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MAR

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DELICIOUS

REPUTY

PICTURES


Vertical decorative graphic element on the right side, consisting of horizontal lines.



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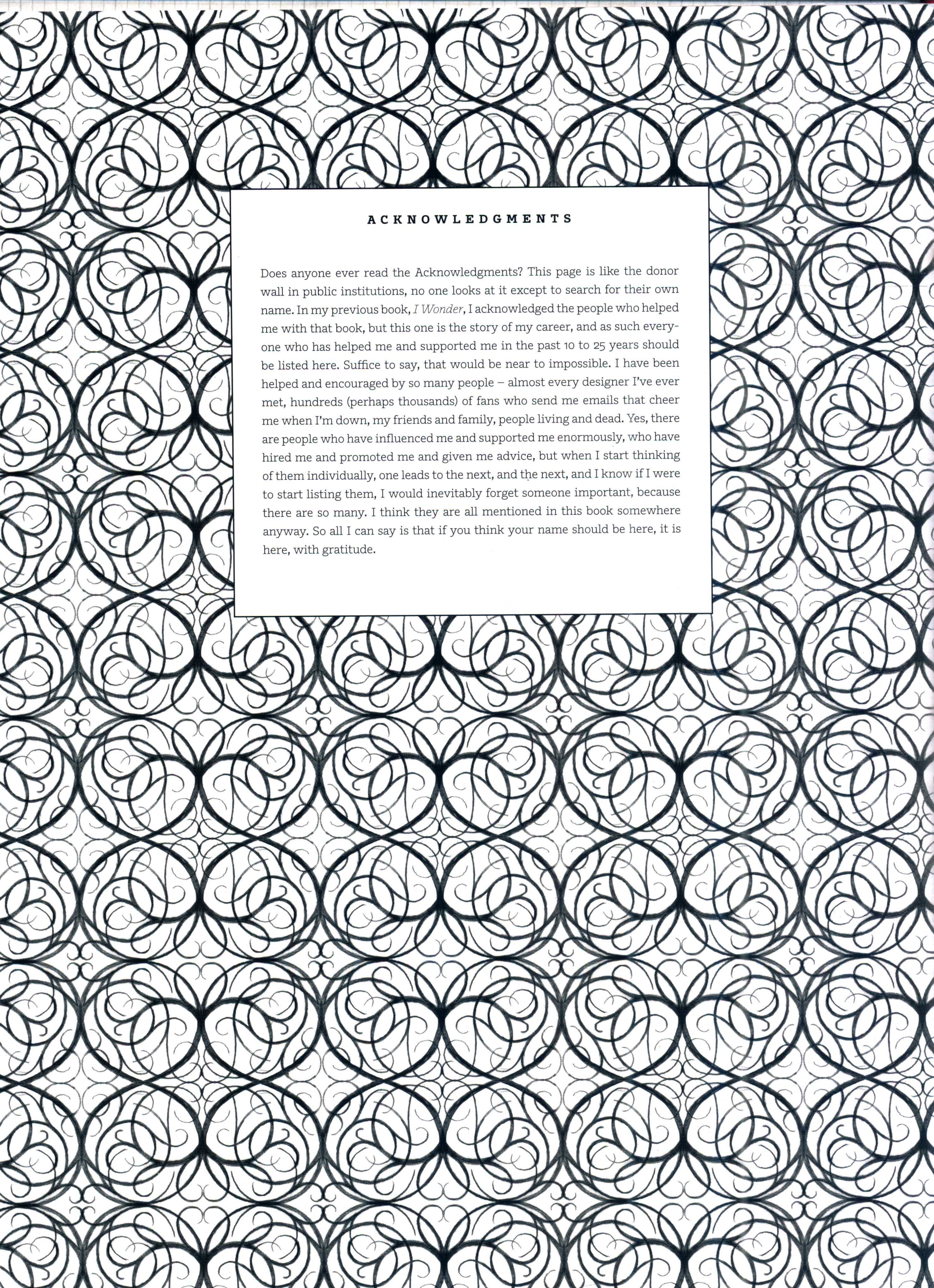
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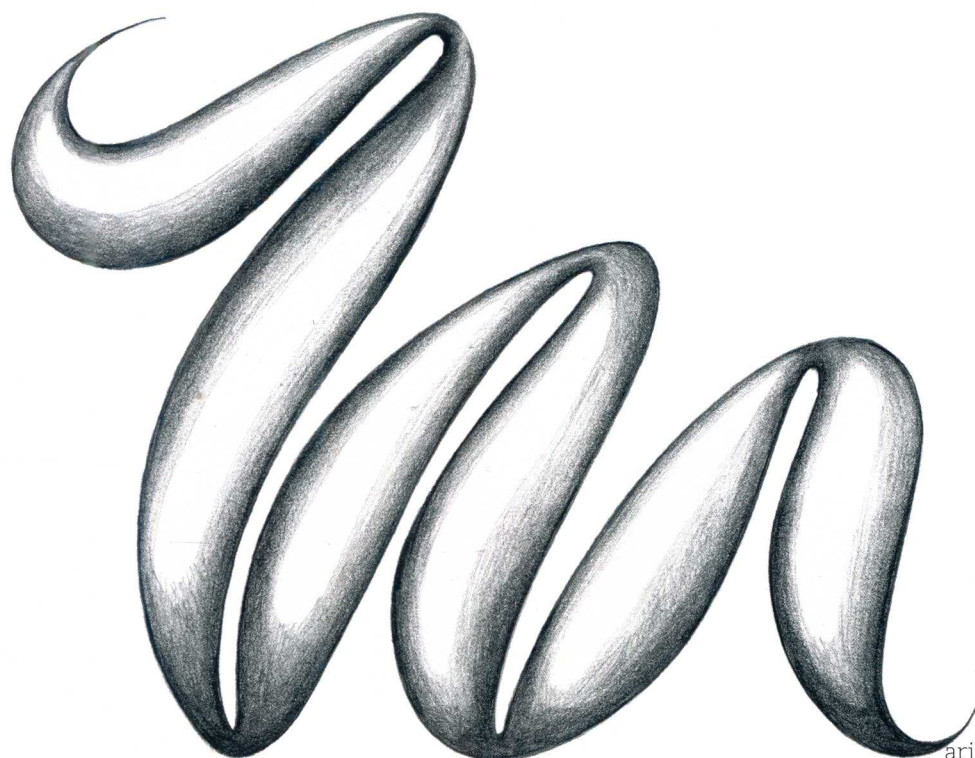




ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Does anyone ever read the Acknowledgments? This page is like the donor wall in public institutions, no one looks at it except to search for their own name. In my previous book, *I Wonder*, I acknowledged the people who helped me with that book, but this one is the story of my career, and as such everyone who has helped me and supported me in the past 10 to 25 years should be listed here. Suffice to say, that would be near to impossible. I have been helped and encouraged by so many people – almost every designer I've ever met, hundreds (perhaps thousands) of fans who send me emails that cheer me when I'm down, my friends and family, people living and dead. Yes, there are people who have influenced me and supported me enormously, who have hired me and promoted me and given me advice, but when I start thinking of them individually, one leads to the next, and the next, and I know if I were to start listing them, I would inevitably forget someone important, because there are so many. I think they are all mentioned in this book somewhere anyway. So all I can say is that if you think your name should be here, it is here, with gratitude.

