

# From Copper Paint to Finished Book



by Sherrie Lovler

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE DAYS when I wanted to try something new. With all the work I have done on black paper, there I was in my local art store, realizing I had not yet worked with copper gouache. Often new paper gets my energies flowing in a creative direction, or a poem strikes my fancy. New combinations of paint have also inspired me, so it shouldn't surprise me that a book would come from a tube of copper gouache, but still I'm amused by the journey.

I sat at my desk and painted a little soft-sided rectangle with my new paint. Then I pulled out an old palette and painted more rectangles and a circle. This formed a figure-like image that looked to me like a person off-balance.

I wondered what poem or quotation I could put with this image. I sorted through the archives of my mind and remembered one of my favorite poems written by the Zen poet Ryōkan:

*Have you forgotten me  
Or lost the path here?  
Now I wait for you  
All day, every day.  
But you do not appear.*

This poem is from a series of nine love poems written in the early 1800s between Ryōkan and the beautiful young nun, Teishin. They were first published in 1835, in a book called *Dewdrops on a Lotus Leaf*. The edition I have is from Shambhala Publications, translated by John Stevens.\*

*\*The translator of the poem is not the same John Stevens many calligraphers know for his fine brush lettering. John Stevens the translator is a scholar of Japanese arts and culture. His books include translations of Japanese poetry as well as works on Buddhism and martial arts. Calligraphers may be familiar with his book, Sacred Calligraphy of the East (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1995).*

Having finished what I called “Love Poem #5” (which will be in the next *Letter Arts Review Annual*) I envisioned doing all nine poems. These intimate poems called out to be in a book format, although I did consider a large wall hanging. An accordion book was my dream, but I didn’t have much experience in binding. A few months later I was teaching a calligraphy class for the Friends of Calligraphy, and one of my students was Georgette Freeman, who teaches bookbinding at the San Francisco Center for the Book. One day she brought some of her book designs to class. One of them was a miniature version of a hardbound book that looked like an accordion book to me, but she called it a French tablet. This was the perfect presentation for book I wanted to do.

She agreed to work with me. I decided that this would be my faculty exhibit piece for the Legacies conference. That put us on a timetable and Georgette put me in her calendar.

#### DESIGNING THE BOOK

Creating an artist’s book poses different challenges than creating a single-panel piece. It calls for unity of design over several pages, flow from one page to the next, and attention to detail that holds up when held and looked at closely. A book brings the reader into its world. It creates an intimate space, a story, and an experience. As the designer, I was looking to make pages that felt they belonged in a family: different, yet similar. I used color, size, themes, and repetition to unify the pages. The poems created their own unfolding sequence as they described different moments of the relationship: the beginning joy, hopes and dreams, intermingling of two souls, worrying that something may be wrong, working through conflict, renewed playfulness, and foreseeing the end.

The initial illustration of “Love Poem #5” came from doodling. I needed that same freshness in all of the images. I let the text lead the way. The recurring themes were dreams, interconnection, and the moon. Perfect for black paper—lucky me!

I began painting some of the images directly on black paper, in the manner of my off-balanced figure. Images six and seven were done that way. The rest were sketched in pencil on white paper. Image four was designed several years ago, but sat in a drawer waiting for its proper use. Most of the drawings came to me very quickly, with few drafts. I worked with the phases of the moon, to evoke the phases in a relationship. First, I used the full moon, to evoke joy. Then, the new moon, quarter moon, three-quarter, waning moon, and I even put in a blue moon.

#### COMING OF AGE

As my drawings were getting very detailed, I began to foresee problems. How would I transfer them onto black paper? And if I were to do an edition, what would be the easiest way for me to do that? I also wondered how I would line the paper in the least tedious way, especially if I was making more than one copy.

This is where the computer came in, with Photoshop to the rescue. Once the



*This page: the third panel from the book.  
Shown actual size.*

*Opposite page: This is what the final guides  
looked like that I photocopied on each sheet of  
black paper.*

*Opposite page, far right:*

#### EVOLUTION OF A DRAWING

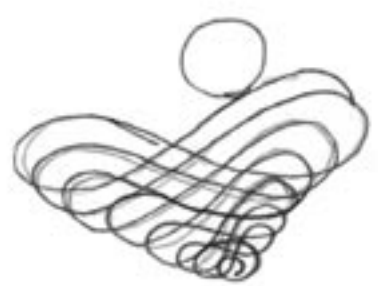
- 1) I used the infinity symbol to represent the countless days and years and then attached the moon to it. Sketch is done in pencil.
- 2) I began to neaten up the infinity part.
- 3) I changed the shape and went over the lines with a felt-tipped marker
- 4) The image is now fuller and more evenly spaced. Again I went over the image with a marker and scanned it in.
- 5) Now, on the computer, I moved the moon away from the image and made the circle in Photoshop. The 1/4 moon was made by placing one circle over another, moving the top circle into place, and then I cleaned up the extra lines. The infinity symbol was touched up in Photoshop to make a clean outline.



