

Nick Pride Typographic Collages



15 November 4 December 2008

The Illustration Gallery Middle Street Stroud GL5 1DZ England www.theillustrationgallery.com



This exhibition is supported by the University of Gloucestershire



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Printing woodtype at Tipoteca, near Venice



One of the back rooms at Graziani in Napoli



Sr. Ponzi, now 94, in his studio in Rome. All the signs he has made throughout his life are handdrawn



Some notes about the work

These collages are made almost entirely of pieces of printed type and found objects that I come across as I live my everyday life. Recently I have been able to travel and work for periods of time in Iran, Italy and America. Of course, I keep my eye out for things: bits of unusual typography, a ticket handed to you in a foreign city, a poster peeling from a wall as I walk at night in the rain. I collect these things wherever I go, and seek out old printing houses, stationery shops, sign-writers and rubberstamp makers, where, after a faltering introduction with little language, I am often made welcome. Frequently my enthusiasm leads to an old drawer, a store down the street, or the room out the back where treasures are to be had. I particularly value small local printers, one-man outfits such as you still find in Italy and the Middle East, often with an eclectic and improvised collection of old type languishing in a corner, and really only still in business out of habit rather than commercial gain.

Sometimes there is a rare find: a box opened in a flea market in Bruxelles full of old zinc stencils – at other times mere good luck, a brand new ticket lying in my path in the street, waiting for me to pick it up. At other times I need the cunning of a trapper; a left luggage receipt could not be retained after collecting my bag – the attendant suspicious of some ruse to claim someone else's bag – so I found an empty box, placed a stone inside, handed it in and received the ticket I desired. As far as I know the box is still there.

Therefore a large part of making this work is the travelling, and collecting, and a kind of typographic hunting. I fill boxes and boxes with the stuff I gather – as precious to me as flowers. My collection goes back perhaps fifteen years.

Then, every now and again when time allows, I have a period of time in a studio, in England or Venice or Tehran, assembling some of this treasure into collage. I work swiftly, not too much fussing and rearranging, just careful selection, a bit of editing, and done with it. I put together a room to work in with mostly print-making materials: ink, stencils, stamps. Lately I have added bits of silkscreen from type I have photographed, or found left on an old screen in the print workshop. Four or five years of collecting, a month or two of assembling.



Shop sign in Tehran



A letterpress printer from Ferdosi Street Tehran



Trays of pantograph dies at Graziani, Napoli



Old and new, Fondamenta della Misericordia, Venice

You can approach this work in many ways. Firstly, they are simply what they appear to be: some pieces of paper (and one or two other materials), brought together on one surface and in a relationship to one another for the first time. Thus a piece of 19th century Irish woodblock letterpress nestles with an Italian receipt, an American race ticket and a dressmakers pattern from 1950s England. They are a record of the typography of everyday life, the ephemera that surrounds us and passes through our hands, often unnoticed. Much of this kind of printed material is disappearing fast, was locally produced, often very particular to a place and time, and made with regard to function rather than style. The collages are therefore a history of vernacular typography, and link different languages, cultures and places.

If you wish you can look a little closer: they are also a precise record of parts of my, and other people's, lives. A till receipt puts me in a particular place at a time recorded to the second. An airline label maps a journey long after I have forgotten the details of date, airport, seat number, flight. Our lives leave a trail of numbers, letters, and coded data: records of our being somewhere. These objects are the typographic footprints we leave behind us.