FOREWORD

by *Rick Poyner*

arian Bantjes is one of the most notable

graphic image-makers to have emerged since 2000. Only a tiny number of designers in each decade manage to come out of nowhere and become stars of the profession within two or three years. Bantjes's rise was all the more remarkable because, for the first part of her career, until her late 30s, she worked as a regular designer, doing a fine job, no doubt, but seemingly not harbouring great ambition to conquer design's global stage. Although she had talent, there were few signs that she was capable of the extraordinary flights of graphic ingenuity and embellishment that rapidly made her name once she had taken the decision, in 2003, to leave her company and go freelance. This makes Bantjes doubly interesting. She has created some of the most memorable graphic design of this century, helping to propel the field in a new ornamental direction, and she has pulled off a mid-career life change that many might dream about, but few achieve with such conviction, panache and success.

I first encountered her name on the *Speak Up* blog in the early 2000s, where she was one of a team of feisty bloggers. Her posts were written with brio and great confidence, and I assumed that Bantjes was a precocious upstart since that was the manner *Speak Up* cultivated. When I met her in Vancouver in 2005, she gently pointed out to me that she was older than I had probably assumed. Those early posts, written in parallel with her new creative work, played a part in her international lift-off. They projected the sense of an inquiring, opinionated, fully formed individual who knew exactly what she was doing. Right from the start – or the second start – she was a designer with a distinctive personal voice, and not all designers possess this.

The peril of having too distinctive a voice and presence is that it can communicate more insistently than the work. In retrospect, I can see this slowed down my appreciation of Bantjes's design. As a viewer, this was an odd position to be in, because, left to speak up on its own account, Bantjes's output absorbs and delights me. Looking through the pages of this monograph before writing, I have followed the same winding trail of pleasurable (re)discovery that awaits each reader. Books and exhibitions always have the effect of concentrating perception and, when viewed in such quantity, the explosive graphic invention of her work is even more exhilarating and beguiling.

Bantjes created these pieces during a period in which many graphic designers seemed uncertain what to do with the visual potential of the discipline, and grew to believe that visual style and effect were inherently a problem. Some beat a retreat back to the security of unadorned Modernism. Some allowed programmer-determined defaults to make the visual decisions for them. Some prioritized conceptualism over supposedly bankrupt aesthetics. Bantjes's work showed that such thinking represented a failure of imagination and a loss of faith in design. More often than not these paths led to dead ends. It was still possible, she reminded us, to produce graphic design that was knowledgeable of the past while being entirely contemporary, a celebration of the joy of form while maintaining a rigorous communicative intelligence. We hadn't seen designs that embraced complexity with such artfulness

and passion since the mid-1990s, but where early digital design had often been about fragmentation and dissonance, Bantjes's pieces were lustrous, sinuously linear and harmoniously interconnected.

The feistiness and self-belief are still there in her writing, but there is a chastening honesty, too. You gain a real picture from these pages of how and why the work gets made and what Bantjes feels about it, positive or negative. 'This is a terrible piece of shit,' she declares at one point. 'I am a terrible logo designer ... Whatever the rationale, it's no excuse for this mess.' And another time: 'I really blew this one, badly.' Such candid admissions, where others might put on display only their gleaming successes, make for a book that is truly instructive about the struggle to create great work and the unsparing self-criticism this requires. It is surprising to see the number of rejected pieces – not because the work is lacking, but because of what this reveals about the unfathomable nature of some clients, and the toll this must take on a self-aware designer who has poured everything into delivering an exceptional design. From the outside, it can only seem perverse that *Western Living* magazine wasn't happy with the cover Bantjes devised (page 198), and that a country she must not name (now which could it be?) should be unwilling to accept a manifestly ravishing stamp design (page 222). She makes no secret that this episode rocked her confidence – it would rock anyone's.

This is the challenge and risk of importing so much art into design. It is the art – if by art we understand a profoundly personal degree of engagement – that elevates the work to another level of content. Bantjes's highly wrought filigrees, arabesques, patterns and intricacies come from obsession; the fibres of her emotional and intellectual being run deep in them. In her most unrestrained images, which often seem close to a lush, ornamental Surrealism – see, for instance, 'YouMe 3 aka Alienhead' (page 25) – the tendrils branch and intertwine, enfold and fondle each other like animated capillaries. When a colleague proposed that, 'Art and Design are cousins. They should not sleep together,' Bantjes strenuously objected. There is, of course, a place for design that abstains (at least consciously) from intimate contact with art. What Bantjes has shown with this triumphantly realized body of work is that graphic art that fuses the capacities of the two disciplines, because the maker is both designer and artist, has the power to captivate and astonish any viewer alive to its energy.

INTRODUCTION



nyone I've ever spoken to about doing a monograph has told me the experience was traumatic in one way or another. Mine has been no exception. There is a summing up, and a reflection on the body of work that is not always easy. I find that I swing between seeing it all as insignificant and unworthy of a monograph, and seeing things that I think are so great, but that I have never matched since. Going through my back catalogue has revealed many surprises – forgotten works, pieces that weren't as bad as I remembered, foreshadowings of things to come. Sifting through the past – old emails, old arguments, correspondences both comforting and painful – it's more than just a cataloguing process. At the end of it, it seems like something has to close: a chapter of work at the very least, if not of life.

This monograph came about because Lucas Dietrich at Thames & Hudson nagged me, over a period of years, to do it, until I finally agreed that I was ready. And once agreed, an idea of the thing fell quite rapidly into place. My first decision was to do the whole thing myself: works editing, writing, designing, layout and production, with Lucas as sounding board and Elaine McAlpine as editor. This was against the advice of several people, who advocated hiring someone else to edit the works, and even design the book. But I'm far too much of a control freak for that.

My next decisions were to include almost all of my work in the past nine years and to arrange it chronologically. I wanted this partly for myself – to see the development of my work – but I also felt it would be most instructive for the viewer. Many of the people who are interested in my work are at the beginning of their careers, and I want them to see the progress and changeability of my work over time. As well, by including everything, from the good to mediocre to bad, I want to give some hope to people who struggle. There is trial and error, achievements and disappointments, both in myself, the process and in clients. It's a tale of triumph and heartbreak!

Writing it all myself was a must. I had no intention of creating a picture book with just-the-facts captions, but wanted to tell stories about the work, much as I do when presenting on stage. In fact, originally I wanted to get everything I ever had to say about my work, about design, art and design, and various thoughts and ideas into this book, so I would never have to say it again. But to do it all would have included another couple of hundred pages of writing alone. That will have to come another time – so for this one I concentrated solely on the graphic work.

I've genuinely enjoyed the designing aspect of this: working on a complex book design with myriad decisions on every page. Early attempts to work with a grid were just too restricting. The restrictions of chronology, importance, detail and narrative were enough. But this isn't to say that the pages are without structure – far from it. Each page spread has its own alignments and balance within the confines of the margins. While generally chronological, I took some liberties to create good pairings, and to fit multiple works together nicely on a page.

Indexing was quite fun, and I got into the categorization of works, while at the same time being more than a little shocked by the primitiveness of InDesign's indexing system.

