

The Politics of Graphic Design

Katharina von Stackelberg, 01.06.2025

Structure

- Introduction
- What is Graphic Design
- And why is it political?
- Elements of Graphic Design:
 - Typography
 - Colour
 - Image
 - Information
- Looking at Graphic Design

Introduction

- Name
- Pronouns (if that is something you want to share)
- Experiences with graphic design
- What software you use

ME!

- Katha (they / them)
- Junior Art Director
- Bachelor in Design

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- Katha (they / them)
- Junior Art Director
- Bachelor in Design

→ Who am I?

I'm Katha, I use they/them pronouns. I'm 27 years old, and I've been a part of The Left Berlin for about a year now.

→ What do I work on ?

So in my day to day life I am a junior art director. Which sounds very fancy but means most of what I do is Graphic Design for events. I'm not really trained as a graphic designer, but I did study design in the Netherlands where I graduated with two small indie games / interactive experiences. I like playing with visual language, I like thinking about the meaning of visual language. I like to research complex topics often at the intersection between technology and feminism and find the purpose of my work in whimsically raising critical questions - because I don't think designs need to follow a certain aesthetic to be valuable or taken serious.

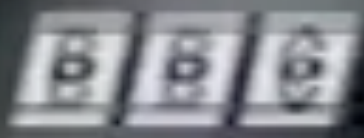
(Show examples of work?)

→ My blind spots

I was born and raised in Germany and studied in the Netherlands, where I was taught by mostly Dutch men - a lot of the times these teachers didn't really question what they had been taught which does mean that a lot of what I have learnt during my studies was quite eurocentric, and also definitely very focused on the global north. I am doing my best to bridge the gaps of that education but I also want to acknowledge that I definitely have blind spots. A lot of what I am talking about is very eurocentric, is very situated around the global north. If I say something questionable, or something wrong, please don't hesitate to correct me. If you have examples, ideas, questions, just go ahead and interrupt me. I'm super excited to learn from each other.

What is graphic design?

The Design of Visual Communication



A short history of graphic design



A short history of graphic design



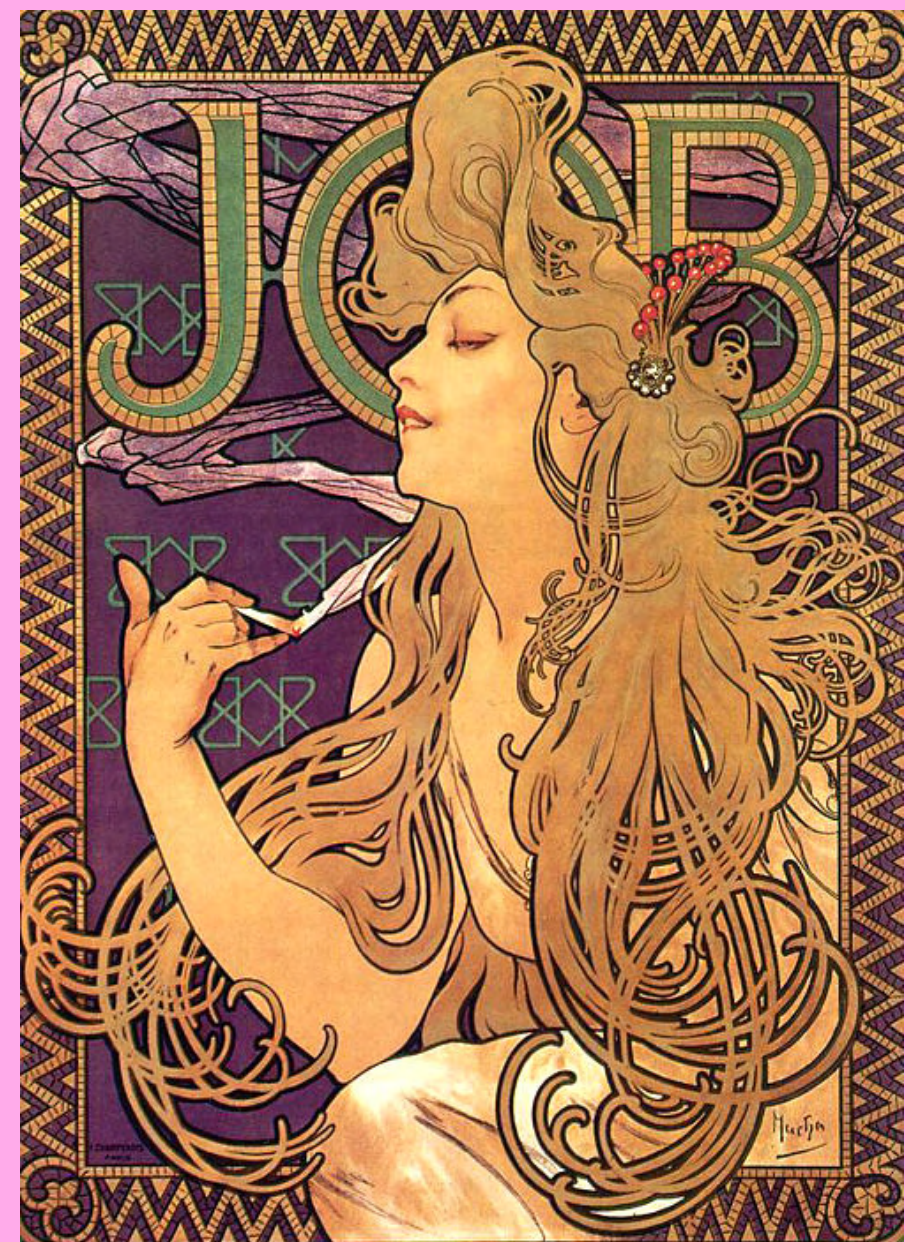
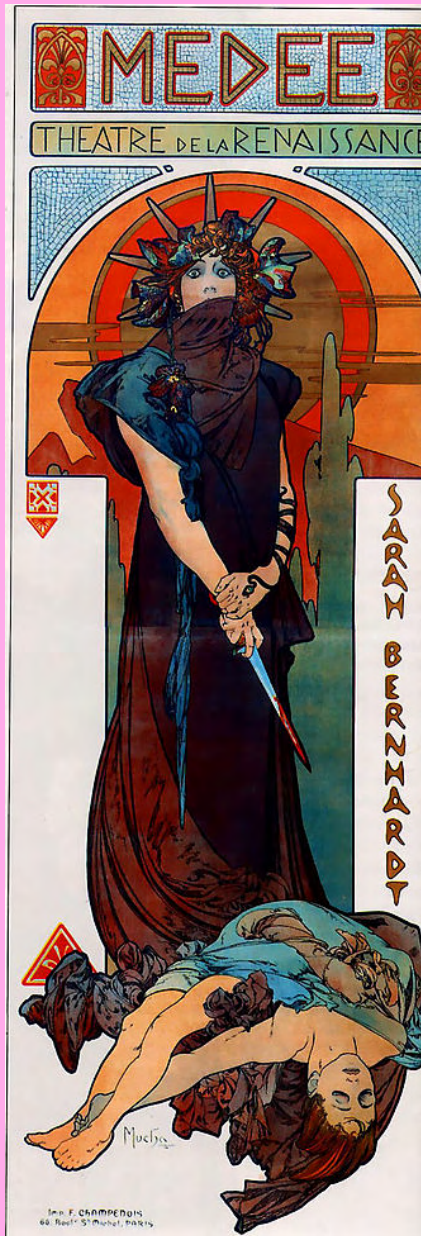
The term Graphic Design was coined in 1922, and as an occupation only really became a thing during the Industrial Revolution - where due to new production methods suddenly the design of communication mediums and their production became separated. Before this all visual design and layouting was done by the people producing - think of scriptures, old print, calligraphy. So as a specific profession graphic design has always been quite separated from the production of things, while the profession itself is really heavily interlaced with the technologies used for it. Think about the move from the printing press to digital printing, where suddenly we have hundreds and thousands of fonts, and whatever we want available to us.

