A VISIBLE SPECTRUM OF IDEAS

Past
Exhibition

Creating Community

Event Posters for AIGA NY

———

November 16, 2023—April 14, 2024

On January 20, 1914, a small group of white, male designers met at the National Arts Club in New York City to establish the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), a professional organization with the sole mission of elevating and advancing the field of graphic design. Up until this time, graphic design had not been seen as a distinct profession, and it would take another decade for the art of creating effective and powerful communication through the combination of imagery and lettering to be globally recognized. By 1947, AIGA had more than one thousand members, and by the early 1980s, individual chapters had been established in key cities around the country.

In 1982, AIGA NY was founded by five men and four women, incorporating the subsequent year as a separate entity from the national group. It aimed to provide stimulating educational support and opportunities for the thousands of designers working in the tristate area. Within a few months of its formation, AIGA NY began hosting a full roster of activities for its members, with each event advertised by a unique poster sent through the mail. The organization provided diverse and ever-expanding programming intended to establish a sense of community among graphic designers in New York, and open channels of communication between them to avoid stagnation in the field.

This exhibition highlights the full range of events hosted by AIGA NY from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. It chronicles the evolving state of the graphic-design field, from the analog to the dawn of the digital age and beyond. As professional designers were the audience for these posters, it was seen as both an honor and a challenge to be asked by AIGA NY to create one, and many of the artists involved expressed their fear of failing to impress their peers. Nevertheless, some of the 20th century's most important and notable graphic designers either produced the posters or participated in the many panels, discussions, presentations, and events organized by AIGA NY—always on a volunteer basis in order to promote and enhance the field of graphic design.

Unless otherwise noted, all posters come to Poster House through a generous loan from AIGA NY. Every effort has been made to properly credit all those involved in the production of each poster.

The posters for [these events] were a big deal because it was the main form of communication before social media and motion graphics became the norm.

—Armin Vit, designer

Curation
Angelina Lippert

Exhibition Design
Ola Baldych

Special Thanks

Scott Santoro, Principal, Worksight

Stacey Panousopoulos, AIGA NY

Michael Bierut, Pentagram

Jennifer Kinon, Champions Design

Michael Mabry, designer

John Duffy, creative director & designer

Stefan Sagmeister, designer

Irma Boom, designer

Mirko Ilic, designer

Bobby C. Martin, Jr., Apple

Rick Poynor, writer

Armin Vit, graphic designer

Elliott Earls, designer

Niklaus Troxler, designer

Richard Poulin, designer

James Victore, King Kong & designer

Rick Valicenti/Thirst, designer

Philippe Apeloig, designer

Koko Takeuchi, designer

Catherine Bindman, editor

AIGA New York: Spring 1987, 1987

Steff Geissbuhler (b. 1942)

Collection of AIGA NY

- This early poster for AIGA NY announces its major spring events, including a lecture on packaging design, a survey of design from the 1960s, environmental and exhibition design, a roundtable on new business development, walking tours of design studios around New York City, and the Fresh Dialog series, in which at least two designers discussed a given topic reflecting the changing face of the field.

- The sheer variety of programming, with the participation of important designers from around the world, speaks to AIGA NY's efforts to provide an eclectic and significant range of events for its members.

- Steff Geissbuhler is a legend in the field, having created iconic brand identities for NBC, the EPA, Telemundo, and dozens of other clients. He also served as a principal and partner at the famed Chermayeff & Geismar Inc. for more than 30 years. In this design, he incorporates visual references, some even a bit tongue-in-cheek, to each program's speakers or topic.

Breaking Out: Beyond Graphic Design, 1990

Ross Culbert (Dates Unknown)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Similar in style to Michael Bierut's poster of the same year, Ross Culbert's photographic composition presents a mood board on a prison-cell wall, ironically referencing the concept of "breaking out" of the graphic-design field. As with many of the early posters produced for other chapters of AIGA, some of the concepts and conceits might be seen as inappropriate today.

- Included on the roster of speakers was Karen Skelton of Bellwether Design, Sandra Higashi and Byron Glaser of Higashi Glaser Design, Michael Vanderbyl of Vanderbyl Design, and Tibor Kalman of M & Co.—all of whom excelled at bringing their design practices into innovative spaces.

Fresh Dialog 1990: Can Graphic Design Be More Than Pictures of Guys in Suits?, 1990

Michael Bierut (b. 1957)

Collection of AIGA NY

- First held in 1984, the Fresh Dialog series was an annual event that tackled emerging or particularly timely issues in graphic design. Speakers were typically up-and-coming designers known for their edgy or innovative work. The series was always held at the end of a programmatic year, right before or after the annual meeting.

- This edition of Fresh Dialog brought together renegade designers Art Chantry, Charles S. Anderson, and Alexander Isley to challenge the slick, Madison Avenue-style graphics that had dominated the field in the 1980s.

- Michael Bierut—who at this time would have just left Vignelli Associates to become a partner at Pentagram—represented the panel's title with a stock photograph of a corporate business meeting, crossing it out to suggest what the future might hold.
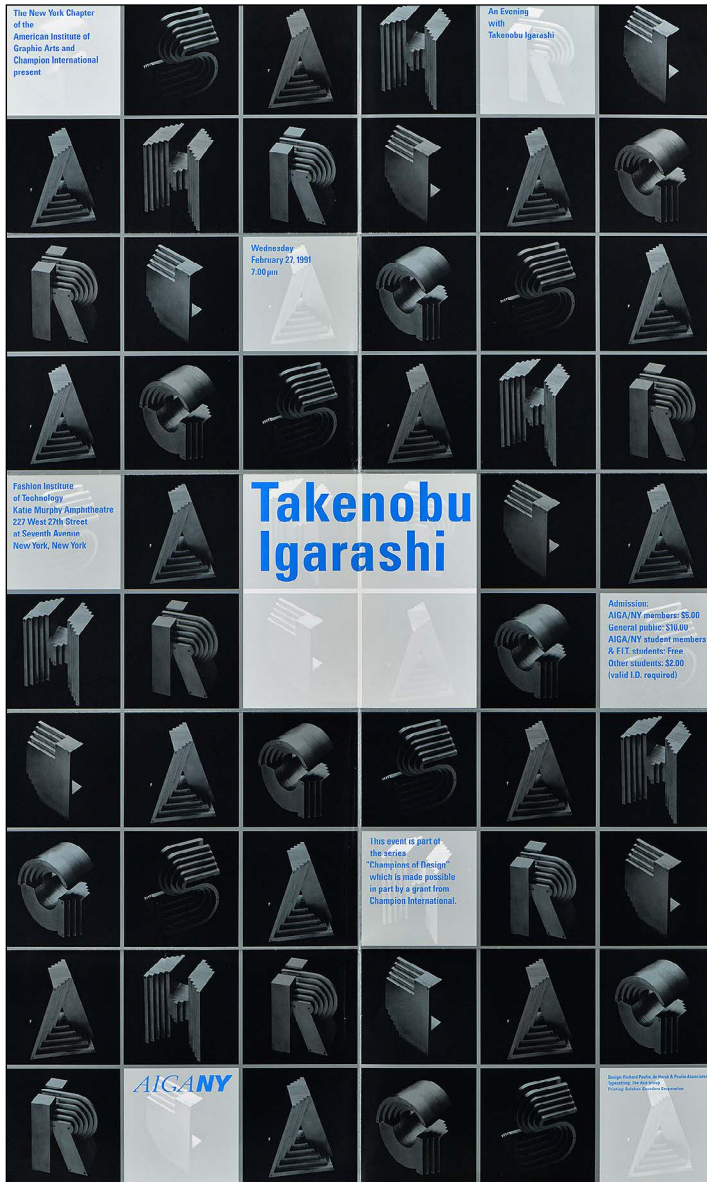
Takenobu Igarashi, 1991

Richard Poulin (b. 1955)

Collection of AIGA NY

- AIGA NY prided itself on providing a space in New York City where internationally acclaimed designers could meet and speak with their peers. At the time, Takenobu Igarashi had studios in both Japan and the United States, and was especially known for the work he created for major companies like the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Mitsui Bank, Meiji, Suntory, and Nissan.

