

Tropics of the Imagination Conference in Cairns on 31 Oct – 1 Nov. 2011

Katja Fleischmann

Senior Lecturer | Digital Media Design | New Media Arts
School of Creative Arts
James Cook University
Townsville | Australia | QLD 4811

Abstract

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Lettering and signage in the urban environment of the capital of North Queensland: Tropical flair or univernacular?

A young designer recently posted a request for help on a graphic design blog: 'I have to do a piece for the tropics ...Anybody can recommend a typeface?' Replies to his request were sparse and mostly pointing towards websites with typefaces available free for download of varying quality. Predominantly illustrative in style—a palm tree or leave here and there attached to a letter—many of the recommended typefaces could not remotely be considered a visual representing of the tropics. Is there even such thing as a typeface signifying the tropics? Is there type, lettering or signage communicating the qualities of the tropics and creating a sense of place? And more specific is there something unique to the urban environment of Townsville—the capital of the tropical North Queensland?

The journey undertaken explored the typographic landscape of lettering and signage in Townsville. The author investigated the streets, searched in obvious and hidden places, rediscovered forgotten walls and inspected signage of business owners advertising their services in search for the vernacular typography to explore if there is a unique typographic landscape in Townsville. Is the vernacular typography alive or a vanishing art form?