Just the organization of the whole thing has been daunting. My records were not what I would have liked; but in the making of this project a database has been started, a physical file system

The title of this book, 'Pretty Pictures', was given to me by Rick Valicenti. It is both a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgment of a criticism that is sometimes levied against my work, and a juxtaposition against what I hope is obviously more than it seems.

Some things of note: occasionally, projects are identified as rejected, killed or died, and well might you wonder the difference. For my purposes, rejected work is that which the client didn't like; killed projects are those that for reasons outside my control didn't go ahead, so they liked the work, but something else happened; and projects that died are those that just semi-mysteriously disappeared. It happens.

set up, samples organized ... but it is still in need of months' worth of work. As always, I'm uncertain: is it a legacy, or a pile of junk?

I first became known for my interest in ornament and, if you will, fancy curves and elegant lines married to contemporary shapes: pixels and squares and geometric forms. I have never tried to recreate the past: the past was already done so well. But I wanted to resurrect motifs that had been abandoned by modernism and the pseudo-modernist culture of contemporary design, without being nostalgic. I was

In the index is a section called 'fonts used'. Because most of my work is my own custom lettering, I thought it only fair, and interesting, to note where I've used someone else's font. Please note that this does not cover instances where my work was used as an illustration in another design, such as a magazine. In those cases I had no say or control in the choice and placement of additional type, nor do I have any idea what font was used.

at the beginning of a movement that rose like a wave and quickly crashed over us in a splorp of thoughtless ornamentation. In a way, ornamentation was undone in the 21st century by the same mechanization that undid it in the 19th. The Victorian era was known for the proliferation of a morass of printed ornament parts that were used and combined willy-nilly and to excess by mass-production printers. The neo-decorative movement of the past decade was similarly glutted by a laying-on of clipart curves, sprayed

flowers and the vomit of organic shapes that poured out of digital paintbrushes. For the few of us who were genuinely interested in exploring the marriage of old and new, and in resurrecting and perfecting a purity of form, it was already too late. Curves and swirls are over, man. They were trampled in the digital, faddish stampede without so much as a glance towards quality or invention. Very few people seem to have an eye for a good curve, fewer still the ability to make one. Despite the genuine pleasure I still get in creating the loop-de-loop, I backed off from the arabesques quite soon – my interests were broader and more complex.

Throughout, as well, I've been interested in patterns and custom lettering – sometimes combining both, which I find some of my most satisfying work. But there is always a desire to subvert or surprise with the forms and content: to juxtapose opposites. I've had some trouble with clients in this regard, as I've resisted, as best I can, doing work that is expected: pretty things for pretty subjects. I'm also very interested in the boundaries of legibility and how far you can hide them in other systems. I strongly feel that if you have something of interest to say, it's OK to make people work for it. People enjoy using their brains; figuring things out. It makes them feel triumphant when they succeed.

I'm very interested in structure, especially as I've developed. Structure may or may not mean 'grid', and grid may or may not be based on mathematics or other systems. Mostly it means balance and relationships between elements on the page.

A note about the sizes of works. This caused me no end of head-scratching, but in general, where there was an original piece of work (a drawing or painting) I've given the paper size of the work – this in accordance with how galleries do it, even though I'm uncomfortable with the fact that I show only the image, not the whole sheet of paper. But that's how it's done. If the thing is a poster, magazine cover or book, I've generally given the size of the printed piece. Many of the vector works have not been given sizes: this is because vector graphics are digital files that are infinitely scalable.

From the beginning I've worked by hand, and made type and ornament out of different media and materials. This may be part of, or have contributed to some kind of 'handmade' movement, but the handmade is part of a natural swing of the pendulum as the design world became almost exclusively digital. For most, it is reaction: you stand out by being not what the mainstream is, but for myself increasingly it's because I'm just too fucking old to do what these youngsters are doing. I've seen astonishing, gut-wrenchingly great digital work in the past few years, and I know that I

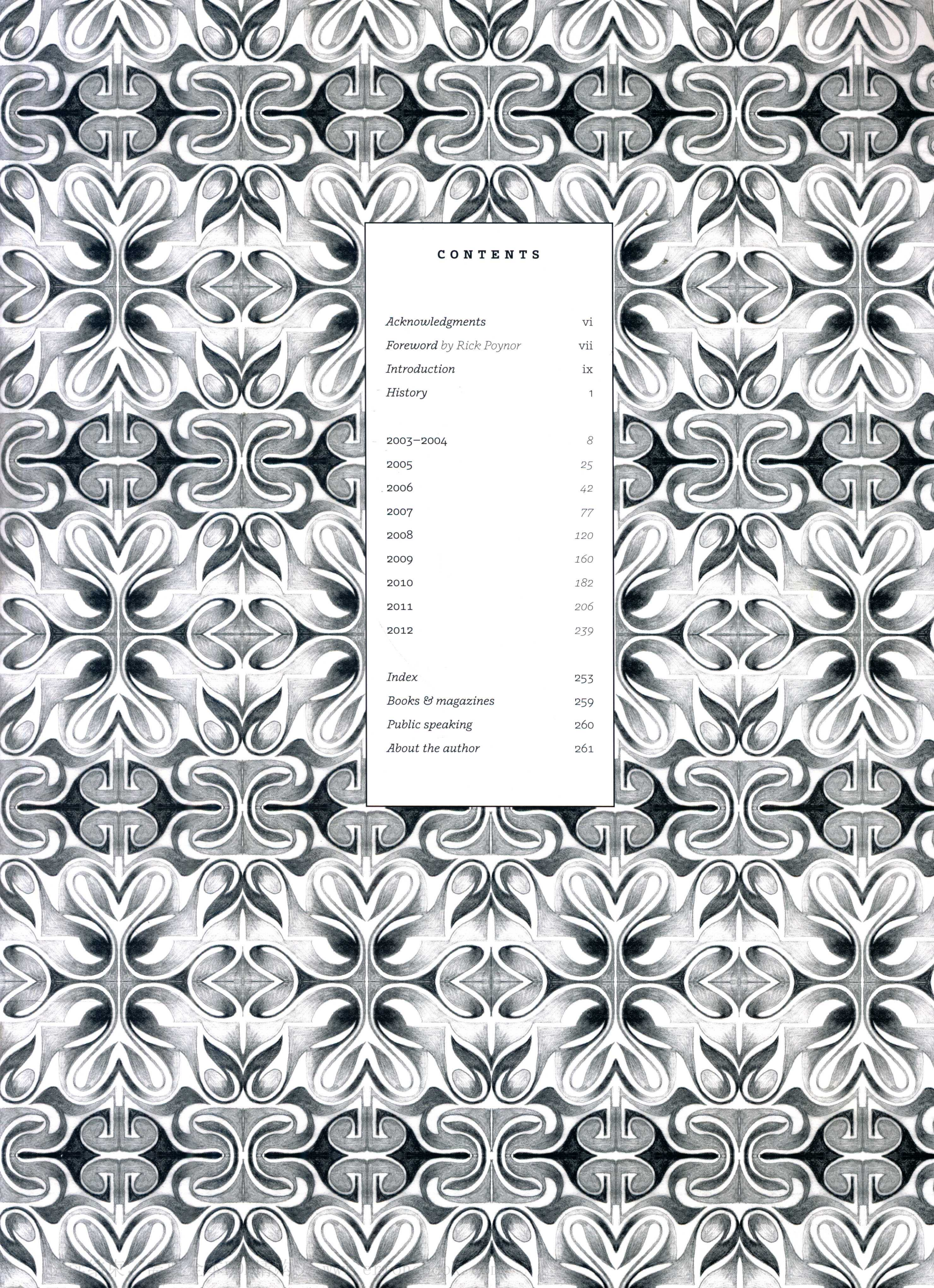
can never keep up with that. So I retreat to the pencil; it is an old friend.

