadou (50cm x 65cm).



2011. Catherine Baptiste (20cm x 20cm). Photo by Corrie Cameron



2012. Rolling Stones & Charles Baudelaire (each papercut 64cm x 150cm).  
Photos by Paul Guillemin.



## Inspiration

The poems in themselves are a source of inspiration, effecting the images that come to him during the design process. Matisse once said that when he draws a tree, he draws not the shape of the leaves, but the space between the leaves. That is the essence of the difference between yin and yang. A magazine has sheets of paper called pages, but the space between these pages (leaves) is nameless. When in the yin mode, the letter is cut and then falls out. With yang, it is all the unnamed shapes around the text that are excised.

Pablo thought: the less you name what you are making, the more images have a chance to appear, enabling them to hold the emotions that are evoked. An image that comes up is of the spider in its web, but that is so common that it seems banal. To go further, he envisions human pyramids, where the letters are mini acrobats that are climbing while clinging to each other; he thinks of the *o* as the smallest, lightest, and also the freest bird; he calls on the inspiring image of a beloved, with whom he removes garments one by one, gently and tenderly. ☺

*A Dutch version of this article first appeared in Scriptores, the journal of the Dutch-Flemish Association for Calligraphy (Uitgave van de Nederlands-Vlaamse vereniging voor kalligrafen).*

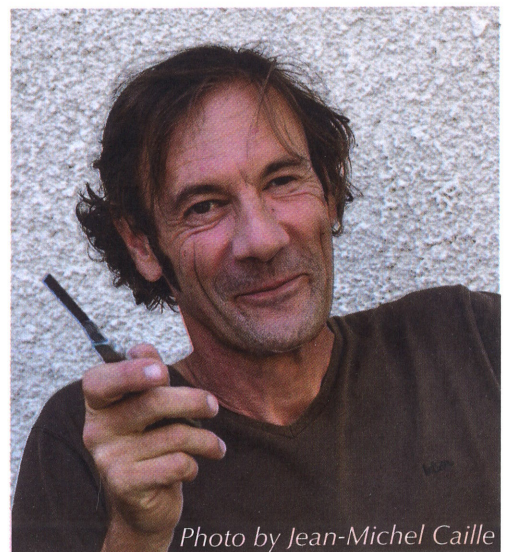


Photo by Jean-Michel Caille

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