

RECOMMENDED READING

Artists & Designers of Note

Boundaries

Maya Lin
Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition 2006

A surprisingly lucid and accessible first person account of Lin's design process. If only there were some graphic designers out there that could write so elegantly and clearly about their work.

Despite Straight Lines

Joseph Albers
MIT Press, 1977, or Yale University Press, 1961

His drawings rather than paintings, using, you guessed it — straight lines, to create 3D illusions in 2D. Good inspiration for an alternative approach to drawing and symbol work. I think I found my copy used after a 15-year search through dusty bookstores.

Recommended by Rob Hugel

Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph

Doon Arbus (Editor), Marvin Israel (Editor), Diane Arbus (Photographer)

Aperture; 25th Anniversary edition, 1997

One of the most important photographers of the 20th century, Diane Arbus teaches us how to really see through her often disturbing black and white photography.

For the Voice

Written by Vladamir Mayakovsky
Designed by El Lissitzky
MIT Press, 2000

Whenever possible, go to the source, find the original, experience it first hand. Holding For the Voice, first published in 1923, in your hands is holding a landmark in modern graphic design history and one of the finest achievements of Russian avant-garde bookmaking, a tradition in which poets and artists collaborate. This book was inspired by "new optics," where letters become image and, as Lissitzky wrote, by "words that are seen and not heard."

Inside/Outside: From the Basics to the Practice of Design

Malcolm Grear

Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1993

I think, out of print, and maybe a better resource for Level 1 and 2 faculty than for students, but you never know, some of my past students were suitably inspired. It includes many school projects and examples of student work from this longtime RISD GD1 professor, as well as examples from his professional practice circa 1965-1990.

Ndebele.

Margaret Courtney-Clarke

Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1986

A spectacularly visual book documenting the graphic patterns of the Ndebele women of South Africa. A lesson about what can be done graphically with almost no resources.

Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design

R. Roger Remington, Barbara J. Hodik

MIT Publishers, 1989

Including William Golden, Lester Beall, Alvin Lustig, Ladislav Sutnar.

Tibor Kalman, Perverse Optimist

Peter Hall and Michael Bierut, Editors

Princeton Architectural Press, 2000

Design Theory

The Aleph (in The Aleph and Other Stories)

Jorge Luis Borges

Penguin Classics; Reprint edition, 2004

The Art of Contemplation

Alan Watts

Society for Comparative Philosophy, 1972

A handwritten essay (with drawings) on the art of contemplation published by the Society for Comparative Philosophy in Sausalito, California. Being aware of the Beat Philosophy is local lore and understanding of an era. The ideas Watts presents are of a creative nature and foster inquiry into self.

The Art of Looking Sideways

Alan Fletcher

Phaidon Press, 2001

As Long As It's Pink. The Sexual Politics of Taste.

Penny Sparke

Harper Collins Publishers, 1995

A really engaging book by a historian of modern design, Penny Sparke investigates the assignment of the roles of taste/design/gender.

Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life

Anne Lamott

Anchor, 1995

Replace the word "write" with the word "design" throughout this book and you're all set.

The process of creating design as well. Dispels a lot of the "genius" myths around creative endeavours, and provides indispensable tips for research strategies and generating work.

Chasing the Perfect

Natalia Ilyin

Metropolis Books, 2006

This is a newer book that just blew my mind. It's a personal meditation on Modernism where Ilyin contrasts design's undying love for all that is modern with the ill effects Modernism has had on her everyday life. One of the more thought-provoking texts I have read in a long while.

Recommended by Eric Heiman

Design Writing Research

Ellen Lupton & J. Abbott Miller

Phaidon Press; New Ed edition, 1999

I've had this book since I was in school, and it is still is about the only design text that successfully packages design theory and history in an intelligent, accessible and, god forbid, smartly visual way.

The Dialectics of Seeing

Susan Buck-Morss

The MIT Press; Reprint edition, 1991

This is a penetrating guide to Walter Benjamin's seminal work which looks closely at design as a site of collective expression and of loaded representations — of technology and its social meaning, in particular, and of modernity and history in general.

The Evolution of Useful Things

Henry Petroski

Vintage; Reprint edition, 1994

Worth reading of the section called "Form Follows Failure."

Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman

James Gleick

Vintage; Reprint edition, 1993

Reason 1 for reading: The practice of design and the practice of theoretical physics are remarkably similar in that both operate within constraints. Reason 2 for reading: What we do is not terribly creative when compared to the work of those engaged in theoretical math and science

Has Modernism Failed?

Suzi Gablik

Thames & Hudson; 2nd Rev edition, 2004

Illuminations

Walter Benjamin

Schocken Books, 1969

"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"—this essay, in particular, is relevant to students of graphic design. Benjamin discusses issues that affect how we understand "art" that has been altered by technologies of reproduction. Although written in the earlier part of the 20th century, this essay is surprisingly relevant today. The introduction by philosopher Hannah Arendt clarifies the importance of Benjamin as a cultural critic. (There is also a new book of Benjamin essays, "Volume 2," which contains many short essays on a wide variety of topics. Not all of Benjamin's writings lie within the area of literary criticism. He is now considered to be the father of cultural theory.)

Recommended by Leslie Becker

The Medium Is the Massage

Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore
Gingko Press; New Ed edition, 2005

This is an exemplary work, demonstrating the capacity of graphic design to interpret and activate a text in continuously inventive ways, using only the tools at its immediate disposal and the basic structure of the book.

Recommended by Emily McVarish

No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs

Naomi Klein
Picador, 2002

A Thousand Plateaus

Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze
University of Minnesota Press, 1987

Film/Motion

Art and Film since 1945: Hall of Mirrors

Kerry Brougher, Jonathan Crary, Russell Ferguson (Editor), Bruce Jenkins, Kate Linker

Monacelli, 1996

Designing for Interaction

Dan Saffer
Peachpit Press; 1st edition, 2006

This book is a clear, concise account of what comprises good design for interaction. All modern websites are vehicles for interaction graphic designers who want to work for the web need to be thinking about interactivity. This book is the best I have seen yet to deal with this burgeoning topic. This book is recommended by AIGA.

Experience Design

Nathan Shedroff
Waite Group Press; 1st edition, 2001

A personal, somewhat philosophical and sometimes surprising ramble through this broad ranging subject. A must read for anyone who thinks about and designs websites. It's all about the experience.

In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing

Walter Murch

Silman-James Press; 1st edition, 1995

Imagine your grandfather writing a small book comparing film to sight.

An essay on film editing by the master. Many of his principles apply to any art medium

History

Film Posters of the Russian Avant-garde

Susan Pack

Benedikt Taschen Verlag; Original Ed edition, 1996

Recommended by Sandra Kelch

Graphic Agitation

Liz McQuiston

Phaidon Press; Reprint edition, 1995

It was agitprop/political work that got me interested in graphic design in the first place, and this book does a great job of gathering these materials from around the world. Very inspiring.

Recommended by Alysha Naples

The History and Power of Writing

Henri-Jean Martin

Translated by Lydia G. Cochrane

University of Chicago Press, 1995

This book is a similarly exhaustive and valuable history of print "culture," though I do not find it to be as compelling a read or as socially aware as Eisenstein's book.

Recommended by Stuart McKee

The Printing Press as an Agent of Change

Elizabeth Eisenstein

Cambridge University Press; New Ed edition, 1980

Unfortunately this book is no longer in print, but it is routinely available through used book web searches, though not necessarily at a cheap price. I think that it is an essential read because it functions as both an authoritative history of print "culture" which transcends the typical who-did-what-when approach, and also functions as a seminal history of the social implications of print media.

Suffragettes to She-Devils

Liz McQuiston

Phaidon Press, 1997

Information Design

Beautiful Evidence

Edward R. Tufte

Graphics Press, 2006

Tufte opens Beautiful Evidence with the following quote from the British typographer Eric Gill: "If you look after truth and goodness, beauty looks after herself." Through the thinking, writing, design and production of his books, Tufte exemplifies what design (across all disciplines) should encompass: critical thinking, lucid communication, and beauty in form.

Recommended by Angie Wang

Envisioning Information

Edward R. Tufte

Graphics Press, 1990

Recommended by Angie Wang

The Visual Display of Quantitative Information

Edward R. Tufte

Graphics Press; 2nd edition, 2001

Recommended by Angie Wang

Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative

Edward R. Tufte

Graphics Press, 1997

Recommended by Angie Wang

Practice

Conscientious Objectives: Designing for an Ethical Message

Yolanda Zappaterra, John L. Cranmer

Rotovision, 2004

Recommended by Sandra Kelch

The Education of A Graphic Designer

Steven Heller (Editor)

Allworth Press; 2nd edition, 2005

Includes an interview with Michael Vanderbyl.

