**Independent Inquiry**

# An investigation into Graphic Designers and their responsibility to design for social change.

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BA Graphic Design

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## Summary of Topic

The aim of this Independent Inquiry is to explore social design, the role of the graphic designer, and whether graphic designers have responsibility to society. I will be investigating various examples of social design over the years, referencing historical events and graphic designers and I will argue whether graphic designers have a responsibility to design for societal benefit or not.

## Introduction

Throughout my experience of studying Graphic Design, I become increasingly aware of the influence that it has on the world. I innocently considered graphic design as a tool for economic growth; however as I get older and become more aware of the current state of world events, I am no longer blind to the negative impact that humans have on the Earth. Trying your best to design for societal benefit raises the moral question of what jobs do you accept, what practices you should perform, and what is the overall message of the design? It also raises the question of if I was desperate, would I still be so thoughtful about which jobs I accept in the future? Becoming more environmentally and socially conscious has affected everything I do - from what I eat, to how I work, and everything in between. I feel that everyone is responsible for making a positive stamp on the world, and I believe that one of the most powerful ways in which to do so is through the means of graphic design.

The aim of this Independent Inquiry is to explore social design, the role of the graphic designer, and whether graphic designers have responsibility to society.

This Independent Inquiry will be structured into three separate chapters. Chapter 1 will explore the history of graphic design and social design. Within this chapter, I will be giving an overview on what graphic design is, showing examples of some of the first examples of it ever recorded. I will then move on to show examples of how graphic design has been used during historical moments, e.g. during the World Wars, and finally I will be exploring the progression of the role of the graphic designer. In addition to books and websites, I will be conducting primary research in the form of a questionnaire which will provide me with up-to-date opinions of the topic.

In Chapter 2, I will be exploring the various examples of social design over the years, mainly giving reference to designers who have dedicated their careers to the topic. Within this chapter, I will be giving an overview of what social design is, and also showing examples of work from the social designers that I will be researching. The work that I will be researching will be a wide variety of examples, ranging from designs for protest, to designs for children.

In my final chapter, I will be investigating more modern ways of working within graphic design. I will be referencing graphic designers who could be considered pioneers within the field of working sustainably and ethically, investigating the various methods and media that they use. I will also be exploring contrasting opinions regarding the modern social responsibility of graphic designers, including the ethics of certain jobs.

## Chapter 1: The History of Graphic Design and Social Design

### 1.1: What is Graphic Design?

All design practices that support a sustainable lifestyle and offer alternatives for the current social and economic system can be regarded as Social Design (Zwaag, 2014). It can also be defined as “design that seeks to solve humanitarian issues such as improving living conditions for its beneficiaries” (Foundation, n.d.). Overall, it seems that any design that can be thought to make a positive impact upon society can be considered social design. Designers have the power to solve societal problems through their designs, and it is crucial that the practice of design travels past striving for financial gain and actually contributes to a better world.

### 1.2: The First Sightings of Graphic Design

Graphic design is all around us, and almost everything can be interpreted as a form of graphic design. “The term ‘graphic design’ is relatively recent in the history of visual art, although the activity it denotes is as old as the earliest scratchings on cave walls” (Roberts, 2005). The first signs of graphic design were prehistoric cave paintings.

Fig 1: *Prehistoric Cave Painting 30,000 – 28,000 BCE*

Between 35,000-4000 BCE, Africans and Europeans left paintings in caves. They used charcoal to make black, and they used iron oxides to make shades of yellow and red in their paintings. These images were the start of visual communication, as these were used for survival and ritualistic purposes (Meggs & Purvis, 1985).

When relating these first sightings to social design, one could conclude that these would be considered a form of social design. Although the people who produced these markings back in 35,000-4,000 BCE wouldn't have had access to less ethical and damaging materials, it is undeniable that the tools used to produce these markings would have been sustainable. Also, these paintings served a

purpose for society being used as a form of communication for survival and ritualistic benefits, also reinforcing the idea that they could be considered social design.

In terms of more recent years, graphic design arrived as its own practice as a result of the Industrial Revolution. By the 20th century artists of all genres were being used in the advertising industry for a wider variety of clients due to the fall of local production. Artists and writers were used to try and help companies remarket themselves to fix their public appearance (Roberts, 2006).

**1.3: Graphic Design During the World Wars**

When it came to the First World War, propaganda was at the forefront which combined new societal ideas with a new attitude to design. At the same time that people were engaging in lethal battle, graphic designers were using their tools to almost fight another war of their own – gaining support for their respective nations. Propaganda was so important as it had the power to change the course the war due to its ability to encourage the public to join (Schenker, 2018).

Some may argue that the propaganda during World War 1 was an unethical form of graphic design as its primary purpose was to encourage people into joining a life-threatening war zone. It doesn't seem that whoever conducted the practice of propaganda cared or considered the impact that these posters would have on society. On the other hand, some may say that propaganda was the only way that the government could ensure a sufficient number of people signed up to the army during the war meaning that the public would be protected, arguably making it a form of social design.

The main propaganda during World War 1 was in the form of posters. These posters would feature stereotypically heroic images along with taglines, which would

consequently encourage people to be just as heroic as the person on the poster.

One of the most common qualities of these posters was finger pointing.

Fig. 2: *I Want You*

This propaganda poster from World War 1 consists of patriotic colours with a powerful-looking man pointing his finger directly towards the viewer. The message of this poster is very direct and personal, as it is saying that the U.S Army wants 'YOU' specifically (Schenker, 2018).