- One of Igarashi's breakthrough contributions to the design field revolved around his axonometric—or three-dimensional—alphabets; here, Richard Poulin spelled out the visiting designer's name using photographs of some of them. Organized much like Japanese *tategaki* writing, "Igarashi" can be read from right to left as well as from top to bottom throughout the composition.
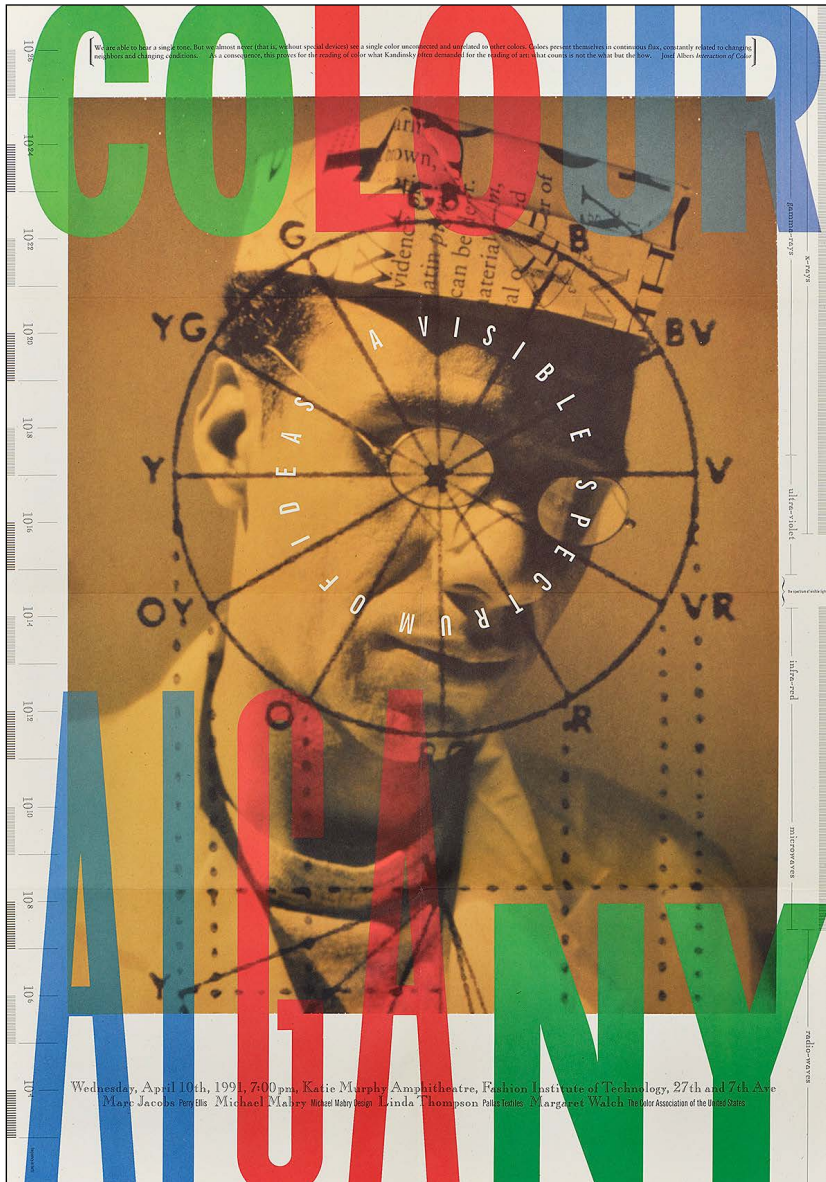
Colour: A Visible Spectrum of Ideas, 1991

Michael Mabry (b. 1955) & Margie Chu (b. 1951)

Collection of AIGA NY

- This poster advertises an evening lecture on color trends, theories, and observations, featuring speakers Marc Jacobs (at the time, a designer for Perry Ellis who had not yet debuted his controversial Spring/Summer 1993 collection that brought a streetwear aesthetic to the runway), Michael Mabry, Linda Thompson, and Margaret Walch of the Color Association of the United States.

- The top of the poster features a quote by the legendary German color theorist and artist Josef Albers, who believed that the way individuals see or experience color is relative.

- Michael Mabry wanted the poster to appear scientific but not sterile. The central image is his own photograph of a friend wearing a lab coat and a 19th-century-style pressman's hat. Superimposed on it is a drawing of a color wheel representing the relationships between primary and secondary colors. The right edge of the poster indicates the small spectrum of visible light that humans can see compared with the much broader range of non-visible color.

Gert Dumbar, 1992

Douglas Morris (b. 1962) & Richard Poulin (b. 1955)

Collection of AIGA NY

- After founding his eponymous studio in 1977, Gert Dumbar helped revolutionize Dutch graphic design, creating notable work for IBM, the Royal Academy of Arts in London, Apple Computers, Philips, and Bayer. He served as chairman of the Dutch Association of Graphic Designers and was also head of the Graphic Design Department at the Royal College of Art from 1985 to 1987.

- This poster draws from geometric graphic elements that Dumbar and the large studio Total Design used in the iconic corporate identity they created for PTT Nederland (the state-run postal and telephone services).

Globalism(s): An International Designers' Saturday, 1993

Michael Bierut (b. 1957)

Collection of AIGA NY

- This poster announces a symposium held at Cooper Union, hosted by AIGA NY in partnership with the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI, the largest and most important international association for graphic design). AGI had just held its annual congress in Montauk, and the event allowed AIGA NY to take advantage of the presence of so many designers in New York at the same time.

- All of the speakers were members of AGI, while those introducing them were members of AIGA NY. The star-studded (notably all-male) lineup of impressive international talent included Ken Cato, B. Martin Pedersen, Shigeo Fukuda, Seymour Chwast, Werner Jeker, Michael Bierut, Pierre Mendell, Massimo Vignelli, Bruno Oldani, and Steff Geissbuhler. The tagline reads "five graphic designers, five world capitals, five points of view."

- Michael Bierut originally intended the poster to be printed on thin, nearly transparent paper, so that a silhouette of an airplane on the verso would be visible from the front. The printer, however, used slightly better paper than requested, believing he was doing AIGA NY a favor rather than compromising the design.

