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I HATED GRAPHIC DESIGN

GILBERT

This series tells the story of how graphic design was dreamed up by some frighteningly old Euro males in order to automate their ugly cousins out of the Lord's work. Graphic design turned out to be highly persuasive communicology, went a little out of control, but then spent half a millennium years grinding the gears of its legacy hardware.

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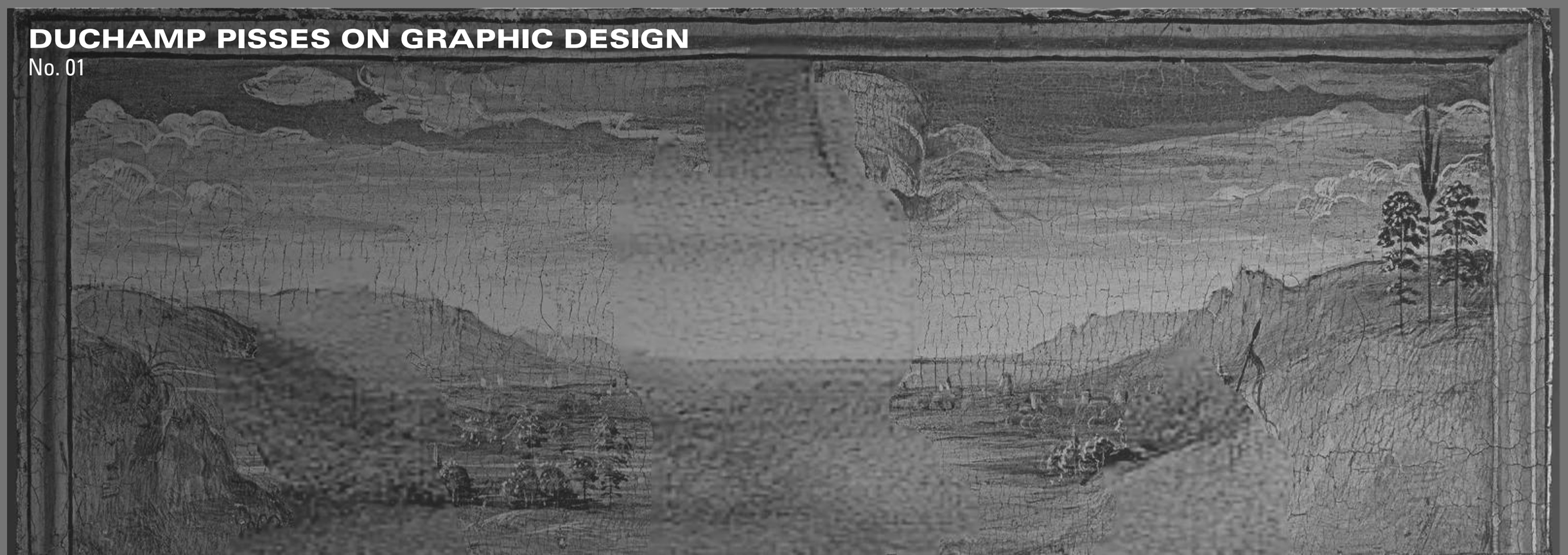
I HATED GRAPHIC DESIGN

The term *graphic design* is properly supposed to describe a specific professional managerial role in a twentieth-century division of labor, but, frankly, that's the kind of dutiful historical fidelity you can forget about with Gilbert. You know graphic design when you see it: /imagine innocent off-white device isometric 3D render, background cool pastel gradient, font ultralight techno-medieval. Sighting confirmed.

Gilbert is an *amateur* historian of graphic design. Impeccably sculpted in silicone, resin, oil paint, and human hair, yet quite at home on the internet. They're certainly not the kind to get hung up on small details. They once commented "looks like a david rudnick 🖤" on a Cultural Tutor post about sixteenth-century woodcuts, lol. As graphic design arrives at its sublime conclusion, who did what first seems trivial anyway.

Gilbert says graphic design is capital's fixer and capital's lapdog. What an incredibly senseless predicament. Capital loves it when you protest because graphic design. Billionaire rapper wears IN THE DUST OF THIS PLANET leathers because graphic design. CIA rebrands as a student techno night because graphic design. And yet, and yet, in prospective digital realms, graphic design is *the* world-building skillset. Genuine creative industries superpower. Founding a next-gen DeFi primitive? Building a permissionless hyperverse? Rolling out a benign brain-computer interface? Graphic designers conjure futures with their bare, RSI-ravaged, hands. They probably ought to unionize, but that's on ice for now.

