

(party)

per

bend

sinister

(We Would Like to Share)

Some Thoughts on a Possible School Badge

“The oblique stroke appears at first sight to be the signal that the binary opposition between categories (speech/writing or love/hate) won’t hold— that neither of the words in opposition to each other is good for the fight. The stroke, like an over-vigilant referee, must keep them apart and yet still oversee the match.”

— Steve Rushton

Heraldry is a graphic language evolved from around 1130 AD to identify families, states and other social groups. Specific visual forms yield specific meanings, and these forms may be combined in an intricate syntax of meaning and representation. Any heraldic device is described by both a written description and its corresponding graphic form. The set of *a priori* written instructions is called a Blazon—to give it form is to Emblazon.

In order to ensure that the pictures drawn from the descriptions are accurate and reasonably alike, Blazons follow a strict set of rules and share a unique vocabulary. Objects, such as animals and shapes, are called Charges; colors are renamed, such as Argent for Silver or Or for Gold; and divisions are described in terms such as Dexter (“right” in Latin) and Sinister (“left”).

A given heraldic form may be drawn in many alternative ways, all considered equivalent, just as the letter “A” may be printed in a variety of fonts. The shape of a badge, for example, is immaterial and different artists may depict the same Blazon in slightly different ways.

The Blazon is a fixed, abstract literary translation of the open, representational graphic symbol (and vice versa.) Using a limited but precise vocabulary, full descriptions of shields range in complexity, from the relatively simple:

Azure, a bend Or

to the relatively complex:

(Party) per fess, Vert and Gules, a boar’s head erased Argent, langued Gules, holding in his mouth the shankbone of a deer proper, in chief: and in base two wings conjoined in lure reversed Argent. Above the shield is placed an Helm befitting his degree with a Mantling Vert doubled Argent, and on a Wreath of the Liveries is set for Crest a hand proper holding a Celtic cross paleways, Or, and in an Escrol over the same the motto “l’Audace”.

Today, schools, companies and other institutions may obtain officially recognized forms from heraldic authorities, which have the force of a registered trademark.¹ Heraldry might equally be considered part of a personal or institutional heritage, as well as as a manifestation of civic and/or national pride. However, many users of modern heraldic designs do not register with the proper authorities, and some designers do not follow the rules of heraldic design at all.

Bastards.²

In proposing a badge for a (possibly) temporary art school, we are interested in following, yet superseding, heraldic conventions.³ Just as Manifesta 6 is founded on a new, informed reading of art schools, so its logo can be founded on a new, informed reading of heraldry. Both referring to, and departing from, tradition.

Our Blazon:

(party) per bend sinister

translated to English means:

a blank shield with a single diagonal line running from the bottom left edge to the top right hand corner

The badge we would like to wear is two-faced— both founded on, and breaking from, established guidelines. Stripped to its fundamentals, and described in heraldic vocabulary, it is UNCHARGED. It is a schizophrenic frame, a paradox, a forward slash making a temporary alliance between categories, simultaneously generic and/or specific.

