
Edito by Véronique Vienne



Choosing paper is a creative act.

Staring at a blank piece of paper is like gazing into a crystal ball. The potential for magic is palpable. You can almost touch it. This series of notebooks were conceived to reveal the many ways paper can bring out the latent beauty of things, particularly in our digital age when the tactile dimension of visual communication is so sorely challenged.

But for designers today, is the choice of paper still a creative act? If so, how do they reconcile the pressure of electronic media with the feel-the-weight, test-the-texture, and see-the-

difference expertise necessary to select the best paper when circumstances demand it?

To what extent does the choice of paper contribute to the success of the communication of a message, an idea, or a concept?

To answer these questions, we decided to interview twelve top designers in twelve different countries and explore with them the most critical issues and concerns regarding the role of paper today. We picked graphic artists working for cultural institutions as well as brand experts and heads of advertising agencies.

Rather than present the result of our investigation as a book, we thought it would be more useful to create a series of little notebooks that would allow readers to write, draw or doodle to experience the feel of the various papers. We chose from the line of Arjowiggins Creative Papers distributed by Antalis, our generous sponsor who initiated this project.

Among the conclusions we can infer from talking with our twelve contributors, a couple stand out. First, the sense that paper delivers an emotional experience that digital devices do not provide. Second, information printed on paper is more memorable than information presented on a screen. Last but not least, our designers all agreed that the success of a project depends on the choice of paper as much as that of the typeface, the layout, and the printing technique. Paper is more than a means to an end, it is an integral part of the concept.

Today, even though ordinary printed matter is experiencing a setback, oddly enough, paper is at the forefront of a second digital revolution, one in which innovations in the field of sensory design are driving the research in electronic technology. We can't read the future in a blank sheet of paper, but we can be sure that it contains some of the answers we need as we move forward in the XXI century.

Thanks by Véronique Vienne

The twelve designers who graciously answered my questions did so because they believed that the topic was critical enough to merit their participation. Reinventing the role of paper is at the center of their practice. I am exceedingly grateful for the sort of insight they shared with me. They were candid in their remarks, and generous in their explanations.

Just as generous was our sponsor, Antalis, Europe's leading distributor of paper, packaging solutions and visual communication products for professionals. Special thanks to Xavier Juvet, Véronique Tripard, Isabelle Lombard and Laetitia de La Motte Rouge. While never interfering with my editorial direction, they facilitated the logistics and the production issues at every turn of the process. Without them, we could never have had this global conversation.

Thank you to the French advertising agency Bambuck & Associés who masterminded this project. There, I benefited from the support of Jérôme Duby, Emmanuelle Plaça, Oriane Gibarroux and Jean Louis Bambuck.

Special thanks go to my mentor, Milton Glaser, who accepted to participate and spoke up eloquently about the future of our profession.

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Hans Wolbers

“This is how I choose paper: as part of the initial concept.”



Hans Wolbers is a Dutch art director who studied applied arts and design at the University of Arts in Utrecht, The Netherlands. After graduating, he founded Lava Amsterdam, a studio that soon became one of Holland's leading design agencies known for its talent in creating and developing smart and trendy editorial publications. In 2002, he became a member of the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale). Today, as Lava's principal, Wolbers and his team focus

on creative strategy, editorial design, interactive design and dynamic identities. The agency has won numerous international awards and its work was exhibited in various countries. Wolbers regularly conducts workshops and lectures in Europe, Russia, Taiwan, China, Indonesia and Iran. In 2012 Lava expanded its creative activities with collaborative projects in Moscow, Istanbul and Seoul – and with the opening of a permanent office in Beijing.



The Lava office, inside an old grain elevator on the Amsterdam waterfront, is a cathedral full of light. But when you walk in, what attracts your attention at first is not the soaring space but rather the perspective at eye level. Every available surface, it seems, is covered with piles of paper. Heaps of paper. Reams of paper. Rolls of paper. The white sheets are stacked on long counters, with workstations squeezed in between. Around the place, on bulletin boards, paper charts are posted, covered with notes layered on top of each other. “The people who use the most paper in our company are the web designers,” explains Hans Wolbers, who founded Lava 25 years ago. “They need paper to think. It is so much faster than digital tools.”

Today, only a third of the work done at the agency ends up in print. It used to be a lot more, when editorial design was Lava's main focus. Now the creative teams include graphic, motion and interactive designers who handle branding and communication projects for a wide range of clients. “We do not specify paper as often as we did ten years ago, but when we do, we are particularly attentive to what our choice says about the project,” remarks Wolbers. “The personality of the paper must reflect the personality of the brand message.”

In the Netherlands, paper is serious business. For his etchings, Rembrandt would experiment with different papers (some local, some imported from Japan) in order to get drastically different tonal variations. By the end of the 18th century, Dutch paper was considered the finest in Europe. The techniques of fabrication were the most advanced, allowing for exceptionally beautiful results in printmaking. “But the best paper on earth is worth nothing if the information on it is meaningless,” observes Wolbers. “That's why I have a love-hate relationship with paper. It's tricky: you have to choose the right paper because what it says is part of the content.”

Véronique Vienne

VV: How do you know it's the “right” paper?

HW: The choice of paper starts with its “feel” but also its weight. If you are after the perception that what's printed on it is valuable, then weight is a good thing. The lighter the paper, the less respect readers will have for what they read. There are many clichés such as this one. However trite they may seem, you can't ignore them.

You have to think about the assumptions readers will make regarding the feel of paper. For example, even though uncoated paper might be a lot more expensive than coated paper, the perception is that it is *cheaper*. And you wouldn't want to print something about the environment on glossy paper – even if it happens to be more eco-friendly than some fancy matte paper – it would simply send the wrong message.

The choice of paper is not only part of the brand message, it also informs users on what to do afterwards, whether to keep or throw away the publication, the book, or the magazine they just read.

Printed matter is something most of us are reluctant to throw away. Information seen or read on a page is more memorable than the same information seen or read on a screen – so, naturally, the tendency is to keep it.

Granted, stuff you want to keep, think about, etc. is best printed on paper. Print media belongs to a much slower timeframe than its digital counterpart. Not only because it lasts longer, but also because it is slower to produce. But that's not the main issue. Let's assume that somewhere in South Korea – as we speak – someone is inventing a digital screen that looks and feels just like paper. But so what? What does it mean in terms of longevity? Will the information on it survive? Will it be more attractive, more interesting, or more memorable than the information printed on traditional paper?

What matters to me is how long the information will remain relevant, not whether it's available on paper, on a screen, or on some other miracle surface.

Are you talking about information as text? What about images? They look better on a bright and glossy surface, don't they?

The problem with printed images is not the way they look but the way they function. Because of the technology, there is no shortage of great-looking photographs these days, but what do they mean? Sure, what people want are visual stories – stories told in images. But let me ask you: why stare at pictures when you can watch small documentaries on your tablet? When I send photographers on assignment, I tell them to make short five-second films instead of portraits or pictures. If you want pictures, you can go to museums to gaze at paintings, drawings, etchings, watercolors and beautiful printed posters.

You don't think that pictures have a place in our culture anymore?

Truth be told, we don't really know anymore what visual communication really is. We've lost the ability to read images as symbols. In the past, people who couldn't read could nonetheless read signs. Illiterate people looked at visuals and got the message in a way we can't even comprehend today.

Comments like "This is really a beautiful picture" are meaningless, in my opinion. Personally, I don't care about beautiful pictures – I want to know what they are trying to say. I am a typical agency man. I am not an artist. I go for the concept that's right.

Unfortunately, too many digital designers are still thinking like print designers, with information delivered on a screen as a series of still images – almost like revolving posters on street display panels. I even know of some designers who design static posters and then post them on a screen as pdf's. It's ridiculous. On that same screen, they could as easily show moving images or at least post links to videos. This is something we still have to teach designers: stop translating print media into digital media, and instead think directly into moving images.

If only we could make printed images come to life!

This is exactly what I am working on these days. I have developed this new viewing device that allows you to look at layers of printed images under controlled RGB light. When you slowly change the balance between the red, the green and the blue light, different parts of the images come alive. It's spectacular. You get the impression that the picture is moving right in front of your eyes. What looks like a regular poster in daylight, when seen through my device becomes a living, breathing, animated image.

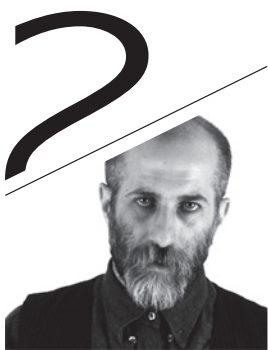
Is it analog or digital? I don't care.

What I care about is that my layered images be printed on the best paper possible, so that the whites are bright and the printed colors are as brilliant as possible. This is how I choose paper: as part of the initial concept. I love paper, but it has to serve a purpose that I can identify.

Would you say that paper is a language of its own? It's more than a mere surface, it's a form of expression?

Ask my web designers. For them paper is the language of thought, of research, of analysis. They appreciate the versatility of paper – its formats and its convenience. For book designers, it might be about texture, color and weight. For printers it might be the way paper reacts to various inks. For me, paper is a communication tool. Even when printed matter is not the final product, somewhere along the creative process, I know that paper will play a critical role.



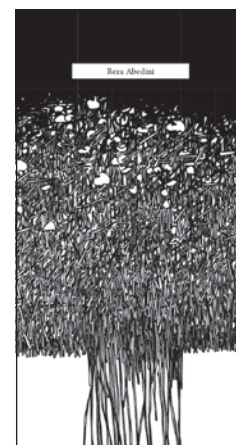


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Reza Abedini

“When an idea starts to form in my mind, its paper manifests itself at the same time.”

Reza Abedini was born in Tehran in 1967. His grandfather and uncle were both accomplished calligraphers and he learned the basics of the craft as a teenager. After getting an undergraduate diploma from the School of Fine Arts in Tehran, he continued his studies in painting and fine arts at the Art University of Tehran. Since establishing an independent practice in 1987, he has been working as a designer, teacher and researcher in the field of typography, graphic design and visual arts. Meanwhile, he has received many awards and accolades, among them the Netherlands' Prince Claus Award. He is a member of the Iranian Graphic Designers Society (IGDS) since 1997, and of the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) since 2001. He has been on the jury of several biennales throughout the world. Sharing his time between Lebanon and the Netherlands, he is today a professor of graphic design and visual culture at the American University of Beirut.