Overall, I am a visual designer. My work usually makes sense in context, but Concept is never a driving force, nor even usually a consideration – one way in which I swim against current standard practice in Graphic Design. Another way is that I do not believe Less is More – it can be, but usually is not – and the inference that More is Less is downright irritating. And I am on record as saying that there *is* a place for Ego in design – that being not self-aggrandizement, but the investment of the self. To say 'this is mine; this is a piece of me' is to take ultimate responsibility for it. Being egoless in your work (i.e. tailoring it to the needs of the client, in collaboration, without your identity on it) can too easily lead to excuses why it isn't as good as you had hoped or intended it to be.

It was while judging a show several years ago that I was able to formulate what I consider to be desirable in design, both my own and others. With some refinement, those things are:

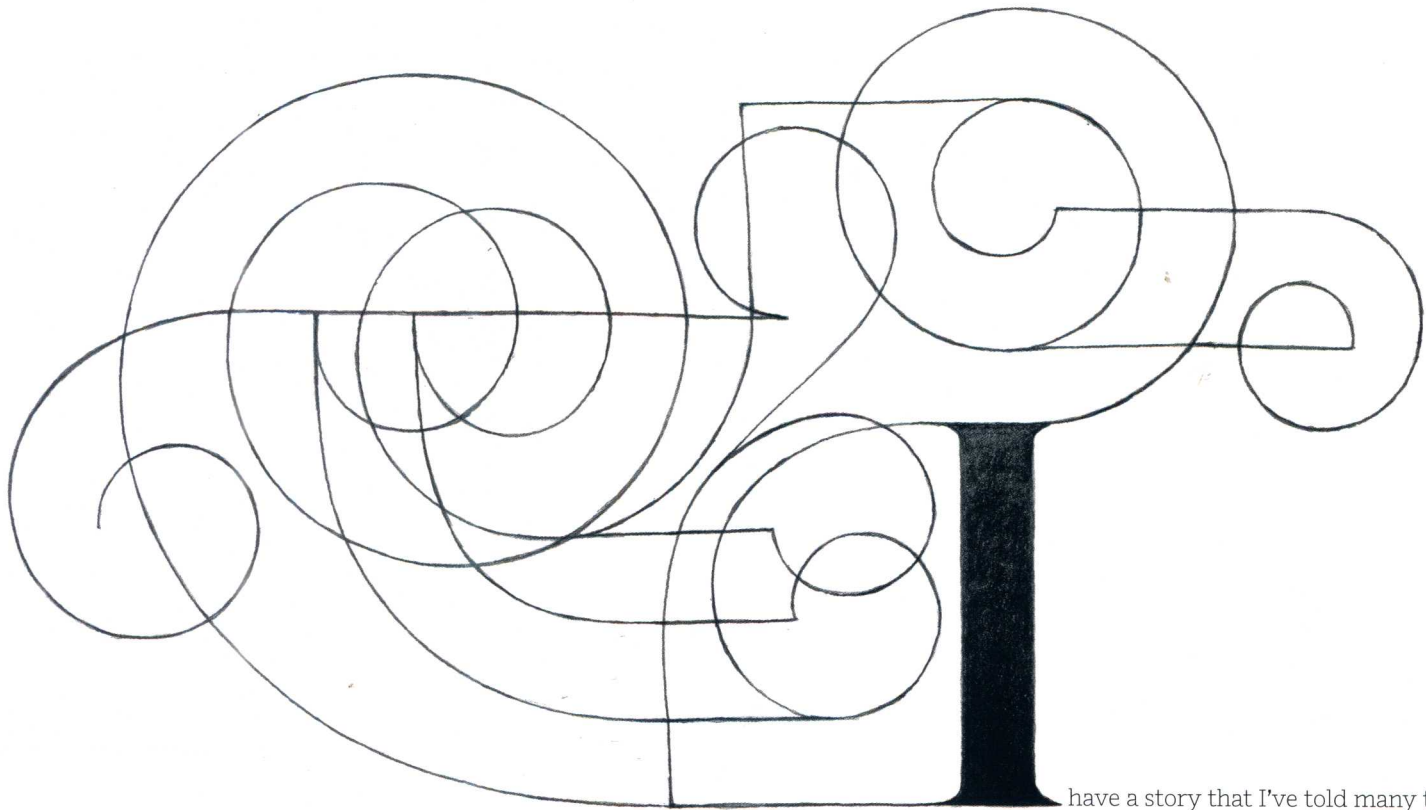
1. It should arrest and hold attention.
2. It should then invoke curiosity.
3. It should surprise.
4. It should invoke wonder.
5. It should bring joy.
6. It should be memorable.
7. Bonus points if it's funny.

It's very difficult to get them all, but those are my goals. Ultimately, I want to make things that are worthwhile, that affect people positively without being saccharine or too easily digestible. Things that can somehow affect the way they see or think. It's rather a grand task, and has absolutely nothing to do with advertising or the promotion of a client. I see clients as both benefactors and beneficiaries of what is, ideally, a bigger experience. *Oh fuck it, what am I saying? It's just design, dammit.*



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have a story that I've told many times.

I've told it so many times that I've become bored in the telling and I've condensed the story into smaller and smaller pieces until, in more recent tellings, they are like bullet points. But it's a good story, and true, so I'll tell it again because it's the story of my career and the reason I'm 'here' today. Here, as in here in these pages, in this book, in your hands.

I've heard that the human brain is predisposed to finding patterns, to linking cause and result, often in long chains of reaction. As an atheist, I'm not comfortable with the notion of fate, but looking back over anyone's life, it's possible to see those turning points, those key twists in life that turn some random act of everyday living into a crossroads. One of mine came when, at the age of 20 and unemployed in Vancouver, Canada, I went into a second-hand bookstore to get change for the bus. There, posted next to the cash register was a small, handwritten ad for a job in a publishing company. I've always been a reader, but I had no interest in publishing or the production of books. I particularly had no knowledge or interest in typography, and if I hadn't answered that ad, I doubt I ever would have.

It was 1983, and only a year earlier I had dropped out of art school (Emily Carr College of Art, now Emily Carr University) after the Foundation year.¹ My new job, at Hartley & Marks/Typeworks, was just a job. I was hired initially to do photocopying and filing, but that soon turned to being trained in paste-up and layout, and led to being trained as a book typesetter on the not-quite-state-of-the-art phototypesetting machines.² This is not a job in design; it's one in which you follow the instructions of a designer to the letter. An experienced typesetter will use their knowledge to attend to the myriad details that the designer may have overlooked, but this is in no way a creative process. It's a skill of a very old-fashioned sort, similar to that of a tailor. The goal is to make it right, to make it fit, to make it elegant.