Here  
with you  
I could  
remain  
For  
countless  
days and  
years,  
Silent  
as the  
bright  
moon  
We gazed  
at together.

Teishin





sketches were made, I scanned them into my computer and touched them up in Photoshop. Instead of the perfectly made Bézier curves that can be done in Illustrator, I prefer working pixel by pixel, which to me, makes for a more natural-looking line. I didn't need perfectly smooth designs, either, as I was basically creating a coloring book for myself on black paper, where I would be painting over the outlines of the drawings. I did, however, use the circle tool in Photoshop to make perfect circles. After touching up the drawings and making the painted ones into outlines, I sized them all to work together.

I even used the computer to pick out the colors to paint in the drawings. Using two of the drawings that I had originally painted and scanned in, I matched the colors in Photoshop and filled in all the rest of the drawings with color on the computer. I then printed out all nine drawings in full in color. When I was ready to do the final work, I painted them each page to match my printed colors. The paints I used were: Winsor & Newton Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Yellow Pale, Cobalt Blue, Naples Yellow, Permanent Green Middle, Sepia, Jet Black (for the clouds), Pro White and Holbein Pearl Copper.

#### CALLIGRAPHY AND COMPUTER

The lettering style for this piece has been developing over a nine-year period. The first time I started breaking away from a traditional bookhand was in 1996 when I lettered *Desiderata* for the first time. Since then, my lettering has loosened up, and it's turned into a fairly casual style. I lettered this book with a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mm Brause pen point, filed to slightly narrower width. I first drafted the piece to see what letter height seemed most natural to me. Then I matched it up with the typeface that is closest to my lettering: Sanvito, designed by Robert Slimbach for Adobe. (Donald Jackson used the same type, in a modified form, for laying out *The Saint John's Bible*.) I typed in the poems in 26-point size, making adjustments in the leading for lines with ascenders and descenders. Also, the number of lines in each poem varied between 12 and 14 lines, so adjustments had to be made there, too, since I wanted all the beginning and ending lines on each page to be in the same place.

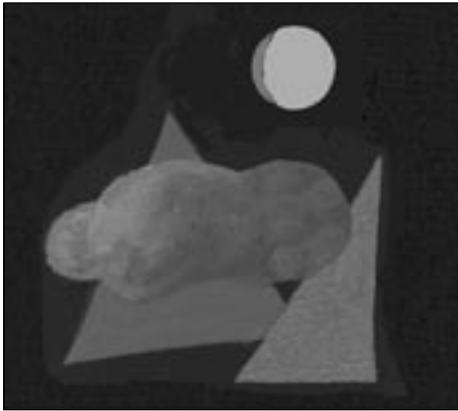
When I had all the pages typed, I printed out each poem with the corresponding outline of each drawing. I made sure that all the pages looked good next to each other in terms of layout and negative space. I spent a lot of time moving words around in Photoshop and reprinting until I was happy with the layout of every page. I added the author's name and an image like two crossed swords, one pointing toward the left for Ryōkan, the other to the right for Teishin.

With the words all typed in their proper places, I made guidelines in Photoshop for each page. Then I printed out a page for each poem with the image outline and guidelines for the text. I also printed out the text separately for each poem so I could copy the layout as I lettered it.

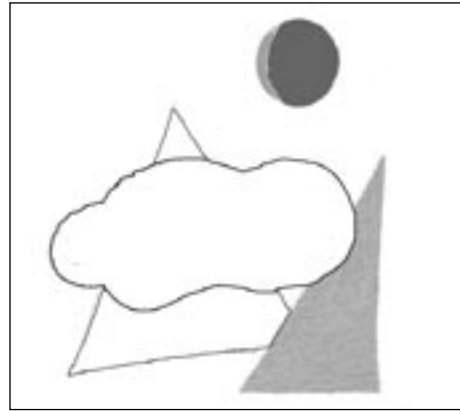
I decided to photocopy the black outlines and guidelines onto black Hahnemuehle paper instead of printing them directly through my laser printer. The toner didn't stick as well through my photocopying machine, which was a bonus, since I didn't want the lines to show too much. I could even brush off the toner and still have a light line left. From my laser printer, the lines were too strong; they actually showed through my lettering.



