

FACE THE NATION

HOW NATIONAL IDENTITY SHAPED MODERN TYPEFACE DESIGN, 1900–1960

PRESENTED BY:

 Minnesota Center
for Book Arts



UNIVERSITY of ST. THOMAS
MINNESOTA

College of Arts and Sciences

Face The Nation: How National Identity Shaped Modern Typeface Design, 1900-1960

July 12 through September 21, 2008

On display at Minnesota Center for Book Arts, Star Tribune Foundation Gallery

Presented by Minnesota Center for Book Arts (MCBA) and the University of St. Thomas, this historical exhibition investigates how the desire to reinforce, redefine or transcend national identities shaped the design of typefaces between 1900 and 1960. The same era that encompassed two World Wars also saw many new designs of type, in part demanded by the new printing technology of the Monotype and Linotype casting machines. The exhibition will include a number of engaging case studies, including historical curiosities, examples of original printed works and objects from the printing trade.

Curator Craig Eliason, assistant professor of art history at UST, describes this time period as “the last great era of metal type.” The evolution of printing technology — from carving and casting wooden and metal letterforms by hand, to typesetting technology like the Monotype and Linotype machines, to photostatic and now digital composition methods — has relegated metal type to the studios of MCBA and other such devotees of historical handicraft. Furthermore, Eliason says, “the digital age has revolutionized not only typesetting but also type design: the designers of almost all of today’s letters do not carve punches nor draft engineering drawings, but rather drag points and curves on computer screens.”

Two coordinating exhibitions feature the work of two contemporary designers, Romäno Hanni (Switzerland) and Erik Brandt (U.S), who explore typography in contemporary graphic design and new challenges in designing for global markets and cross-cultural messaging. Alongside the exhibitions, MCBA and University of St. Thomas will be hosting a number of presentations, workshops, panel discussions and even a film screening to provide multiple opportunities for the public to engage these topics.

“Typography and type design continue to attract scholars’ attention because unlike verbal communication, type creates a physical record; how an idea is presented can affect the message,” says MCBA Artistic Director Jeff Rathermel. “Many designers feel that good typography is *transparent*, that it should not get in the way of the information, but rather add content and value to what is being presented. Due to this transparent quality, type design is something you must have your attention called to to appreciate.”

An integral component of the exhibition is the Face The Nation website, which will include additional historical insights on the featured case studies, photographs of the exhibit, and a series of audio guides, which you can download to an MP3 player and use in the gallery for a virtual guided tour. Find all this and more at:
www.stthomas.edu/facethenation

Where:

Minnesota Center for Book Arts
1011 Washington Avenue South, First Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55415

All exhibits and events are free and open to the public, except where noted otherwise.

Media Contact:

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Coordinated Exhibitions:

Swiss Impressions: Romano Hänni and the Art of Metal Type

July 12 through September 21; Open Book Lobby Gallery

View the stunning technique and design mastery of Basel designer/printer Romano Hänni in this exhibition of hand-printed books. Educated at the Basel School of Design, Hänni returns to the core values of traditional printing technique and modernist European design. The strict limitations of hand typesetting are his cornerstone, everything composed from the incremental units of type and spacing available in the type shop. Hänni's work encompasses a wide range of fields in visual communication, from books, magazines, catalogs and newspapers to drawings, photography and journalism about design and everyday culture.

Typøgrafika: The Work of Erik Brandt

June 20 through August 3; Open Book Cowles Literary Commons

Brandt's interests focus on issues of globalization that affect and drive the complexities of intercultural visual communication systems. Brandt began his career as a magazine editor in Japan; taught typography and visual communication in Doha, Qatar; and is currently an assistant professor of design at Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

Opening Reception:

Saturday, July 12, 6 to 9 pm at MCBA; Gallery talk begins at 7pm.

Join designers, historians, artists and book and printing arts enthusiasts to view the exhibitions, enjoy refreshments and print a commemorative letterpress broadside to take home with you. Free and open to the public.

