

NEW ORNAMENTAL TYPE*



DECORATIVE LETTERING IN THE DIGITAL AGE
Steven Heller & Gail Anderson

Thames & Hudson

NEW RAM NENTAL TYPE



DECORATIVE LETTERING IN THE DIGITAL AGE



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For Nicolas Heller – S. H.

For Cindy Cope – G. A.

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*This book would not have been possible without the crackerjack research,
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*And our thanks are extended to Mia Song, who, like Christine, researched her
way through morning sickness – making New Ornamental Type filled with
even more surprises than New Vintage Type.*

*Special thanks to Jeff Rogers for designing his way through too many Sundays
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suggested contributors, answered our questions or just listened to our
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– S. H. & G. A.

DESIGN
*Gail Anderson
Jeff Rogers*

RESEARCH
*Christine Thompson Maichin
Mia Song*

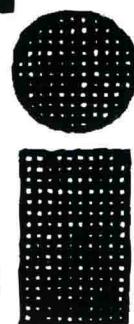
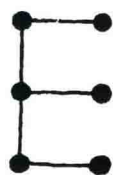
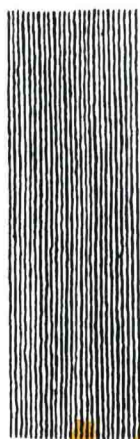
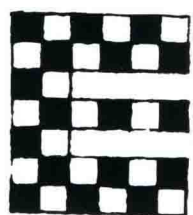
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STEVEN
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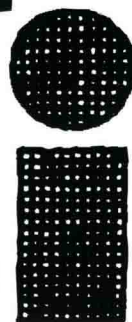
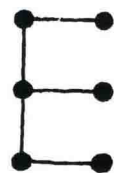
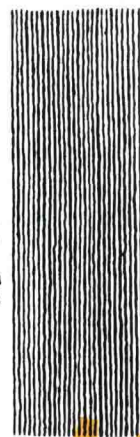
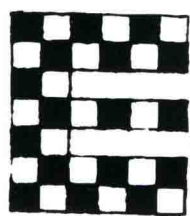
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Introduction

isis!

ISIS This topsy-turvy lettering for the Los Angeles band Isis was influenced by what Justin Kay calls their “doomy” and dark, epic sound.

ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER: Justin Thomas Kay

CLIENT: Isis PRIMARY FONT: Custom made by Alex Trochut

ORNAMENT IS NOT A CRIME

WHEN AUSTRIAN ARCHITECT Adolf Loos mounted the barricades in 1908 with his essay “Ornament and Crime,” proclaiming, “The evolution of culture marches with the elimination of ornament from useful objects,” design was in an ornamental quagmire. Twelve years after the advent of Art Nouveau (*Jugendstil*, Vienna Secession) in 1896, forests of vines and tendrils – what critics have called “floriated madness” – covered everything from posters and typefaces to furniture and buildings. Loos’s preference for “smooth and precious surfaces” derived from his fervent belief that functional objects swathed in ornament were guaranteed instantaneous obsolescence. For Loos, superfluous decoration was not merely a waste of a designer’s time, it was downright immoral. Obsolescence was, therefore, on a par with venal sin. Yet barely twenty years

later, just prior to the Great Depression, the strategy known as “forced obsolescence,” or what the innovative American adman Earnest Elmo Calkins called “styling the goods,” was celebrated for having brought the United States economy back to vitality from stagnation.

