Margo Rouard-Snowman

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MARGO ROUARD-SNOWMAN

330 ILLUSTRATIONS 179 IN COLOUR

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GRAPHICS

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Preface
Graphics for museums: an overview

This work is a collection of high-quality graphics, commissioned by art institutions and for events – museums, galleries, festivals and temporary exhibitions – all over the world. The term 'art' is used in the widest sense to include disciplines – architecture, photography, design and cinema – which have not always been accorded full status as 'art' by the museum world. This collection is neither, at one extreme, a coffee-table book, nor is it an extended portfolio. It is intended to be a reference volume full of information, where those who commission graphics will find a wide range of models and where those who design them may seek inspiration. It aims to present a balanced and comprehensive view of tradition and innovation in the field and is illustrated with a great variety of international examples.

The introduction first of all examines the recent proliferation of museums. There follow a brief history of art and graphics; a consideration of graphics and national identity; a description of the graphic artist's profession and methodology; a glance towards the future; and a select glossary of technical terms. After these sections come fifty-nine fully illustrated case studies, organized solely according to geographical location.

Since there is a continuous increase in the number and variety of graphic projects for the arts, this publication, which takes the early 1980s as its starting point, is by no means exhaustive. Any book simply casts light upon its subject and provides one particular view of the works which it has gathered together. Without this element of subjectivity, *Museum Graphics* would not exist in its present form, contributing as it does to the recognition of much professional talent.

Introduction
The museum boom

The museum, which first appeared in eighteenth-century Europe and America, has changed considerably over the last few years. Once poorly managed institutions, they have now emerged from a process of refinement, convinced of the need for a public image, or at the very least for strong posters, and have won for themselves a prestigious position. It is the museum and its temporary exhibitions that authenticate and exalt the fine and applied arts that make up their displays. Whether in the field of painting, sculpture, decorative arts, architecture, photography, design or cinema, the museum conserves its collections and interprets them for its visitors.

Twenty or thirty years ago, museums and the so-called 'cultural' enterprises had a reputation for elitism. This was due, among other things, to the difficulties of public access and to the conservative policies of curators, who were more concerned with acquiring rare pieces and with pursuing their own lines of research than with putting their treasures on show and introducing them to the public. Today museums and cultural events are regarded with respect. The public has a wide variety of attractions to choose from and is prepared to queue for hours to gain entrance. This boom can be observed just about everywhere in the world. Art exhibitions are becoming major events for which commissions are sought from architects, designers and graphic artists. Whereas it formerly opposed popularization, the art world is now witnessing museum marketing programmes which are doing away with the traditional barriers and creating professional opportunities for graphic artists.

The discrepancy which exists between the substantial investment granted to architecture and its leading lights, in what amounts to a 'star system', and the small sums allocated to visual communications is regrettable. On occasions, the poor quality

of a collection is concealed by commissioning the building from one of the big names of international architecture. In such a case, the communications strategy is centred for the most part around the name of the architect and the building, to the detriment of a true policy of graphic communication. There is, moreover, another important aspect to this practice: the expensive 'stars' have to serve the interests of their employers. Consequently, they appear in every 'modern' and 'intelligent' electoral manifesto.

In France in 1989, for instance, 120 building projects were in progress, 70 of them large-scale programmes. In Paris, there is Ieoh Ming Pei's Pyramide and the Grand Louvre project; in Clermont-Ferrand, Adrien Fainsilber and Claude Gaillard's conversion of a barracks in order to house the Musée des Beaux Arts (cost: 50 million francs). In Nîmes, there is Norman Foster's Médiathèque (cost: 270 million francs).

This trend is not confined to France. In Germany, the major cities and *Länder* rival one another in their museum development programmes. Mönchengladbach commissioned a municipal museum from Hans Hollein (1972–82). Stuttgart commissioned James Stirling and Michael Wilford for its Neue Staatsgalerie (1977–84), while Ulm turned to Richard Meier for an exhibition and conference centre (1986–). Cologne built a complex to house the Ludwig collection, designed by the architects Peter Busmann and Godfrid Haberer (1975–86). In the democratic post-Franco era, Spain is in the process of renovating and enlarging the Prado; creating the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (based on the Pompidou Centre); accommodating the Thyssen collection from Switzerland at great expense; and inaugurating the Fundació Tàpies (Roser Amadó and Lluís Domènech). In London, the Tate Gallery was the first to construct an extension to its existing building, commissioning the architects James Stirling and Michael Wilford (1980–85). The more traditional National Gallery followed suit with a commission by the architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown (opened 1991). In Italy, the Palazzo Grassi in Venice has been restored by Gae Aulenti and Antonio Foscari in order to create a centre for contemporary art financed wholly by the Fiat group. In addition, there is the multi-media centre for contemporary art in Palermo designed by Mario Botta (1988–). In Japan, the Municipal Museum of Art in Kitakyushu was designed by the architect Arata Isozaki (1972–74). There is also the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto by Fumihiko Maki (1986), the Museum of Modern Art in Nagoya by Kisho Kurokawa and, as early as 1950, the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo designed by Le Corbusier. In the United States, the museum for the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, was designed by Renzo Piano (1981–83). The Guggenheim Museum in New York is adding to its existing buildings, with designs by Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel.