Although this form of graphic design could seem rather extreme and unethical in some cases, is it far from the graphic design that we experience today in terms of advertisements? The message could be considered the same, where the message of both forms of design is mainly to falsely entice the public.

As the Second World War came it brought a new need for wider methods of communication between governments and the governed, which developed the creativity and the idea of what graphic design could be. It was at this time that graphic designers started to realise that they had been conditioned to the needs of their clients, and started to question their intentions (Roberts, 2006).

**1.4: The Progression of Graphic Design**

It could be said that the role of the graphic designer has progressed over the years. In more recent years, author David Berman claims that "designers have an essential responsibility" as they create so much in the world (Berman, 2008). In the book *Do Good Design*, Berman reinforces the notion that graphic designers have a social responsibility to act as ethically and sustainably as possible. He also draws on his experience where he spoke at a conference in Canada in 2002, and when he moderated a day at a Design Congress in Cuba 5 years later. He claims that in 2002, he was the only person debating the social responsibility that designers have. In comparison, almost every single speaker in 2007 related their work to ways in

which designers can make social change. He explains the absolute shock he was in as he couldn't comprehend the severe change of attitudes in such a short space of time. This suggests that the way in which people consider the role of graphic designers is rapidly changing.

To reinforce Berman's message that the way in which designers think has changed over the years, I have conducted a questionnaire to gain the general consensus of 38 students at my university. The results are as follows:

**Do you think that Graphic Designers have the potential to use their profession in a way which impacts positively upon society?**

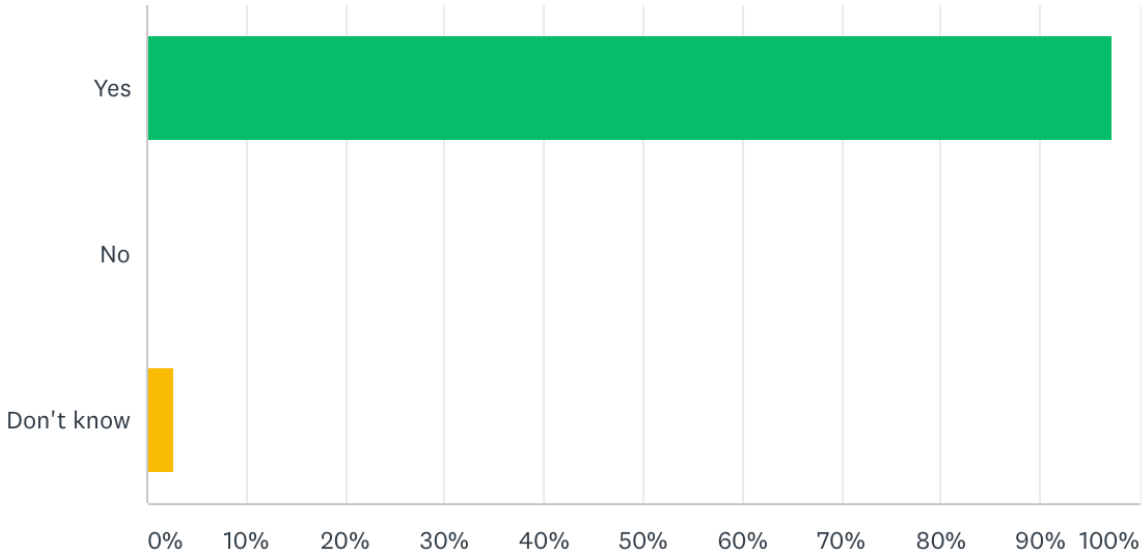


Fig 3: *Explains what division of people support the way in which graphic designers' impact positively upon society*

The first question asked whether you think that graphic designers have the potential to have impact upon society. From my results I can see that just over 97% of people believe that graphic designers do indeed have the potential to impact society, with almost 3% of people opting for 'don't know'.

From these results I can conclude that the general consensus is that graphic designers themselves feel that they impact society, whether that is a positive or negative impact. For the 1 person who answered with ‘don’t know’, it could be suggested that they are debating the old-fashioned opinion that a graphic designer’s main job is to encourage financial gain for corporations. In the book *GOOD*, Lucienne Roberts discusses the role of the graphic designer and how it has changed over the years. Before, graphic designers were used purely as a tool to make money for businesses and corporations; however nowadays, you could consider graphic designers to have more of an ethical responsibility for society (Roberts, 2006).