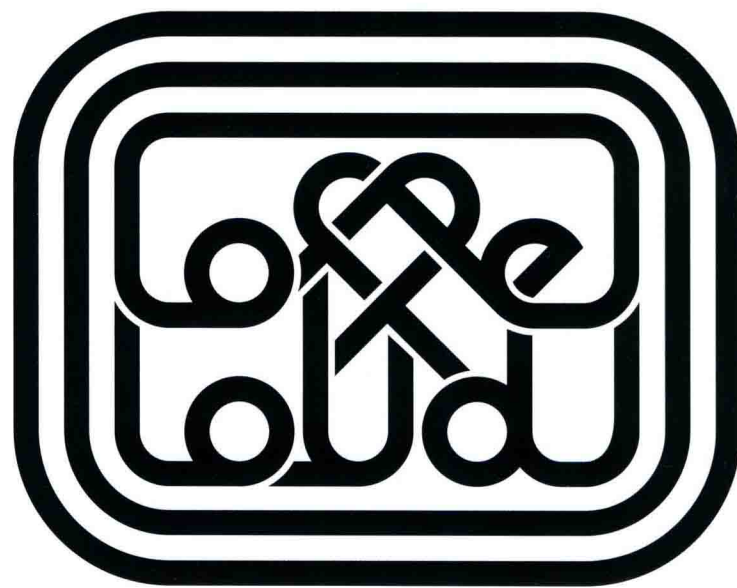
Loos’s critique, published in Europe when Art Nouveau was at its most eccentric, made some philosophical and practical sense. The time was right to throw off the shackles of stultifying style and move forward to a more advanced stage of aesthetic evolution. Yet arguably, no matter how excessive the ornamentation, labeling it immoral may have been hyperbole. Not all decorative impulses are sinful. In fact, visual austerity could be seen as the denial of aesthetic pleasure, a puritanical notion practiced, among others, by the Shakers, who denied themselves all earthly pleasures. After all, who could argue that a Persian miniature, with its complex graphic layering, or the Book of Kells, with the interlocking patterns and serpentine filigree that fill its pages, are not among the most beautiful (and, in a sense, most functional) of graphic artifacts? How could Baroque and Rococo motifs be pilloried for crimes against the eye, or society in general, despite what they came to symbolize?

What better advocate for ornament than William Morris, the late-nineteenth-century artist, designer, printer, author, social critic, and founder of the Arts and Crafts movement? He exalted ornamentation as a high form of spiritual expression. The Kelmscott Chaucer, the pinnacle of his career as a book designer, reintroduced the Medieval or Gothic approach from its lavish ornamental borders to its decorative capitals and frames. But the Kelmscott Chaucer did more than simply revive an antique style. It was the realization of Morris’s belief that a combination of modern printing techniques and traditional arts and crafts could counteract the corrosive impact of industrialization. Ornament was not merely a veil to hide ugly industrial machines and wares,

it was an antidote to the perceived poisons spewing from factory chimneys – a prescient concept at that time.

Ornament is not inherently evil, nor does it pander to the base nature of man or woman. As with any graphic manner or style, its symbolic or literal meanings derive from the reality of the thing or idea that is represented. Nonetheless, passions are ignited when ornamentation is injected into high-minded matters of design.

The Bauhaus masters rejected the idea of a Bauhaus style. Yet even this progressive German design institution proffered and maintained an overriding ethos, expressed largely through its distinctive graphic persona, rooted in the New Typography. Though it rejected excessive ornamentation as the relic of an older bourgeois order, Bauhaus design was not entirely ornament-free. It replaced unnecessary flourishes with minimal functional ornament (black and red rules and bars), which was by any other name still decoration, albeit with a structural underpinning. Even to this day, followers of the Bauhaus and adherents of Modernism maintain the belief that minimalism enables the clearest communication. They deride what advertisers in the 1920s and 1930s called frou-frou decoration. Yet there has long



LOVE LOUD The style of lettering in this logo for Revolve Clothing means exactly what it says, reports Paul Sych: “Let your love be loud and resonating.”

DESIGN FIRM: Faith ART DIRECTOR/
DESIGNER: Paul Sych CLIENT: Revolve Clothing
PRIMARY FONT: Hand lettering

been a desire – indeed, a compulsion – among designers to introduce graphic complexity into design languages. This tendency emerged as a full-blown movement with the growth of Post-Modernism in the late 1970s, which incorporated passé decorative elements onto otherwise austere modern structures.

From that point on, ornament has made a spectacular comeback. Since the late 1990s, it has been as widespread as it was in the Victorian and Arts and Crafts eras at the turn of the twentieth century. But the rationale – the desire for aesthetic delight – is not unfamiliar; even in Modernist times the decorative instinct was minimized but never totally dissipated, and its popularity has swung like a pendulum. During the mid-to-late 1960s, for instance, eclectic designers – notably New York’s Push Pin Studios, founded by Seymour Chwast and Milton Glaser – responded to the dominance of the Swiss International Style’s typographic economy (or, for some, sterility). They reclaimed outmoded approaches – Victorian,

Art Nouveau, and Art Moderne (also known as Deco, for “decoration”) – and inspired others with their decorative playfulness. The Push Pin style fell out of favor in the early 1980s, but with the advent of the computer things changed yet again. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, graphic designers initially leaned toward gridlocked austerity, precisely the style that the computer produced so well. Yet that preference quickly “devolved” into the more cluttered, anarchic, indeed flaw-inspired typographic designs typified by David Carson and his kindred graphic “grunge-mongers.” This was not ornamental as such, but it was “unclean.”