→ I wanna point out here that a lot that I saw and learnt about the history of graphic design is incredibly eurocentric / focused on the global North - that is also because graphic design grew hand in hand with the advertising industry and with consumerism here. At the same time it's important to mention that about 2000 years before Gutenberg, in China Bi Sheng invented the first printing technology with movable type, which was basically the base of commercial design.

There's two steps within this history that I would like to shortly talk about.

Art Nouveau

1890 - 1910s



Mucha, from left to right: Medea, Cremant Imperiale, Gismonda, Job

Art Nouveau

1890 - 1910s



Mucha, from left to right: Medea, Cremant Imperiale, Gismonda, Job

→ I would argue that these hold a lot of the key elements of what later is then considered graphic design. If you look at the elements right, we see typography, illustration - there is definitely a certain visual identity within the whole thing. But one thing that I think also probably stands out quite heavily is that the majority of these posters are advertisements - they're sort of a commodification of art, while also kind of existing at the intersection of art, craft and applied design which is very much also where graphic design then starts to happen.

→ Two things I would like to point out.

→ Art Nouveau takes a lot of elements from a Japanese print movement, Ukiyo-e - in that sense it is also quite exemplary for graphic design later, which at many times and to this day quite happily engages in cultural appropriation.

→ When you look at the role of women in Art Nouveau works, they basically always exist as an object, just another thing to advertise with. This is ultimately to this day quite exemplary of the use of women in graphic design.

Neue Typografie

1920s



Neue Typografie

1920s



https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/02/12/rediscovering-the-new-typography/

→ This is sort of a counter movement to the decorative art nouveau. Their beef with art nouveau was that it was too decorative, distracting, that the use of different fonts was chaotic. And so we see this also in other things in the world around that time, like the Entstickung in Germany where house facades suddenly got very heavily cleaned up and de-decorated. New Typography is heavily modernist, rejecting the traditional arrangement of type, and instead organising blocks in compositions. - Similar to how you see it in a lot of modernist paintings. This movement came from Soviet Russia and the Weimar Bauhaus and then finally Jan Tschichold created accessible guidelines for it in a book in 1928.

Central to New Typography was the intention to establish typography as an artistic expression. They were trying to both to elevate the everyday to the level of art and to give art a functional, utilitarian role. Because of this it is also called Funktionale Typographie.

Some rules from New Typography are still quite heavily enforced like using little different fonts and font sizes and weights, using cursive or boldened words to highlight things, and to avoid using capitals when possible.

Neue Typografie

1920s

“Obvious similarities consist in the ruthless restriction of typefaces, a parallel to Goebbels’s infamous “Gleichschaltung” and the more or less militaristic arrangement of lines.”

Jan Tschichold

Neue Typografie

1920s

“Obvious similarities consist in the ruthless restriction of typefaces, a parallel to Goebbel’s infamous “Gleichschaltung” and the more or less militaristic arrangement of lines.”

Jan Tschichold

Later Jan Tschichold is forced to leave Nazi Germany, and upon reflection kind of turns away from New Typography. He says: “Obvious similarities consist in the ruthless restriction of typefaces, a parallel to Goebbel’s infamous ‘gleichschaltung’ and the more or less militaristic arrangement of lines.” I think that this is a good pathway to talking about why graphic design is political.

**What is
graphic design?**

**And why
is it political?**

And why is it political?

“Norms”

The lie of objectivity

Aesthetics

And why is it political?

“Norms”

The lie of objectivity

Aesthetics

So I am a firm believer that everything is political, and design is no exception to this at all. As someone that's trained more in general design, there's many many great examples of why design is inherently political - and that does ultimately also connect to graphic design. When we look at design as a whole for example, or even something like industrial design that I feel like likes to hide between a certain “objectivity”, you learn very quickly that a lot of the norms that are to this day used to create furniture are based on measurements of men that were taken in WW1 - similar to the existence of clothing sizes. Do you wanna know which measurement isn't based on men ? Kitchen counter height. That's probably one of the only normed surfaces that is based on women.

In general a lot of norms only work for a subset of people, that subset of people most of the time will be cis white men, we see this in the design of objects, public space, medical knowledge, etc. At the same time norms kind of create this lie of objectivity, I think a lot of the time they allow designers to remove themselves a little bit and their own responsibility, by not having to think about who they are creating for.

→ Visual communication, etc.

If we view graphic design as visual communication, then just like every communication, there are power dynamics, there's cultural context and there's impact. Graphic design often times does determine who and what get's seen and can uphold or subvert existing systems of power. It can control access to information, learning to read visual communication is a skill, that a lot of us learn quite early on because we are always surrounded by this type of communication - this isn't the same for everyone. Most importantly it embeds ideology in form. The visual choices we make don't exist in a vacuum. Fonts and colors and images have historical baggage, they have human creators that often have their own ideologies and purposes. In the same way what is deemed good design does not exist in a vacuum, it is often heavily influenced by class, race and education standards. It is no coincidence that most of the designers I have been taught about were all white european men. That so much of what is taken serious in design nowadays still follows rules from new typography and the modernist movement - I beg you, do not fall for that. Things do not need to look a certain way to be taken serious, or to matter.

Consumerism

“We propose a reversal of priorities in favor of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication – a mindshift away from product marketing and toward the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning. The scope of debate is shrinking; it must expand. Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of design.”

First Things First Manifesto (2020)

Consumerism

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First Things First Manifesto (2020)

As we have learned through our little history of graphic design, graphic design and consumerism are quite heavily intertwined. They are still. A lot of graphic designers work in advertising or advertising adjacent industries. There are many many many design manifestos but I wanted to share something with you from the First things First Manifesto (2000).

There is a long standing discussion within design between designers that think that design is apolitical (boo) and designers who think it isn't. There's obviously many ways to use graphic design that aren't inherently connected to consumerism - think of protest art, for example. I'm gonna do my best to show you varied examples throughout all of this. And now that we have gotten our basics down I will try and walk you through the different elements of graphic design a little bit.

Elements of Graphic Design

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Typography

Colour

Image

Information

Language and Typography

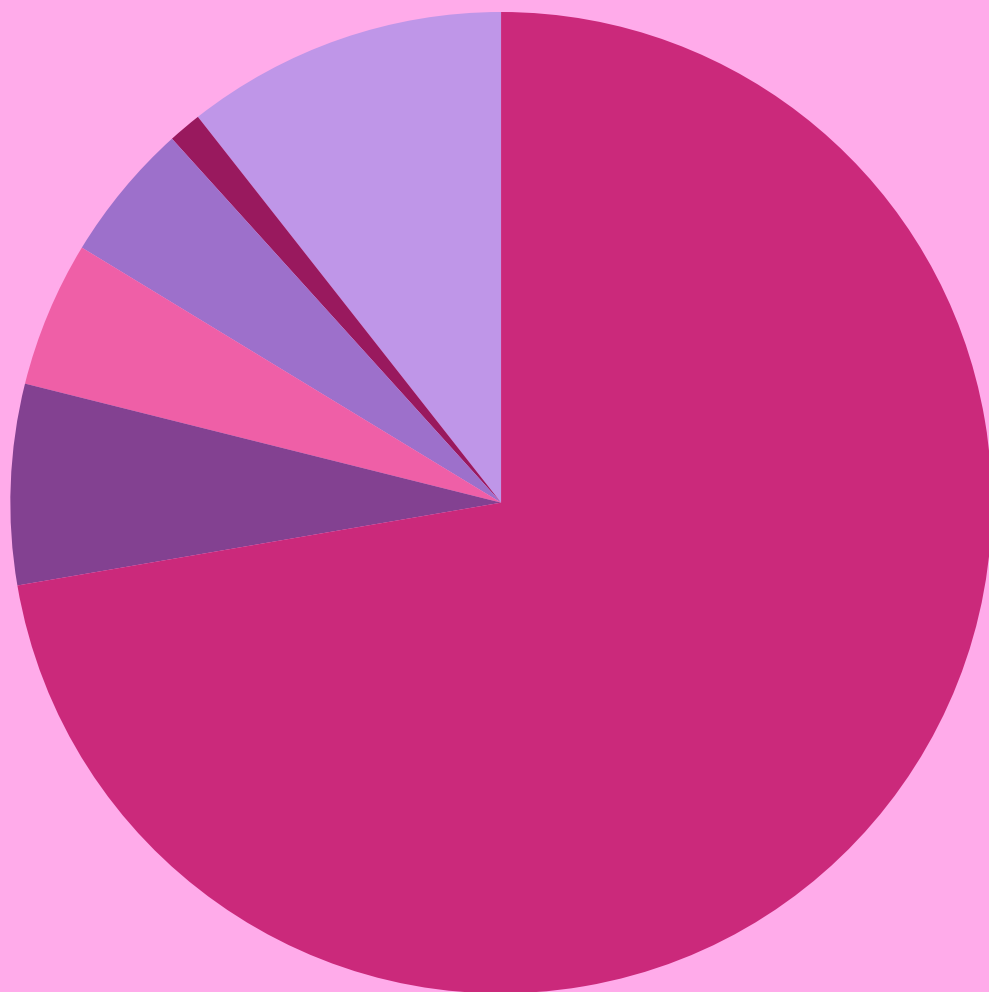
- Scripts
- Noto
- lowercase
- Vocal Type
- Practical Tips

