



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year (Xu Bing, Computer Font Project, 2003. New English Calligraphy CD, computer, printer, paper, and visitors at Drawing the Line: Contemporary Artists Reassess Traditional East Asian Calligraphy, Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, California, 1 Jun – 5 Oct 03. Photo: S. Chattopadhyay)

and structure of language by presenting pseudo-calligraphic characters that skewer the verbal with the visual.

Xu Bing's 'New English Calligraphy'

Over time the Chinese calligraphic tradition evolved seven major Chinese scripts.⁴ In the modern era, even Mao instituted 'a new type of ... abbreviated characters (*jiantizi*)',⁵ in an attempt to make the learning and reading of Chinese more accessible to the masses. Xu's pseudo-calligraphic scripts wryly extend such historical precedences, building towards the future while acknowledging the past.

Book from the Sky was Xu's first work to

address this complex legacy. Following his relocation in 1990 to the United States, he invented a second script which came to be known as *New English Calligraphy*, fusing letters of the English alphabet with the formal structure of Chinese Regular Script (*kai shu*), ostensibly transforming Chinese characters into English words. Writing in reality a language that is neither Chinese nor English, but rather a fusion of both, *New English Calligraphy* thwarts the traditional expectations of both linguistic audiences, effectively integrating selected visual signs gleaned from both languages to ultimately address the utopian dreams and dystopian foibles of cross-cultural communication.