

ASGER JORN – Personality Profile based on letter to Willem Sandberg, 1960.

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Spontaneity and urgency have been used to describe Jorn's use of paint on canvas. Those adjectives can also be applied to describe the personality traits seen in his handwriting at age 46. The flat lines that are intermittently obvious in various words, beginning with Sandberg in his greeting, are indicators of this. He was a bottom line, no frills kind of individual. The letter malformations, often resulting in illegibility, are due to the fact that his hand could not keep up his rapid thinking, analytical mind. His writing shows he had an uncanny ability to get to the heart of a problem, critically assess all sides and then readily move forward with a solution.

The overall simplicity of the writing style also represents the simplicity of Jorn's essence. Jorn knew what he wanted and he was usually able to find the most effective and time efficient way to accomplish what he set out to do. Once the decision to act was made, there was little chance of talking him out of it. Those inverted, inflexible V-shape lines above the baseline demonstrate a stubbornness which was enhanced by an inflexible mindset that did not often welcome ideas that were contrary to his beliefs. The V-shapes in his handwriting that are seen below the baseline represent Jorn's need to take action in a potentially assertive/aggressive way overtly refuting those opposing ideas as well as the people who held them dear. It is also interesting to note that some of his etchings have been described as containing such short, aggressive lines.

As you view the global positioning of his writing, Jorn's mental organization ability is apparent. The pride and dignity evident in his writing gave him a certain awareness of his surroundings as he strived for excellence. The wide gaps between his words represent an individual who liked his alone time thus preferring to keep others at a distance due to his skepticism about whom to trust. When deeply engulfed in his creative endeavors, the small size of his mundane, mid-zone letters meant that he could block out distraction and would resent any interruptions. His irritability would be easily and quickly triggered toward those who did not respect this need.

Jorn was very much an independent thinker as seen by his very short d-stems. The fact that they are looped also means that he was sensitive to criticism, more about his appearance, than about his ability as an artist. If offended, he would find a way to strike back with much thought put into it. This need to do his own thing is somewhat of a contradiction to his behavior. Jorn did not always afford others the luxury of exercising their right to think, speak and act as freely as he felt a strong need to do. This concept of, "opposed dualities" was also represented in his work as Jorn stated, "Tension in a work of art is negative-positive; repulsive-attractive; ugly-beautiful. If one of these is removed, only boredom is left." Jorn's handwriting concurs...his personality and ultimately his life, though it lasted for only 59 years, was anything but boring!