So now, the question became how do I show people this. How does Betsy get to shine without being overshadowed by words that are being said. The project had become so much more than just designing letters to speak a voice. The characters, set at size 10 font would risk being lost. Yes the typeface has to be shown set in some word form, but there was something else that it needed. I wanted a situation in which the typeface could be seen for itself, and not as part of something else. Through this I came to the type grid. The type grid allowed the viewer to look at the anatomy of the type without the added pressure of reading something. It also provided all of the letters in one space, which enabled the viewer to follow the architecture throughout the face. The angled crossbars of the A, B, and H, which are not present in the E and F because it would have created an uncomfortable situation in the upper space.

While happy with this, the question then became what to do with the rest of the space that I was being given, a whole room. I wanted to do something that showed different things type could do, use it in more than just as a vehicle in which to write words. So I decided that I would use the space to look at type in three different ways: conventionally as something you write in; architecturally, which would be the grid; and as the pieces which made the art. In order to unite the rest of the room I decided that I would need some theme, or idea too ensure some cohesiveness to the project. My decision here was to chose a short story which would be set in the typeface. I chose Where the Wild Things Are and made the decision that for the remaining third part of the project I would create a life size forest out of the characters of the typeface.

The first challenge in space was that my original view of the room included it being painted. Since I was unable to do so the alternate solution that I found was to use stage gels to color the spotlights in the room. The resulting effect of this in the forest was really magical—the “branches” were hung from the ceiling which accomplished a number of things: first it blocked some of the lights adding to the ambiance; secondly it provided something for the light to work its way through which helped to diffuse it. I think that this really added to the effect of the forest because it actually recreated what would happen to light when it came through leaves. This actually became my favorite area of the room to be in. With an air mattress set up underneath the forest, it was a spot where you were truly transported to a different place. I feel this is a great accomplishment since it was reliant on so many things working together. Additionally in that area of the room I constructed and stuffed four feet tall letters which became the monsters from the forest. Which also gave these individual letters an opportunity to develop a further to grow and develop on their own.

The grid was also hugely successful. A class of Freshman came in briefly before my opening to talk with me about the process of creating a typeface and they immediately noticed many of the things I was hoping people would notice in the grid that they may not have if they were reading a body of type, such as the tail of the uppercase “Q” and the way the joint reflected the joint in the descender of the lowercase “g”.

Seeing the body of type set in Betsy was almost, anti-climatic. While there was a definite sense of accomplishment seeing the typeface in a functional way. Yet it was so much more satisfying to see the characters in the grid, standing for themselves. Speaking in their own voice, which was so distinctly not mine, or than of anyone else’s. Looking at the type grid one can truly see what a typeface really is.

So often type is something that gets lost in other people’s words, or a vessel in which meaning is communicated. Designers often forget, and non-designers often don’t know that it is something which we greatly take for granted. We accept readily that all of these beautiful shapes are here for us to use and tell stories with. We don’t often stop to think about what a typeface looks like without our interference. So in answer to my original thesis question: I think no. A readable typeface cannot be designed to represent a certain speaker because inevitably a typeface has to represent itself. For as with everything else in life, if a typeface is not strong enough to be magnificent on its own, it can never be magnificent in someone else’s voice.