GDES1003: Creative Digital Imaging

Composition and Layout Techniques

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Composition

Composition is the placement or arrangement of visual elements or ingredients in a work of art, as distinct from the subject of a work. It can also be thought of as the organization of the elements of art according to the principles of art.

In graphic design and desktop publishing, composition is commonly referred to as page layout.

Composition Techniques

Elements of Design

- Line - the visual path that enables the eye to move within the piece

- Shape - areas defined by edges within the piece, whether geometric or organic

- Color - hues with their various values and intensities

- Texture - surface qualities which translate into tactile illusions

- Form - 3-D length, width, or depth

- Value - Shading used to emphasize form

- Space - the space taken up by (positive) or in between (negative) objects

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The Rule of Thirds

The rule of thirds is a guideline commonly followed by visual artists. The objective is to stop the subject(s) and or points of interest (such as the horizon) from bisecting the image, by placing them near one of the lines that would divide the image into three equal columns and rows, ideally near the intersection of those lines.

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Principles of Design

The artist determines what the centre of interest (or focus) of the art work will be, and composes the elements accordingly. The gaze of the viewer will then tend to linger over these points of interest. Elements are arranged with consideration of several factors (known as the principles of design) into a harmonious whole which works together to produce the desired statement — a phenomenon commonly referred to as unity.

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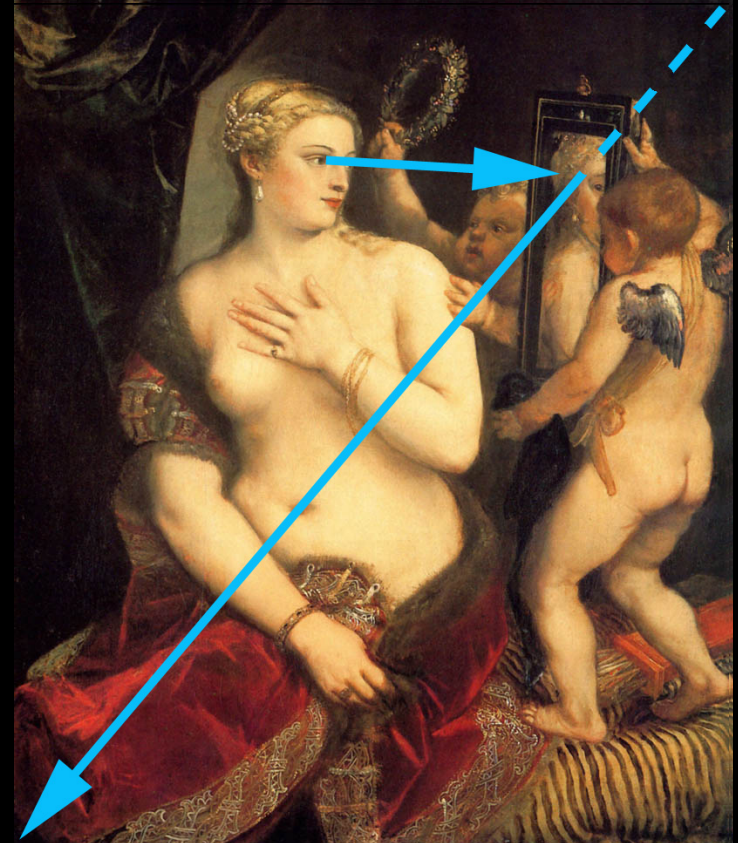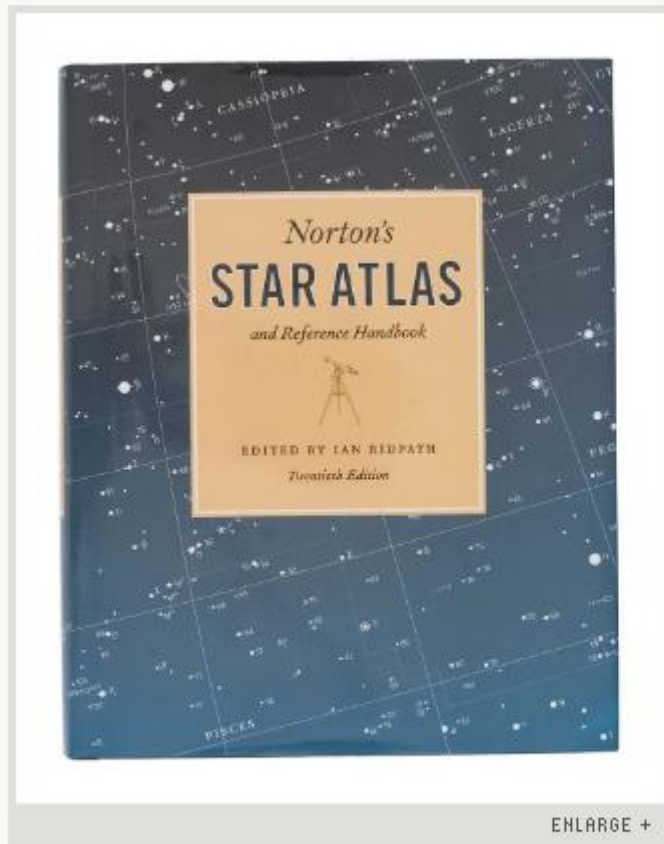
Norton's Star Atlas

