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Wolfgang Weingart:
A Retrospective

AIGA National Design Gallery

November 5 to December 15, 2021

BACKGROUND:



Wolfgang Weingart is an internationally recognized figure for his iconic body of work in the field of graphic designing and typography. His work is characterized as Swiss Typography. Moreover he is deemed the pioneer of 'New Wave' or Swiss Punk typography. Weingart was born in 1941 in Constance at the northern foot of the Alps in southern Germany. He spent most part of his childhood in Germany and for a brief period moved to Lisbon with his family, in 1954. Four years later, he returned to Germany and enrolled himself at the Merz

Academy. One of the first.

There he opted for a two year program in applied graphic arts. While studying, he developed certain skills including linocut, woodblock printing and typesetting. Then he began a three-year apprenticeship at Ruwe Printing, where he learned typesetting in hot metal hand composition. He also had the opportunity to come across the company's consulting designer, Karl-August Hanke.

Hanke took up the role as his mentor and encouraged him to continue his studies in Switzerland. In 1963, Weingart relocated in Basel after

meeting Emil Ruder and Armin Hofmann. He attended the Schule für Gestaltung Basel (Basel School of Design), as an independent student. In 1968, he was requested to teach typography at the institution's newly established department Weiterbildungsklasse für Grafik. He was one of the highly inspiring teachers the international Advanced Program for Graphic Design had until 2005. He accepted the teaching position at the Yale Summer Program in Graphic Design in Brissago, Switzerland, upon Armin Hofmann's request. Internally grateful for this action.

"Anyone who uses Helvetica knows nothing about typefaces."

CAREER AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

In 1976, he designed a poster for photographer John Glagola which presented wide silver bars printed across the artist's name. The poster depicted the decline of foundry type as a viable commercial means of printing. For over four decades Weingart has extensively taught and delivered lectures across Europe, Asia, New Zealand, North and South America, and Australia. According to him, he never influenced his students to adopt a certain type of style, especially his own. However, his students misunderstood his teaching as his own style and spread it around as 'Weingart style'.

A retrospective of Weingart's work was mounted by The Museum of Design in Zurich from May to September in 2014. The exhibition, Weingart: Typography, was the first one to showcase

his personal work along with the product of his teaching. Weingart wrote a retrospective book on typography, which Lars Müller Publishers compiled in a volume in ten sections, Weingart: Typography — My Way to Typography, in 2000.

Furthermore, several designers,

“The simpler the assignment, the more difficult the solution.”

Knapp, Susan, Hofmann, Dorothea, Michael, collaborated on Weingart: The Man and the Machine. The book, published by Karo Publishing in 2014, is comprised of statements by 77 of Weingart's students at the Basel School of Design during the period 1968–2004. From 1978 to 1999, Wolfgang Weingart served

as the member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI). So he offered his services on the editorial board of the magazine, Typographische Monatsblätter, for eighteen long years.

The honorary title of Doctor of Fine Arts was conferred upon him by MassArt in 2005. The American Institute of Graphic Arts recognized his creative genius and for his typographic explorations and teaching, awarded him the highest honor of the design profession, AIGA Medal, in 2013. The following year the Federal Office of Culture presented him the Swiss Grand Prix of Design award. He was nominated for the award for his life-long merits as a professional graphic designer. Inspiring so many others. However, his students misunderstood spread it around as 'Weingart style'.

“What's the use of being legible, when nothing inspires you to take notice of it?”

EDUCATION:

“For me, typography is a triangular relationship between design idea, typographic elements, and, printing technique.”

In April 1958, at the age of 17, Weingart began a two-year course in the area of applied art and design. He was very eager to learn about the process of sketching and planning for linoleum and woodcuts, both which are printmaking techniques. He was also very interested in handset type and printing. During his free time he continued to work on personal projects that included working with setting type/print.

During this time he first encountered metal type. Wolfgang stated that during this moment that he, “could not foresee the potential, nor the creative freedom that awaited the typesetter with our twenty-six movable letters and their affiliated signs.” In 1960 Weingart began a three-year

typesetting apprenticeship at Ruwe Printing. During this time he became familiar with Swiss typography which inspired him and also enlivened his years as an apprentice.

