Name: Kaycie Doble
Student Number: 2204108
Module: Research in Context
Lecturer: Donna Williams

Research in Context

'Investigate the digital graphic design revolution of the mid 1980s. Discuss the work of 3 designers who embraces this new technology to challenge the past and define the future.'

During the mid 1980s, graphic design took a major plunge into a world of technological art. The introduction of famous artistic technology opened up a whole new side and genre of graphic design with a whole new range of possibilities. Some were excited for the brand-new prospect of technology and art coming together and embraced the large range of tools and the flexibility that digital art could offer. However, others felt that it posed a threat to their careers and refused to take on the challenge of building new skills and merging the two worlds in a positive way. This essay will explore the work of those brave few that took the plunge into digital artistry and the many different factors that came into play during the mid 1980s that have made graphic design what it is today.

Swiss style plays a major role in today's graphic design. Originally formed in 1940s but became known internationally in the 1950s. Josef Müller-Brockmann, who (grapheine, 2013, para 7) called "The father of Swiss Graphic design", was one of the first people to spread the movement in The Kunstgewerbeschule, an art school in Zurich. Swiss style was heavily influenced by the neutrality of the military in 1815. Mainly for the "balance and objectivity" (Chung, 2023, para 3). The main aspects of Swiss style push for a minimalistic and clean design that focuses on the information being presented, opposed to the artist's subjective style. Swiss style artists believe that "design should be as invisible as possible" and should follow function not frills (Bigman, 2016, para 5). It drew a lot of inspiration from a variety of artistic movements. Some include, suprematism and constructivism, a Russian movement that focused on function and form.

> Thirdly, The Bauhaus school, an art school that "promoted modern design and art by emphasizing simplicity, functionality, and various artistic disciplines, such as architecture, fine arts, and industrial design" (Chung, 2023, para 7).

And De Stijl, an art and design movement from the Netherlands that focused on the use of geometric shapes and primary colours in order to create abstract designs to "achieve visual harmony" (Chung, 2023, para 8). The style uses a grid method which creates a hierarchy of information in order to allow the reader to absorb the information with ease. The clean-cut guide of a grid makes it simple to create simple layouts and "eliminate distractions for the viewer" (Budrick, 2021). In addition to the grid method, Swiss style artists tend to use

photographs instead of illustrations and sans serif typefaces which are clear and easy to read. These aspects further push the simplicity and clarity of the style. Many aspects of Swiss style are predominantly used in modern graphic design, such as minimalism. Minimalism is a popularly used style aspect in modern design as it removes any unnecessary clutter and avoids. Clarity and readability are still extremely important when creating anything from a poster to a logo, to packaging. The obvious reason being that, as a consumer, a person wants to scan a product / image with ease and in some way be told what to look at and in what order without being given too much information which causes them to lose interest or become overwhelmed. “Many famous brands have updated their logos from sans-serif to sans typefaces, as the shift to digital interfaces demands readable logos both on print and on screens.” (Chung, 2023, para 21).

Volkswagen. *“think small” campaign* (1959)

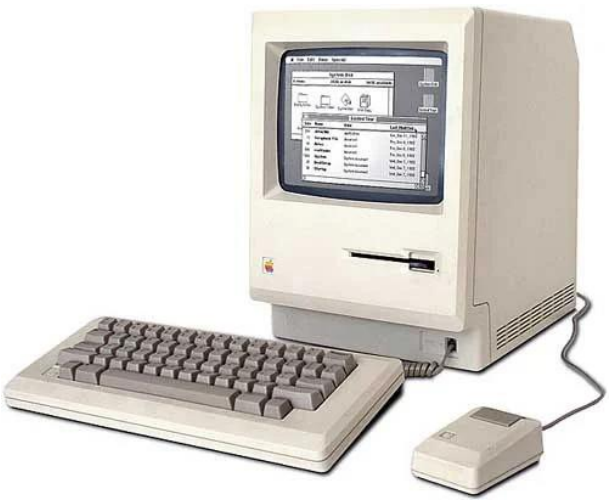
The Volkswagen Beetle “Think small” advertisement, created by Volkswagen in 1960, used aspects of Swiss style which played a large part in the car’s profound success. The car was known for being a strange looking, small, bug-like car from a foreign country. These factors made the car very unappealing to Americans at a time when cars were no longer just a means of transportation but a fashion statement and a glamorous accessory. The Volkswagen Beetle did not meet these standards. Not only was it physically unappealing, but it was also a post World War 2 German made car. Yet this advertisement changed people's perception of the car and pushed it to become “iconic to a generation of post war Americans” (Johnson, 2017, para 2). Minimalism was a major factor in the success of this advertisement. “On an empty background, your eyes are forced to take in the car” (Johnson,

2017, para 17). The white space forces the viewer to see the car in a whole new light and proved to play an integral part in allowing consumers to view the 'Beetle' in a new, modern and stylish way. The white space and plain background strips back any outside influence or preconceptions someone may have on the origins of the product. By removing all subjective designs, the viewer, from any background, can picture themselves enjoying the car.

