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The act of making art is often a solitary endeavour, but as social creatures, we also have an inherent desire to connect with others, now more than ever. During this time of increased isolation, many artists also strive to stay

creatively engaged and learn new art forms, especially relaxing ones. In recent years, there has been an exciting resurgence of interest in Latin calligraphy, a slow and meditative art. Joining a local calligraphy guild or society is a wonderful way to connect with kindred spirits in one's community, develop calligraphic skills, and glean tips and tricks of the trade from seasoned artists. Modern-day Western calligraphy societies are nonprofit organizations with open membership, created to promote and preserve the art of beautiful writing.

To the uninitiated, the word "guild" may conjure up shadowy visions of medieval craftspeople meeting by candlelight. These images are not accurate in a modern context, but the history of guilds does indeed date back to the Middle Ages. Prior to the invention of the printing press, European scribes worked painstakingly to produce manuscripts (such as liturgical texts, legal documents or charters). Early on, this work was executed primarily by monks, inside of their monastery's scriptorium (rooms dedicated to writing). However, in the later Middle Ages, the rise of cities and universities led the way to lay scribes and necessitated the creation of trade organizations for the "mutual aid and protection of its members" (Oxford English Dictionary). Within the university context, masters would provide an original manuscript (or *exemplar*) to stationers, who would reproduce sections (or *pecia*) by hand for students. The stationers had their own guilds to regulate their trade and manage uniformity of texts, which included the signature scripts used.


Fast forward to the 20th century, when students of Edward Johnston (the father of modern calligraphy) founded the Society of Scribes and Illuminators in 1921 in the United Kingdom. This group of professionals and amateurs is known to be the first modern-day calligraphy guild. Other organizations followed in the mid-century, such as the International Association of Master Penmen, Engrossers and Teachers of Handwriting (IAMPETH) and the Society for Italic Handwriting (SIH). Lloyd J. Reynolds, professor at Reed College, founded the Western American branch of SIH in 1969, which went on to become North America's first calligraphy guild: the Portland Society for Calligraphy. "Through study, understanding, and critical practice," wrote Reynolds, "let us promote this healthy arts and crafts movement."

Indeed, the 1970s and early 1980s were a veritable heyday for the craft, with regional guilds forming across

the United States and Canada. These societies were led by prominent calligraphy teachers such as Donald Jackson (scribe to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II), Maury Nemoy and Sheila Waters. Sheila was the founding president of the Washington Calligraphers Guild (as well as the Smithsonian Associates' calligraphy program). She and her students wanted to "meet together, hold lectures and demos, learn from each other, teach others and uphold the standards of work we held dear."

Starting in 1981, the annual international calligraphy conferences became an exciting gathering place for calligraphers. Guilds began to coordinate tours by top international instructors, which continue to this day. In order to attend guild workshops, one simply needs to become a member of that organization. Nearly all Latin calligraphy guilds and societies are open to anyone with a love of lettering, regardless of profession, experience or ability. And many people become members of multiple societies, to take advantage of workshop opportunities and to receive annual publications. *Scrisp* and *Alphabet* are two particularly notable journals, produced by the Washington Calligraphers Guild and Friends of Calligraphy, respectively.

Over the past year, many guilds have transitioned their meetings, lectures and workshops online. Carol Dubosch has taught numerous online workshops since the pandemic upended traditional scheduling in early 2020: "I got a document camera, signed up for Zoom and asked for forgiveness." She quickly grew adept to the new format and loves that every student has a front row seat. Many guilds are now offering online workshops, including the Society for Calligraphy, the Society of Scribes, the Chicago Calligraphy Collective, Friends of Calligraphy and the Calligraphic Arts Guild of Toronto (just to name a few).

As the world around us continues to evolve, it's remarkable to watch how artists are adapting and forging ahead. As Larry Whitson, member of the Portland Society for Calligraphy, so aptly writes, "We are all on a journey of letters, and we generously share that journey with each other." 



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