Gallery Hours:

Mondays through Saturdays: 10 am to 5 pm

Tuesdays open late: 10 am to 9 pm

Sundays: 12 noon to 4 pm

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Coordinated Programming:

Dialogue: The Place of Letters

Tuesday, July 15; 7pm

Face the Nation curator Craig Eliason will lead a conversation about how type designs acquire associations with national identities. We will consider competing ideas about how a typeface can express the values or outlook of its country of origin. Seen historically, what motivated commentators to draw those associations? In our web-enabled world, in which digital fonts can originate anywhere and be accessed everywhere, what has become of national cultures of design?

Family Workshop: Design Your Own Typeface

Saturday, July 19; 1-4pm

Get inspired by the typography exhibition *Face the Nation*, then design the letters of your name in your own special style and "carve" and print them on the Vandercook press to make personalized posters and accordion books. Each participant — children and adults — will get to make prints! For families with children ages 6 and up. Pre-registration and payment required; call 612-215-2520 or visit www.mnbookarts.org.

Dialogue: Geotypografika Nuovo: Global Issues in Graphic Design and Typography

Tuesday, July 29; 7pm

Designer Erik Brandt provides context and projections to stage a discussion on contemporary issues and challenges facing designers in a rapidly changing globalized market. How to practice or teach graphic design and typography in a truly massive global market where competition is as fierce as never before? While highly intimidating in some respects, the new global market offers new and exciting problems for designers to solve.

Screening: *Helvetica*

Thursday, Aug. 14; 7pm

Helvetica (2007, dir. Gary Hustwit) is a feature-length independent film about typography, graphic design and global visual culture. It looks at the proliferation of one typeface (which will celebrate its 50th birthday in 2007) as part of a larger conversation about the way type affects our lives. The film is an exploration of urban spaces in major cities and the type that inhabits them, and a fluid discussion with renowned designers about their work, the creative process, and the choices and aesthetics behind their use of type. *Helvetica* encompasses the worlds of design, advertising, psychology, and communication, and invites us to take a second look at the thousands of words we see every day.

Dialogue: About Face: Deeper into Type Design and National Identity

Tuesday, Sept. 16; 7pm

Four panelists, contributors to the *Face the Nation* exhibition, will offer presentations on some of the most interesting intersections of national identity and type design, expanding on the displays in the gallery. Natalie Stanton will discuss Colm O'Lochlainn's Colum Cille type and its relation to his efforts to establish and support the Irish Free State. Caroline Baum will talk about Rudolf Koch's interest in updating the German blackletter alphabets while they competed with roman types of foreign origin. Lisa Melander will trace the career of Vojtech Preissig, whose designs satisfied the emergent demand among Czechs for a type of their own. And Traci Olinger will explore the modernist milieu of Weimar Germany, within which pared-down sans serifs were proclaimed to transcend national interests. All four panelists are enrolled in the Master of Arts in Art History program at the University of St. Thomas.

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Background:

As the largest and most comprehensive center of its kind in the nation, Minnesota Center for Book Arts celebrates the book as a contemporary art form that takes many shapes. From the traditional crafts of papermaking, letterpress printing and hand book-binding to experimental artmaking and self-publishing, MCBA helps artists and learners find creativity, expression and inspiration through the limitless creative evolution of book arts. MCBA provides workshops in the book arts for adults, teens, youth, families and teachers. Our artist programs include exhibitions, lectures and community events, residencies, fellowships, and an artists' co-op. The Shop at MCBA features work by over 140 consignment artists along with handmade gifts and art supplies. MCBA is located in the Open Book building in downtown Minneapolis, along with The Loft Literary Center, Rosalux Gallery and Milkweed Editions.

The University of St. Thomas is Minnesota's largest private university with campuses in St. Paul, Minneapolis and Owatonna, Minn., and Rome, Italy. A Catholic university established in 1885, St. Thomas enrolls more than 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students. It offers more than 90 undergraduate majors and graduate degrees in more than 45 fields of study, including art history.

Media Contact:

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