“When I get negative feedback about one of my posters from a Western designer, I feel that I must have done something right!” says Reza Abedini. Such criticism is a rare occurrence. Even though Abedini doesn't use the classic graphic design language prevalent in the Occident, the poetry of his work is universal and celebrated worldwide. Like a number of Japanese graphic designers such as Ikko Tanaka who has been a source of inspiration to him, Abedini has developed a way of integrating specific characteristics of his own culture into a very contemporary mode of expression.

He designs posters, book covers, and announcements to promote events in the Arab World but also in the Netherlands, France, Ireland, Greece, or England. His style can be described as “Persian” – it has strong calligraphic elements, of course, and the text, whether in Arabic or in roman typefaces, has a compact, woven, lacy quality. His colors are dense yet subdued, with a predominance of earth tones. But one of the most recognizable attributes of his work is the very special presence of the human figure. Reminiscent of the kind of formal portraits that were popular in Iran in the 19th century, the people he draws are graphic apparitions who fill the page with considerable aplomb.

The texture of paper is somehow always present in the work of Abedini, not visually, but as a force field beneath his drawings. It is as if the hand of the designer had been guided by some knowledge coming from the touch, smell, and sound stored inside the paper itself.

Véronique Vienne

Before I answer your questions I would like to say that the scariest, most exciting, and most challenging moment in the visual world for me is when I select a blank piece of paper and gaze at it, and for a while I'm not able to do anything...

VV: What role did paper play in the development of Arabic calligraphy?

RA: Paper has influenced the creation of many Iranian-Islamic scripts. An example is the Nastaliq script, that requires smooth and free hand movements and includes many circular forms. It would not be possible on rougher surfaces like stone or wood or even tiles. Later, these new traditions were returned to other uses of calligraphy, such as mosaic and ceramic, and go on to continually influence each other.

In your own practice, are you attentive to the quality, texture, color or weight of the paper on which your work is printed?

Let me answer from two different angles: from the point of view of a visual artist, and from that of a graphic designer. As an artist, ever since my first years studying in a fine arts high school (when I was 14), the type of paper, its texture, its weight, and even its edges were of great concern to me. Especially later when I developed an interest in printmaking, where, as we all know, paper is enormously important. Otherwise, my latest pieces are based on a variety of fine and/or handmade paper when I work on them with black ink and acrylic. Here, paper is not only a part of the aesthetic of the piece; it also has a technical significance. The paper must be able to withstand the ink, water, and other additives. As a graphic designer, I consider the type of paper, its color, its weight, and its texture, a main part of each project. I must explain that in many cases, the final product of a graphic design piece (e.g. a poster) is created by the synthesis of many elements; for example, a particular type of print, on a particular type of paper, cut in a particular way. Therefore, paper is a part of the idea of graphic design, not just the surface on which the design is printed.

Do you sketch on paper before translating a design in digital form?

Yes, almost always. Because I really enjoy drawing. When the paper under my hand is nice to the touch, I can reach a

design or concept in a much easier and smoother way, at least it feels like that. Therefore, I always have a variety of papers by me, which I use for making notes or sketching. I particularly like coarse, and craft papers.

What percentage of your work ends up printed on paper?

More than 90 percent of my final work is seen only on paper, whether it's drawing or graphic design pieces. In most cases, when an idea starts to form in my mind, its paper manifests itself at the same time.

How do you make sure that designs that look great when backlit on a screen look just as good once they are printed on paper?

I began work in graphic design at a time when computers and screens did not exist! Or at least, they were not used for design. So the fact that there is a difference between the vision and the final product is a familiar concept to me. It is true that sometimes images on a screen are more clear and eye-catching. But as we know, those images have no physicality. Considering this, I have more respect for a print or real drawing, their tangibility. We must remember that each of these images; digital and physical, engages a different part of us. Each of these can be beautiful, and they have their own use.

At the same time, I'm much more confident when my design starts on paper and ends on paper. Being able to touch the paper during the process of design and drawing has a huge positive impact on my soul. I am addicted to touching paper. What you can touch is part of the aesthetic of the piece. For example, imagine a series of colors from pastels that are printed on a textured paper. The sense of touch and the visual information both help to remove you from a more commercial atmosphere. Or imagine a series of colored grays that are printed on a coarse paper to give you the sense of concrete. This is a very complex combination of visual communication, functionality and aesthetic.

When you have to specify paper, do you rely on your own evaluation, or do you consult paper specialists?

On particular occasions I always get advice from print-making specialists. They sometimes have interesting recommendations for new materials and techniques but I always make the final decision myself. I take calculated risks when I believe it's worth it.

Is the archival quality of paper something that concerns you?

With printed material, time has a meaning that is not there with digital pieces. Materials can store and reflect time. This is why we are interested in scrutinizing paintings and watercolors from the 19th century for example, because we can also witness time in them.

Did you know that the sound that paper makes when you draw on it, or when you turn pages, triggers a pleasurable tingling feeling in the brain? Have you ever had an opportunity to take advantage of the auditory qualities of paper?

In my last project I recorded the sounds of drawing letters over and over. I then presented these with the drawn image of each letter. So the audience could look at and hear the sounds of the letter "B" for example. I have also completed a few projects in this field with my students. The entire process of beginning and finishing a project, like touching the paper, listening to the sounds of the drawing, the edges of the paper, are all like a religious ritual to me.

At what point of your design process is the choice of paper a creative act?

As I said, the idea and the materials for the idea tend to come to me at the same time. But it has happened that after the design progresses, I change my mind and think it would look better on a different paper. In recent years, a certain type of paper has become a part of my visual language, like an author who favors certain words.

Can you describe an instance when the choice of paper made a critical difference in one of your projects?

I believe it is possible to change the public opinion and introduce others to new experiences. I can think of a lot of examples, like printing the same work on two different types of paper and seeing how one got a lot more attention than the other; or printing white paint on grey card (which is not easy to do and always come out imperfect) instead of printing grey on white card and leaving some parts white (to simulate the same effect), which create a completely different atmosphere.

What are some of your favorite works on paper by graphic designers you admire?

I have a personal collection of many old posters and books. The type and smell of the paper, and even the printing ink affects me every time I refer back to them. This intimate relationship with printed matter is endlessly enjoyable.

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Michal Batory

“If you pick the wrong paper, there will be no magic.”



© MB

Born in Poland, Michal Batory studied graphic design at the National Art School of Lodz, then under the communist regime. A greater influence on his sensibility was the street, where clever, colorful posters provided a relief from the dreary routine of everyday life. In 1987, Batory received a prestigious grant from the Polish Ministry of Culture allowing him to print his posters using the silkscreen technique. A year later, he moved to Paris in search of work opportunities. He never went back to Poland but instead

settled in the French capital where he made a name for himself among local graphic designers. From 2001 to 2008, he was in charge of communication for the Théâtre National de Chaillot, for which he created a series of legendary posters. All along, even though he lived in France, he was working for publishers and cultural institutions in Poland, and his work was featured in poster shows worldwide.



Michal Batory is a Polish artist who crafts strange talismans: a smartphone shaped like a Neolithic arrowhead, a yellow balloon sporting an aviator’s cap, a loaded gun made of rolled film strips. His hybrid metaphors incorporate crowns, wings, skulls, lips, flowers, footprints, corsets, and bloody fingers. Photographed against brightly colored backgrounds and printed on posters, they become jaw-dropping visual concepts – giant surrealist artifacts more real than the real thing.

Making this happen is not unlike pulling a rabbit out of a hat. The trick here is the choice of the paper on which the poster is printed. “If you pick the wrong paper you can never get the colors you want,” says Batory. “Never. However hard you try, your oranges will be brownish and your greens will be khaki-dirty. There will be no magic. No wonder. Nothing.”

Batory’s home in Paris, in a back alley, is part workshop, part photo studio, part design agency, part garage, part atelier, part greenhouse. Large cheerful posters contrast with this subdued “La Bohème” décor. The intensity of the cadmium yellows, pure magentas or peacock blues is reminiscent of the Polish posters designed by the likes of Jan Lenica or Roman Cieslewicz. In this quiet northeastern corner of Paris, you could be in Warsaw, in an artist’s loft in the edgy Praga district. These days, most of Batory’s commissions come from clients in Poland. Famous in France for his campaign for the Chaillot theater and for a number of prestigious festivals, Batory is also a major figure on the Polish graphic design scene.

Véronique Vienne

VV: Poland is known for its conceptual posters. Can you explain why?

MB: The modern poster was invented in Poland in the 1950s, under communist rule, as a reaction to censorship. People used to laugh at the stupidity of the censors who never got the irony, or the political message, hidden in these images. Making fun of censors was almost a national sport. That’s why my Polish posters are more provocative than those designed for a less politicized French audience. In Poland, the public is used to shocking images showing bones, guts, blood, gore, nudity, and severed body parts!

You sometimes use photoshop, but your 3-D collages never look computer-generated. What is your secret?

I create surrealist objects using ordinary, everyday things. I start with sketches on paper to figure out the concept, and only then do I begin to carve, sculpt, and assemble the hybrid forms I have in mind. Sometimes I do not have to retouch the images at all. My posters are compelling because I build the objects to the right scale, so the perspective, the lighting and the textures are completely naturalistic. The quality comes from there. And from the way the colors look once they are printed on the paper I choose.

Can you explain why the paper makes such a difference?

Uncoated paper will absorb the ink, spread it, plug it – and the color definition can be less vibrant. So, in theory, coated paper is better to reproduce photographs. But you have to select the right kind of coating. How thick? How water resistant? What is the best finish: matte, semi-gloss, or high-gloss? The final result is often a question of judgment: Which part of the image should you privilege, the light areas or the shadows? How subtle should the gray scale be? How black do you want the black to be?

Look at the difference between these two reproductions of the same poster in two different books. In one book, on coated stock, the image is bright, cheerful – but a little flat. In the other book, printed on a thicker stock of a higher quality – a beautiful uncoated offset paper – the image is richer, fuller, with more detail. It has a lot more impact.

You design posters but also book covers. Are the rules different?

Yes they are. The coated versus uncoated rules are not always correct when it comes to books. Coated paper is usually whiter, so it's better? Yes and no. Sometimes, for books, I prefer a more yellow paper – and I compensate for it at the color separation stage. You have to be ready to challenge the conventional wisdom to obtain what you want. You also have to choose the paper depending on the viewing conditions of the images, whether it's indoors or outdoors, on the cover of a book, on a postcard, or inside a catalogue. My posters have been reproduced in so many different situations, I am aware of how different the results can be, depending on the nature of the surface on which they are printed.

