

fig. 1 Reconstruction of a Neolithic weave, ~ 3000-2000 BC, by unknown maker, location unknown



fig. 2 Sungazing, 2023, by Team Thursday, Milano, Italy



fig. 3 early example of cuneiform clay writing tablet, 3100-3000 B.C.E, Iraq



fig. 4 Was it a cat I saw?, 2022 by Team Thursday (fragment) Rotterdam, Netherlands



fig. 5 Bedouin tents in Marocco: one of the oldest types of fabric shelters

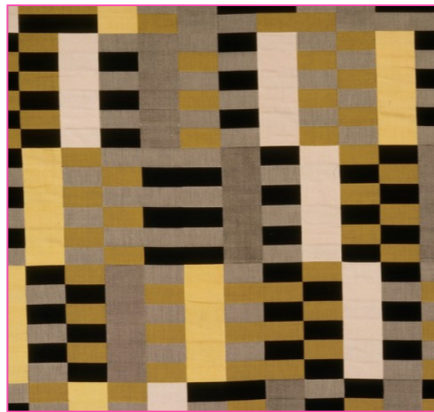


fig. 6 Hanging, 1926-1967 (close up) by Anni Albers, Bauhaus, Germany



fig. 7 All-T'oqapu Tunic, 1450-1540, by an unknown Inka maker, (fragment), Inka Empire (Ecuador -> Chile)



fig. 8 Interior for Kunstinstituut Melly, 2023, by Team Thursday, Atelier Tomas Dirrix and Koen Taselaar, Rotterdam, Netherlands



fig. 9 Seoul City Sampling, 2017 by Team Thursday, Seoul, South Korea



fig. 10 Does a Face Have a Chronology?, 2021, by Team Thursday, Rotterdam, Netherlands (spread)

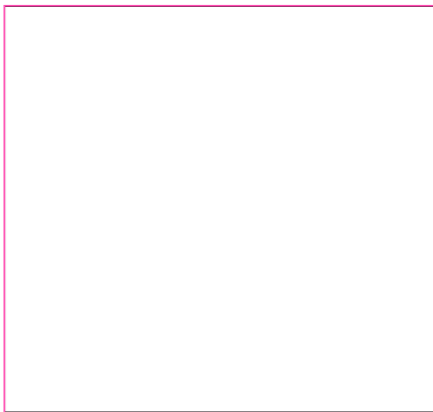


fig. 11 Airplane view of German fields. Photo by author

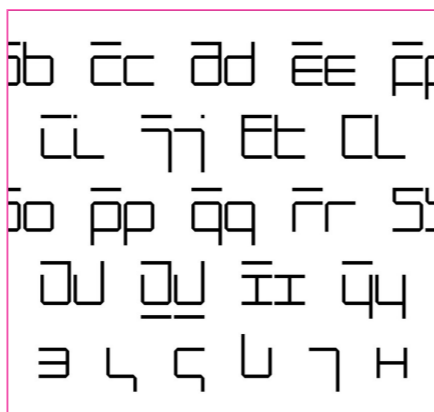


fig. 12 Specimen for New Alphabet, 1967, by Wim Crowel, Netherlands

EN TEAM THURSDAY

Welcome to the exhibition by Team Thursday, taking place 9 Sep - 14 Oct at Block C and ARTisBOOK. Team Thursday, consisting of Loes van Esch, Simone Trum, and since recently Saskia van der Meer, is a graphic design studio based in Rotterdam. In the exhibition, several recent typographic, material and visual experiments are displayed alongside autonomous and client projects from approximately a decade of work. This approach strongly reflects their general process-driven work, developing all kinds of material. Visual identities, curtains, books, prints and spatial objects all combine into an ongoing experimental visual research that concerns itself with pattern, material and the performativity of objects.

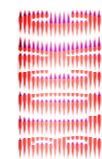
Earlier, TT designed the publication *Rollable Ramblings*, a critically acclaimed monograph with tapestries by Koen Taselaar. In this process, Block C (who initiated the publication) got to know TT in their broad interest, open attitude, daring innovation and playful experiment.

Inside this leaflet, you will find a short essay by Michiel Teeuw reflecting on some of the themes in the exhibition and TT's creative process in general. Through historic sketches, personal associations and theoretic wandering, the essay hopes to prompt different ways of looking at the material in the exhibition.

