

Research Paper 1

Designer: Willi Kunz

Title: Swiss Cheese Mixed with American Cheddar

Communication Design has been one of the most influential and dynamic parts of society and culture. Its impact on our daily lives is so subtle but penetrates us dramatically in the most prolific ways. From suggesting what we should eat, and wear to the promotion of utilizing devices and machines in our homes, schools, and offices. It's just everywhere! Yet do we stop to think about how design has evolved to what it is today? What are its origins? What has influenced the different trends over time? Looking back, we can look at one time period in history that has heavily contributed to the graphic design world of today. The Avant-Garde movement of the early 20th century; consists of futurism, constructivism, De Stijl, Bauhaus, and the Swiss/international Style of design. These movements have embedded their DNA within graphic design and have helped communicate what its authors believe are clear, concise, and meaningful messages.

Focusing on the Swiss/international design style, Willi Kunz was one of those designers who embraced this style promoted by the Avant-Garde. Elements of the Swiss/international design style are objective, minimal with color, the use of geometric shapes, and always use sans serif for text. The layouts are tight being they are constructed on grids and overall give a sense of universality. Born in 1943 in Switzerland, Willi moved to the United States in the 1970s. He gained his recognition by designing for the "Merit Gasoline station Franchise". Shortly after he



opened his design studio which is still in business today, he heavily promoted the ideologies and practices of “Swiss Style” but moved into what is now perceived as “creative experimentation”. His work is featured in the New York and San Francisco MoMAs. He specializes in print, visual identity, and architectural graphics. He wrote a sought-after book titled “ *The Origins and Growth of an International Style 1920 - 1985*”. (“Willi Kunz | Cary Graphic Arts Collection | RIT”). His work continues to “greatly contributed to postmodernism”. (“Home”) Looking at a few pieces we will see how Kunz has embraced the design trademarks of the “Swiss style”, initially part of the Avant-Garde.

Kuntz designed a few poster designs for Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture with the “international typographic style”. The first poster “*Introduction to Architecture program Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation one*”, (“02”) immediately projects the asymmetrical organization of all the design elements on the page. The layers, in order from the bottom to the top, starts with a large black-and-white photo of the sky with soft clouds. Then an almost royal blue circle flushed left with most of its circular part protruding to the right. A sixteenth of it bleeds off the page. We then see smaller black-and-white images of landmarks in the cities of New York and Paris positioned like steps leading up to each city name; to the far mid-left of the poster you see text reading vertically, which at the last line flows up to the top midsection of the poster where it starts



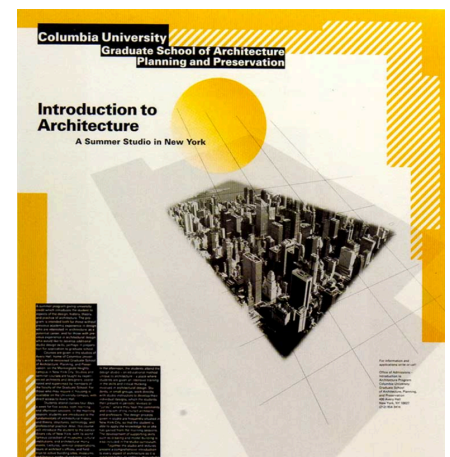
flowing into the headline. The design flows to the far right to the last grouping of text which starts mid-page far right and flows down vertically. These paragraphs of text are sized smallest suggesting it's the least important of the hierarchy on the page.

The second poster is titled, "*Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design / Master of Science in Architecture and Urban Design* Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation". ("02") has the same asymmetrical design, but the headlines flow across the top of the page from left to right and then lead down to the body text on the far right. The image and abstract shapes are centered, making it the poster's focus communicating directly to the reader. The shape elements of the poster almost demonstrate a frame for the images, which gives it the



second element in the hierarchy of the poster after the bold headlines. Here you can also see Kunz is moving slightly away from the main primary colors and working with a deeper shade of red, contrasting well with the cream-like color on the rest of the poster.

The third poster, "*Introduction to architecture summer studio* Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation" ("02"). Flows the same asymmetrical layout as the



other posters, but is created differently. All text including headlines and body copy are flushed left and spaced out strategically vertically down the left portion of the poster. To the bottom left, within black rectangular text boxes, are white body text with the full description of the poster. The photo is centered horizontally again and framed by shape elements to help highlight its importance. There is a mix of shapes (squares and circles) and lines in this poster. To support the season of summer in the title, the circle is at the top center above the image on the poster, colored in a bright gradient yellow. The heather grey lines stretching out from the middle of the sun over the city may represent the rays of heat generated by the sun that usually beams over New York during the summer.

Kunz has kept the basic clean minimalistic “international typographic style” approach to his design; you can see his experimentation with shape and color. Instead of just placing shapes on the page side by side, some overlap each other, some bleed off the page, and some have vertical sides instead of straight edges all to keep the reader engaged while still providing ease for readability. You can tell his designs sit on a grid, possibly with 5 to 7 columns and about 5 to 6 rows. I am reminded of the grid of Swiss typography created by Josef Muller-Brockmann when deconstructing this poster. Noted in our textbook, “*Graphic Design Theory: Readings From the Field* by Helen Armstrong; and Margaret Rhodes, Joseph Muller-Brockman, “*Grid and Design Philosophy*” pg 62. He only uses sans serif type supporting the universality of using a typeface that does not specifically suggest any emotional interpretation, but exactly what the type reads. In his manifesto, Jan Tschichold states, “The gentle swing of the pendulum between ornamental type, the (superficially understood) “beautiful” appearance, and “adornment” by extraneous

additions (ornaments) can never produce the pure form we demand today” *Graphic Design Theory: Readings From the Field* by Helen Armstrong; and Margaret Rhodes, Jan Tschichold, “*The New Typography*” pg35.

Willi Kunz is proof that the origins of most graphic design trends started with the Avant-Garde. It has stood its test through time and has weaved its way to what is now part of the standard of graphic design. Designer or not, anyone who views work done by designers within the Avant-Garde and compares it to work done in the industry today can see how the authors of that movement were more than just designers but trailblazers for communication design today. As stated in our textbook, *Graphic Design Theory: Readings From the Field* by Helen Armstrong; and Margaret Rhodes, *Section One - Creating The Fields* pg 19. “Their idea clashed and converged to form the modern foundation from which the graphic design industry emerged”.

Works Cited

“Home.” *YouTube*, <http://www.tm-research-archive.ch/designers/willi-kunz>. Accessed 6 March 2023.

“02.” *Willi Kunz*, <http://willikunz.com/studio/18x24>. Accessed 6 March 2023.

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Graphic Design Theory: Readings From the Field by Helen Armstrong; and Margaret Rhodes, Joseph Muller-Brockman,

- *Joseph Muller-Brockman, “Grid and Design Philosophy” pg 62.*
- *Jan Tschichold, “The New Typography” pg 35.*
- *Section One - Creating The Fields pg 19*