Sometime during the early 2000s, well over a decade after the computer became the state-of-the-art design tool, neo-Art Nouveau – serpentine, floral ornamentation – returned with a vengeance. Perhaps the impetus was rebellion against template-driven, computer-generated design; or, more likely, the realization that difficult drafting processes were made simpler through digital applications. No less significant was the fact that the traditional boundaries of design and illustration had once again become blurred, as they had at the turn of the previous century, when the *Sachplakat* (object poster) holistically brought type and image together. The introduction in the 1990s of font-creation software enabled illustrators to become more engaged in letterform and type design. The grunge and DIY movements of the mid-1990s contributed to the growth of digital foundries that offered scores of “novelty” faces made from an array of non-traditional type materials, including such vernacular items as cans, razor blades, and toy soldiers, and such naturalistic ones as twigs, flowers, and trees. From these hothouse experiments a new era of floriated madness blossomed.

JUVELEN This custom lettering for a record sleeve is a slightly deconstructed form of a somewhat traditional condensed font. The band’s music uses a lot of clichés, but still manages to come across as contemporary. The type attempts to accomplish the same.

DESIGN FIRM/ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER:
Grandpeople CLIENT: Hybris/Juvelen PRIMARY
FONT: Custom made

1234 This treatment was inspired by Chinese New Year prints (*nianhua*) and grafted onto a punk-rock aesthetic.

DESIGN FIRM: Q2 Design ART DIRECTOR/
DESIGNER/ILLUSTRATOR: Qian Qian CLIENT:
Self PRIMARY FONT: Custom made

In addition, a groundswell of interest in historical (or retro) ornament took hold during the early 2000s. Advertisements and package designs inspired a new wave of ornamentation, including patterns of countless formats and descriptions. These were largely born out of the Hip-Hop or street culture aesthetic rising in various media, from textiles to the Web and print. Typography became the principal vehicle for ornamentation. Illustrated letterforms – not calligraphy in the classical sense, nor illumination in the biblical context – became the most common approach to “the new lettering.” Handwritten lettering in variegated forms – stitching, collaging, scrawling, scraping, carving, and more – added yet further ornament to design in the twenty-first century.

Ornamentation is now sought after for print, screen, motion, and various other tactile forms of design. Whether neo-Art Nouveau, pseudo-Art Deco, crypto-Victorian, or any combination or hybrid of these historical and contemporary, vintage and futuristic patterns, type wrapped in decorative veneers is ubiquitous. This tendency might seem to be a rejection of the coldness of computers. But new ornamental type is largely enabled by the computer; a comparatively small number of the examples shown here are generated by hand. This book is a survey of the most popular manners and methods in current use. From faux-naturalism (what we call Green), to the integration of graffiti (what we call Hip-Hop), and more, this is a raucously esoteric time for letterforms, and, we might say, for the decriminalization of ornament.



ASK



ASK INSIDE This sparkly logo for Revolve Clothing was designed for a clothing line that uses typography as its main visual element.

DESIGN FIRM: Faith ART DIRECTOR/
DESIGNER: Paul Sych CLIENT: Revolve
Clothing PRIMARY FONT: Custom made

DESIGNERS DERIVE ALMOST as much joy from debating the merits and demerits of appropriating history as they do actually designing. Injecting passé design conceits into contemporary work – a method also known as retro, as in “retrograde,” a word inherently negative in tone and meaning – has long been part of the design process. So much owes its existence to precedents established decades or centuries before that the entire debate should be moot. Nonetheless, some critics argue that living in the present demands a design language that reflects the here and now. Retro is, they insist, essentially nostalgia, and nostalgia, like neuralgia or aphasia, is in the strictest definition a disorder. Others who are less judgmental or dogmatic refuse to believe that history should either be ignored or pickled in brine. As Tom

Wolfe once said, design history is a “big closet” from which to draw inspiration. Design builds on a variety of styles and methods, either as a measured response or a violent reaction to the distant or recent past.

