Spotlight On

In this issue we have the pleasure of introducing fellow PSC member Inga Shipstead Dubay to our readers. Inga is a multi-talented person: painter, calli- grapher, teacher, author. Her resume lists an impressive array of accomplishments: teacher and former department head at the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts, faculty member of several International Calligraphy Conferences, exhibiting artist at many invitational and juried exhibitions including Moments in Calligraphy: An Exhibition of Letters as Art (1990); Dragon's Brood--students of Lloyd Reynolds who became master teachers (1989); Experiment Faculty Exhibit (1989);The Process, Ten Oregon Calligraphers (1986); Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas, William Morris: A Commemorative Exhibition of Calligraphic Work by One Hundred Fifty Scribes (1984); and many more.

Inga was interested in letters from the very beginning. Even as a young child, one of her favorite books was the Speedball calligraphy book! Her parents were very supportive of Inga's artistic interests. "As a child, every Christmas and birthday I was given some type of gift having to do with painting or drawing. It was either an oil set, pastel set, paper, or drawing tools, art books, all types of things that were very supportive of me being an artist."

Born in Syracuse, New York, Inga grew up without a lot of relatives nearby. Her Norwegian father (who was a research chemist for Eastman Kodak) and her English mother (a piano instructor at Eastman School of Music) were the only ones of their families to emigrate to the United States. Being of Norwegian descent and having studied the language, Inga (after graduating from the University of Oregon) applied to study at Kunstakademiet, the art academy in Oslo, Norway and was admitted as a foreign student. As a student of painting, part of Inga's interest in living in her father's native country was sparked by the fact that the only person in the family to gain renown as a painter was a Norwegian ancestor, Kalle Lochen (some of his paintings hang in the National Gallery). "I actually lived with the Lochens on my grandmother's side of the family. I was named after my Norwegian grandmother, Inga. While I was there in Norway I was able to visit my grandmother often. As my language skills were limited, I drew her a lot."

After returning to the United States to do graduate work at the University of Oregon, Inga met her husband, Joe, who was then teaching mathematics at the University. "When I first met him, he was doing watercolors-- I was very attracted to a mathematician that did watercolors". They were married in 1959 and moved to Berkeley, California where Inga continued to do artwork. "However, I had three children. Our oldest son was born in 1960 and then in 1963 we had twins, which was unexpected. That was wonderful but I didn't get much artwork done."

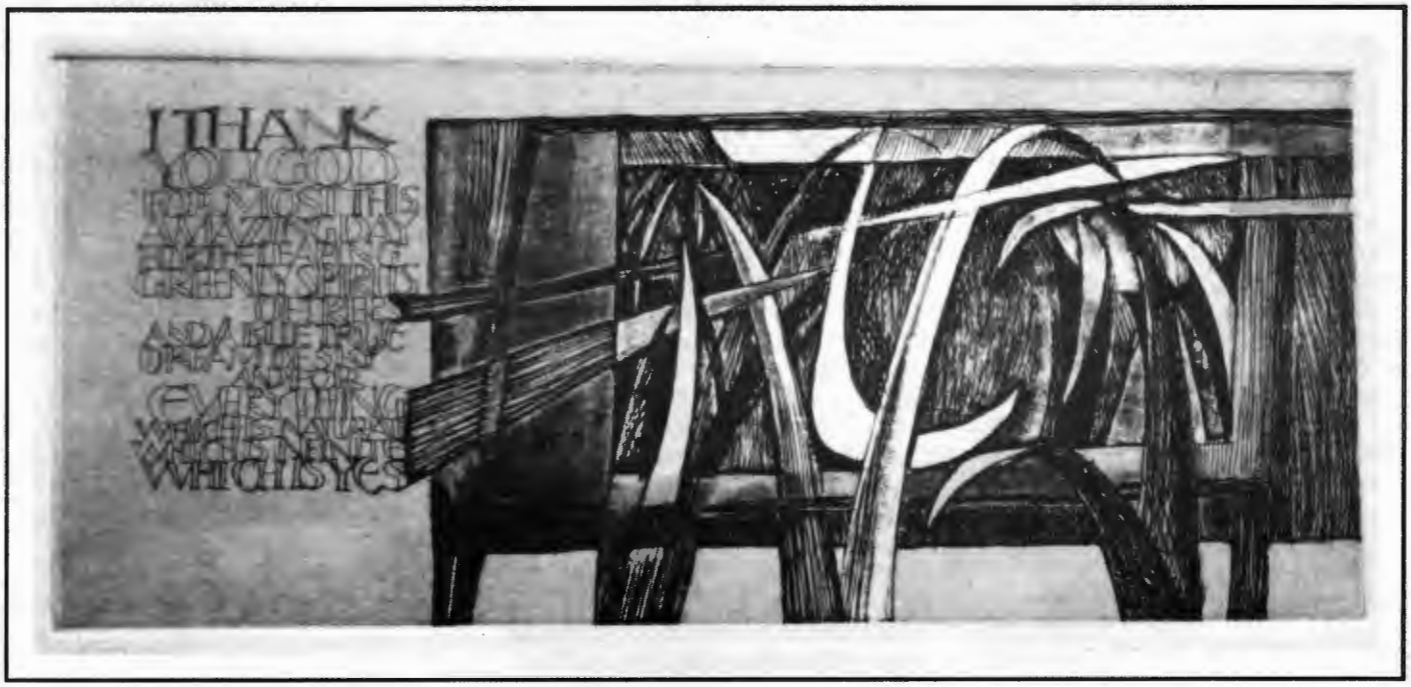
While living in Ashland in 1965, Inga received a letter from someone in Portland that changed her life. The sender "must have been studying with Lloyd Reynolds. I decided that I