This flourishing of the museum world is closely related to the operations of the art market and contributes to an increase in both values and prices. Because the new exhibition spaces have to be filled, rare objects have to be hunted down and purchased. It is equally necessary to find sponsors who are willing to finance both acquisitions and conservation, and also to make exhibition spaces pay their way by attracting the general public. There is, therefore, a greater need than ever for professional graphics, not only for the purposes of communication, but also to attract a wider audience. Whether for reasons of taste, profit or prestige, private companies are beginning to finance cultural activities, thus relieving the state and local authorities of part of their burden. However, the real reasons behind this capital outlay must be considered, and the results must be clearly identified. For this reason there is a need for regular communication between institutions and their publics. At times the difficulty lies in maintaining a balance
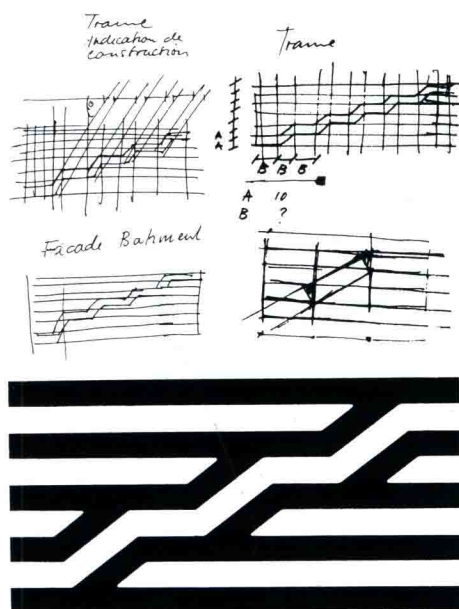
Jean Widmer and Ernst Hiestand's preliminary sketches and logo for the Centre Georges Pompidou (1974).

between financiers on the one hand and the integrity of artistic practice on the other. Graphic art can serve the launch of these institutions and events, but it must also enable them to communicate regularly with their different publics; to win the loyalty of their visitors; to confirm their national and international reputations; and possibly to gain an advantage over their competitors.
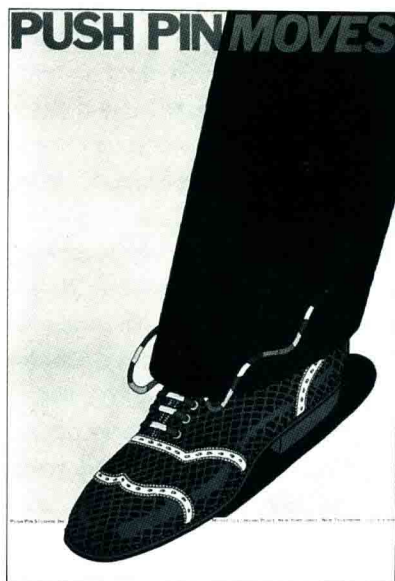
Unfortunately, it is rare to find a cultural institution which brings both enthusiasm and continuity to a visual identity programme. Often the museum curator regards with scorn the notion of a graphic identity for art and museums and persists in opposing a structured communications programme. In addition, investment in building often results in the neglect of graphics. International competition stimulates the promotion of the museum, while over the last decade, the benefits brought as part of this process to these temples of culture by the graphic arts can be clearly observed. As the art historian André Chastel commented in 1989, 'The museum must from now on be classified in the category of entertainment, and as consumer art.'

A brief history of graphics

Vilmos Huszár's logo for *De Stijl* (1917).
Below: poster to announce the Pushpin Group's office move (1980; illustration and design by Seymour Chwast).

Graphics is a recent subject based on the well-established tradition of typography which dates back to the fifteenth century and Gutenburg. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the development of printing was centred around the production of books and periodicals. In 1917, De Stijl began life as a magazine, its logo (designed by Vilmos Huszár) made up of letters drawn using basic rectangular shapes. In 1920, graphic artists broke with the decorative arts tradition, evidence of the strong and lasting influence of the Russian Constructivists. In the post-war period, graphic art began to mediate between the interests of institutions and the international economy on the one hand and a public of passive consumers on the other. A pioneer with regard to museum identity is the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam where, between 1945 and 1963, Willem Sandberg, the museum director, designed posters and catalogues.