DESIGN CATEGORY
Book design, 2003

DESIGN FIRM
Charles Nix & Associates (New York, New York)

COLLECTION
(2004) 50 Books/50 Covers of 2003

○ DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS   ○ JUROR'S COMMENTS

The client wished to update the contents and look of this classic text for amateur astronomers. Originally published in 1910, it had gone through 19 editions and had assumed a very workmanlike form. The publisher wanted a design commensurate with the publication's history and reputation. In the design, we sought to create clear hierarchies—editorially and typographically—and to define a consistent and rational style for treatment of tables, charts, maps, and illustrations.

The project was produced on a very tight

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In a formal layout, visual elements are distributed equally on both sides of a central vertical axis to express formality. A symmetrical layout nicely suits this classic work of astronomy, originally published in 1910.

Ms. Toi: That Girl CD packaging

CREATION YEAR
2001

COLLECTION
AIGA Jurors 2001

Greg Ross was a juror for the Package design category of (2001) AIGA 365: 22.
View Biography

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ENLARGE +

In an informal layout, elements are balanced unequally on both sides of the page. This layout expresses dynamism and energy. This soul music CD uses an asymmetrical layout design to express its lively and dynamic musical style.

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Graphic Design Techniques

Emphasis: Focal Point and Accents

One of the most important design decisions is what element to make the most prominent. The most important element in a composition is called a **focal point**. Emphasis is achieved by position, rhythm, colour contrast, typeface weights and styles. Secondary emphasis points are called **accents**.

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Inner Navigation: Why We Get lost and How We Find Our Way

DESIGN CATEGORY
Book design, 2001

DESIGN FIRM
Simon and Schuster (New York, New York)
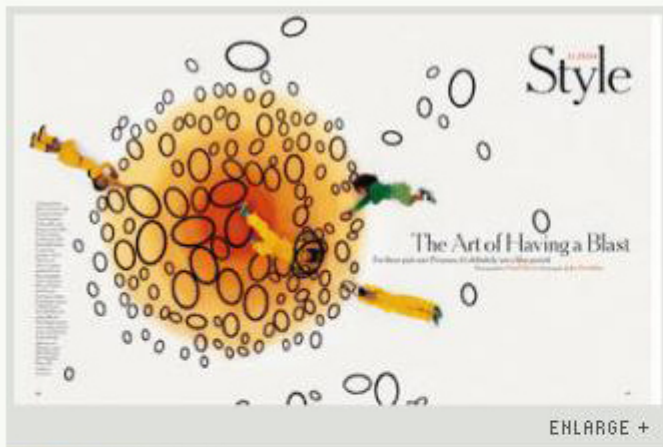
COLLECTION
(2002) 50 Books/50 Covers of 2001

○ DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS

Christoph Niemann's illustration shows a maze where the negative (inner) space creates the shape of a person running. I supported it with a traffic signal reference and clean type.