The introduction of creative technology in the 1980s brought a whole new level to graphic design and infinitely expanded the endless possibilities that an artist's imagination could create. The Apple Macintosh was first introduced in March 1985. And from that moment the creative field was forever changed. This device changed the trajectory of graphic design as we know it and revolutionised the field. Before the Mac was introduced the average person didn't have the faintest idea how to use a computer. Let alone how to use one to create art. The device was specifically designed "with the aim to put the creative power of technology in everyone's hands" (Caula, 2014), and it worked. Using simple and inviting icons, the Mac made navigation easy for anyone from all backgrounds. It began an era of computers that could be used by everyday people for creative purposes. Thanks to the Apple Mac, Artists could now combine text and image using their wildest imagination without having to worry about making a mistake, like you would with a physical sheet of paper. It allowed designers to use a large collection of tools to their advantage which they previously would've had to purchase individually and store in a large studio.

> The average graphic design studio had a "few main pieces of equipment, such as, a drawing board, a T-square, a rolling cart (with a set of tools), a desk lamp, rubylith (a masking film), zipatone lettering and illustration boards". (Makaulie, 2014, para 2).

The device also included a large collection of colours at the click of a button, the modern mac offers 1.6 million different colours, even offering the ability to create custom colours to create the perfect vision in seconds. Most importantly, the Mac significantly shortened the amount of time it takes a designer to design something. "The process of creating a layout for a client to see took at least a week, and for a print ready copy it could take an extra 2 weeks." (Makaulie, 2014, para 2). This in and of itself represents the importance of creative technology and the major impact it had on graphic design.



Apple. *The Macintosh* (1985)

Another impactful piece of technology introduced in the 1980s was the Apple LaserWriter. The LaserWriter, introduced in 1985 was one of the first consumer laser printers. Before this there were only inkjet printers which could only print a section of a page at a time. However, a laser printer could print an entire page at a time which was very efficient for saving time and printing whatever the designer liked in minutes. With both a laser printer and the Apple Mac a person could design an image and have it physically printed within minutes. This was highly efficient for personal work or printing for mass production.

There are some artists that are very prominent in the graphic design movement of the 1980s for their radical decision to embrace the new technology, and in turn inspire others to do the same. An artist who made a major influence at this time was April Greiman. April Greiman is a graphic designer born in 1948. However, she prefers the term "transmedia artist" for her mixed media approach to her work (Julier, 1993, page 96). She is widely known for being "one of the first designers to see computer in a different light, who realized its potential as a design tool" (FGD, 2013, para 1). Her success in her choice to use a creative device to her advantage inspired many others to take a chance and broaden their tool and skill set by following in her footsteps. Greiman's art style includes layering type along with other objects such as photographs, shapes, colours and illustrations. In the 1970s many were afraid of the advancements of technology in their work. However, Greiman saw the technology as an opportunity and a challenge that she would face head on.

Greiman & Odgers. *WET Magazine* cover (1979)

With the introduction of the apple macintosh, Rudy VanderLans also decided to embrace the use of new technology in his work. VanderLans is a graphic designer born in 1955 in the Netherlands who specifically enjoyed using this technology in for work because he "liked the freedom it gave him in designing his layouts" (Creative Bloq, 2014, para 16). He and his wife Zuzana Licko quickly became two of the first designers to embrace digital art in the 1980s. Together they created some of the very first digital layouts and typeface designs. The pair "founded Émigré Fonts, the first digital type foundry, which introduced early dot-matrix fonts and, as technology improved, issued high-resolution typefaces" (MoMa, para 1). The two would eventually publish these designs in Émigré magazine (a graphic-design magazine launched by the pair in 1984) which 'resulted in demand for the fonts which lead to the creation of the Émigré Type foundry.'

Rudy VanderLans . *Oblong font* (1988)

The 'Oblong' font, created by VanderLans in 1988, was originally designed as a logo type for a small architectural firm but later was developed into a complete typeface, including upper- and lower-case letters. (Fontstand, para 1) states that the design took inspiration from "both early computer and constructivist typefaces". This is one of VanderLans' most famous font designs.

