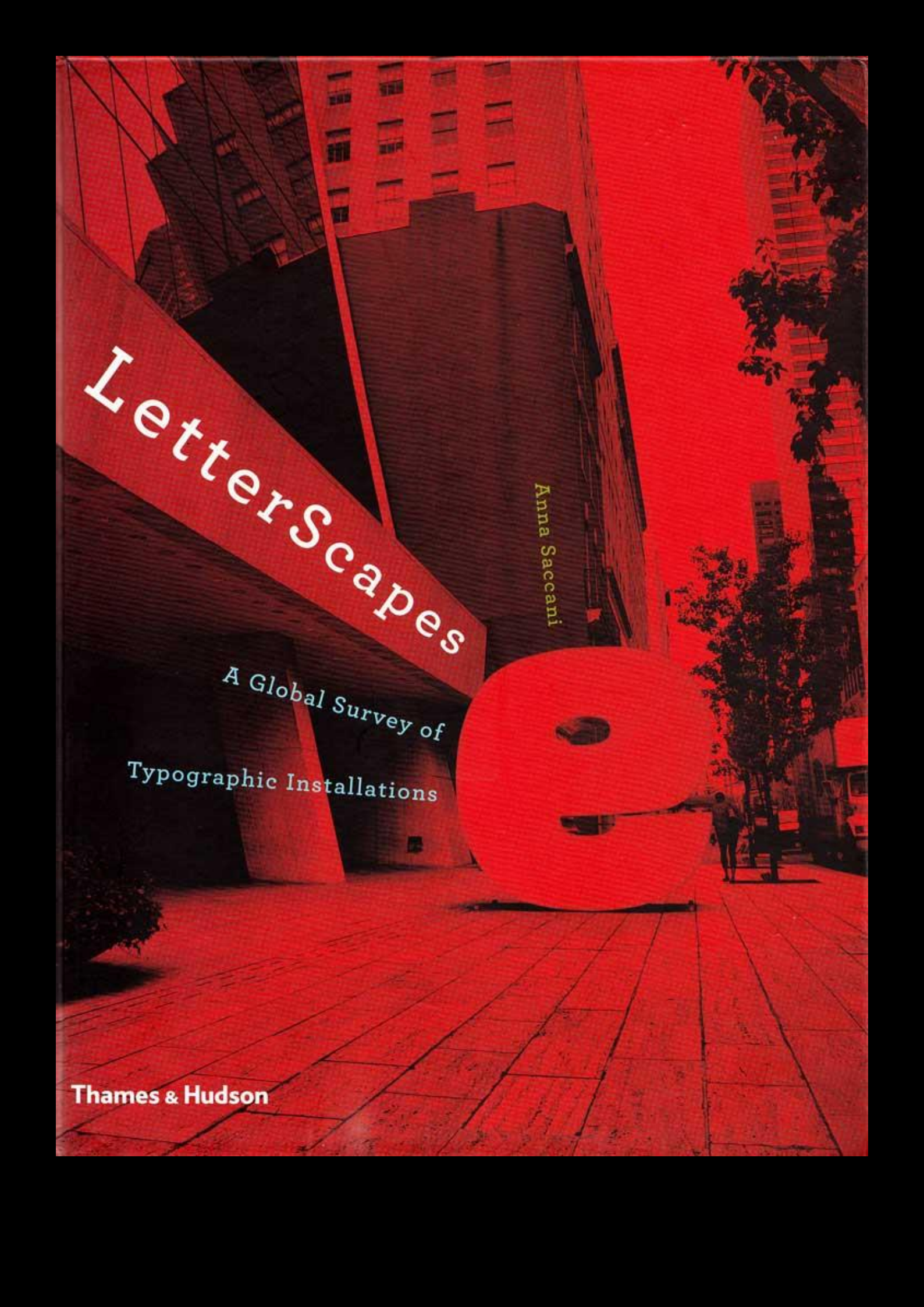




Letterscapes

Anna Saccani

A Global Survey of
Typographic Installations

Thames & Hudson

Introduction

More than ever, public lettering can be seen everywhere we look in the contemporary world. Road signs, shop names, advertisements and graffiti cover the walls of our cities. These messages penetrate into our minds, informing, appealing, persuading or inciting. Painted, drawn, sculpted or cast, assembled in metal, plastic or stone, the words become tangible physical entities in the landscape, contributing to its personality and unique identity.

