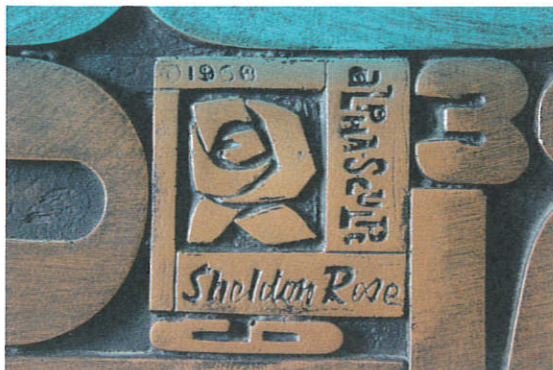


There is a completely unexplainable, almost magnetic force that can connect a person to a piece of art. I have undoubtedly experienced *the pull* more than once, but never quite as strongly as one rainy Saturday poking around a consignment shop in rural northwest Montana. As a librarian, former English teacher and writer, my life revolves around the beauty of letters and words. The colours and composition of this piece—an enormous framed circular collage, made entirely of antique wood type—completely captured my imagination. I knew I would buy it the instant I laid eyes on it.

It was not until anchoring its heft into the studs of my living room wall that I realized it was actually made of plaster, hand-painted to replicate the patina of a beautiful antique. A signature block, incorporated into the collage, identified the artist: “Sheldon Rose, Alpha-Sculpt, 1968.” The storyteller in me wanted to know something, *anything*, about its story. *Who was Sheldon Rose? What else did he create? Is it rare?* Disappointing online searches revealed nothing more than a small number of pieces sold at auction—various-sized cubes, wall hangings like mine and even a lamp base. Hoping to learn more, I posted a picture of my Alpha-Sculpt online. Soon, others started reaching out, excited about their serendipitous purchases, curious to know more about the mysterious unknown artist. One comment in particular inspired me to dig further into telling his story: “Sheldon was from Queens New York and a graduate of Cooper Union.”

Uncovering the story of this obscure artist proved to be no small feat. With a little digging, I track down Rudi Wolff, a New York artist and former Cooper Union classmate. Wolff describes his old friend, “Shelley,” as friendly, open and fun—an inventive problem solver who was very creative. Rose’s graduation photo in the 1953 yearbook is captioned “Photogradgeteer Extraordinaire,” a nod to his passion for cameras and photography. Wolff also remembers that Rose had an early interest in antique wood type. “On and off, Shelley would show me some of his finds,” he says. However, this was



SHELDON S. ROSE

65-41 Saunders Street, Forest Hills

“Photogradgeteer Extraordinaire.” The man behind the shutter, behind the attachments, behind the tripod, behind the—where is he? Any evening you may catch a lecture on his novel theory that the best photographs are taken with cameras, preferably those which contain film.



the early 1950s and, according to Wolff, wood type was not particularly “in” at the time. Looking back, he points out, Shelley “certainly defied the trends.”

Wolff puts me in touch with fellow Cooper classmate Peter Adler, a retired graphic designer. Over the phone, Adler reminisces about catching a ride back to Queens for a school holiday with the Rose family, including Sheldon’s younger sister, Ruth. “Shelley was quite a character,” he recollects, “and I was afraid his sister might be a bit off the wall.” As it turned out, a little friendly joking on the ride home was all it took for Ruth and Peter Adler to hit it off, and the two have been married for over 60 years. Sadly, I learn from Adler that his brother-in-law died of a heart attack in 1993 at the age of 66, dashing my hopes of meeting the artist in person.

When I tell Adler that I am coming to New York for a conference, he suggests that his wife would be able to give me more information for my story. Which is how, two weeks later, I find myself sitting in Peter and Ruth’s dining room, enjoying the company of the two