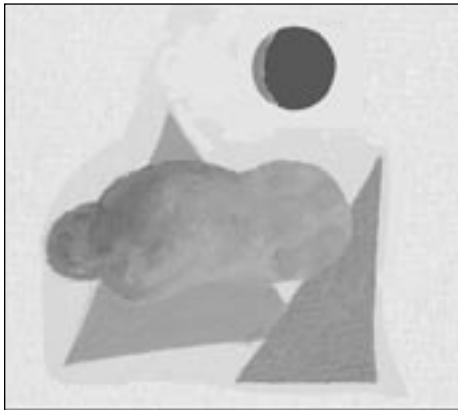
*Above: the seventh panel from the book. The image from this panel is shown on the opposite page, in various stages of adaptation using a computer.*



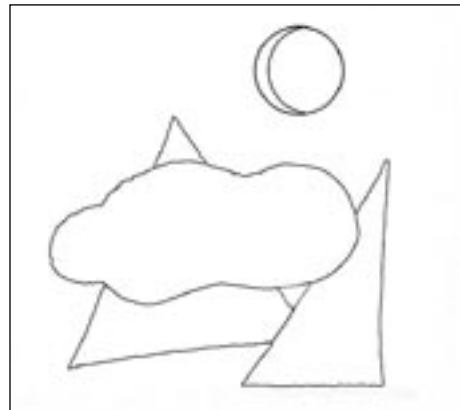
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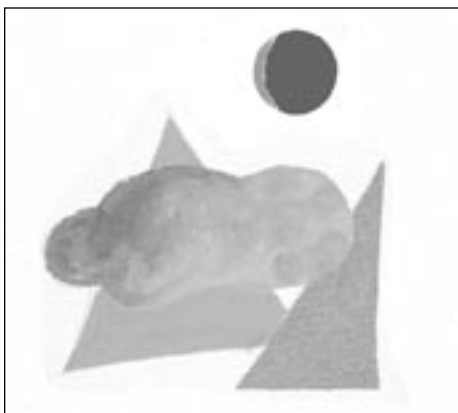
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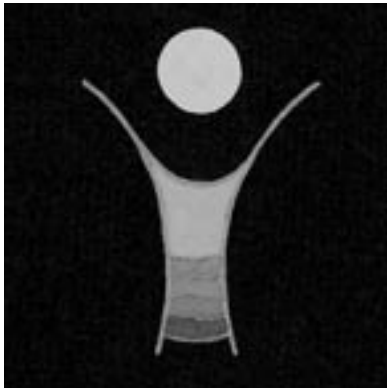
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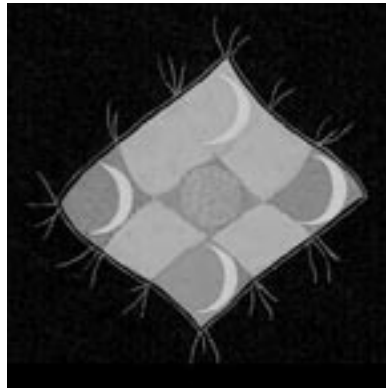
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#### FROM IMAGE TO OUTLINE USING PHOTOSHOP

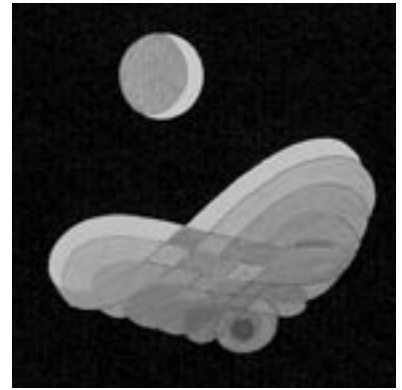
- 1) *The draft was scanned in.*
- 2) *Using Image > Adjust > Invert, the colors were reversed.*
- 3) *Using the Image > Adjust > Levels tool I made the background white.*
- 4) *Then I used the magic wand to select an area (the tolerance was adjusted to limit the area selected), and pressed the delete button. Using black as my color, I chose Edit > Stroke, put in 2 pixels, pressed Okay, and there was my black outline.*
- 5) *This was done to each area until the whole design was outlined. There was no need for the edges to be perfectly smooth, since they'd be painted over.*