Another digital artist who made an impact with his art at the time was Keith Haring. Born in 1958 in Reading Pennsylvania, Haring loved drawing from a young age and was heavily inspired by Dr. Seuss, Walt Disney and his father who was an amateur cartoonist who taught him his basic artistic skills. He was a well-known activist due to his personal tragic experience with illness and the way that he used his own work as a way to shine a light on and spread awareness of his illness. Haring was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988 which led him to start the Keith Haring Foundation in 1989. He used this foundation to raise money and provide funding for AIDS organizations. Using his own imagery, in the last few years of his life, he chose to spread the word of his own illness and used his art to generate talk around the issue. Haring preached that there were "endless possibilities to be investigated in this area" (Designboom, 2023, para 5) using a computer as an artistic tool. (Designboom, 2023, para 6) wrote that "one may deduce that he was a pioneer of digital art" and some believe that he was way "ahead of his time". He was known for his graffiti style illustrations of figures and symbols accompanied by bright colours in his work. Furthermore, he believed that art should not be propaganda and that "It should be something that liberates the soul, provokes the imagination and encourages people to go further" (printed editions, 2023, para 1). In 1986

Haring was offered a computer by Timothy Leary, a software developer, who was developing a video game adaption of the novel *Neuromancer* by William Gibson. He wanted Haring to create visuals for said game using a computer. Specifically, an Amiga, a popular home computer at that time. Initially, in the 1970s, Haring had expressed his concern and initial worries about the new creative technology mentioning that he felt 'threatened' by it (Chen, 2023). However, by this time he had gotten over that initial worry and had become increasingly familiar with digital tools by the 1980s. He was one of the few artists to embrace the technology by using it to hone his skills and creating a new type of art using Quantel Paintbox, a "computer graphics workstation for composition of broadcast television video and graphics" (Wikipedia, 2023). Even though the project never went any further Haring decided to continue to use the Amiga to create his digital drawings which were recently resurfaced in September 2023 after being hidden away on a floppy disk since the 1980s. His digital designs feature colourful depictions of figures in various positions, doing various things, but not one is straight forward, leaving room for the imagination, allowing the viewer to think about what they're seeing.

Keith Haring. *Digital design* (1980s)

In conclusion, many factors have come into play that have changed graphic design to what we know it as today and created a revolution in the field during the mid 1980s. The introduction of creative technology such as the Apple Macintosh and the Apple LasterWriter in the 1985 jumpstarted a wave of new ideas and creativity from many talented artists who inspired a generation to challenge the predetermined beliefs of what art was and could be by embracing new technology and taking inspiration from already loved styles like Swiss design to envision a brand new view of the world of art and make it whatever you believe it to be.

Bibliography

1. *Alex Bigman (2016) What exactly is Swiss design, anyway?* Available at: https://99designs.com/blog/design-history-movements/swiss-design/ (Accessed: 20 November 2023).
2. Rabiot, M. (2013) *Josef Müller-Brockmann 'Swiss style'*, *Graphéine - Agence de communication Paris Lyon*. Available at: https://www.grapheine.com/en/graphic-design-en/graphic-designer-muller-brockmann-swiss-style (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
3. Chung, E. (2023) *The history of international typographic style - is it timeless?*, *LogRocket Blog*. Available at: https://blog.logrocket.com/ux-design/history-international-typographic-style/ (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
4. Budrick, C. (2021) *Swiss style: The principles, the typefaces & the designers*, *PRINT Magazine*. Available at: https://www.printmag.com/featured/swiss-style-principles-typefaces-designers/ (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
5. Johnson, J. (2017) *The greatest print campaigns of all time: Volkswagen think small*, *Design Shack*. Available at: https://designshack.net/articles/graphics/the-greatest-print-campaigns-of-all-time-volkswagen-think-small/ (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
6. Rodrigo Caula I. (2014) *Apple presents 30 years of mac, highlighting 3 decades of tech design*, *designboom*. Available at: https://www.designboom.com/technology/apple-30-years-of-mac-03-28-2014/ (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
7. Makaulie (2014) *How has the Apple Mac changed graphic design?*, *Graphics*. Available at: https://edgraphicsyr2makaulie.wordpress.com/2014/02/16/how-has-the-apple-mac-changed-graphic-design/#:~:text=The%20Apple%20Mac%20made%20it,scale%20with%20much%20more%20accuracy (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
8. Julier, Guy (1993) *The thames and hudson encyclopaedia of 20th century design and designers : Julier, guy : Free download, Borrow, and streaming* (1993) *Internet Archive*. Available at: https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780500202692/page/96/mode/2up (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
9. *Famous Graphic Designers (FGD, 2013) April greiman: Biography, designs and facts. Famous Graphic Designers*. Available at: https://www.famousgraphicdesigners.org/april-greiman (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
10. Creative Bloq (2014) *6 graphic design icons who used technology in original ways*, *Creative Bloq*. Available at: https://www.creativebloq.com/graphic-design/icons-who-used-technology-31411147 (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