The smart, energetic illustration harmonizes with the necessary type. The result embodies the themes of the book in many ways.

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The focal point of this book cover is the negative shape of the running man, which is emphasised by its relative simplicity against the patterned foreground.

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Article, "Having a Blast," *The New York Times Magazine*

DESIGN CATEGORY
Editorial design, 2004

DESIGN FIRM
The New York Times Magazine (New York, New York)

COLLECTION
(2005) AIGA 365: 26

● DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS

The inspiration was to put a design spin on a children's fashion story through the idea of children "creating" art or reacting to it in a hands-on way. The three enormous geometric compositions that our 11 young models "redesigned" are artworks by John Tremblay, a Brooklyn artist.

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The large circle draws the viewer's eye by its large size, warm colours, level of complexity and implied lines that point to the centre of the shape.

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Positive and Negative Shapes

Positive shapes advance; they are the foreground elements

Negative shapes recede; they are the background.

In a successful positive/negative shape relationship, the positive and negative shapes are interdependent, forcing viewers to consider the *whole* space.

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Open Letter

YEAR
1973

COLLECTION
AIGA Medalists 2004

Jack Stauffacher became an AIGA Medalist in 2004.

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ENLARGE +

Negative shapes are just as important to the design as are the positive shapes. Notice how the positive shapes divide the negative shapes into large, medium and small areas.

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Image Ethics in the Digital Age

DESIGN CATEGORY
Book design, 2003

DESIGN FIRM
Civic Design (Minneapolis, Minnesota)

COLLECTION
(2004) 50 Books/50 Covers of 2003

● DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS   ○ JUROR'S COMMENTS

This book is about the technological revolution, visual reproduction and distillation of images throughout mass media culture — digital control, manipulation and deception, instantaneous distribution and the erosion of privacy. It presents a volume of original essays about media and the visual environment in the digital age. The academic community is the primary audience. A number of cover directions were initially developed. With a typographic approach being selected, I wanted to convey a sense of multiplicity and omission within the pattern of type.

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Negative spaces are so important that they are often referred to as negative "shapes", indicating their equal level of importance with the positive shapes.

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Mrs. Sartoris

DESIGN CATEGORY
Book design, 2003

DESIGN FIRM
Alfred A. Knopf Publishers (New York, New York)

COLLECTION
(2004) 50 Books/50 Covers of 2003

○ DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS   ○ JUROR'S COMMENTS

This is a short, fierce story about a modern-day Madame Bovary. Oote Boe, a fantastic photographer with a knack for making everyday objects remarkable, took this beautiful photograph. When paired with the title, the match suddenly becomes a woman, and in the case of Margaret Sartoris, a woman who quite literally burns out by the end of the novel.

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Mrs. Sartoris   a novel   Elke Schmitter
translated by Carol Brown Janeway

ENLARGE +

Here, positive and negative shapes are emphasised by strong contrast of colours.

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Grids

A grid is a guide – a modular compositional structure made up of verticals and horizontals that divide the format into columns and formats.

A grid gives a design a unified look

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"102 Minutes" diagrams

DESIGN CATEGORY
Information design, 2002

DESIGN FIRM
The New York Times (New York, New York)

COLLECTION
(2003) AIGA 365: 24

◉ DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS

The tower diagrams needed to help tell the stories of as many of the victims and survivors as possible. The stairwells played a key role in determining who survived and who perished, so it was important to present them prominently in color. The time sequence was meant to depict, with great specificity, the progression of smoke and fire through the tower floors (determined from amateur video footage), and to locate and quantify such grim details as where people were last seen on the buildings' facades and how many people jumped. The locations and movements of people were culled from hundreds of interviews

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A grid structure creates unity and order for most periodical page layouts. By applying a consistent grid from page to page, the reader gets the correct impression that the various pages belong together as a system.

