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Irma Boom

Bladeren door het Amerikaanse landschap: een index van boeken en beelden

Typography is a strong communication tool in design that immediately establishes mood and tone it is used to communicate a message. Photography is a tool that captures a specific moment in time that gives a glimpse into the world we live in through different eyes. Now sometimes the mood of the type and the mood of the photo work in synergy and perfect harmony to express a message, idea, or emotion. However, in other times, the mood of the typography and the mode of the photo juxtapose each other where the message is conflicting with one another. I will explore the workings of Irma Boom's 2009 book *Bladeren door het Amerikaanse landschap: een index van boeken en beelden* (*Browsing the American Landscape: An Index of Books and Images*). I will be exploring the ideas of this piece and how the photography and the typography work with each other to create a visually pleasing and stimulating piece.

The design of the front cover of the book is a strong bold black sans serif font with the background juxtaposing the font with a barren landscape setting. The book itself was filled with a variety of scenic photos of different landscapes with an accompanying description of the photo. Now Irma Boom is a Dutch designer, so their designs cater to the Dutch speaker. So as an American my gravity for the design is strictly based on the language that I perceived. This language barrier may skew my interpretation of the design itself; there is still a boldness to the design that can be seen regardless of language. The background itself is of a barren grassland with canyons peering off the horizon. The photo also has a blue sky with clouds scattered around the area. The photo feels very disjointed from the font. Yet the cover still feels uniform at the

same time. It's almost as if the photo and the typography compliment and contrast each other at the same time.

This exact issue Ferdinand de Saussure was trying to avoid in his General Linguistic article. Saussure discussed the importance of clarity in linguistics. He stated "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it "material," it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract." In short he expresses how the use of signs and symbols are made to be interpreted universally. The sign creates a sound-image relationship that is easier to understand from all languages. However; that wasn't done here. In English speaking countries "BLADE" means something completely different to someone who is Dutch. Regardless of the content of the message, that wasn't what caught my eye, rather it was the bold font contrast with the calm soothing background that made this design visually appealing.

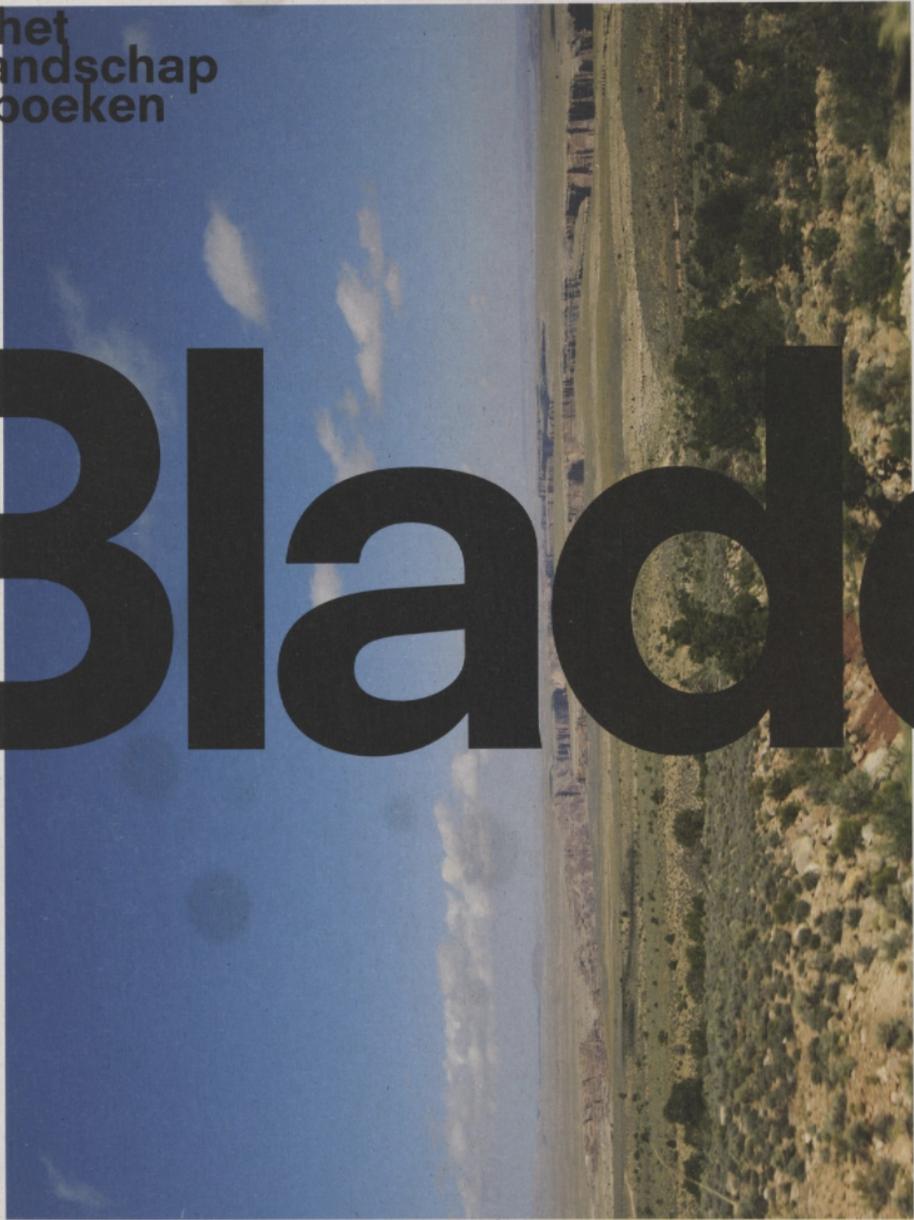
In terms of the typography and language barriers, the use of the bold typeface was incorporated for a more aesthetic eye-catching element rather than sending a distinctive message. The typeface on the book cover took up a majority of the page and gave an immediate sense of importance and urgency. However, because I'm not the intended audience for this message it has a more sinister feel for me than it was intended. The design to an English speaker describes a knife used for self defense. When exploring the typographic elements of this piece it has similar ideas of miscommunication with character that was discussed in Miller's article. He states "Many historians view phonetic scripts as the most advanced stage in development of writing. The roman alphabet is an attempt to analyze the innumerable sounds of speech into a couple

dozen signs, suited to being carved in stone or drawn on paper and capable of indefinite preservation.” Which can also be interpreted as the pre established alphabet is hard to understand especially because language is a social construct. It is malleable and changes with time and with region. Miller is expressing how uncertain the alphabet is and how relying on the alphabet alone to convey a specific message will change depending who you send it to. Case in point the Boom’s book cover; has a very strong noticeable series of symbols to create a word, however this word means something entirely and would be lost in translation. So if we were able to find a uniform way of communicating the same idea for example icons and images, communicating beyond regions and cultures will be a lot simpler.

All in all, language and typography can be a powerful tool, while also being a significant hindrance depending on who you are targeting and what your intended message is. It is important to understand that as a graphic designer we are responsible for making sure that the message is clear to who we are targeting and also being aware that it may mean many different things to different people. The designer is the ultimate communicator and it is our job to be conscious of the messages we share. As of right now there is not a uniform language that everyone knows, so it is our job to make sure we are as clear and concise with our design as possible.

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Blade



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