Language and Typography

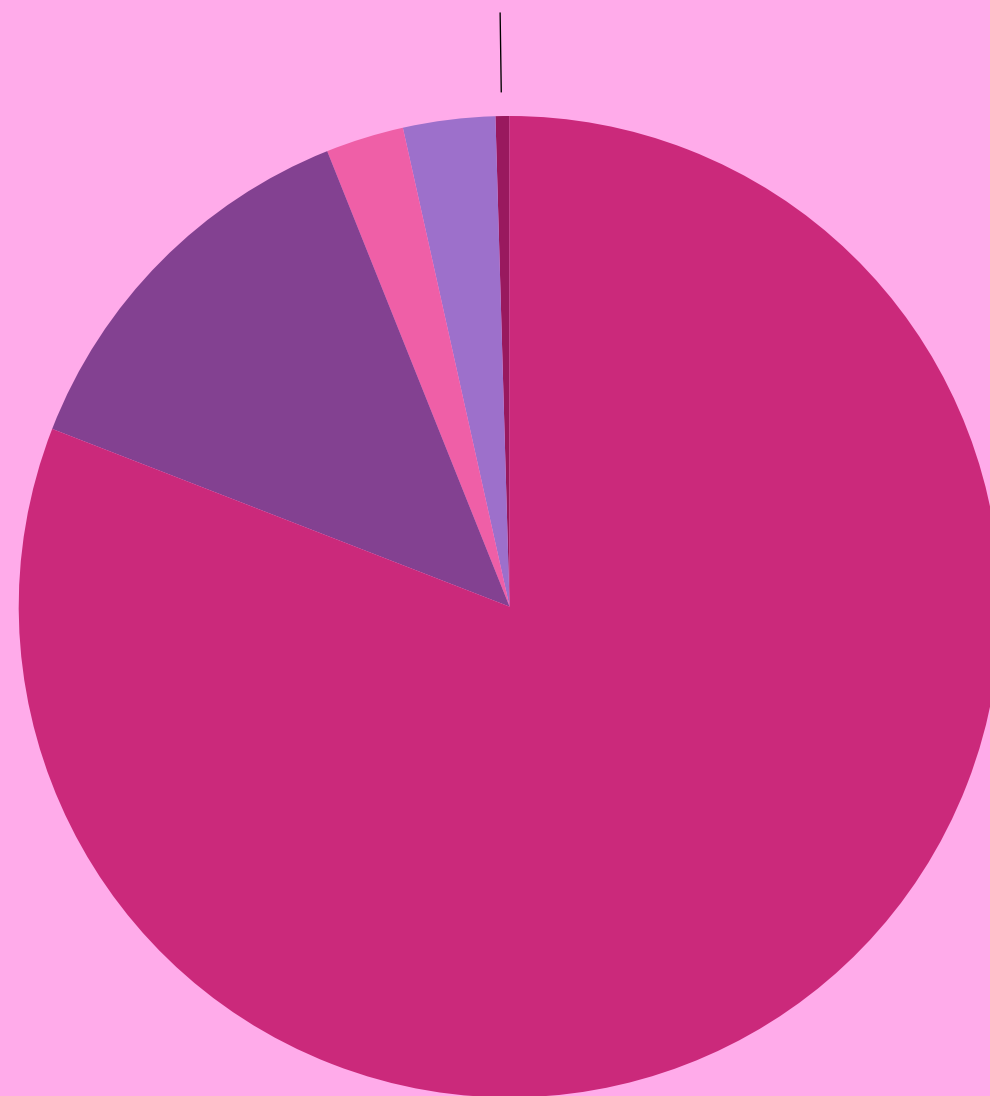
- Scripts
- Noto
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We are gonna start by talking about scripts. You know that there are many languages in the world but can you guess how many scripts there are? A script is a writing system so a set of characters that provide visual representation of a human language. So let's take some guesses

Scripts

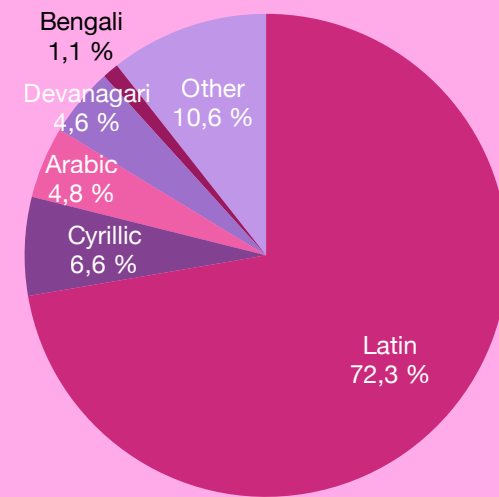


Script Use
By Number of Languages
(Omniglot, 2024)

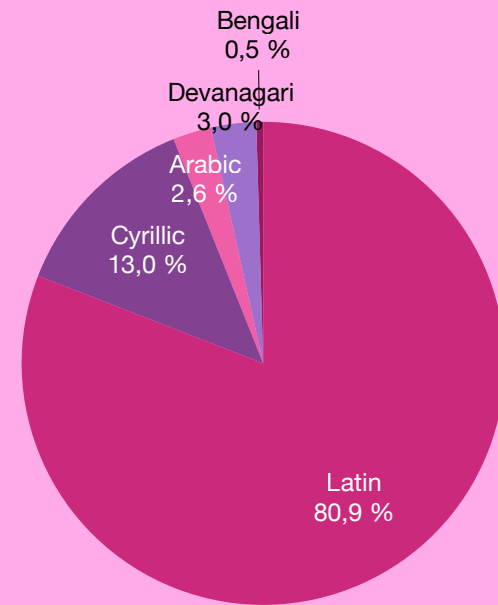


(Normalised) Script Support
By Number of Fonts
On Google Fonts

Scripts



**Script Use
By Number of Languages
(Omniglot, 2024)**



**(Normalised) Script Support
By Number of Fonts
On Google Fonts**

So according to the worlds writing systems, there are 293 writing systems in the world. Of those only 156 are living scripts, meaning that they are still in use. The 5 most used scripts are Latin, Cyrillic, Arabic, Devanagari and Bengali. These make up about 90% of all languages.

Checking for different writing systems on google fonts - which is a big open source library for fonts and often used for websites - I compared the fonts that they offer - 1826 in total, with how many of these support the top 3 writing systems.

When you look at the differences I think it's quite easy to see who gets more representation and who get's less.