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AIGA Journal of Graphic Design,
vol. 2 number 4

YEAR
1984

COLLECTION
AIGA Medalists 2004

Caroline Warner Hightower became an AIGA Medalist in 2004.

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In this cover design for the *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, some elements align with the grid (for unity), while other elements break the grid (for variety) in order to keep the page unpredictable and exciting.

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Unity and Variety

Unity establishes an integrated whole rather than a group of unrelated parts. Applying consistent colours, illustration or photographic styles and typography unifies a design.

Variety can be established by changing other elements in order to keep the design fresh and new.

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Norman Design identity

DESIGN CATEGORY
Brand and identity systems design, 2001

DESIGN FIRM
Norman Design (Chicago, Illinois)

COLLECTION
(2002) AIGA 365: 23

○ DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS   ○ JUROR'S COMMENTS

We at Norman Design wanted to revitalize our brand to better define who we are and what we do. The system is distributed to both clients and prospects. We emphasized our name, Norman, and added a tagline—A Design Studio—which is more descriptive and boutique-like in nature. We also developed an icon that can standalone and created a complementary typographic treatment. The four-ink palette enables the mixing and matching of components. The business cards stand out with their irregular shape, vertical orientation and two-sided printing. Letterpress provides a tactile experience

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ENLARGE +

Elements of unity (the position of the coloured square, the typeface, logo position etc.) unify the various components of this identity system so that they work together as a system. Elements of variety (the various colours) keep the viewer interested by presenting unpredictable visuals.

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Rhythm

In music, rhythm is thought of as a "beat", a sense of movement from one chord to another, a pattern of stresses.

In graphic design, rhythm is a "beat" established by visual elements. It is a pattern created by repeating or varying elements. It establishes a sense of movement from one element to another.

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"My Girl"

DESIGN CATEGORY
Illustration, 2002

DESIGN FIRM
GQ magazine (New York, New York)

COLLECTION
(2003) AIGA 365: 24

○ DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS

The author, a first-time dad-to-be, wrote about the anticipation surrounding the arrival of his baby girl—especially in a culture where a man is often expected to want his first-born to be a son. The only direction given to artist Mirko Ilic was to incorporate the sonogram of the author's daughter in his illustration.

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This repeating pattern of visual elements floating around the girl in the centre forms a pattern, which focuses the viewer's attention on the central image of the ultrasound scan image applied to the girl's skirt.

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Graphic Design Techniques

Contrast

Contrast means difference.

It can be established by varying sizes, colours, weights, levels of complexity, positive shapes vs. surrounding negative spaces etc. It can be one of the most powerfully engaging techniques of design

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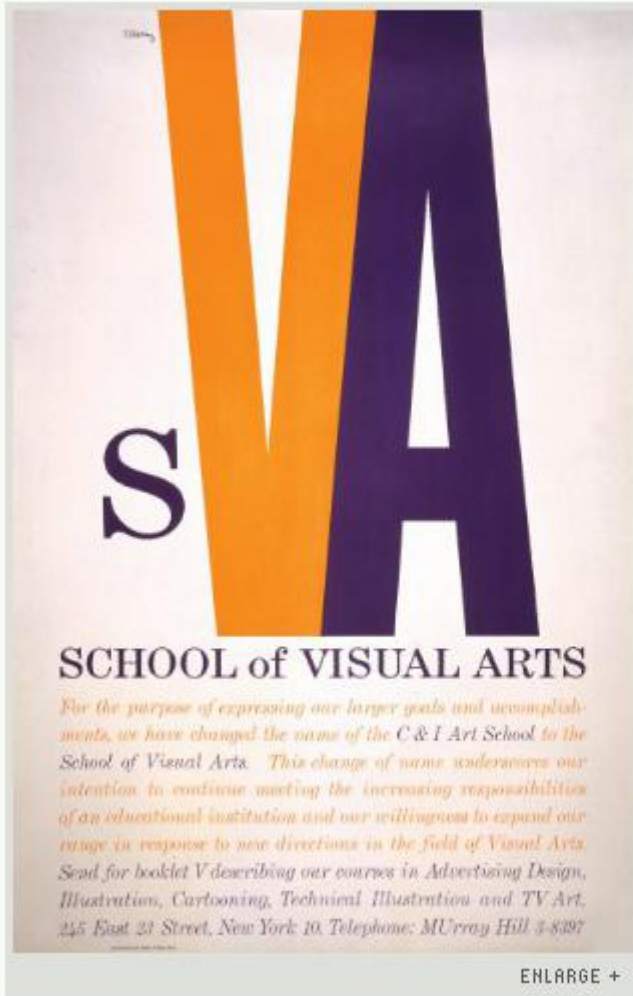
SVA subway poster