How did you learn to choose the right paper?

Choosing paper requires the kind of savoir-faire and experience that few designers have today. Most art directors do not take the time to go speak with printers or paper representatives, to pick their brains or ask them for advice. And they might never understand why a result is disappointing. They'll think it's the fault of the photographer, or the printer, or they might not even be aware that there is a problem.

Nowadays, we just glance at images on a screen – we no longer know how to contemplate images on paper. Would you agree that printed pictures are more enjoyable because we don't rush so much when looking at them?

We do rush! The problem with posters displayed in the street is that, more and more, they are on rotation. They remain stationary only for five seconds. They are really there for people on the move, for people in cars – for drivers more than for pedestrians.

Most people, whether driving or walking, can't decipher more than 50 or 30 signs in such a short time. The forms I create must be first and foremost understandable in the street, in a hurry. My images can be "decoded" by ordinary people. For me the most important thing is the message. I am an "affichiste" which means that I am more interested in the concept than the form.

Eventually my posters are reproduced on line or in books. Only then can you begin to appreciate the work I put into it. However, even though they are beautiful – their vivid colors are part of their appeal – beauty is not their primary function.



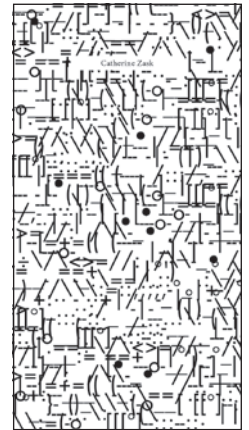


Catherine Zask

“The pleasurable sensation that you experience when handling paper becomes associated with the message printed on it.”

Graphic artist, poster designer, writer – Catherine Zask is as multifaceted as the building blocks of her visual language. A graduate from the Paris ESAG in 1984, she established her independent practice in 1985. She works with institutions and private companies, creating their visual identity and designing various aspects of their promotional material for which she combines writing, typography, drawing, video

and photography. Among her clients are L’Hippodrome, the National Theatre of Douai; the French Ministry of Culture; the University Paris Diderot; the Prix Emile Hermès; and La Scam, the Civil Society of Multi-media Artists. In 1993-94, during her residency at the French Academy of Rome (Villa Medici), she created *Alfabetempo*, an experimental notation system based on decomposing the beats of letter strokes. This work continued the research she had begun ten years earlier on letter, tracing and sign: *Alcibiades*, *Doodles (Gribouillis)*, *Radiographies de pensées*, *Sismozask*, *Cousu-Zask*, the *Iris Project*, or *Happy Dots*. She teaches and lectures in art schools in France and abroad. She has had many solo exhibitions and has won several awards, including the Grand Prix at the 20th International Biennial of Graphic Design in Brno, in 2002. In 2010, she received a prestigious distinction from the French Ministry of Culture, the Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et Lettres medal. She is a member of the AGI, the Alliance Graphique Internationale.



Catherine Zask’s spacious Paris studio looks more like a gallery than a workspace. When you enter, the first thing you see is her black and white graphic work displayed on white walls. Take a few steps forward to have a closer look and you bump into long tables on which artifacts are arranged in neat rows: multiple white cards imprinted with iterations of a same spiky motif, pieces of bark buffed and polished, or pens and pencils lined up like so many brush strokes. Hanging from a track in a corner of the studio are her famous posters. From the corner of your eye you can identify her *Macbeth*, a monumental black and gold masterpiece for the Douai theater, and just behind the striking yellow presence of one of her Scam “manifestos.”

Catherine Zask’s personal and professional work is a seamless construct. Other designers make a point of separating their artistic from their commercial work, to emphasize the fact that they are first and foremost competent problem solvers, but not Zask. Few people are as knowledgeable as she is when it comes to typography, design and print production, yet she never flaunts her competence and expertise. Clients come to her for her distinctive typographic approach characterized by an economy of means, rigorous compositions, and handsome letter-forms orchestrated with consummate panache.

A passionate collector of everything made of cellulose fibers, she treats every scrap of paper she finds as if it were special. She also writes about her love affair with wood pulp. In a recent collection of her remarks on the topic, published under the title *Casual Drawings*, she says that part of her creative process involves manipulating and appraising pieces of paper until one of them whispers to her: “Take me!” Only then can she begin to draw and explore the contours of her conceptual thinking.

Véronique Vienne

VV: Why is the texture of paper so important in your work?

CZ: My job is to create documents that people not only want to read but also want to keep. To that effect, I try to combine sight and touch. Both senses are necessary, in my opinion.

Imagine, for instance, an invitation printed on paper that is coated on one side and uncoated on the other. On the coated side, the colors are fresh and vibrant, while on the uncoated side they are matte and velvety. Your fingers can tell that the two sides are not the same. There is a difference between recto and verso. There is a front and a back. It’s palpable. Hands have an intelligence of their own. I try to make the most of their ability.

Granted, it’s a small difference. But the subtle pleasurable sensation that you experience when handling two-sided paper becomes associated with the message printed on it. The slight tingle at your fingertips eases your nerves and uplifts your mood. In contrast, when you get an invitation that is printed on ordinary paper covered on both side with the same boring acrylic varnish, you are more likely to just glance at it before tossing it into the wastebasket.

How did you learn to evaluate paper?

I collect all sorts of papers. You could say that I am a scavenger at heart. I am always salvaging and reclaiming old envelopes, wrapping paper, scraps from discarded notebooks, blotters, industrial papers, cigarette paper, pieces of cardboard, you name it. I also get paper samples from professionals in the packing and moving business, from bookbinders, from electricians, from building contractors, or from people in the garment industry: I find stuff like paper used to pleat fabrics, or cardboard to insulate wires.

I experiment by printing and drawing on these found treasures. I test different printing techniques on various quirky surfaces. As much as possible, when I am working on a specific project, I get on the phone and pick the brains of printers, paper representatives, and distributors of special papers.

At what point of the creative process do you select the paper?

Early in the process I let my mind wander. I jot down ideas. I experiment on the side with various papers. Only later do I call the paper representatives with whom I have a relationship and describe to them what I have in mind. Maybe I am looking for a very thin paper that's shiny on one side and matte on the other? We talk. They make some suggestions. They help me think it through.

What are some of your favorite papers?

I do not have a favorite paper – the ultimate choice depends on the design, the client's personality, and the message. However, I know what I don't like. It breaks my heart, for instance, when I see a beautiful offset paper ruined with acrylic varnish recto verso.

Why would anyone apply acrylic on uncoated paper?

Acrylic varnishes, whether matte or shiny, protect the printed surface from smears, stains or dust. Applying it safeguards the final result against smudges. It's considered more economical in terms of production because the job always comes out looking pristine – even though the specific varnish eradicates the tactile dimension of the paper. The end product doesn't even look like paper anymore!

So, how do you preserve and enhance the tactile quality of paper?

My way of working is to match a specific paper with a distinctive printing technique. Once, I tried hot foil printing on blotting paper. Another time I might want to experiment with matte printing on flocked paper.

One of the looks I like most is a solid luscious color printed on uncoated paper. But it's quite a feat, technically. To get the best result, a printer sometimes has to try every trick in the book, including coating his rollers with thick layers of ink. It is particularly difficult with black ink. Black surfaces are known to smear. I don't know many printers today who can pull this off.

I had assumed that advances in printing technologies gave designers more creative options.

In theory, yes. But presses have become so sophisticated – and so expensive – they are not profitable unless running at high speed, and preferably with the four-color process. As a result, printers today are weary of trying anything that might slow them down, such as special requests for customized mixture of colors.

Sadly, technology has eliminated risk-taking. Everything has to run smoothly, since all the steps of the printing process are now interconnected. From the client's carefully worded brief to the tightly scheduled delivery date, there is a long chain of precise operations that are contingent on each other. If one thing goes wrong, the entire project will flounder. Fumbles have to be eliminated.

So, how do you remain creative?

Sometimes being creative feels like trying to plant flowers in gravel. But I don't give up. I keep my relationship with paper very much alive thanks to my personal work. I fill notebooks with drawings, sketches, doodles, scribbles, and ink smudges. At the same time I attract clients who know that I can propose unusual design solutions. I have a reputation for experimenting, and for some projects this approach makes absolute sense.

That said, what is the place of digital technology in your work?

I love paper, but I love computers as well. They have liberated us from the tedious obligation of doing what we used to call "mechanicals" or "paste-ups" – the complex, camera-ready layouts assembled by hand with wax or glue. Today, I can begin my creative investigation on paper, but I am just as likely to sit in front of my computer and start exploring forms right there, directly on the screen.

I am constantly tweaking my digital tools – hardware, software, applications, or anything that allows me to take pictures, create animations, or add sound to images. Loving paper as I do is not an obstacle to enjoying the convenience and pleasures of being electronically connected.



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Elaine Ramos

“The paper will determine the flexibility of a book – it’s a critical choice.”

Elaine Ramos, known in Brazil but also on the international design scene for her flawless graphic work, graduated from the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo in 1999. A graphic designer as well, she became, in 2004, the art director at Cosac Naify, the main publishing house in Brazil dedicated to visual arts. There, she is not only responsible for the design of more than a hundred books, she also coordinates all the releases of

titles about design, many of them translations into Portuguese of classic texts, such as Philip Meggs’ *A History of Graphic Design*. Concurrently, she is developing original books, including a comprehensive history of Brazilian graphic design, *Linha do tempo do design gráfico no Brasil*. For it, she has assembled more than 1600 images, evidence of two centuries of Brazilian creativity. She is a member of the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) since 2012.



In bookstores in Rio, Salvador, Brasilia, or Sao Paulo, the books designed by Elaine Ramos and her team stand out. Something about them entices the eye but also the hand. It’s not just their colorful typographical excellence – that’s not so unusual in Brazil where graphic design is practiced by very talented professionals – it is another quality, much more difficult to identify. “My approach is always structural,” says Ramos. An established architect, she designs from the inside out rather than from the outside in. In other words, she begins with the content. With the feel of the book as you open it. With the reading experience as you turn the pages. And with the paper on which text and images are printed.

A Modernist at heart, Ramos is also heiress to a Portuguese tradition that goes back centuries. In the past, in Portugal but also in Brazil, inexpensively printed books were sold in outdoor stalls, “on a string,” hanging like laundry on a clothes-line. The equivalent of “pulp fiction,” these humble publications belonged to a literary genre accessible to all, known as *Literatura del Cordel*. Illustrated with beautiful woodcuts, the popular booklets were often written by local poets who promoted their production by singing or reading aloud to large crowds in open-air markets. Ramos, unwittingly perhaps, keeps alive this vibrant heritage with affordable books that incorporate a poetic dimension. Her creations often feature playful flaps, unexpected folds, elegant inserts, and creative paper variations.