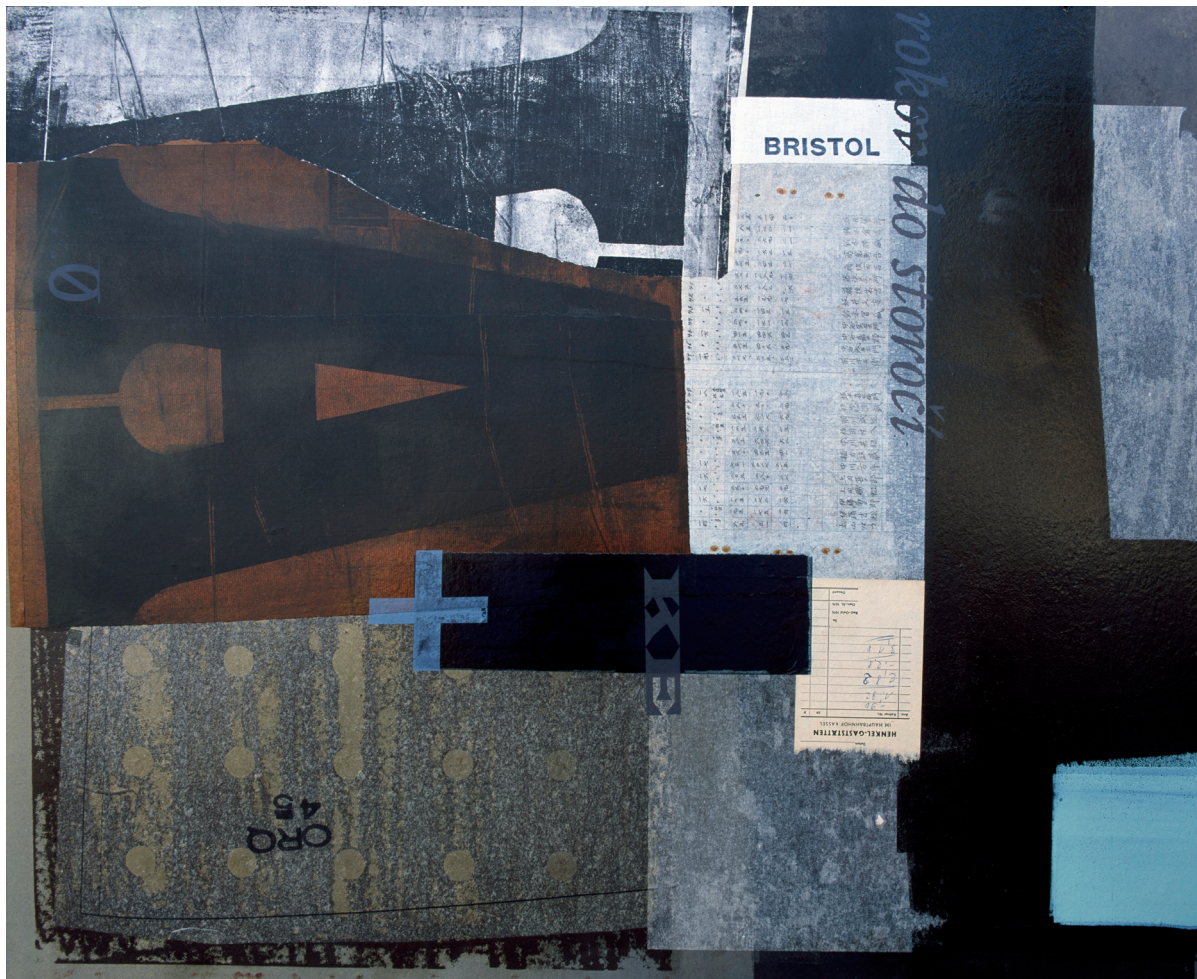
Also, some parts of the collages are made very carefully to tell a story, and if you wish you can uncover hidden messages, little narratives. There are meanings in some places that you can discover, or interpret as you wish, for example an X is many things: a kiss hopefully, but also a cancelling out, a vote, a multiplier, something banned, a mark to find treasure, a hazard, or simply the letter x. You can sometimes find a meaning that repays your curiosity.

And lastly, they can be seen as unashamedly decorative arrangements of type and image, to be simply enjoyed and to entertain the eye. In them I am paying homage to my heroes of collage such as Kurt Schwitters and Robert Rauschenberg, and acknowledge the help and encouragement, by example, of my tutor and friend John Furnival. It's good to know that I'm not the only one who feels as I do about this stuff.

Having worked as a lecturer and graphic designer for nearly twenty five years I have recently turned away from commercial practice to concentrate more on projects that I have been meaning to do when time allowed.