Graphic Activism In Mean Times, 1995

Mirko Ilić (b. 1956)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Part of the Fresh Dialogue series, this "night of alternatives" focused on designers who worked on politically controversial material. Among them were the graphic journalist Sue Coe; Michael Lebron, who had brought a Supreme Court challenge against the National Railroad Passenger Corporation for its removal of a billboard he put up in Penn Station criticizing the Coors Brewing Company for its support of an anti-Marxist group in Nicaragua; firebrand James Victore, who created work for the NAACP and Amnesty; and Dan Walsh, the founder of Liberation Graphics.

- The event was moderated by design historian Steven Heller, who asked Mirko Ilić to create this poster because of his own notoriety in the political space. Both sides of the image are meant to be seen in tandem, the front representing revolution and chaos breaking the "order" of the verso. The raised fist was photographed wrapped in paper to give the illusion of cracks or destruction in the design.

- As with many of these posters, the final printing did not reflect the designer's original intention—the photograph was reproduced in darker tones than Ilić desired, losing much of its detail. Additionally, on the verso, the word "speakers" is misspelled as "spikers"—a happy accident that ultimately fit the theme.
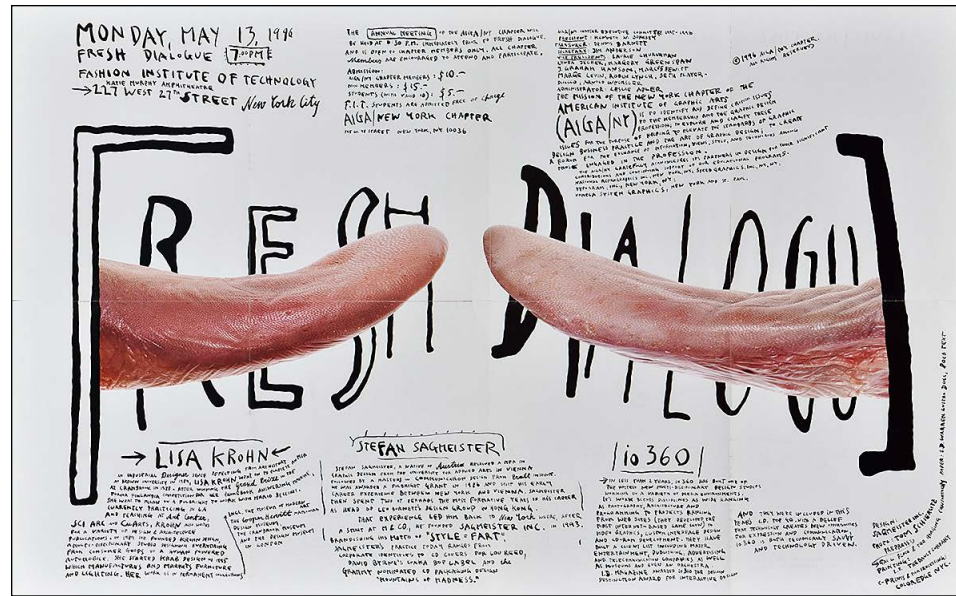
Fresh Dialogue, 1996

Stefan Sagmeister (b. 1962)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Playing with the idea that mouths are needed for "fresh dialogue," Stefan Sagmeister wanted to include photographs of tongues in his poster for this event. As human tongues are relatively short, photographer Tom Schierlitz brought two fresh cow tongues from a nearby meat market to the studio, resulting in this shocking image that combines Sagmeister's distinctive handwriting with expressive pink muscle.

- This evening's event included Sagmeister as a speaker alongside industrial designer Lisa Krohn and architect (later digital designer) Gong Szeto. Krohn had left her slide carousel in Los Angeles and was therefore forced to ask other attendees if they could bring in slides of her work, essentially creating a crowd-sourced lecture.

- The mid-to-late '90s was known for "shock" advertising, and this design proved no exception—many AIGA NY members complained that Sagmeister's composition was "vulgar." Such a choice was not unusual for the designer, however, as some of his most well-known work of the period involved him appearing in the nude.
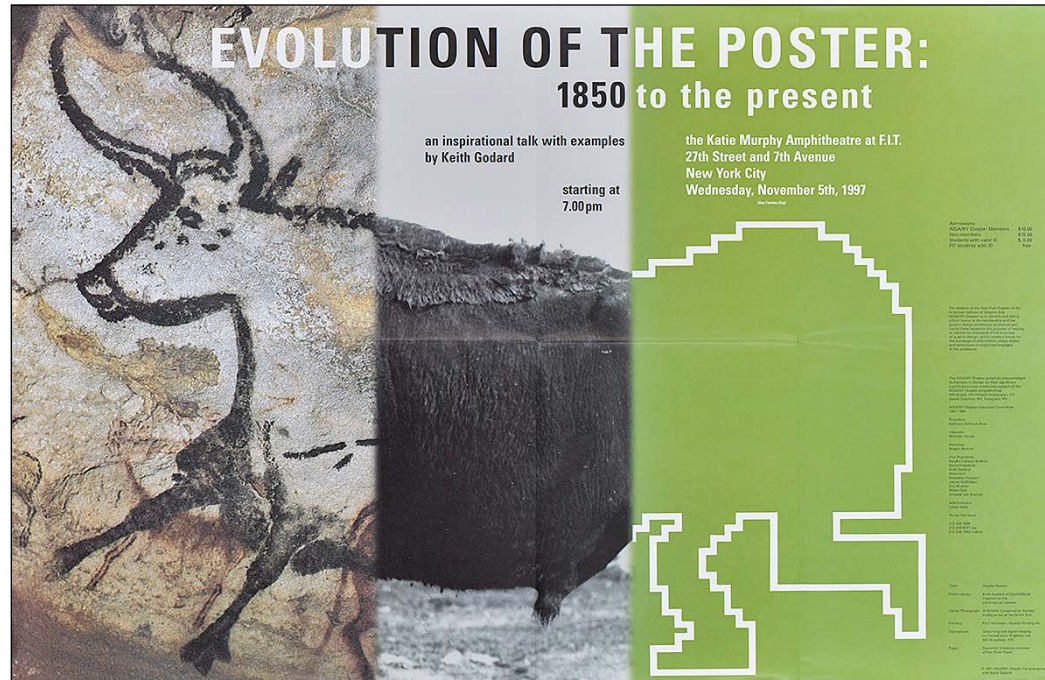
Evolution of the Poster: 1850 to the Present, 1997

Keith Godard (1938–2020)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Many of these posters use wit or sly humor to engage the viewer, indicating that AIGA NY wanted to distance itself from stuffy professional organizations and target a younger, more progressive and fun audience.

