text + work

EUREKA
An exhibition of the
Idea-based Graphic Design
of Bob Gill
in collaboration
with norwich gallery
Norwich School
of Art & Design

text+work, The Gallery
The Arts Institute
at Bournemouth

25th September –
21st October 2006
Event 5th October 2006

text+work is presenting a comprehensive exhibition of the design work of Bob Gill in collaboration with norwich gallery, Norwich School of Art & Design.

This exhibition was developed out of the expertiseof Ray Gregory who was taught at the Royal College of Art by Bob Gill in the early 1970's.

Bob Gill is a designer, an illustrator, a copywriter,a filmmaker, and a teacher. His work has been shown in Europe, South America, the Far East andin the US.

As part of the concept of text+work, Bob talks about his process as a designer. It has been said that Bob has a unique ability to cut right to the chase; to take a complex design problem and arrive at an exciting and intelligent solution. He has also been described as being among the most inventive designers of his generation.

text+work underpins the current exhibition programme at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth's gallery. norwich gallery is part of Norwich School of Art & Design and it has run a consistent programme of exhibitions of contemporary art and design since the 1970's.

Letting go

In the beginning, I, along with most graphic designers, was preoccupied with aesthetics and fashion. I wasn't really interested in communication. I presumed to know what a well designed job should look like, before I bothered to find out its purpose.

But that was a long time ago.

I eventually realized that it was more exciting not to know what a well designed job should look like.

Design, for me, was no longer a fashionable typeface or a layout looking like a Mondrian with lots of white space. Design became a process for solving problems. I realized that any design was valid as long as it solved the problem in a precise and original way.

As I began thinking in this new way, my relationship with clients began to change. I stopped trying to ram my aesthetic prejudices down their throats. Why should clients have my tastes? My background was in art. Theirs was in commerce.

We began to communicate on a different level. We talked about solutions and ideas instead of design.

Of course, the design process doesn't end with getting a valid idea. It only begins there. The idea has to be realised. The design decisions must not look arbitrary. I try to make them seem inevitable.

Aside from letting go of my preconceptions about design, there's something else that affects my process.

Reality

The audience for, say, a black and white, three inch, one column ad, is the same audience that will have seen the latest alien film and the hottest music video with special effects that are dazzling.

How can a graphic designer hope to compete with this magic? We don't have the technology, or the budgets, or the time.

If we want to attract attention to our work, we have to go to the other extreme. We have to go to reality! We must take a careful look at the real world, and, in effect, say to our audience, "look – have you ever noticed this before, even though it was right under your nose?"

That, to me, is more exciting than the most amazing special effects.

I appreciate that designers love choosing colors, pushing type and shapes around, drawing in a particular style, and imposing the latest graphic tricks on their next job, regardless of whether they are appropriate or not.

I love color, type, shapes, too. However, I'm prepared to wait until I have something interesting to say before I begin to design.

I believe that the more interesting the message, the more likely it is that the image will be interesting.

The Culture

I try to ignore what the culture tells me is interesting.

The culture tells everyone what's exciting, what's interesting; and most designers spend their time trying to emulate what's supposed to be hot, what's current, what's trendy.

But just think, if we want to do something that's original, how can we rely on what the culture tells us? Remember, the culture tells all of us the same thing.

Neil Postman, in his brilliant book, Amusing Ourselves to Death, tells us that when 1984 came, we boasted that the ominous prediction by George Orwell, in 1984 that we would be enslaved by Big Brother, never happened.

Postman also said that Aldous Huxley's prediction Brave New World,

"that people will come to love their oppression, and adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think," did come true.

It's not Big Brother who's watching you, it's Disney, and Time/Life and Rupert Murdoch, and a few other mega-corporations.

The culture which they inflict on us through their virtual monopoly of television, cable, CDs, radio, fashion, film etc. is designed almost exclusively to appeal to the lowest common denominator, which, in turn, allows them to market the largest amount of stuff. Of course, they allow just enough high culture, to show that they are not Philistines.

And judging from their insatiable appetite to control more and more media, there will be even less diversity in the future.

So if we are to become original thinkers, we must extricate ourselves from the culture's avalanche of white bread.

That's the hardest part.

Getting there

When I get a job, regardless of how familiar the subject, I resist the temptation to think I know enough about it, and that I'm ready to design. I assume all of the information and imagery was supplied by the culture mafia, that none of the information or imagery is original with me.