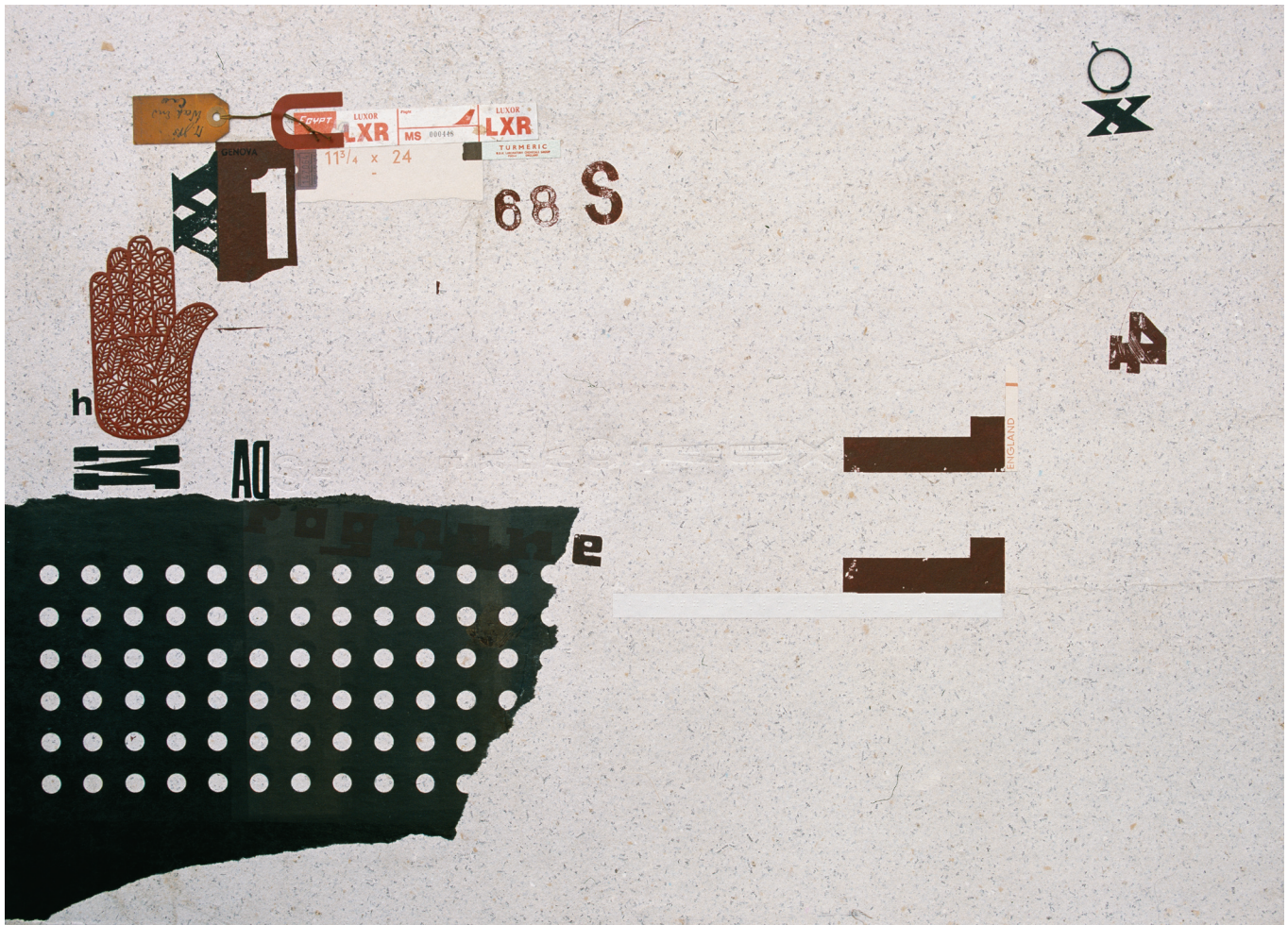
I hope you enjoy looking at the exhibition.

Nick Pride November 2008



Bristol 2007 82 x 103 cm

Ink, collage, gumprint, screenprint and leterset on old commercial litho plate. The word BRISTOL is printed on a cloth bag used by the Bristol Omnibus Company to collect passengers change at the end of the day. The German receipt, for a meal in a station, was part of a scrapbook of tickets and receipts made by an English family travelling through Germany in the fifties, given to me as a gift.



