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ART QUARTERLY WINTER 2017

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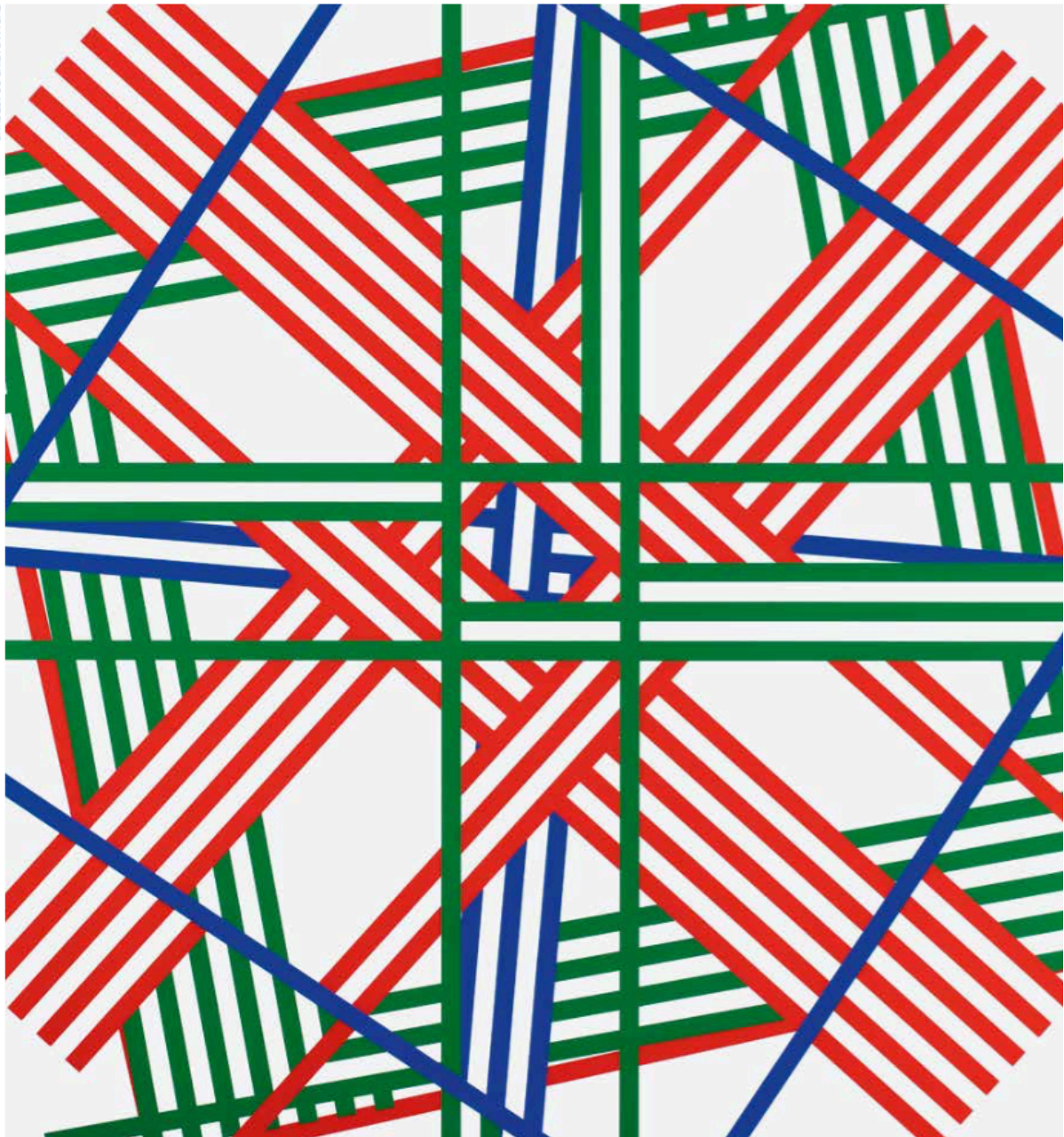
WINTER 2017