- Here, Keith Godard incorporates an image of a bison—as it evolves graphically from a cave painting at Lascaux to a photograph from the Bronx Zoo, and, finally, to a bit-mapped rendering of its rear end—to advertise his lecture on the history of the poster.
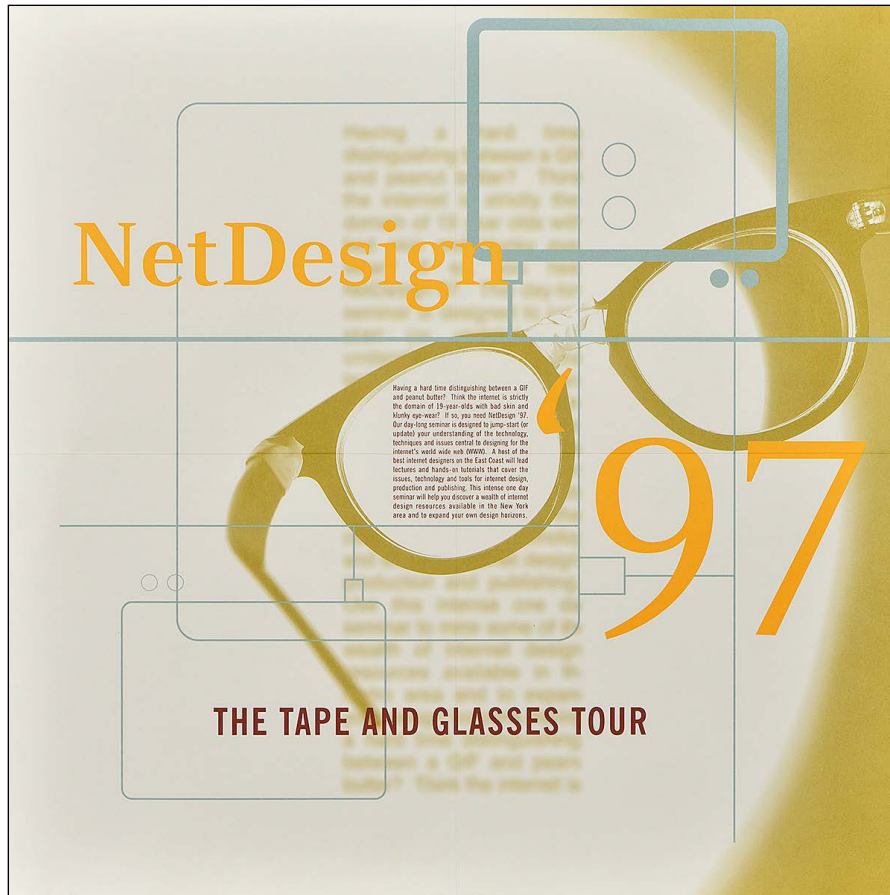
NetDesign '97: The Tape and Glasses Tour, 1997

John W. Duffy (b. 1969)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Eager to provide its members with information and opportunities at the forefront of the graphic-design industry, AIGA NY hosted this day-long seminar (known as NetDesign '97) about designing for the World Wide Web—a relatively new and exciting field at the time.

- The event, organized with help from Pentagram, featured East Coast web designers who led talks and tutorials on various aspects of internet design, specifically promoting resources available to members within New York City that could help their careers.

- John Duffy conceived of "The Tape and Glasses Tour" title, believing that the corresponding image—forever associated with extreme nerdiness—would make for a striking graphic. As was the case with many of these posters, the designer was less than pleased with the color palette after it was printed.
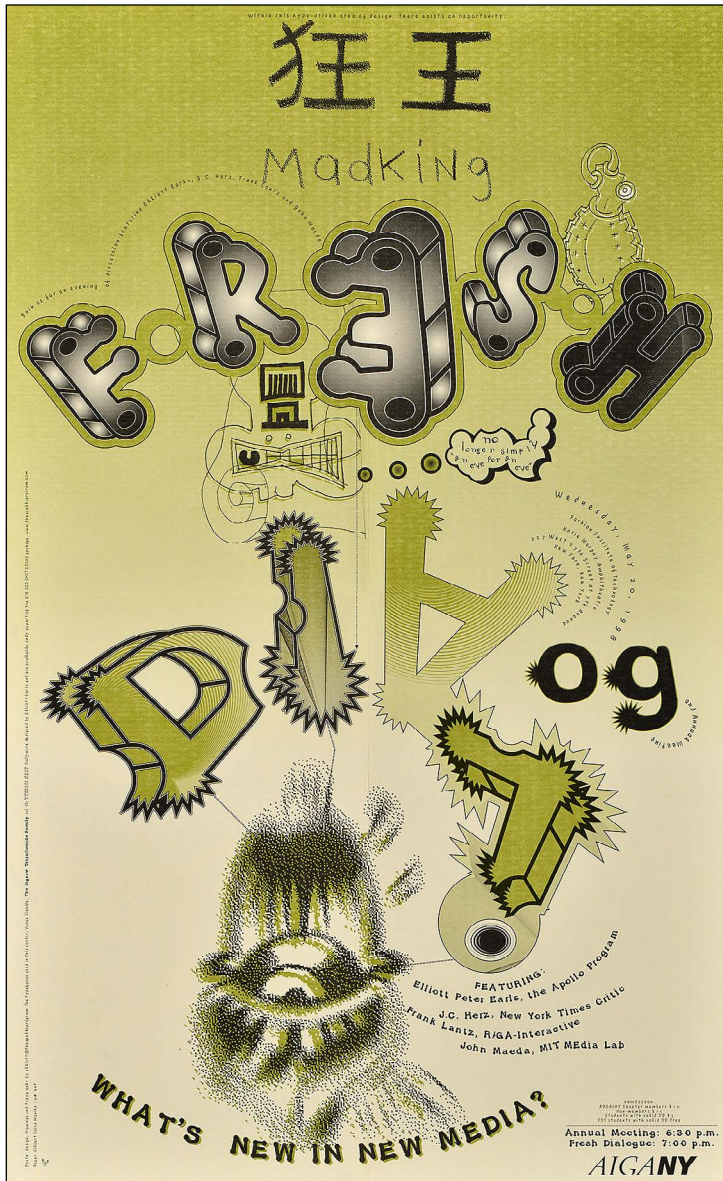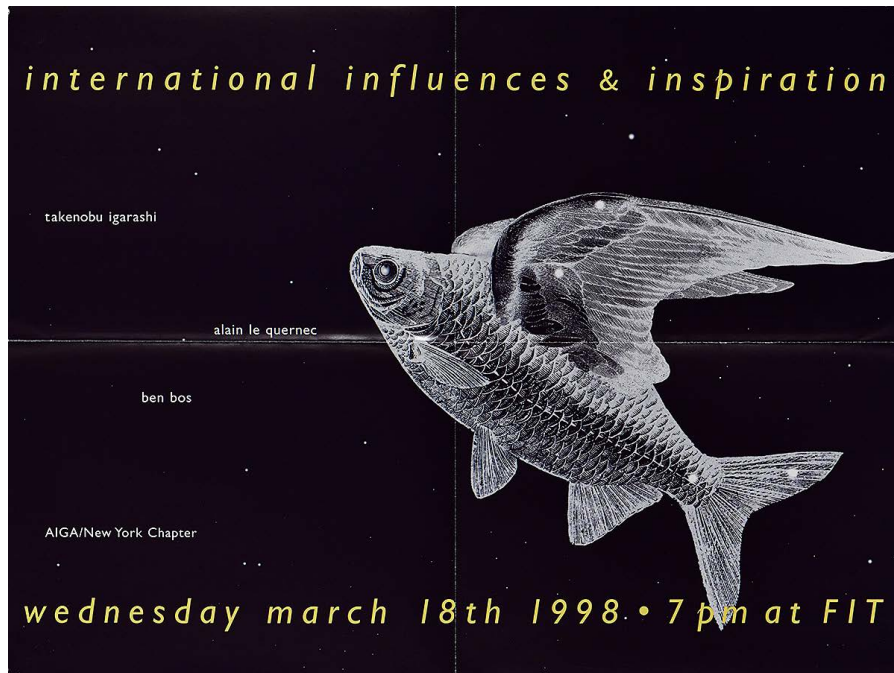
Fresh Dialog: What's New in New Media?, 1998

Elliott Earls (b. 1966)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Part of the Fresh Dialogue series, this event featured the *New York Times* digital-media critic J.C. Herz, MIT Media Lab's John Maeda, Frank Lantz of R/GA Interactive, and the designer of this poster, Elliott Earls, in conversation.