Design para um mundo complexo, (*Design for a Complex World*), by Rafael Cardoso, is an example of how she turns paper into an interactive feature. The book is wrapped in a thick folded poster that serves as an external jacket. When you open it up, it reveals a bright blue, glossy soft cover. Also playful is *Zazie No Metrô*, (*Zazie in the Metro*), by Raymond Queneau. Printed on translucent bible paper, it looks at first glance like a pile of bundled pages. It is illustrated with French period posters, printed in the back of the pages, ghostly images providing a mysterious visual buzz. Another handsome specimen is *Conversas com Paul Rand*, (*Conversation with Paul Rand*), by Michael Kroeger, whose cover is a striking green and purple typographical composition. Inside are thick colorful pages, bristling like the quills of a porcupine.

Never showy, produced with a minimal amount of expenses, the books Elaine Ramos designs are artful collectibles, ordinary yet precious. Brazilian readers are lucky people, indeed.

Véronique Vienne

VV: Would you say that you are a true Modernist – not just someone working in that “style”?

ER: Being an architect certainly has a strong connection with the way I design. Having a “style” is never the issue for me. I try to face each new project as a new challenge – my goal always being to translate a specific content into a three-dimensional object that communicates with its audience.

Your designs have no “style,” but they have a lot of personality!

No “style” doesn’t mean that my designs have no soul, or that they are neutral. I try to make my work discreet enough not to eclipse the content, but interesting enough to make a difference. Each of my books belongs to a specific edition, with a specific personality and must stand out as such. Finding the balance is not easy. On one hand I am influenced by Modernist ethics, on the other I don’t believe in neutrality.

Do you use computers to create the visuals in your books?

I do all my work on a computer. I think through the computer, it is the tool I am most familiar with. I’m terrible with manual skills, my approach is much too conceptual. One important input to my designs is discussing with the design team, the editors and the authors. I come up with better ideas when I am talking than when I am drawing!

You design on a screen, yet the typography of your books doesn't feel computer-generated.

Can you explain why?

Maybe because, for me, typography is never an end in itself. My choice of typeface, and what I do with it, is always a means to communicating an idea, or a content.

It's the same with paper. I think of the texture of the paper as an essential piece of information to share a message, an idea, a concept or an impression with readers. Printed matter in general is dependent on the paper on which it is printed. When it comes to books, this choice is even more complex and absolutely fundamental. In addition to the tactile quality of each page, the paper choice is strongly connected to the weight, to the volume and, most importantly, to the flexibility of a book.

The flexibility?

The pliability of paper is very important. But it is never an isolated factor. When we talk about books, many elements must be orchestrated. The flexibility depends also on the format, on the binding, on the number of pages, etc. Flexibility is connected to the weight of the paper, and the weight of the paper is connected to its transparency. The transparency is, in turn, connected to the layout and the content of the book. For example, *Zazie no metrô* is printed on bible paper – even the cover. It is part of the initial concept, the design takes advantage of the paper's flexibility as well as its transparency. I wanted the book to be elusive, to evoke the dreamlike quality of the narration. The cover is as flimsy as the book itself.

At what point do you design the cover of a book?

Usually the cover is the last element I would design in a book. I proceed from the inside out. The ideal cover is a synthesis of everything that's inside, that you cannot see. It is a logical continuation of the internal design and, at the same time, it should draw the attention of people who browse in the over-stimulating context of a bookstore.

A good cover captures the essence of the book. It just sits there, quietly, patiently – but its visual appeal is the result of a series of very careful and deliberate design decisions.

In the introduction to your book, Steven Heller writes “I had no idea Brazil had such a long design legacy or was as stylistically rich and conceptually astute.” In your opinion, what is the most singular quality of Brazilian graphic design?

It is always so difficult to answer that question. Sure, the European and North American influences are visible at first glance, but it is more complicated than that. Brazilian design has an identity of its own, with Alexander Wollner its most acclaimed pioneer. He had studied at the Ulm School of Design in the 1950s before coming back to Brazil where he promoted the sobriety and simplicity of lines of the Concrete style initiated by Max Bill. Later, in the 1960s, the modern, geometric, minimalist, functional axis based on the Bauhaus philosophy coexisted with popular art, and with the pop influences of the “Tropicália” movement, as incarnated by the great Brazilian graphic designer Rogerio Duarte.





Leonardo Sonnoli

“It’s easier to feel that you can own a message when it is printed on paper.”

Leonardo Sonnoli was born in Trieste in 1962. Partner of the Tassinari/Vetta studio with offices in Trieste and Rimini, he deals mainly with the visual identity of public institutions and private companies. He has worked for, among others, the Venice Biennale, the Château de Versailles, the Centre Pompidou, the Palazzo Grassi-François Pinault Foundation, the Mart in Rovereto, the Giulio Iacchetti Studio, the

Superintendence for Archaeological Heritage of Rome, the New York

Times, the SNCF (French railways), Artissima, International Fair of Contemporary Art, Turin and the furniture company Zanotta. He has taught at the RISD – Rhode Island School of Design (USA) – and at the IUAV in Venice; he currently teaches at the ISIA in Urbino and holds regular workshops and lectures on his activity in Italy and abroad. Since 2000, he is a member of the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale). His designs are kept in numerous international public collections and he has received prestigious awards, including the Rodchenko Prize 2008, the silver medal at the Triennial in Toyama (Japan), the first prize at the Biennial of Hangzhou (China), the Merit Award of the Art Directors Club New York (USA) and, in 2011, the Compasso d’Oro (Golden Compass) Prize. He collaborates with the daily business newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore (The Sun). He has been living in Rimini with his family for twenty years.



The concept of “meta-design” was probably invented to describe the work of Leonardo Sonnoli. His design solutions are not only conceptual, they are an abstraction of a concept. Practically, it means that he goes beyond the obvious to express a point of view on the work itself. In other words, when you look at a poster or a publication by Leonardo Sonnoli, you feel slightly more intelligent than you did a minute ago. It’s a great feeling!

Sonnoli turns printed matter into an interactive medium with still images that always contain an element of surprise: unexpected letterforms, an unusual graphic treatment, or a startling sense of scale. The surface of the paper on which his work is printed becomes a dynamic environment for the message. “When you communicate on paper, you give readers something to think about,” he explains.

His designs often feature abstract typographical forms that might look difficult to decipher at first glance but turn out to be completely legible after all. The way he spells his name on his website, for instance, with the consonants on top (Lnrđ Snnl) and the vowels below (eoao ooi) suggests the rhythm of an accentuated Italian pronunciation. For him, words are alive: from his oversized pixelized scribbles for a series of posters he did recently for the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, to his playful kaleidoscopic typography for Artissima, a contemporary art fair in Torino.

Sonnoli is partial to black typography, using colors sparingly, and only in pastels for his backgrounds. The inky quality of his letterforms is so remarkable (he often prints black on top of black), he should be credited for putting Graphite, a form of carbon that’s a cousin of diamond, back into Graphic Design.

Véronique Vienne

VV: You use paper as if it were white marble: your typography looks almost “carved” rather than merely printed. Are you influenced by Roman stone engravings?

LS: I am Italian, sure, and I live in Rimini, a few steps from a monument with handsome Roman inscriptions. But there is more to my background than just Roman influences. In Rimini there is a library with a huge collection of printed books from the 16th century – so you could say that Renaissance typography is yet another influence. But in reality, it is the 20th century avant-gardes that have had the greatest impact on my work. It’s all because I was born in Trieste, a city on the Adriatic Sea, near Slovenia, in a region where Latin, Slavic and Germanic cultures collided. At some point, Trieste was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was then an artistic center on a par with Vienna, Prague and Budapest. There, a great number of avant-garde graphic art movements flourished, from the Vienna Secession to the Futurists.

You have been able to translate all these typographic currents into a very coherent personal style. How do you do it?

Nothing I do is decorative or gratuitous. I always focus on the message. Once, I was asked to design a poster for an international poster show in China, but there was no central theme, no main topic. So I decided to take this absence of idea as my idea, and I designed a typographic poster that highlighted this lack of content. I punched out the word “emptypeness” across the width of a sheet of white paper, as a critical gesture to mock the futility of trying to say something when you have nothing to say.

You compressed “empty” and “type” and added the suffix “ness” to denote a condition that you deplore – design with no real message?

Yes, the poster was bare, empty, meaningless, except for a short text that explained my intention.

In general, there is very little color in your work. Is it because you feel that colors take away from the purity of the typography?

I figured that if something works in black & white it usually means that it works. And since I use mostly letters in my designs, it doesn't bother me: it's like writing with ink on paper. However, in Italy, black is considered a “sad” color, so, to defend this choice, I have many animated discussions with my “sponsors” or “commissioners” (sorry, I don't like the work “client” to describe the people who come to me for my design expertise and services).

You are a minimalist with colors, but, in contrast, you experiment with a lot of different printing techniques...

As long as they are not simply decorative, but serve a function, I will consider using all sorts of coatings, varnishes, metallic inks, cutouts, etc. I always look for the most economical way to highlight a few key elements on a page without creating additional distractions. In fact, well-chosen finishing touches can make the overall composition look less fussy.

And what about the paper itself? Do you have a favorite one?

I prefer paper that absorbs light to paper that reflects it. In other words, I prefer uncoated papers or very opaque coated papers. But obviously the choice depends on the function of the final product. Some books require photographic coated paper, but often I use opaque uncoated paper – then apply a gloss varnish only on the photos. This prevents glare on the rest of the page: shiny surfaces enhance photographs but make reading the text less comfortable. In fact, when there is a lot of text, I specify a natural paper, something not too white, to make sure that reading is not tiring to the eye.

Do you sometimes design for the screen?

Like everyone today, I use digital technology, but for me the computer is a visualizing tool, not an end to itself. Often, I do computer animations to explore all the dimensions of the letterforms I design. They become more interesting when viewed from some unusual angles. But when I am finished playing, I end up selecting only a couple of screen captures of the moving images.

I believe that when you are trying to communicate actual content, paper is better. If you are reading something, it's easier to feel that you own a message on paper than a message on a screen, where it is public property.

But posters are designed to be seen in a public space!