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ART BOOK

Pliable walls and rigid pages

When entering the space, you are confronted by a maze of curtains. Despite being pliable, the printed and woven fabrics take the role of a *counterpart to solid walls, (...) bringing an intensified note of airiness to [the] place.*^{1} For me, it evoked memories of my summer travels, when I traded my brick house for a portable fabric dwelling. When I would arrive at a campsite, I'd unroll it, set up the metal frame, and drape it over the outer layer, thus assembling a tent. As artist Bart Lunenberg once shared in an interview, all houses used to be like this, textile being the first type of building:

The first walls in prehistory and huts over the whole world were often also textile, were woven plant (...) or animal materials, draped over wooden constructions. And building with textile is actually a sort of prototype for later building with stones.^{2}

In other words, the human-made wall started out in textile, pliable form, and in some regions transformed into more solid and rigid forms of building.^{3} Throughout the building of ARTisBOOK / Block C, we encounter examples of these rigid forms, like the visible typical Groningen brick structure, albeit painted white. Here, the wall is hard and sturdy. On the top floor, a wallpaper is built up out of several loose, thin sheets, which now became one with the wall and its rigidity (while still showing the underlying brick structure). This phenomenon reminds me of one prototype for books and print: Mesopotamian cuneiform clay tablets, a sort of portable successor of rock carvings.^{4} From this format, papyrus writing started to develop, moving writing into scroll formats and eventually into bound books,^{5} a medium very familiar to TT. But in the exhibition, some paper sheets can't be flipped and folded; they are rigid like bricks; just like some of the walls can sway with wind.

{1} These quotes come from Anni Alber's essay *The Pliable Plane: Textiles in Architecture*, *Perspecta* The Yale Architectural Journal 4, 1957.
{2} Bart Lunenberg, in *Kunst is Lang #231*, Mister Motley, 2022, at 19:20, translation by author. Lunenberg seems to draw strongly from *The Pliable Plane* here.
{3} This transformation, despite being sometimes depicted as such, is universal nor evolutionary. Varying cultures still use textile housing because of its nomadic nature or its convenience in the climate.
{4} As Michiel Huijben mentions in his essay in TT's publication *Does a Face Have a Chronology?*, the Mesopotamian society was exactly one where the transition from nomadic to sedentary living was furthered.
{5} The new medium of the e-reader digitalises this bookform while strongly reminding of the cuneiform tablets in its hard rectangular shape. Its virtual pages can only be flipped through by tapping or swiping on its e-ink screen, making it a technological equivalent to its prototypal form.

Speaking in garbled tongues

I could look at TT's typographies for hours. In fact, I have done so, trying to understand the layers, letters, and the underlying system. I find it an especially rewarding challenge to constantly become familiar with their idiosyncratic way of writing. Each of TT's typographic works follows a distinct modular system, creating seemingly abstract compositions with very well-hidden typographies; and with each cycle of work, these typographies become more elaborate, cryptic and obscure. For example, the tapestry *Was it a cat I saw?* hides its palindromic title inside its intricate typography, almost like a puzzle or a labyrinth. Was it a W I saw there? Could this be an H? This part looks circular... Time after time, TT's abstracted and innovative letterform representations invite me to reassess my understanding of these letterforms. In other words, I have to become open-minded: I have to read without prejudice in order to understand the letters. In an age of hypercommunication and smooth, rounded Silicon Valley design vernaculars^{1} it is refreshing to see ways of communication which are not immediately apparent or readable in plain sight. I love to dig here.

On the different curtains, lyrics to *Wordy Rappinghood* by Tom Tom Club are spread.^{2} At one point, the following lyrics come along:

*Words can make you pay and pay
Four-letter words I cannot say
Panty, toilet, dirty devil
Words are trouble, words are subtle*^{3}

At the third line, the vocal track suddenly is garbled by a digital effect, rendering the lyrics almost unintelligible. For me, trying to read the letters on the different curtains feels similar: like a shy alien cat is attempting to speak our language, but merely producing garbled sentences. Language is present, but resists reading (or decodification, however you call it). *Ti esrever dna ti pilf nwod gnaht ym tup i.*^{4} Reading the different curtains is a slow but rewarding process: only by repeatedly and attentively reading, the messages reveal itself to the patient reader.

