

Zootype: Is It a Case of Typographic Latin American Amnesia?

By Victor Garcia

Zootype is, perhaps, the first Latin American font awarded at an international contest, a fact that is often forgotten in regional historic reports.



Saying «typography» is to say «memory» and the letter is the conceptual and factual repository of the memory of the culture and society in its multiple expressions at all latitudes.

That was very clear for the powerful and despotic emperor Qin Shi Huangdi when unifying China by fire and sword: once the highest office assumed –which made him master of the world–, in 213 BC ordered to burn all the historical books of the ancient subjected feuds, so the history began with him.¹ Fact is that letter is, also, power.

The development of typography history in the Old Europe accumulates almost six centuries, and is marked in such a multiplicity of vicissitudes, discoveries, inspirations, confusions and intrigues from the very beginning – it suffices to recall the painful dispute between Francesco Griffo and Aldus Manutius about copyrights of alphabets masterfully cut by the first one and wisely used by the second at the legendary *incunabula* published by famed Venetian scholar–² which is scarcely affordable summarize it in a succinct monograph.

This is not the case for our brief Latin American contemporary history of typography –strictly understood in relation to type design– as yet has the advantage of a fledgling production, which could allow typographic researchers on this novel regional discipline extend details in a few pages, without need to restrict the wealth of information.

But even having that advantage, and despite that essays and historical writings in this field are not yet particularly abundant, it often happens that some data are omitted by some authors, presumably by oblivion, if not by a biased and restrictive vision about the typographical phenomenon in the region, which excludes from their consideration those developments that do not match their aesthetic and stylistic preconceptions, even when could have meant a remarkable typographical event.



Zootype Regular

, alphabet with air, land and water fauna. Design: Victor Garcia, 1997. 2nd Prize »Fun« Category. 2nd. *International Digital Type Design Contest*, organized by Linotype, Frankfurt am Main, 1997.

This often happens with *Zootype*, a font designed by this writer and awarded in Germany in

1997. This award, which not seems arbitrary to consider of regional concern, was omitted some time ago in a local academic report devoted to the state of typography in the region, and was introduced as lecture at the Typographic Congress of Valencia.³ Later, after author's request, omission was corrected in an online version, now undiscoverable. But it is presumed the original document keeps the origin's informative omission. Which is a problem for the designer, whose work was recorded in an inconsistent and confusing way in an academic paper of international dissemination; and also for any researchers who could access to that report and / or use it as a bibliographic source, because by having two apparently identical documents, one digital and elusive and one printed in a particular book, in case of find discrepancies, it is likely to be granted more credit to printing over the digital material. To make this denial process and/or forgetting –perhaps unconsciously– even deeper, it is worth mentioning a local book recently published which also deals with regional typography,⁴ that does not have any mention to neither the font nor his author, whose typographic activity is not limited to designing *Zootype*.

This recurring amnesia could be attributed to that collective construction of a regional typographic memory still is in adolescence stage, a state of development that generally implies the illusion that everything starts from that fact, as Qin Shi Huangdi did. So by sticking the noses in the immediate, there is no perspective to ponder dispassionately what others may have done before, even if it was in the recent past ... because for the adolescents impetus that »before« does not exists.

The origin of species

Zootype is a long-cherished idea and a typographic design planned in advance that must await the advent of digital tools to become reality. Once finished the resulting font, which initially consisted of just a single type style, won a 2nd Prize, Category »Fun« in the *2nd International Digital Type Design Contest* organized by Linotype, in March 1997. Jury comments:

Adrian Frutiger: «Geniale idea». («A great idea.»)

Kurt Weidemann: «From all of animal and plant's typefaces, Zootype is the most accomplished [...]»⁵



Zootype Regular, 1997; *Zootype Air*, *Zootype Land*, *Zootype Water*, 1999. Idea and designs: Víctor García

Later on, to start the new millennium, there were many notable and deserved awards received by regional typefaces in prestigious international competitions but that does not modifies nor much less invalidates the Zootype's precedence in that exclusive club.

The evolution of species

In 1998 three additional type styles were developed: *Zootype Air* –winged fauna–; *Zootype Land* –terrestrial fauna–; *Zootype Water* –aquatic fauna–; which, together with the previous award-winning *Zootype Regular*, the 4 fonts represent the «wild» current type family, to which in the near future is expected integrate a 5th type style with insects.

Page design magazine, contest's sponsor, published the scoop about the award. Hamburg, June 1997.⁵ The first local piece of news was published by *Tipográfica* design magazine, Buenos Aires, 1997.⁶

Then it was published in *La Nación* newspaper, Buenos Aires, 1997;⁷ *novum* magazine, Munich, 1999;⁸ Catalogue of the exhibition of the *19th Biennial Brno, 2000*;⁹ *Artegráfica* magazine, Barcelona, 2005;¹⁰ and more recently the font is displayed in a singular book: *Alphabets. A miscellany of letters*. Great Britain, 2010.¹¹

Meanwhile, *Zootype* was exhibited at diverse events:

- 19th. Biennial Brno 2000, Czech Republic, June 2000..
- International Meeting: «Tipografía para la vida real», («Typography for real life.») *Tipográfica* magazine - Letras Latinas, Buenos Aires, 2001.
- «Argentinian Graphic Design - Decades of the 1980s and 1990s». MAMBA - Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires, Graphic Design Collection (currently integrates the permanent collection), Buenos Aires, May 2004.
- «Zootype: Un safari tipográfico». («Zootype: A typographical safari.») 3rd Latin American Typography Biennial *Tipos Latinos*. Category: *Designing with Latin America fonts*: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, 2008.