Yes, you cannot generalize. Not all objects made of paper are the same. There are specific sets of rules that apply to one type of paper product but would be totally inappropriate for others.

On posters, for instance, the information needs to be laid out as a single “map” with a strict visual hierarchy that emphasizes some parts of the message while minimizing others. With books, the mapping of information obeys totally different rules: the hierarchy is managed not in a single layout, but as a sequence of pages. With books, you deal with two, three and even four dimensions – with the time you take to turn the pages a critical element.

Another important difference between posters and books is the distance from which you view them. Posters must be seen from far away, so they must “scream” at you – while books are intimate objects that are graphically a lot less loud.

What sort of books do you like?

Some of my favorite books are not just visual, they are melodic – they produce sounds. An example is Keith Godard's famous “Sounds” book, made with different paper stocks, some thin, some brittle, and some very dense. As you turn the pages, the book produces a series of distinctive and intriguing noises. But it is not always possible to use paper for its auditory qualities! The thinnest papers are usually the noisiest, but they are fragile or do not absorb ink evenly. I have to give priority to readability of text and images, so I seldom specify translucent or lightweight stocks, even though they are irresistible to the touch... and the ear.

Most people only know the screen version of your posters. Does it bother you?

In my opinion, the digital and the analog version are both valid experiences. Paper and screen are two different means of communication. They need not be in competition. However, to make sure that a poster looks as good in reality as it does on your LCD monitor, you must do some printed tests. There is a reason why you still do proofs on the same paper on which you will print the final project. Better yet to choose the paper before you start designing, and adjust the brightness of the screen to the paper, not the other way around.

But beware: for a great result, the quality of the paper is almost always as important as the quality of the design.

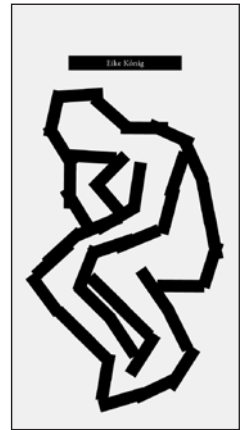


Eike König

“Deciding on a paper is as important as choosing a typeface or a color.”

Eike König was the art director of Logic record label before opening his design agency in 1994 in Frankfurt, Germany, under the name of EIKES GRAFISCHER HORT (“Eike’s Graphic Kindergarten”), which he conceived first and foremost as a creative playground. HORT soon became a household name in the music industry, designing record sleeves for different independent and major labels. Today it is a Berlin based studio specializing in developing visual languages

for brands large and small. Disney, Nike and Microsoft are among the many acclaimed clients. Hort also interacts with cultural institutions, among them the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation for which they designed a new identity. Eike has led numerous creative workshops locally and internationally and teaches graphic design and illustration two days a week at the Offenbach University of Arts, Germany.



At Hort, Eike König’s Berlin office, there are as many bikes as computers. At least a dozen bicycles are parked along the bookshelves or leaning against tables and desks. In the back, there is a large workshop – but, oddly enough for an agency that caters to prestigious clients, there is no conference room. The studio is a busy place: everywhere people are doing things. Some are building models or making collages. Others are sketching on paper, while others still are drawing on electronic tablets. “This is an institution devoted to making ideas come to life,” says König. Designers, interns, guests, visiting students, and clients are mingling in an atmosphere of studious camaraderie. “We are all team players here,” he adds. “We share the same ideal, even though every single one of us has a strong personality.”

König’s design philosophy is based on experimentation. His own approach is more analog than digital: his relationship with design is physical. He thinks best when he is immersed in action. “My favorite form of meditation is to go into the print shop and mess around with paper and ink,” he says. “For me, printing a poster by hand is the equivalent of doing yoga.” About two-thirds of HORT’s design solutions involve paper one way or another – paper as a surface, as a medium, as a source of inspiration, or as a visual metaphor.

HORT’s main clients are international brands that are looking for breakthrough communication strategies. They trust König’s unconventional approach to problem solving and are willing to take risks along with him. Only one thing is sure: HORT’s answers to their problem – posters, videos, books, brochures, or interactive installations – will be unexpected, clever, and contemporary. “I tell my designers: Surprise me!” says König. “It’s my motivation for going to work every morning. I can’t wait to see what new ideas we are going to think up.”

Véronique Vienne

VV: Is paper still the source of surprising design solutions today?

EK: While working in front of computers fosters isolation, working with paper invites experimentation, participation and socialization. To begin with, when you sketch your ideas on paper, or when you build a model or a prototype using paper or cardboard, people always stop by to look at what you are doing. They give you advice, make comments, ask questions – and before you know it, new ideas are popping up right and left.

Work involving paper requires many tryouts to achieve the desired result – that’s a good thing. Paper is not easy to control but that’s what makes it exciting. Accidents can look very good. You have to accept them as part of the creative process.

Now, with my team at HORT, we have a lot of discussions as to what paper we are going to use for a given project. We talk about the fact that deciding on a paper is the same kind of decision as choosing a typeface or a color. Needless to say, younger people have a different connection to paper than I do. While for me paper is part of the action, for them it is part of a later decision. However, I encourage everyone in my studio to be aware of the importance of paper – and how we can integrate it not only in our design process but also in our design solutions.

Even so, at some point of the process, computers take over, don’t they?

Computers are great tools, but there is more to designing than sitting down, adjusting your earphones, and pushing a mouse around. At some point, you need to bring the material world back into the process. What bothers me most about computers is the fact that there is no limit to what you can do with them. There is no boundary to your work either. The physical “moment” is missing. With work on paper, I can walk away from it, turn around, and see the whole scope of it.

Your design solutions have a three-dimensional quality, even when they are simply printed. Is it premeditated?

I come from the collage culture: it's all about assembling, connecting, glueing, and cutting different textures, most of them imported from old frames of reference into new ones. And while I do that, I come up with a lot of new ideas. People in the office do the same: they use collages to discover new things, whether by accident or by deliberate research. Sometimes I do digital collages, tinkering with scanned files of recycled images.

How did you learn to integrate paper in your work?

The first thing I had to learn in order to become a designer was to coordinate my brain with my hand, and my hand with paper. Soon, the only way I could think and visualize my thoughts was with a piece of paper in front of me. I was lucky, my first job was art director for a music label, designing record sleeves – and record sleeves are something you hold in your hand while listening to music.

Wow, I never thought of it this way. Are you saying that the tactile contact with paper was associated with the listening pleasure?

Yes it was. At that time I was able to choose the paper for the inside as well as the outside of the sleeves. I could do spot varnishes. I could choose the printing technique. I could do cutouts and embossing. And all along, I knew that what I was designing would end up in someone's hand. That tangible, handmade sense of touch was very important back then, and is still very present in my work today.

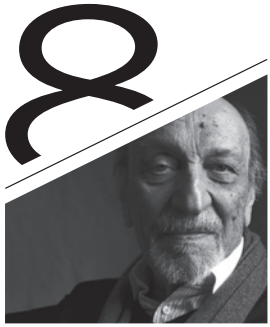
But paper is not just texture. For me it's also about temperature: the coolness of the paper, or its warmth, whether to the touch or to the eye.

Weight is critical too. For the visual identity of Jazzanova, the Berlin "nu-jazz" music group, we did a 3-D collage logo using a special paper that comes in different weights. The color range of that particular paper helped us define the graphic language of Jazzanova. We printed all their collateral material on that same paper. That's what I really like. Paper! This is the world I work in.

I noticed, on the wall in your office, a poster that reads I LIKE IT. WHAT IS IT?* Does it relate to your philosophy?

It does. It's part of HORT's playground mentality. I sometimes do workshops with kids. Unlike most designers, who think too much, kids start working instantly, the minute they sit down. They are much more spontaneous and come up with genuine surprises. With my team, we talk a lot about that. Sometimes I wish we could all get rid of our education. A lot of good ideas would arise if we could access the creative source within ourselves directly, like children do. HORT is about work and play, with the emphasis on play.

*original print by Anthony Burrill.



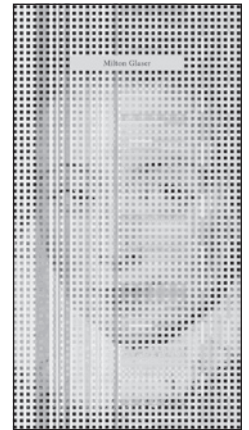
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Milton Glaser

“When it comes to paper, people associate authenticity with tactility.”

Milton Glaser is probably the most famous graphic designer in the United States, well known for his I♥NY logo and his 1967 Bob Dylan poster. The young Glaser had studied with the painter Giorgio Morandi in Bologna. Back in the United States in 1954, he founded the Push Pin Studio with Seymour Chwast. In 1968, he created the New York Magazine with Clay Felker. In 1974, he opened his own agency, Milton Glaser, Inc., and since has produced spectacular

designs, illustrations, publications, and posters. He has had the distinction of one-man-shows at the Museum of Modern Art and the Georges Pompidou Center. He is a member of the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) since 1975. In 2009, he was the first graphic designer to receive the National Medal of the Arts award. Today, he is considered one of the most articulate spokesmen for the ethical practice of design.



Milton Glaser is always the tallest person in the room. Even when he sits down to talk to you, he looks like a giant. He dominates the situation with his size but also with his lofty ideas. A conversation with him about his work is likely to turn into a colloquy about the Nature of Reality or the State of the World. Listening to him, one gets the feeling that graphic design is a branch of philosophy.

Even though ninety percent of his work ends up in flatland – printed on paper – his design solutions are the result of a process of inquiry that explores a number of other dimensions – the historical, social, political, ethical, and cultural realms. “But there are no absolutes,” he says. “The realization that there is no definitive answer to anything inspires me to create new forms.”

These days, the new forms Milton Glaser creates include the re-branding of the Kingdom of Bhutan – yes, Bhutan, the country in the Himalayas; posters for the final season of the television series Madmen; a book titled The Design of Dissent: Socially and Politically Driven Graphics; new packaging for the popular Brooklyn Brewery company; and a controversial campaign to rebrand the climate movement.

A philosopher in disguise, Milton Glaser is not a hermit. At the ripe age of 86, political engagement is still one of his priorities.

Véronique Vienne

VV: Printed matter is your life and your work, yet, over the phone, you told me that you had misgivings about the role of paper in the digital age. Can you explain?

MG: Yes, I have an axe to grind when it comes to paper, or, more specifically, when it comes to traditional books. We live in a time in history when we have to stop printing books that sit on shelves without being read. At best, books are read once and then put away, never to be seen again. In every house I know, including my own, there are thousands of books, rows of them, piles of them, simply occupying space.