wanted to learn to write that way. I copied, more or less, every letter on the letter. And then I got a hold of Lloyd's Italic Calligraphy and Handwriting and did what I could." After moving to Portland in 1968, Inga started taking classes at the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts (at the old location on 18th and NW Hoyt) which was close to her children's school--The Metropolitan Learning Center. "I thought I'd study there just one term and learn Italic and that will be it. I started studying with Lois McClelland and, of course, I loved it. Then there was that Uncial alphabet up on the wall, and I wanted to learn Humanistic Bookhand, and Yvonne Bianco's History of Alphabets class the next year, and . . ." Inga found that calligraphy suited her lifestyle with three small boys and a small rented house.

Inga put her new skills to use right away by creating a series of silkscreened prints of the eleven seasons of the liturgical church year. The prints all involved letters because they contained both a traditional and a contemporary thought. "When I started, I was doing letters that were the sort of psychedelic letter where the letter takes up the whole area that you're working in and you carve into the space to create the letter. They were drawn letters and then, as I learned more about edged pen writing, the edged pen letters began coming into these prints. I started putting the letters to use almost right away which was good. There were a number of exhibitions that Lloyd (Reynolds) had arranged at the Art Museum for two or three years running so that was a great impetus to get work done and to do pieces that were matted and framed. There were lots of opportunities for exhibiting which was great because that sort of got you going. I remember one time I was really floored--It was at a Society picnic , and Lloyd asked me if he could buy one of my e.e.cumings works; Squeezing Four Dimensional Ideas Onto A Two Dimensional Stage. I was amazed. I had the presence of mind to say 'can we trade?' So now I have a piece of his that says 'An Inch Of puddle reflects miles of sky'."

Besides continuing to study with Lois McClelland, Yvonne Bianco, Lloyd Reynolds, and a host of visiting instructors, Inga began to become involved in her sons' experimental school which had a strong emphasis on parental involvement, which Inga feels is a real key to a successful education. "Whenever Lloyd gave a talk or a workshop he always talked about the millions of children who are being crippled by bad handwriting. I felt I really needed to do something about that." Inga was first asked to teach calligraphy at the Metropolitan Learning Center, and then when it became apparent that they needed some work with handwriting, she began teaching from the Beacon series from England after adapting it to her students needs. "I found that the children did very well with these letterforms. It was such a pleasure to teach and my own chidren were doing so well--I was really encouraged. Inga was also asked by Catlin Gable to teach handwriting in their Lower School.

"I had met Barbara Getty at various workshops and, in about 1975, she said 'would you be interested in doing a series of workbooks?' She was a classroom teacher in the Beaverton School District and had gotten her principal's permission to teach Italic in the third grade. She was busy doing work sheets and so was I, but neither of us really wanted to tackle the



project alone. I said sure, let's do the series. Barbara did kindergarten, first and second, I did third, fourth and fifth, and we did the sixth grade book together. We did it all on our own, writing for three years and then published it ourselves in 1979. We had eight schools in our pilot program. We went through a period of looking for a publisher and thought maybe we'd just forget it because there wasn't anybody available." In 1980, Portland State University Continuing Education Press agreed to publish the series. "Collaborating with Barbara Getty has been a wonderful experiance--accomplishing tasks neither one of us would have done alone."

