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05.10 - 16.12 2023

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Colophon

While reflecting on Rad Hourani’s proposal on writing, I was reminded of Rober Racine’s meticulous and monumental dictionary-based works. Looking through his artist’s file, I found an essay he wrote for *Parachute* magazine titled “Écrire une installation ou installer l’écriture” [Writing an installation or installing writing]. In it, Racine looks at other visual artists who are interested in the written word. It struck me that Rad Hourani could very well be part of this historical cohort, since, as Racine states:

“An installation artist with an interest in writing will emphasize the gesture of writing, will feature it, in sign(s), in visual form; whether legible or not. Writing will be the starting point that will allow the artist to experiment with several spaces, several visualizations, and their *mises à voir*, or *visual settings*. From then on, writing will be both source and intention, pigment and support, light and volume.”¹

This quote sets the stage for understanding Rad Hourani’s approach. In his exhibition *Classroom of Language*, the neurodiverse artist creates a place for experimentation, a space to question the education system, and raises issues of concern around exclusion in language policies.

Hourani’s installation invites us to consider how language is used in daily life through his own version of a classroom, which he shares here with the public. In the gallery are forms that look like letters, but what’s most noticeable are their materials, their placement in the room, and their blend of textures. Arranged this way, writing becomes tactile—we want to touch it, feel it, and hold it close.

Here, Hourani presents his own *Classroom of Language*. Compared to what’s been inculcated in us since childhood, it might be impossible to read anything, to understand the lexical scope of this proposal, or to decode the meaning behind the words that take shape around us. But what matters is that we make our own kind of writing here and now.

In this exploratory exhibition, multidisciplinary artist Rad Hourani transforms the Artex te gallery space into an imaginative *Classroom of Language*. Drawing from his experiences growing up and learning in the school systems in Montréal and Jordan, the artist uses materiality, iconography, design, the Artex te collection, and the built environment to rethink how learning and communications are disseminated through language.

Four years ago, the artist was diagnosed with severe ADD and dyslexia, profoundly transforming his perspective on his childhood and formative years. His recollections of those early years were characterized by struggles in school and the lack of resources and alternatives available to him. Memories from his experiences with educational systems—of humiliation, hierarchy, alienation, and low self-image—haunt him to this day. School consistently failed to help him achieve literacy by reinforcing a hostile environment inconducive to his undiagnosed condition.

Dyslexia is far from being a rare condition, and learning disabilities in general are experienced by many. According to Statistics Canada, in 2012, the prevalence of learning disabilities among Canadians aged 15 and older was 2.3 percent. Individuals who reported such disabilities were found to experience lower rates of educational achievement and were more likely not to complete high school and post-secondary qualifications.¹ The effects of their educational experiences had a significant statistical impact on their career choices, experiences with bullying, length of time to complete school, and difficulties finding employment in adulthood. These statistics show the devastating impacts that an insufficiently adapted educational system can have on neurodivergent populations and underline the need for greater efforts toward adapting institutions and making them accessible to people with diverse learning abilities.

In 2022, Artex te initiated a long-term process to evaluate and establish a course of action to help the organization become more sustainably accessible. Beginning with a multi-phase digital accessibility project, Artex te's first objective will be to redesign its website to meet accessibility codes. This initiative and the conversations it has sparked within the organization have sensitized the team to approach its programming through a more accessible and inclusive lens. As a library—a place for learning and disseminating information—it is important to consider how Artex te's own limitations impact users across the ability spectrum.

Leading up to his exhibition, Hourani carried out a research residency at Artex te in the fall of 2022. Taking his experiences with learning disabilities as a base, he explored the stacks rigorously and creatively, taking particular interest in the materials and design qualities of the printed matter and intuitively selecting documents he found most stimulating. He identified books that, in their particular layouts, fonts, colors, images, and illustrations, were more appealing to engage with. Hourani also explored Artex te's holdings to identify books and other documents that directly addressed accessibility and neurodiversity in the arts. Through his research, Hourani has helped Artex te identify certain deficiencies or gaps in its collection, knowledge that will in turn inform future book acquisitions.

Classroom of Language takes these reflections as a call to begin thinking about language, learning, and the potentialities of being differently wired. The installation transforms the exhibition space entirely, imagining an alternative world that is more just and equitable for everyone. Hourani's artistic gesture critiques educational exclusion and neuronormativity and advocates for a broadening of our collective consciousness on these matters. He liberates language from its rigid rules, creating a new alphabet using abstract material forms that loosely evoke early pictographs and the evolution of writing systems.