This series tells the story of how graphic design was dreamed up by some frighteningly old Euro males in order to automate their ugly cousins out of the Lord's work. Graphic design turned out to be *highly persuasive communicology*, went a little out of control, but then spent half a millennium years grinding the gears of its legacy hardware. Computerization set graphic design free, ushered it into the incandescent digital light, only for it to be tragically captured, reduced to mere templates, and paraded unceremoniously around contemporary visual culture on a giant platform that tracks your eyes. *You can't look away.*

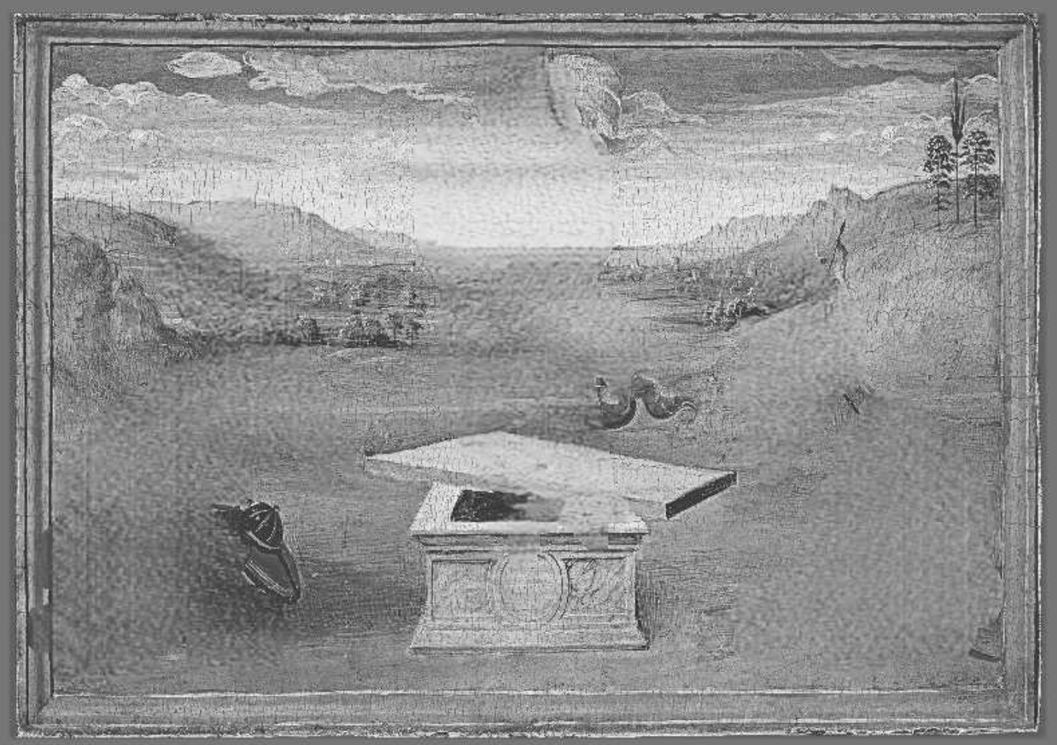


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DUCHAMP PISSES ON GRAPHIC DESIGN

○ I HATED GRAPHIC DESIGN



BY Gilbert

ABOUT

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Old Gutenberg invented the Europe Industries printing machine on the fifteenth of one century. ‘Twas an all-nighter, the first pages were spat out moments before sunrise. Many commentators claim this was the dawn of modernity — **if you squint, maybe** — but it was a big fat zero in the double-entry bookkeeping of graphic design. Old G had basically built a skeuomorph setup. So as not to alarm the church-going public, his techy, printed bibles were designed to look identical to the handwritten books of the scribes. Cunning, yes. Pages upon joyless pages followed, containing lines upon economical lines of text, and hardly any pictures unless you could afford the gold-tier collector’s edition.

In Century 2.0, artist Monsieur Duchamp pisses on this uptight arrangement. Duchamp’s undisciplined graphic imaginary inspires a coterie of artistic acolytes to become trainee graphic designers. This rogue faction labor thanklessly in the margins for decades, many do not live to see their conspiratorial fantasies come to fruition. That day does come though, in 1984, when Steve Jobs revives Aldus Pagemaker (1449–2004) and graphic design careers off the rails.