The path towards teaching was a natural one for Inga to follow. "My mother was a piano teacher, she had a unique way of teaching music theory. It felt very natural to go on and teach others. I really feel the importance of sharing a skill, nurturing other people and bringing others the joys that I have experienced. I really like teaching beginners. I want to get people started on the right foot. Also, as I say to students, I almost envy them because they have such an adventure ahead. The discovery of what the edged pen will do, the wonderful forms available not only in the historical letterforms but in the student's own interpretations and finally as their own improvisations."

Because of Inga's background in painting and drawing, it was the beauty of the pattern and shape of the calligraphic letter and the pattern those letters make on the paper and the forms that are created that drew her into calligraphy. In her own work she feels that there is still a lot to be discovered, for which there never seems to be enough time. Many of Inga's works involve the poetry of e.e. cummings. "I'm very attracted to e.e. cummings because when my husband and I were first married we would read his poems together. He was a poet that we just enjoyed so much. I love the words he uses and the fact that you can read them over and over and still they're fresh and new. I think a piece of calligraphy that hangs on the wall needs to have that kind of excitement about the letters. It invites you into it and then hopefully the way you write the words is also fresh and interesting so that you can look at it again and again as in any good painting or drawing. You want to continually enjoy it and, like an old friend, you're continually happy to see it." One of the things Inga has been working on in her current pieces has been a kind of visual window where she is not so much illustrating what is going on in the text but creating little vistas that are linked physically with the text by sinews. "Looking through the windows, each one has a letter in it that was in a sense the wellspring for the design in that area. In the earliest ones I did, such as 'Here's To Opening And Upward', the letters in the windows were blotted from another piece of paper. They were then backwards letters which were more interesting in the sense that they created new shapes to me. I built up shapes around that letter, so each one of the three areas (there are the same number of areas in each piece) actually extend from a letter shape.

Inga really loves working with pencil and watercolor and would like to continue doing more of that. "I like to work with pencil and all the variety of values you can get with graphite. I like the transparency of watercolor--being able to work layer on layer, and to be able to go back in with a brush and water and remove certain layers and even get back to the white paper".