ANDREAS GURSKY:
THE PHOTOGRAPHER
WHO THINKS BIG

FACE TO FACE:
RACHEL WHITEREAD
& IWONA BLAZWICK

WEAVING STORIES:
TEXTILE ART AND
DESIGN IN FOCUS

THE MAGAZINE OF ART FUND



Her name is far from well known, yet the graphic designer Elizabeth Friedlander, a German-Jewish refugee who came to Britain in 1939, is thought to have been one of the first women to design a Western typeface. She is now the subject of an exhibition at Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft and a short film by Katharine Meynell, whose grandfather was a close friend of the artist. *Anna McNay* reports

THE PROTOTYPE



Right: portrait of Elizabeth Friedlander, date unknown; facing page: foundry proofs: left: Elizabeth type Roman; right: Elizabeth type Italic, both 1932

Published in 1939, volume 41 of *The Penrose Annual* – one of the key design magazines of its time – included a review by the typographer Robert Harling of a new typeface, which he described as ‘undoubtedly the year’s most successful type’, adding, ‘There seems to be no weak spot in the font.’ The typeface was known simply as ‘Elisabeth’ – ‘Elizabeth’ in English-speaking countries – and had been designed a number of years earlier by the German-Jewish graphic designer Elizabeth Friedlander. This typeface remains Friedlander’s key achievement. Not only is it still in use today – having been digitised by the Spanish designer Andreu Balius in 2005 – but Friedlander was one of the first women to design a Western typeface [alphabet]. Its creation was no mean feat. By the time the typeface was issued, Friedlander had already had to leave her job, her home, and her country, as Nazi persecution took hold. When she reached London from Berlin, via Milan, on a domestic service visa in 1939, it was the printer and poet Francis Meynell – founder, along with his second wife, Vera Mendel, and David ‘Bunny’ Garnett, of The Nonesuch Press, and the editor who had commissioned Harling to write the typeface review – who came to Friedlander’s aid. Meynell helped to find her design work – not only in publishing, but also in ‘black propaganda’ for the Political Intelligence Department (PID), which employed her knowledge of German script to produce fake ration books and Wehrmacht stamps.

Katharine Meynell, artist and granddaughter of Francis, inadvertently stumbled upon both Friedlander and the family link while researching an unrelated project at the St Bride typographical library in London. Give or take some sparse

details, however, there is little that can be added to the biographical tale of this seemingly resilient woman, who, deliberately or not, left very little trace. What can be gleaned comes from her creations – both professional and private – and the few artefacts left behind. These testify to her talent and generosity, her precision and her thoughtfulness. It is from these fragments of a life that Meynell has pieced together a short film, *Elizabeth* (2017), best described as an artistic essay, and which will form part of the exhibition ‘Elizabeth Friedlander’ at Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft, opening in January.

Alongside her typeface, what Friedlander leaves behind is a catalogue of design work including commissions for the Folio Society, Mills & Boon, Reader’s Digest, Thames & Hudson and Jonathan Cape; patterned papers for Curwen Press; roundels and calligraphy for the 25th anniversary of Penguin Books; trademarks for Saxone shoes and the London University coat of arms; ornamental borders for Linotype; and calligraphy for the Roll of Honour at Sandhurst, which was quite an honour in itself. In 1956 she also created the first uniform edition jacket designs for Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* and Una Troubridge’s biography of Hall, seven years after the novel was first republished, having been banned for obscenity in 1928. Again, this design is simply credited ‘Elizabeth’.

