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Scroll with calligraphy in the Morikami's Japanese Tea Ceremony Room that says, *Wa Kei Sei Jaku* (Harmony, Respect, Purity and Tranquility), by Sen S sa (b. 1938), Heisei Period, 1993, Collection of Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens

Beautiful Letters

by Jenifer Mangione Vogt

When people think of calligraphy, images of elegant wedding invitations often come to mind.

Calligraphy, however, is an expressive art form with roots dating as far back as ancient Egypt, where examples are evident in *Book of the Dead* scrolls made between 1550 and 50 BCE.



▲ Two works by Alexandru Macovei: (L) from *The Grand Inquisitor*, 2013; (R) from *Evangelia*.



"Long Life"
Japanese Calligraphy

Comprising pictures and letters, calligraphy is an interwoven blend of artistic and literal expression. The term is derived from two Greek words, *kallos*, which means "beautiful," and *graphe*, which means "writing." In Muslim cultures, calligraphy is considered such a high and pure form of religious expression that it's al-

most granted divine status. It's also omnipresent as decorative elements on buildings and in all forms of artistic expression. Even the Al Jazeera media company's logo is based on calligraphy.

Calligraphy is also revered in both China and Japan. Striking examples of Japanese calligraphy can be found on view at the Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens in Delray Beach. Works of Chinese calligraphy are included in the collection of the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach and are displayed on a rotating basis. Recently, the museum featured *Yinli, Prince Guo, 1717*, (China, Qing dynasty) as its work-of-the-month. As part of its annual Chinese Moon Festival, the Norton has also offered calligraphy classes in the past.

"In China, there are three art forms that are known as the Three Perfections: painting, poetry and calligraphy," says Laurie Barnes, the Norton's Elizabeth B. McGraw Curator of Chinese Art. The art form, she says, has endured because of its beauty and ability to convey both thought and emotion. "Every cultured person in China practices calligraphy as a form of self-cultivation and expression."

"In Japan, everyone studies calligraphy," says Veljko Dujin,



מזל טוב!

"Mazel Tov"
Jewish Calligraphy



"Without a beautiful letter there's no book, without a beautiful book there is no culture."

– Villu Toots (Russian calligraphy artist)

the Morikami's curator of collections. "It's a revered form of expression." Dujin cares for and documents thousands of works in the Morikami's collection, many of which contain calligraphy. "These are often family heirlooms that are only taken out and displayed on special occasions."

Caring for and displaying the museum's collection of delicate scrolls adorned with calligraphy could be considered an art form itself. Dujin uses white gloves and a gentle touch when removing scrolls from the fragile wooden boxes in which they are stored. "They are mounted on silk and with elegant paper, but the person doesn't choose the fabric or paper. They take it to an artisan who decides what will look best," Dujin explains, adding, "Calligraphy is often done by a Buddhist priest and requested of him to mark a special occasion."

Calligraphy in the County

THE NORTON MUSEUM OF ART

1451 S. Olive Ave., West Palm Beach, www.norton.org
Calligraphy appears in works that are on view in the *Four Princely Gentlemen* exhibition, which is on display through January 26.

THE MORIKAMI MUSEUM AND JAPANESE GARDENS

4000 Morikami Park Road, Delray Beach, www.morikami.org.
Many works that contain calligraphy are on display at the museum, which will be hosting calligraphy workshops for children and adults in the spring. The Morikami's library also contains reference materials pertaining to Japanese calligraphy.

THE JAFFE CENTER FOR BOOK ARTS

Wimberly Library, Room 350
Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton
www.library.fau.edu/depts/spc/JaffeCenter/
The center's unique collection includes a small selection of artistic books that feature calligraphy as well as some select resource materials.

THE SOUTH FLORIDA CALLIGRAPHY GUILD

southfloridacalligraphyguild.org
This organization is dedicated to originating, supporting and promoting activities and communication in the field of calligraphy and the related arts.

◀ Calligraphy classes at the Norton Museum of Art

Contemporary artists also find calligraphy to be a beautifully expressive medium. Alexandru Macovei is a skilled calligrapher who uses it to accentuate his painted works. The West Palm Beach resident, who was born in Moldova in Eastern Europe, trained extensively with masters of Japanese and Chinese calligraphy and, while this influences his work, he's also made it his own. "Japanese and Chinese have a similar free style and concept but I've kept a unique European style that allowed me to define a symbiosis between Latin and Slavic languages," he says.

As Macovei's work illustrates, all calligraphy is marked by the personality of the artist. Just as painter Franz Kline's black-and-white paintings are immediately recognizable, so, too, are the distinctive styles of noted calligraphers. "It's like a fingerprint," Dujin says. "Each artist makes it personal."

Both the visual impressions and the words – often proverbs or famous sayings – are what identify the calligrapher. "Calligraphy art is a correlation between text and image," Macovei explains. "What identifies me is the harmony between the written text and the images created." [a&c](#)