**Would you accept a job offer if the ethics and ethos of the brand/business didn’t match your own?**

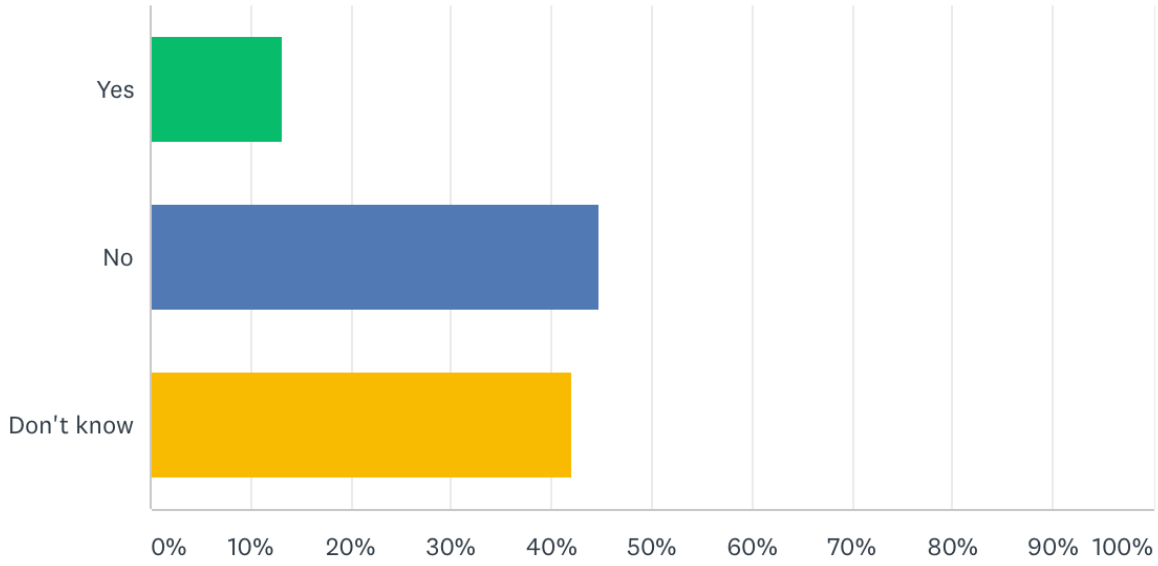


Fig 4: *Explains what division of people would accept a job offer from a business with ethics different from their own*

Here are the statistics from the second question asked on the survey. The question asks whether you would accept a job if the company’s ethics didn’t coincide with your own beliefs. The results from this are slightly mixed, with the majority of

people at almost 45% opting for ‘no’. The remainder of people chose ‘don’t know’ at just over 42%, and the ‘yes’ at just over 13%.

One could suggest that the majority of society nowadays could almost be discouraged from accepting a job from a company with contrasting beliefs to your own. Also in the current climate we are encouraged to reconsider our ways and practices, as we are more aware of the impact that we could have on the world in later years. In the book ‘GOOD’, Lucienne Roberts also makes reference to the responsibility that graphic designers put on themselves, when in reality there are many things to juggle in terms of clients, contracts and even themselves. If you become in a position where money is tight and you need a job, how much would you jeopardise your own morals and beliefs?  (Roberts, 2006)

**Do you think the role of the Graphic Designer has changed over the years?**

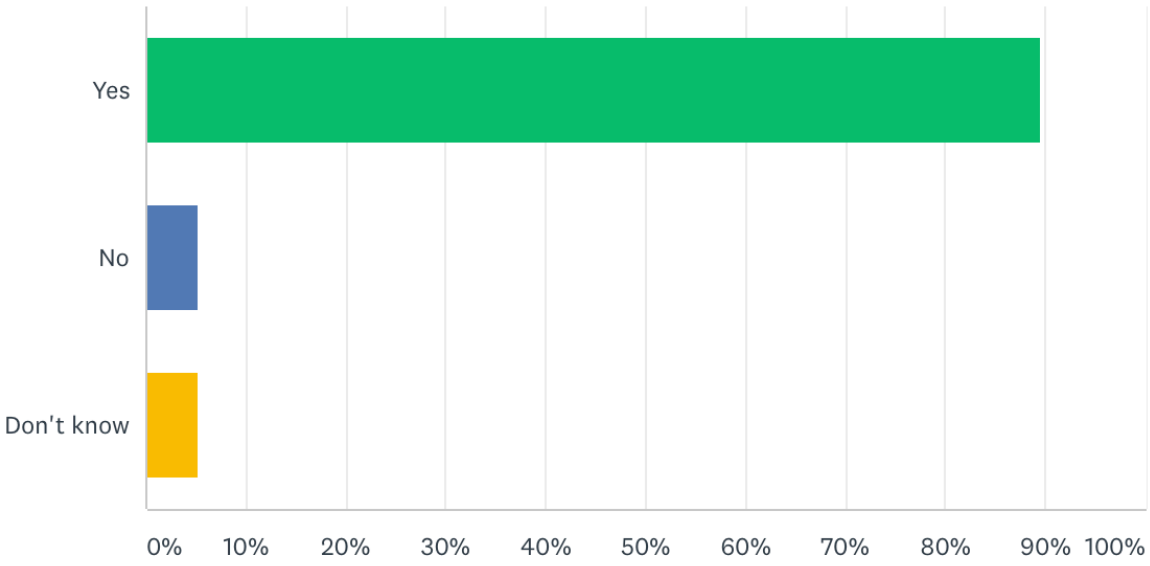


Fig 5: *Explains the division of people who believe that the role of the graphic designer has changed over the years*

Here are the results from the final question asked. The question asks whether you believe that the role of the graphic designer has changed over the years. The

results conclude that the majority of people believe that the role of designer has changed, with almost 90% opting for ‘yes’. Just over 5% of people opted for both ‘no’ and ‘don’t know’.

Unsurprisingly the results support the notion from (Berman, 2008) and (Roberts, 2006) that people’s opinions on the role of graphic designers has changed. One could argue that for the people who opted for ‘no’ and ‘don’t know’, they are in the mindset that the role hasn’t necessarily changed, but the opinions on graphic designers has changed. Although nowadays people consider graphic design to have more of an impact on society, does that necessarily mean that the whole job has changed?