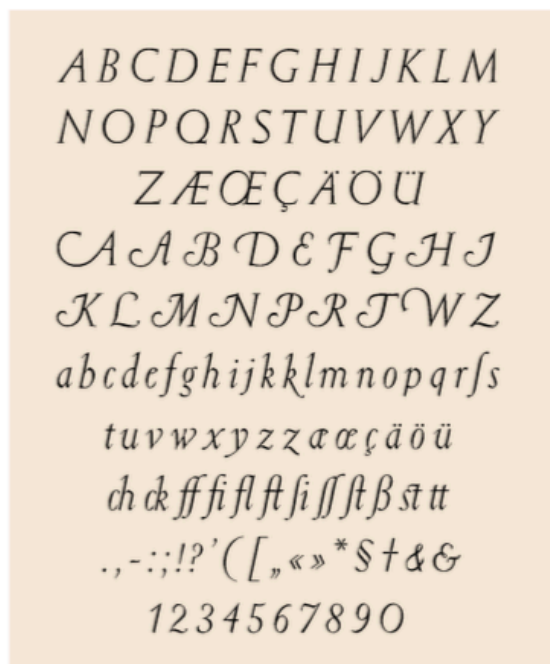
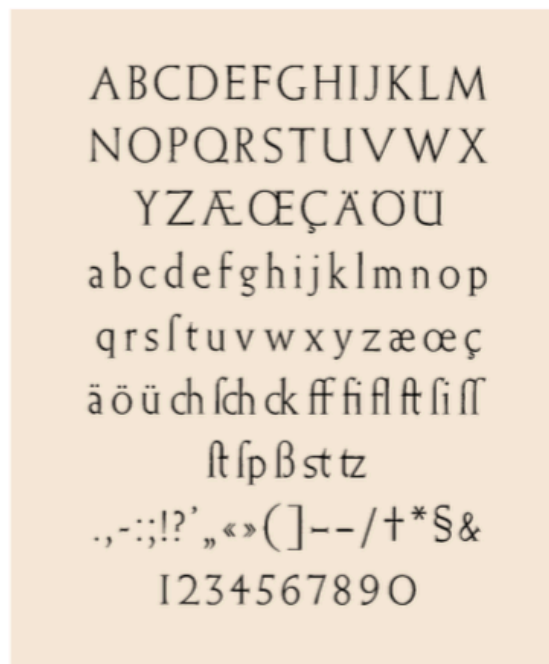
Born Elisabeth Friedländer in Berlin-Charlottenberg on 10 October 1903, Friedlander studied art at the Berlin Academy under the Art-Nouveau designer and calligrapher Emil Rudolf Weiss. She went on to hold a salaried position at Ullstein Verlag, the largest printing and editorial company in Europe, where she worked on the luxury

magazine title *Die Dame*, hand-drawing many of the elegant article headings and being responsible for much of the layout. In around 1928, Weiss introduced Friedlander to Georg Hartmann, director of the Bauer Typefoundry in Frankfurt-am-Main, and it was he who commissioned her to design her typeface. Hartmann was thoroughly pleased with her work and wrote in a letter of his ‘belief that your type will be one of the best and most beautiful types ever produced’. He later went so far as to describe it as his *Lieblingsschrift* (favourite typeface). Comprising Roman and Italic, it was initially to have been called the *Friedländer-Schrift*, but with the developing political climate, such a recognisably Jewish name became impossible. Indeed, in 1936, Friedlander lost her right to work in Germany, since her ‘non-Aryan’ status, according to state decrees, meant she ‘lack[ed] the necessary reliability and fitness to participate in the creation and dissemination of German cultural values’.

After two years working as a designer for the publishing house Mondadori in Milan, in September 1938 Friedlander became subject to the introduction of racial laws in Italy, even harsher than the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 in Germany. With her attempts to secure a visa for the USA unsuccessful, Friedlander instead set sail for England, with the aid of the Society of Friends Germany Emergency Committee.

Despite her permit only allowing her to undertake domestic work, Friedlander took matters into her own hands and, seeking design work, turned up on Francis Meynell’s doorstep at the advertising agency Mather & Crowther. He found her work and they soon became firm friends. In October 1941 she wrote him a letter

COURTESY PAULINE FALCKENBERG PRESS/SPACE LIBRARY/FACHLIBRARY.CO.UK



of thanks, giving him as a token her treasured, handwritten and pen-illustrated copy of Gottfried Keller's *Eugenia* – one of few personal items (along with her baby album, her portfolio and her Klotz violin) that she had brought with her from Germany. The friendship was well requited, with Meynell writing the following affectionate short poem:

*Elizabeth
A stranger still to Death
Registers in this place
Her sum of days.
Although he knows her name
Death for the life of him
Cannot recall her face.
(Alas, her lovely face)*

Friedlander also compiled two beautifully handwritten anthologies as gifts for Meynell – one made for his third marriage in 1946 to Alix 'Bay' Kilroy, and one for his 60th birthday in 1951. The first is a volume of carefully selected poetry including Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 116' ('Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments'), and poems by both Meynell himself and his mother Alice. Friedlander had it hand-bound in vellum by one of the best bookbinders in London. The second volume contained essays as well as poems, again carefully selected according to Meynell's personal tastes.

