

Type design und typography between art and design

an exhibition project for
KINDL – Centre for
Contemporary Art, Berlin

Type design and typography between art and design

The group exhibition “Illegocene – The Age of Dizziness” (KINDL – Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin) includes artworks from the fields of photography, video, drawing, painting, light art and sound, next to an artwork from the field of typography and type design.

For the latter, we were invited by the Austrian artist duo and curatorial team Anderwald & Grond, as well as Sergio Edelsztein, to develop an artistic-typographic contribution. The exhibition, with the overarching theme of “Dizziness”, explores the multiple crises of the present day and the experience of a perpetual state of emergency characterised by a lack of language and other forms of connection. It showcases artists’ positions that propose new vocabularies for these states of dizziness.

<https://www.kindl-berlin.com/exhibitions/illegocene>

In the beginning we asked how dizziness can be translated to the field of typography and type design. Can a typeface make us dizzy? Can certain type forms provoke a feeling of disorientation and confusion by interfering with the reading flow? By spinning, slanting, shifting and fainting letterforms to different extents, we have been testing various types of disruptions. Finally we’ve decided for a simple yet quite effective method: the baseline shift. By doing so we’ve created a type system with different states of dizziness via glyphs that shift from their baseline (usually a fixed constant in type design) at different levels.

The new typeface is based on our Referenz Grotesk type family, which we designed a few years ago. > It’s Nice That article

<https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/referenz-grotesk-open2type-typography-graphic-design-140520>

By selecting the various stylistic sets within the new font, ‘Referenz Grotesk Groundless’ transforms legible text, either gradually or all at once, into a typographic texture where letter and word constellations at different heights collide, challenging readers to varying degrees.

When typesetting the first texts and mixing the various degrees of dizziness, we were particularly interested in the transition zones between legible and illegible. How long can one continue reading or orient oneself within the texts using the higher degrees of dizziness? At what point does one actually accept the difficult-to-read text as an abstract texture? Various tests revealed that, despite the challenging conditions, it is possible for a surprisingly long time to match letters to their lines in order to continue understanding the text content or at least individual words.

Following the initial development phase and a meeting with the curatorial team in spring 2025, they had the idea not to present our typeface ‘merely’ as an artwork in a single location within the exhibition space, but also to let it run as a common thread through the entire exhibition in between the other artworks.

For this purpose, quotations from various authors and participating artists were selected which enter into a dialogue with the artworks and accompany the exhibition as a recurring element. Different paragraphs, representing different states of dizziness, appear on walls throughout the exhibition: ranging from legible to hardly legible to illegible. In some places, entire quotations are displayed in a barely legible style, which was set in prior consultation with the authors.

Various promotional materials and the introductory text at the entrance to the exhibition are also set in the Referenz Grotesk Groundless. For this, we have mostly used the basic style, which features only a minimal offset of individual letters and thus communicates the dizzying theme only very subtly.

Part of the artistic typeface project and also on display in the exhibition, alongside the wall graphics, is a type specimen that comprehensively showcases the typeface and its different styles. Here, its playful character is evident once again – moving between legibility and illegibility, and the space in between, opening up scope for individual interpretations of the content.

The exhibition runs until 26 July 2026
at KINDL – Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin.







