The Emigre Coloring Book

Introducing Crackly
Years ago, during a visit to New York, we had lunch with Steven Heller and the topic of coloring books came up. It was during the time when coloring books were the next big thing in publishing. Publishers were producing them at a steady clip. Bookstores everywhere had entire sections devoted to them. “Emigre should do a coloring book,” Heller suggested. “Millions hang in the balance!” he exclaimed. Heller, who has published over 100 books on graphic design and popular culture, is not a person whose advice we easily dismiss, but his tongue-in-cheek was hard to miss. We had a good chuckle about how to spend the riches, but we couldn’t imagine what an Emigre coloring book would look like.

Until now. While experimenting with line patterns, designer Zuzana Licko stumbled upon the perfect font to create abstract graphics that would work perfectly for creating a coloring book. We called the font “Crackly.”

The idea for these angular pattern fonts came from Licko’s ceramic sculptures. She was composing stacked totems made from modular cones and disks of various sizes and angles. To help visualize these shapes in different combinations the font allowed her to type out the sculpture compositions before assembling them.

Seeing the cones in 2-D, Licko started experimenting with the font by connecting the diagonals (see left), which then slowly evolved into the Crackly fonts. The cone shapes used for the sculptures were eventually dropped from Crackly in favor of elements that could be rotated in a square and combined into dynamic patterns (see page 2), much like the process Licko used to create Tangly.
process Licko used to create Tangly, her previous pattern font design. Many of the resulting patterns create 3-D illusions of depth with incongruous perspectives, also explored in Jonathan Barnbrook’s Priori Acute font and its ornaments. The effect is also reminiscent of Cubism or M.C. Escher’s plays on shifting planes and viewpoints.

As Licko was experimenting with the patterns, it occurred to her that the compositions would make excellent graphics for coloring. This reminded her of the lunch with Heller and his suggestion for an Emigre coloring book. Realizing we had probably missed the boat, and presumably left millions on the table, we decided to make a coloring book disguised as a type specimen (or vice versa?), and give it away for free to help promote our new font Crackly.

What Crackly adds to the coloring book phenomenon, though, is that you can use these pattern fonts to make compositions, print them out on your laser printer, and generate your own coloring pages. We imagine that kids and adults alike can enjoy the experience of getting lost in the moment of experimentation and coloring. Or you can use Crackly for any other pattern applications, such as endpapers or backgrounds. The options are limitless.

Crackly comes in a variety of line weights to accommodate use at various sizes. In this way, Crackly contains some of the features of optically-sized fonts. Crackly also offers a Shadows version, featuring filled in components to create additional playful patterns.

Crackly has a number of inspirational sources and conceptual kinships. Besides the font that Licko designed for her modular ceramic totems, which got the ball rolling, Crackly’s patterns create the same kind of 3-D illusions of depth and surprising perspectives explored in Jonathan Barnbrook’s Priori Acute fonts and its ornaments (see left). The patterns that are created from rotations of the same element bear resemblance to Bram de Does’ Kaba ornament compositions, which share the same underlying process (see below).
Crackly

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While the previous pages show us how Crackly can be used to create a variety of patterns using the basic Crackly Lines fonts, additional visual effects can be generated by combining and overlaying Crackly Lines with Crackly Knockout and Crackly Shadows.

On the following pages we’ll show you how to use the different Crackly versions in combination to generate a number of different effects.

On pages 32-35 we show how Crackly Knockout can be used to add background colors, and on pages 36 - 37, we explain, step by step, how the cover image was created using a combination of all three Crackly variants.

On pages 38 - 43 we show examples of texture variations using the different Knockout fonts together with the Shadows font.
Crackly Knockout was used to create the white background shape in the cover illustration.

Follow these steps to create the cover image:
1. Start with a Crackly Lines composition, with the text set to black, on top of a grey color field.
2. Duplicate the Crackly Lines text block, set the color to white, and change the font to Crackly Knockout All.
3. Change the top line to Crackly Knockout Edge Top, and change to bottom line to Crackly Knockout Edge Bottom.
4. Change the top left element to Crackly Knockout Corner Top Left. Similarly, change the remaining three corners; change the top right element to Crackly Knockout Corner Top Right, change the bottom left element to Crackly Knockout Corner Bottom Left, and change the bottom right element to Crackly Knockout Corner Bottom Right.
5. Change the left edge elements to Crackly Knockout Edge Left. Similarly, change the right edge elements to Crackly Knockout Edge Right.
6. To add the green accents, duplicate the black layer, change the text color to green, and change the font to Crackly Shadows.
7. Remove unwanted shadows by replacing them with a space character.
The Crackly Knockout and Shadows fonts can create additional effects through layering.

1. This Knockout layer has the 15 top left elements set to Crackly Knockout Corner Top Left, the 12 top right elements set to Crackly Knockout Corner Top Right, the 12 bottom left elements set to Crackly Knockout Corner Bottom Left, and 15 bottom right elements set to Crackly Knockout Corner Bottom Right. All seven compositions on this spread use the same Knockout layer, with the following additions:

2. The same text block is set to Crackly Shadows and overlaid in black.

3. The same text block is set to Crackly Shadows 30 and overlaid in black.

4. The same text block is set to Crackly Lines 30 and overlaid in black.

5. The same text block is set to Crackly Lines 30 and overlaid in white. The knockout layer is set to black.

6. The same text block is set to Crackly Lines 30 and overlaid in white. The knockout layer is set to black, and a third text block with same text is set to Crackly Shadows and set to white.

7. The same text block is set to Crackly Lines 30 and overlaid in black. The knockout layer is set to black, and a third text block with same text is set to Crackly Shadows and set to green.
Examples of texture variations using the different Knockout fonts.

All seven examples use the same top layer, with the following Knockout versions in the background set to white:

1. Crackly Knockout Edge Top
2. Crackly Knockout Edge Left
3. Crackly Knockout Edge Bottom
4. Crackly Knockout Corner Top Left
5. Crackly Knockout Corner Top Right
6. Crackly Knockout Corner Bottom Left
7. Crackly Knockout Corner Bottom Right
Examples of texture variations using the different Knockout fonts together with the Shadows font.

All seven examples use the same top layer and Shadows layer, with the following Knockout variants in the background set to black:

1. Crackly Knockout Edge Top
2. Crackly Knockout Edge Left
3. Crackly Knockout Edge Bottom
4. Crackly Knockout Corner Top Left
5. Crackly Knockout Corner Top Right
6. Crackly Knockout Corner Bottom Left
7. Crackly Knockout Corner Bottom Right
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