While setting type it was like a childhood pleasure for Weingart as the methodical procedure brought back childhood memories. At this time he was very focused on Swiss typography however he became intrigued by the poster 'Giselle' designed in 1959 as he thought that the way the word Giselle was vertically arranged was both unabashed and courageous. Here was the first time he perceived the meaning of unity between type and image. It was at this time that Wolfgang mastered the techniques of letterpress printing and began to get more

experimental with his work with letters and type elements in round compositions. He also began to experiment with unusual letter spacing and the repetition of words on a singular page. In 1962 he chose to experiment with the letter 'M', this was an independent project that would follow him and interest him for many years to come. It was curiosity that influenced him to combine new signs with the letter 'M' and to experiment with changing its size, positions on the pages surfaces and also its angles. He learned to manipulate the letter he had chosen; bending it, twisting it, recreating it, deconstructing it and working with the space within the pages themselves. Through this he created very unique and diverse system.

“Berthold is still a good typeface, but even Berthold has some less than attractive features, and then I just cut them off because I didn't like them.”

TEACHING:

Weingart is known to have a rebellious mind-set and has liked to push the limits of what is considered as 'the norm' and from an early stage he broke the typographic rules by freeing letters from their restricting design grids. He spaced them, underlined them or reshaped them and reorganized type-setting. Weingart believed that the development of the Swiss Typography was becoming stagnant as it was sterile and anonymous. "Unbecoming."

His goal was to breathe new life into the teaching of new typography. He believed that the only way to break typographic rules was to know them; an advantage he gained from his apprenticeship. He encouraged

his students to look and experiment with, not only the basic design relationships with type placement, size and weight, but also with letter spacing, with the goal to test the limits of readability. He allowed his students to have the freedom to experiment and create in an expressionistic manner allowing certain graphic modifications of type thus intensifying meaning. Due to this his students dubbed this style as 'Weingart style', although Weingart states that he never forced any style on his students, and also did not set out to create a style.

The results of this experimentation conceived the realisation that with increased space between letters, the words became graphic in expression

and the message became less dependent upon reading than they had supposed. This act of experimenting challenged the role of typography, according to Emil Ruder, "Typography has one plain duty before it and that is to convey information in writing . . . A printed work which cannot be read becomes a product without purpose.." Processing designs.

This new style, or approach to typography that came from his students, became more popular and led to a new generation of designers that approached most design in an entirely different manner than traditional Swiss typography. These elements are produced in a simple but highly logical and still. Due to this his students dubbed this style as 'Weingart style',

*"Electronic equipment replaces neither
Eyes, Hands, nor Heart."*

NEW WAVE:

*"I took 'Swiss Typography' as my starting point, but then I blew it apart, never forcing any style upon my students.
I never intended to create a 'style'..."*

This new style of typography is the stylistic movement where graphic designers moved away from the International Style. Focusing more on playfulness than the grid, these 'New Wave' typographers pathed the way for future designers to explore graphic design. The style itself actively defies the strict grid-based arrangement conventions of the 'Swiss typography'. Characteristics of this new style include all the aspects that Wolfgang taught his students to experiment with, including; inconsistent letter spacing, varying type weights within single words and type set at non-right.

The 'New Wave' differs from the International typographic style by stretching the limits of legibility. By ignoring the grid structure, this meant that type could be placed centre, to the left or the right, or be chaotic. This gave the artist the freedom they wanted or needed to

express themselves. The text also became textured with the development of transparent film and the increase in collage in graphic design, a style that is very prominent in Wolfgang's work as himself mounted halftone films to form collages for many of his posters. Correcting problems.