YEAR
1950

COLLECTION
AIGA Medalists 2004

Silas H. Rhodes became an AIGA Medalist in 2004.
View Biography

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Contrast is established by juxtaposing small vs. large type, serif vs. sans serif type and orange vs. purple in this poster for the School of Visual Arts.

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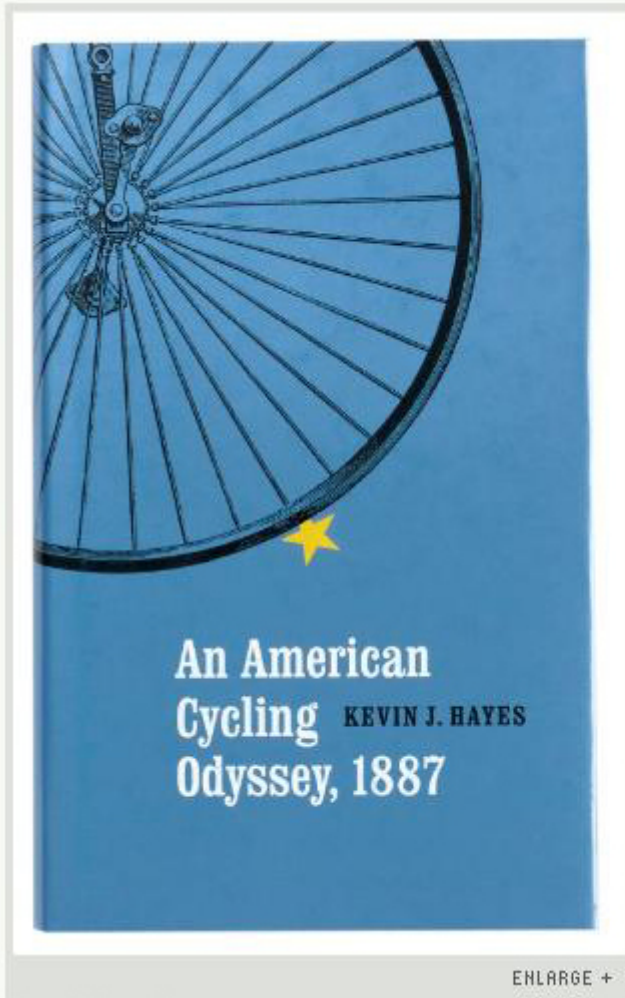
An American Cycling Odyssey, 1887 book

DESIGN CATEGORY
Book design, 2002

DESIGN FIRM
University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, Nebraska)

COLLECTION
(2003) 50 Books/50 Covers of 2002

○ DESCRIPTION   ○ CREDITS

An American Cycling Odyssey is the account of the brash young journalist George Nellis's attempt in 1887 to break the time record for crossing the United States on a bicycle. Though the apparent self-parody may not have been deliberate, the narrative is often as hilarious as *The Diary of a Nobody* by the Brothers Grossmith. The publisher expected a popular market for this book, so it seemed appropriate that the design should echo the levity of the text. The page folios are intended to suggest an odometer counting the miles as Nellis

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Strong size contrast and positive/negative shape relationships form a very successful book cover design.