As time progresses and the climate of the world’s news changes, so do the attitudes of society. Designers seem to be more encouraged to consider factors such as the ethics and sustainability of the work they produce, whereas these factors may not have been so considered before.

## Chapter 2: The Various Forms of Social Design

### 2.1: What is social design?

The main agenda for a social designer is to try to change and make life better for other people, rather than to sell products that they may not necessarily need nor want. As U.S. designer Daniel Young points out in an interview for *CorD magazine*, “Don’t just design. Think first whether society actually needs that design… don’t design if you don’t have something good to contribute to society” (Radoja, 2010).

Alternatively, some may suggest that if you are in a situation you need an income, who becomes the priority – yourself or society? In the book *GOOD*, Lucienne Roberts talks about the ethics involved with the responsibility of graphic

designers; however she also discusses the difficulties for designers that become apparent when considering clients, contracts, colleagues, and themselves (Roberts, 2006). She explains that it becomes easy for us to delegate the responsibilities of others, although there are numerous other factors to take into consideration first.

The philosophy regarding social design is that it is engaging and thought-provoking, giving people the opportunity to consider social issues. The fact that it has now become a commonly used term suggests a shift in the way that designers design. In the world of design, there is an increasing need to make a positive stamp on the world and designers are now challenged with the task of conjuring up new solutions to societal issues through the medium of graphic design.

### 2.2: Ken Garland

A pioneer in the social design movement is Ken Garland. Garland is a British graphic designer and writer, who is well-known for his anti-nuclear campaigns and the 'First Things First' manifesto (designlectur, 2014). Garland is the self-proclaimed 'Mr Ethics' of graphic design due to his ethical beliefs. Garland has never seen a clear divide between his commercial work and his commissions for good causes as he believes that all the work he's done over the years are all equally valuable (Garland, 2012).

#### 2.2.1: Ken Garland – The Aldermaston Marches

In 1962, Garland designed posters for the Aldermaston marches (Garland, 2012).

Fig 6: *Aldermaston to London Easter 62*

The Aldermaston marches were anti-nuclear weapons demonstrations which took place in the 1950's and 1960's. The marches took place over Easter weekend from the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in Aldermaston in Berkshire and lasted for over 50 miles. The aim of the march was to demonstrate the opposition to nuclear weapons (CNDUK, n.d.).

Ken Garland designed one of the protest posters for the march in 1962. The poster features the CND emblem – which is a symbol of peace – and is repeated as

it diminishes from left to right. Although Garland didn't actually design the CND emblem himself, he used it in an attempt to make peace for societal change. Although the march is considered a mass protest, this poster suggests that the main objective was to remain peaceful, which could subsequently gain more respect for the march from the public. This piece of work from Garland exhibits his ability to transfer his core values and beliefs onto peaceful protests, rather than unproductively forcing them upon people in a confrontational way. Here Garland is demonstrating how he has used his passion of graphic design to design for the greater good of society. He is designing for a cause that he is passionate about, rather than designing purely for financial benefit.

### 2.2.2: Ken Garland – First Things First

Garland decided that it was his duty to make a change to the way in which designers were designing, leading into the creation of the *First Things First manifesto (1964).*

first
things
first

A manifesto

We, the undersigned, are graphic designers, photographers and students who have been brought up in a world in which the techniques and apparatus of advertising have persistently been presented to us as the most lucrative, effective and desirable means of using our talents. We have been bombarded with publications devoted to this belief, applauding the work of those who have flogged their skill and imagination to sell such things as:

cat food, stomach powders, detergent, hair restorer, striped toothpaste, aftershave lotion, beforeshave lotion, slimming diets, fattening diets, deodorants, fizzy water, cigarettes, roll-ons, pull-ons and slip-ons.

By far the greatest time and effort of those working in the advertising industry are wasted on these trivial purposes, which contribute little or nothing to our national prosperity.

In common with an increasing number of the general public, we have reached a saturation point at which the high pitched scream of consumer selling is no more than sheer noise. We think that there are other things more worth using our skill and experience on. There are signs for streets and buildings, books and periodicals, catalogues, instructional manuals, industrial photography, educational aids, films, television features, scientific and industrial publications and all the other media through which we promote our trade, our education, our culture and our greater awareness of the world.

We do not advocate the abolition of high pressure consumer advertising: this is not feasible. Nor do we want to take any of the fun out of life. But we are proposing a reversal of priorities in favour of the more useful and more lasting forms of communication. We hope that our society will tire of gimmick merchants, status salesmen and hidden persuaders, and that the prior call on our skills will be for worthwhile purposes. With this in mind, we propose to share our experience and opinions, and to make them available to colleagues, students and others who may be interested.

Edward Wright
Geoffrey White
William Slack
Caroline Rawlence
Ian McLaren
Sam Lambert
Ivor Kamlish
Gerald Jones
Bernard Higton
Brian Grimbly
John Garner
Ken Garland
Anthony Froshaug
Robin Fior
Germano Facetti
Ivan Dodd
Harriet Crowder
Anthony Clift
Gerry Cinamon
Robert Chapman
Ray Carpenter
Ken Briggs

Published by Ken Garland, 13 Oakley Sq NW1
Printed by Goodwin Press Ltd. London N4

Fig. 7: *First Things First Manifesto*

The original *First Things First manifesto* was written in 1963 and published in 1964 and was signed by 21 other artists and designers who also shared the same views as Garland that the heart of design was dying (Design is History, n.d.). The aim of the manifesto was to challenge artists and designers to reconsider their ways of working. Classed as one of the most significant pieces of writing in design, it fought against a commercial culture and aimed to target designers. ‘We have reached a saturation point at which the high-pitched scream of consumer selling is no more than sheer noise’ (Garland, 1964).