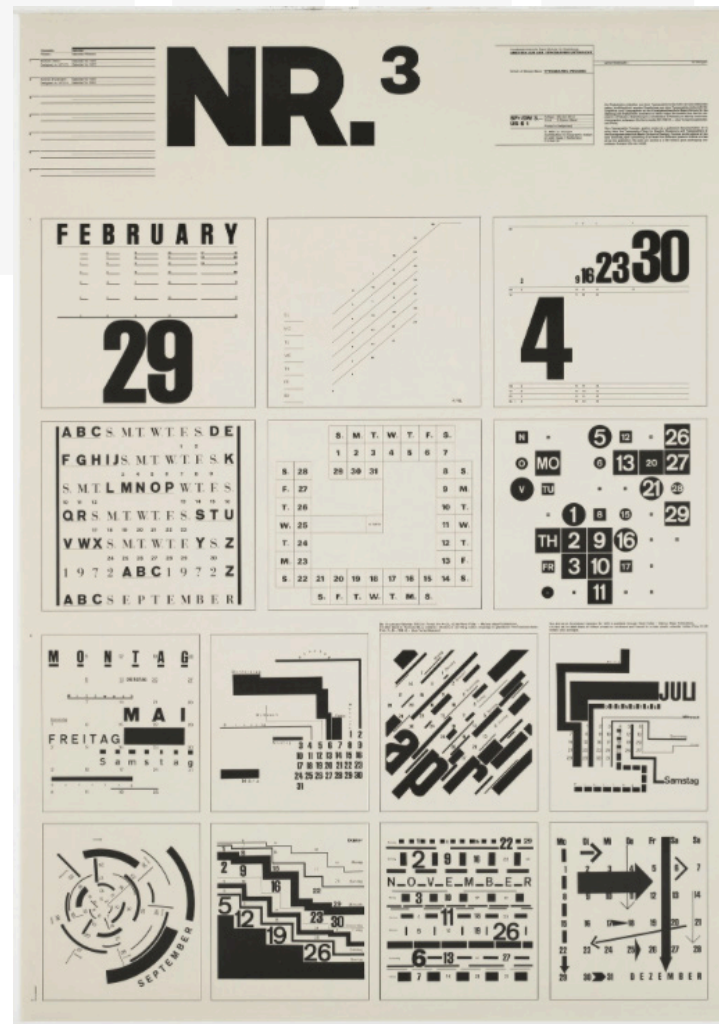
The practitioners of this new style, also called Swiss punk designers, disagreed with the less is more and minimalist philosophy, by ascribing that typography can play a more expressive role and that this increase in expression aimed to improve communication. Therefore, New Wave designers such as Weingart felt intuition was just as valuable as analytical skill in composition.

Weingart's 'new wave' work and thinking included letter spacing, bold stair-stepped rules, rule lines punctuating space, diagonal type, mixing typefaces or weight changes within words, and type reversed from a series of bars. His work is

very experimental and included experimenting with the offset printing processes to produce posters that appeared both complex and chaotic but also playful and spontaneous resulting in unusual textures and building up images within his posters.

These posters then became his most famous and admired works and in creating these posters, Weingart revived the techniques inspired by Dada collage and photo montage by layering images and type that had been photographed. One of his most famous posters and most experimental practises was in the making of his 1984 exhibition poster of the 'Matterhorn' which he created by crumpling up tissue and photocopying it to get a range of shapes, tones and textures.. Throughout his career Wolfgang has become a very well-known, from his teachings and the designs he has made. Matterhorn' which he created. New Wave designers such as Weingart felt intuition.

POSTERS



Nr 3. Calendar Text Structures

Date: 1971-1972
Type/Medium: Lithograph
Size: 34 1/2 x 24 1/4" (87.6 x 61.6 cm)
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Didacta Eurodidac

Date: 1980-81
Type/Medium: Lithograph
Size: 50 3/4 x 35 1/2" (128.9 x 90.2 cm)
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Nr 2. From Simple to Complex

Date: 1973
Type/Medium: Lithograph
Size: 34 1/2 x 24 1/4" (87.6 x 61.6 cm)
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Nr 4. Typographic Signs

Date: 1971-1972
Type/Medium: Lithograph
Size: 34 1/2 x 24 1/4" (87.6 x 61.6 cm)
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Das Schweizer Plakat

Date: 1984

Type/Medium: Offset Lithograph

Size: 47 1/4 x 33 1/8" (120 x 84.1 cm)

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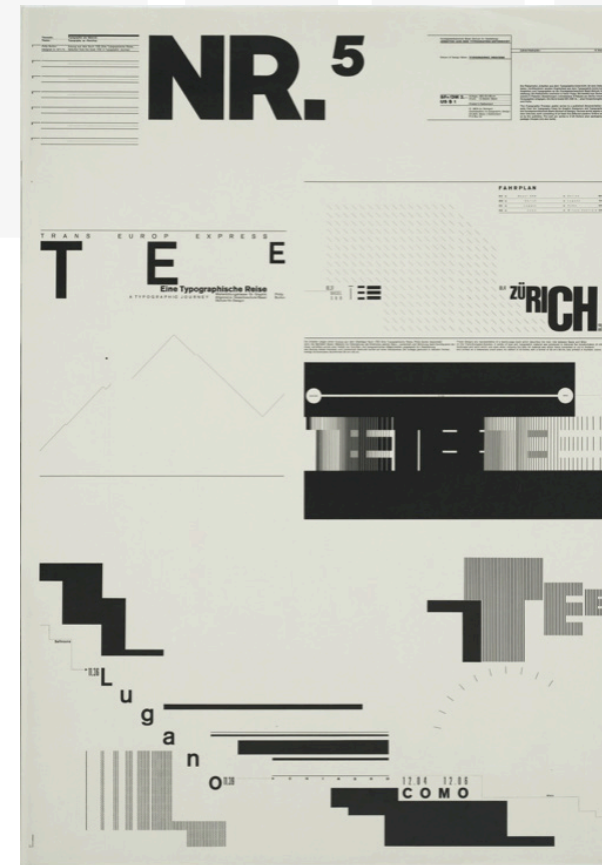
Nr 5. Typography as (Painting)