Ornament is one of the metrics of design history. Like the rings of a tree trunk, it can often be used to accurately date a work, or at least signify its aesthetic pedigree. The various styles of ornament developed during specific periods mirror the concerns, economies, technologies, and cultures of those times. Usually the designer’s proficiency in using said ornament reveals where and when the work was created. Some styles were short-lived, while others, including Baroque, Rococo, or Art Nouveau, lasted for a generation or more. Certain designers, like today, rejected a particular ornament if they felt it represented an aesthetic or concept that had outlived its

ORRY ESON

STINGRAYS: PART SHARK *And, we Suspect,* PART UFO

STINGRAYS This logo was designed for a poster promoting Toronto Zoo. It plays on the Victorian fascination with nature, which at times could approach hysteria. The tone was meant to be light-hearted in a way that was evocative of circus posters.

DESIGN FIRM: Lowe Roche Advertising
ART DIRECTOR: Adam Thur DESIGNERS:
Adam Thur, Ian Brignell LETTERER: Ian
Brignell CLIENT: Toronto Zoo PRIMARY
FONTS: Hand lettering

usefulness. Others clung to timeworn styles because they were comfortably familiar and their audience still comprised a viable market. For yet others, ornament was much more than a superficial veneer that could be put on and taken off at will; it symbolized an aesthetic viewpoint with relevance far beyond the mere object of design.

Most contemporary design employing historical ornamentation is not entirely slavish to the source. When pastiche (the deliberate copying of a style) is not the foremost concern, the aim is more reference than exact copy. For instance, the sub-genres of type and lettering in this section may be liberally influenced by such vintage mannerisms as Gothic, Victorian, or Modern, but in only rare instances can they be mistaken for being what they are not – that is, created when the styles were current. Historical

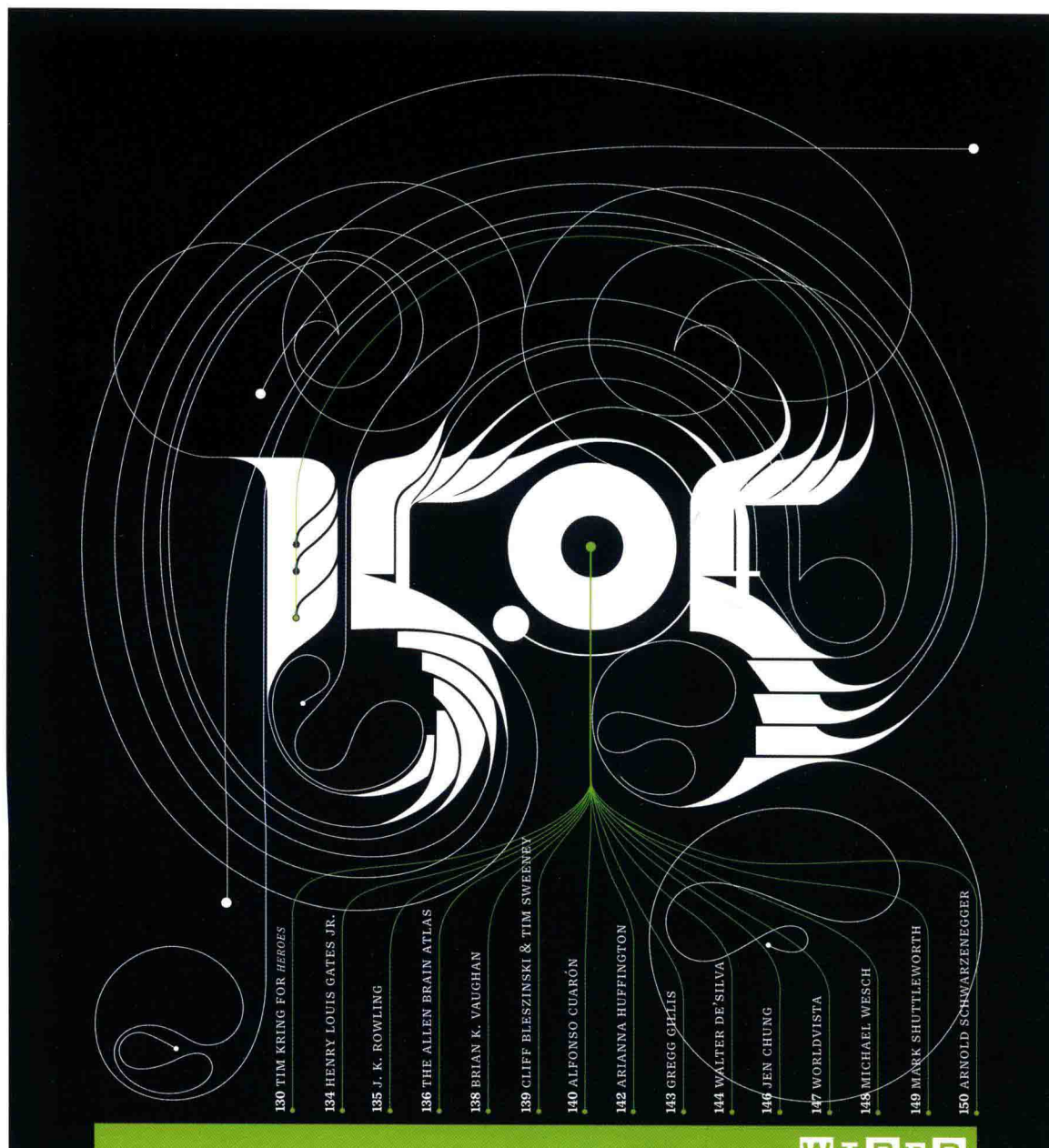
ornamentation is the underpinning for hybrids that are mixtures of various styles, not the styles themselves. Categories such as Hipster, Pop, Psychedelic, Hip-Hop, Tech, and Non-Roman are not (with the exception of Psychedelic) academic styles, but they build on historical reference points to produce a present-day typographic lexicon. While all of the typography in this section refers to bygone eras, the overall aim, and result, is to create type and lettering that signals “now.” What makes effective letterforms varies greatly, depending on context and purpose. The goal of some is to evoke a particular context, while for others it is to play with form, to exact a pleasing image using all the vintage or contemporary conceits available.