This is actually very rare in the design industry now. Most designers leave the tedious details to junior designers/production people, who aren't usually qualified to do this work properly, and it's considered a chore. But I still love that feeling of making something that is correct. I have even considered, if my career falls apart, that I would love to work as a typesetter again for some really good designer. It's very satisfying.

I worked as a book typesetter for ten years. The job ended unhappily, in a fight with my boss. No matter, it was 1993 and the trade I'd spent ten years learning was already nearly obsolete. I found myself highly trained in a specific area of typography, but without a lot of the skills that would get me a good job in a design firm. For instance, I had never really worked with images or colour, and had no idea what happened after artwork left the shop until it magically returned some time later as a bound book. And so, without knowing how little I knew, it was then that my friend Sue Kerr and I decided to start our own design company.

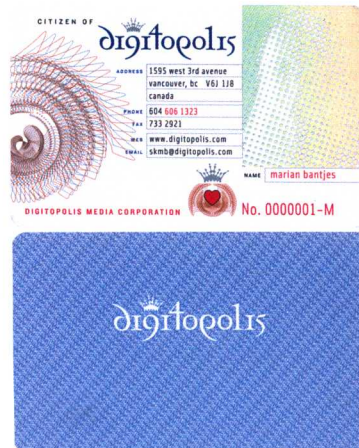
Sue named the company Communication by Design.³ In the beginning, we got lucky with a couple of big clients and the first two years were just crazy. I was the main designer, and my learning curve was through the roof. There was crying, there was elation, there was fear, but mostly it was

1. In 2010 I was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters by ECU.

2. I wish I could say that I immediately fell in love with type, but it wouldn't be true. I became familiar with type and I became very good at my job. I loved the fact that there was a right way and a wrong way to do it. I was fast and my work was correct and I took a lot of pleasure in this rightness and in the attention to detail. It was only in working with type that I came to know it and understand it from a working perspective. Type had a feel and a personality when set in text, and while after time I could come to love a particular R or S or italic Z, I've always needed to work with it to really get a sense of whether I liked that particular typeface or not.

My training was very informal: what was needed for the job, what I picked up from how the designers used type, and the occasional impromptu diatribe on the finer details of typography by our boss, Vic Marks (who had an excellent eye coupled with an astonishing inability to actually implement his otherwise great taste). But I am an obsessive, and I latched onto what little of the arcana of typography I could. It was also a stroke of luck that one of Vic's friends was Robert Bringhurst. I typeset a few of Robert's books and display pieces – his mark-up was always impeccable – but I left the company before the production of *The Elements of Typographic Style*, which took a place at the top of the typographic canon shortly after being published in 1992.

3. We changed the name to Digitopolis about five years later, after I confessed in a staff meeting that I was so embarrassed by our original name that I wouldn't tell it to anyone I met.



4. For many years I was on public record saying that what we did should have been illegal. We weren't prepared at all for what was required of us. My idea that design = art + typography turned out to be faulty at best. We were the untrained upstarts that every established designer rails against. But, while our inexperience was hard on us and hard on our clients, I've had a complete about-face on the practice of design and how it should and shouldn't be done. And today I'm not so sure that the way I entered design wasn't perhaps the best way. Although we were somehow quickly absorbed into the median of design practice, perhaps with a little more guts we wouldn't have been. I don't know anymore. I don't know what it takes to be a great designer, except that extraordinary vision seems just as likely to come from outside design education as from within it.

a lot of fun. I was just doing all sorts of things I had never done before: everything was a first. And so many mistakes.⁴ That was followed by about another six years of growth in staff, clients, facilities and projects in all the usual areas of graphic design. But what also grew was an increasing frustration on

my part in terms of my vision of the kind of work I wanted to be doing not being borne out in the work we actually were doing. I felt angst not only for myself, but for my designers, Chris Campbell, Brian Morgan and Kirsten Gravkin. The business became a kind of machine. The money flowed in, the money flowed out. Computers, offices, employees, clients ... but the work was no longer this adventure, it was just work that never ended. I started to not care. At first we'd joke about it between us, 'Who gives a shit what colour your logo is, or what your brochure looks like? It doesn't matter!' and then it wasn't a joke anymore. Also by this time, I really was looking around and seeing what other people were doing, and

I had ideas to do work like I hadn't seen before (mainly in the vein of the work I'm doing now). I'd make elaborate pieces for our own company, and people loved them, but, as my business partner put it to me, 'This is all very nice, but nobody wants it.' The final two years marked the distinct breakdown in my friendship and business relationship as our vision for the future of the company diverged and I became disillusioned with not only the company and my work, but also the very nature of graphic design.