- At this time, Earls was particularly interested in exploring the sculptural qualities of typography, often crafting letterforms that gave the illusion of three-dimensionality. Unlike many of his peers, though, he did not want his text to veer into the realm of illegibility.

- While positioned on different planes and not traditionally "readable," Earls's letterforms merely slow down the viewer's comprehension of the message rather than obscure it. Through this process, he hoped readers would begin to see typography as both a sculptural form and a means of communication.

international influences & inspiration

takenobu igarashi

alain le quernec

ben bos

AIGA/New York Chapter

wednesday march 18th 1998 • 7 pm at FIT

International Influences & Inspiration, 1998

Makiko Takeuchi (b. 1970)

Collection of AIGA NY

- This lecture brought together three international designers: Takenobu Igarashi of Japan, Alain Le Quernec of France, and Ben Bos of the Netherlands. In addition to sharing their individual work, they were each asked to present things that had either influenced or inspired their practice.

- While set up much like a portfolio review, this program encouraged the designers to delve deeper, exploring cultural contexts and historic affiliations within each piece, and inviting new ways of thinking about design.

From White Board to Website: The New Media Design Process, 1999

Duncan C. Creamer (b. 1972) & Sara Scott-Harper (b. 1972)

Collection of AIGA NY

- As digital design became more popular, AIGA NY partnered with United Digital Artists for one programmatic season to create a series of lectures and workshops intended to demystify what was then known as "interactive media."

- This day-long seminar focused on the nuts and bolts of web design, from content development to project management to proper client communication. Highlighted speakers included David Webster of Siegel+Gale, who talked about creating effective online strategies; Gong Szeto of i/o 360 digital design, inc., who discussed how to make effective user experiences; Kyle Shannon of agency.com, who presented on managing web teams and processes; and Wayne Neale of kodak.com, who lectured on ways to ensure a site is useful, usable, and effective.

- Designer Sara Scott-Harper was especially excited about working on this poster, as she was given few restrictions and was able to combine her training in analog print media with digital to create the final composition. The cream-on-glossy-white result is meant to reflect the feeling of a just-cleaned whiteboard of the kind that designers frequently use to work out ideas.

DO YOU THINK IT IS IRMA
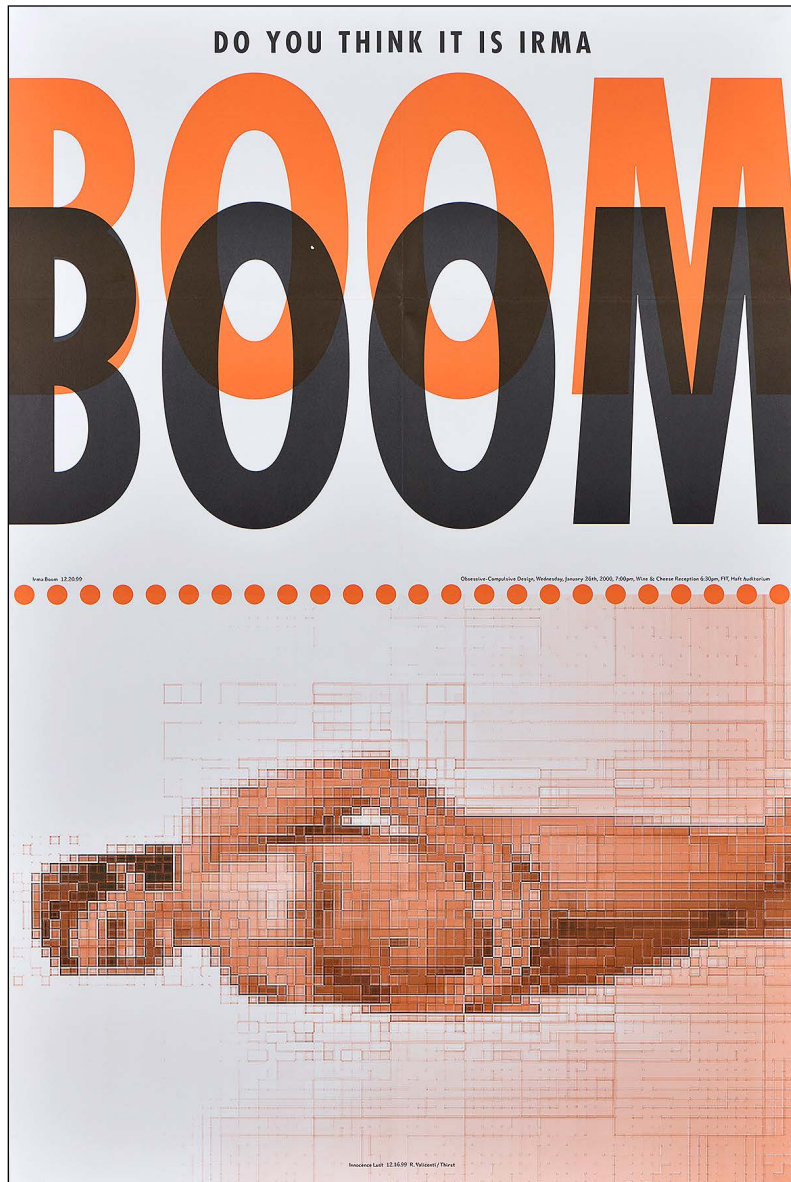
BOOM

Obsessive-Compulsive Design, 2000

Irma Boom (b. 1960) & Rick Valicenti (b. 1951)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Obsessive-Compulsive Design was an annual lecture that pitted two distinctly different designers against each other in a moderated conversation during which they discussed "their personal idiosyncrasies" and the "obsessions and compulsions that drive them over the top."

- The poster for each of these events was typically split between the two designers. Here, Irma Boom took the top half of the poster, while Rick Valicenti took the lower half.

- Valicenti's pixelated nude was meant to symbolize the fact that design, pornography, and the internet are in business together. In hindsight, he feels his contribution to the poster missed the mark, and remembers that colleagues criticized him for the work.

Wolfgang Weingart: My Way to Typography, 2000

Philippe Apeloig (b. 1962)

Collection of AIGA NY

- This poster announces an evening with Swiss typography maverick Wolfgang Weingart coinciding with the release of his latest book, *My Way To Typography*, published by Lars Müller. Presented in partnership with the Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography, it was held at Cooper Union.