Here's an example of a typical design problem: an art gallery's moving announcement:

Of course, I know something about art galleries, and something about moving. But at that point, I have nothing to say that's original.

I take a fresh look at the subject.

I do some research: I talk to the proprietor. I visit the gallery.
I look around.

I stay there as long as it takes to notice something that I honestly think is interesting.

Eventually, I changed the problem to what I thought was a more interesting one:

Problem: What do the walls look like in an art gallery after it has moved?

The Forum Gallery is moving to
745 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10151 Tel 212-355-4545 Fax 212-355-4547
on December 1, 2006

Connections

Even I, with my limited knowledge of science, know that everything in the universe is related.

All the more reason to assume that no matter how two parts of a statement seem to be unrelated, it should always be possible to find a simple, single image to represent both parts.

A typical problem that involves two unrelated subjects: one serious, one not serious. Logo for a series of informal luncheons hosted by the United Nations Association.

LUN.cH

Exaggeration

My interest in reality also includes reality with a twist.

A client that repairs cast-off computers and donates them to schools and various charities has as their slogan, *a computer is a terrible thing to waste*.

When I had to incorporate the slogan in an ad, I thought it would be more powerful if I used it as a quotation.

And then, as long as I used it as a quotation, I thought I might as well attribute it to the greatest quotation generator of them all.

> ## "A computer is a terrible thing to waste."
> William Shakespeare

Stealing is good

People have been making images for thousands of years; x-rays, flags, NASA moon photographs, comic books, cave paintings, theatre masks, pub signs, graffiti, daguerreotypes, engravings, Christmas cards, the Mona Lisa, etc.

These images, depending upon how they are used, can transcend their original narrow purpose.

They can represent a specific historical period or a cultural attitude or something else I can't imagine at the moment.

If a designer comes across an existing image which says exactly what is required, and which was never intended by its original creator for the same purpose, and you're not violating someone's copyright, I see nothing wrong with using it.

As in this program cover for a piano recital:

I asked the pianist about the program. He told me it ranged from Rachmaninoff to Gershwin.

I went to the picture collection in the New York Public Library and found an engraving of a piano from the same period as Rachmaninoff.

And I found an illustration, obviously from the thirties, which was from Gershwin's period.

I stole both images.

Bob Gill

LOGO
MANiA

1 problem; 31 solutions (plus other stuff).

One other thing

I often hear designers say, "if only my client was not such an idiot, if only he had a modicum of taste, what beautiful symphonies I could create for him."

I don't believe it.

I think there's no such thing as a bad client. Only bad designers.

For years, I've been telling my students, and anyone else who would listen, that no matter how many times a client turns down your absolutely brilliant solution, for whatever dopey, arbitrary reason, you should be able to go away and do another absolutely brilliant solution.

And sometimes it's even better the second time.

As clients usually accept my solution the first or second time, or they decide that I'm the wrong designer, and they get rid of me, I've never had a chance to test my theory of unlimited good solutions.

That's why I decided to do a book where I solved the same logo again, and again, and again.

I must confess, thirty-two solutions are not quite unlimited, but I trust my point will have been made.

Bob Gill
Designer, Illustrator, Film Maker
Copywriter + Teacher

Lecturer in the Graduate Department,
Pratt Institute, New York.

September 2006

Bob Gill

Designer, Illustrator, Film Maker,
Copywriter + Teacher
Lecturer in the Graduate Department,
Pratt Institute, New York.

Bob Gill is a designer, a New Yorker,
an illustrator, a copywriter, a film-maker,
a teacher, and a terrible jazz pianist.

He spent two years at the Philadelphia
College of Art and a few months at
The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art.

He returned to New York to begin
freelancing, soon to be interrupted
by the draft during the Korean War.

After his discharge, he continued
freelancing. This time with a telephone
and answering machine.

He went to London on a whim in
1960 as an art director in a small
advertising agency.
He hated it.

The agency life, not London. He loved
London and stayed fifteen years.

Together with Alan Fletcher and Colin
Forbes, two talented young designers,
he started Fletcher/Forbes/Gill, on April
Fool's day in 1962.

F/F/G began with two assistants and
a secretary. Today it's called Pentagram,
with offices everywhere except Tibet.
Gill resigned in 1967 to work
independently in London. The office
was already getting too big.

After that, he spent half of his time
designing, half illustrating, half
teaching at the Royal College of Art,
and the other half making industrial
films and television commercials.

He returned to New York in 1975, to
write and design Beatlemania,
a history of the sixties with a Beatles
score, the largest live and multi-media

musical ever on Broadway, with Robert Rabinowitz, the painter.

