What’s unexpected about this thing you just made?

When I first got hold of the chisel and hammer, I didn’t know which one to hold in my right hand (the dominant hand). I assumed the chisel would go in my right hand. But after reading the book The Art of Letter Carving in Stone by Tom Perkins, I realised the hammer is held in the right hand. This means that compared to the chisel, which determines the position to be cut, controlling the force of the hammer is actually more crucial. Also, I had no idea how to carve the contact surfaces between strokes at different angles. (Tom Perkins), I learnt the hammer should be held in the right hand. This means that, compared to the chisel determining the position to be carved, controlling the hammer's force is actually more crucial. Also, initially I had no idea how to carve the contact surfaces between strokes at different angles. Only when I actually did it did I realise these surfaces didn't require special design from me. When two or even three strokes naturally meet, the contact area carves itself out.

What do you understand better or differently about your tool or medium now?

Begin carving from the central axis; the most crucial point, and one I overlooked during my first attempt: the finer the stroke, the shallower the carving should be (Ideally, the angle between each stroke's two walls and the horizontal line should remain consistent—typically 45 or 60 degrees). During carving, visualise the stone as a “malleable” material to achieve finer detail. When carving a particular stroke, I first sketch a central axis line with a pencil, then guide the chisel along this line for the initial carving. This establishes the deepest point. In practice, I've found that when the central axis is curved (depending on the stroke's shape and the carver's design intent—even the letter “S” can have its central axis deliberately carved straight, this design creates a compelling contrast with the curved body, generating tension). In such cases, one should not fixate on a pre-set central axis. Even when carving from the central axis, one must imagine carving along the shape of the stroke's edge. Lighting and carving perspective are crucial. I found the main light source should be positioned directly above the stone slab (placing it upper-right caused the illuminated slope to appear thicker). One should carve from as close to directly above as possible, otherwise horizontal strokes become uneven (the lower half thicker).

Did it pose a particular technical challenge?

When carving the first R, the serifs of this Roman capital letter proved most troublesome (the two beneath the head and stem). My reference images depicted these areas carved with great precision, but as a novice, mine turned out rather coarse. This was likely because my chisel hadn't been sharpened, so it lacked sufficient edge. Additionally, I initially overlooked the need to hold the chisel perpendicular to the stone surface to create fine grooves. Secondly, carving curves, such as the lobe of the R, initially seemed impossible to me. Later, I discovered that by repeatedly replacing the old line with the tip of the

chisel, I could achieve better results when sculpting curves. One issue that remains unresolved is that I have no idea what angle I'm carving the slopes at. More importantly, I can't tell whether the slope is consistent from top to bottom, or whether the slope of a single stroke is uniform (I suspect this could be checked under certain lighting angles, but I've tried many times and found it difficult to achieve).

What kind of output or knowledge does this tool or medium favour?

The knowledge stone carving imparts to me pertains largely to the technical aspects of this medium, alongside reflections on typography. It reveals how differing materials and methods of “writing” naturally yield distinct typographic forms. Take Trajan, born of marble and chisel: its defining characteristics are the absence of lowercase letters, followed by restrained curves and serifs employed as letter terminations. However, I carved on limestone, whose coarser grain made it harder to achieve sharp serif terminations. Comparatively, even different stones seem to favour particular typefaces. This made me reflect on the present: when typefaces are created using tools like digital software, what kind of highly non-intuitive morphological changes does this software introduce?

What relationship does it have to graphic or communication design?

I selected a great piece to copy: a Gothic R. More significantly, I had previously attempted to carve the R from Trajan, the world's first Roman capital letter font. The sensation of carving these two fonts differed markedly. Though this was my first attempt at stone letter carving, after completing the Gothic letter, I realised Trajan was inherently designed for carving. Every stroke is ergonomically perfect, for instance, the angle of the R's tail is so precise that I could carve it naturally without rotating the stone slab. In contrast, carving the Gothic R felt less like practising calligraphy with a chisel on slate and more like tracing a painting – somewhat tedious. I found myself constantly rotating the slate, adjusting my hand position and carving angle to replicate the Gothic R as perfectly as possible. When chiselling the strokes, the cutting motion felt like filling a specific space with negative form.