Yet people love their books!

I am not saying that we have to burn books! What I am advocating is that we stop manufacturing most of them. In our day and age, we have other means to share knowledge with each other. We can do that electronically.

No, what I am saying is that books should be reinvented.

Books today must be works of art. They have to propose instant experiences, like paintings. You can look at the same painting all your life and never get tired of it: it can remain forever a source of delight, knowledge, and information.

Likewise, books should not require you read them in order to enjoy them. Imagine a book you could leave open on a table, a book whose main function would be to be looked at, riffled through, played with, and it would never cease to satisfy you.

Can you give me an example?

By some strange coincidence, I was recently contacted by Joshua Prager, a distinguished author and journalist, who gave me an opportunity to test my theory. Originally, he wanted me to design a book of inspirational quotes, with one quote for each birthday, from one year all the way to a hundred years. I convinced him to transform the book into something that looks like a book but is part sculpture, part poetry, part anthology, and part artwork. I firmly believe that there is more to books than simply reading them.

The book of quotes I created is at the convergence of narrative, form, and colors – with the pages darkening progressively both horizontally as well as vertically, going from light pastels to deep hues of blue and green as you leaf through it. I haven't picked the paper yet. All I know is that it should be matte yet bright to enhance the subtle color variations.

Do you see the demise of traditional books as a positive outcome of the digital age?

We don't know the consequences that all these changes will bring. Electronic devices are redefining our relationship with books, but also with friends, colleagues, and family. We might have to wait a long time to find out what influence the digital world has on our culture. All we know is that it has an influence – positive as well as negative!

Meanwhile, has digital design influenced your work?

Of course it has. One of my favorite posters is a digital image I create recently for the State Hermitage museum in Saint Petersburg. I was able to apply to the surface of the paper a succession of visual layers, about ten different layers. I didn't proceed systematically, though. On the contrary, the computer allowed me to be playful and quirky. First I combined two images. Then I introduced a pattern on top of which I put a grid. Following my whims, I changed the grid before imposing a different pattern. Afterward I diminished the intensity of some of the colors while intensifying others. And so on.

My goal was to turn paper into something other than a flat surface. I wanted to push the boundaries of paper. I could have gone on forever. The real question in this digital game is how do you know when you are finished? When do you stop?

When did you stop?

The boundaries of the paper are the boundaries of the assignment. And then there are your needs, and the needs of your audience. But truth be told, I could have stopped earlier – or gone on for another ten layers.

Do you feel that it's possible to go beyond the 2-D limitations of printed matter?

Let's face it: increasingly, the difference between digital and analog is blurred. I am having more and more difficulty figuring out what's what. Take my work, for instance. On top of the illustrations, the posters and the books, I have designed packaging, signage systems, logos, typefaces, magazines, interiors, and even products – yet I still can't differentiate two-dimensional from three-dimensional design. To me, it's all part of the same illusion. Basically, I don't believe that there is an absolute reality out there. What we call reality is a representation composed inside our brain.

Yet, wouldn't you agree that images printed on paper look more “real” than images viewed on the screen?

People associate authenticity – reality – with tactility. The perception is that if you can touch it, it's real. That's why stuff printed on rougher paper, paper that has a tangible texture, feels more “real” than stuff printed on smooth and glossy paper or stuff shown on a brilliant screen.

At the same time, the issue of authenticity is tricky. The beautifully printed, signed, authorized reproduction of my well-known Dylan poster is a lot less “authentic” than the poster included in the Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits album in 1967. Frankly, the newer poster looks a lot better and a lot brighter than the original one, printed on cheap paper. Yet, it is a lot less valuable because it's not “the real thing.”

But for me, issues of tactility and authenticity have more to do with the hand than the paper itself.

What do you mean?

For me, the primary issue in the digital age is the relationship between the hand and the design process. Fewer and fewer designers draw by hand, and that's a terrible loss. They no longer conceptualize alternative shapes because they are finding readymade images online. From my point of view, they are merely “finding” design solutions instead of creating them.

Yet Picasso used to say “I don't search, I find.”

Picasso was drawing all the time! Drawing is not about creating a representation but about increasing attentiveness. When you draw something you become attentive. This is how you begin to make sense of the world. Drawing is about understanding. And since the hand is a modified brain – not merely an extension of the brain – drawing with the hand is drawing with a part of your brain.

For me, it is the most extraordinary encounter: a rough surface – paper – that accepts the trace of a writing tool. For a designer, it is the fundamental engagement.



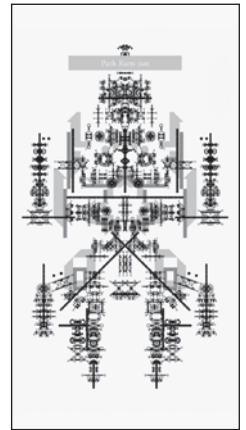
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Park Kum-jun

“My work on paper gives away its mystery gradually, one discovery at a time.”

Award-winning South Korean designer Park Kum-jun founded 601BISANG, his design agency, in 1998. Over the years, his work has reflected a deeply philosophical commitment to existential values associated with the Korean cultural heritage. For his clients, he designs catalogues, exhibition posters, calendars, magazine covers and conceptual installations. “We not only design for clients – we become clients for ourselves to design what we want,” he says. Several of

his most celebrated projects are self-generated. The agency has won countless awards, gold medals, first prizes, and trophies from international design organizations, including, in 2012, the prestigious “Red Dot: Agency of the Year” distinction. This accolade honors the continuously high design achievements of 601BISANG, a studio that is highly respected on the Asian design scene for its relentless creativity. Park Kum-jun is a member of the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) since 2008.



From South Korea, Park Kum-jun shipped a large parcel full of the most wonderful examples of his work. Inside, neatly wrapped, were individual packages encased in elegant cardboard boxes. Opening each of them was a ritual. Some boxes, it turned out, were not only printed outside, they were also printed inside with exquisite motifs. Then came layers of crisp protective paper. The expectation was delicious: by the time you held in your hand the final content – a book, a catalogue, a calendar, a brochure – all your senses were on the lookout: your eyes, your fingers, but also your taste buds. Who knew that leafing through a publication could be a mouth-watering experience?

“Paper is a very sensitive creation that has a life of its own,” says Park Kum-jun. “It breathes and reveals its feelings in its own unique way.” He strongly believes that design is a process that should highlight the inherent beauty of an object. For him this object is more often than not paper. His agency in Seoul handles cultural projects for museums, festivals or special events. He has won so many design awards, it makes your head spin. Everything he touches, it seems, becomes an art piece.

The secret of Kum-jun is his love of hanji, the traditional Korean paper made from the inner bark of mulberry trees. Very substantial, yet soft to the touch, this handmade paper is said to last a thousand years. One of its properties is the irregular way it absorbs ink, creating unforeseen results and bringing spontaneity to designs that might otherwise look too rigid. “Impromptu yet precise,” says Kum-jun to describe the quality he tries to achieve in his work. His goal is to “call attention to permanence” with creations that capture a spiritual dimension.

Véronique Vienne

VV: Do you think that there is a danger that we might become a “paperless society?”

PK-J: It is true that mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets are increasingly taking the place of paper. This trend will no doubt continue to expand. However, paper has properties that stimulate our intuition: the feel and smell of paper, which changes over time, cannot be delivered through a screen. I think the crisis that paper is currently facing can be transformed into an opportunity to open up new possibilities and invent new roles for paper.

Though paper may have reached its limit as a print media, its value will keep growing across diverse areas. In fact, the papermaking industry is continuously expanding. Paper is becoming a multipurpose material on the industrial front. The very nature of paper, as opposed to “digital paper,” is contributing to the growth of its value. Paper is re-establishing its identity as a medium that not only satisfies our emotional needs but also helps us explore our creativity.

At what point of your design process is the choice of paper a creative act?

Paper instills emotions into content and form, so I select the paper in the pre-planning stage. Sometimes, an entire plan or idea starts and grows from a specific type of paper. A comprehensive review of the paper selection, the printing method, and the processing method helps deliver the planned intention. However, it is crucial to take into account the communication objectives, the tone and the cultural language of the project.

How do you evaluate the best paper for a specific project?

I focus on looking into what atmosphere, or set of emotions, I want to achieve. An “atmosphere,” or set of “emotions,” in an aesthetic sense, is the result of a tightly knit assemblage of elements, similar to a living organism. One of these elements is paper. In my opinion, it communicates emotionally mainly through its texture, whether rough or soft to the touch.

But let's not forget the auditory qualities of paper! Once, I created three flipbooks capitalizing on the sounds made by paper. These sounds, in combination with symbols, were intended to stimulate the auditory sense of viewers and lead them to imagine more sounds. I am always trying to push the boundaries of the viewer's "synesthesia" – his or her ability to process multiple impressions at the same time. Synesthesia is a neurological phenomenon in which one sensory or cognitive pathway can spark secondary cognitive pathways such as color perception or pattern recognition.

What other techniques do you use to communicate emotionally?

The way I work requires patience and perseverance, from me, but also from my readers. Paper is ideal for works that involve intuitive text and emotionally appealing, subtly sensuous forms, such as illustrations and typography. I might use ambiguous visual clues to reinforce a specific message or, on the contrary, use symbolic language to suggest different interpretations. For example, an ink smudge may be left on a page as if by mistake and lead viewers to take a closer look at the printed product in search of additional smudges. Sometimes, in order to add layers of complexity, I deliberately disrupt the way people read a book – based on what I call the "aesthetics of inconvenience." I might create odd cutouts in a poster or a book in an attempt to invite the outside in, and incorporate surprising elements into the composition. Very often, I make sure that my designs look different depending on how far or how closely you look at them. They may form one single image from a distance, but reveal a network of sensuous details and delicate shapes when viewed from close-up. Many of my works appear as text from far away – but turn three-dimensional as you approach them. Another example of the way I communicate emotionally is best exemplified by an experimental yearly publication, the 601 Artbook Project. My goal was to stimulate the readers' sense of wonder every time they turned the pages. I was careful not to reveal all my intentions at once. I hid symbols and metaphors on different scales, along with the usual visual signs. My work on paper is never understood the first time around. I create publications and posters that give away their mystery gradually, step by step, one discovery at a time.

Can you describe one of your favorite projects?

I am currently interested in re-interpreting Asian values: the harmony of yin and yang, the natural elements such as water, soil, air, and sedimentary layers reflecting the flow of time. So, one of my favorite projects would have to be Digilog 601: Harmony thru Design, a series of four posters I did recently.