It was these two volumes that set Katharine Meynell off on her search for Elizabeth. When her father died in 2009, she was clearing through her grandfather's cottage in Sussex, and, as she describes, 'There were these two beautiful calligraphic volumes at the back of Francis' bookcase, amongst the other poetry anthologies. One was signed "Elizabeth" and one was signed "EF". Shortly afterwards, while researching in the St Bride Library on an unrelated project, the librarian brought her a copy of Pauline Paucker's 1998 book *New Borders: The Working Life of Elizabeth Friedlander* (published by Incline Press). 'I started reading, and it mentioned the books she had made for Francis. It was a complete coincidence. Nobody had told me about Elizabeth.'

Meynell can't recall if she ever met Friedlander, but she does remember her grandparents going to visit her after she'd moved to Kinsale in Ireland in c1961. In Kinsale, Friedlander lived modestly, supplementing her income by handcrafting keepsakes for tourists. She moved there to be near her friend Alessandro 'Sandro' Magri MacMahon. They had a long-standing relationship, were invited to the local literary circle as a cou-

COURTESY PAULINE PAUCKER/INCLINE PRESS/ROOLE LIBRARY ARCHIVE/UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, COBK



Clockwise from above: bookplate design from Bauer sample book in *Elizabeth Antiqua*, date unknown; hand lettering for *Die Dame* magazine, 1928-35 (both)



Clockwise from above: wartime Christmas card; letterhead for Ellic Howe, dates unknown; calligraphic penguin, 1959, drawn for the 25th anniversary of Penguin Books





COURTESY PAULINE PAULCHENKINE, PRESS/RODOLPH LIBRARY ARCHIVE, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, COBK

Left: self-portrait of Elizabeth Friedlander, 1928; right: hand lettering for Die Dame magazine, 1928-35

Obst
 Säfte
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Above and right: Christmas card designs and proofs, 1950s





ple, but only ever lived down the road from one another. In her later years, Friedlander became known as 'dormouse' because of her habit of falling asleep in her chair. Her eyesight began to fail and she died in 1984, aged 80.

Finding materials for the exhibition at Ditchling has not been easy as nothing held in the Friedlander archive, located in Cork, Ireland had been catalogued, and virtually nothing survived from past exhibitions on her work, held at London's Ben Uri Gallery in 1955 and Cork's Boole Library in 1988. The original matrices for her typeface were abandoned in Berlin when Bauer transferred to Barcelona in the 1970s. Meynell was also initially turned away by the Public Records Office when she was seeking the file

concerning Friedlander's British naturalisation, being informed it was closed until 2048, as she had been working for the PID. 'I had to pay an extra fee for them to look at it and decide whether or not it was sensitive material,' she says. 'It was just a bit of personal stuff about her parents, who she was working for at that point, and so on.'

'There will be a bit about her story in the exhibition,' says Meynell, 'but also that sense of frustration of not being quite able to pin anything down.' This may be in part due to Friedlander being a product of her era. Ellic Howe, for whom she worked in the PID, indexes Friedlander in his 1982 book *The Black Game: British Subversive Operations Against the Germans During the Second World War*, again without a surname, and

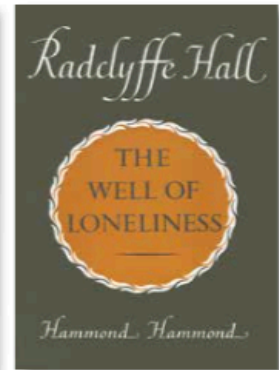
describing her as 'a demure spinster in her late thirties'. 'Obviously, she was a refugee,' says Meynell, 'and it's entirely appropriate that we think about how people struggle through that sense of displacement.' Perhaps the best that can be surmised about her comes from looking at the gifts that she made – in particular, those two precious volumes for Francis Meynell. 'These gifts were made for the other person to appreciate,' says the narrator in Katharine Meynell's film. 'What there is of her is in the script, the choice of ink, margin, paper, binding.'

