Spotlight on Colleen Cavin

By Mary Ellen Hartman

"Calligraphy has not come easily for me, I was not a natural," said Colleen Cavin, the new president of the Portland Society for Calligraphy. "It was several years before it occurred to me that I really liked it."

In Colleen's case perseverance paid off. She now teaches calligraphy at The Pacific Northwest College of Art Extension program and Bookbinding at Oregon School of Arts & Crafts along with her freelance calligraphy work.

Colleen's first exposure to calligraphy was in high school where she learned from a left hander, Florence Bafus, and studied those old standbys, The Speedball Book and Lloyd Reynolds's Italic Handwriting Book. Inspiration finally came she says when "I made a lovely capital S and I was smitten in that instant."

In college, Colleen studied with Jaki Svaren, which was her first exposure to calligraphy as a disciplined art form. She ventured on to study with Lloyd Reynolds first at PSU's Haystack Summer program and then at the Museum Art School (now Pacific NW College of Art). "I was terrified of Lloyd at first and the many prominent calligraphers in that class. I held calligraphers up in the clouds--they were angels." Colleen went on to attend Portland State University where she received a degree in art history. While at PSU she studied with Bettye Lou Bennett and took a week long workshop with Dorothy Dehn at Reed College on Roman Capitals.

After completing college she worked as a screen printer at Meier & Frank Department store (in Portland) as a screen printer and taught calligraphy classes in the evening. She continued to study from Dorothy Dehn and attended workshops at OSAC.