- At the time, Philippe Apeloig was the curator of the Lubalin Center. To create the poster, he tilted an oversized "W" on its axis and allowed it to bleed off the page. He then took a three-dimensional photograph of the physical book and made it appear to fly through Weingart's initials. The remaining text follows the diagonal strokes of the letter "W," all combined to mimic Weingart's dynamic design style.
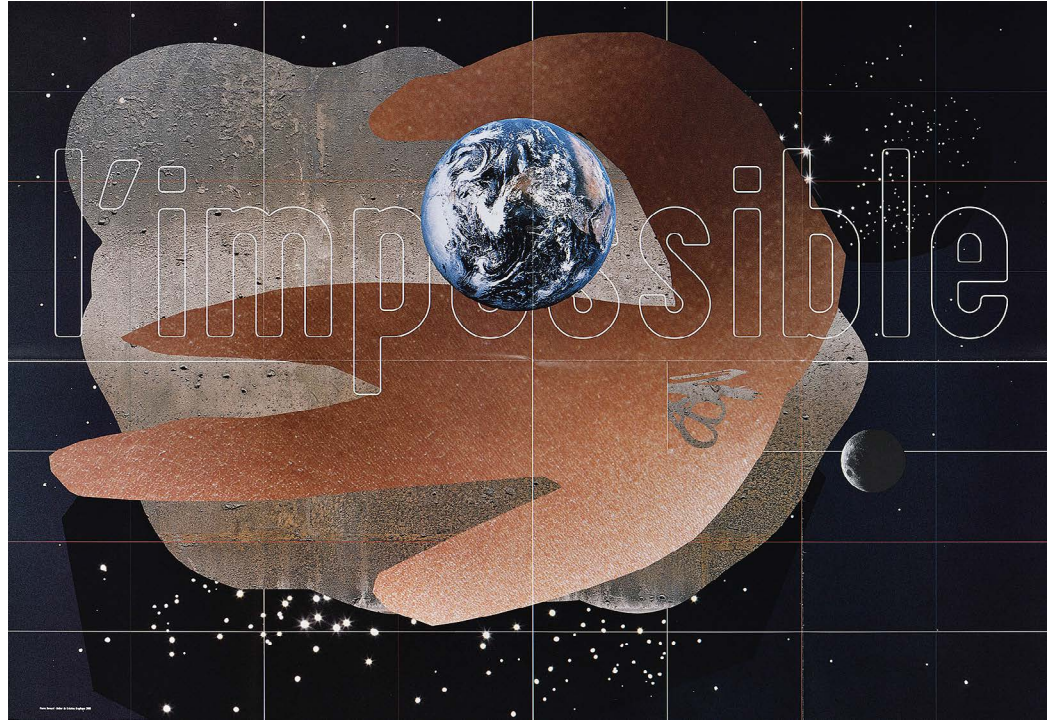
Be Realistic, Demand the Impossible! An Evening with Pierre Bernard, 2000

Pierre Bernard (1942–2015)

Collection of AIGA NY

- As one of the original founders of the French graphic-arts collective Grapus in 1970, Pierre Bernard was a boundary-pushing designer with a global reputation.

- This poster, designed by Bernard, promotes a conversation between him and the equally bombastic James Victore. During the discussion, Bernard read part of a manifesto outlining his views on the current relationship between designer and client. He quoted a well-known phrase from the May '68 riots in Paris, noting that both parties should "be realistic [and] demand the impossible," thus expanding their individual capacities for expression and creation.
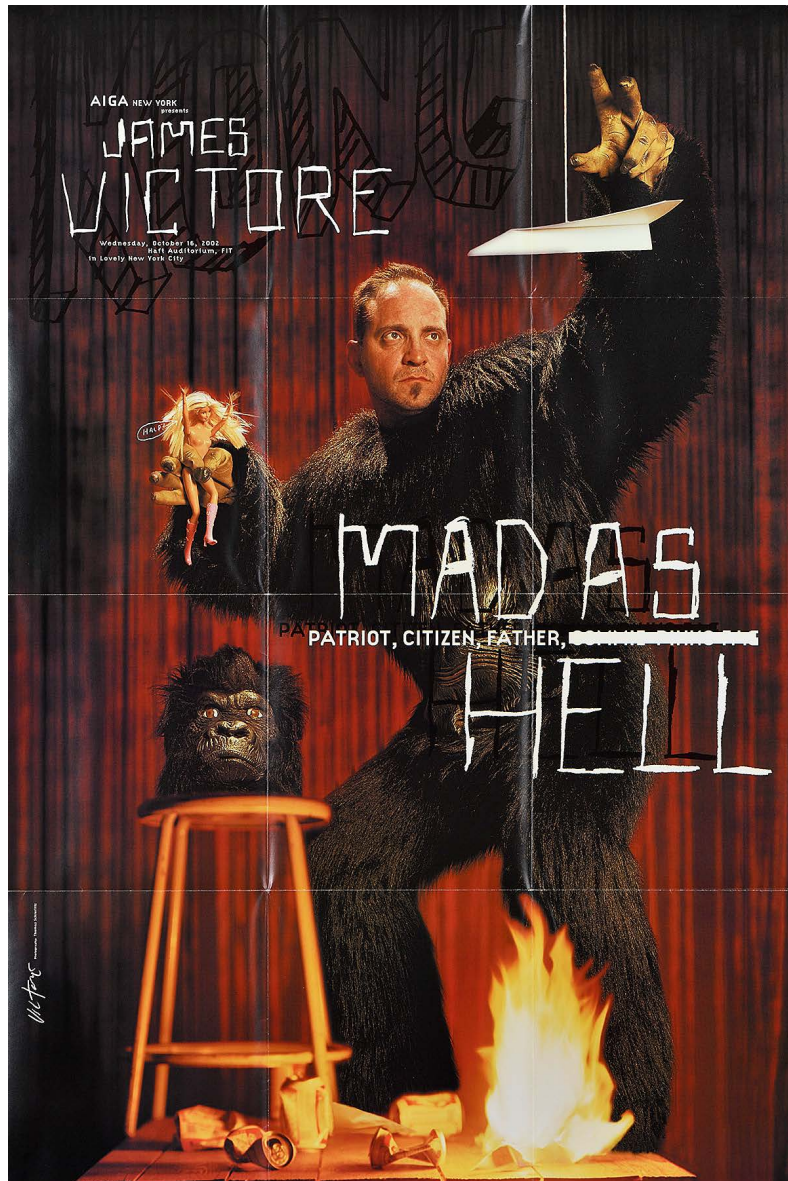
James Victore: Mad As Hell, 2002

James Victore (b. 1962)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Photographed by Thomas Schierlitz, this image represents James Victore as King Kong, swatting at a paper airplane while holding a nude doll above flaming rubble. As New York City was still reeling in the aftermath of September 11 when it was produced, the poster intentionally references both the classic film and the terror attacks.

- The evening's event was in honor of Victore's latest book, *Who Died and Made You Boss?*, with the full title of the lecture being "James Victore: Patriot, Citizen, Father, Commie-Pinko-Fag." The sponsoring paper company censored the last three words.

