

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

We all see Digital Graphics situated in every day-to-day life; from billboards, company branding to coffee cups and clothing. But where did it evolve from? Throughout history, even in some of the most prolific and important sectors that make up today's society, graphics pushed its way in through gaps and helped fuel points, destroy arguments and lead innovations. It had allowed artists to wander into different art-forms, further their creativity and better represent an image for themselves. But it was never that easy. During the 1980's, the 'Digital Revolution in Design' set itself in history, an era in which the advancement of technology benefited artists that worked on mechanical and physical machines such as the letterpress, thanks to the introduction of digital computers. Even quoted as "the most significant event since Gutenberg's printing press and marks a bigger shift in human communication." (Clarke, 2012, pg. 79). Due to this revolution, multiple of many artists gained success and agreed to the future of the 'digital era,' meanwhile, others developed a nostalgic love for the previous physical machines, deeming them more ethical and meaningful. This essay will discuss the work of 3 designers who seized the opportunity to adapt to this new revolution to challenge the past and characterize the future. It will conclude with an overview of how the revolution both benefited and set a drawback for the future of graphics.

Graphic Design in the modern era consistently uses digital practice that covers many factors such as; simplicity, time-management, perfectionism, and a broader horizon of opportunism to create something different. Ever since the 20th century and introductions of computers, the drive to adapt to an unfamiliar environment of work was evident, a quote by John Clifford mentioned "Artists, writers, architects and designers rejected historical styles and ideas that had no place in the Industrial Age, developing new concepts in response to the era's possibilities" (Clifford, 2013, pg. 16). This new revolution brought brand new positive impacts that covered communication efficiency and helped fuel new possibilities in design techniques. These techniques would benefit those before and after the revolution, primarily in the areas of typography, forming a term called 'experimental methods' in which "the legibility of a typeface is not a universal, where one feature or set of features performs well under all circumstances" (Luna, 2018, pg. 114.) These methods would not only appear before the revolution in the 80's but used exponentially in the future. A method that appeared before and after the revolution was called the 'axonometric method' constructed by Takenobu Igarashi in the mid 1970's, in which graphics are portrayed in three different projections; isometric, dimetric and trimetric which also uses 3 axis instead of 2 which allows the lettering/typography to have a sense of three-dimensional depth. His technique would use this type of design as a term of 'building', like architecture when it came to lettering; using simple geometrical shapes that acted like the base-blocks of an art piece. "The simple and clear differences between the three shapes serve as a creative language in the process of transforming thought into form. The circle as a symbol of perfection is frequently used in composition for the formative nature of a circle's centre point." Takenobu fundamentally used this technique in his typography work and came across computers in 1987, in which his views came across as uninspiring, even "some of his 1987 calendars were primarily created on computer and found the results 'not interesting'. Later speaking of a 'digital design virus'." (Apperly, 2020.) Even to this modern era (2012-present), Igarashi's exhibitions and art installations are much more lenient to sculpture design rather than graphic design; still following his route of straying away from digital/technologies and sticking with the traditional ways of his work.



Source 1: MoMA Poster Calendar, Takenobu Igarashi, 1987, Japan.