Recommended by Steve Reoutt

Graphic Design Manual: Principles and Practice

Armin Hofman

Reinhold Publishing, 1966

Arthur Niggli; Multilingual edition, 2001

A basic primer on the elements of image and form

Grid Systems

Josef Müller-Brockmann

Arthur Niggli; Bilingual edition, 1996

This is simply the best book on the subject that has been written. I think it should be required reading for every graphic designer.

How to Be a Graphic Designer Without Losing Your Soul

Adrian Shaughnessy

Princeton Architectural Press, 2005

Signs and Symbols, Their Design and Meaning

Adrian Frutiger

Watson-Guption Publications; Reprint edition, 1998

This exhaustive work examines symbols in their myriad forms, including the history of writing and writing's origin in drawing. Frutiger convincingly shows that every mark has meaning, and that "emptiness does not mean 'nothing'."

The Universal Principles of Design

William Lidwell, Kritina Holden, Jill Butler

Rockport Publishers, 2003

The Universal Principles of Design uses a clarity of language to describe design function and aesthetic which I find very helpful both in teaching and in the area of client education. The terms are backed by studies in many instances.

Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing
Margaret Livingstone

Harry N. Abrams, 2002

Harvard Medical School neurobiology professor Margaret S. Livingstone explains how great artists exploit the functions of the human eye and brain — with pictures!

2D Visual Perception

Moritz Zwimpfer
Arthur Niggli, 2001

This book presents the elementary phenomena of two-dimensional perception with concrete, simple, visual examples. True to da Vinci's wisdom, simplicity is the ultimate sophistication, as these 18 chapters introduce us to the eye of the perceiver, our audience as graphic designers, and the power therein.

Ways of Seeing

John Berger
Penguin (Non-Classics); Reprint edition, 1990

This slim book explores the relationship between art, advertising, desire and capitalism. A must-read.

Print Design

Designing Books Practice and Theory

Hochuli and Kinross

Hyphen; New Ed edition, 2004

Understanding Comics, the Invisible Art

Scott McCloud
Harper Paperbacks; Reprint edition, 1994

Ostensibly a comic book about comics, McCloud will broaden your understanding of symbolism, the relationship between words and images, narrative, time as a function of narrative, and communication. Fun!

Typography

American Metal Typefaces of the Twentieth Century

Mac McGrew
Oak Knoll Press; 2nd/Rev edition, 1993

Dutch Type

Jan Middendorp
Uitgeverij 010 Publishers, Netherlands, 2004

Encyclopaedia of Typefaces

W. Pincus Jaspert, W. Turner Berry, A.F. Johnson, authors
Seven Dials; Paperback edition, 2001

How Can One Make Swiss Typography?

Wolfgang Weingart
Octavo, 1972

Actually not the big yellow and red book, but the seminal illustrated lecture from Weingart's first US tour reprinted in Octavo 87.4.

Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors & Students

Ellen Lupton
Princeton Architectural Press; 1st edition, 2004

Despite of its stodgy title, this book is highly accessible/easily digestible. A great primer for anyone interested in acquiring a rudimentary understanding of type, cultivating good type etiquette and avoiding heinous type crimes.

The Elements of Typographic Style

Robert Bringhurst
Hartley and Marks Publishers, 2004

Possibly one of the most comprehensive and coherent resources on type and type history. A poet writing about typography- — what more can any typophile ask for? If you were to purchase only one book on typography, make it this one.

Typographica

Rick Poynor
Princeton Architectural Press, 2001

Examination of the culturally influential British design journal and its publisher/designer, Herbert Spencer. Typographica was published in London in two series of sixteen issues each, from 1949 to 1967. Many beautiful and instructive reproductions.

Typography As Communication and Form

Emil Ruder
Bancroft Library Press, 1975

The Visible Word
Johanna Drucker

University Of Chicago Press; New Ed edition, 1997

This book remains one of the most thorough explorations of the theoretical implications of the early modern typographic experimentation that gave rise to graphic design as we know it.