Noto

**No
More
T fu**

Noto

**No
More
T  fu**

<https://www.itsnicethat.com/news/google-monotype-noto-type-family-061016>

I would like to highlight one font - Noto. Noto is designed to cover all scripts encoded in the Unicode standard, right now it covers 162 writing systems. That is more than all living scripts. It was commissioned by Google, and the name Noto, comes from the beautiful small rectangles that you see whenever a font doesn't have the right character available. Those are sometimes called tofu - since they look like little blocks of tofu. And so the aim of Noto is to remove this tofu from the web. It is considered probably the biggest font project in the world to date and according to google "One of the aims of the Noto project is to digitally preserve little-spoken or dead languages to help enable global communication "across borders, languages, cultures and time periods". Interestingly enough IKEA uses a custom version of Noto for their own brand, and I personally think one of the issues with Noto is the same that fonts like Helvetica have. I think it looks too neutral. It looks a lot like a font that was made to fit latin and cyrillic - I don't know how well it works in other scripts because I sadly can only read latin, but there are a lot of scripts where stroke matters, and a lot of these minimalist modern fonts force everything into one stroke weight. It is created by the TypeFoundry Monotype - who did apparently do significant research and worked with local designers and linguists to perfect each letter form. There is also obviously the question of why google would invest a lot of money into this - and I would argue that it is probably for reasons other than their deep deep love for languages. And so while having all these languages documented and digitally writable, I think it is also important to consider that here realistically consumerism is also a major driving force.

The case for lowercase

“In colonial times White as a race was capitalised and black was written in lower case. Titles like King, Lord, President, Pope and Emperor were capitalised, while words like peasant, slave or serf were written in lower case.”

Ruben Pater, The Politics of Design

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Ruben Pater, The Politics of Design

We recently had quite a lot of discussions about whether titles on our website should be in title case or sentence case - and then while I was looking a bit closer at graphic design history I learnt that in fact in the 1920s the New Typography did try to make the case for using only lower type. And this is actually quite fascinating. There are only three scripts in the world that use upper and lower case - those are Cyrillic, Greek and Latin. The modern Latin alphabet that we use - is a combination of the geometric Roman capitals and lower case letters from the middle ages that were brought together by Renaissance type cutters. Having two alphabets - one upper case and one lower case - brings in the option to visually discriminate and create systems of hierarchy. You can see this in what gets capitalised and what doesn't, like in this quote by Ruben Pater, from “The Politics of Design”. So Bauhaus teacher László Moholy-Nagy argued that capitals were inherently associated with power, authority and tradition and proposed that we should drop them. This also offered the convenience that keyboards and typewriters could be made more efficient and this did inspire a lot of designers to work only in lower case until about the 80s. At the same time I'm sure most of us here are familiar with bell hooks, who explicitly wrote her name in lower case to challenge the structure of text.

Vocaltype

Italian
Resistance
Movement

ANTI—
—FASCIST





Vocaltype!

→ It is a typefoundry that creates fonts based on protest signs, newspapers, pivotal global movements.

These include TankMan which is a font based on a student banner from Tianmen Square.

Garibaldi - inspired by anti-fascist WW2 newspapers, that used very eclectic combinations of fonts, because they often had to work in secret. The name comes from the *Brigate Garibaldi*. The Garibaldi Brigades were partisan units aligned with the Italian Communist Party active in the armed resistance against both German and Italian fascist forces during World War II. They were so well organised that they even published their own journal for a whole year.

There are so many fonts that this foundry has made and they are all incredibly special, based on DuBois, the March on Washington, womens suffrage, Stonewall, but also redesigning a font that used to be called Jim Crow and was heavily used in the advertising of minstrel plays.

There is one font I would like to specifically highlight. I understand that most people here do not have the money or need to spend money on fonts, which is super super fair - but this one is free and it is one of my all time favorites. It is based on the signage of Martin Luther King Jr's and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Chicago Freedom Movement, a campaign that marked the expansion of their civil rights activities from the South to northern cities.

Practical Tips

Serif

SansSerif

Practical Tips

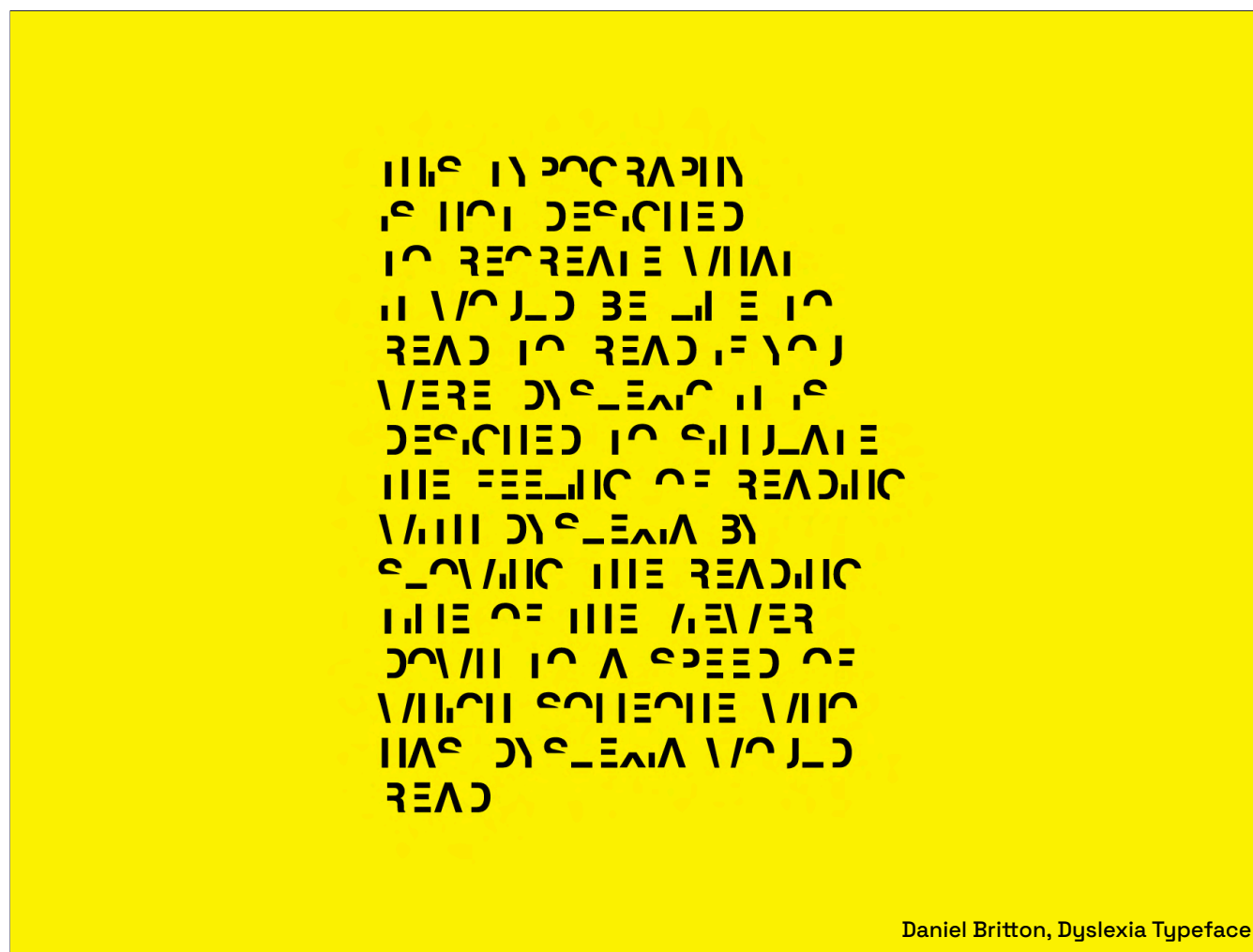
Serif

SansSerif

And now some more practical tips / vibes whatever:

So fonts tend to be separated into serifs and sanserifs → serifs are the little squiggly bits. Serifs are older - they are supposedly easier to read on paper and they are what is traditionally used for printed media. A lot of serifs are often used to showcase luxury, tradition, yada, yada. Sans Serifs tend to look more modern, a lot of them have a somewhat neutral feel to them - think of Helvetica. What is relevant and something to think about is that sans serifs tend to be easier to read especially digitally - and they make reading easier if you're dyslexic.

I HAVE BEEN READING
 THE BOOKS OF THE
 BIBLE AND I HAVE
 FOUND THAT THE
 WORDS OF THE BIBLE
 ARE THE SAME AS THE
 WORDS OF THE
 BIBLE. I HAVE
 FOUND THAT THE
 WORDS OF THE BIBLE
 ARE THE SAME AS THE
 WORDS OF THE BIBLE.