In the manifesto Garland mentions that the design community had been bombarded with the message that the most useful way for designers to use their talent is for corporate financial gain, however he states that the efforts of designers

working in advertising is ‘wasted on these trivial purposes, which contribute little or nothing to our national prosperity’ (Garland, 1964). So it could be suggested that Garland was fed up of the way that design had been for so many years – a tool for financial gain for large corporations.

In 2000, the *First Things First 2000 manifesto* was launched by Adbusters magazine, which is an updated version of the first manifesto in 1964 (Montgomery, 2014).

First Things First Manifesto 2000

We, the undersigned, are graphic designers, art directors and visual communicators who have been raised in a world in which the techniques and apparatus of advertising have persistently been presented to us as the most lucrative, effective and desirable use of our talents. Many design teachers and mentors promote this belief, the market rewards it; a tide of books and publications reinforces it.

Encouraged in this direction, designers then apply their skill and imagination to sell dog biscuits, designer coffee, diamonds, detergents, hair gel, cigarettes, credit cards, sneakers, butt toners, light beer and heavy-duty recreational vehicles. Commercial work has always paid the bills, but many graphic designers have now let it become, in large measure, what graphic designers do. This, in turn, is how the world perceives design. The profession's time and energy is used up manufacturing demand for things that are inessential at best.

Many of us have grown increasingly uncomfortable with this view of design. Designers who devote their efforts primarily to advertising, marketing and brand development are supporting, and implicitly endorsing, a mental environment so saturated with commercial messages that it is changing the way citizen-consumers speak, think, feel, respond and interact. To some extent we are all helping draft a reductive and immeasurably harmful code of public discourse.

There are pursuits more worthy of our problem-solving skills. Unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises demand our attention. Many cultural interventions, social marketing campaigns, books, magazines, exhibitions, educational tools, television programmes, films, charitable causes and other information design projects urgently require our expertise and help.

We propose a reversal of priorities in favour of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication – a mindshift away from product marketing and towards 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.

In 1964, 21 visual communicators signed the original call for our skills to be put to worthwhile use. With the explosive growth of global commercial culture, their message has only grown more urgent. Today, we renew their manifesto in expectation that no more decades will pass before it is taken to heart.

Fig 8: *First Things First Manifesto 2000*

Adbusters is ”an international collective of artists, designers, poets, punks, writers, directors, musicians, philosophers, dropouts, and wild hearts” (Adbusters, 2019). Adbusters was founded by Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz in 1989 when he produced an advertisement which fought against the forestry industry in British Columbia. Today, Adbusters is an activist magazine which challenges consumerism, with Jonathon Barnbrook being one of its many contributors (Activist Facts, 2019).

The reason for the relaunch of the manifesto was because Adbusters felt that the message from the original manifesto had become far more relevant today (Eye Magazine, 2000). As issues such as global warming and extinction become more and more prominent in today's society, the manifesto seems to be more relevant than ever before. The more modern version of the manifesto was released in more magazines and publications than before, ensuring that it reached a far wider audience. This version of the manifesto also received 33 signatories including Jonathan Barnbrook, which is 12 more than the original version.

### 2.2.3: Ken Garland: Children's Toys

Aside from his political work, Garland also designed children's toys. The majority – if not all – of the toys served an educational purpose, which is no surprise due to Garland's ethical and moral stance. An example of one of the toys that he designed is *Anymals* (Garland, 2012).

