

Meggs, Philip B., and Alston W. Purvis. Meggs' History of Graphic Design. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2006.

I have two critical observations about Philip Meggs' impressive tome that chronicles the evolution of graphic design: First, in his 575 page book which started with Prehistoric visual communication and ended with sample posters from 2004, Meggs and Purvis focused extensively on poster design beginning in the mid 1800's and used this medium as examples of graphic design until the final chapter titled, "The Digital Revolution and Beyond." I find myself at a loss to think of a better medium to illustrate the evolution and history of graphic design, but I become more dubious when the authors introduce such descriptors as art, visual communication, and information design in place of graphic design, then posters, broadsheets and books seem insufficient to fully represent the language of visual design. In my criticism, I can honestly say that I would not eliminate one image or delete any chapter or topic matter covered. My critique stems from noting my process as I read the book. There were spans that I was glued to every word, afraid that I might skip an important point or valuable bit of information and then there were other sections when the authors listed designer after designer emphasizing seemingly erroneous facts and minor historical events. This book is packed with page after page of prominent designers throughout history, but as an academic interested in understanding the epochs of design history and the evolution of graphic design, I often found these details unhelpful. One example is Stan Richards, head of the Richards Group in Dallas, is recognized as a "catalytic figure in the emergence of their state (Texas) as a major design center," (437) and that's the extent of the entry. I didn't feel this entry expanded the conversation and I experienced a similar response throughout the text.

Secondly, the book begins with a fascinating exploration of symbols, characters, markings and crude drawings, moving to Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphics. I was completely engrossed through the first eighty pages up to and including Gutenberg's contribution to graphic communication and information design. Then starting with broadsheets, which became a major means of information dissemination as a direct result of the printing press, the authors used typography as the thread that pulled the reader through the next four hundred and fifty years. I would agree that typography and the influences of society, cultural events and technologies are interwoven and provide a narrative that gives insight into the design epochs, but I would have given fewer pages to typography and possibly focused more on the details of the movements and impact of the designers who led the graphic design industry and shaped future visual communications. The authors noted their regret of not being able to profile more leading designers; I would have appreciated a more in-depth exploration of fewer designers and details that illustrated the technologies these thought leaders utilized to further the field of design. Even though emerging technologies and art

movements are the primary influences on typological design, I find it difficult to make the leap that typography is the best indication of the leading factor in a design epoch or social movement. Manifestos were mentioned throughout and possibly these documents could have been better explored. I can imagine Meggs and Purvis' dilemma of chronicling a field as broad as graphic design and they obviously chose print media to define the "graphic" side of design, but I would have preferred a broader view of the field and possibly wider definition of graphic design.

In summary, the book began with an intense and comprehensive presentation of visual communication, and ended with a shallow exploration of digital fonts, and further reviews of contemporary posters and book cover designs. In between the reader was led through a detailed exploration of typographical designs from the printing press to present and poster designs that reflected the work of prominent designers and artists. It was interesting to stop and think how visual information affects my life and how I only think of posters as niche advertising such as movie posters and sales placards in retail environments. I acknowledge the authors' point of the impact of posters and their purpose as broad communication tools; especially during world war one and two. I would guess the predominant suburban environment of Dallas lends to less street promotional material, but then I think of graffiti, billboards, and digital information as still impactful media that reflects our culture and possible areas of exploration. After reading the final one hundred pages of the book, my inclination was to suggest the authors leave the final chapter out of the book, but the 90's and beyond have demarked a new epoch in design, even a "revolution," as Meggs and Purvis suggest and to leave this new era of design out of the "History of Graphic Design," would be academically irresponsible. I would then suggest they expand their choices of media and expand their exploration of graphic design. Ironically, after my seeming negative review of Meggs and Purvis' book, *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, I would strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in design and a comprehensive compendium of art, graphic design, and the field of visual communication.