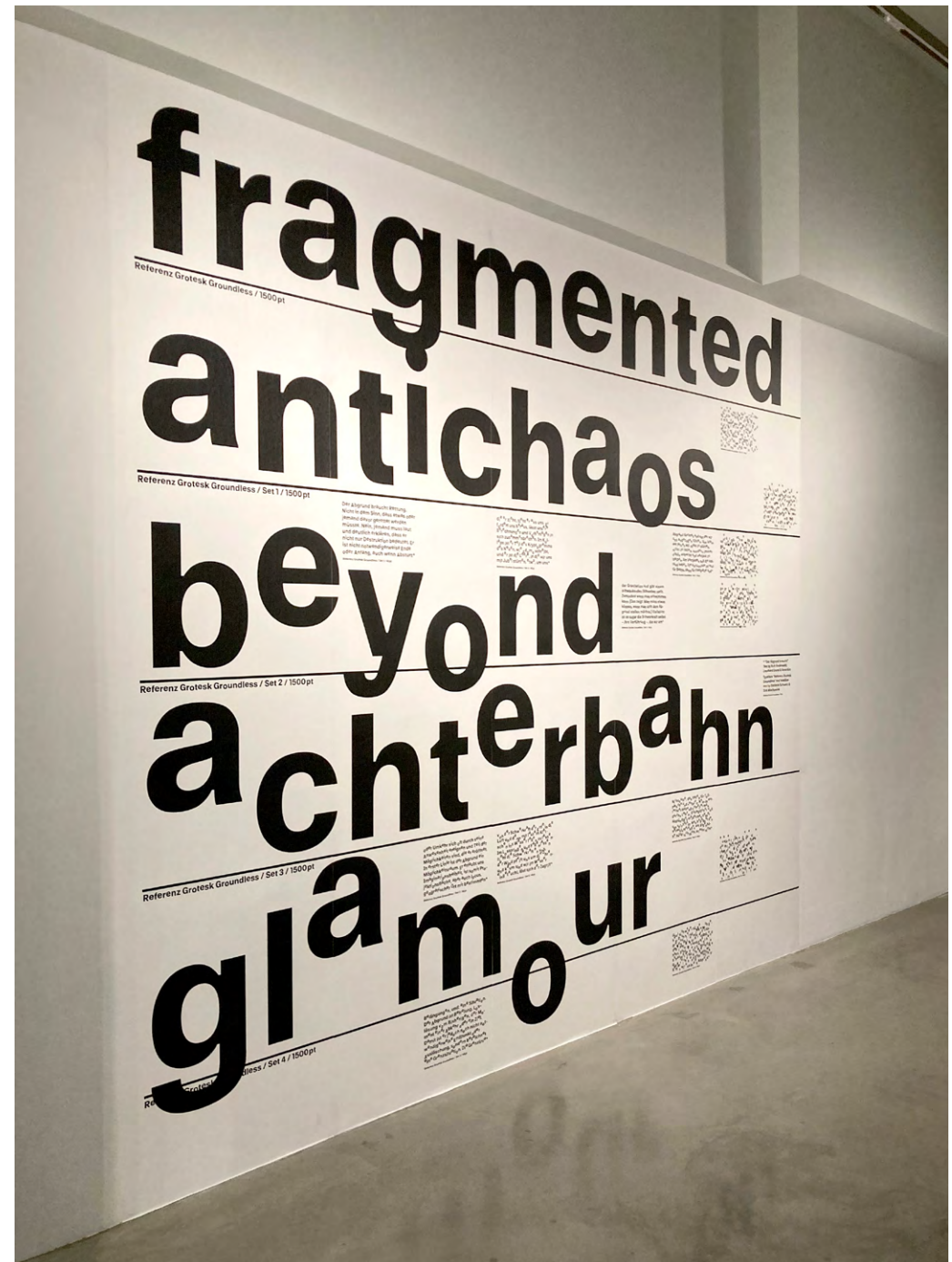
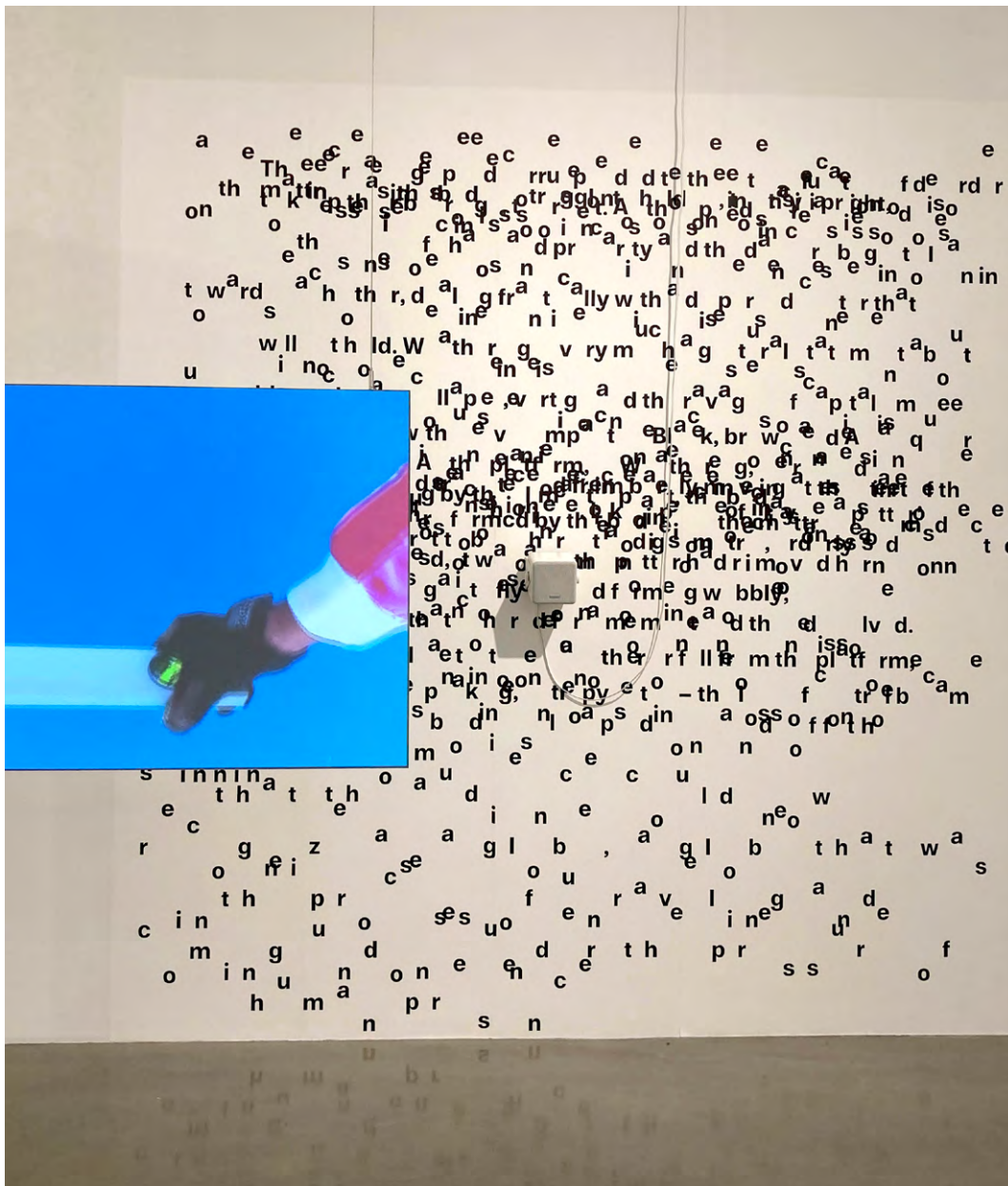
One has to remind
oneself more often where
the North, East, West or South
is. Or, when you are outside
the station, you feel lost even
though you know the way. Or
you forget things, for instance,
how to navigate in the station.