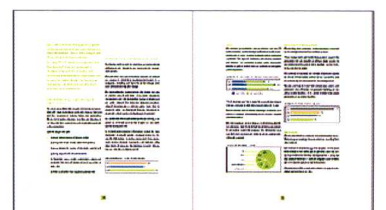
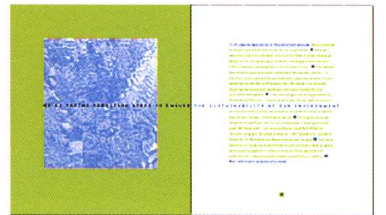
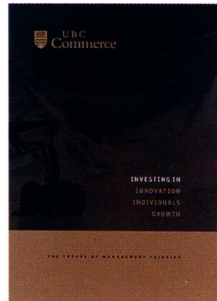
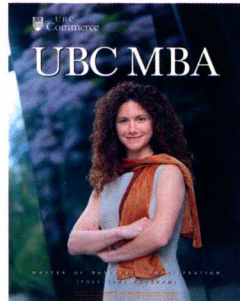
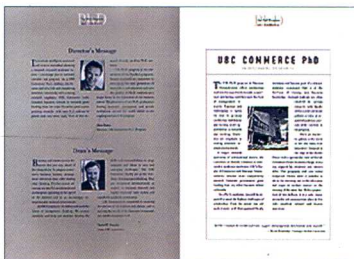
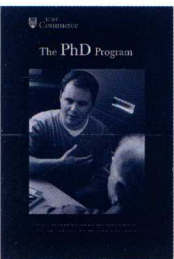
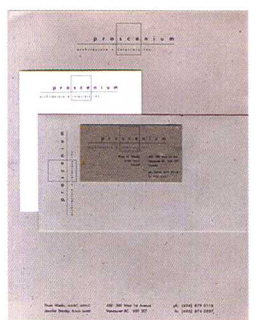
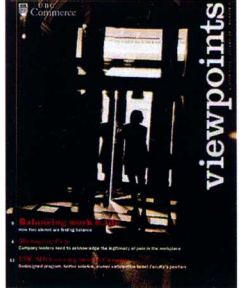
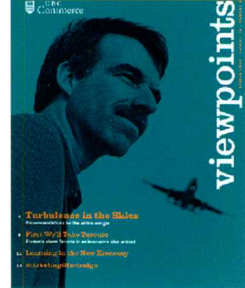
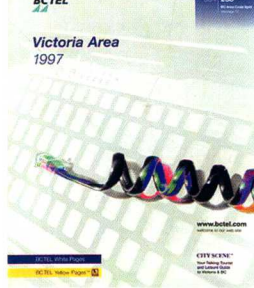
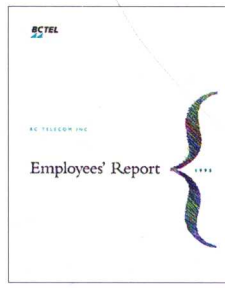
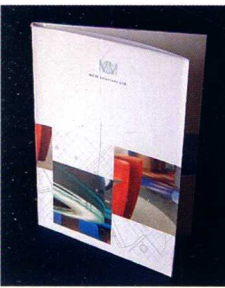
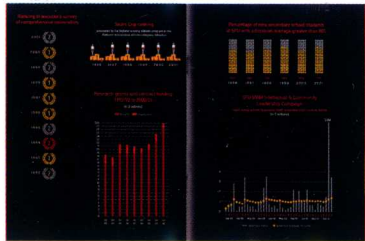
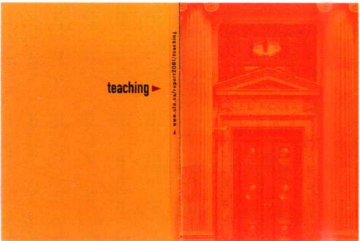
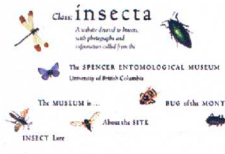
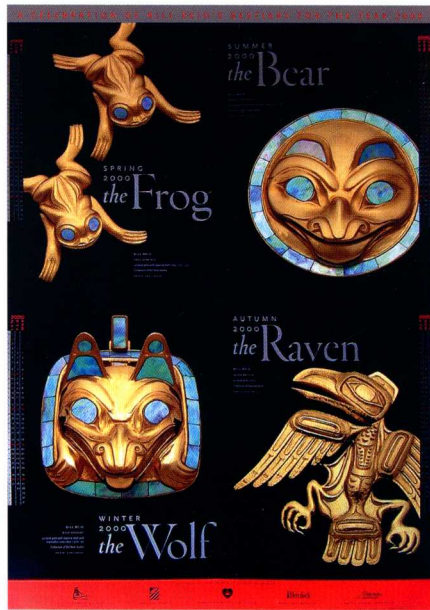
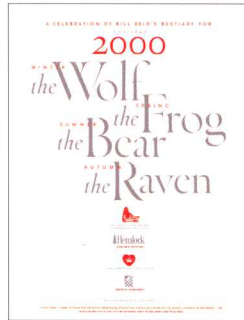
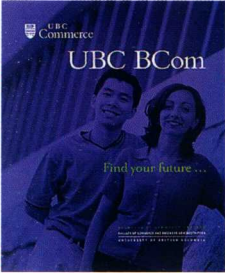
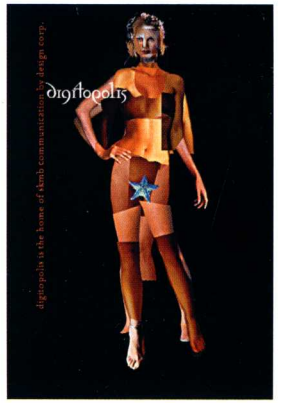
I became, in short, jaded and bitter. I no longer wanted to be a consultant on people's marketing services. I imagined myself on my deathbed looking back over my life, and I felt that I'd wasted it. I'd created nothing important or memorable or influential.⁵ I had lived in a small backwater of the design world, creating pseudo-importance from nothing, justified on the grounds that it was somehow 'cleansing the world of ugly design' and 'contributing to the success of businesses'. I was extremely unhappy, and desperate to get out. This was my mid-life crisis.

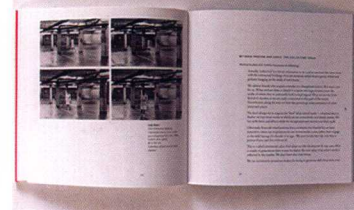
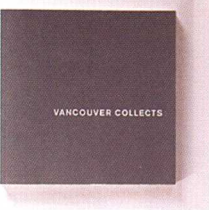
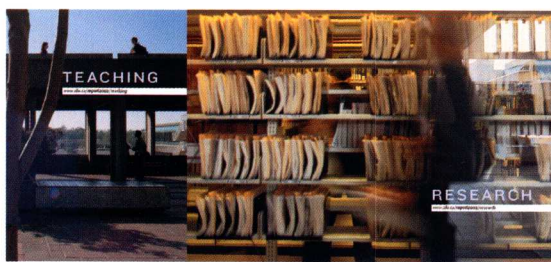
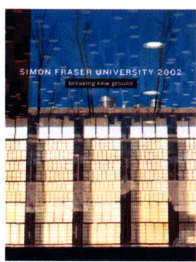
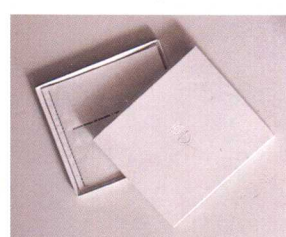
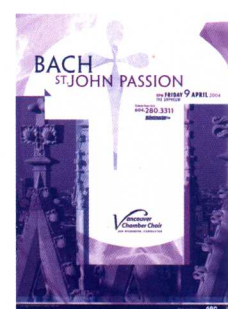
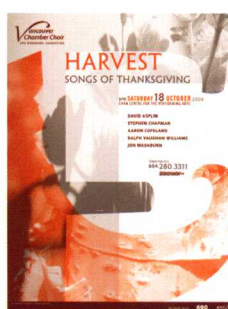
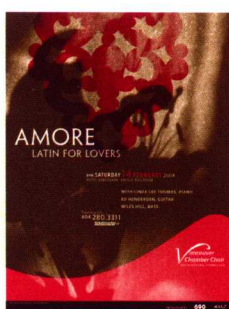
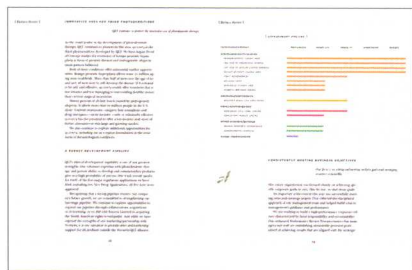
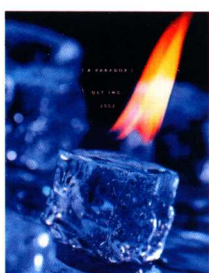
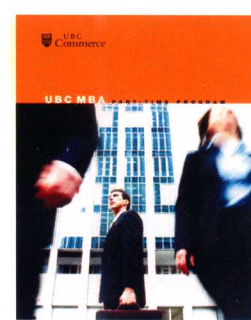
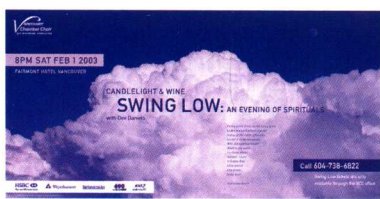
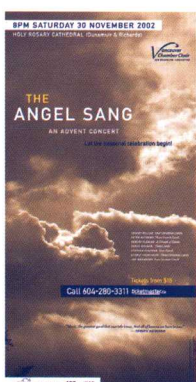
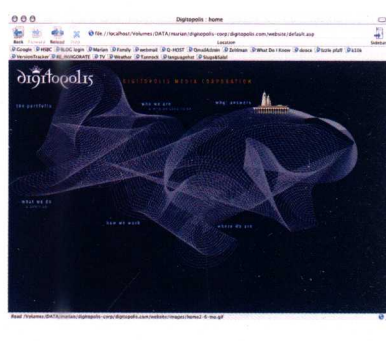
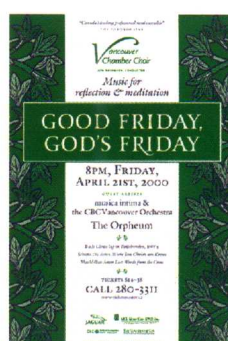
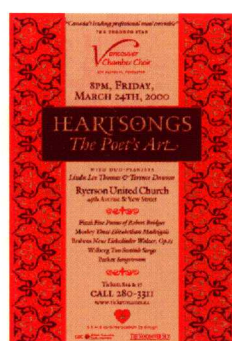
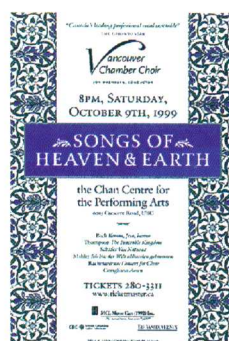
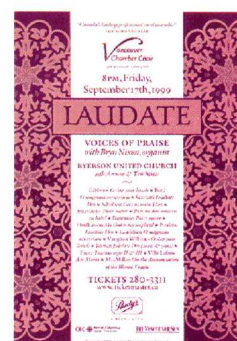
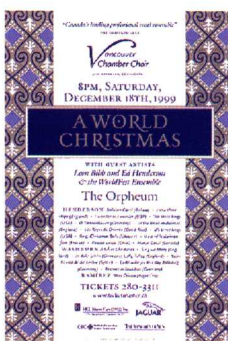
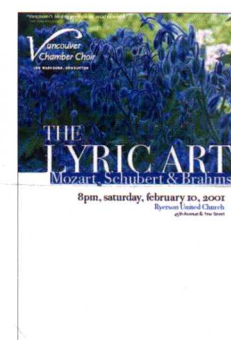
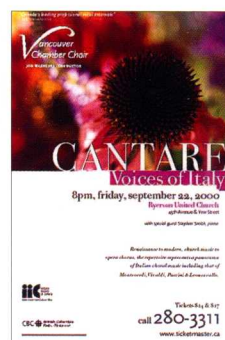
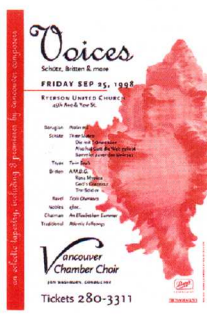
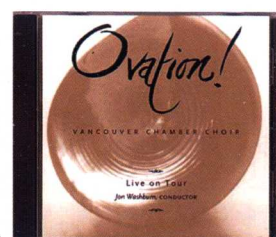
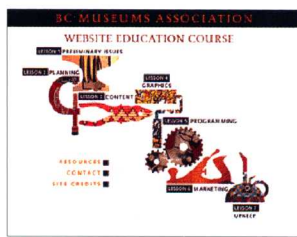
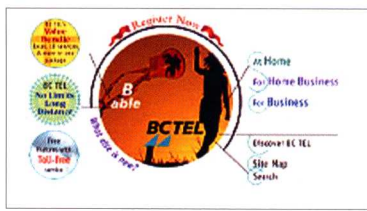
5. Despite the fact that I tend to remember my work from Digitopolis with contempt, I find when I go back into the archives a number of pieces that are surprisingly advanced and certainly prescient of the direction I eventually took. I've long had this idea that my 'new' work sort of sprang forth from almost nowhere, shortly after leaving Digitopolis. But if I really look at the visual record, I can see a fairly long interest in ornamental work, as well as a few genuine attempts to experiment with form and with the unexpected.