D/S

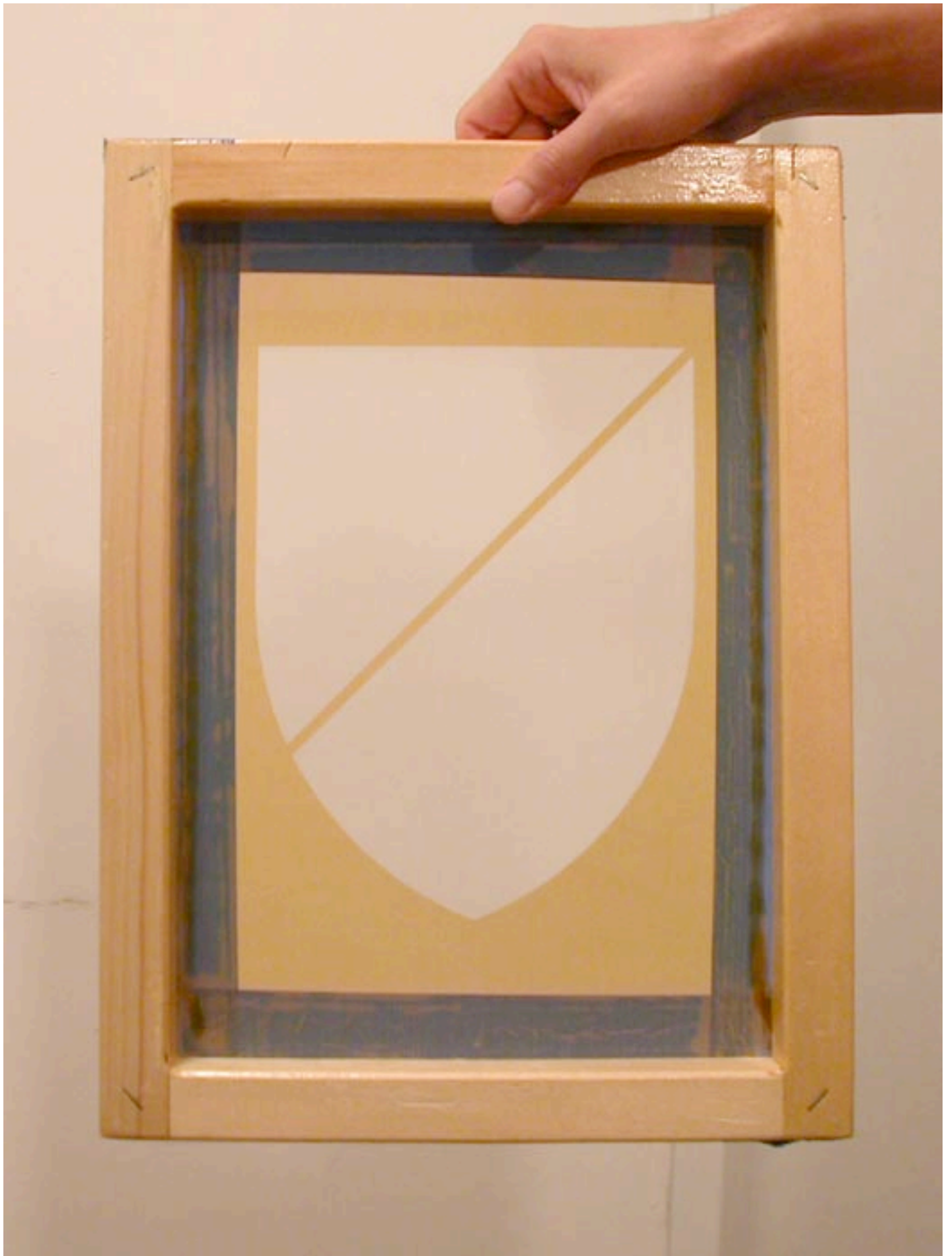
Notes

1. In fact, Scotland’s chief heraldic authority, Lord Lyon, retains far-reaching powers equal to a high-court judge.
2. It is worth noting that, on reading an early draft of this text, heraldic expert David Phillips commented, “People who use arms without authority are cads, not bastards.”
3. Contrary to Josef Albers’ notes on Black Mountain College logo from the March 1935 newsletter:

“We are not enamored of astrological, zoological, heraldic, or cabalistic fashions. We have hunted neither the phoenix nor the unicorn, we have dug up no helmet and plume, nor have we tacked on learned mottoes. And for ‘sapientia’ or ‘virtus’ we are still too young.

Instead, as a symbol of union, we have chosen simply a simple ring. It is an emphasized ring to emphasize coming together. Or, it is one circle within another: color and white, light and shadow, in balance. And that no one may puzzle over cryptic monograms, we give our full address.”





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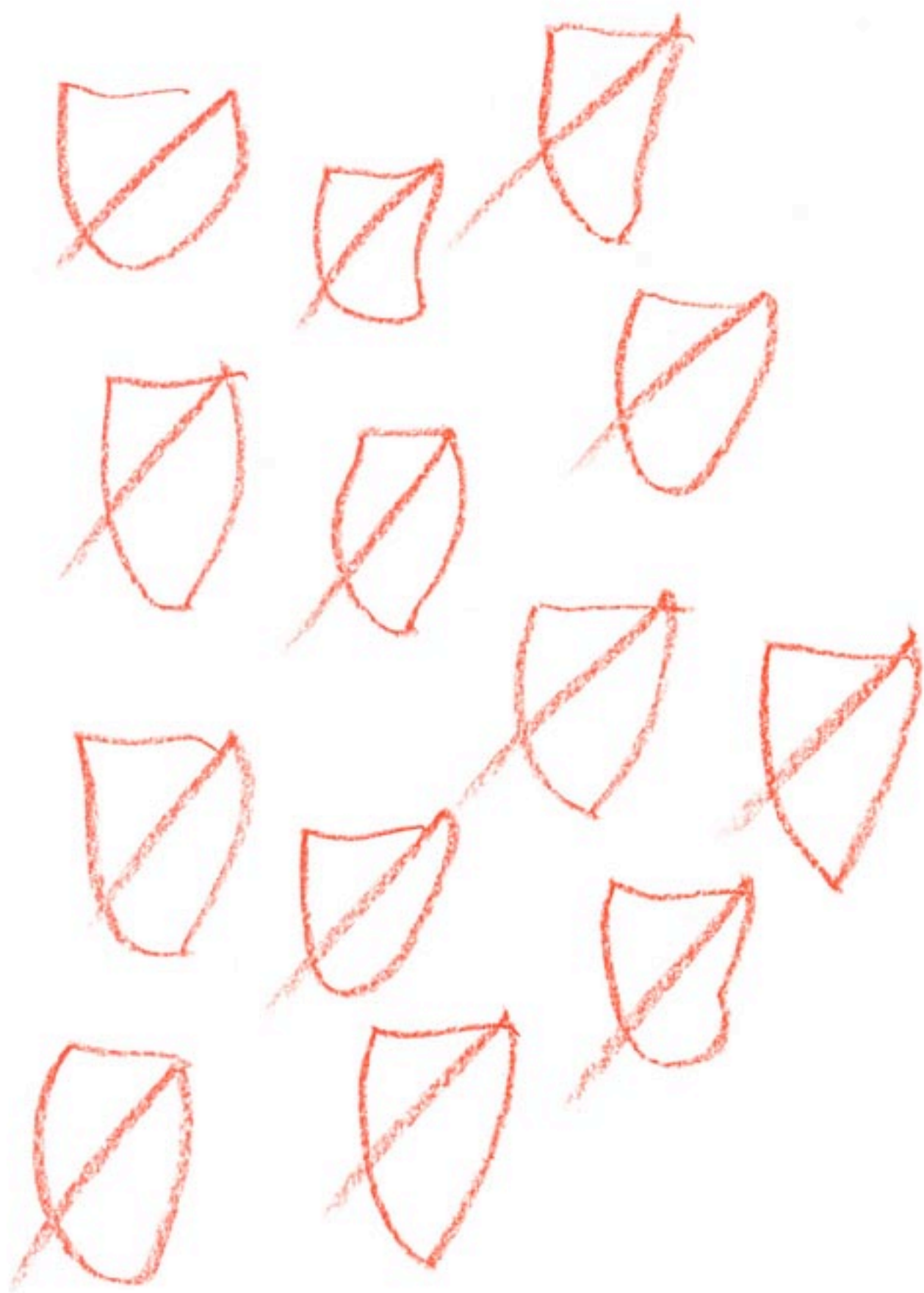
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DAVID REINFURT