Daniel Britton, Dyslexia Typeface

Some other tips and tricks that make fonts more accessible is that larger tracking so inter-letter spacing - around 35% of the average letter width, makes it more readable. Larger line and inter word spacing can also improve readability, and lower case letters tend to be easier to read. Cursive and underlining is not great if you're dyslexic. Neither is multiple columns, a lot of people with dyslexia find it easier to read images than text so that can be a great way to communicate - and what i personally find really fascinating is that black on white tends to be harder to read for people with dyslexia. The British Dislexia association recommends using dark colored writing on a light background.

The font you see here on this slide is made by Daniel Britton and is called Dyslexia Font. This is what he says about it: "This typeface recreates the feeling of reading with Dyslexia for a non Dyslexic person therefore creating empathy and understanding for the problem. Like in any case only once a problem is fully understood can it be solved. How the typeface does this is by breaking down the reading time of a non-dyslexic down to the speed of a dyslexic by removing around 40% of each letter and making each letter almost illegible in turn then slowing down the users reading experience to the speed of a stereotypical Dyslexic person and then recreating the frustration and embarrassment of everyday reading."

Practical Tips

Where to find (free) fonts?

- <https://open-foundry.com/fonts>
- <https://unblast.com/fonts/>
- <https://fonts.google.com/>

Where to find typography inspiration?

- <https://fontsinuse.com/>
- Pinterest

Colour and Contrast

- Colourblindness and Accessibility
- The meaning of colour
- Red as a socialist colour
- Practical Tips

Colourblindness / Accessibility

Color Contrast Checker

Calculate the contrast ratio of text and background colors.

Text color

#E52332

Background color

#FFFFFF

Contrast

4.55

Good
★★★★★

Small text

★★★

Large text

★★★

Good contrast for all text sizes. [Click to enhance](#)

Quote n. 21

When you go into court you are putting your fate into the hands of twelve people who weren't smart enough to get out of jury duty.

Norm Crosby

Colourblindness / Accessibility

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Calculate the contrast ratio of text and background colors.

Text color

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Contrast

4.55

Good

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★★★

Good contrast for all text sizes. [Click to enhance](#)

Quote n. 21

When you go into court you are putting your fate into the hands of twelve people who weren't smart enough to get out of jury duty.

Norm Crosby

<https://coolers.co/contrast-checker/ffffff-e52332>

We already learnt that black text on a white background tends to be quite difficult for people with dyslexia. Now when we look at color blindness and visual impairment there are two factors that are important. First of all color blindness, the way color receptors work is that we have 3 different kinds of cones, we have Red, Green, Blue - which you might be familiar with from RGB color values. People that struggle with color blindness tend to not be able to see red or green very well - so that's an important thing to consider when you are using color to discern things. The other thing that is important is contrast. So there are a bunch of websites you can use to check contrast of colors, there's certain contrasts that are needed in terms of accessibility. Because text is just easier to read if there is bigger contrast. Here you can see the colours that we primarily use within the left Berlin - our red and white - and how it is a contrast that works well with large text, but actually doesn't uphold accessibility standards on smaller texts, and becomes somewhat difficult to read.

The meaning of colour

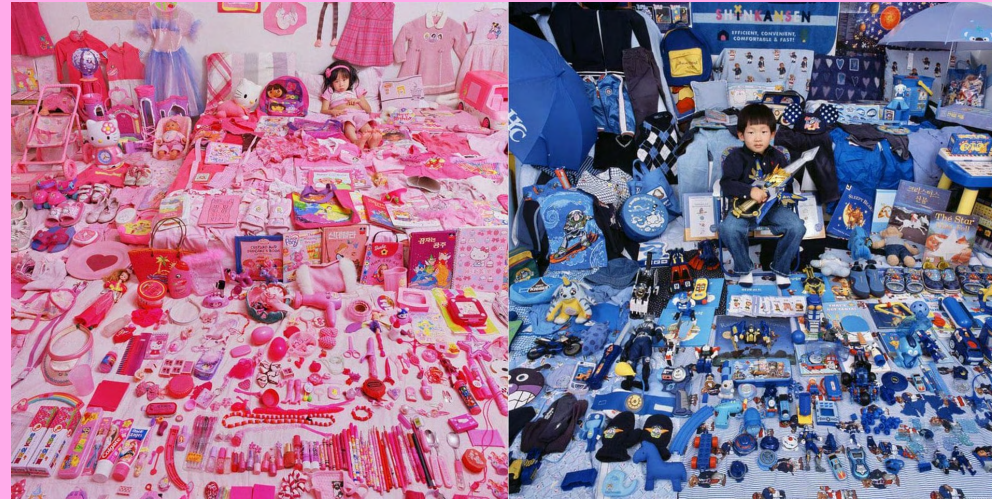
Colours do not have universal meaning.



JeongMee Yoon's "The Pink & Blue Project"

The meaning of colour

Colours do not have universal meaning.



JeongMee Yoon's "The Pink & Blue Project"

It's important to remember that colour doesn't have a universal meaning and that it changes with culture and time. We see this well as white as a bridal color, which is a pretty recent European trend. But also the way that pink for a long time was associated with little boys, while it is now more associated with little girls for example. JeongMee Yoon's Pink and Blue Project works a lot with our gendered associations around colour. She photographs children surrounded by their pink / blue items and highlights the way that color and gender intersect. Color is obviously used to signify things. There's a reason why we use certain colours. I think it's just important to be aware that they're not universal. To me a lot of color psychology sounds a bit esoteric, so I wouldn't bank on stuff like "blue calms people down, yellow makes them happy" — but it does usually help if you're justifying a choice to have more to back it up than just saying "oh well it looks good."

Red as a socialist colour



Red as a socialist colour



"Lamartine, before the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, rejects the Red Flag", by Henri Philippoteaux, <https://www.parismuseescollections.paris.fr/en/node/402424>

Looking at the colors that the Left Berlin uses I thought it might be fun to take a little deep dive into the history of the color red as a socialist color. So red as a color of the working class emerged first during the french revolution when a red flag was reclaimed by revolutionaries as a symbol of resistance. Before that it was a symbol of martial law. After the french revolution the association to working-class rebelling stayed and then reappears during the 1848 revolutions in France, Germany Italy and Austria. Over time it gets adopted by parties, trade unions, and the First international. Through the Russian Revolution red then became a state power and the color of communist ideology, the Soviet Union used it heavily in propaganda, uniforms and architecture. But so all of this kind of starts with the french revolution, and with red that meant something entirely different in that context.

Practical Tips

How to chose colours ?

Practical Tips

How to chose colours ?

How to chose colors and colorschemes ? I wish I was more knowledgable on this. I have to be honest I'm a sucker for pink and orange so that's a lot of what I work with when I work on my own stuff - a lot of the time when I work for other things there are already exisiting Corporate branding manuals and i barely ever get to make my own. Most of the time what I do if im starting something from scratch is to just check pinterest and see what other people are using. Or to go through pictures I've taken of posters I've seen. If you're creating a whole brand identity, it's a bit deeper and you want like to be able to do certain things with it but especially if you're making a poster or a post - i think it's fine to just go with whatever floats your boat.

Image

Photography / Illustration / Symbols / Icons

- The Male Gaze
- Alegria
- Emojis
- Practical Tips

The Male Gaze



The Feminine Touch⁶

12-26 Women, more than men, are pictured using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface (the latter sometimes under the guise of guiding it), or to effect a "just barely touching" of the kind that might be significant between two electrically charged bodies. This ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates, or holds:



What has happened to women has now happened to perfume.

14



This oral contraceptive contains 50 mcg. estrogen and 0.5 mg. progesterone.

15



This tiny bit of Moon Drops Under Makeup Moisture Film

16

connection with the (pages 295-320), I draw directly on observations made by Michi Ishida, to whom I give thanks.