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Graphic Design Techniques

Visual/Verbal Synergy

The cooperative action of words and images used together to create a meaning that is greater than the individual signification of its parts.

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First Air America ad campaign

CREATION YEAR
2004

COLLECTION
AIGA Jurors 2004

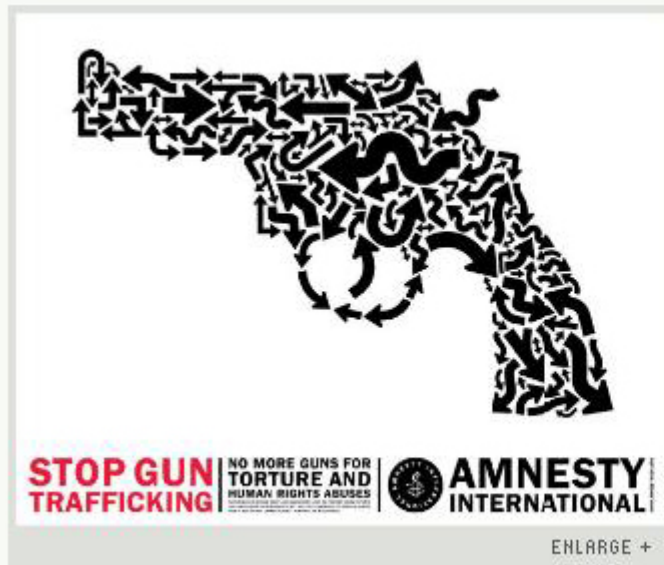Emily Oberman was a juror for the Promotional design and advertising category of (2004) AIGA 365: 25 .

View Biography

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Without this image, the headline is incomplete. Without the words, it is merely a portrait of George Bush. The headline blinds the image to a specific meaning.

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Stop Gun Trafficking poster

YEAR
2001

COLLECTION
AIGA Medalists 2003

Woody Pirtle became an AIGA Medalist in 2003.
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The indefinite image of gun composed of arrows is given more specific meaning by the headline. Notice how the arrows, stylistically, are specifically the kinds of arrows found on traffic signs and pavement markings.

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Graphic Resonance

Graphic designers bring a resonance (a term borrowed from music, "to reverberate or echo") to visual communications through the interaction of colour, typography, imagery, layout and shapes. These visual elements all speak the same graphic "voice" to reinforce a message.

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Martha Stewart Baby magazine, special issue

CREATION YEAR
2000

COLLECTION
AIGA Jurors 2002

Barbara de Wilde was a juror for the Editorial design category of (2002) AIGA 365: 23.

View Biography

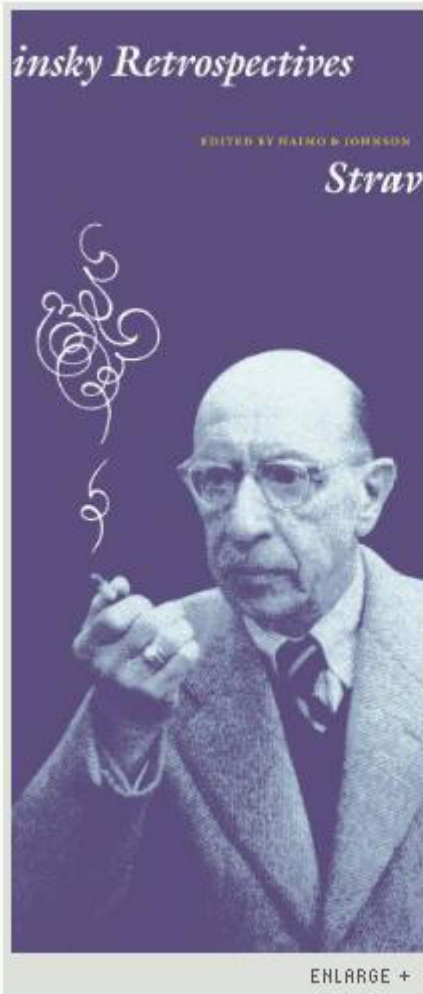SEND THIS PAGE

In this example fro *Martha Stewart Baby* magazine, graphic resonance is applied to reinforce the concept of a baby magazine by incorporating large, playful type, pastel colours, simplistic images and layout, and a clean white background.