The term "digilog" was coined by combining digital and analog. Digital and analog may appear to clash, but they co-exist in a complementary manner. As far as I am concerned, "digilog" design embraces both the rational thinking of the West and the spirituality of the East. My four posters translate this concept graphically, using highly symbolic and ambiguous images, but the overall impression is that of a living, organic system. In general, my work focuses on the concept of interdependence within a greater framework.



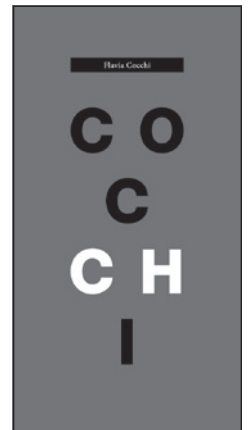


Flavia Cocchi

“I am in heaven when paper representatives come in to show me their latest designs.”

Swiss-born Flavia Cocchi was classically trained as a graphic designer in the tradition of Emil Ruder, Josef Müller-Brokmann and Armin Hoffmann. Her practice focuses on typography, with Akzidenz Grotesk a favorite. Printed matter is her love and paper her passion. Before opening her own studio in 1997, she worked for Werner Jeker in Lausanne, for the Anatome agency in Paris, and for Massimo

Vignelli in Italy. Today, Atelier Cocchi in Lausanne specializes in books and catalogues for clients in the cultural field. Since 2000, for the Mudac (Musée de design et d'arts appliqués contemporains) in Lausanne, Cocchi has designed more than a dozen books, as well as countless posters, catalogues, brochures and collaterals. She is a member of the AGI (Alliance Graphique Internationale) since 2012.



In Switzerland, Atelier Cocchi is the design studio of choice if you want a book, a catalogue or a brochure that speaks to your senses. For Flavia Cocchi, turning pages is an experience that engages the eyes, the mind, the ears, and the fingertips. The publications she creates are the visual equivalent of mouth-watering gourmet dishes.

When prospective clients come into her studio in Lausanne, she is attentive to their likes and dislikes. “As soon as they walk in, I try to imagine the kind of paper that would be right for them,” she says. She gives them small bites to taste. “I show them samples of my work – books, catalogues or posters – and observe how they react. As we discuss their project, I try to get a mental image of what would be right for them.” For an architectural firm, she might imagine a puffy watercolor paper. For a museum, her intuition might suggest inserts in translucent vellum. For a photographer, she might picture a very smooth, uncoated cream-colored stock.

However, pleasing clients is not as difficult as pleasing herself. To be satisfied, Flavia Cocchi feels that she must control every step of the printing process, from the paper selection to the last stitch of the binding. “And when something is not exactly the way I think it should be, I feel like crying,” she says, “... and sometimes I do cry, even though clients are seldom as finicky as I am.”

Véronique Vienne

VV: So you always begin a project with your choice of paper?

FC: Yes I do. It's what triggers my creativity. I always try to mix papers in my books. If I use coated paper in a photo section, I will choose uncoated for the texts, to give that part a more precious, sensual feel. Or else I print the text on almost transparent stock, like Bible paper.

One of my favorite books is a catalogue I did in 2008 for Mudac, the Musée de design et d'arts appliqués contemporains in Lausanne. It was for an exhibition featuring decorative tangerine paper wrappers – the kind used to wrap top quality, imported citrus fruits from Italy or Spain. I used an ultra-thin, fifty gram, crinkly stock, like the real thing. You know, the kind of paper you can't help but smooth with your hand and keep safely between the pages of a book.

Are your Swiss clients as quality-conscious as you are?

They are – and that's why I came back to Lausanne after working in France for a while. The standards of workmanship are so much higher here. One can observe a loss of quality on a global scale, but it's happening to a lesser degree in Switzerland. If you care enough, you can obtain exactly what you want here, whereas elsewhere it's no longer possible. And I am exacting: the finishing touch is everything for me. That's why I do not design digital interfaces such as websites: there is no materiality there, no tactile interaction. I refuse to get involved with a project, unless I can manage everything, down to the last detail.

This love of precision is very Swiss, isn't it?

I am very Swiss indeed: I am precise, but also minimalist. I believe that empty space is more attractive to the eye than space that is filled with lots of stuff. White space is not empty. White for me is a color, particularly when it is silkscreened. I often work with a printer who loves to experiment with silkscreen techniques, and encourages me to do so. For example, I might silkscreen a white grid on top of white paper, or I might print on both sides of a semi-translucent paper.

What's the most fun part of the process for you?

It's when paper representatives come in to show me their latest designs. I am in heaven. All the samples get me excited

about new possibilities. I can't wait for the right opportunity to use this or that paper – and when it arises, I call the representative at once, request more information, and order a mock-up to show the client.

Are printers as helpful as paper representatives?

Talking with printers is just as important. They know how to get the best results, but, as far as I am concerned, they are not the main authority when it comes to paper specification. Once, to economize paper – and to save money – a printer cut some of the pages of one of my books against the grain – against the direction of the fibers. I could hardly keep the book open. It was warped: a very bizarre sight. The paper couldn't roll in the direction in which you turn the pages.

Are all beautiful books necessarily expensive?

Oh no! I consult with both paper representatives and printers to try to keep the cost of books down. However complex books or catalogues might be, they should always be priced moderately. They have to be affordable. Otherwise no one buys them. And what's the use of a beautiful book that sits on a shelf?

Where does your fascination with paper come from?

A big influence in my life was my father, an architect, who loved to draw. He drew for me every night, before tucking me into bed. He would tell me stories, and, as he spoke, he would draw pictures of people, monsters, castles, and fabulous architecture. I kept the pieces of paper with his sketches, scribbles and pencil strokes. Over the years they got folded, crushed, torn and wrinkled, but remain precious nonetheless.

How do you foresee the future of paper in the digital age?

I think beautiful art books are here to stay but I am most worried about the future of the press. How about newspapers, pamphlets, tabloids, fanzines, cheap comic books, and pulp fiction? I love fine stock, but I also love stuff printed on paper that turns yellow with time. Like my father's crumpled drawings, these most humble examples speak on behalf of our humanity.



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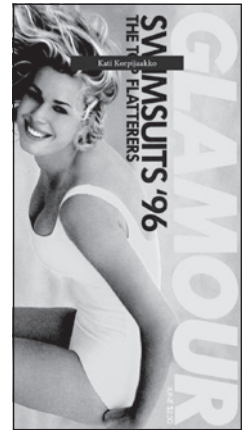
Kati Korpjaakko

“Better, heavier, and glossier paper was the ultimate reward.”



Finnish editorial designer Kati Korpjaakko is much admired by magazine art directors worldwide for her strong design sensibility, in the Scandinavian modernist tradition. In Finland, she worked for the magazine VIKKO before coming to the United States in the early 1970s. After a decade art directing smaller magazines like Art News and New Jersey Monthly, she landed a job at the celebrated feminist monthly Ms. Magazine where she demonstrated her typographical flair

and attracted the attention of talent scouts at Condé Nast Publications. From 1983 to 1988, she was at Mademoiselle; from 1988 to 1998, at Glamour; and from 1998 to 2004 at Self – three fashion and lifestyle magazines with a circulation of over a million. She now shares her time between Finland and the USA, and is building a career as a contemporary artist using mixed media including fiber, paper pulp, wax, and ceramic.



Kati Korpjaakko remembers the days when being a magazine art director meant handling paper all day long. Back then, editorial designers used their sense of touch every step of the way: assessing the quality of a photographic print, managing bulky typesetting galleys, doing quick sketches, designing page layouts, trimming pictures, pasting down headlines and copy, or checking printer's proofs. “Our hands were never idle,” she recalls. “And paper was everywhere, on every surface, on every desk, and in every drawer.”

Born in Finland – the country that is one of the biggest producers of paper in Europe – she grew up among the sawmills. Where she comes from, people are familiar with all the byproducts of the timber and pulp industry. They know paper the way the French know wines. Korpjaakko is no exception. When she was in charge of the design of Mademoiselle and Glamour in New York, she kept asking the production department to purchase better paper from Finland. “The prestige of a fashion magazine is intimately associated with the brightness of the paper on which it is printed,” she notes. “The shinier the better.” As her magazines’ sales figures improved, so did the quality of their paper. For Korpjaakko, better, heavier, and glossier paper was the ultimate reward for her magazines’ high performance at the newsstand.

Today, back in Finland during the summer months, far from the glitzy New York magazine scene, she works as an artist, with paper still her favorite medium – but now nature is her primary source of inspiration. There, in her quiet studio on a hill, in a remote part of the country near the Russian border, she creates three-dimensional collages, mixing textures and techniques. She designs light fixtures, vases, and paper pulp sculptures. “What I do today is more personal than what I did as an art director. Yet, come to think of it, the layouts I did back then were very personal too.”

Véronique Vienne

VV: You were active as a magazine art director “before” computers, but also “after”. How did you negotiate the transition into the digital age?

KK: Basically, “before”, we did paper collages. We were encouraged in this technique by the legendary editorial director Alexander Liberman, a Russian painter and sculptor who supervised the design of all the magazines for Condé Nast Publications. Some art directors didn't like doing collages, but I did. It took time for me to get the knack of it, but eventually I became good at it. I remember tearing up pieces of colored paper, cutting them, layering them, and pasting them together to create visual patchworks. The result was distinctive, a look unique to Condé Nast, different from all the other American magazines at the time, yet commercially successful. Between 1988 and 1998, when I was the art director of Glamour, its circulation was three million – a million more than Vogue – an impressive figure, even by American standards. Liberman retired in the mid-nineties, at about the time when computers were brought into art departments. Things were never the same after that. The whimsical creativity was gone. No more wild collages. Soon the bean counters took over. The budgets became tighter. By then I was art director of Self magazine, another Condé Nast title.

Did you ever design magazines in a “paperless” office?

With the advent of computers, paper didn't completely disappear. But what was gone was the joyful busyness and the camaraderie of the pre-digital age. For the first twenty-five years of my career as a magazine art director, when we were still designing magazines by hand, I seldom sat down. We all worked in a communal art room, standing up, in front of high slanted desks, like architects' tables. Moving around. Fetching stuff. Walking back and forth. Telling stories. You'd think that it was physically grueling, but it wasn't. Boy, it was fun! We worked hard, but, at the same time, we felt like spoiled brats, employed as we were by one of the most prestigious magazine companies on earth.