Date: 1971-1974

Type/Medium: Lithograph

Size: 34 1/2 x 24 1/4" (87.6 x 61.6 cm)

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Kunsthalle Basel Kunstcredit 76-77

Date: 1977

Type/Medium: Lithograph

Size: 50 3/8 x 35 1/2" (128 x 90.2 cm)

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Original 1980s Modern Swiss

Date: 1981

Type/Medium: Offset

Size: 50.3 x 35.4 in. (128 x 90 cm)

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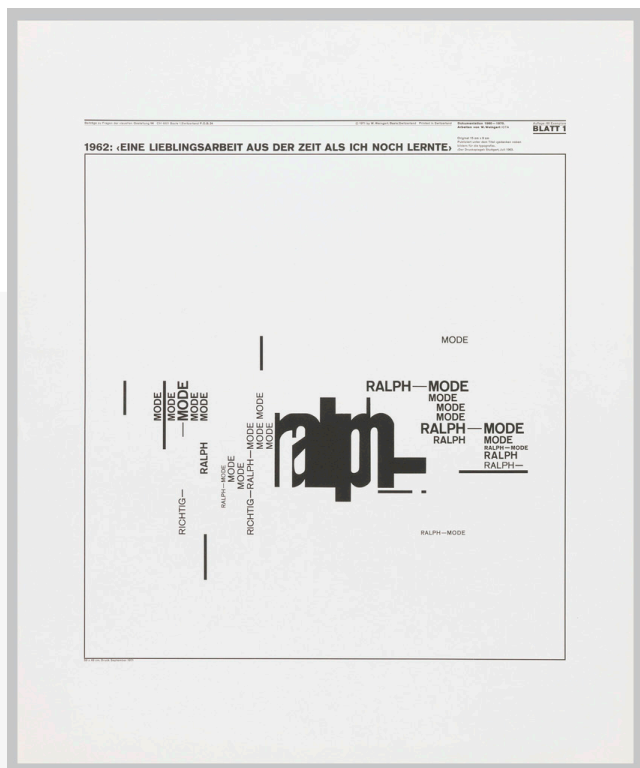


Herbert Bayer, Das künstlerische Werk

Date: 1982
Type/Medium: Offset
Size: 35 x 50 in. (90 x 128 cm)
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GEFUNDEN 1963 AUF DER STRABE

Date: 1971
Type/Medium: Lithograph on off-white paper
Size: 65.1 x 48.5 cm (25 5/8 x 19 1/8 in.)
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BEITRÄGE ZU FRAGEN DER VISUELLEN

Date: 1962
Type: Lithograph on white wove paper
Size: 58.9 x 49 cm (23 3/16 x 19 5/16 in.)
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TYPOGRAPHISCHE KALENDAR-BLÄTER

Date: 1974-75
/Medium: Offset lithograph, orange wove paper
Size: 41.9 x 42.1 cm (16 1/2 x 16 9/16 in.)
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TROTZ DER WUNDERSCHÖNEN KASSETTE

Date: 1972-1973
Type/Medium: Lithograph on off-white paper
Size: 60.1 x 45.1 cm (23 11/16 x 17 3/4 in.)
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JEWELRY SPECIAL EXHIBITION

Date: 1976
Medium: Offset lithograph on yellow wove
Size: 101.8 x 71.1 cm (40 1/16 x 28 in.)
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CALENDAR PICTURES

Date: 1971
Medium: Lithograph on white wove paper
Size: 47.9 x 36.1 cm (18 7/8 x 14 3/16 in.)
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PRINT, 1974: COLLAGE 8

Date: 1975
Medium: offset lithograph, heavy white wove
Size: 58.9 x 48.9 cm (23 3/16 x 19 1/4 in.)
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Matthew DeSouza

For more information, visit aiga.org/exhibits