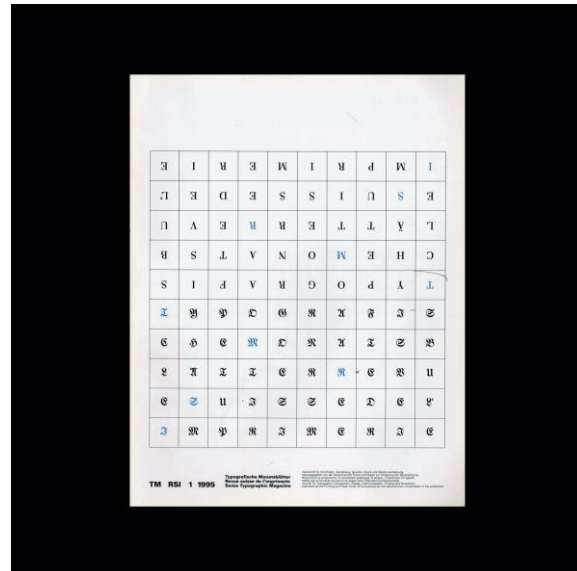
Above, in Source 1, is an example of Igarashi's digital work. A design that features his axonometric method of giving typography a three-dimensional look. A trend that seemed to drool out from the likes of Japanese artists, was the adaptation of modernism, most wanting to continue their works in the fields of physical work, hardware, and typography experimentation. Takenobu himself despised the idea of digital work during the revolution, that he turned away from graphic design to become a sculptor, quote saying "my approach to design and sculpture has always wavered between my wish to do something useful for society, and my desire to create something beautiful with my own hands" (Igarashi, 1988). Considering that Takenobu himself did not agree with the future of computers and the ideology of post-modernism, his axonometric method would still be used to this day under different sectors of design; architecture, typography, and branding. Allowing to prove that not only did his work challenge the past of typography, but his methods also helped shape the future of designers that want to use the computer and create three-dimensional art pieces.

Striving away from artists that disliked the revolution, let's glimpse into artists that adapted to the change. Hans Rudolf Bosshard studied typography in the mid-1960's to the modern day, teaching classes and evolving his work around computers. The reasoning behind the change was due to 'type-face setting,' in which "Type design software increased the capability of serious type designers to create many more custom and proprietary typefaces" (Heller, 2015, pg. 97). Hans himself worked around typesetting, teaching the formats of lead type and transitioned into photo typesetting in the 1960s; so instead of using brass, wood, and lead, it was replaced by film and laser styled settings. Yet Hans discovered the computer in the 80's, studying around its new developments and wondered what he could benefit from its software. This new understanding of software allowed work to become structured since "the computer made it possible to manipulate the font, size, weight and slant of type as well as the spacing between letters, words and lines freely and breaks the old-

principles of lead type” (Kunz, 2009.) Yet again, there was a trend that seemed to account for the adaptability of this new revolution; the introduction of computers was feared, un-liked and ‘a lot of effort,’ Hans himself spoke in an interview documenting his work mentioning “I remember at school, there were all these classes to learn how to use a computer ... step by step, and we had to, had to, but we did not really want to. Only when I left school did I start working with the Macintosh, and now I do everything on the computer” (Bosshard, 2012.)



Source 2: Woodcut Graphic,
Hans Rudolf Bosshard, 1961.

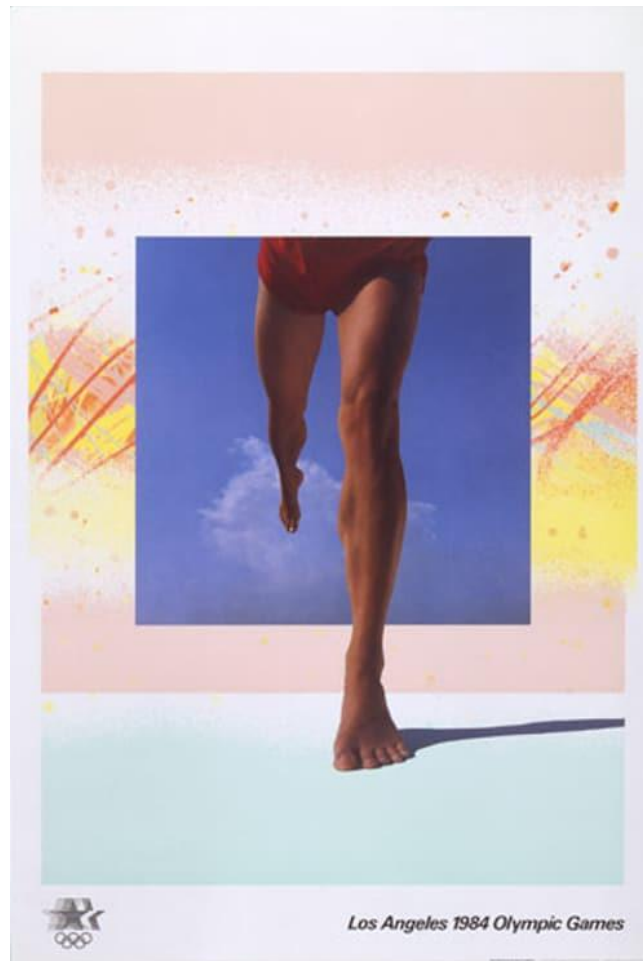


Source 3: Typografische Monatsblätter, Hans
Rudolf Bosshard, 1995.

