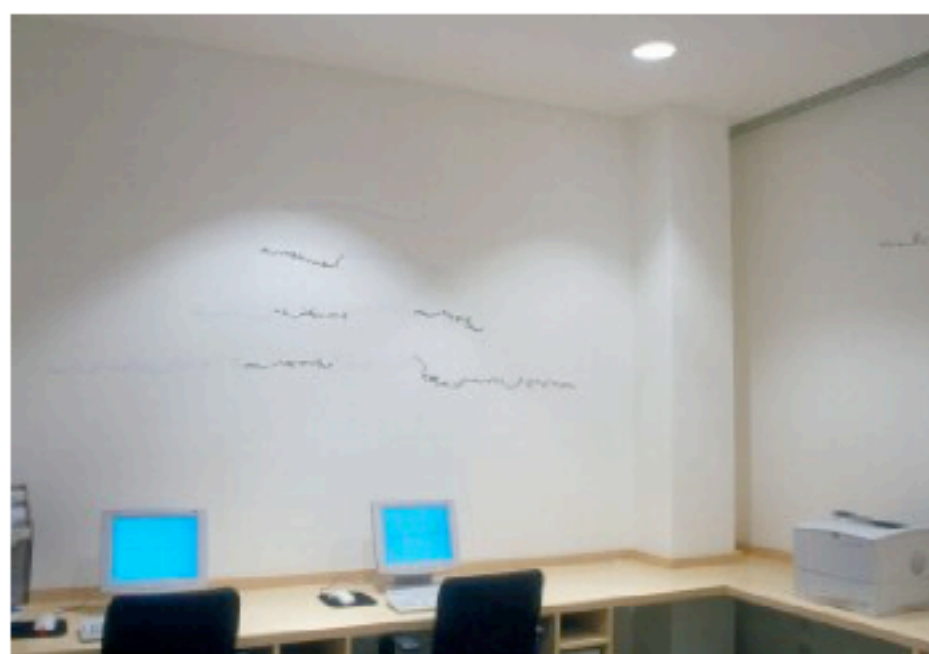


Inside Out



**Matthew
Sontheimer**

Inside Out

2002

Wall Drawing and
Screensaver

2002.217

Inside Out is a site-specific installation commissioned by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston from Matthew Sontheimer for the museum's Hirsch Library. The installation continues the MFAH's long-standing commitment to works of art that can be integrated into the fabric of the institution. Sontheimer, a Houston artist, is known for creating exquisitely rendered drawings and murals based on fragments of text. At the museum's invitation, he created a wall drawing and corresponding screensaver for the library's Electronic Resource Room.

Sontheimer builds his drawings from an abstract alphabet that he has devised through the dissection of his father's signature into its component parts. Using this alphabet as a template, he then encodes a short message of his own choosing, one generally based on a private experience, story, or insight. *Inside Out* was conceived with the demands of the library facility in mind, and after consulting with the museum staff, Sontheimer chose the following text as his point of departure: "enter from a bound search to an open scroll." Sontheimer first rendered the text by hand on sheets of paper. With technical assistance from graphic artist Pat Elston, he then had the drawing enlarged and cut in vinyl, and applied it to the walls using a transfer process. Portions of the text are partially covered by a second layer of white vinyl that mimics the effect of liquid paper on a page, suggesting the revisions of thought that research engenders.

On the left wall the lines of text zigzag across the surface, creating an irregular pattern that cascades from the top corner; as the installation progresses on the center and right walls, the lines run horizontally, placed with increasing clarity and balance. To the casual visitor, the drawing will appear completely abstract. However, both the structure and content of the installation imply liberation from the constraints of traditional forms of research: from the physical (the world of books and journals) to the virtual (the world of computers and the Internet). Sontheimer incorporated the second component of the installation into the library's computer monitors. The "letters" not whited-out from the left and right walls form an anagram for "screen door." From these words the artist created a virtual drawing that is programmed into a screensaver. As Sontheimer has noted, the defining characteristic of both a screen door and a computer screen is permeability. While each might be said to mark the boundary between inside and outside, they also facilitate communication between the two.

The installation may be viewed during library hours in the Electronic Resource Room of the Hirsch Library, which is located in the Caroline Wiess Law Building at the MFAH.