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Sinister/Bastard:

interchangeable paragraphs on a typographical sign

/ Imagine it swinging like a catflap between one category and another. Flicking rapidly from the diagonal to the vertical, to the reverse diagonal, allowing passage for the meaning of words. /

/ The oblique stroke appears at first sight to be the signal that the binary opposition between categories (speech/writing or love/hate) won't hold – that neither of the words in opposition to each other is good for the fight. The stroke, like an over-vigilant referee, must keep them apart and yet still oversee the match. The stroke highlights the inadequacy of each word. Just when we think we have a word that seems up to the task of describing a thing, it obscures the thing it is describing. This sets up (you know the old story) a chain of signifiers, re-establishing the 'metaphysics of presence'. The oblique stroke emphasises difference but implies possibility. It excites the words on either side of the stroke into motion toward each other and yet divides them irrevocably./

/ The oblique stroke preserves a form of specialisation, but at the same time announces a change in the rules in which the specialisation is organised and mediated. Come to think of it, how could the political economy of the art industry exist without the oblique stroke? If the diagonal lines that joined and separated the production of art / its theorisation / (and) its reception disappeared, how could one continue to exist independently of the other? How could an artwork or the artist exist as autonomous entities without the handy device that seemingly abolishes such designations? And how could we continue to say that the distinction is blurred/merged or blurring/merging? /

/ In this age of multi-tasking the oblique stroke has been gainfully employed in the job of simultaneously separating and binding together different professional categories. This is particularly true of the economy of contemporary visual culture where it is common to see oblique-stroked practitioners of all kinds: designer/activists, artist/curators, DJ/filmmakers along with the multi-stroked profession/s that rattle along like boxcars: artist/curator/writer/educator. (This/is/the/night/train/crossing/the/border). In the world of transferable skills a single specialism implies mobility. The oblique stroke allows us to be neither one thing nor the other / and both. /

/ The perfect place for the oblique stroke to sit would be between the categories of dance and karate, for instance, or perhaps it could slide comfortably between the practices of brick-laying and synchronised swimming. We live in a culture where it is seen as inherently virtuous to blur the destination between one thing and another, where any kind of hybrid is preferable to the incipient inbred (born of a single line – with a single eye in the centre of its forehead). /

/ The oblique stroke does exactly what it says on the tin – it makes a temporary alliance between categories. The stroke is a mediative indicator. /

/ There's a story, probably put about by Sir Walter Scott and now generally accepted, that the heraldic symbol of the bend sinister, the oblique stroke across a coat of arms, denotes illegitimacy. If this were the case the stroke would serve the paradoxical function of ensuring the legitimacy of the line through the bastard son. The emphatic stroke and its indeterminate oblique – born on the wrong side of the sheets – in a sinister fashion. It is sinister because it inclines to the left – deriving from the Latin *sinistrad* – the family line takes a detour, deviates. /

/ But what about the monsters it produces – these interdisciplinary chimeras with the head of an administrator, the hands of an artist and the body of a sumo wrestler? Part theorist, part editor, part curator, part designer? And could there be points of division where a distinction can be made even between inter-disciplines? Is it possible that an as-yet undeclared infra-slim specialisation may exist in the diagonal line between puppeteer and weightlifter? And deep in the blackness of the stroke is there another stroke? /

Steve Rushton