In the 1950s, the Swiss schools came to the fore, becoming an international point of reference. This is the era of clarity, severity and of the systematic integration of text and image. The chief exponents were Max Bill, Otto Treumann and Joseph Müller Brockmann. In the Netherlands during the same period, Wim Crouwel's work anticipated 'objective design'. He regarded design as the solution to every problem. His graphic responses are structured and totally lacking in artistic pretension. He rejects all pictural and anecdotal images. An identical development can be observed in the plastic arts with the emergence of minimalist art and the 'zero movement'.

In the 1960s, a world order was advocated in which each individual is regarded as a potential artist. In the United States, the Pushpin Group took its inspiration from art history, while popular culture used humour and parody to confront modernist ideas. Pushpin played an important role in the development of visual communications in an international context, and it was at this time that the graphic design profession organized itself on an international scale. In 1963, ICOGRADA, the International Council of Graphic Design Associations, was founded. Almost everywhere there was conflict with the established order which resulted in the production of alternative graphics characterized by hand-drawn, highly plastic and anti-functional images. These graphics were at times difficult to read.

With the 1970s came the apogee of advertising and the first shy attempts by museums to develop a visual identity. In 1966, the Stedelijk Museum set up a structured

programme, designed and carried out by Wim Crouwel and Total Design, which continued and developed the graphic design strategy started by Willem Sandberg. The museum used a standard grid for all its catalogues and posters, thus conferring upon all its products, whatever their nature, a wholly recognizable graphic identity. An opposing view was held by Jan van Toorn, a graphic designer at the Van Abbe Museum, also in the Netherlands. He argued that a provocative graphics policy, based on 'stimulating the outrageous in order to awaken consciousness', is more effective. He rejected a uniform approach which 'conditions desires rather than informing or communicating'. These ideas were the subject of a public debate in November 1972, a debate which is central to the history of graphic design and which remains current today: the questions of rigour and legibility, and of free-hand drawing and confusion.

The expression 'visual communication' was coined in the United States in 1966 to cover various areas: typography, posters, layout, illustration, logo creation and so on. In 1977, the Centre Georges Pompidou opened in Paris, projecting a high quality visual identity created by Jean Widmer. The rapid development of visual communication in the arts and in local communities can be linked to the acceptance, characteristic of the 1970s, that there are certain virtues in advertising.

The 1980s was a decade of rapid change, when the cultural values of different countries became superimposed upon those of others around the world. This process acted as a counterweight to those stereotypes which are seen as embodying the national or historic characteristics of our cultures. The museum boom of the '80s, which was fed in part by this weakening of international barriers, had the effect of opening up the professional market to a great variety of graphic projects.

The 1990s are witnessing a growing tendency to theorize the profession of the graphic designer, which wavers between that of intellectual and artist. In addition, art institutions are now beginning to define and manage more comprehensive visual identification strategies.

Stedelijk Museum: front cover of a 1957 catalogue (Willem Sandberg) and poster for a 1968 exhibition (Wim Crouwel/Total Design).

Graphics and national identity

The works presented in this book cover a wide range of categories, including posters, catalogues, invitations, sign systems, publicity brochures and other related products. Graphics from the USA, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, created over the last decade, have been selected for their professional excellence and their aptness to the user's aims. Overall, the evidence of national characteristics cannot be denied. Each creation expresses a sensibility inherent in the spirit of that country, and therefore appropriate to the promotion of that nation's artistic and cultural programmes.

In the USA, graphic design has no obvious orientation in any one direction. Instead, the diversity of modes of expression guarantees that all typographical trends are represented. A concern for the effectiveness of the graphic image, coupled with the financial involvement of companies in art institutions, means that highly apposite images are produced, although at times these lack refinement.

In Australia, graphic design is characterized by a variety of styles and freedom of expression which reveal the impact on graphic designers of different schools and trends. The work produced by the Australians is full of vitality.

