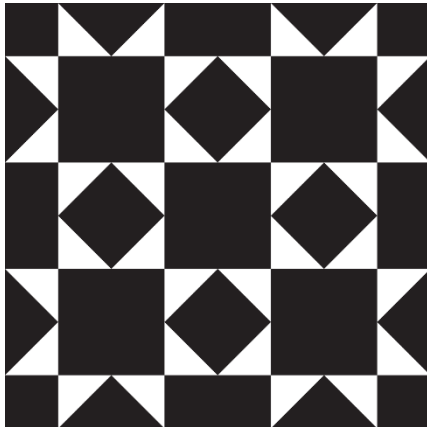
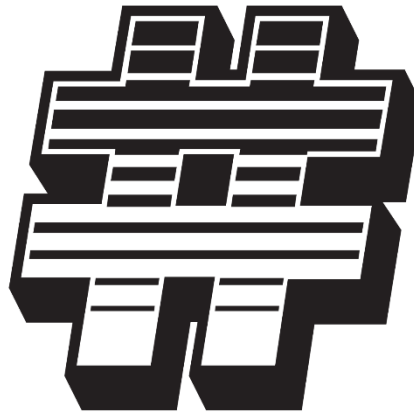


Characters: Type + Progress

An exhibition exploring the power of typography, interrogating its troubled past, and showing how characters* throughout history are inspiring the movements of today



VTC Harriet by Vocal Type



VTC Ruby by Vocal Type



VTC Spike by Vocal Type

RICHMOND, VA, November 7, 2022 – The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design will present *Characters: Type + Progress*, the first exhibition dedicated to exploring the troubled history of font design through the work of typographer and design historian Tré Seals of Vocal Type, a diversity-driven type design studio based in Washington, DC. The show draws connections between significant moments and figures in history that inspire Seals’ fonts and what was happening in the world of type at the time. (**Characters* — referencing both people throughout history, as well as typographic letters or symbols.)

On view from November 11, 2022 through March 12, 2023, the exhibition features seven Vocal Type (VTC) fonts: *Harriet*, *Ruby*, *Spike*, *Bayard*, *Martin*, *Marsha*, and *Colin*, each inspired by a moment in history from a specific underrepresented race, ethnicity, or gender. The story of each typeface is told through its own visual time capsule. *VTC Harriet*, named for Harriet Tubman, for example, a type design inspired by quilting symbology used in wayfinding for the Underground Railroad, tells the story of the peak of slavery in America coinciding with the rise of typographic style and printing technology. And *VTC Spike*, a font designed by Vocal Type for a Spike Lee book, illustrates the use of mass media to counter racist stereotypes and white supremacy through history.

“The fonts we chose in the course of composing documents or an email are taken for granted when, in fact, they have deep and



sometimes problematic histories – either in the ways they were used or designed, and by whom,” said The Branch’s Executive Director, Sharon Aponte.

Curated by Seals and based on his research and designs, the exhibition was designed in collaboration with Civilization, a design studio that uses visual communication to address social issues, expand cultural dialogue and serve communities. Their work is internationally recognized, and they are a recipient of a Cooper Hewitt National Design Award for Communication Design. The Civilization team partnered on this exhibition because “*Characters* illustrates the ways in which typography can be used both as a tool of oppression and liberation.”

The exhibition celebrates accessible, everyday materials and methods commonly used in protests, such as cardboard, construction paper, murals, and digital printing. Flat-packed, recyclable, and reusable cardboard boxes are a main element of the exhibit. Stacks of large-scale typography boxes use the language of children’s blocks, referencing some of our first experiences with typography. Walls display murals of each character. Special algorithms were created to add texture to the character’s portraits, which are composed of letters, numbers, and symbols.

Vocal Type created a new typeface for the exhibition's branding, *VTC Terra*. Each letterform is designed to eliminate ink pooling to reduce the amount of ink needed when printing.

Accompanying the exhibition is a small reading room with books about typography, curated by Seals, to encourage design students and enthusiasts to take a deeper dive into exhibition topics. The reading room will also have a button-making station where visitors can make buttons using exhibition graphics. During the show, The Branch will present a series of public programs, including a conversation with Tré Seals and Michael Ellsworth of Civilization on November 11; a book signing for Seals’ new book, *Dream in Color*, on November 12 at the Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU in partnership with the Book Bar; a screening of *Graphic Means* on November 17 including a conversation with director Briar Levit. Additional programming will be announced on The Branch’s website and social media during the run of the show.



About Tré Seals and Vocal Type

Tré has been on a lifelong path when it comes to design: he’s been practicing writing in cursive since he was in kindergarten; started his first business selling \$3 graffiti-style name cards to his classmates between the ages of ten and eleven. He designed tattoos, bead jewelry, comic strips for the school paper, yearbooks, his first font, and more by high school. After graduating in 2015 with a degree in Visual Communication Design, Seals opened his own brand consultancy (2015-2020) known as Studio Seals. Through Studio Seals, he worked with over 250 partners, ranging from small startups to national and global brands (2015-2020).

Inspired by the lack of diversity in the graphic design industry, Tré launched the diversity-driven font foundry known as Vocal Type. Each typeface highlights a piece of history from a different

underrepresented race, ethnicity, or gender—from the Women’s Suffrage Movement in Argentina to the Civil Rights Movement in America and beyond. Since founding Vocal Type in 2016, Seals’ fonts have gone from being inspired by progressive movements to becoming a part of them: taking shape in

the form of Black Lives Matter street murals, brand campaigns for the 2020 Virtual March On Washington, political campaigns like that of Stacey Abrams, logos like the Amazon Labor Union, and so much more.

Says Seals, "I knew that I couldn't simply diversify design's demographics or educational system. So I tried to figure out a way to introduce a non-stereotypical piece of minority culture into the design vocabulary itself, starting with the basis of any good design – typography."

Now 29, Tré has been named an Ascender by the Type Directors Club, a Young Gun by the One Club for Creativity, and a Black Design Visionary by Instagram and the Brooklyn Museum.

Image Captions

1. VTC Harriet by Vocal Type
2. VTC Ruby by Vocal Type
3. VTC Spike by Vocal Type
4. Characters exhibition installation view
5. Tré Seals

Additional high-resolution images available on request.

The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design

The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design – housed in a 1919 John Russell Pope building on the National Register of Historic Places – explores the impact of design in everyday life, working with individuals and communities to create a more equitable, beautiful, joyful, and productive future. Through thought-provoking exhibitions, we aim to spark creativity, joy, and appreciation for design excellence. Through forward-thinking programs, we empower people to recognize and advance successful design solutions to better lives.

General Information

The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design is located at 2501 Monument Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23220. The museum is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00am-5:00pm and Sunday, 1:00-6:00pm. For general information, please call 804-655-6055 or visit the website at branchmuseum.org.

#characterstypeandprogress

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