Gill asked, "what's multi-media?"

He's had one-man shows in Europe, South America, the Far East and in the US.

He was elected to the New York Art Directors Club Hall of Fame and the Designers and Art Directors Association of London recently presented him with their Lifetime Achievement Award.

Among his books on design and illustration:

Forget everything you ever learned about graphic design, including what's in this book

Graphic Design Made Difficult

Unspecial effects for Graphic Designers

Graphic Design as a Second Language

Illustration

Logomania

He's also written and illustrated a number of children's books.

He's now living in New York with his wife, Public Radio's Sara Fishko, their son Jack, and their daughter Kate.

Elizabeth I. McCann, Nelli Nugent & Ray Larsen present

RICHARD DREYFUSS in TOTAL ABANDON

with John Heard, Clifton James, George N. Martin

Written by Larry Atlas Directed by Jack Hofsiss

Setting: David Jenkins Costumes: Julie Weiss Lighting: Beverly Emmons

Associate Producer: Marc Flatt

TOTAL ABANDON
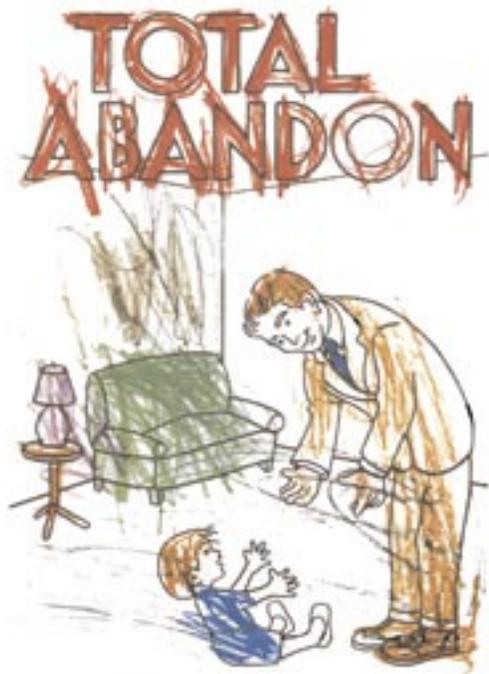
Booth Theatre

222 W. 45th St.

text+work

The Gallery at The Arts Institute at Bournemouth is a major resource for contemporary visual art at the Institute and has received regional and national recognition.

The concept of text+work underpinning the exhibition programme, promotes dialogue between innovative contemporary art and design practice and its theoretical context. It provides a platform for practitioners, writers and curators who wish to examine and extend the boundaries between contemporary practice and critical discourse. There are text+work gallery events, critical texts, shared and networked exhibitions, and a text+work website. A text (essay) is published by text+work to accompany each exhibition in the text+work programme.

norwich gallery

norwich gallery is part of Norwich School of Art & Design and it has run a consistent program of exhibitions of contemporary art and design since the 1970's.

It is one of the pioneering art school galleries in the regions. It has worked successfully with the idea that there is as much subject expertise within a regional art school as there is in a major museum.

The gallery has been curated by Lynda Morris since 1980 and she established the major open exhibition EAST international which has taken place annually since 1991.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EVENTS

text+work The Gallery at the Arts Institute at Bournemouth invites you and your guests to the text+work event and private view on
Thursday 5th October 2006
4.30pm – 5.30pm
Lecture Theatre One
Followed by a Private View in The Gallery from 5.30pm – 6.30pm

Please RSVP to
Violet McClean, Gallery Officer   t 01202 363351   e vmcclean@aib.ac.uk

norwich gallery, Norwich School of Art & Design
Opening 4 October 7.30pm to 9pm
Public Lecture, 4 October: 6.30pm
Blackfriars Hall Norwich

Bob Gill will present a free public lecture at Blackfriars Hall.
Tickets are available in advance from Norwich Gallery.

For further information please contact Dan Tombs, Assistant Curator
d.tombs@nsad.ac.uk or 01603 610561 ext: 6375

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In conjunction with norwich gallery, Norwich School of Art & Design

25 September – 21 October 2006

The Gallery, The Arts Institute at Bournemouth
Opening Hours
9.00am – 8.00pm   Monday – Thursday (Term Time)
9.00am – 6.00pm   Monday – Thursday (Summer Time)
9.00am – 4.00pm   Friday
9.00am – 1.00pm   Saturday (Term Time)
Closed Bank Holidays

text+work
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