- Victore's mantra—"Mad as Hell"—comes from the 1976 film *Network*, in which a news anchor famously screams "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!"
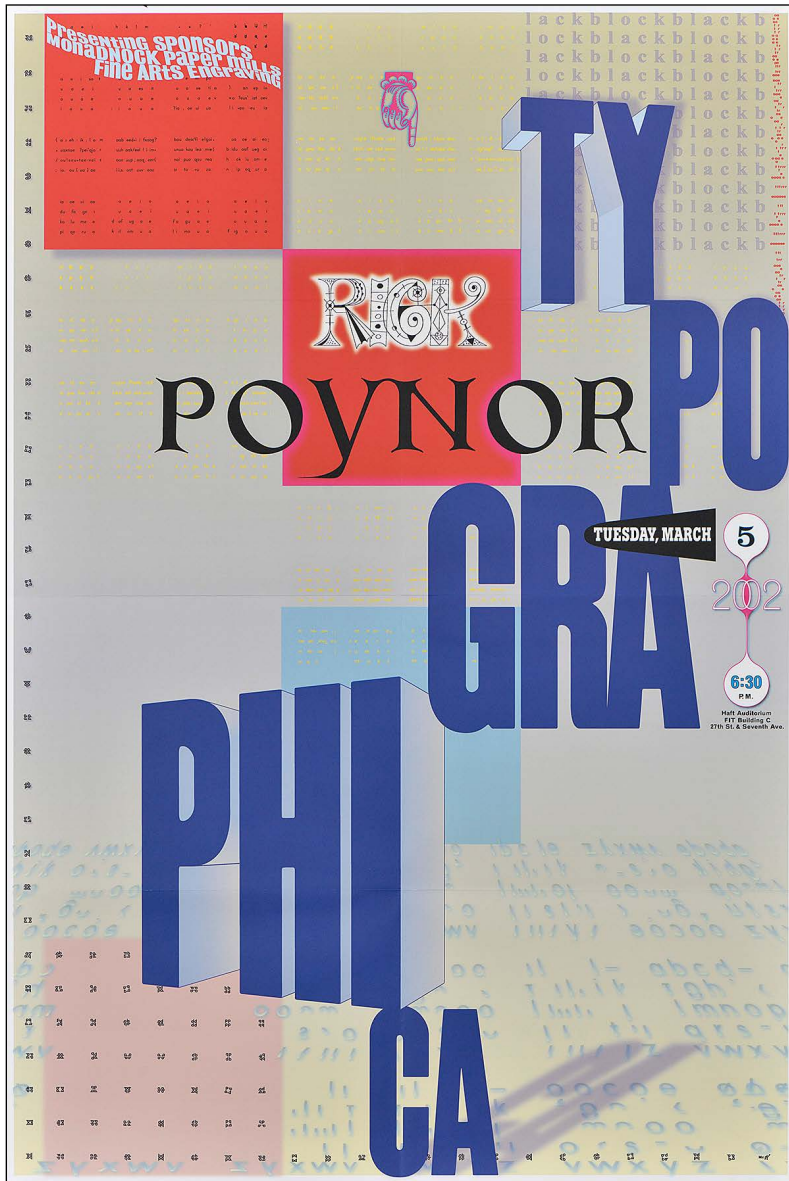
Rick Poynor: Typographica, 2002

Jeffery Keedy (b. 1957)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Published in two separate series ("old" and "new") between 1949 and 1967, *Typographica* was an idiosyncratic, postmodern magazine edited by Herbert Spencer that focused on the cutting edge of typography and printing. As Spencer's goal was zto create something beautiful rather than to make money, each issue incorporated a variety of printing techniques and applications, from tip-ons and special papers to letterpress and braille.

- This poster announces an evening with Rick Poynor, founding editor of Eye magazine in London, who had just written a book on the history of *Typographica*.

- Jeffery Keedy's poster combines a variety of visual references to motifs that had appeared in the magazine over the years. For example, "Rick" and "Poynor" allude to lettering styles featured on the cover of *Typographica* old series no. 1, and the large blue letters of "Typographica" are similar to those designed by Franco Grignani on the cover of old series no. 16. Each element was carefully selected from different issues of the publication, resulting in a poster more visually cacophonous than the original references.
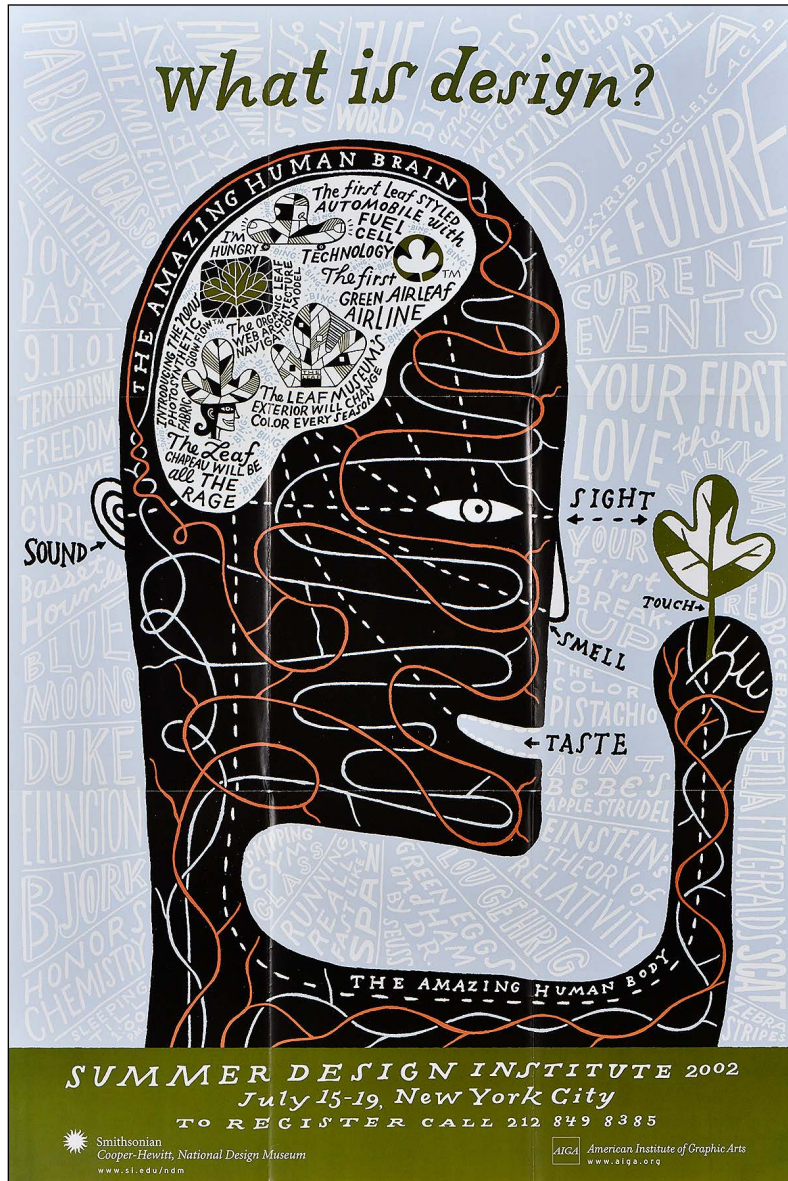
Summer Design Institute, 2002

Michael Mabry (b. 1955)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Co-sponsored with Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, this poster advertises the annual Summer Design Institute, a week-long program of workshops, studio visits, and lectures intended to help educators find ways to incorporate design into their classrooms.