Where were things again?

Ah, it's weird reminding
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Anonymous
Antarctic Expedition
via Alexander Stahn





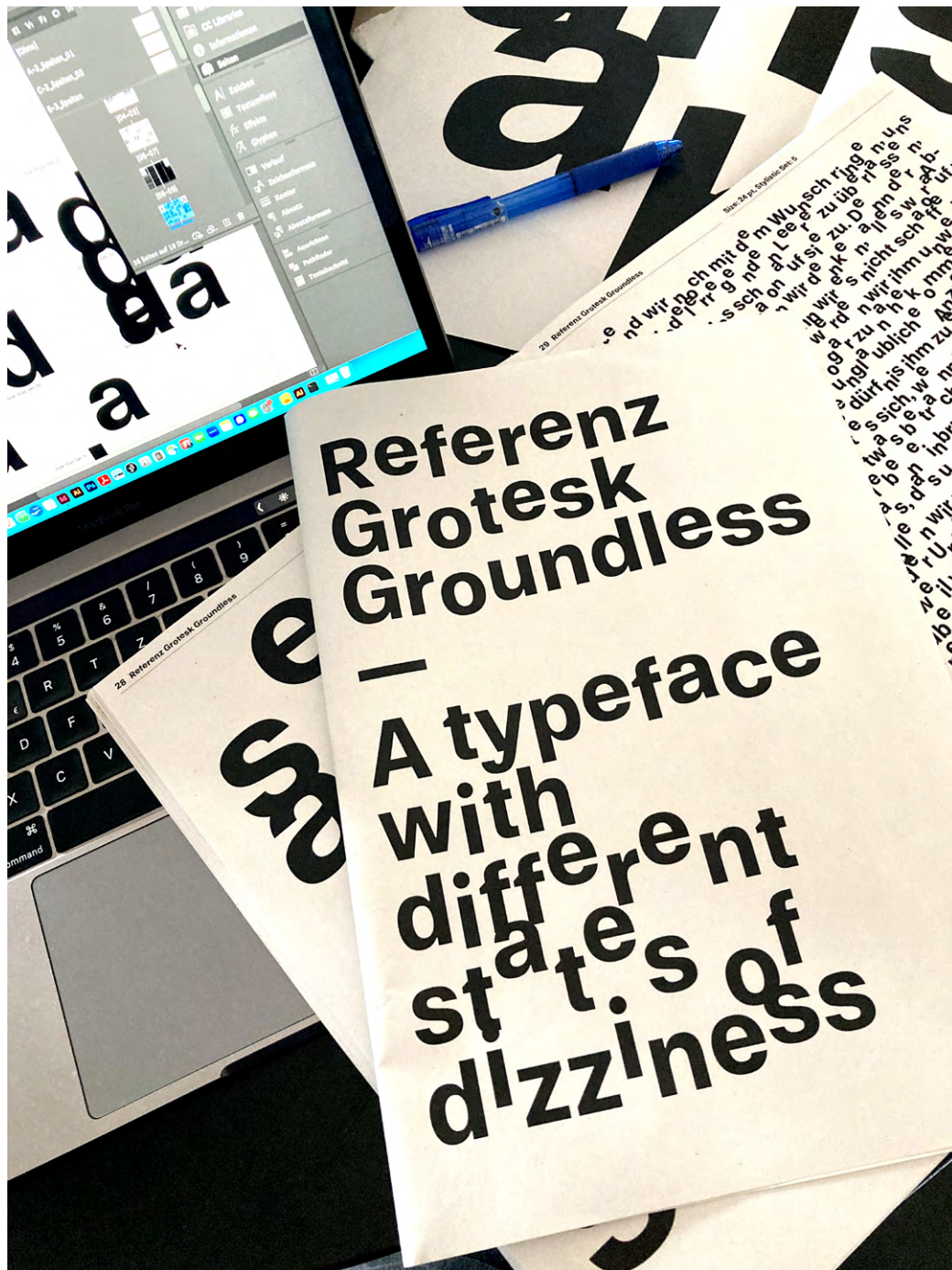


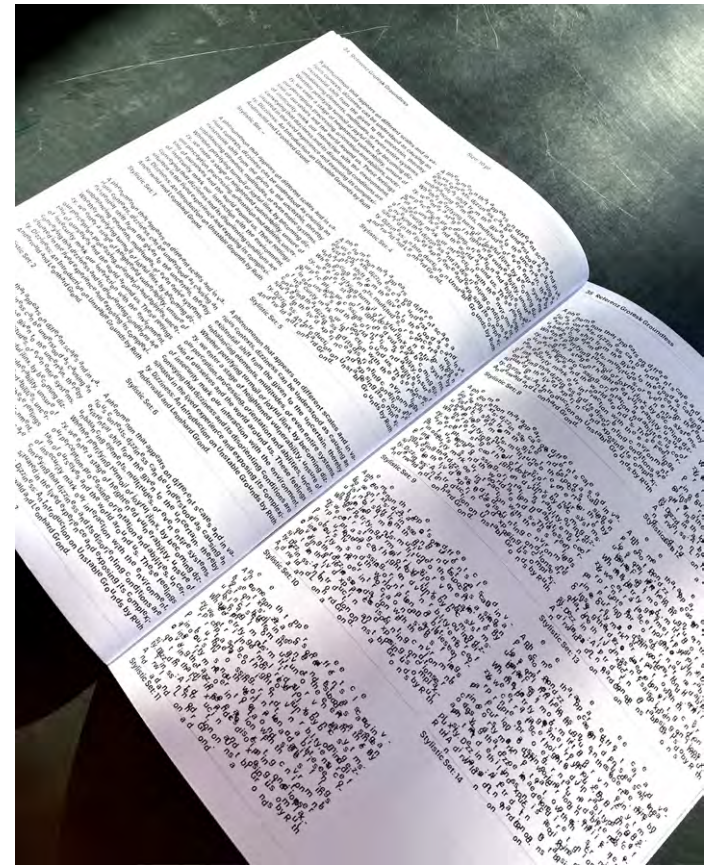
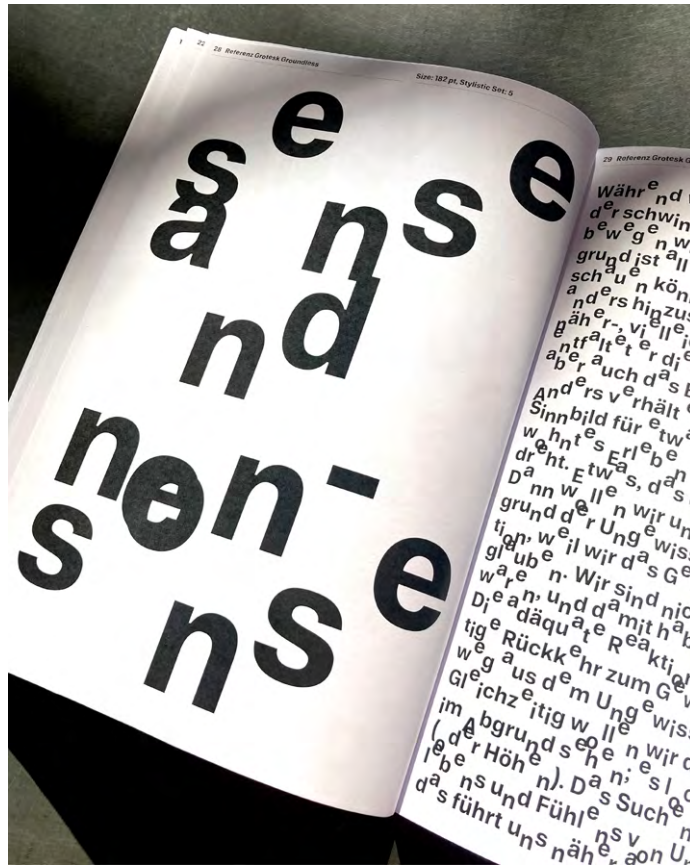
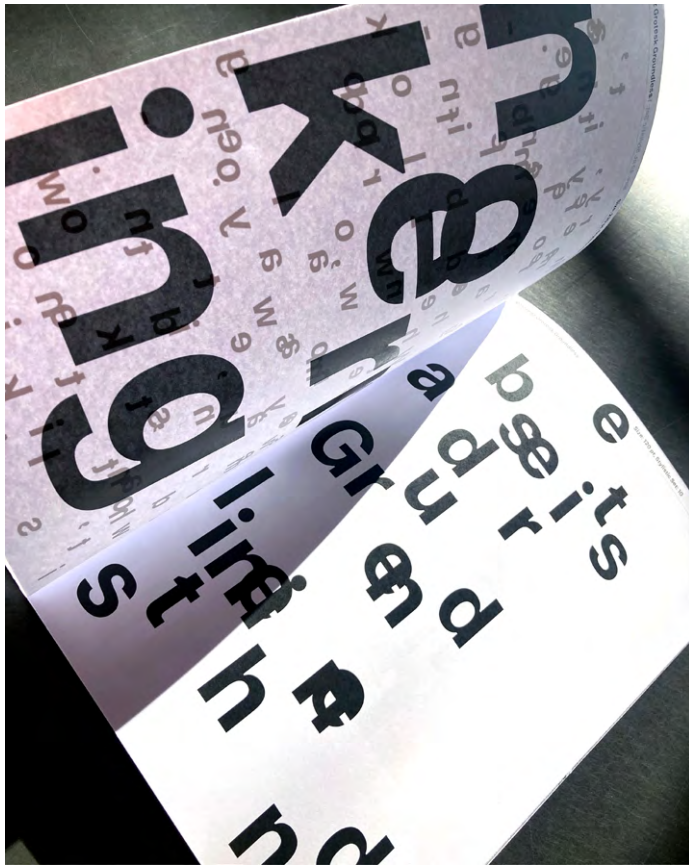
Iligocene – The Age of Dizziness