digitopolis

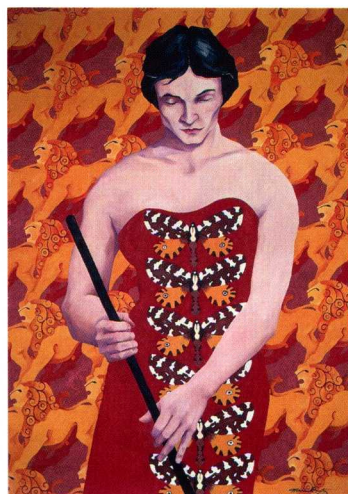
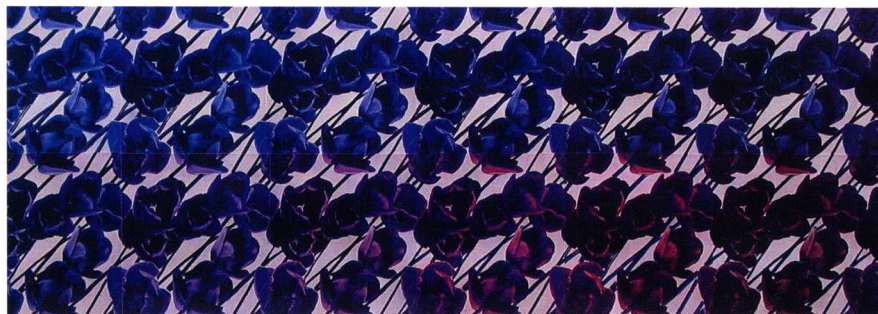




In 2002 I was very close to just walking out the door on my own company, when my partner offered to buy me out. Overjoyed, I agreed to one more year on contract, and I began planning my future. While these plans weren't particularly clear, I determined that I wanted to follow a different model: that instead of me operating as a purveyor of whatever style was appropriate to clients' needs, I wanted to have my own style that people would come to me for. I could imagine this only as being an illustrator, and so in some vague way I decided to become an illustrator. I felt that it should be possible to make a living doing something I loved – it didn't seem too much to ask. At this point I thought I was finished with graphic design.

Meanwhile, I encountered another strange twist of direction in my path. Sometime in early 2003 I began hanging out on a website – a blog – called *Speak Up*.⁶ I soon became completely obsessed by this boisterous, irreverent, lively community of designers and became a frequent commenter on the posts. To my great surprise I was not finished with design: I still cared a lot about design and had a lot of strong opinions about it. And while I planned to leave the design profession, I found that through writing, I actually became much more deeply involved in it.

So I left my company and a good income to do something more personal, more art-based and somehow closer to myself. I'd been dabbling in ornamental forms for several years. Many of the things I'd made for Digitopolis were based on ornament, complexity and organic forms. I had been painting with patterns since 1989, and I explored that further in 2003 with printmaking. I was starting to see the beginnings of ornament in the design world, and I was certain that the time had come for me to start working in this style. But the switch was far from easy.



Once I had finished my contract with my former company in July 2003 and gone out on my own, not only did my income drop to zero overnight (and stayed there for over a year), but also I was a neophyte once again. My design work was somewhat known in Vancouver, but completely unrecognized outside of it (understandably). So I did what everyone else does when they're starting out: I made self-promotion pieces and sent them out to designers I admired. 'No answer' was the stern reply.⁷

One of the great mysteries to myself is where my interest in and knack for custom typography came from, as well as my penchant for curves, and how I happened to approach both with an apparent understanding of form. I was certainly never taught it, nor had I studied it in any great detail. Prior to leaving Digitopolis I had never made custom lettering beyond the slight modification of a font for a logotype. I had been working with patterns in my own artwork since about 1989, and there is some evidence of my interest in the Baroque from some of my prints from the '90s. But the well-formed flourishes and letterforms seemed to spring forth from nowhere immediately upon leaving my company. It's really most strange.