In an act of self-determination, Hourani recreates the classic classroom based on his own experiences and understandings, instinctively reassembling the fundamental furnishings and objects found in the learning environment by focusing on its tactile and visual qualities. Growing up, the one place where the artist excelled was art class, where he was praised and encouraged. This was a determining moment in his early life, one that impacted his career trajectory positively and illustrates the power of supportive pedagogy. Drawing from this experience, the artist's sculptures are a means for him to experiment with the materials associated with human communications (clay, wood, plastic, plaster, metal, and paper), as well as with the various communications technologies and techniques (engraving, sculpting, printing, laser-cutting, etc.) that have been developed across human history. Through this exhibition, Rad Hourani asks us to consider how our social structures and systems can stunt our personal paths and thereby stand in the way of our flourishing.

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Rad Hourani

Nativist though they may seem, the writing systems we use to communicate in society are learned and acquired practices. Each year brings new additions to the dictionary, concerning new definitions or distinct situations in time. These attributions are products not of nature but of nurture. Through syntax and lexicon, society continues to defer to authority by treating traditionally educated individuals with respect and praise while overlooking and neglecting those who do not echo a similarly literate proficiency. Due to his writing and reading difficulties, the use of script and orthography has long intimidated Rad Hourani. Rooted in his own experience as a neurodivergent artist, this body of work aims to open a dialogue on invisible disabilities and the divisive issues of written language. Hourani questions how linguistics might better facilitate the structures of our synthetic languages; isn't there a way to make them accessible to all?

Furthermore, Hourani investigates how text creates social divisions. A national language is comprised of a writing system that one perceives as an identity from which the separation of the self is born. The use of nouns divides through feminine or masculine applications, and certain adjectives may exert a negative impact on the mind simply because of their learned meanings. Although numbers are neutral in gender, their use as indicators of age and class can reflect inequality. As vocabularies are and continue to be the invention of specific individuals that categorize people, namely through their physical characteristics, Hourani further asks: is it possible to neutralize semantics by challenging the norms and binary conceptions contained within language?

Through the detachment of the elements that make up a phrase or the illustration of paragraphs, Rad Hourani has created laser-cut PVC sculptures, depicting letters, digits, and signs in different typographies. These amalgamations are reminiscent of a page from a book or of a classroom blackboard; their forms and textures allow blind or visually impaired people to access them by touch. Hourani intends to highlight the vast interpretative possibilities beyond the mainstream narrative. It is through an unbiased, flexible language that we could create inclusive forms of communication.

This sculptural series of uncommon patterns and rotations in various fonts proposes alternative concepts of words, constitutions of sentences, conjugations of verbs, declensions of pronouns, and uses of punctuation marks or letter cases. Reflecting on the structural rules of grammar, it falls not only to linguistics to establish terminology or to create a glossary, but to each of us, regardless of our academic and literary skills. Rad Hourani's artworks suggest a nuanced understanding of self, beyond the categorizations implicit in the articulation of a certain language, to be of a certain age or sex, or to make a certain salary.



WORD - 2022
PVC
37 X 39 X 0.75"



PRONOUN - 2022
PVC
37 X 39 X 0.75"



ADJECTIVE - 2022
PVC
37 X 39 X 0.75"



PARAGRAPH - 2022
PVC
37 X 39 X 0.75"



NOUN - 2022
PVC
37 X 39 X 0.75"



CLAUSE - 2022
PVC
37 X 39 X 0.75"



VERB - 2022
PVC
21.6 X 39 X 0.75"



SENTENCE - 2022
PVC
37 X 39 X 0.75"



ADVERB - 2022
PVC
21.6 X 39 X 0.75"

This body of work stems from artist Rad Hourani's personal experiences with everyday language and the sense of social exclusion he felt while growing up, especially when confronted with textbooks and other educational materials. Noticing a lack of sensorial stimulation in the use of language in neurotypical pedagogy as well as in public spaces, his deconstruction of textuality and the alphabet sheds light on a discriminatory educational heritage affecting millions of people. Hourani seeks to dismantle the social hierarchies and inequalities that result from these practices by creating adaptable learning tools for those who are differently wired.