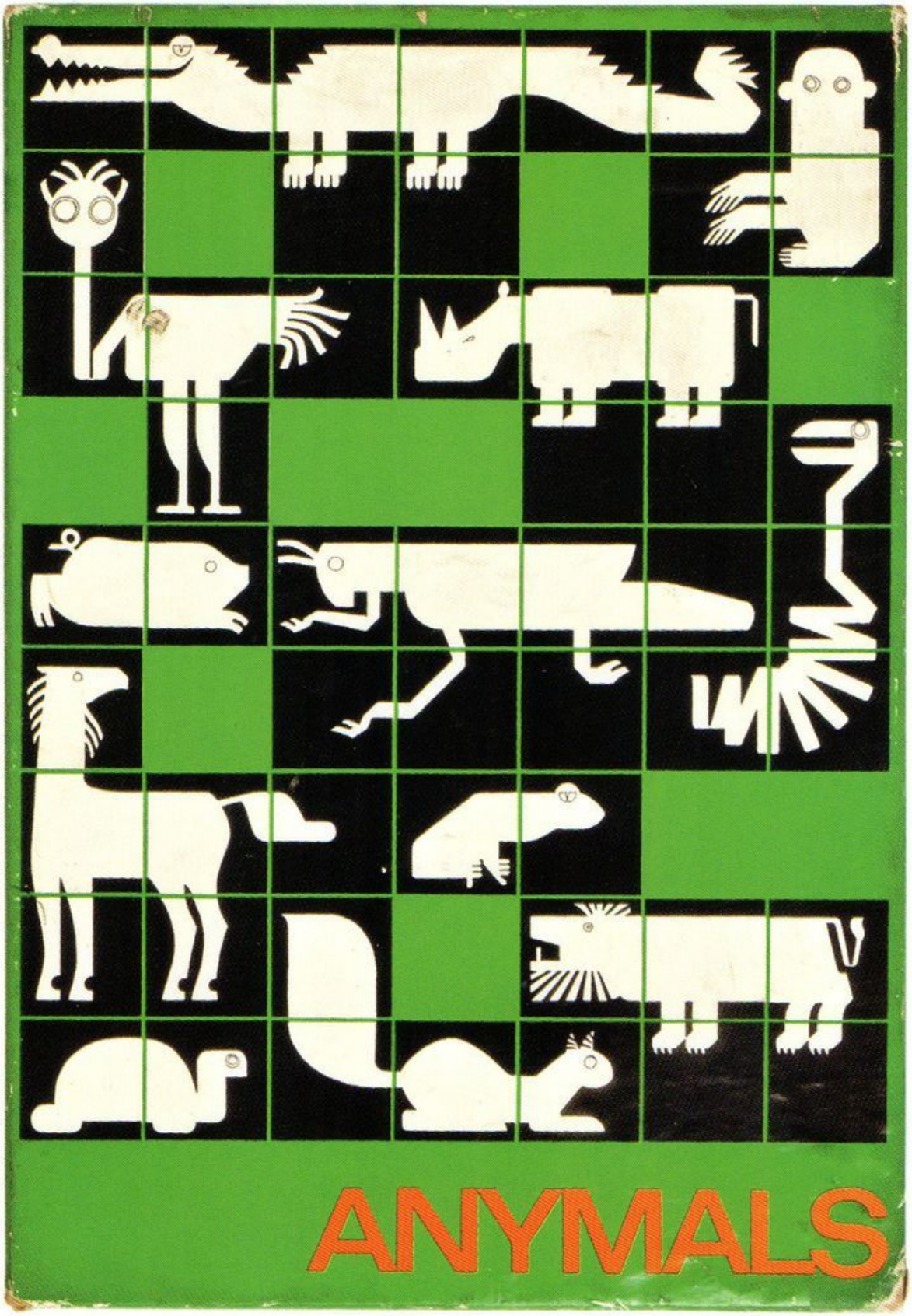


Fig 9: *Anymals*

Fig 9 shows the game *Anymals* by Ken Garland. The game is a puzzle in which the player must complete to see all of the animals. The target audience for this game is children, making it an enjoyable form of education.

It could be argued that this is in fact a form of social design. The purpose of the game is to not only be an enjoyable version of a puzzle, but it's also a positive way of encouraging cognitive activity within children. Garland is demonstrating his ability to transfer his morals and ethics onto educational projects, which are subsequently for societal benefit.

**2.3: Jonathan Barnbrook**

Jonathan Barnbrook is a very prominent British designer who is famous for his activism, graphic design and typeface design. Barnbrook has dedicated a large part of his career to designing for social change – "Barnbrook believes design shapes the way we perceive the world and can facilitate social change" (Barnbrook, n.d.).

Barnbrook's first political act was producing a range of posters about the Gulf War in the 1990's, as he had overwhelming feelings of powerlessness.

Fig 10: *Jihad*

Since then Barnbrook has become involved in a number of anti-corporate designs, including his collaboration with Cop21 for a Guerrilla poster campaign (Long, 2019). “COP stands for Conference of the Parties, referring to the countries that have signed up to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Fig 11: *Brandalism VW*

Here is an example of one of the posters from the *Brandalism* campaign. From a distance the poster could pose as a typical VW advertisement, however once you fully investigate it, it becomes clear that the message is far deeper.

The series of posters came after German car manufacturer Volkswagen admitted to cheating in their diesel emissions tests. It was discovered that 11 million cars worldwide were producing up to 40 times more emissions than permitted. The Guardian reported that not only was this detrimental to the environment due to the copious extra amounts of Nitrous Oxide into the atmosphere, but it could also be damaging to your health, leading to respiratory and heart problems (Topham, 2015).

This is just one example of a poster from the Brandalism campaign, however Barnbrook, along with other graphic designers produced many more compelling designs. The main theme running through the series is the desire to change the way in which we view advertising. The reason behind advertisement is to sell a product or a fantasy, which can be misleading (Brandalism, n.d.). Here Barnbrook has taken a stereotypical advertisement from VW and used it to convey a complete opposite message than what it usually would. The purpose of the campaign was to expose the corporate greenwashing of some of the largest polluters, whilst underlining the connection between consumerism and climate change.

## Chapter 3: Social Design Today

### 3.1: Lucienne Roberts

Lucienne Roberts is a British graphic designer born in 1962. She is based in London and is the founder of design studio 'LucienneRoberts+' and the co-founder of design studio 'GraphicDesign&'. In her book *GOOD*, Roberts explains how the two questions that have always stayed with her are 'what does it mean to be good?' and the question of death, which then naturally morphed into her interest in ethics (Roberts, 2006).

Lucienne Roberts is a big advocate for working ethically. Although this is a big priority of hers, she also makes it clear that it's important to find a balance between our responsibilities to others and to ourselves. It suggests that although working ethically is favourable, we also shouldn't sacrifice ourselves to the cause (Roberts, 2006).

