



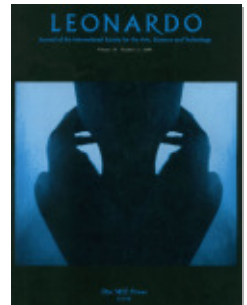
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A Typographic Workbook: A Primer to History, Techniques and Artistry by Kate Clair (review)

Roy R. Behrens

Leonardo, Volume 33, Number 2, April 2000, p. 152 (Review)

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world,” tens of thousands of which ended up in museum collections throughout the world. Many (perhaps most) American and European artists and designers were influenced by the then-strange stylistic traits of these prints (crisp black outlines, bold flat areas of color, asymmetrical arrangements and dramatic cropping), among them such people as Whistler, Manet, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Aubrey Beardsley and Frank Lloyd Wright. “All my work,” wrote Vincent van Gogh to his brother, “is in a way founded on Japanese art.” This stunning volume is a full-color treasury of 130 of the woodcuts (introduced and annotated by scholars) from the many now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

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A TYPOGRAPHIC WORKBOOK: A PRIMER TO HISTORY, TECHNIQUES AND ARTISTRY

by Kate Clair. Wiley, New York, NY, U.S.A., 1999. ISBN: 0-471-29237-0.

Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens, Department of Art, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA 50613-0362, U.S.A. E-mail: <ballast@netins.net>.

This is a 370-page college-level textbook about the use of printed letter forms, or what is more widely and commonly known as “typography.” It is surprisingly ambitious, in the sense that it makes an attempt to discuss an enormous range of issues, large and small, related to the history, theory and practice of typographic design. The result, which interweaves an astonishing amount of text with hundreds (maybe thousands) of black-and-white illustrations (of mixed quality), is easily enough to fill two or three volumes. The first 270 pages consist of 20 chapters with such general headings as “Readability and Legibility,” “Typographic Hierarchy” and “The Grid Structure.” Within each chapter, there are a dozen or more subsections on such topics as “Designing with Two Families of Type,” “Letterspacing and Its Effect on Readability” and “Color Symbolism through Time.” Intended to function also as a type specimen book, it ends with 75 pages of type samples, while, throughout the volume, the texts

on the pages are purposely set in varying type styles, with annotations about typeface, size and leading: how admirable to have put all this information under one cover. Yet, sadly, it suffers the critical flaw that, too often, the typography and layout of the book contradict the book’s own principles. For example, nearly all the text is set in 8.5 point type with 12 point leading, regardless of typeface. While this may be convenient for type comparisons, the effect is devastating for the reader, since some type styles can survive dense paragraphs at that setting, while others cannot. In the book’s opening pages, the boldface, small cap headings for “dedication” and “acknowledgments” are so small and tightly letter spaced that they are all but unreadable. These strange errors, of which there are many throughout the book, are not quibbles. The relationship between what one says (content) and how one speaks (form) is essential in design, which is largely about form and function and, in the end, the book undermines its own credibility. It is, after all, an arrangement of type about type arrangement, a book about book design.

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TECHNO TEXTILES: REVOLUTIONARY FABRICS FOR FASHION AND DESIGN

by Sarah E. Braddock and Marie O’Mahony. Thames and Hudson, New York, USA, 1998. 192 pp., illus. Paper, \$29.95. ISBN: 0-500-28096-7.

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Textile technology is at the forefront of materials development, fashion and architecture. *Techno Textiles, Revolutionary Fabrics for Fashion and Textiles* begins by asserting that “The astonishing new technology in contemporary textiles is narrowing the gap between the worlds of art, design, engineering and science.” In what appears to be a valiant attempt to cover every aspect of contemporary techno-textiles the book is packed with a mass of images, technical descriptions and, perhaps most interestingly, explorations of new definitions of textiles. The result is that the authors

have created an exciting and fascinating salad of mixed sources, images and technologies that explores an heroically wide range of materials, applications and philosophies.

The book is divided into two substantive parts and a reference section. The first part, “Innovations,” investigates the future of fiber and fabrics, electronic textiles, engineered textiles and textile finishes. This is followed by “Transformations,” which is a fascinating and varied assemblage of examples of revolutionary applications of textiles in fashion, design, architecture and art. The reference section—which has an extensive bibliography and a comprehensive directory of technical terms, biographies, useful addresses, important exhibitions and collections—is a valuable resource for the designer and historian.

The authors have produced a fascinating book that is culturally wide ranging, open to influences as diverse as Stelarc and geosynthetic construction fabrics in architecture. This range is both its asset and its difficulty. Any work of such scope that seeks to retain its *joie de vivre* is bound to be somewhat discursive if it is to avoid becoming unwieldy. At its best *Techno Textiles* illustrates a fascinating, varied and excitingly fresh take on the notion of how textiles might be utilized as both material and creative inspiration. The connections and tensions between the understanding of textiles in architecture and fashion, which the authors highlight, are fascinating, especially when applied to the section dealing with textiles in art practice.

But the sheer ambition of the enterprise forces a discontinuity, resulting in two books in one jacket. Part 1 and Part 2 have quite different characters, and it almost appears as if they have been written as separate entities. This is perhaps a reflection of the difficulty that the authors have had in making the connections between such diverse sources. In its worst moments, the book sometimes seems to lose track of what it is trying to say as for example, in dealing with Stelarc and the cyborg, ideas that are only tenuously linked to the subject of the book. The evident excitement of the authors and their openness to the ideas and discussions about the intimacy of textiles and the body as a carrier and node to information systems sometimes drives them to make some odd inclusions. That said, however, the infectious enthusiasm of the