(continued)

The Male Gaze



The Feminine Touch⁶

THE FEMININE TOUCH 29

12-26 Women, more than men, are pictured using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface (the latter sometimes under the guise of guiding it), or to effect a "just barely touching" of the kind that might be significant between two electrically charged bodies. This ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates, or holds:



14



15



16

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(continued)

Gender Advertisements, Erving Goffmann, http://www.publiccollectors.org/Goffman_Gender.pdf

We are gonna kick things off by talking a little bit about the Male Gaze. I'm assuming you're all familiar with it. The male gaze is the act of depicting women and the world in visual arts and literature from a masculine, heterosexual and patriarchal perspective that represents and paints women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male heterosexual viewer. Similarly people talk about a white gaze, which you can definitely see in how pictures are taken of people of colour. A lot of posters, advertisements, etc. are still very much made for cis white heterosexual men and they do actively enforce stereotypes or just objectify the people that are meant to be represented in the images. If you're interested in reading more the book Gender Advertisements by Erving Goffmann is a super interesting collection of visual research. When we look at images, it is always good to remember that the way we photograph people holds power and also furthers a narrative - that the photographer might not always even be aware of.

Alegria



(Left) Facebook Alegria, Buck <https://buck.co/work/facebook-alegria> / (Right) Meme from Reddit

Alegria



(Left) Facebook Alegria, Buck <https://buck.co/work/facebook-alegria/> / (Right) Meme from Reddit

Talking about illustration I couldn't not talk about the wonderful wonderful thing that is Alegria. Alegria is basically the font Helvetica if you turned it into colors and symbols - it is meant to be "neutral" and "apolitical" but welcoming, and becomes incredibly soulless and corporate. You might know Alegria from facebook, or literally any website ever. Facebook did start that - but since then many many especially tech companies have started using it. It's usually illustrations of humanoids in motion with very very long limbs - they're very colorful, and tend to use unnatural skin colors. They're made up of very simple geometric shapes which means that illustrators can make them quicker - so they're cheaper to make and because they are all used in the same flat style it's quite easy to have what feels like a coherent brand. The figures are not specific to their ethnicity or body type, I think what i dislike about it so much is that Alegria was a way for companies to look diverse without doing the labor of diversity. They're these bland soulless creatures that are always smiling in this tech utopia and idk to me they feel quite distopian. It's again this use of design as almost a shield. and I mean once again, nothing is neutral, trying to appear apolitical is the same as agreeing with the status quo. And i mean i feel like especially in the light of what Mark Zuckerberg has said in the last couple months that is quite telling - that this is an art style that facebook kind of invented.

Emojis

A vibrant pink background filled with numerous colorful emojis. The emojis are scattered across the entire surface, creating a dense and playful visual field. They include a wide variety of facial expressions such as smiling, crying, angry, surprised, and neutral. There are also object emojis like a lightbulb, a ghost, a pizza, and a money bag, as well as symbols like a heart and a dollar sign. The overall effect is a cheerful and engaging digital collage.



Emojis are another great example of how visual language is not universal at all. I see this every time I get a text from my boss or my dad and their use of emojis is atrocious in my opinion. I thought it would be fun to maybe check what our most used emojis are and to kinda collect them ? And see what we can learn from them but also see what they mean to us ? Would you like to do that ?

Practical Tips

Where to get images?

- <https://search.getty.edu/>
- <https://search.creativecommons.org/>
- <https://openverse.org/>

What to do with them?

Practical Tips

Where to get images?

- <https://search.getty.edu/>
- <https://search.creativecommons.org/>
- <https://openverse.org/>

What to do with them?

Where to get images ? → The getty library can actually be a great source for images, there are some creative commons image libraries, personally i do like to either use pictures I've taken myself or to take pictures and kinda make them somewhat vague?

What to do with images ?

- DUOTONE
- Differing
- LAYERING

Information

Datavisualization

Information

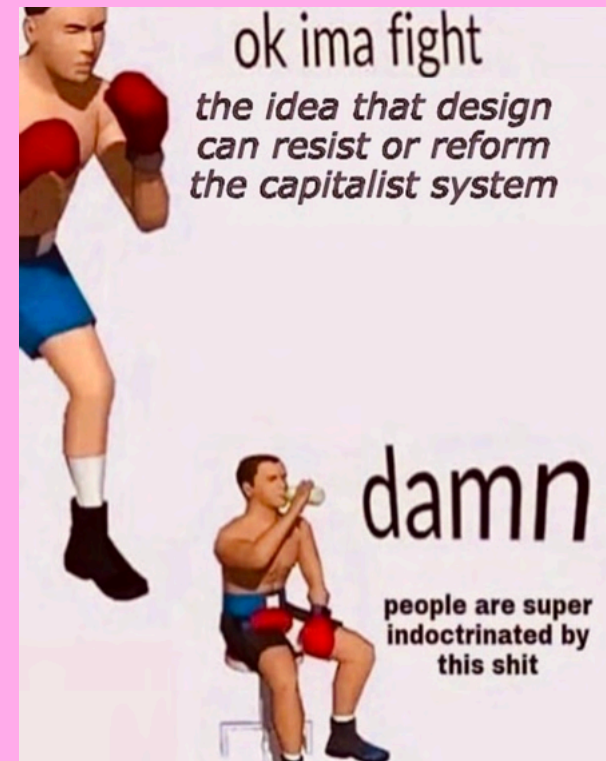
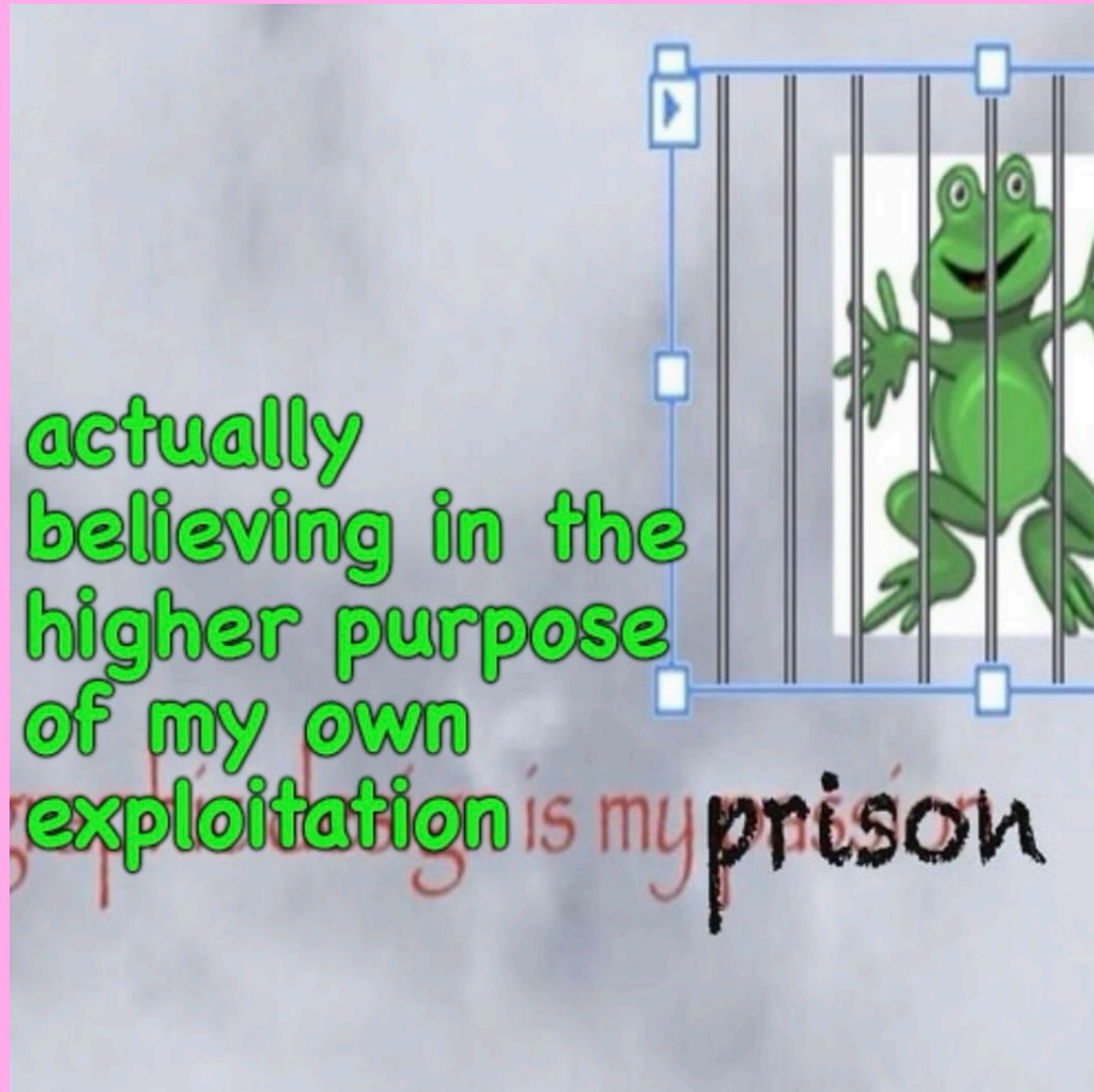
Datavisualization