These two sources above represent two art pieces by Hans, one depicted before the revolution in the 60's and one depicted a time past the revolution in the late 90's. If the interview from the previous statement is true, it shows that the image in 'Source 3' is created digitally while 'Source 2' is created physically. A point I would like to make about these two sources specifically is the drastic change of creativity and simplicity that goes into both designs; being that the artwork in source 3 is much more refined and acknowledgeable from the design on the left, this is a method that is commonly used after the revolution which is usually referred to as a post-modern typography art piece, "Complexity implies the feeling of being lost; simplicity implies the feeling of being found." (Maeda, 2020, pg. 61) In an interview and document constructed by Willi Kunz, they go into detail about the demands for work after the revolution of computing and their need for designers to keep up with the new 'typesetting' that was coming into fields, claiming that "typography was increasingly produced by typesetting services without the necessary awareness for quality and a lack of aesthetic feeling. Due to these radical changes in typesetting, designers specializing in typography were hired by graphic design studios, advertising agencies, and industry with the task to keep typographic standards high" (Kunz, 2009.) This allowed people like Hans to further their work with such a high demand after the shift into digital designs, since they were already experienced in typesetting.

April Grieman is a staple of an artist that fuelled positivity for the revolution of computers, especially the Macintosh computers in the mid 1970's-80's. She embraced the digitalization helped impose the original International Style, instead of repelling the idea – she exploited the tools given to her and

made use of the pixelation errors and fuelled it to create more posters and design processes in her work. Grieman had bought her first Macintosh in the early 1980's; only to receive one of the first Grand Prizes 'First Macintosh Masters in Art Competition'. Her work "exploited the potential of computer and video to create multi-layered, multi-referential and fragmented images with typography to engage the viewer's imagination" (Votolato, 1998, pg. 198.) Her work was considered as "New Wave" design, which cultivated the use of bright colours and enforced her own ideology of post-modernism. From the same book, it was sought out that this new 'post-modernism' was a growing trend within the art and design world, quoting "In the 1990's, post-modernism appears to be taking a direction which would help American design for rapidly advancing demands by environmental movements and higher organizational systems" (Votolato, 1998, pg., 200.)



Source 4: Los Angeles Olympic Games Poster, 1984, April Grieman.

Mentioned earlier in the essay, the development of computers took the idea that tools within the software helped designs look more simplistic, yet professional. 'New Wave' artists such as April Grieman pushed against this; instead, using the Macintosh computers to experiment with colour practice, the manipulation of type and the use of collaging imagery deemed to be much more expressive, resulting in a complex, broader viewer response. Viewer response in design started to become much clearer after the revolution; now that the designs were digital, viewers could come back to each piece without it having to move, change or alter in any way. April mentioned about this in a book written by Alan Pipes, stating "digital design is like painting where the paint never dries, it also means incorporating design evolution, making sure that the site feels alive to people visiting more than once." (Pipes, 2005, page 140.) This is important to notice as it can be used in multiple

Sources

Source 1: MoMA Poster Calendar, 1987, Takenobu Igarashi, Japan.

Source 2: Woodcut Graphic, Hans Rudolf Bosshard, 1961.

Source 3: Typografische Monatsblätter, Hans Rudolf Bosshard, 1995

Source 4: Los Angeles Olympic Games Poster, 1984, April Grieman.

Source 5: "Does it make sense?" Design Quarterly Magazine, 1986, April Grieman.

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