

moments

Edited by Valentina Frchetti

Alan Fletcher

Why did you become a graphic designer?

I always used to draw as a kid and when it came time to leave school, you were offered three options. You went to university, or you went into the army, or you worked for the bank. I didn't fancy any of those and I learnt that if you went to art school you could get a grant. I studied illustration at Hammersmith art school for a year, then I discovered there were other art schools in London. Central School was very lively, so I applied to go there.

Did you have a sense of almost evangelical mission towards design?

Were you as a generation going to bring design to Britain?

It was an evangelical mission, not necessarily to bring design to Britain, but to do design. It was that 1950s period which was fairly socialist-minded – hair-shirt and puritan. There wasn't much work around and you would have been mad to become a designer if you weren't passionate about it. From Central I went to the Royal College of Art, where I managed to get a scholarship to Yale.

Britain was very grey, boring place and America, from what I could see in the movies, was bright lights, Manhattan, Cary Grant and Doris Day.

You seem to have had trouble making contact with inspirational people there – with Paul Rand, Saul Bass, Leo Lionni.

Was that something you set out to do, or was it just a series of happy accidents?

It was a bit of both. If you know the right people, you meet the right people. I happen to have been taught by pretty terrific people at most of the schools I went to – Anthony Froshaug, Henrion, Herbert Spencer, Herbert Matter, Josef Albers, Bradbury Thompson. When I was at Yale, Rand helped me by giving me the odd freelance from IBM and introduced me to other people. But you have to work at it. When I went to Los Angeles, I called Saul Bass from a public phone box and said "Sorry to bother you, sir. Can I come and see you and show you my portfolio?" I didn't have any money, so he helped me by giving me freelance work.

The American experience must have given you a headstart over people who had stayed in austerity in Britain.

Everybody was still doing the same thing: little black and white jobs with eight-point type. If it had a second colour it was red, or possibly blue. When I arrived back in London in the early 1960s it was with a portfolio of full colour jobs and ambitious hopes. I had been back about six months when Bob Gill rang, saying he had been given my name by Aaron Burns in New York. We went out for supper and after about three months we decided we should start our own little design office



Alan Fletcher - Photograph by Martin Dunkerton

with Colin Forbes. We didn't get a single job for the first month. Then we got some Penguin book jackets. We used to go out to a café with the brief for one Penguin book jacket and do it over coffee, share the book jacket like a bone.

With Pentagram you co-operated in the setting of a partnership that would give you the freedom to pursue your own interests and a secure company framework within which to do it.

I'm a split personality. I do quite large, complex corporate identity jobs. I enjoy that, but I also enjoy sitting round doing my own little things, which are invariably the ones that don't pay. The clients who do pay give you an opportunity to extract time and money for your own indulgences. That's important. I think a lot of clients come to Pentagram because of the uncommercial jobs we do – calendars, Christmas books, the Pentagram Papers and so on.

You knew in advance what you would or wouldn't like and this influenced the solutions you were prepared to attempt.

What I meant was that you have to throw away the crutches. When you know that you do a certain thing quite well there's a temptation to keep doing it in that way. You become a graphic cliché. Most designers suffer from inhibition and wanting to please. I didn't wake up one morning

and say "I've got to change my life". I just thought: I've got to be less inhibited. If I think the right answer is to walk over a piece of paper with muddy shoes, or pick a typeface that everybody loathes but try to do something with it – that's what I mean by uninhibited. I think a lot of designers talk like that, but the work ends up looking the same, which means they haven't totally let go. I haven't either.

Design as you practise it seems to involve reading between the lines. When you use visual puns and rebuses, that's what you are encouraging the viewer to do.

That, to me, is what design is. The rest of it is just layout. I'm quite broad about ideas: putting certain colours together could be an idea, or an optical idea. Every job has to have an idea. Otherwise it would be like a novelist trying to write a book about something without really saying anything. I also like ideas that have further jokes – private ideas or jokes. I think the Polaroid poster is quite a good one. We were asked to do something on a new colour film and I thought that idea of a Rorschach test with colours would look quite pretty. What I really liked about it, though, was when someone said to me, "But what does it mean, Alan?" I just shrugged my shoulders and smiled.