(I did not actually talk about this because I forgot to prep for this, but if you're interested in a p cool approach to data visualisation I would recommend checking out what The Pudding does. <https://pudding.cool/> — Data is also not objective, and our association with numbers as a neutral thing is often used to back up claims even when the data really isn't there .. think of 9 out of 10 dentists, etc. - when you use data in a graphic design it is vital that you understand what it means, how it was collected and what the point you are trying to make with it is. There are obviously all kinds of charts, that can be fun to work with. Tableau is a fun program to try out if you're interested in data visualisation, but a lot of the Adobe Suite also actually let's you create graphs. Alternatively - I've also worked with live data visualisation in python before using Matplotlib. There are so so many ways to display and work with data - you do not have to work in pie charts or bar charts, but I think no matter how you use data it is again incredibly important to understand what it is you're trying to say.)

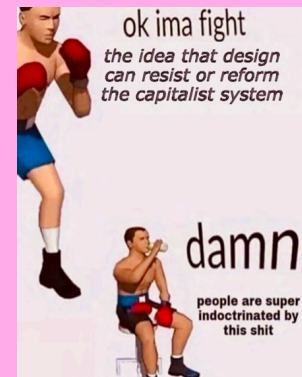
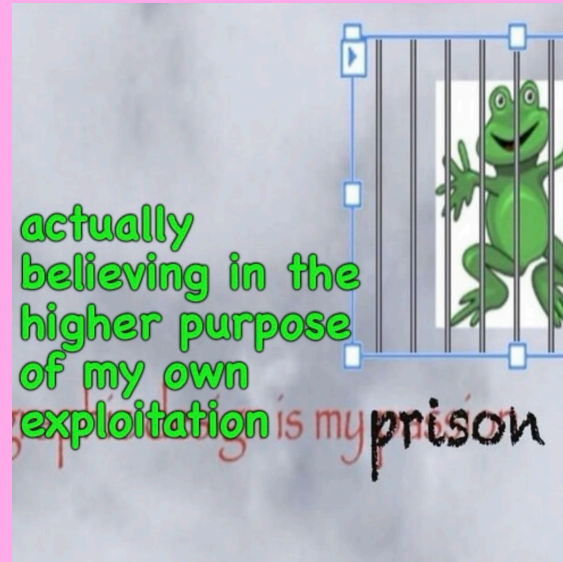
Looking at Graphic Design

- Memes
- IG Infographics
- Political Design

Mememes



Memes



EthicalDesign69 on Instagram

I would argue that Memes and the creation of memes is a form of graphic design. There are certain things that are quite central still to a lot of memes in different times. Like the impact font for a long time - but also even now they are a massive form of visual communication. Because they are quite simple and easy to make I would argue that they are one of the most democratic examples of graphic design and because they are so quick and easy to make they can move and spread so much faster than traditional graphic design can. I'd also argue that they are more of a bottom up approach - where so much of the graphic design you see in ads goes through many many iterations feedback rounds seniors, whatever - the memes you see aren't curated like that - they tend to be curated by platforms but they're kind of brought together by people if that makes sense. And at the same time we have seen them used as weapons - think about the feel good man frog and how that got appropriated by the right wing. Or the very famous bimbo meme, which looks like it says something about women and different expressions of femininity but in reality is this online fetish work that just got taken out of context.

TRUE

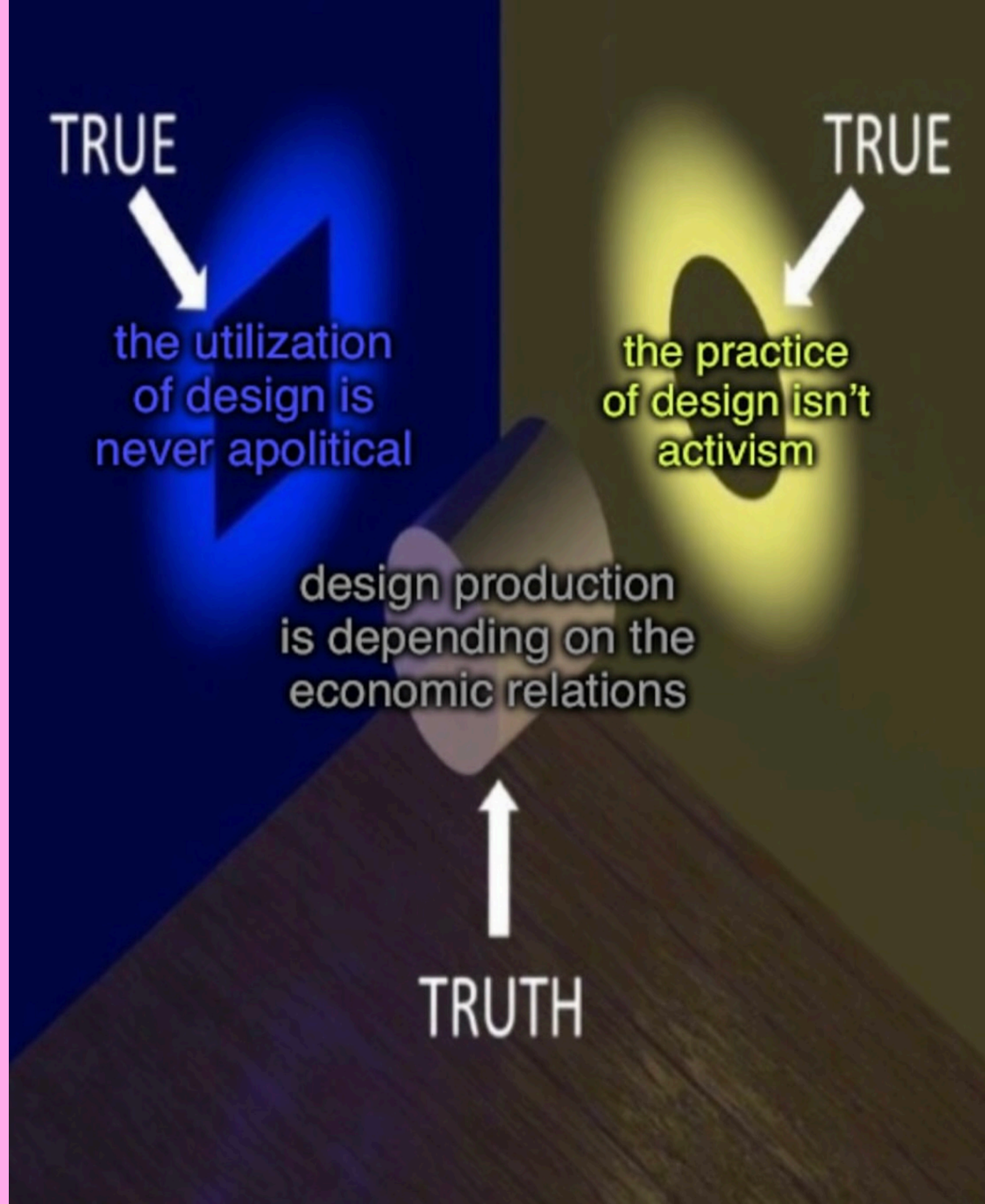
the utilization
of design is
never apolitical

