

AnOther Correspondence

The Lost Art of Calligraphy

Nicolas Ouchenir pens invitations that demand a response



In a digital world, where mailouts and identikit e-vites zip through the web like virtual wildfire, handwritten correspondence has become something of a rarity – an emotive relic. It takes time, effort and clarity of mind to apply pen and ink to paper without making a mistake, all sentiments and syllables intact, as Nicolas Ouchenir, Paris's foremost contemporary calligrapher, can attest. "A handwritten exchange creates an authentic human connection that's almost impossible to ignore," he explains.

In fact, it seems unimaginable that one of Ouchenir's deftly crafted invitations – created in his converted atelier in Palais Royal, and featuring deliciously inky, cursive script applied by specialist pen, fine brush or qalam – could be considered anything but luxuriously personal. And this, in a nutshell, is the greatest draw for prolific fashion houses such as Dior, Prada, Maison Margiela, Hermès and Louis Vuitton, which routinely tap the master artist to pen bespoke signatures, logotypes and

invitations for their runway shows, press events and exclusive parties. "Calligraphy is a pure, almost religious process to me," he says. "It's beautiful in both a perfect and un-perfect state. I like to think it creates a mirror for a brand, reflecting the aesthetic and atmosphere."

Ouchenir, who founded his calligraphy practice almost 12 years ago, is entirely self-taught. "Working with designers such as Rick Owens, Diane von Fürstenberg, and Madame Prada is consistently inspiring," he muses. "With them, the creative process feels very organic. I start by creating a single letter, which in turn sparks the curvature and line of the script, and then everything flows quite naturally." As the creator of many a fabulous invite, Ouchenir is an understandably astute critic. "One of the best invitations I ever received was from an English duke. The traditional English scripture was so elegant that I felt immediately inclined to respond," he reveals. "So, it works, you see? Magic."