- Michael Mabry's composition reflects the leading concept of the program—that design can be found anywhere and is connected to all aspects of life. He chose to focus on a leaf to show that even the simplest, most ubiquitous object might conjure seemingly infinite associations, from spirituality to scientific analysis, humor to pop culture. Unlike in his other poster in this exhibition, here Mabry used a pen-and-ink illustration to promote this program to a broad audience of non-designers.

Move: Design for Film & Television, 2004

Cheri Dorr (b. 1960) & Marc Nahas (Dates Unknown)

Collection of AIGA NY

- This two-day conference on motion graphics was held at New York University and surveyed the latest trends in music-video design, advertising, and broadcasting.
- In addition to highlighting the most innovative work in the field, the program featured speakers from award-winning studios in Los Angeles, New York, and London, including Motion Theory, PSYOP, Shynola, Duotone, and Troika.

Sweet Child
Love is Blind
Tongue Tied
Stock Piled
Deep Fried
Please Unwind
Tour Guide
Sun Dried
Dined and Wined
Girls Gone Mild
Rising Tide
Comic Sans, Reviled
Death is Fine
Taxes Filed
Worlds Collide
Step Aside
Bright Side
Bona Fide
California Pride

Lorraine Wild:
Full Stride

Thursday, November 10 at 6:30 p.m. Be there or be digital.

AIGA
New York

Lorraine Wild: Full Stride, 2005

Armin Vit (b. 1977)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Lorraine Wild is a Los Angeles-based designer and educator who frequently collaborates with architects, curators, and publishers. Since 1985, she has been a teacher at California Institute of the Arts.

- Most AIGA chapters hosted a monthly talk by a major designer, who was often flown in for the occasion. Typically, the poster for the event was created by the speaker; however, as many of these posters demonstrate, that was not always possible. In the event that the speaker declined to produce a poster, the assignment was given to another prominent designer.

- As Wild is also a writer, Armin Vit gathered short phrases that rhymed (or looked like they *should* rhyme) with her full name and—at least tangentially—had something to do with her practice. This allowed him the freedom of not having to mimic Wild's writing style.

- To get the texture on the typography, Vit typeset the composition in Clarendon, printed it, and then traced around the letters with a Sharpie marker.

Music/Man: Niklaus Troxler, 2008

Alan Dye (b. 1975)

Collection of AIGA NY

- Niklaus Troxler is known as one of Switzerland's foremost graphic designers as well as one of the country's most passionate devotees of jazz. From 1975 to 2009, he organized the famous Willisau Jazz Festival near Zurich, for which he made many of the posters.

- This talk by Troxler about his posters was originally supposed to be held at Jazz at Lincoln Center; however, the venue proved too expensive and it was moved to Cooper Union. After the presentation, musicians Bob Stewart and Craig Harris performed some jazz favorites.

- Under the direction of Carin Goldberg, the posters for AIGA NY events at this time followed a simple formula in which two objects related to the speaker were juxtaposed on either side of a backslash. Here, Alan Dye—currently vice president of human interface design at Apple—incorporated an illustration of a saxophone made by Troxler for another poster and a silhouette of the artist based on a photograph.
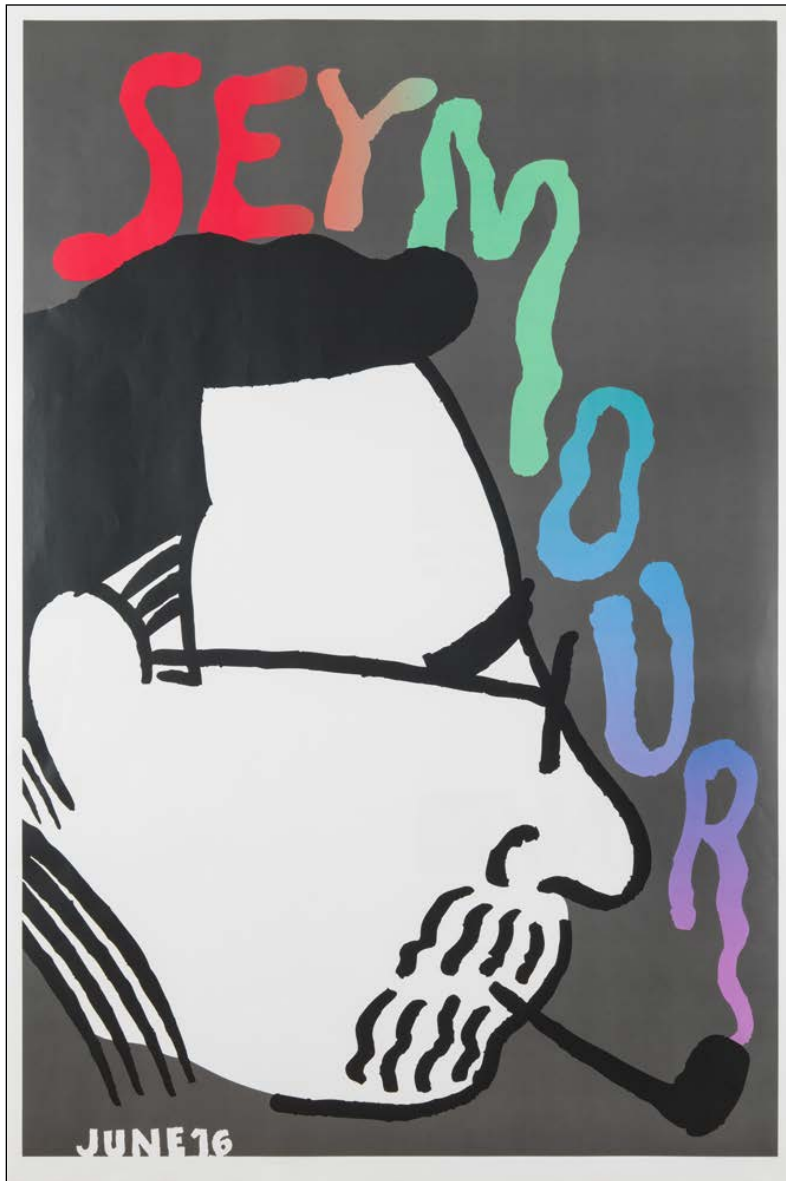
Seymour: The Obsessive Images of Seymour Chwast, 2009

Seymour Chwast (b. 1931)

Poster House Permanent Collection

- This poster promotes an evening with Seymour Chwast in conversation with design historian Steven Heller. This talk was held at the SVA Theatre in Chelsea in honor of the release of Chwast's latest book, referenced in this poster.

- The verso advertises the event as including "hundreds of images" and "never before seen animations," while Chwast would "expose his obsessions, as well as his fears, follies and successes."

- The design is simply an enlarged version of the book cover, showing Chwast himself in profile, smoking his signature pipe.

Press Reviews

harlem world
around the block, around the world

新創意设计

POSTER HOUSE