22.3.–26.7.
2026

Kindl – Zentrum für zeitgenössische Kunst
Am Sudhaus 3, 12053 Berlin







A phenomenon that appears on different scales and in various contexts, dizziness can be understood as causing an existential shift from the given to the uncertain, thereby unbalancing elements, multitudes, or even entire systems. Whether petrifying turmoil or joyful ilinx, by becoming dizzy, we enter a stage of heightened vulnerability, unsure of our perception, processing, orientation and abilities, uncertain of ourselves and the world around us. These feelings of insecurity mark our interaction with the environment, conveying that dizziness and its disorienting conditions are situated in the lived experience and exposing its complexity. Dizziness: An Introduction on Unstable Grounds by Ruth Anderwald and Leonhard Grond.

Stylistic Set: –

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Stylistic Set: 2

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Stylistic Set: 3

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Stylistic Set: 4[illegible]**Stylistic Set: 5**

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Stylistic Set: 6

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Stylistic Set: 7

A phenomenon that appears on different cases and in various contexts, dizziness can be understood as causing an existing shift from the given to the uncertain, thereby unbalancing elements, multitudes, or even entire systems. Whether the triggering of joy or joyfulness, by becoming dizzy, we enter a stage of heightened vulnerability, misuse of our perception, loss of orientation and ability, or a certain loss of us and the world around us. The feelings of insecurity mark our interaction with the environment, conveying that dizziness also disorienting conditions are situated in the lived experience and exposing its complexity. Dizziness as an introduction on unstable grounds by Ruth Andreadakis and Leona Grand.

Stylistic Set: 8

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Stylistic Set: 9

Apho monon th t p p s on d f f e n t s c l e d i n v -
 ho se on t x s d z i n s e n d e d w o o d s a s i e n a -
 x i s t i n t a s t r o m t h g i v u n d t h e a n e t h e b y
 u b i n t a s t m s m u l t i u n d s o r v n n e c s y s t m s
 w h e p e r t r i f y e r m i t e r v o l u n e b y b o c m g i z -
 z y w e c a t a s t g c f h i g h t a n d v n r b t v o n i n g c e o -
 p u r p l a n e s s s i o n e r t o n a n d a s i e s e e n c e o -
 a i n o b o u r t y m n d t h v e r o l d n o n s e e s f l a s s
 o i n s e l v s n d t h c t a o n w i t h t c n v r m n e
 q u t i n g t h d z z e r i n t r a c t i o n w i t h c n v r m n e
 s i t i n g t h l v d x p a c i n g a n d x p o s i n g u s o m p l e x
 t y d z z i n s s a t t r d u c t i o n o n s a b f G r o n s b y R u t h
 A d r w i d d l n r h d r d n d

Stylistic Set: 10

A Ph ome non th t p p s off ff e t s c a d in v -
e o e q t x i s t a s s a n e s w o m a s i f n e a
u i s t i n g t h e m t h u g v n e a s a t h e y
e l i a s e i m t m t u n o r v e n e s y s t m s
w h a e t r i y n g e m o i n j u n r b l y e n c i f
z y w e r c p a s c o h i g h t o n d n r b l y e n c i f
p e r u f n e s o s s i n g o n d n a t i e n a b l e s e e
o a i n o u r t y m s n d n t o p a w i t h t h c n v i o n m n h
o i n g t h t a z e o i n t a l o n t h c n v i o n m n h
q u i n g t h t a z e o i n t a l o n t h c n v i o n m n h
s i t y d e z i n s s a l t h r d r o n o n s t b f g r o n d s b y R t h