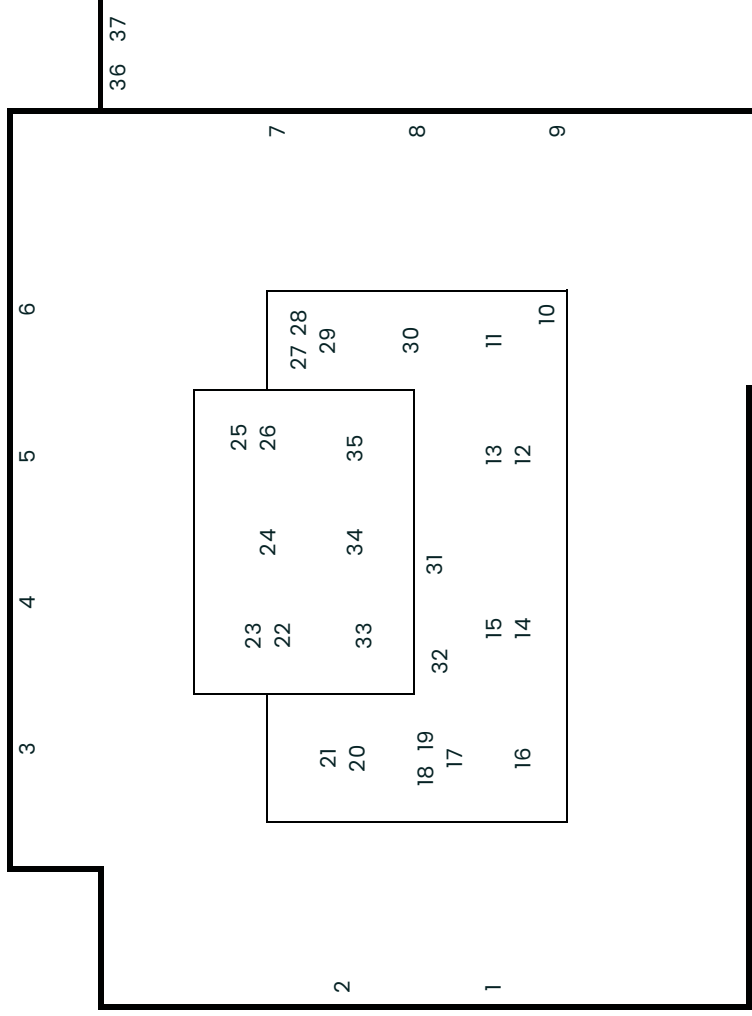
Although touch is the first language we learn to decode, conventional means of communication are often disconnected from our senses, unstimulating, and repetitive. By adopting a diverse approach to semiotics and activating our sensory systems, the interpretation of signs becomes more interesting, engaging, and accessible. In addition to unlocking new ways of thinking and communicating, an embodied perspective on language can also speak to people across cultures and generations.

We live in networks of relationships in which the sensory modalities we use to communicate shape our experiences. The transmission of a clear message takes place at multiple embedded levels, such as by uttering words and sounds, and through the perception of neurological changes in the body. These aspects are absent from the abbreviated written forms that we regularly use today. Additionally, contemporary virtual means of communication contribute to isolating and dividing people, creating new social and economic issues. The appearance of chats, emails, text messages, and emoticons in the digital sphere, which were originally perceived as commodities but have since become established, accepted linguistic forms, carries the risk of further miscommunications.

Spanning a wide range of art media, this sculptural series employs an abstract approach to the alphabet wherein wood, paint, clay, stone, vinyl, metal, plaster, and paper collide into new forms at the intersection of communication and creativity. The relationship between content and container is reconfigured to reflect how we experience feelings and sensations through color, texture, pattern, shape, and contrast. Working with clay for the first time, Hourani creates figurative, anthropomorphic letters that echo ancient writing materials, a reflection upon a time before the invention of visual language. The sculptures are intentionally overpainted, cracked, turned upside-down, or otherwise imperfect, highlighting the rules and norms of writing and the inevitability of miscommunication. Combining both hand- and machine-made works, the series explores the evolution of language through time and the meanings it carries: old versus new, raw versus polished, organic versus synthetic, ecological versus unsustainable.

Art is a way to communicate with each other as well as an ultimate expression of human emotion and knowledge, which plays a crucial role in addressing inequality. Reflecting on past, present, and future alphabets, from early use of clay tablets and pictograms to spelling reforms and the recent evolution of inclusive writing, Rad Hourani explores how language may, even today, be optimized and renewed to the benefit of the neurodiverse (and, indeed, of everyone). Embodied communication supports the advancement of social struggles, as people around the world are affected by various learning disorders and find themselves isolated in digital spaces that employ constructed and, more recently, AI-derived languages. Whether embracing body language, linguistic standards, emojis, or other forms, our means of connection remain vital today—and, most significantly, unwritten.





List of works:

1	VERB - 2022 PVC 21.6 X 39 X 0.75"	8	CLAUSE - 2022 PVC 37 X 39 X 0.75"	15	LETTER H - 2023 metal + wood + plaster + acrylic 8.5 X 10 X .44"	24	LETTER E - 2023 metal + wood + tape + plaster + paint .20.5 X 22 X 53.5"	33	LETTER O - 2023 clay + paint 9 X 9 X 9"
2	ADVERB - 2022 PVC 21.6 X 39 X 0.75"	9	WORD - 2022 PVC 37 X 39 X 0.75"	16	LETTER K - 2023 metal + wood + plaster + paint 19.5 X 15.5 X 28.5"	25	LETTER X - 2022 clay + glaze 18 X 11 X 11"	34	LETTER U - 2023 plaster + metal + paint 14 X 16 X 27"
3	NOUN - 2022 PVC 37 X 39 X 0.75"	10	LETTER C - 2023 vinyl 145 X 84.75"	17	LETTER Y - 2022 clay + glaze 6 X 8.5 X 13.5"	26	LETTER T - 2022 wood + paint 20 X 20 X 27.65"	35	LETTER D - 2023 wood + plaster + paint 11.5 X 10 X 10.5"
4	SENTENCE - 2022 PVC 37 X 39 X 0.75"	11	LETTER G - 2022 clay + glaze 11 X 12 X 16"	18	LETTER V - 2022 clay + glaze 8 X 10 X 13.5"	27	LETTER S - 2022 clay + glaze 6 X 6.5 X 14"	36	VOCABULARY - 2022 PVC 37 X 9 X 0.75"
5	PRONOUN - 2022 PVC 37 X 39 X 0.75"	12	LETTER A - 2023 wood + plaster + clay + paint 19.5 X 23.5 X 30.5"	19	LETTER L - 2022 clay + glaze 4.75 X 8 X 13.5"	28	LETTER J - 2022 clay + glaze 6 X 7 X 14"	37	SYMBOL - 2022 PVC 37 X 9 X 0.75"
6	PARAGRAPH - 2022 PVC 37 X 39 X 0.75"	13	LETTER F - 2022 clay + acrylic 4.5 X 5.5 X 13"	20	LETTER M - 2022 wood + paint + metal 20 X 20 X 28"	29	LETTER R - 2022 clay + glaze 7 X 9 X 14"		
7	ADJECTIVE - 2022 PVC 37 X 39 X 0.75"	14	LETTER B - 2022 clay + glaze 19.75 X 18 X 9.25"	21	LETTER N - 2022 clay + glaze 12 X 11 X 8.5"	30	LETTER W - 2023 plaster + metal + cardboard + acrylic 5 X 7 X 50"		
		15	LETTER I - 2022 marble 8.25 X 8.25 X 24"	22	LETTER J - 2022 marble 8.25 X 8.25 X 24"	31	LETTER P - 2022 mike media 7 X 7 X 20"		
		16	LETTER Z - 2023 metal + tape + plaster + acrylic 17 X 8 X 22.5"	23	LETTER Z - 2023 metal + tape + plaster + acrylic 17 X 8 X 22.5"	32	LETTER Q - 2023 wood + acrylic 2.75 X 3 X 10.5"		

Rad Hourani is an interdisciplinary artist who uses the mediums of sculpture, painting, architecture, photography, costume, curation, performance, text, sound, and video to highlight the labels that are used to code and categorize human beings and the violence that is born of these divisions. His hybrid artistic approach revolves around the foundations and contexts of geopolitical, religious, sexual, and economic social systems. Questioning established boundaries and hierarchies, Hourani's practice seeks to revolutionize these structures into evolving manifestations of activism.

Hourani perceives humanity as a synonymous ecosystem of cultures and posits nonconformity as the essence of individuality. His critique of the discriminatory bases of nationalism, racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, and authoritarianism foregrounds a pluralist perspective on the theme of neutrality as an attentive observation of humanity. It aims to return to the basis of these precepts in order to achieve awareness of the effects of our generalizations.

An artist classified as BIPOC, queer, dyslexic, dysphoric and dysphonic with ADD, Hourani's multidisciplinary practice challenges the categorical preconceptions of identity as created by society and its established hierarchies. His aim is to revive crucial debates and open dialogues on issues of inclusion and inequality. Additionally, his work invites us to question the ways in which we function and to envision an existence free from limitations and conditioning.

His work has been the subject of numerous exhibitions, notably at the Jardin du Palais-Royal in Paris (2009), the Yvon Lambert Gallery in New York (2010), the Centre Pompidou in Paris (2012), Tate Modern in London (2013), the Phi Centre in Montréal (2013), the MU Hybrid Art House in Eindhoven (2014), the Centre Culturel Canadien in Paris (2015), the Hering Museum of Contemporary Art in Hering (2015), Arsenal Contemporary Art in Montréal (2015), the Cooper Hewitt Museum in New York (2016), the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (2017), the Savina Museum in Seoul (2019), the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (2019), the Noguchi Museum in New York (2019), and the A.K.T; in Pforzheim (2021).

Between 2005 and 2007, Rad Hourani invented gender-neutral patterns and introduced the first entirely gender-neutral ready-to-wear collection in fashion history via a runway performance at the Dominique Fiat Gallery in Paris. In 2012, he was approached by the "Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture" in Paris to become an "invited member." Rad Hourani became the first to create and introduce a unisex collection in the history of "Haute Couture." His revolutionary concept of gender-neutral collections aims to initiate a dialogue on non-binarity through the medium of costume.

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Rad Hourani
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