Did the quality of the magazines suffer when computers were introduced?

What suffered most was our health! The art department became a sedentary place. We lost all the exercising and socializing. We grew love handles from sitting on our behinds all day long!

What other changes did you notice?

What changed magazines most was not the paperless technology. Sure, some designers and art directors went crazy with software like Photoshop or Illustrator, but at Condé Nast, the difference in design wasn't perceptible at first. No, what changed magazines was the Internet, the tablets to be more specific. New reading habits have been the biggest factor influencing the redesign of magazines.

I am a good example: I love paper and prefer the printed versions of magazines, but I read magazines online. As for fashion magazines, I only read them at the hairdresser, when I get my hair cut. I always grab magazines on paper when I find them, but, for some reason, I don't buy them.

My kids read magazines online as well, but they also read D.I.Y. paper fanzines and magazines that are a combination of art and design. These publications use photography and graphic design creatively. I look at these experimental magazines to get some inspiration.

How do you foresee the future of printed matter?

Paper is here to stay – it will just be perceived differently. Instead of being a surface on which to print text and images, it will be “recast” as a creative medium – as an exciting material for artists and designers. It's already happening. Some bookstores in New York, but also in Paris, Barcelona, or Oslo, are doing a brisk business selling artists' books, alternative magazines, limited edition posters, underground periodicals, and zines.

Some of my favorite places in Manhattan are Printed Matter, a downtown bookstore, and the Drawing Center, a small museum on Wooster Street in the Soho district. You go crazy just looking at everything. As you would expect, there are a lot of poetry books printed on stuff that looks like handmade paper. But you also find slick museum catalogues, handsome photography books, and literary magazines, all published on extraordinary paper – some uncoated recycled stock, but also some marvelous, irresistible material unlike anything I have seen before.

Then there are all the downtown galleries that show the work of contemporary artists who mangle, tear, fold or cast paper into extraordinary sculptures. For me, who has been around sleek glossy paper all my life, this new unexpected development is truly inspiring. I see a never-ending life for paper. Nothing can stop it anymore.

So, what does paper mean to you today?

I use paper in my own work. I took papermaking classes. Paper for me is no longer a mere surface – it's a structural building material, like marble, clay or glass. I make forms out of it. I paint it with thin layers of wax. I color it with powdered graphite. I weave it into fluttering wall hangings that make noises in the breeze. And sometimes I compost newsprint and turn it into mulch for the plants in my garden in Finland!

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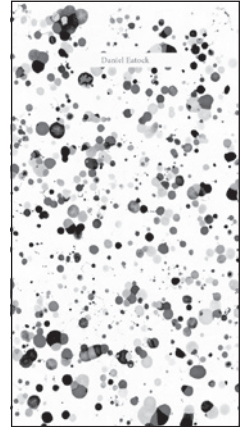


Daniel Eatock

“Paper has six sides: a front, a back, and four edges.”

On Daniel Eatock's website there are more than twenty distinctive versions of his biography. They are smart, witty, intriguing, with each presenting a different facet of his work. Rather than try to plagiarize them all in an attempt to give readers the full story, I decided to reproduce here the shortest one, written by Tim Milne, for the British website Container: Daniel Eatock is renowned for his exploration of the wit and conceptual irony that exist in everyday objects and situations.

He devises systems, templates and opportunities for collaboration, inviting contributors to shape the outcome and participate in the creation of his work. He embraces contradictions and dilemmas; seeking out alignments, paradoxes, chance circumstance, loops, impossibilities and oxymorons. He likes to create the feeling of falling backwards. Daniel trained at the Royal College of Art as a graphic designer, but is now an established artist exhibiting around the world with a devoted following.



Daniel Eatock began having fun with paper when he was 10 years old. His father, a designer, would give him lots of paper and let him play with his sets of magic markers. The little boy liked to draw, but what he loved even more was to watch how the colored ink would soak through layers of paper and leave stains all over. He was particularly enthralled by the drawings that appeared on the second, third and even fourth sheet of paper. The further away from the top layers, the more abstract the drawings. The slower he drew, the more interesting the results.

Today Eatock is best known for his “pen prints”, beautiful compositions of colorful dots or stains made with marker pens standing on their base with their nibs facing upright. Single sheets of paper are carefully placed to rest on the bed of pen nibs. The paper pulp sucks in the colors, drawing them up as if by capillary attraction. Also famous are Eatock's “Hand Drawn Circles” which he creates during meditative exercises that challenge the very idea of perfection. Some of his circles are better drawn than other, but they all express his fascination for “eccentric” conceptual gestures.

A visit to eatock.com documents these experiments and many more, from how to use your iPhone to take a picture of the palm of your hand, to alternative designs for the back of postcards, or instructions on the best way to spray an aerosol canister with its own content. Eatock displays an inexhaustible curiosity for all aspects of design, always managing to dodge conventional expectations with some lighthearted visual mischief.

Véronique Vienne

VV: What place does paper occupy in your graphic design practice?

DE: I was trained as a graphic designer but I don't consider myself a graphic designer. The reason is that for me the word “graphic” suggests an image, and I am not so much concerned with images. I am much more concerned with concepts.

Yet your concepts are translated into forms – forms that are often made of paper.

For most graphic designers, paper is a surface on which words and images can be printed. But for me, paper was never a medium for graphics. Even as a student, I considered paper to be an object, one with six sides: a front, a back, and four edges. Today, I use paper as a material, and the thicker the paper, the more obvious its materiality. I even stack sheets of paper to create piles of it. That's the principle I use when I make my felt-tip designs. I observe the way the ink from the magic markers penetrates the various sheets of paper, layers of it. I do not consider the top layer to be the original, on the contrary. I am just as fascinated by what happens as the ink seeps through the next four or five layers.

How would you describe the “materiality” of paper?

What I like about paper is the fact that it's so humble. It's a quality that I have appreciated all my life. Paper is ubiquitous, available, affordable, and generic. I am fascinated by the everydayness of it. A blank piece of paper has infinite potential – you can do so many things with it: you can write on it, draw on it, paint on it, fold it, cut it, etc.

What's more, paper is forgiving. I don't get frustrated with paper the way I do with computers. The screen, the interface... they are limited, and I don't always understand how to work with them. With the digital tools I quickly meet my own limitations whereas with paper I can experiment as I please.

Are you saying that the humbleness of paper, its non-assuming qualities, its muted presence – these are the very qualities that make it precious to you?

What I am trying to say is that what you do with paper will elevate it to another level. You can transform the most ordinary paper into something sublime by bringing out one of its conceptual dimensions.

The things I make are always conceptual objects. I happen to be making a lot of conceptual objects with paper. In that sense – and in that sense only – is paper an extension of my practice.

What other conceptual objects do you make with paper?

I do something called “one-minute circles.” I draw circles free-hand, with my pen moving at the same speed as the seconds around the clock – without it leaving the page. I also do “60-minute circles.” It’s a lot more meditative! “One-hour circles” means that my hand must move on the surface of the paper no faster than the minutes around the clock. When I do workshops or performances in museums or galleries, I enroll participants to draw larger circles free-hand. Eventually, I figured out how to fit 60 people around a single sheet of paper to draw “one-hour circles” in one minute – or “one-minute circles” in one second. In both cases, the circles are drawn simultaneously in 60 sections.

You also create quite a few “card” projects: postcards, greeting cards, business cards. How do these cards figure in your work?

I love books – but printing books is expensive, whereas you can make an edition of 100 cards for almost no money. In the past I would print these cards on the edges of other people’s projects, on the parts of the paper that are usually thrown away. I would speak to the printer and he would let me fit my cards into the margins. But these margins are usually small, thus the format of my small editions!

Do people collect your cards the way they might collect posters?

I don’t want to encourage people to collect what I make. I refuse to do stuff that contributes to the clutter. Even though paper is quite ubiquitous and available, we should be conscious of the way we use it. We should not print things that are unnecessary.

Are you saying that cards are less wasteful than posters?

For me, what matters is the conceptual dimension of a project. As a rule, I like to create objects that can only exist in the format they are in. In that respect, some of my cards are something of a dilemma, because more and more people send invitations by email. If a greeting card or an invitation can be replaced by a digital file, I don’t want to print them. On the other hand, I still do postcards because they have a front and a back (and four edges) and the experience of looking at them recto-verso cannot be replicated digitally.

So you are not collecting other people’s work...

I am not a collector. When people send me cards, I don’t keep them – I don’t like to keep too many things around. The same way, I don’t send my cards to people who are going to collect them. As I said, what I like are concepts more than images. Once you get a concept, you don’t have to hold on to it. That’s the beauty of it.

I noticed that you also like to turn books into concepts.

Yes, I am interested in aspects of books other people tend to ignore: the weight of the paper, for instance. I have a small installation with heavy books lined up on a thin shelf in such a way as to make the shelf bend, but the top of the books are perfectly lined up.

In another experiment, I photocopied every page of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary to produce a stack of more than fifteen hundred pages. The copies are more valuable than the original due to the time and expense invested in making them. The height of the stack of copies (about three times that of the book) makes the amount of information more tangible and more weighty – physically and conceptually.

Once, with the twenty volumes of the Oxford Dictionary, I created a big circle of books with their bindings opening up slightly and their covers touching the covers of adjacent books. In a way it was a perfect circle, one formed by every single word and every single definition of the English language.

Some years ago, I designed a book of photographs in which the horizon of the pictures disappears into the centerfold, forcing readers to crack the binding to get the full view, thus generating a morphologic change in the shape of the book as a whole.

How about the way you re-use adhesive labels – the stickers that you peel and re-apply on different surfaces?

I can see what you’re driving at! You are connecting these projects because they are all made of paper, but in fact they have nothing to do with each other – or at least paper is not the connection between them. I work with books, for instance, but it’s not because they are made of paper. It’s not why they interest me. What interests me is their “thingness.”

I am known for using books as currency, for example. I like to swap them as an alternative to money. This is the way I got quite a few of my favorite books. I never ask for expensive books, mind you, but I ask for a specific book I’d like to read. I get inundated with requests for interviews. I usually spend more time responding than people do sending me an email. So by asking them to give me a book in return, I weed away those who are not sincerely motivated. At the same time, it’s so much nicer to own books given than books purchased. And when I open one of these books, I remember what I did or what I made in order to acquire them. It charges that book with a backstory.

What can I give you in exchange for this interview?

I’d like to ask you for the most beautiful conceptual book ever made – plus it uses paper in a perfect way. It’s *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* by Edward Rucha (1966).