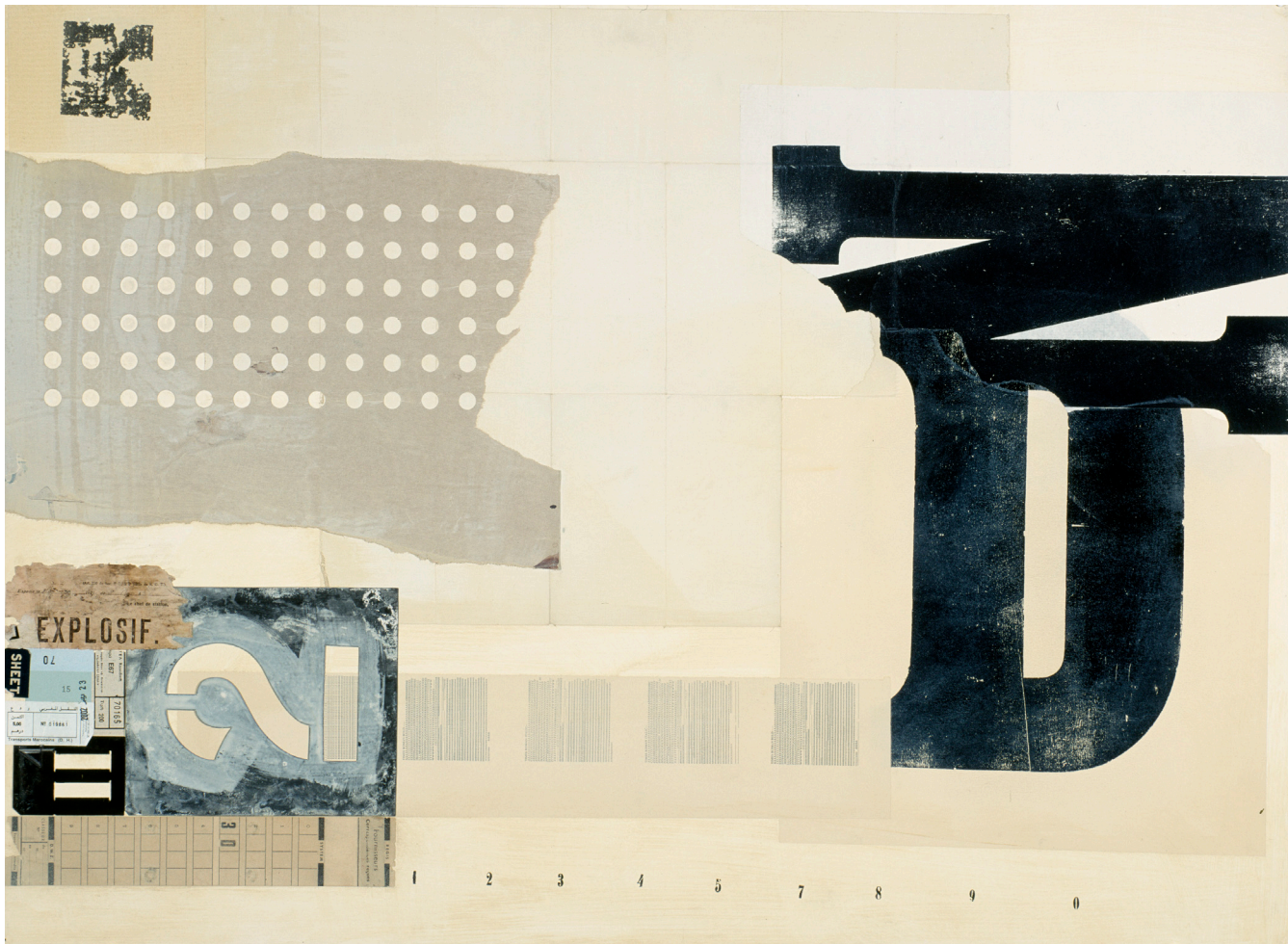
Luxor 2006 67 x 93 cm

Paper made from the pages of a French-English Dictionary, with collage, letterpress, silkscreen, blind embossing, braille and found objects. Some complete and some fragments of words are visible on the surface. The paper with holes is from supermarket waste, printed black, the hand is an Indian henna stencil. I found the male symbol lying in the street, a chance fragment of plastic waste. The orange luggage label was in my father's desk when he died, its purpose lost



