

As I have loved you, you must love one another. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, because you have such love for one another. . . . — JOHN 13:34–35



UR DEAR FRIEND,
gentle soul, and
artistic phenom of
the alphabet and
beyond, Alan Abner

Blackman, quietly “crossed the bar” on June 6th, 2024. At the age of 96 years, Alan had a sense of wonderment about life and shared it eagerly with all whose paths he crossed. This biblical quote above was one that Alan lived by. It is written in gold on a white wall in his graceful brush italic, with his masterful, well-tuned ascenders and descenders, along the hallway in the basement art space of Santa Sabina Center in San Rafael, California, the site of the FOC retreats that were a meaningful part of Alan’s life. [See page 6.]

Alan has bestowed us with a legacy in the world of calligraphy and lettering that had never been imagined before. More than that, he strived to stretch his own imagination to innovations in letterforms and design with meticulous precision and care. Nothing was left to chance in his work. This can be seen from his often painstaking drafts to final masterpieces. Alan’s work is represented in the San Francisco Public Library’s Richard Harrison Collection of Calligraphy and Lettering (SFPL); the library of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and the collection of Letterform Archive, San Francisco.

Those who were able to be with Alan during his last few months saw his never-ending effort to remain independent, maintain a sense of humor, and express love and gratitude towards all who were with him. His favorite way of expressing this was to say, “I love you to bits!” with a warm twinkle in his eye.

“I’M THE HAPPIEST PERSON I KNOW!”

ALAN BLACKMAN
1928–2024



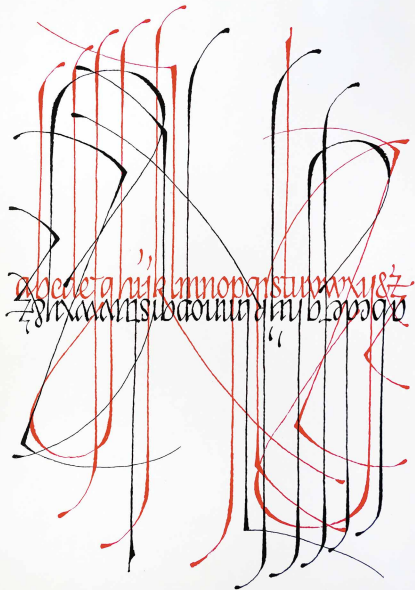
by Karen Haslag

I was extremely fortunate to be with him at his apartment almost daily from May 7 to June 3. Alan and I had a ritual: We would share a hug (even when he was resting in bed), then hum up and down, matching pitches, or humming in wacky harmony, and then break into laughter. Alan’s astute memory for stories of past times was remarkable, but his recollections would come in bits and spurts. On several occasions, he reminisced about how he would come to my apartment on Haight Street in the 1970s, and we would do lettering, then just eat! I remembered exactly the opposite. I would phone Alan and, if he was free, would walk over to his apartment on Shradler Street and we’d do lettering together (or I’d just watch him) and then—well, he had the eating part right! We loved to roam around Haight Street and other neighborhoods. Alan had several pets, including a rabbit and 15 guinea pigs, so we would never pass up a pet store.

Alan was able to stay in his own apartment, where he was happiest, until the end, through the tireless and loving effort of his niece, Lissa Blackman Spitz, and her brother, Will. When Lissa visited, she was 200% present for Alan, tidying up his apartment, keeping him in fresh flowers and his favorite treats, and, most importantly, managing his medical needs and having meaningful conversations with him. Lissa made several trips this year to San Francisco from her home in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Friends and fans also generously contributed to Alan’s ongoing

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Diffraction full pieces—Alice's one-two punch in the faculty show at the Innovations '86 conference. Above: Symmetrical Prayer, on the faculty exhibition catalog cover (photo by Anna Pisto); opposite: Asymmetrical Prayer, Harrison Collection, gift of the author.