Often the messages are too many and too confusing. They blend into a background noise, with no individual voice emerging from the general hum. But there are times when, suddenly, something will attract our attention. Intent on our daily chores, heads down, we find our eyes turn to seize this new message. A word, phrase or sometimes just a letter becomes familiar and part of our landscape.

A public lettering is made unique by the relationships it sets up with what is around it: not a blank page, but the sky, the streets, the sunlight with the shadows it creates, the rain making the colours brighter, combined with slow erosion from the passage of time. To this we can add people, moving, gazing, more or less attentively, their curiosity driving them to find something new and different in an everyday landscape. In the words of Jock Kinneir, a major figure in the study of this discipline: 'If public lettering was just a larger size of type there would be little to interest us. Yet, quite apart from the question of the extra dimension, there are obviously a host of different relationships to be explored. Buildings and people, rather than pages, are the frame of reference, and sometimes even the sky and open fields.'¹

This volume is an exploration of typographical installations created between the mid-twentieth century and the present day, selected from the most important works throughout the world. All the works discussed are sited in public or semi-public places and were intended as permanent fixtures, and so this book can also be used as a guide. It aims to highlight the graphic element in the installations, along with the communicative power of the arts of typography and lettering, demonstrating that these works deserve as much attention and appreciation as do architectural and artistic creations.

Keeping playwright August
Strindberg's great wit alive
by embedding his words in
a Stockholm street.

FA+ Citat

Drottninggatan,
Stockholm, Sweden



Och jag tror inte på Gud? Ajo del gör jag inte, men jag tror på mig själv och på att jag kan göra det som jag vill.

STRINDBERGS
CITAT
KONCEPT FA+
I FALK G AGUERRE

¹ Interview with Gustavo Aguerre, 5 March 2008

² Ibid

³ Ximena Narea, 'Facing the Physical and Cultural Space', *Heterogénesis*, www.heterogenesis.com/Heterogenesis-2/Textos/hsv/hnr27/Narea.eng.html

Citat was created in 1994 by FA+, otherwise known as the artists Gustavo Aguerre and Ingrid Falk, to commemorate the celebrated Swedish playwright August Strindberg on the occasion of the first festival dedicated to him in Stockholm.

Starting from the idea that 'the text is the writer',¹ the artists placed significant quotations by Strindberg along the Drottninggatan, a street with which the words are intimately connected. As Aguerre explains, 'Strindberg...lived the last years of his life on this street.... It is not unlikely that some of these words came to him during his strolls.... The words in the street represent his thoughts embodied, solidified.'²

The quotations run straight down the middle of the crowded shopping street, and this longitudinal arrangement, easily read from either side, emphasizes the linear structure of the space – as art historian Ximena Narea says, 'The street is, simply put, a path that takes us somewhere and not the destination itself. The linear structure of the texts is very well suited to represent this concept.'³ By choosing provoking phrases such as 'libraries should be burned down every now and then' or 'I am under observation on suspicion of being clever', FA+ have sought to attract the attention of passers-by and to bring out the ironic and controversial aspects of Strindberg's personality.

The work was initially painted: with the help of the Strindberg Foundation and the Friends of Open Air Theatre, 11,000 letters were cut out to make the stencils used to paint the 83 quotations extending over a length of 1.2 kilometres (¾ mile). By the time the painted letters had worn out, it was clear that they had become an integral part of the urban landscape, and the people of Stockholm asked for a permanent installation. In 1998, when Stockholm was the European Capital of Culture, the space was closed to traffic and the lettering recreated in stainless steel. The placement of the texts in the middle of the street reconstructs the lane division, and the decision to use Helvetica and steel harmonizes with the asphalt and other common street materials.

One of Stockholm's most beloved pieces of public space art, *Citat* is a project that has closely involved the local community – the quotations were suggested by schools, libraries, literary associations and academics in the city. Providing a stimulating alternative to the visual pollution of the advertising and shopfronts on the street, *Citat* has become an essential sight on the visitor's circuit. Commissioned by the Stockholm Art Board and the City of Stockholm's street and building authority, the project received support from the Danieli Donation Fund and the Stockholm European Cultural Capital 1998 Fund.

