

Right, top: **Carpet.** A Finnish joke. Watercolors, automatic and pointed pens.

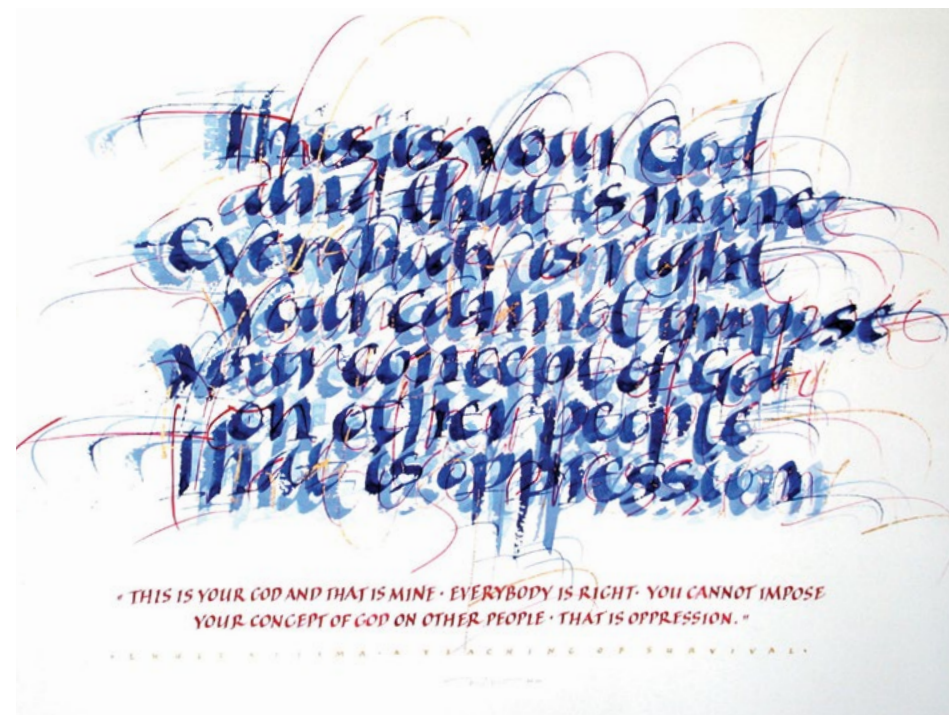
Right, bottom: Invitations and envelopes. Commissioned work for Harrods, London.

VEIKO KESPERSAKS

BY SUE GUNN

By the 1960s, propaganda had become a form of art all over the Soviet Union, including in Estonia, where noted calligrapher Veiko Kespersaks is from originally. Every factory employed an artist who produced political posters and banners, and each one of them had to be taught lettering. For this, Estonia was very lucky to have Villu Toots, a well-respected calligrapher and enthusiast who worked hard to further the lettering arts and who published several books on the subject. In fact, Veiko says, calligraphy in Estonia collapsed after the death of Toots in 1993.

While in secondary school in the 1980s, Veiko's art teacher, a pupil of Villu Toots, noticed his talent at writing and suggested he join Villu's lettering school at the Cultural University in Tallinn. Unfortunately, by the time Veiko wanted to attend the school, Villu was semi-retired and rarely taught. However, after Veiko produced a group of bookplates in his final year at school (which were very popular in Estonia at the time), Villu took notice. Veiko visited his home several times, and Villu became a teacher and mentor as well as a friend. He even lent Veiko foreign art magazines, of which Veiko says: "In those days, these were much sought after for their rarity. After his death I still associated such magazines with him, and when I saw some for sale at a second-hand bookshop, I bought a number." Veiko credits Villu Toots with being his



Left, top: **This is your God.** Text from Luule Viilma's A Teaching of Survival. Watercolors, quill, automatic pen.

Left, bottom: **Drilling a hole.** A Finnish saying. "Drill a hole in the fridge door. This way you can always be sure that the light goes off when you close the door." Watercolors, automatic and pointed pens.

main inspiration in taking up lettering, and it was he who talked about England and recommended studies in what, at the time, was an unreachable country.

But first Veiko had to do his national service. It was 1987 and he was fortunate: his two years in the army were spent doing what he liked best – creating posters and slogans. By the time he had completed his national service, Mikhail Gorbachev had loosened the reins and the country's borders were not as firmly closed as before. This affected Veiko's family directly because his mother is Finnish, and suddenly, for the first time, members of the family could consider emigration. His sister took advantage of this change by moving to Helsinki, and Veiko followed her to Finland in 1990 to study art. He had been offered a place at both the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki and Kankaanpää Fine Arts School. Helsinki seemed big and alien to Veiko, whereas at Kankaanpää the principal met with him and showed him around, which immediately pleased Veiko. Language was no barrier for him or his sister as they had always spoken a mixture of Estonian and Finnish at home. His Finnish-speaking maternal grandmother lived with the family, and most people in Tallinn watched Finnish television. While his Estonian father continues to live in Tallinn, his mother lives mainly in Helsinki, with frequent visits to Tallinn. Veiko remembers her being quite shocked at his move to Kankaanpää and rather concerned about how he would manage living all alone in a small town.

The art course at Kankaanpää lasted four years and included printmaking and