In the book *GOOD*, Roberts discusses the responsibility that graphic designers have on society. She explains how the job of a graphic designer is to

communicate a message, and in a way, to endorse a message. Roberts then questions whether graphic designers should therefore accept a job from clients with contrasting beliefs. As a counter argument, she compares the job of a graphic designer to that of a barrister, explaining that a barrister's role is to defend someone who could be guilty of heinous crimes. This could be considered a dramatic comparison, however the principles of the two professions appear pretty similar. Roberts then concludes that the responsibility of a graphic designer truly depends on the morals, ethics and conscience of the individual (Roberts, 2006).

### 3.2: Sustainable Design

Sustainable: 'the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance" (Simpson, 2010).

Sustainable design is a relatively new term, and is also known as 'eco-friendly' or 'eco-design', however using the term 'sustainable design' importantly highlights the difference between being purely environmentally friendly, and the social and economic effects of production processes (Sherin, 2008).

The demand for practicing sustainably has become a lot higher due to the fright that issues such as global warming has on our future. Statistics released from *NASA* claim that Carbon Dioxide levels, global temperature and sea levels are the highest on record (NASA, 2019). This information raises the question of what we are able to do in order to stabilise and decrease these figures. These issues are also continuously being highlighted on television by Sir David Attenborough. Attenborough is a very well-respected English broadcaster, who is recognised for his shocking nature documentaries. His programmes highlight the impact that human

activity is having on the planet and show the devastating effects of our behaviour (Britannica, 2019).

Practicing sustainable methods for corporations is becoming a modern niche and a popular way in which to gain more customers. Consumers seem to become more aware of the impact that unsustainable materials are having on the planet and are therefore opting for brands who practice sustainably. Some design studios are also becoming rather particular about their client base. For example, Design Action Collective is a design studio in California who try to balance their efforts of reducing their environmental footprint, while also finding the right clients who share the same values as their own (Sherin, 2009).

### 3.2.1: Sustainable Design Practices

In the book *SustainAble*, Eric Benson, Graphic Design professor at the University of Illinois, outlines the best practices in which to design sustainably. He claims that the process of designing sustainably starts at the beginning of the process where the designer must decide if there is any form of need for the design in the first place. Then questions such as “what is the impact of making this piece?” and “how can we lessen the impact if we print this piece?” are asked, which then lead to a final decision of whether the design process should go ahead (Sherin, 2009).

Benson then goes on to explain how the designer must work collaboratively with clients to discuss issues such as whether the design improves the quality of life, does the design respect the community, and how can we minimise the reduction of non-renewable resources. All of these conversations then force the graphic designer to become more conscientious about the longevity of the design; the waste and ink

coverage of the design; the recyclability of the design. Graphic designers are both suppliers and consumers, therefore Benson believes that it is imperative that we use our power to incite change and difference (Sherin, 2009).

### 3.3: Fred Martins

A good example of someone who makes it their duty to design for societal gain is Nigerian-born Fred Martins. Martins is an illustrative artist who creates to provoke an emotional response in the viewer (Design Indaba, n.d.). One of Martins' most recent collections is regarding the effects of global warming.

Fig. 12: *Global Warming Zebra*

Fig 12 depicts what could appear to be a zebra melting under the hot sun. This is just one piece of artwork in the series 'Global Warming', where numerous animals are seen to be melting under the sun. Global Warming is a huge topic in today's society, with more and more people changing their lifestyles - from what they eat to the way they travel to work – to combat the issue, and here Martins has used his creativity to translate this message into art.

Without the title 'global warming' sitting under the image, it is still very clear as to what message Martins is trying to convey. Here Martins is using his platform as an artist to deliver messages regarding strong issues that resonate with him. Martins actually stated early on in his career that "making pretty things wasn't enough" and with that he decided to use his skills as an artist and designer to trigger an emotional response in his work (Design Indaba, n.d.).

Martins is the creator of many other pieces of art, which all have the same message.

Fig. 13: *Orange, Black and Freedom*

*Orange, Black and Freedom* sees the faces of famous activists crafted onto afro combs. Here is just one example from the series of work, where an afro comb has been moulded into the face of famous equality activist Martin Luther King Jr. The majority of those featured in the series were at one point incarcerated for their activism, explaining the use of the orange background as it is a typical colour for the clothes that prisoners wear (Gbadamosi, 2016). The purpose of the series was to commemorate those activists who inspire us today.

Fred Martins is a great example of an artist who designs purely to convey messages for social benefit. There is meaning behind every one of his pieces, rather than using his talents purely for the benefit of large corporations.

### 3.4: Under the Skin

Under the Skin was founded by two brothers from South West Wales, who from an early age had a fond love and understanding of nature. They are both avid explorers, which lead them to become more aware of the impact that humans have on the planet. This knowledge sparked their passion for living a sustainable lifestyle, which then followed into their practice. The pair now own Under the Skin, which solely focusses on raising awareness for endangered species (Under the Skin, n.d.).