In France, the use of images has traditionally played a more important role than typography. Different trends generate a variety of styles, which give ample room to

Poster by Günter Ranbow (1988) to illustrate the theme that knowledge alone does not create art.
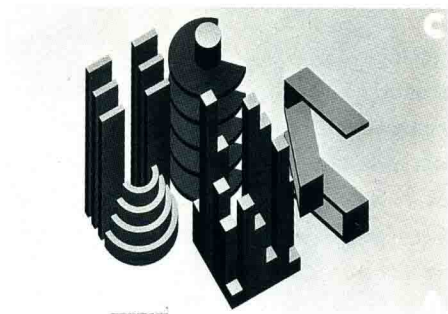
Poster by the Japanese designer Takenobu Igarashi for the University of California, Los Angeles.

expression through free-hand drawing and to a profusion of ideas deriving from various artistic influences: at times the result exhibits a certain degree of impudence. Since the state controls the country's cultural bodies, and since museums are the generating force behind art and media ideology, visual identity systems for museums are sometimes commissioned to stimulate creativity and to set valuable examples. As a result of this a market for graphics is opening up in a society where graphic designers still have difficulty in gaining recognition outside the world of advertising.

In Germany, the traditional use of images and typography is based on functionalism. This results in a rigorous adherence to the rules laid out in design standards manuals and leads to continuity in the use of high-quality brand images.

In Italy, the revenge of the amateur against cultural elitism, a sense of good taste and a respect for typography have all given rise to extremely free graphic creations which are wholly without academicism in their use of illustrations. Nevertheless, the home of contemporary design and the centre of pilgrimage for art lovers flocking to its great museums seems to be more prolific in the creation of household objects than in the production of graphic images.

In Japan, the concept of the museum is relatively new. Shuji Takashina, a professor at the university of Tokyo, says of the museum, 'It is an institution not yet a century old which has been imported from the West.' According to Professor Takashina, Japanese private collections belonging to aristocrats or to religious orders were not traditionally shown to the public, except on special occasions such as festivals, anniversaries and tea ceremonies. Indeed, the fragility of Japanese works of art, such as lacquerware and silks, prohibits their prolonged display. Recent museums are centred around Western art, but these venerable institutions have not commissioned visual identities. The fashion for temporary exhibitions has generated the publishing of many posters, sometimes of high quality, but lacking related visual supports in any other form. Major graphic designers, such as Yusaku Kamekura and Ikko Tanaka, produce posters in abundance, but have not always created graphic images linked to the art world.

In the Netherlands, graphic art is never regarded as a derivative art form. Dutch graphic culture and typography is unrivalled anywhere. Resolutely modern, open to all fields of influence, creative and abstract, it is regarded as being on an equal footing with other art forms. Outside the art world, one only need mention the Dutch Post Office which, since 1930, has employed professional graphic designers. The Post Office's policy is motivated by a certain freedom of action and creativity, a strong typographic tradition, a desire to promote graphics and to encourage letter writing. The Dutch authorities are a source of numerous commissions and their actions have a knock-on effect in that private companies are prompted to emulate them. Their tradition of non-decorative abstraction would seem to give the Netherlands a position of undeniable leadership in the field of European graphic design.

In Spain, political repression, which continued until the end of Franco's rule in 1975, made unlimited freedom of expression impossible. A few pioneers, such as Peret, have emerged, but they have so far received few commissions from the art world. The latter is recovering its identity, but without recourse to graphic design.

In Switzerland, graphic designers were responsible for the creation of a set of rules to ensure that information is legible and organized clearly, and that rhetorical devices are rejected in favour of honesty and the communication of information. The use of functional typefaces and of standard layouts for all documents ensures that

Witte de With
Persbericht

The cloud-motif logo of Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, as adapted for press release notepaper. (Gerard Hadders, 1989)

publications, whatever their nature, have a graphic identity which is wholly unmistakable in terms of the rigour of its design and its legibility. The rules which are applied exclude neither creativity nor the need for high quality, both of typography and illustration, and they give rise to excellent functional images. Whether poetry or parody, the overall effect of the visual images is in keeping with both the austerity of the typography and the modular construction of the layout. Legibility is always of the highest standard. Swiss graphic designers have gained a considerable following and since 1950 have trained numerous graphic design professionals whose methods are undisputed all over the world.

In the United Kingdom, there is a strong typographic tradition which gives a high priority to information and its presentation in a graphic form. Influenced by the punk movement and by the numerous magazines designed by Neville Brody (*The Face*, *Arena* and *City Limits*), graphic productions tend to harmonize type styles by creating word-images, while occasionally having recourse to illustration. The mixture of neo-classical and post-modern influences is bringing about a return to functional typography, while thanks to an injection of humour and surrealism, British graphic design is characterized by a number of singular styles.

Beyond styles and fashions, all the examples chosen for this book have one thing in common: quality. A number of different trends can, however, be isolated, each adapted differently according to national and cultural identities.