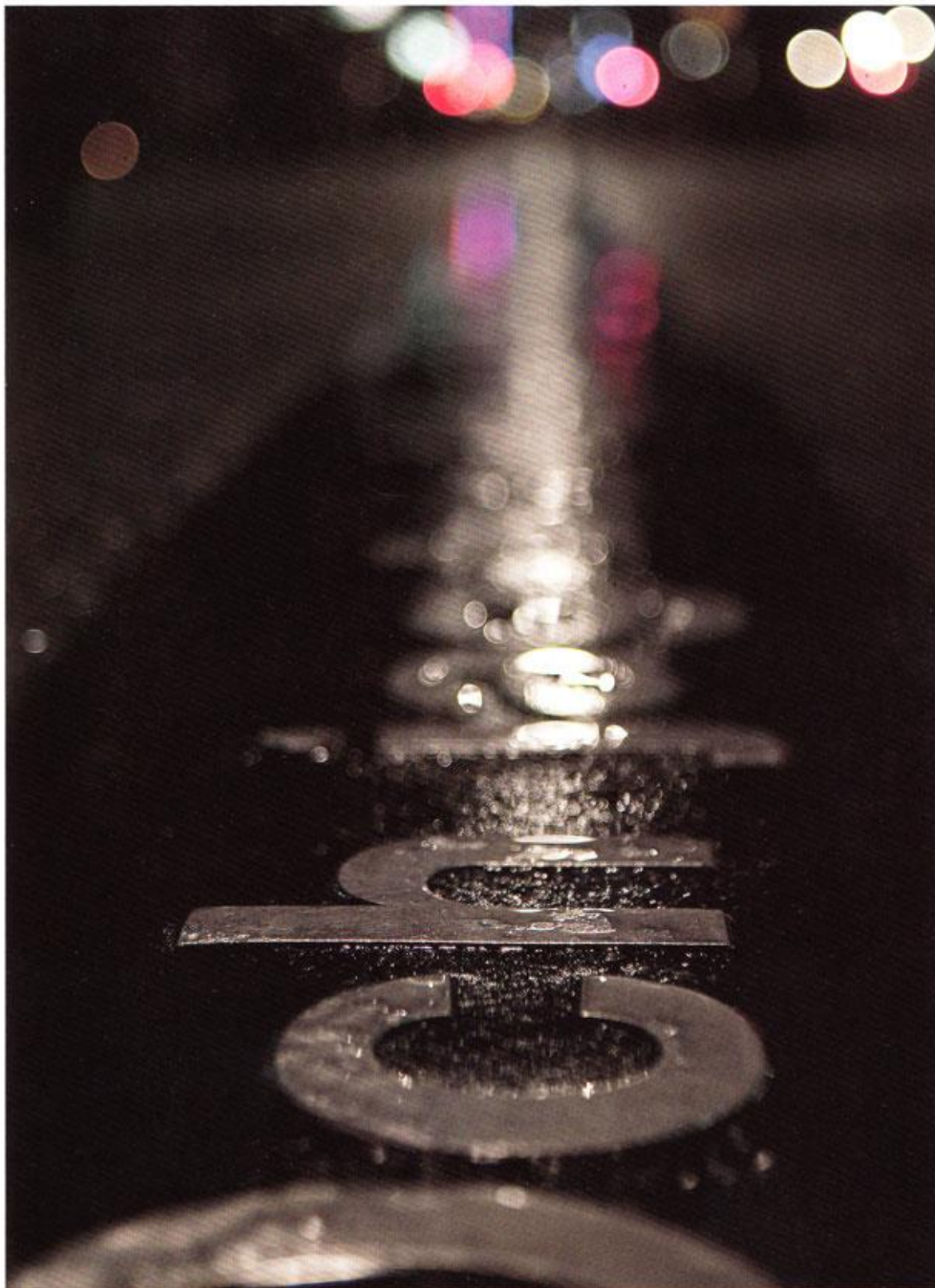


Above: Various stages in the construction of the installation.
Following pages: The installation in the Drottninggatan.

(Photo FA+)



(Photo Joakim Mathlsson)





(Photo FA+)

Citat is a first step towards a larger project, *The Universal Library*, the purpose of which is to promote poetry and, more generally, literature through the installation of significant quotations. Other installations forming part of this project are: *Zitat*, a quotation from Kant in

Kaliningrad, Russia (top left); *Into death so loved*, a line by Adlesparre in Falun, Sweden (top right); *FA+Norén/WAR*, excerpts from Norén's play *War* in seven Swedish cities (bottom left); *Sitat*, quotations from Ibsen in Oslo, Norway (bottom right).

Finns det en medgörligare och oskyldigare

Helvetica

'Is there a more amenable and more innocent human than this former minister?'