Zootype (background) and historical animal alphabets: Joseph Balthazar Silvestre, France, 1848 (a, b, c), Master E. S., southern Germany, 1466-1467 (r, s, t).

Context, with and without text

Starting from *Zootype*, the author developed a variety of typefaces: the alphabet *Bix Plain* (2000) and many symbol fonts: *Tangomaniacs* (2002); *BixBats* (2003); *Ole Flamenco - Ole Torero* (2004); *GarciaToons* (2008); *MotionBats* (2009).

Ole Flamenco - Ole Torero received the «tpG Prize to Latin American font design». Category *Miscellaneous or iconographic fonts*. 2nd Biennial *Letras Latinas*, Buenos Aires, March 2006.¹²

At the same time, this writer has been active in the dissemination of Latin American typography, writing articles as a correspondent for the design magazine *novum* of Munich, among others about Rubén Fontana, Gabriel Martínez Meave, Alejandro Paul, Ariel Di Lisi (Negro); type foundries *TypeTogether*, *Tipo* and *Lián types*; Course of Typographic Design at the University of Buenos Aires (CDT FADU-UBA); the typographic biennials *Letras Latinas* and *Tipos Latinos*; and the International Conference *Letter.2* of ATypI.

In a broader typographic scope, should cite two extensive articles published in *tpG*: about Hermann Zapf¹³ and Gudrun Zapf von Hesse,¹⁴ and two articles published in the official ICOGRADA Website, one of *Letter.2*, previously published in *novum* magazine¹⁵ and the other one about pictograms, first published in *Tipo* magazine from Prague.¹⁶

This report is necessarily personal and –even at the risk of seeming presumptuous– certainly partial. in function of to rescue a particularly significant work to the author, in order to prevent permanent omissions from future historic reports of the region. It also involves the aspiration of contributing to preserve a plural collective typographic memory, inquiring and open-minded, able to register, without conceptual nor methodological prejudices, the fascinating adventure undertaken by the Letter in a multitasking territory that is discovering to itself.



Zootype is piece of news: Initial publications on the awarded alphabet (from top to bottom and from left to right): *Page* magazine, Hamburg, 1997; *La Nación* newspaper, Buenos Aires, 1997; *Catalog Biennial Brno*, 2000; *tipoGráfica* magazine, Buenos Aires, 1997; *novum* magazine, Munich, 1998.

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1. [Qin Shi Huangdi in Wikipedia](#).
 2. «A history of graphic design». Philip B. Meggs. Van Nostrand ReinPold Company. New York, 1983.
 3. «Latinoamérica: Nuevos horizontes tipográficos». («Latin America: New typographic horizonss.») Carlos Carpenter, Pablo Cosgaya, María Victoria Lamas, Mariela Monsalve, Marcela Romero and José Scaglione. 3rd. International Congress of Typography, Valencia, 20 to 22 June 2008, Published in the Congress of Typography papers' book, p. 126-130, by the Designers Association of Valencia.
 4. «Tipografía latinoamericana. Un panorama actual y futuro». («Latin American Typography. A current and future overview.») Vicente Lamónica (compiler). Wolkowicz editors. Buenos Aires, 2013. ISBN 978-987-28453-3-9.
 5. «Kinder der Typo-Revolution». («Children from the Type Revolution.») *Page* magazine 06/97, Hamburg, June 1997. (p. 34).
 6. «Alfabeto premiado». («Awarded alphabet.») *TipoGráfica* N° 32, *Context* section, Buenos Aires, 1997. (p. 4).
 7. «Tipografía de exportación». («Typography for export.») Daniela Leiserson, *La Nación* newspaper, *Architecture and Design* supplement, Buenos Aires, 22/10/1997.
 8. «Víctor García». Bettina Ulrich. *novum* 04/99, Munich, April 1999.
 9. *Biennial Brno 2000*, 19th Exhibition□s catalog. Czech Republic, June 2000.
 10. «Zootype: Un safari tipográfico». («Zootype. A typographic Safari») Víctor García, *Artegráfica* N° 12, Barcelona, December 2005.
 11. «Alphabets. A miscellany of letters». David Sacks, Black Dog Publishers, Great Britain, 2010. ISBN 978-1-907317-09.
 12. «Premios tipoGráfica al diseño de fuentes latinoamericanas». («TipoGráfica□s Prizes to Latin American Font Designs ») *TipoGráfica* N° 71, Buenos Aires, Jun/Jul 2006.
 13. «Primus Inter Pares». *TipoGráfica* N° 60, Buenos Aires, April 2004.
 14. «Una Dama de las letras». («A Lady of letters») *TipoGráfica* N° 65, April 2005.
 15. «[Oktober\(type\)fest in Buenos Aires](#)». *novum* magazine 02/12, Munich, Feb. 2012. *Icograda Feature*. April 4, 2012.
 16. «[Yes. There is life beyond letters. But... What does it all mean?](#)» Typo Magazine N° 45, Prague, Nov. 2011. *Icograda Feature*. Jan. 10, 2012.□



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