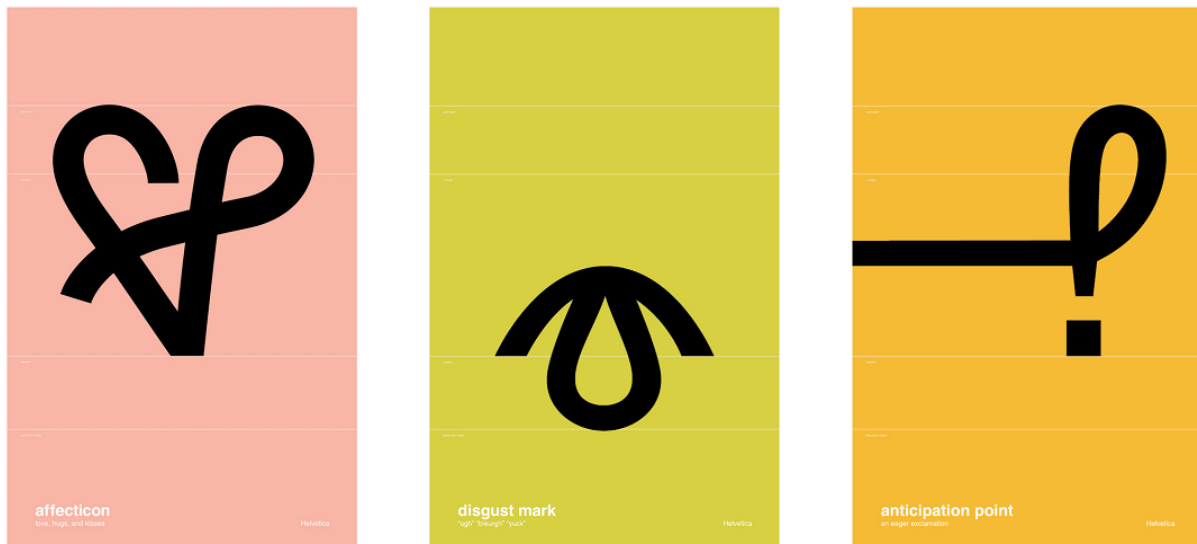


Move Over, Emoji!

Designer Mia Cinelli adds clarity to digital communications with elegant typography that blends human gestures and punctuation.

by John Thomson

January 30, 2020 8:30 AM



Mia Cinelli, "Affecticon," "Disgust Mark" and "Anticipation Point" (left to right), 2019, digital print on matte polypropylene, 36" x 24" each (courtesy the artist and the Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver)

Designer Mia Cinelli thinks we need a new range of expressive symbols to enhance our digital vocabulary.

Her show, *This Being Said*, on view at North Vancouver's Seymour Art Gallery until Feb. 29, includes 12 speculative characters on plasticized paper. They are joyous, whimsical and, as Cinelli, an assistant professor at the School of Art and Visual Studies at the University of Kentucky, sees it, a complement to digital communication.

"I think you can lose a lot of really salient meaning when you communicate digitally and I think we're compensating for it," says Cinelli. "Right now, we're using emojis or animated graphics. Or we'll write down our actions because we don't have anything else for them. I think we could be more empathetic in the way we communicate with each other. We could clarify what we mean to say."



Mia Cinelli, "This Being Said," 2020, installation view (courtesy the Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver)

Her characters, prototypes at this point, suggest feelings and tone, and include a descriptor at the bottom of the page for context.

Inspired, in part, by facial expressions and gestures, Cinelli began the process by looking in the mirror. *Gesture Mouth* superimposed by the character, *Disgust Mark*, illustrates the point. *Shrug Sign* looks like someone shrugging his shoulders.

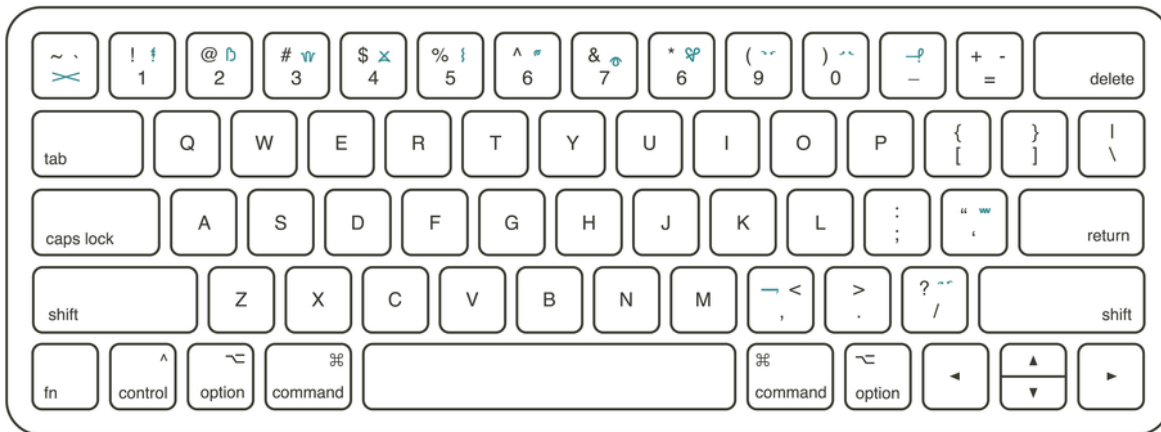
Existing punctuation also inspired Cinelli. It's easy to understand *Frustration Point* – an exclamation point ruptured by jolts of anxiety. With *Anticipation*, one can feel the time it takes to reach the point. My favourite is a pair of single quotation marks repositioned to convey anger, skepticism or worry, simply by altering their axis.

Hell if I know. ʌ

Mia Cinelli, "Hell If I Know," 2019, letterpress print, 4" x 6" (courtesy the artist)

Cinelli says the exhibition is no mere exercise. She has indicated where proposed symbols could be placed on a keyboard (the top row, alongside the numbers) and her three examples, including *Hell If I Know*, shows us how to use her symbols in a sentence – not to replace punctuation but to amplify it by clarifying the writer's intention. She believes her characters could become commonplace if enough people asked for them.

typing guide: keyboard layout



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Mia Cinelli, "Keyboard," 2019, digital print on matte polypropylene, 16" x 24" (courtesy the artist and the Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver)

Is Cinelli's work art or design? The gallery's director, Vanessa Black, is unconcerned about the distinction. "I think that question is a great opportunity for dialogue," she says.

Cinelli agrees. "I don't think of art and design as exclusive, separate fields," she says. "I think of them as being more like a line between the poetic and pragmatic and you can have many things that fit along that spectrum."

And while she agrees intent and methodologies can differ, she says any kind of expressive art still has a practical function – "to prompt discussion even if its origins come from a different place." ■

Mia Cinelli: This Being Said is on view at the Seymour Art Gallery in North Vancouver from Jan. 18 to Feb. 29, 2020.

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