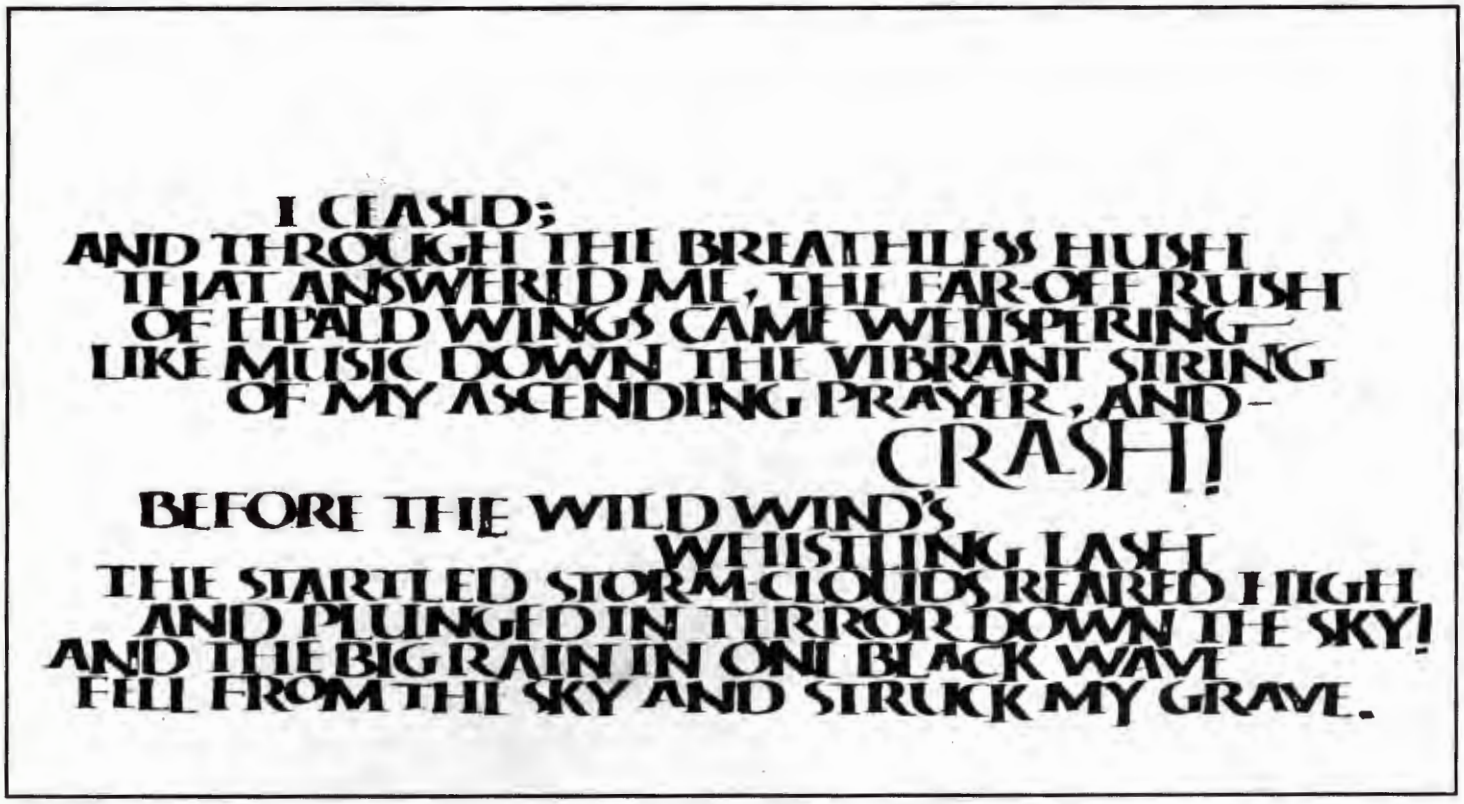
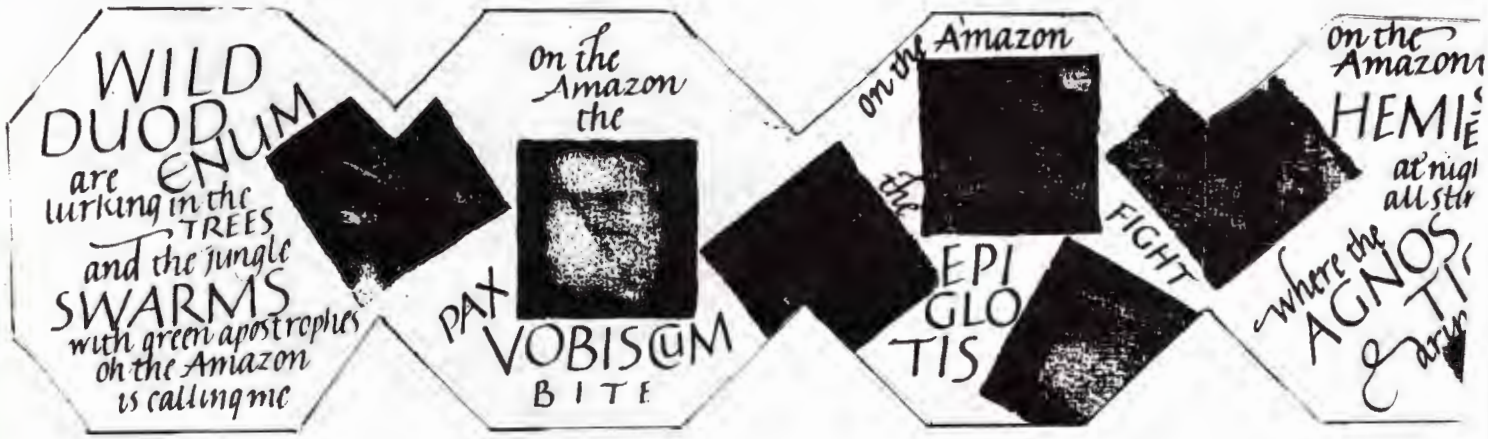
Colleen attended the California Experience International Calligraphy Conference in 1985. "That conference changed my ideas about calligraphers forever--my angels had fallen. Calligraphers party, drink beer and have families. I found that some good calligraphers aren't always the best teachers." Colleen came home with a new confidence in her ability and applied for admission to the Roehampton Institute in London, England in their bookbinding and calligraphy program. To her surprise she was accepted. She then applied for grants and again to her surprise received a Fulbright Scholarship. Colleen left for London in the fall of 1987 where she studied with Ann Camp, Gaynor Goffe and Jen Lindsay. Her year in London greatly expanded her ideas about calligraphy by acquainting her with European influences, giving her hands on access to historic manuscripts and the artistic riches found in the museums and cathedrals throughout the country.

"No one instilled the love of letters in me. Rather it grew out of familiarity from constantly working on Italic, those

truly wonderful Romans and history. I take my own delight in actually making a good letter form--the way it feels in my hand."

"I'm indebted to my teachers--Jaki, Lloyd and Dorothy. But I owe my determination to London. If I could go there alone with no place to live, no one to meet me, hauling bags of stuff from train to train to get somewhere I've never been--I can do anything."

Below: A page from a book Colleen did based on a poem by her favorite poet, Edna St. Vincent



Below: Several pages from an accordian book.