11. *MoMa, Emigre Inc., Rudy VanderLans, Zuzana Licko. Emigre Magazine ... - moma* (no date) *MoMa*. Available at: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/101653 (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
12. *Fontstand, Oblong font - typeface family by emigre - try fonts for free and rent fonts on fontstand* (no date) *Fontstand*. Available at: https://fontstand.com/fonts/oblong (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
13. Designboom (2023) *Keith Haring, Digital Artist? rare 1980s computer drawings resurface as nfts at Christie's*, *designboom*. Available at: https://www.designboom.com/art/keith-haring-nft-digital-artworks-1980s-amiga-computer-christies-09-06-2023/#:~:text=Keith%20haring%20is%20a%20pioneer,a%20computer-generated%20image (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
14. Chen, M. (2023) *Keith Haring's never-before-seen computer drawings are hitting the block as nfts at a new Christie's online auction*, *Artnet News*. Available at: https://news.artnet.com/market/keith-haring-amiga-drawings-nfts-christies-2355175 (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
15. *Wikipedia (2023) Quantel Paintbox, Wikipedia*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantel_Paintbox (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
16. Printed editions (2023) *Keith Haring Quotes.* Available at: https://www.printed-editions.com/blog/keith-haring-quotes/ (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
17. designboom, rodrigo caula I. (2014) *apple presents 30 years of mac, highlighting 3 decades of tech design*, *designboom | architecture & design magazine*. Available at: https://www.designboom.com/technology/apple-30-years-of-mac-03-28-2014/ (Accessed: 29 November 2023)
18. V&A (2017) *V&A · Introducing William Morris*, *Victoria and Albert Museum*. V&A. Available at: https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/introducing-william-morris. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
19. exhibitions.lib.umd.edu. (n.d.). *Arts and Crafts Movement | William Morris*. [online] Available at: https://exhibitions.lib.umd.edu/williammorris/morris-influence/arts-and-crafts-movement. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
20. 'Graphic design - William Morris and the private-press movement | Britannica' (2020) *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/art/graphic-design/William-Morris-and-the-private-press-movement. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
21. The Art Story. (2018). *Jugendstil Movement Overview*. [online] Available at: https://www.theartstory.org/movement/jugendstil/. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
22. TypeRoom (2020). *In grid we trust: Emil Ruder aka the iconic pioneer of Swiss Style - TypeRoom*. [online] www.typeroom.eu. Available at: https://www.typeroom.eu/in-grid-we-trust-emil-ruder-aka-the-iconic-pioneer-of-swiss-style. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
23. NARAN-HO | Design Marbella | Diseño Web + Fotografía. (2021). *Emil Ruder*. [online] Available at: https://www.naran-ho.com/en/emil-ruder/. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
24. juliabockute (2014). *Armin Hofmann in Contrast. Giselle*. [online] Julija Bockute. Available at: https://juliabockute.wordpress.com/2014/11/26/armin-hofmann-in-contrast-giselle/. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

25. The Keith Haring Foundation (2023). *Keith Haring*. [online] www.haring.com. Available at: https://www.haring.com/. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
26. Chen, M. (2023). *Keith Haring's Never-Before-Seen Computer Drawings Are Hitting the Block as NFTs at a New Christie's Online Auction*. [online] Artnet News. Available at: https://news.artnet.com/market/keith-haring-amiga-drawings-nfts-christies-2355175 (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
27. Jess, A. (2019). *Swiss Style*. [online] Graphic Design Student. Available at: https://jessicaodonnell1011363.wordpress.com/2019/07/18/swiss-style/ (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
28. Sherman, N. (2012). *Volkswagen of America ads, 1960–68*. [online] Fonts in Use. Available at: https://fontsinuse.com/uses/1976/volkswagen-of-america-ads-1960-68. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).

Images

29. Fontsinuse (2012) *'Think small' Campaign*. Available at: https://fontsinuse.com/uses/1976/volkswagen-of-america-ads-1960-68 (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
30. History-Computer (n.d.). *The Apple Macintosh*. Available at: https://history-computer.com/macintosh-by-apple-complete-history-of-mac-computers/. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
31. Emigre (n.d.). *Oblong Font*. Available at: https://www.emigre.com/Designer/RudyVanderLans. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
32. Readymag (n.d.). *WET Magazine cover*. Available at: https://readymag.com/designstories/april-greiman/. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).
33. artnet (2023). *Keith Haring digital art*. Available at: https://news.artnet.com/market/keith-haring-amiga-drawings-nfts-christies-2355175. (Accessed: 29 November 2023).