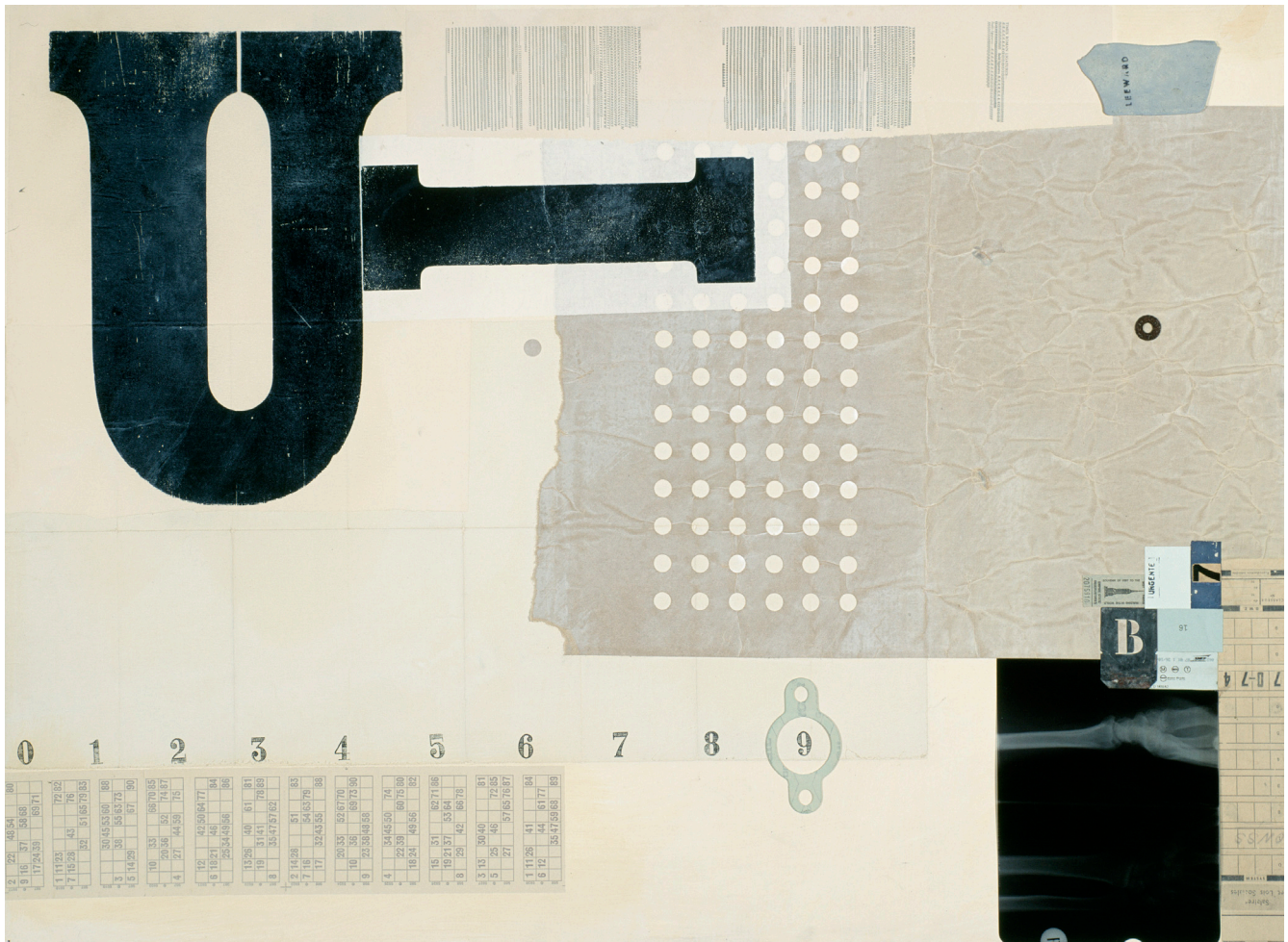
Don't Walk 2006 68 x 93 cm

Paper made from the rest of the dictionary, with collage, gumprint, blind embossing and silkscreen. This hand is printed from a photograph of the pictorial pedestrian crossing sign in New York, which replaced the old WALK -DONT WALK signs, which I preferred, but were presumed too difficult to understand if you didn't speak American. The plastic X is from a child's spelling toy given to me as a gift.



Explosif 2002 76 x 104 cm

Letterpress from 19thC wooden type with collage, rubberstamp and found objects. The small numbers at the bottom are printed from a wheel of rubberstamps for pricing goods, found in the same box as the small metal stencil and bought in a flea market in Bruxelles. The label EXPLOSIF was glued to a strong wooden box that was nailed shut and which I prised open gingerly. It was empty, but smelt of cordite.



You and I 2002 76 x 103 cm

Letterpress from 19thC wooden type, with collage, rubberstamp, X-ray and found objects. These numbers are from sets once widely available in Italy, and still used for shop price tickets. The Empire State Building admission tickets have now been replaced with a thin paper version. The X-ray is of my suspected broken wrist: it was. Also present is some beach plastic, a gasket and washer. Both this collage and its companion, *Explosif*, contain muslin-backed maps glued face down to the card, their identity thus concealed.



THR 2008 150 x 440 cm

Collage, screenprint, Xrays, stencils and letterpress from wooden type. The large black targets are from a gun shop in Little Italy, New York, the last to be had of this kind, which were fading in the window. The Chinese owner charged me extra for "aged paper". Scraps of poster are from Armenia; a gift. The very large ZX and U were printed in Italy from the largest wooden type I have seen, and are assembled from two halves on the press. They, and the numerals, form part of an extensive collection of type and other material at Tipoteca - Museo del Carattere e della Tipografia, near Venice.