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Type and Image Integration

A visual comparison between type and specific qualities of an image.

An aspect of unity, type and image integration specifically refers to the display type reflecting the colours, sizes or shapes of an image.

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The visual qualities (colour, shape and glossiness) of the strands of licorice in Björk's mouth are unified with similar shapes and letterforms in this CD cover.
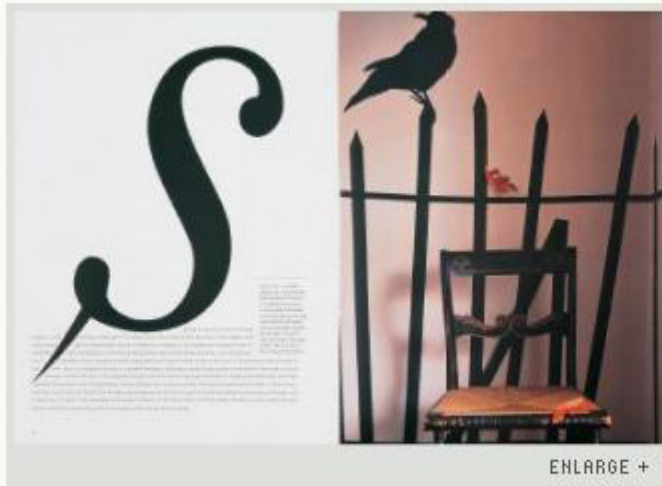
Martha Stewart Baby magazine, special issue

CREATION YEAR
2000

COLLECTION
AIGA Jurors 2002

Barbara de Wilde was a juror for the Editorial design category of (2002) AIGA 365: 23.

View Biography

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The large initial cap "S" is unified with the photograph by reflecting it's colours and shapes. Notice the shape at the bottom of the "S" is similar to the raven's tail feathers.

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Visual Surprise

The discovery of an unexpected quality or element within a work of visual communication which can build interest and gather attention to it.

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Stravinsky Retrospectives

CREATION YEAR
1987

COLLECTION
AIGA Jurors 2002

Richard Eckersley was a juror for the Book design
category of (2002) 50 Books/50 Covers of 2001.
View Biography

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A decorative swash mark becomes the smoke rising from the man's cigarette.
The title seems to bleed off the right side of the page to be continued on the
left.

The cartoon figure seems to scream so loudly, he sends the "O" flying.

The "05" substitutes neatly for the "os" in Boston.

The text "AIGA 2005" is highlighted in red.

Redesigning/Framing Workshop
Part 1

Following on from your album cover deconstruction, you should have brought with you, 4 photocopies of your chosen cover.

Measure your album cover. On one A3 sheet of layout paper, draw 2 boxes to represent your cover, next to each other.

For your analysis you should have taken apart all the elements of the image. Refer back to this list. Using 2 of your photocopies, cut up the elements again and rearrange them into **TWO** different compositions. You don't have to use all the elements, if you feel they are not necessary to the composition.

You must not add any other elements.

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Redesigning/Framing Workshop
Part 2

On another A3 sheet of layout paper, draw another 2 boxes next to each other, again, the same size as the album cover.

Using your final 2 photocopies, explore another TWO compositions, but feel free to change the scale of any of the elements, and, this time, add other elements of your choice - images from magazines, type, hand drawn elements, writing etc.

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Redesigning/Framing Workshop
Part 3

Finally, out of another sheet of layout paper, cut out a frame (window) the same size as your album cover and move it around over your 4 new compositions.

Explore the effects of different crops. When you find crops you are happy with, photocopy them to keep as a record.

Note: Try to apply deconstruction/analysis to imagery and typography throughout the module, with any inspirational items you find and note your findings in your journal.

Examples used in this presentation are taken from the AIGA Design Archives. Available at Aiga Design Archives

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