{1} Examples of this aesthetic are infantilizing color schemes, Alegria illustrations and overly friendly fonts (see Google, AirBNB, LinkedIn and recently the corporate rebrand of Mondriaan Fonds)
{2} The curtain series started as a gift from TT member Simone to her new house. She lives together with the artist Koen Taselaar, who loves these lyrics and introduced her to the song.
{3} Tom Tom Club, *Wordy Rappinghood*, 1981, Warner
{4} Missy Elliott, *Work It*, 2002, Warner

Shapes of great regularity

But what about the graphic construction of these letters themselves? The letters are constructed on a grid, an integral tool in many Western design processes. Yet unlike Modernist grid devotees like Wim Crowel, the grid is not followed as strictly - and a free flow sometimes pushes through. I am reminded here of Anni Albers' description of the view from an airplane:

What we see is a free flow of forms intersected here and there by straight lines, rectangles, circles, and evenly drawn curves - that is, by shapes of great regularity. Here we have then, natural and man-made forms in contradistinction.^{1}

For instance, rivers flow more freely than human-made canals. A similar distinction between a *free flow of forms* and the *shapes of great regularity* can be found in theories about textile. Weaving, Anni Albers argues, exists on a strong grid: a *rigid set of parallel threads in tension and a mobile one that transverses it at right angles,*^{2} *the manner of intersecting [forming] the different weaves.*^{3} Similarly, philosophers Deleuze & Guattari state that the woven fabric *can be infinite in length but not in width, which is determined by the frame of the warp.*^{4} In their definition, they contrast the woven fabric with felt fabric, which instead *implies no separation of threads, (...) only an entanglement of fibers (...) [and is] infinite, open and unlimited in every direction.*^{5} Weaving makes shapes of regularity, while felting creates free flows of forms.

But how can this distinction help us understand TT's letter designs? The key to this lies in Deleuze & Guattari's important note, that the gridded and boundless space are not so dichotomous as they may seem at first. In fact, they constantly transform into each other. It is exactly this transformation and clash which is visible in TT's different designs. Within the gridded space, shapes clash, cancel each other out, and intersect intricately. Regularity and free flow push against each other, overturn each other and bite into each other like acid. Especially in the woven curtains, one sees an adaption of the grid, without fully obeying that same structure.

{1} Anni Albers, *On Weaving - new expanded edition*, 2017, Princeton University Press, p. 70
{2} *ibid*, p. 1
{3} *ibid*, p. 4
{4} Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus - Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1980, University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, p. 507-508
{5} *ibid*, p. 508

In and out of the house

In earlier projects like their book *Does A Face Have A Chronology?*, TT focused their gaze on the facades of buildings: bricks, doors, windows, and other elements visible from the outside. In an accompanying essay to their latest publication, Michiel Huijben shares:

I pass door after closed door, curtain after drawn curtain. So much of this city will always remain invisible to me. (...) When we talk about 'the city', we accept the fact that most of its buildings' insides are hidden to us, reducing them to shells: all surfaces. After living here for so many years, I'm intimate with many of these surfaces, but what lies behind them - what they enclose - is still an abstraction to me.^{1}

In recent projects, however, TT has moved their attention precisely to what lies behind those surfaces. Whether it's the interior they designed for Kunstinstituut Melly with Atelier Tomas Dirrix and Koen Taselaar, or a wallpaper exhibited at Parco Gallery Milano: the gaze is turned inwards. Besides these commissioned projects, the team also started making projects for their own homes, like the curtains. Where earlier projects were concerned with the "face" of a building, the interior is now revealed. But what is inside the building? Is it a mind, a soul? Or even its organs? A close listener might hear the soundscape recorded by TT member Saskia van der Meer, mostly consisting of the different water pipes of/around the TT studio, streaming and flushing. Upstairs, a bowl can be found for an invisible cat, as well as clothing for invisible people. Maybe these are the people who once lived here; maybe the bowl is for Makreel, an old cat friend who used to accompany Simone to the studio? Whose books are those? These markers offer soft suggestions to a domestic setting. Is this a gallery space or a house? Who lives here? What role have these many, many curtains? Who feeds the cat? Like the aforementioned ballet-like furniture pieces for Melly, the interior elements have become theatrical. Not only do they suggest movement and direction: they also suggest narrative and situation. While all the elements in the exhibition give insight into TT's creative process, they also slowly start to function as storying elements, shaping a near-familiar world to dwell through - or defamiliarizing our known world into newfound appreciation.

{1} Michiel Huijben, *To Better Understand Cities*, in Team Thursday, *Does a Face Have a Chronology?*, 2021