TRUE

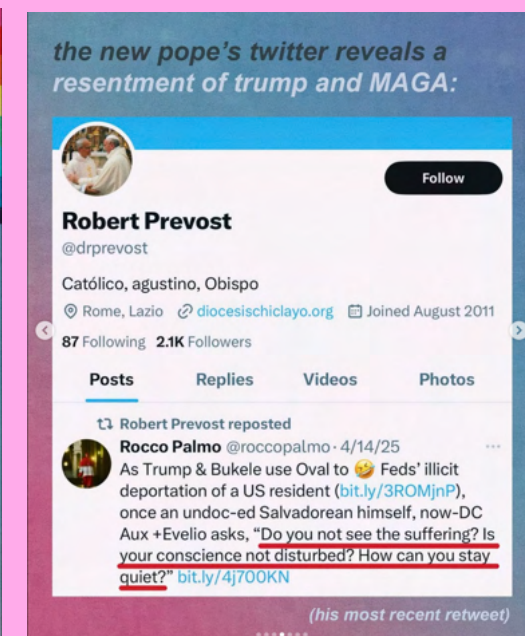
the practice
of design isn't
activism

design production
is depending on the
economic relations

TRUTH



IG Infographics




IG Infographics



<https://www.instagram.com/p/DJZ2a40JV4n>, Mattxiv

Another example of somewhat more democratic design are Instagram info graphics, they are designed to be shared - they tend to be very easy to read while holding information but also are obviously made to be shareable. I think it is always important to ask ourselves the purpose of these ? Because of course it is important to share information, vital even, at the same it is interesting that the information that gets shared tends to be quite aesthetic. They tend to flatten complex topics into more digestible content, and almost turn political activism into a brand. I'm not sure where I stand with them. I think they can be a good way for people to get informed initially and at the same time they do also feel like virtue signaling like this digital performance of solidarity with very little behind it sometimes. So yeah - I'm honest to god torn on them. I at the same time think that you know especially the left has a massive branding issue and could probably reach far more people by becoming more aesthetic - I think what I always struggle with is that a lot of these infographics aren't made by publications, they're made by individual people and then their entire brand becomes saying something in times of conflict - idk again im kinda torn on this.

Political Design



**Do women have to be naked to
get into the Met. Museum?**

**Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern
Art sections are women, but 85%
of the nudes are female**

Statistics from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 1989

GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

Political Design



<https://www.guerrillagirls.com/projects>

So we talked quite a bit about implicitly political designs, but I think it is also important to talk about explicitly political design. For this I wanted to share some examples that I think are relevant and hopefully sources of inspiration - I want to again share that I am not amazingly educated on a lot of this so I have plenty of blind spots but I would love to share some examples that I am familiar with with you.



TOP TEN SIGNS THAT YOU'RE AN ART WORLD TOKEN:

10. Your busiest months are February (Black History Month,) March (Women's History,) April (Asian-American Awareness), June (Stonewall Anniversary) and September (Latino Heritage).
9. At openings and parties, the only other people of color are serving drinks.
8. Everyone knows your race, gender and sexual orientation even when they don't know your work.
7. A museum that won't show your work gives you a prominent place in its lecture series.
6. Your last show got a lot of publicity, but no cash.
5. You're a finalist for a non-tenure-track teaching position at every art school on the east coast.
4. No collector ever buys more than one of your pieces.
3. Whenever you open your mouth, it's assumed that you speak for "your people," not just yourself.
2. Everyone is always telling you their interracial and gay sexual fantasies.
1. A curator who never gave you the time of day before calls you right after a Guerrilla Girls demonstration.

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ARTWORLD



Dearest Art Collector,
 It has come to our attention that your collection, like most, does not contain enough art by women. We know that you feel terrible about this and will rectify the situation immediately.

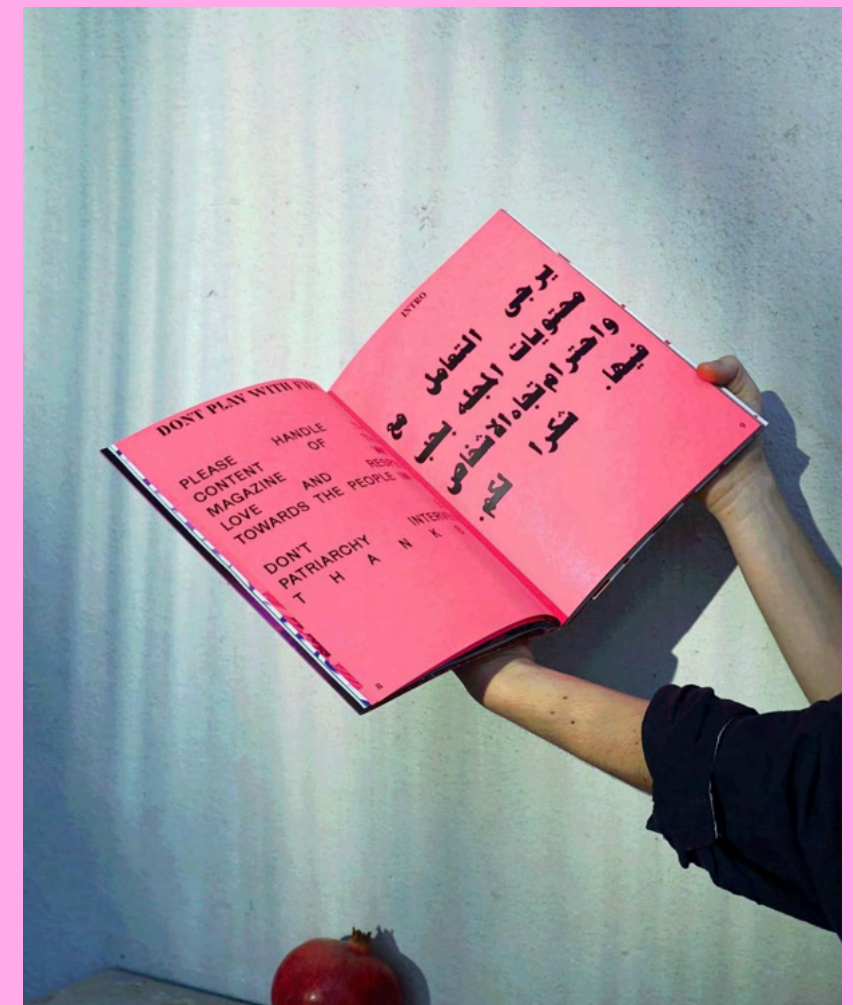
All our love,
 Guerrilla Girls

BOX 1056, COOPER STA., NY NY 10276



The Guerilla Girls are a feminist collective that was formed in New York City in 1985 - they use a lot of graphic design within their work. Above you can see some examples and can also see how they play with typography - like in the “Dearest Art Collector” Poster that has a very girliepop font and play with this association with femininity and niceness. They also quite recently had an exhibition in the MK&G in Hamburg (One of my all time favourite museums) where they highlighted that only 1,5% of the graphic works in the MK&G are made by women.

Political Design



Jonah Attalla, nadijonah on Instagram

Political Design



Jonah Attalla, nadijonah on Instagram

Another great example of political graphic design is my fellow alumni Jonah Attalla, a graphic designer, film producer and all around creative that works around the topics of Arab futurism and interracial solidarity. What you see on the images above is “Pomegranates Explode” — an “art and design magazine that aims to give the new generation of “children of the Arab diaspora” a voice of belonging and expressing”. Jonah does other great work, also as an illustrator - where he has created amazing illustrations for protest posters and apparel, music videos and even his own mixed media short film. (Check him out here: <https://jonahattalla.com/>)

Further Resources

- Palestine Poster Project
- The Politics of Design, Ruben Pater
- futuress.org
- Ways of Seeing, John Berger

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- Palestine Poster Project
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There are many great design resources and ways to look at design. Here are some further resources for inspiration, to learn more about the politics of graphic design, and to read. I hope that at the end of this, you feel like you have a bit of a better understanding of the different elements of graphic design, and how to interpret them and how to look at them.

Questions?

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Web: www.kathastrophies.com