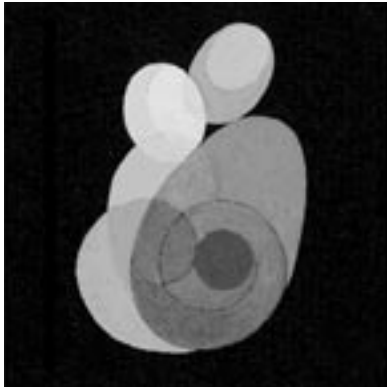
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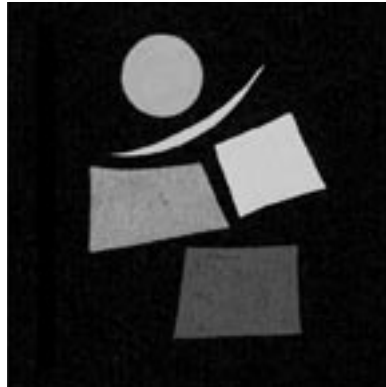
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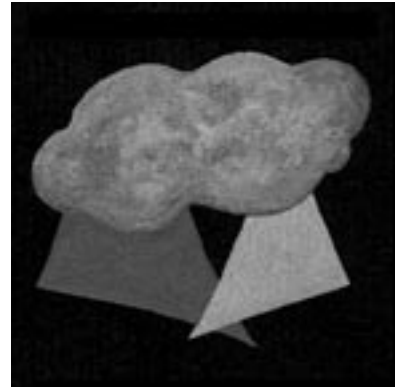
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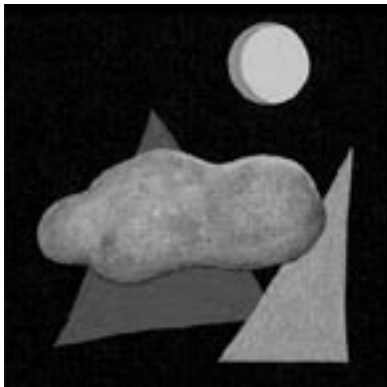
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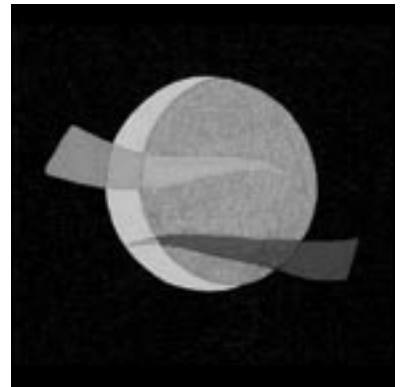
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8



9

1) *Ode to Joy*—this little figure was the last one I did. She has the full moon for her head, which is held up by the space above her lovingly outstretched arms. Her body is like a trunk of a tree. She is both earthy and ethereal.

2) For a dream-like image I chose four  $\frac{1}{4}$  moons and a copper new moon in the center. The soft diamond shape with wispy lines is reminiscent of a patchwork pillowcase.

3) Forever connected—this heart-like shape began with drawing the infinity symbol. It interweaves the female (Naples Yellow) with the male (Cobalt Blue), ending in green—the color of the heart chakra and earthiness.

4) The intertwining of bodies. Again, Naples Yellow, now going into Cadmium Orange, for the feminine, Cobalt Blue for the masculine. Each area was painted directly on the black paper without overlaying, working with color changes to depict a transparent, openhearted connection between the two. The merging is represented in green.

5) The little off-balanced figure. Cobalt Blue for the blue-moon face. The arms are a sliver of a moon. My “first” copper rectangle on the left, the feminine in him (Naples Yellow) on the right. All grounded by the lower green rectangle.

6) The gloomy clouds hide the peeks of these pigeon-toed mountains, crossing over each other.

7) The mountains open up, the cloud is smaller and lower, the peaks now show under a  $\frac{3}{4}$  moon.

8) Back to playfulness—the four  $\frac{1}{4}$  moons and a copper new moon—ball caught in a net.

9) Contemplating Ryōkan’s death, here is the waning moon with both the sky and the earth passing in front of it. The shadow of the moon is Pearl Copper.

The lettering was done with Cobalt Blue mixed with Pro White. I like the subtlety of Pro White as compared with Dr. Martin's Bleedproof White, which is a stronger, brighter white.

#### ON COLLABORATING

The act of working with someone else is a rare occasion for a calligrapher. I have done collaborative paintings with my painting teacher, and a bond is formed that can create a special space. This happened with Georgette and me. She became more than the final assembler. She was someone with whom I could share ideas, interpret the poems, and go shopping for book cloth. We met one day in a San Francisco restaurant to read the poems aloud to each other. New interpretations were formed. We came up with the idea of the phases of the moon together. She placed the book in our first show. I wasn't alone on this project, and that felt good.

And then there was the final trust. After working for weeks on these pages, I handed them off to her. I had seen the ¼ size design of the book, the full size with only three panels, and soon, I would see the finished work.