Stylistic Set: 11

A p e e p p e e e c e
 A l t o n e t h e c s e n d f f e n t s c s h i n g v
 o i q n i e a t h e s s a y u n d h e c o r r e c t i n g a
 u i e l n e a s s i o n e u a i u n o r v n a i n a v s t
 W h e t e r f y m e s n e i r e d s t o x b y b s t s
 z y w e e p r i n g e m o n i g h t e j u n r b l y t h i n g e z
 P e c n e t s r o e d r n t d t n b l e t e s c o
 P e u l a o s s i n w e r n n n H a g a i l s i n e g
 f i n e b u r t s n u n w e r n n n n n n n n n n n n
 G a i n g e t h e n e e p i n e n e p t g c n r o n m e n
 q h t i n t h e l d i n s s n s i s o x n t n g n g i o n s x
 s i y D e z z d i n a l e d r u c a n s o d t b o s g r u s d o n y R t
 A r w l s s n n d r G r o n s o n d s

StylisticaSeta 12

A r h i m e t h a p p e d f f e i c a i d v a
 t o n d z z o s a n d e n s a s a h i n g a
 i q i m a i e h e i n t i s u g n e n t h e o e r a e t i n e b l
 i s p a f e i m o t m i t d o r v e n y t m
 W h a t t r y g e m e l f e p a y b y c i n e a z
 z y w e e r a i g e f h o i g h t o d v i n b l y t e i n e
 r p r n t e s p o e d r n a i n a b l e e n e o
 e a u i q o s s i n v o r d a r h o n h e m i i s t e g
 i n e o r t y m a n e r t e p a t o w h n t i n m i n e
 i n g s g h t e d e z e d e d e p l o n e t g n d o n e r
 q h a i e t h i j d i n s n e f a i s a p i n d n g n i n o n x
 s i j D z z i n t i j d i n t i n t a p h s p i s d e b y R t
 A d r w l f a d l n n a r d o n q u n s o n s

Stylistic Set: 13

A r h c m o t h a p p a r e d f f i t c a i d v a
 f e n o t h o n d z z e a s e n l i d p n s e a s h a n a
 i e f q n i f f t h i n n e u n t h s o c r a e t n i n b y
 p h e i e i m o t m i e t d b r v n e d n y t m
 W h t h e t r y g o m e l i f e p l e x b y d i s e d z
 z h w e c t r a f a c e h o i g h t d v l n a b i l i t y i n c
 r p r i q u e s p r o e s r n t a n d a b i e t n e e
 e f u l i q u e c o n n o r d i f r l o n g h q u i i f n e g
 o n e o r a y m a n k f e t a t o w t h n S r m i n e
 o n s u y t h t d f z z e a c o e l o i r e t d l o a n
 a n t h e t h i l l i n e x p r i s f e q i i n d e g o f l o n s
 p l x t y d z z i n : d i f t r d t n u t h i n s i d e s d o b y
 R t h A d i r i d s a n q a r d c o n o n s o n s

Stylistic Set: 14

Further information about the exhibition

<https://www.kindl-berlin.com/exhibitions/iliggocene>

short video & statement of the curator

Sergio Edelsztein within the exhibition space

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DXeNLR5jJCs/>

6-minutes video about the exhibition

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBdf8PmDVIY>

About us

Stefanie Schwarz and Dirk Wachowiak are graphic designers with a focus on typography and type design. Both studied in Germany and the US before Dirk received his MFA in Graphic Design from Yale University in 2005 and Stefanie her MA in Communication Design from Central Saint Martins/University of the Arts London in 2012.

Based at Stuttgart's Weissenhofsiedlung, they founded the typographic research lab 'open2type' in 2013 as a field of experimentation as well as a platform to showcase their typographic body of work. Creating conceptual typefaces and use them as a medium to archive and convey (hi)stories is something the duo has been establishing since their student days in Southwest Germany, on the East Coast of the United States and in London.

Since 2022 Dirk holds a professorship for typography and visual systems at Hochschule Trier (Trier University of Applied Sciences). 2019–2022 Stefanie has been professor for typography and type design at Bauhaus Universität Weimar. Now she is head of the ABK Type Lab at Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart (Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design).

Their typefaces have been released by FontFont (Berlin), Fontworks UK (Cheltenham), Sudtipos (Buenos Aires), Indian Type Foundry (Ahmedabad) and T-26 (Chicago).

further information about us and our work

<https://open2type.org>

instagram: @open2type

contact

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We have been featured by **It's Nice That** in May 2020

<https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/referenz-grotesk-open2type-typography-graphic-design-140520>