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NEOPHILES VERSUS AMNESIACS

○ I HATED GRAPHIC DESIGN



BY Gilbert

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Graphic design is very easy now. That's just what makes it so different and appealing for millennials to post their graphic design work on Pinterest, Behance, and Are.na. The new amateur demographic designers have sometimes acted very disrespectfully toward their Modernist Forefathers online. Apparently, back when graphic design involved a lot of hard work with scalpel, ruler, and glue, there had been something of a gentleman's agreement to keep things simple. It was a square, circle, triangle (pick one), three-letter acronym, three standard formats, and that'll have to do, kinda thing. When the unwashed first opened PageMaker and realized that corporate branding was literally a piece of piss, well, the gatekeepers of graphic design's cultural authority were suddenly nowhere to be seen.

A bloody territorial graphic arms race has ensued. Professional graphic designers resort to arcane medieval tactics, erecting spectacular **horror vacui** fortresses which they defend with barrages of maximalist, labor-intensive aesthetics, and baroque, proprietary assets. The amateurs, equipped only with their bare wit and 1001 meager free fonts are kept at bay for now. But the anxiety ... **It never stops.**

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WHAT THE GRAPHIC DESIGNERS WORE

○ I HATED GRAPHIC DESIGN



BY Gilbert

ABOUT

CREDITS

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Graphic design pedagogy has adapted to the refigured landscape by breeding a new kind of professional graphic designer who might somehow operate independently from capital. These exotic pedigrees are identified by their prefixes: they are the **critical** graphic designer, the **social** graphic designer, the **speculative** graphic designer. Trained for attrition, they are able to survive in bedroom studio micro-climates, sustained only by servicing friendly, interdisciplinary collaborations with artists and cultural institutions. Once a year they are entitled to attend an artistic residency, during which they produce a 'self-initiated project', an ephemeral currency that affords them a certain amount of attention from grant-writing cultural workers. This, in turn, may translate into the opportunity to perpetuate their practice for another year.

Bullshit, says Gilbert. We excavate the remains of the canonical Euro-male graphic designers. We confront their corpses. We check the cut of their cloth. We take it from here.

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Gilbert would like to apologize to any graphic designers who were offended by their previous video. To make amends, this companion piece does not feature any dead graphic designers. At least not until the end. The tragic end. No, sincerely, this is a love letter to graphic design. Gilbert fondly remembers the first time that they opened a pack of Magic cards, Lord of the Rings edition. Full-colour printed, spot-gloss varnished, with gold foil-blocking and perfectly rounded corners, sliding out of that ethereal, weightless sleeve. The intricate interplay of photography, illustration, and typography. What alchemy could have produced this? It was entrancing, like something one should only be able to handle in a dream. And the sweet smell! The intoxicating air of the factory, and the machines. The big machines. The awesome machines, pounding out their irresistible rhythm down there amidst the fires of Isengard… Gilbert, wake up!

Let's be real, the awkward thing about graphic design right now is that just as it's having its moment — transcending its historical substrates, machine-learning its fiddly manoeuvres — the credibility of its whole project is collapsing. *MFs in the valley be like big things are coming, but it's just graphic design.* People don't believe in it anymore. Nobody, not authoritarian states, not corporate America, not plucky freelancers, seems to be able to make it *sing* like it used to. Well, Gilbert reckons there's only one thing to be done about that.

NOTES: This video is basically an infomercial for four recently published books, which are absent-mindedly paraphrased throughout: 'Immutable—Designing History' by Chris Lee, 'What Design Can't Do' by Silvio Lorusso, 'Blood in the Machine' by Brian Merchant, and 'The Eye of the Master' by Matteo Pasquinelli. The script is adapted from a lecture commissioned by Kunsthochschule Kassel. Art direction, 3D, and animation for all of the good-looking bits by AKUA visuals. Typography, in Ultra Maya, by David Rudnick. Includes new visualizations of a prototypical coin, designed by Chris Lee, and the artwork 'e-deologies' (2020–) by Joshua Citarella. The Fellowship's 'rhetorical assault' consists of memes by @ethicaldesign69. Original music by Moritz Simon.

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