6. This was in the early days of blogs, and Speak Up was the first dedicated design blog. It was started and operated by Armin Vit, a then-disgruntled, intelligent, crankily good-natured Mexican-American designer. And by the time I found it, it was already in full swing with a complement of similarly feisty, no-holds-barred writer-designers such as Debbie Millman, Sam Potts, Patrick King, Mark Kingsley and Tan Le, among others (good friends to this day), and it was also frequented by many of the US's most well-known designers. I didn't know this at the time. When I say I had been existing in a design backwater, I mean it. Michael Bierut, Rick Poynor, Ellen Lupton, Rick Valicenti ... none of these names were familiar to me. But the more I took part, the more I learned: who these people were, what their different and, to me, new perspectives were on design. The greater my understanding of the design world grew, the greater my understanding of my own insignificance. But it was undoubtedly my ignorance combined with my unimportance that allowed me to uninhibitedly challenge anyone or any idea with complete fearlessness. This is something that I have, sadly, lost.

7. Stefan Sagmeister remembers the first piece I sent him, and kept it. He would like to believe that he contacted me, but he did not. It wasn't until I met him some time later that I discovered he had kept and remembered the piece. I don't remember sending anything to Michael Bierut, but he remembers getting it. I had sent things to AdamsMorioka, but it wasn't until I met Noreen Morioka at a conference and gave her the Poster One (page 12) that she paid attention to me. I did receive a kind response from Rudy Vanderlans. But mostly the response rate from the mailouts was poor. It's hard for an inexperienced person to imagine how much stuff these people get on a daily basis. It really is junk mail.

I spent most of my time making things, drawing and exploring, as well as writing for Speak Up. Several other important things happened between July 2003 and August 2004:

ONE I joined the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC) and immediately took a local board position as Communications Chair. What this gave me was the control over the design and production of print materials for the local chapter. I started out cautiously, but spent the next four years using it as a springboard for carte-blanche design. This was my first opportunity to really explore some things in design that I never would have previously dared with a client, and it taught me that it was possible to create effective artistic design work, and to enjoy it.

TWO Speak Up held a T-shirt competition, which I somewhat reluctantly entered⁸ and then won (page 11). My design for the T-shirt was my first custom type and a seminal piece that I became known

for and which I riffed off of for several iterations. It also led me directly to Rick Valicenti – or rather, vice versa – resulting in his invitation to contribute to one of his type projects (page 14), and a long friendship.

THREE I attended my first design conference when the AIGA held their 2003 national conference in Vancouver. Desperate for work, I forced myself to talk to people and to hand out a piece I had made, Poster One (page 12). I was, in fact, bold in a way I never have been before or since. I met Stefan Sagmeister and somehow managed to make an impression on him with our brief conversation and the poster – he recognized the work from something I'd sent him before. By this time also I was very well known on Speak Up,

and I was able to meet people such as Michael Bierut as an acquaintance. And it was there that I met the Speak Up gang in person and became friends with them all – most notably with Debbie Millman, who became one of my best friends and supporters.

FOUR I was also made an Author of Speak Up, which allowed me to compose my own articles and thoughts on design, rather than simply rant about others'. Over time, this developed into a particular writing style that brought me further recognition, and even a following, in the US (and international) design community.⁹ At the time, I questioned the many hours I was putting into Speak Up, thinking

it not much more than a waste of time. But in the end I have to credit it as a significant factor in my success. This was largely a case of being in the right place at the right time. As mentioned, Speak Up was the first design blog and it was very popular, holding the attention of much of the US design community for a number of years. So while I was sending out my new work, when people saw it they were making a connection with me as a writer as

well. And in all honesty, Speak Up put me directly in touch with some very important people, some of whom later became clients and friends. The significance of blogs has passed, and garnering this kind of attention for an unknown designer would require some as-yet-unknown new forum.

Still, despite all of this serendipity, good fortune and hard work, I still wasn't earning any money. In fact, I was rapidly running out of money. The buyout from my business had bought me a year, after which I'd determined that if I didn't make it, I'd have to go out and get a design job. That was pretty much the last thing on earth I wanted to do. But I did run out of money, and the situation was looking very dire except that I was getting noticed. I was getting praise from people I admired, and the various unpaid things I was doing were receiving a certain amount of attention. So I borrowed some money to give myself some more time ... and in August 2004 I got my first paid assignment, from *Details* magazine (page 19) – they wanted something like the Speak Up T-shirt.

After that, the work just seemed to start coming in – not an avalanche, but enough to be encouraging and to keep me hopeful. Within a couple of years I actually was making a living and could call my life change a success.

One more significant thing happened in 2004. I got a call from Emily Carr University asking me to teach Typography in their Continuing Studies programme. Oddly, but thankfully, they had no course materials – I had to create the 13-session course myself, and I had two weeks to prepare. The

experience was fantastic. I had a lot of practical knowledge in typography, but I'd never formalized it before, and I'd certainly never thought of it in terms of how to teach it to students who knew absolutely nothing about typography.¹⁰ Further, I got it into my head that it should be taught within a historical framework, which is fine except that the one thing I didn't know was the history of type and type designers.

So I spent two weeks in intense preparation, and the entire course cramming and learning in order to stay just that much ahead of the students I was teaching. To this day I think I built a really good introductory course, which, after some modifications, I taught for several years. I loved teaching, and I was always amazed by how much I taught

8. This whole T-shirt thing is a particular pivot point. My initial thought was that a T-shirt competition was beneath me. Ten years at the head of your own design firm tends to give one airs. But as well, I had a learned reaction against 'free' work. I relented because Speak Up was my community. It was personal, and I entered the competition as a form of support to that community. But what I learned was that there can be career benefits from these kinds of unpaid contributions to small enterprises. I still would never work for a large company or organization for free, but ever since the Speak Up T-shirt, I've been more in favour of what I see as free printing opportunities. Provided I have complete carte blanche on the design I still sometimes take advantage of these opportunities today.

9. I give a great deal of credit to the American design community for picking me up, welcoming, encouraging and promoting me. Although I eventually became known and admired in Canada, it was long after I was well known in the US and internationally. This is the Canadian way, and no small source of irritation to me and others who've become recognized elsewhere first before being reclaimed by our parochial country.

10. I was surprised to discover that I knew more than I thought I did. Small facts about type designers, dates and places of the origin of typefaces had somehow filtered into my brain over the course of my 10 years as a book typesetter. When I started to study the history, far from it being all new, it was more like all these pieces falling into place and becoming locked in a matrix of greater understanding. It made my research very interesting and enjoyable. I no longer teach, for a few reasons. One is that after I became well known enough to be asked to speak about my work, my travel schedule meant it wasn't possible to be present for an entire course. And the other is that when I was teaching I was really unknown, and the students came into my class with no expectations. Now it seems that my reputation precedes me, and there's an expectation that I would teach what I do. Not only do I have no interest in teaching what I do, I wouldn't even know how.