

Portfolio

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The Italian career of the Swiss graphic designer Walter Ballmer was punctuated by a series of monographic publications. The different formats and aims of these publications represent various typologies of monograph. Analyzing them makes their self-promotional strategies explicit, and shows a tendency towards stereotypical narratives.

In 1955, Ballmer designed a squared portfolio featuring the works he had made since his move to Milan from Switzerland in 1947. [Figs. 145, 146] In the previous eight years, he had worked for Studio Boggeri. In 1956, a year after this portfolio was made, Ballmer was appointed by Adriano Olivetti as one of the art directors of Olivetti. Even though it is difficult to assess whether Ballmer's portfolio played a role in his employment process, it should be noted that this is one of the last publications featuring both his Italian and his Swiss addresses. The position at Olivetti must have been the clincher that made him decide to settle permanently in Milan.

In May 1976, a rich selection of graphic works by Ballmer was included in a monographic issue of the graphic design magazine *2dimensioni*. [Fig. 147, 148] This issue was designed by Ballmer himself, and introduced by

his former employer Antonio Boggeri. In the foreword, Boggeri reiterated one of the myths associated with Swiss graphic design in Milan: namely that Swiss designers' professional training fruitfully interacted with the Italian unorthodox approach to visual communication.¹ Boggeri himself had played a key role in introducing Swiss graphic design to the Italian design scene. Since opening the Studio Boggeri in 1933, he had been hiring Swiss designers, thereby acting as a springboard for their careers in Italy.²

Certain stereotypical narratives on Swiss designers in Milan were also included in other monographic publications devoted to Ballmer. This is the case with a leaflet released on the occasion of a solo show in 1989. [Figs. 149, 150] The leaflet featured pictures of Ballmer and his works, a timeline of his career, and a short autobiographical account. Ballmer recalls having discovered "that the rules of sight exist and are rigid, and that creativity is free only in compliance with those rules" at the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel,³ and having benefitted in Milan from "the advantages of a very peculiar intellectual and productive climate [in which] initiative and problem-solving go hand in hand with creativity and *joie de vivre*."⁴ Ballmer's words echoed the stereotype according to which Swiss graphic designers embody formal severity based on solid education, while their Italian counterparts stand for "imagination, poetry and experimental curiosity."⁵

A typical monographic catalog, [Figs. 151, 152] which remained at the stage of a mockup, can be found in Olivetti's and Ballmer's archives. As the subtitle suggests—*A Designer Between Art and Graphics*—the catalog documents Ballmer's careers as both a graphic designer and a concrete artist. Indeed, it presents two front covers and can be read from both sides. Inside, the layout of the placeholder text affords an idea of the written multilingual content—in Italian, French, German, and English—which was typical of Swiss magazines and monographic publications centered on the so-called pioneers of the "Swiss Style."⁶

The printer Lucini produced another publication, to celebrate Ballmer's eightieth birthday in 2003. [Fig. 153] This small commemorative booklet featured forty logos arranged in no apparent order. In this case, the monographic publication was more an act of friendship than a self-promotional artifact.

A portfolio, a monographic issue of a magazine, a timeline, a monographic catalog, and a commemorative booklet: these publications well describe the trajectory of Ballmer's career from job applications to the dissemination of his works, from self-narrative and canonization up to public recognition.

1 Boggeri 1976.

2 Barbieri 2017: 124–192.

3 Ballmer 1989.

4 Ibid.

5 Richter 2007: 5.

6 *Neue Grafik* 1958–1965; Gerstner & Kutter 1959; Müller-Brockmann 1961.



Fig. 145
1955.

Cover from the portfolio booklet *Walter Ballmer*, Walter Ballmer (graphic design),



Fig. 146 Spread from the portfolio booklet *Walter Ballmer*, Walter Ballmer (graphic design), 1955.

copertine di catalogo



suole, trafile, accessori di gomma
e vernici isolanti
sono presentate in queste quattro
copertine di catalogo.





Fig. 147 Cover from the monographic issue no. 16 of the magazine *2dimensioni*, dedicated to and designed by Walter Ballmer, 1976.



Fig. 148 Spread from the monographic issue no. 16 of the magazine *2dimensioni*, dedicated to and designed by Walter Ballmer, 1976.



Figs. 149, 150 Cover and spread from the folded leaflet dedicated to the life of Walter Ballmer, *Walter Ballmer: Un designer tra arte e grafica* (Walter Ballmer: A designer between art and graphics), Unidesign/G. Fe. (graphic design), 1989.



Fig. 150



Figs. 151, 152 Covers of the mock-up of a monographic catalog titled *Walter Ballmer: Un designer tra arte e grafica* (Walter Ballmer: A designer between art and graphics), Walter Ballmer (graphic design), date unknown (late 1980s).



Fig. 152



Fig. 153 Cover and spreads from the book 80, Walter Ballmer (graphic design), 2003.

