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# INTRODUCTION

Each time we bring one issue of *Emigre* to the printer, the idea for the next will have slowly started to surface, but never quite crystallizes until we're almost finished.

The idea for this issue started to come together after I was invited to do a three-day workshop at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

I have always been impressed by the graphic design work produced there, mostly because of the students' high level of risk taking and experimentation. Regardless of the methodologies used (some far more interesting than what is expressed in the work), it is their sheer energy and sincere interest in graphic design as a creative discipline that I am attracted to. And although not everything they produce is of the same quality (some work I find downright ugly), the work usually manages to offer something new, raise questions, or make me laugh.

Over the past eight or nine issues, *Emigre* has often featured work by Cranbrook students and alumni alike. *Emigre* No 10, published in 1989, was designed, written and produced entirely by the graduate design students.

Just recently a young undergraduate design student from a large university somewhere in the Midwest called me. He had picked up on my bias towards Cranbrook and asked me whether I thought that any of these "convention-and-rule-breaking students at Cranbrook" were ever concerned about contributing in a "positive" way to our culture, instead of always breaking rules. He seemed both mad and frustrated. Mad, I believe, perhaps because he didn't understand this type of work, and frustrated (I found out later) because the school he attended left little room for such personal expression. After suggesting that he should address his question directly to the Cranbrook students, I did feel a need to inform him that, in my eyes, rule-breaking per se was not the goal. I told him that these graphic designers were trying to find their personal voice and were simply intrigued by the never-ending search for alternative ways to communicate visually and verbally. What better place to do this than in a graduate design program? I also mentioned that he should remember that the conventions and rules that exist within graphic design are not exactly carved in stone and that it is valid to question the necessity of these rules or at least wonder about how and why these rules were established in the first place. Graphic design is not like architecture, where, for example, if you don't follow certain regulations, a building might collapse and kill people.

This doesn't mean that anything goes in graphic design. In the end, it is the designer's goal to communicate messages. But simple common sense is as good a rule to abide by as any. After my conversation with this student, I decided that this issue of *Emigre* should be devoted to

graphic designers who experiment -- designers who are fascinated by the idea of what graphic design would be like if we didn't adhere to the existing rules. It would be an iconoclastic issue. "Why do we experiment?" would be the million dollar question.

However, during my three days at Cranbrook, another interesting notion came into the picture. Whenever the question arose of what the future of graphic design had in store, the students expressed a need to return to simpler, more direct ways of expression. This need had come partially as a reaction to ten years of very intense experimentation with complex typographic and pictorial structuring at Cranbrook (beautifully elaborated upon and illustrated in the recently published book *Cranbrook Design: The New Discourse*). The current students, though, felt a need to take inventory and start with a clean slate. Such a reaction sounded familiar. After creating some of the most unconventional (rule-breaking) page layouts for the British *The Face* magazine, Neville Brody eventually returned to the very basics of graphic design or, as Keith Robertson writes in the following article, "the safe refuge of the International Style." When visiting Wolfgang Weingart last year, I was amazed when he showed me examples of his most recent work. They were simple typographic designs bearing little resemblance to his earlier layered typographic experiments. Dan Friedman, one of the initiators of American New Wave, is currently entirely satisfied with creating what some might consider non-design. The book *Artificial Nature*, which he designed in 1990, consists primarily of full bleed photographs with short captions set in Futura bold, set in horizontal black rectangles which are each centered in the middle of the page. Even Jan Tschichold, after setting the design world on fire with his manifesto *Die Neue Typographie* (what is considered a safe refuge now was then the most radical approach to graphic design imaginable), would later return to an even safer refuge: classical, center-axis typography. There are numerous other graphic designers I can think of who have traveled this path.

Is this a natural course that designers who experiment inevitably take? Does all experimentation in graphic design lead to the simplification of graphic design? Are graphic designers who concern themselves with complex solutions merely slow learners who try out the wildest schemes only to come to one conclusion, that less is more? Since we usually raise more questions with *Emigre* than we can answer, this seemed to be a topic right up our alley.

Rudy VanderLans