GOthic

BLACK LETTER dates back to Gutenberg's fifteenth-century invention of the printing press and moveable type. The spiky graphic forms, which came from the pen and brush strokes of medieval scribes, turned from ecclesiastical into nationalist lettering when the Nazis adopted it as "Volks" type ("the people's" type). In its benign form, it has been used for newspaper mastheads as well as in other contexts that demand an official look or an enduring style. In recent years, variations on Gothic lettering – and there are many – have been adopted by street and Hip-Hop culture, as well as being used in heavy metal and Goth aesthetics. Gothic is also the favorite of tattooists.

15.05 This splash page lettering for *Wired* magazine combines geometric, techno and Art Nouveau sensibilities. It is structured around circles, with the zero as the centerpoint and everything leading into or flowing around it. "The type is like sci-fi armadillos. Why? Absolutely no logical reason," says Marian Bantjes.

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Scott Dadich
ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER: Maili Holiman
ILLUSTRATOR: Marian Bantjes
CLIENT: *Wired* magazine
PUBLISHER: Condé Nast
PRIMARY FONT: Hand lettering



WIRED

the 2007 RAVE AWARDS

To find the 22 innovators, instigators, and inventors to honor with a Rave Award this year, we started by looking for the most intriguing breakthroughs in the world today—then tracked down the individuals who made them happen. Each honoree told a unique story, but they tended to have one thing in common: Before changing the game in technology, business, or culture, they first changed themselves. There's the actor who became a politician (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and the politician who became an entrepreneur (Arianna Huffington), not to mention an entrepreneur turned philanthropist (Paul Allen) and a philanthropist turned open source warrior (Mark Shuttleworth).

The lesson seems obvious: Reinvent yourself, reinvent the world.

LETTERING BY MARIAN BANTJES

BLIK DREZ NIKON Daniel Blik's self-promotional piece is influenced by vintage Gothic or Medieval lettering, but the color gives it a more contemporary sensibility.

DESIGN FIRM: Blikdsgn ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER: Daniel Blik CLIENT: Self PRIMARY FONT: Custom made



LUSH MAGAZINE The hand-drawn lettering for "Lush" was constructed by mixing various Gothic and traditional scripts. Haute couture is made to order for a specific customer with hand stitching and a detailed finish, so Paul Sych mimicked this in the construction of the type, as *Lush* contains many haute couture collections. A heart is also an integral part of this mark. Can you find it?

DESIGN FIRM: Faith ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER: Paul Sych PHOTOGRAPHER: Geoffrey Barrenger CLIENT: *Lush* magazine PUBLISHER: Bassett Publishing PRIMARY FONT: Hand lettering