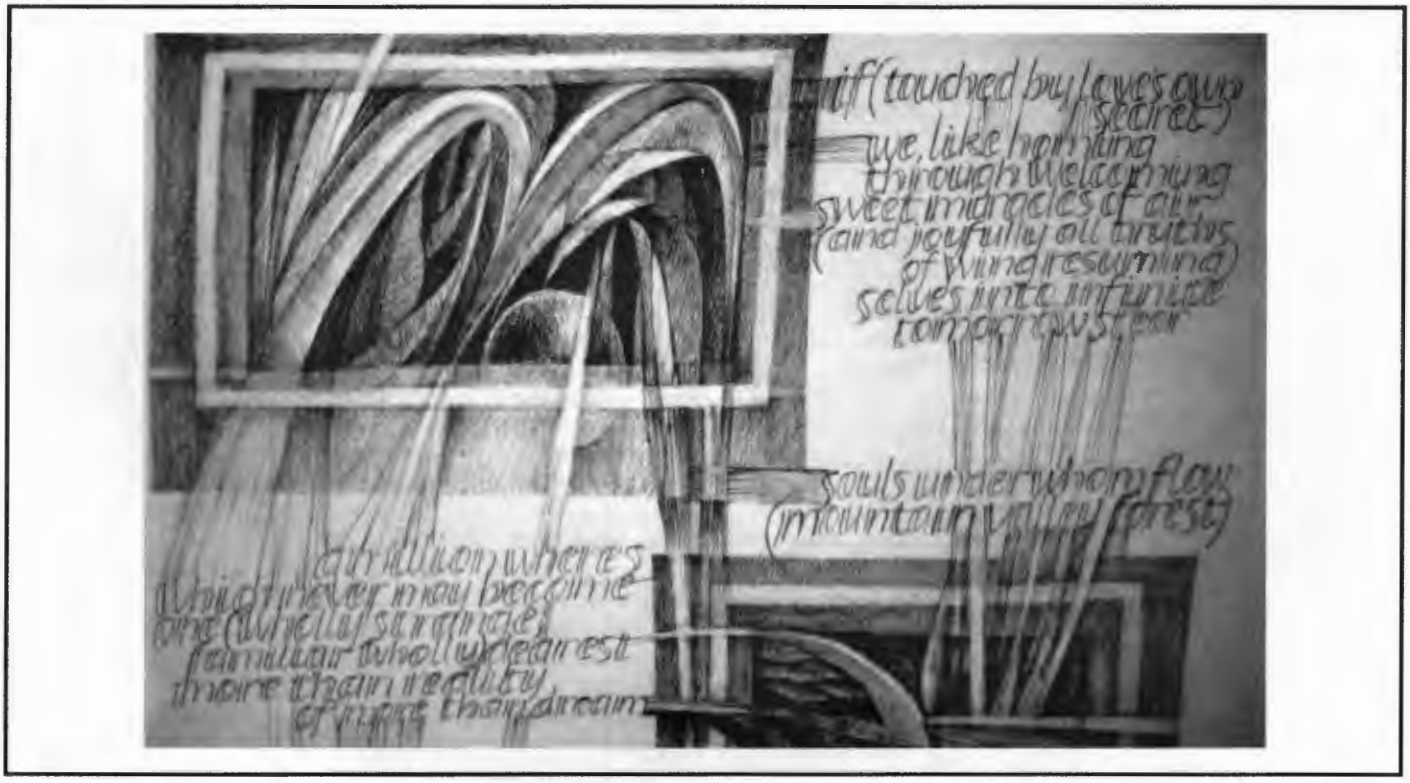
When she begins work on a piece she centers herself through music. "I always listen to classical music when I'm working. There are times when I need to turn it off and just have quiet but generally I do listen to music. I work slowly, I can't be rushed. I have a room of my own to work in--I think its very important to have a place of your own that you can go to. I feel very happy and content when I'm there writing. What I like doing now is drawn and built up letters using a pencil or a crowquill. I like drawing paper like Fabriano, Rives BFK or Invicta.

Besides her work for exhibition and for commercial clients, Inga is busy with many projects. Later She would like to do work on a handwriting series for the learning disabled and perhaps bilingual workbooks. Barbara Getty and Inga have just come out with a new book titled Write Now, which is a version of the sixth grade handwriting book rewritten for adults. They are also in the process of republishing their book Italic Letters: Calligraphy and Handwriting. VNR Publishing originally published it in 1984 and Simon and Schuster published it in 1986 and while it has had five printings, the company decided, along with a number of other books, not to continue printing it. Inga and Barbara received the copyright back and it will again be published at the end of December by Portland State. After a year's leave of absence which she devoted to work on the handwriting series, Inga is back teaching at the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts. "I have so much to do outside of teaching with the revision of the handwriting books and now getting Italic Letters out that I knew there wasn't enough of me to go around for everything. So last year I continued as department head but took a leave of absence from teaching. This year I came back to teaching but gave up being department head. I was department head since 1985 and we did get the program launched (the certificate program in book arts), and we accomplished a lot in that time. I think its good for other people to take over and make their contributions."

This belief in the importance of involving others in a project or program is illustrated in Inga's

thoughts on the education of a scribe. "I think it's important to study with as many people as possible so you get a lot of ideas. It is important to hear many opinions because through that you can form your own opinions and your own ideas about what you like and what you are attracted to. I think the important thing is to get a really good foundation in basic scripts--I would say nine or ten hands so you can get a sense of the historical development of the letters." Inga feels that through the copying of work, students pass through the copying phase, where other artists' work is emulated and interpreted to where students start to find their own interpretations and, finally their own improvisation. Even while copying, students are interpreting how the original artist did it . Once the students have figured out the "rules" of a script or style they are free to adapt and change those rules to suit their own needs or even to break them. As Inga says, "Those rules don't come from on high, they are your own rules. What is the body height? What is the spacing? What is your pen angle? What type of serifs are you going to use?" and other considerations.

"Making a mark is a very exciting, important and adventurous thing to do!"

Julie Lay

Below: Detail from a work based on an e.e. cummings poem.