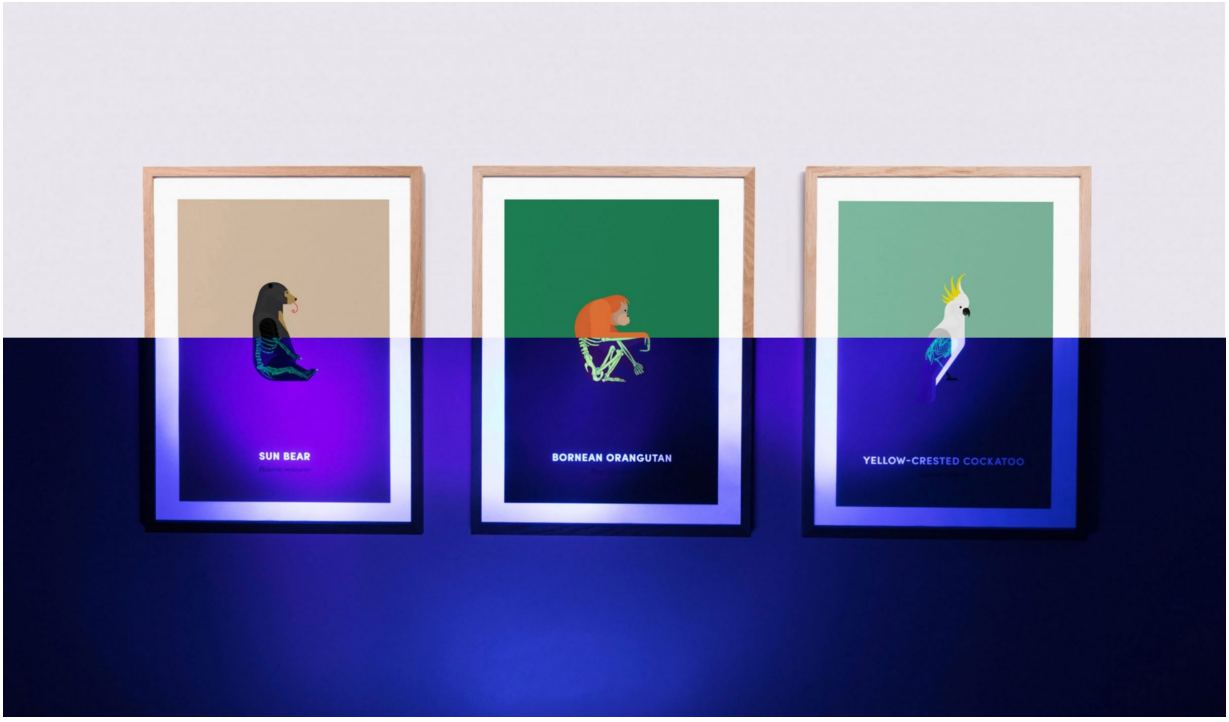


Fig. 14: *Under the Skin*

Fig 14 displays a small selection of prints by Under the Skin. Each print comes with a backstory about the endangered animal, and 20% of proceeds from each print goes to a relating charity (Under the Skin, n.d.).

The image above displays the interactivity of the prints. Each product comes with a UV light, which once shone on the print, reveals the skeleton of the animal. The purpose of this is to raise awareness of what will inevitably be left of these endangered animals if our habits continue. Our generation is currently living through the sixth mass extinction, therefore Under the Skin felt inspired to act proactively to raise awareness of this tragedy (Under the Skin, n.d.).

Not only do their designs raise awareness of sustainable causes, they also use sustainable practices and materials within their work. The paper on which they print on is sourced from 'Fedrigoni' who take the environment very seriously. Their raw materials come from suppliers who practice responsible environmental policies, which ensure that the most ethical materials are used. They also use water-based pigment ink that doesn't contain any harsh chemicals, which is subsequently more sustainable for the environment (Under the Skin, n.d.).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this Independent Inquiry was to explore whether graphic designers have a responsibility to design for social change, which includes the ethics and sustainability of designs and potential employers.

Looking back on my findings, I can conclude that the general consensus was that graphic designers do hold an element of responsibility when it comes to designing for societal benefit. When considering some of the first examples of graphic design, it's clear that there was a true purpose to the work, whether it be for the greater good or not. Progressing onto more recent years, there seems to be a higher demand for graphic designers who design with ethics and sustainability as a

priority; particularly as years go on and issues such as Global Warming are being presented.

When concluding a definitive answer to my statement, I must consider every form of evidence that I have collected. After reviewing the earliest examples of graphic design, it is clear that almost all design has a purpose. For example, the propaganda during World War 1 was used to recruit people to fight for their country, however it could be considered extremely unethical. When comparing this to social design activists such as Ken Garland and Jonathon Barnbrook, it is clear to see how graphic designers have transformed into having to consider issues like ethics and sustainability. This is also evident through Under the Skin, who dedicate their craft to raising awareness of issues such as mass extinction, all while practicing sustainable methods within their work.

Although the majority of my evidence points towards one answer, I must respect the possibility of a contrasting view. Lucienne Roberts points out that although designing with society in mind is favourable, it isn't always possible. When you consider factors such as income and job security, the lines seem to blur between trying to help others and yourself.

After studying all the evidence that I have collected, along with considering any counterarguments that could be presented, I have come to the conclusion that graphic designers have a responsibility to design for social change. Graphic design is a tool for communication, and I feel that it is our duty as graphic designers to ensure that we are communicating the right message to society. Despite this, I do feel that in some circumstances the lines can be blurred when factors such as money and income are involved; however overall I feel that the role of the graphic designer has transformed into something more than just providing a service to large

corporations for financial gain, therefore giving graphic designers a responsibility to design for social change.

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