The influence of the Apple Mac computer can be seen in curved and twisted lettering and in ever-increasing combinations of different typefaces on the same item. If, however, the concept behind the graphic design is weak, then the computer-assisted end product becomes banal. The Macintosh can be used as a graphic tool, just like a pencil, and this has led to the appearance of hybrid images and to the creation of a new vocabulary.

One can also identify the trend of experimental typography, an intellectual approach which fragments the text in the space available and which emphasizes the aesthetic quality of the layout rather than the physical quality of the letter.

Fewer and fewer letters are drawn by hand.

Also identifiable is a trend whereby the text and the image are mixed in an ever more complex manner: the text is either superimposed on the image, or fragmented within the image, and so on.

Finally, there is the use of certain 'retro' typographical effects. These do not cause problems of legibility and create a very individual visual identity.

The profession of the graphic artist

Graphic designers are professionals, working either independently, or in small teams, or as part of a larger office. This might be in the in-house graphics department of an industrial design company or public body or in an advertising agency. Designers occasionally work for agencies which specialize solely in the creation of brand names.

Regardless of the size of the group within which a graphic designer operates, the difficulties presented by a communications project are substantial. His or her first task is to identify the communications needs of the institution which has commissioned the project and to provide an appropriate visual solution. The proposed response is composed of a variety of elements, such as type style, calligraphy, layout, choice of
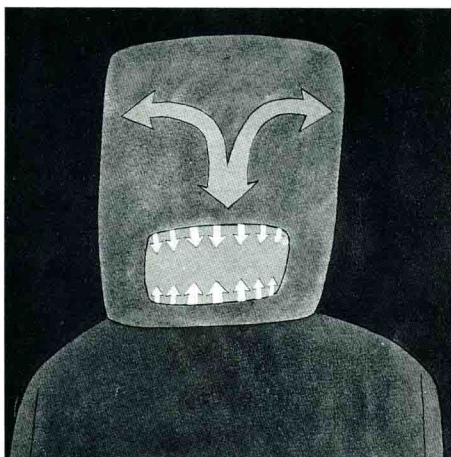
Detail of cover by Jean-Michel Folon for the London magazine *Design* (1969).

media, paper, colours and the possible use of photographs or illustrations. The graphic designer is both an artist and a technician, tailoring his or her response according to the particular nature of the problem. As a mediator between the commissioning institution and the public, he or she contributes to the successful promotion, or otherwise, of the subject. In their work, graphic designers exploit and develop the range of areas where their expertise is needed: visual or corporate identities; advertising campaigns; published material such as posters, brochures, catalogues, programmes; signage.

Some graphic designers prefer to delegate and are known as artistic directors. They organize the work of others, ensuring that the group's production is of a satisfactory standard. Others work alone and do not delegate. Which approach is taken is purely a matter of personality; the end result is the same.

The principal qualities which make a good graphic designer are creativity, sensitivity and a thoughtful approach. Certain graphic artists suffer from inhibition or from an excessive desire to please. Outstanding projects are often based around a sudden change in direction where the designer adopts a type style which is universally despised and attempts to turn it into something interesting. The pitfall for some graphic designers is to repeat what they do best, creating a series of similar designs and ending up with a set of graphic clichés. Worse still, some designers fail to develop their project beyond the first rough sketch. It is in fact always difficult to move on from the sketch to the full-scale design; any inadequacy in the design which does not appear in the reduced-scale drawing becomes all too apparent in the full-scale model. Here the professional talent for 'fine tuning' comes into play. The overall concept, in its broadest sense, can take in a number of different elements, or ideas: the combination of certain colours, the choice of a word, the creation of three-dimensional effect, or whatever. But behind every piece of work there must be an idea. The graphic artist invites the observer's attention by means of visual witticisms, puzzles, ambiguous images, provocativeness and style. His or her skill lies in achieving a subtle balance between provocativeness and communication, between legibility and form.

A professional graphic artist designs and produces images which fulfil certain criteria:

The idea must be original and the design must make an impact.

The graphic form must be appropriate to its underlying meaning.

There must be clarity of intention.

There must be a maximum of expression to convey the necessary information.

The structure and layout must be suitable for their function.

The graphics must be legible so that their message can be readily recognized.

All visual languages and those creations which use them must fulfil these criteria. Only then can one ensure that the signifier is appropriate to the signified, whatever vocabulary is used.

Concept, object and method

The concept of visual identity has evolved over the last fifty years, and nowadays the majority of large bodies, whether they be public or private, have their own visual identity strategy. Visual identity is generally defined as a means of communicating in a memorable way the characteristics which are central to an organization. It is fair to say that every institution, whatever its size, has a visual identity which is either official or unofficial and which may or may not be in keeping with an overall communications