Also included are screen prints of metal hands from Iran, receipts from Berlin, and carbon paper in which many letters are superimposed on one another. The ELEM scrap above is from a pile of old school charts turned out from a school in Castello, Venice, and were waiting for me in pile. The race tickets at left are from a track outside Boston, the bets placed on two horses in the same race. The envelopes are from Tehran, and, opened out, form more Xs.



UV 2006 67 x 92cm

Collage, with background paper from torn firework wrapping peeled to expose the waterproof bitumen layer, and crushed wax paper used to keep engineering parts rust free. On these are fragments of a steamer trunk label from the Anchor Shipping line, and part of a polling station sign found in the Victorian Gothic School of Science and Art in Stroud. The UV page is from a set of dividers punctured with three large holes, the yellow stencil is the Cyrillic alphabet.



Me Life Over 2006 360 x 87cm

Butchers paper, (a traditional green, here with an acrylic glaze), letterpress, collage, rubberstamp, silkscreen, vinyl letters, stencil, letraset, dymo tape and handwriting. Silkscreen additions are parts of stencils left on screens waiting to be washed after use, and includes some very small text. The ticket to the right above is from the Gellert Turkish Baths in Budapest, and is rubberstamped to apportion the time of your stay, which quickly disintegrates in the steam. The numbers at left are made by a numbering machine.



The small VUT stencil letters are from a set bought near Pere-Lachaise cemetery, Paris, in a monumental masons supply shop. They are similar to the classic French Modern typeface Didot, and have uncompromisingly thin serifs for stencils. The 97 (above, inverted) is from Sr. Ponzì's workshop in Rome, one of the last *Pittore d'Insegna* specialising in *Foglio d'Oro su Cristallo*, reverse-gilding on glass. He uses these old numbers to archive full scale drawings of each sign. Over large areas of this collage are pasted tissue dress patterns from the 1960s.



Olio di Semi 2006 67 x 74cm

Collage with silkscreen and found objects. You can still see these small metal signs outside *Alimentari* in Italy, announcing the potent Seed Oil for sale. The large green type I peeled from a wall in Napoli on a rain drenched night ideal for collecting posters, which often fall from the wall at such times. The small green ticket 6495 is my left luggage receipt from Pisa, gained by never reclaiming a cardboard box containing a stone I handed in. It may still be there.



Standa 2006 63 x 95cm

Gum Arabic print, with letterpress, silkscreen and collage. The yellow text is from shop signs I have been photographing in Napoli, these extraordinary letterforms appear to date from the seventies, are made of perspex in their original form, and are to be found on that frequent occurrence in Italian towns in the South - the long abandoned shop. This example above rogn (inverted) is one of the most inventive lower case g I have ever encountered, and is next to an unusually square lower case o.



Gela 2006 61 x 95cm

Gum Arabic print, with letterpress, silkscreen, rubberstamp and collage. One half of a GELATERIA sign, again from Napoli, appears to be the typographic equivalent of the platform sole, perhaps echoing a then contemporary style. The rubberstamp, from Bilbao, records all the petty instructions of office life - urgency, payment, copy, cancellation.



OU 2007 59 x 83cm

Collage with ink, rubberstamp, gumprint, silkscreen, stencil and leterset. The leterset is farsi, from Iran, and was bought in a stationers in the south-eastern city of Yazd, known for its windtowers, and now for its leterset. The orange bookmark overprinted with rubberstamps, from Marblehead Library in Massachusetts, advertises the Grand Bank, which is both a financial institution and a place famous for its whales.



Painted and metal shop signs from Rome and Napoli, and a parking arrow from Boston. Photographers shops are often unchanged for decades, the typeface on the Pizzicheria points back to the 30s.



Printshop signs from the south of Italy, the typeface on the left is Aldo Novarese's Stop from 1971. 60s plastic and neon sign from Napoli. The painted SALONE signs can be often found in smaller towns.



An ancient painted A from Campo San Toma in Venice and a painted POGGI sign with gilding, more Napoli plastic signs, and STANDA, a supermarket in Trastevere, Rome



Examples of foglio d'oro from Sr. Ponzi's workshop

Printed ephemera from the collection at Reading University, the small labels are fish buyers tallies, the Roma typefaces are from a type specimen book, New York crossing signs and a Farsi metal sign