● 'Elizabeth Friedlander', Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft, 6 January to 29 April. ditchlingmuseumcraft.org.uk, free with National Art Pass (£6.50 standard)

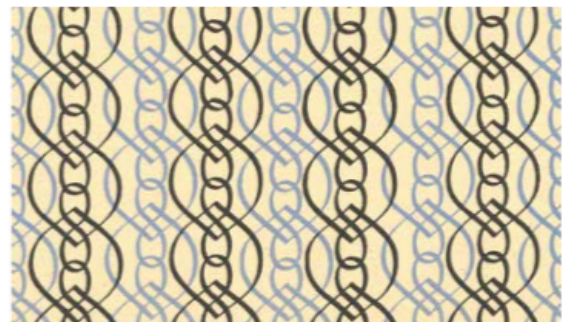
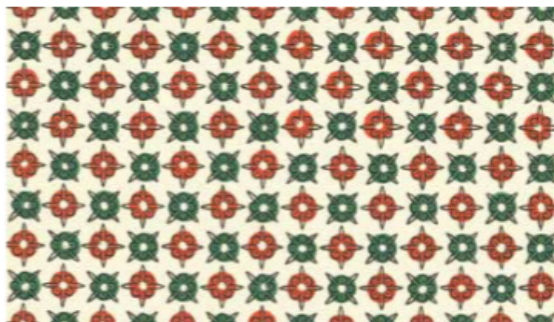
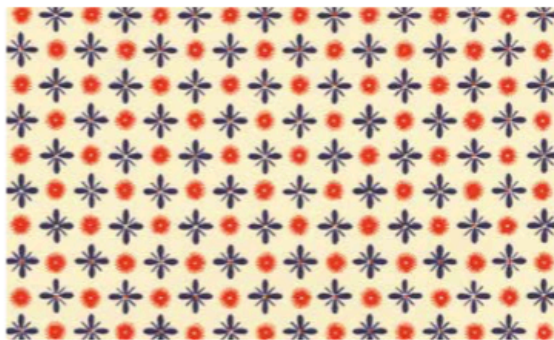
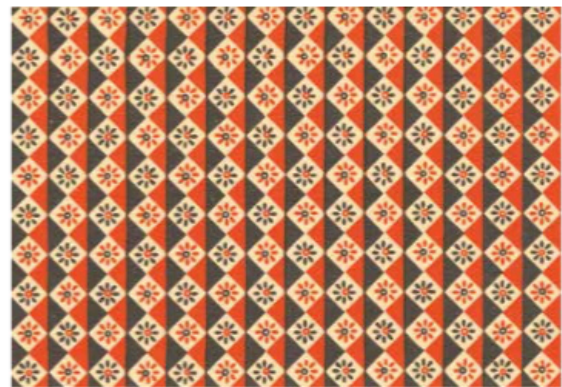
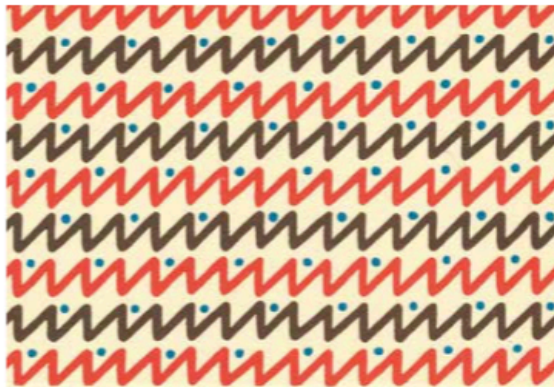
Above: Penguin scores books, designed by Elizabeth Friedlander, 1950s; right: patterns made from border units designed by Elizabeth Friedlander for Monotype hot metal typesetting, 1958



Near right: bogus *Der Zenit* magazine designed by Elizabeth Friedlander on behalf of the Political Warfare Executive, April 1943; far right: jacket design for the uniform edition of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, 1956



Below: Curwen Press pattern papers, clockwise from top left: Zig Zag; Magic; Motto; Curl; Treasure and Allegro, commissioned and first printed variously between 1946 and 1950



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