The idea for the French tablet format came to Georgette after she participated in a Howard Munson class at the San Francisco Center for the Book that featured the accordion book structure. At the time, she was researching how Japanese folding screens were made. According to Georgette, the moment of insight into the new book structure came to her at San Francisco's Cup of Joe Coffee House on Sutter Street, in between sips of a double latte as she folded and refolded a long strip of Fabriano Ingres.

The French tablet is not an "accordion" because, unlike an accordion, an end pleat wraps around from behind, becoming a spine. It also closes with a pair of French doors made from what's left of the pleats at both ends of the structure. In addition to a folding screen, the French tablet can be fashioned into a variety of other things, including a "calligraphy box" that holds pens, nibs, inks, and papers.

#### FINAL CALL

I waited almost patiently for the scheduled time to pick up the book. It was lovely, it was heavy—almost 2 pounds, it was done. It was covered in Japanese silk brocade that we bought at Kozo Arts, bluish-green in color, with a black silk band wrapped around it. Upon opening it, I forgot all the effort that went into its creation. It was like seeing the work for the first time. It combines the poets' words, the translator's poetry, Georgette's binding, and my art. This is a collaboration that spans centuries, gently calling the reader into its secret world and intimate spaces.

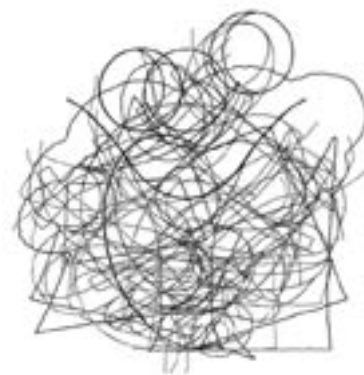
*The poems are taken from Dewdrops on a Lotus Leaf: Zen Poems of Ryōkan.*

*Trans. John Stevens. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.*

*Love Poems can be seen in color at:*

*[http://www.inkmonkey.com/fine\\_art/artists\\_books/love\\_poem\\_1.html](http://www.inkmonkey.com/fine_art/artists_books/love_poem_1.html)*

*Love Poems will be on view in the Kalligraphia show this summer.*



*All the images were sized to work well together.  
Here are all nine drawings superimposed on  
each other.*

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persons, they are  
with others, you  
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3

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days and

4

#### EVOLUTION OF THE LETTERS

1) From 1996, the lettering for the print *I did of Desiderata*. In that piece I wanted a very readable and clean letterform. It's a mixture of bookhand, Carolingian and Italic. Letter height is about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  pen widths tall. The space between the lines is a little more than twice the height of the letter. Joins occur off of the n's and h's to get a bit of a script feel, which is heightened by the slant of the letters.

2) From 1997. Not slanted this time, but much more opened. More like a bookhand, but I snuck in an uncial "u." Letter height is  $5\frac{1}{2}$  and the line spacing is only one x-height due to the long poem I was lettering.

3) From 2001. Back to a more Carolingian feel with the small x-height —  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pen widths tall, and large interlinear space. I am starting to play with the thin beginning of the ascenders in the "b" and "h." I stick with the uncial "u," and start the backward slant of the "n" and "h" to add some more life to the letters, which makes it reminiscent of the typeface Legend. The minuscule "a" now joins other letters to add to the flow.

4) Sample from "Love Poems," 2005. My lettering is more of a slanted bookhand here, with the x-height almost 5 pen widths tall. I've kept the backward slant of the "h," "m," and "n;" the "u" is more Italic, and the "l" has taken on a life of its own.





*I used this mark at the end under the colophon to show the collaboration between Georgette and me. Used separately they represent Ryōkan and Teishin.*



*SHERRIE LOVLER was first introduced to calligraphy 35 years ago and it continues to be her passion. She is now a one-year student of Tai Chi—which holds for her a similar feeling of never-ending depths to explore. She sells prints of her work from the website that she created and designed, [www.inkmonkey.com](http://www.inkmonkey.com). Sherrie will be leading a workshop passing along the teachings of Dick Beasley, her mentor, this summer at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico.*

*GEORGETTE FREEMAN is a student of book arts at the San Francisco Center for the Book, as well as a teacher of classes at the Center on how to make the French Tablet, the carousel book, stereo cards, and the faux-book business card box. Elsewhere, she is a student and practitioner of, among other things, drawing, cooking, making her Ford van into a traveling studio, and karma yoga. This summer, Georgette will be offering a class at the Center on how to make the French Tablet.*

*Measurements:*

*9 3/4" tall, 4 1/2" wide, 1 3/4" deep*

*Open: 47" wide*

*Individual panel: 4" wide, 9 1/2" tall*

*weight: 1 lb. 14 oz.*