



Resource Review

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Name of reviewed item:	Drip-dry shirts: the evolution of the graphic designer
Author:	Lucienne Day
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Review:

Lucienne Roberts is concerned with context and history, and how knowledge of both provides a framework for a better understanding of design practice. She notes that year after year the majority of design books released are interested in neither history nor context, instead they focus on the newest and youngest in a vain attempt to “capture definitively the zeitgeist” (Roberts, p.13). *Drip-dry shirts: the evolution of the graphic designer* is her rich and enlightening response to these books.

Drip-dry shirts takes, as a starting point, the birth of the term graphic design, which Roberts argues did not exist in a coherent and fully recognizable form until after the Second World War. From this point on the individual and distinct activities found in what we now think of as graphic design coalesced to bring about a more concrete definition of the term and the profession. She pegs the 1950s as the time the term “graphic design” entered common parlance –as did the words ‘high-rise’, ‘hovercraft’ and ‘drip-dry’ (hence the title of the book). *Drip-dry shirts* takes as its focus this key formative period – the 1950s and ‘60s – documenting the major events and bringing together the work and reflections of some of the most innovative designers that established themselves in this time.

The book, which is part of the growing roster of design books in the AVA Academia series, is broken into three main sections: the ‘Dimensions’; the ‘Discussions’; and, the ‘Reference’ section which includes a detailed timeline covering 1945–1969.

The ‘Dimension’ pieces, of which there are six, serve as contextual documents to interpret and enrich the rest of the book; we are given a succinct illustrated primer on such diverse areas as the rise of modernism and the role that technology played in

shaping the profession of graphic design. Roberts describes these six pieces as brief “scene-setters” for the following ‘Discussions’ section (p.17).

The main content of the book falls in the ‘Discussion’ pieces section. Here Roberts has collected a wonderful cast of nine designers and design educators to interview. In each discussion she has provided an extended interview allowing the subject to present their reflections and thoughts on design in relation to their experiences and careers. Each of the pieces is richly illustrated with work from the featured designer. To provide richer context and to help place these designers in a continuum of practice Roberts has asked each of the nine designers to name a colleague or student over whom they have had some influence or a working relationship. These secondary designers are then interviewed and a larger and richer contextual history is drawn, as Roberts notes the “pieces are mini design family trees and the symbiotic nature of work and teaching becomes apparent” (p.8). For example we have an interview with Milton Glaser, where he discusses his prolific career and his role in shaping the design profession, and while this is rich and enlightening much of the content, rightly so, has been presented in many other places. What is new and original is how this interview is then furthered by the reflections of Brookie Maxwell, the secondary designer in Glaser’s discussion piece. Through Maxwell’s reflections we are able to see another side of Glaser – from her description of first meeting Glaser in the 1970s during her first year at the School of Visual Arts in New York to the continual support and advice he has given her over her career to the fact that he has ruined her for lunch with other people. These insights from the secondary designers extend our understanding and context of the nine interviewees in ways that are new and illuminating.

Another strength of the publication is the range and breadth of the collection of contributors that Roberts has pulled together. We learn about the working practices, influences and thoughts of such design heavyweights as Wim Crouwel, Ivan Chermayeff and Glaser but we are also introduced to less celebrated designers like Ken Garland and Geoff White. Garland’s career and work has never fit easily into the role of graphic designer – his work, ideas and ideals are much broader than any one term or profession, and as with anything difficult to define he is sometimes left out and should not be. Similarly it is wonderful to see someone like Geoff White included here, a designer that has dedicated his life to design education.

The third and final segment of the book is a reference section with an extensive timeline written and designed by the typographer Kelvyn Laurence Smith. The timeline covers 1945–69 and brings a contextual richness to the publication, helping to link the work and designers featured to broader historical and cultural contexts. We can now easily see what else was going on in 1956 when Wim Crouwel’s *New Acquisitions* poster came out (*High Society* featuring Cole Porter’s lyrics and music was released and *Rebel Without A Cause* with James Dean opened to note two highlights).

The book is ideally suited for design educators, historians or designers who are seeking a greater understanding of the rich and nuanced history of graphic design. Presenting both an overview and enlightening snapshots of a rich period of time the book would work well in a design history or context course where the readings could be further discussed and contextualized.

Overall *Drip-dry shirts: the evolution of the graphic designer* is a unique addition to the catalogue of writing on graphic design. Roberts has provided a beautifully designed and accessible piece that brings to life the history and context of graphic design in the last half-century.