You don't mind if there are aspects of design that people fail to grasp?

It's the extra three or five per cent, if you like. You've solved the problem but it's not enough. I think what separates the designer sheep from the designer goats is to push it to the edge. Most clients don't realise it and couldn't care less even if they did, but it people who have a sensitive intelligence spot it, then that's what gives it extra buzz.

That's a view of design that would be foreign to people who see design's function as fulfilling the client's brief as effectively as possible and stopping there.

I treat clients as raw material to do what I want to do, though I would never tell them that. I try to solve their problems, but in solving their problems take an opportunity to find that extra twist that adds the magic. The art posters I did for IBM are a good example. IBM asked me to design a placard for their new Paris headquarters, which said a painting would shortly arrive for the space on the wall occupied by the placard. In response I did a series of posters interpreting the word "art" as defined by author or artist, and I put the line about the paintings in 6pt along the bottom. If I had answered the brief, they would have got a straightforward placard.

What qualities of thought or sensibility

make for a good graphic designer?

There are elegant ways of doing something and inelegant ways. Sensitivity, though it sounds a bit fey. Thoughtfulness, I think you can look at a portfolio and see the obvious things: if they have idea or don't have ideas, a sense of craft. Then there's that quality... You hardly ever see it. You look at other designers' work and you spot it, and they spot it, too: economy of thought, the oblique reference, charm and, above all, wit.

Do you feel that the approach you and the other Pentagram partners have taken – avoiding the stock market, creating an environment where you please yourselves rather than shareholders – has been vindicated by the recent upheavals in the British design business?

It's not a question of vindication. I think everyone should do what they want to do. Every Pentagram partner in his own way is a hands-on person. They are all small boys who want to be patted on the head and told what a nice job they've done. What turns people on here is being proud of the job, not how much money they earned for it. I can't see a suit coming in from the City and saying, "Look, you can't do this. You've got to do that."

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Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question.

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ALAN FLETCHER

Making marks

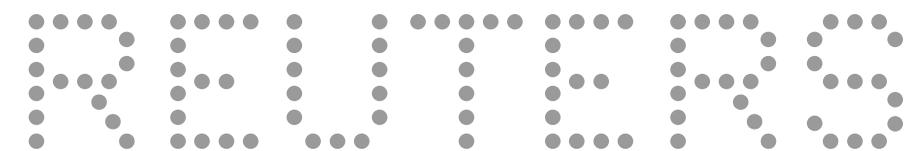
Alan Fletcher has been associated with the corporate symbols of some of the most visible organizations in the world. This section looks at the thinking behind the creation of marks and the attributes which make them distinctive, memorable and effective. The designs demonstrate a wide visual vocabulary, including the pictorial language of metaphor, anagrams and palindromes. They also illustrate the categories to which identity marks belong, and the sources of the ideas behind them. 'As legibility is to words, logobility is to trademarks', he says, then goes on to explain that, 'Logobility is the capacity of a word to be converted into a unique typographic device.' A mark of identity should not merely be a superficial configuration but emanate directly from the personality and activity of the organization it represents. As with the Lloyd's of London logotype, which was derived from letters on a commemorative plaque by Reynolds Stone, he usually hits the mark.



Lloyd's of London logotype - Alan Fletcher (1984)

The unique ingredient - Making a mark on a large organization requires skill and stamina. Reuters was Alan Fletcher's first largescale corporate identity project (1965) and the Institute of Directors, the most recent (1994). Although there is a thirty year span between them, the two projects demonstrate that a symbol must always have a unique ingredient which somehow summarizes the essence of the organization it represents. Gerald Long of Reuters, the international news agency, was one of those exceptional patrons of design who just don't appear to exist any more. He commissioned the proto-Pentagram team to refashion the entire organization: Fletcher had the task of creating a new logotype, Kenneth Grange designer the literature, and Theo Crosby designed their furniture, interiors and offices. While on a fact-finding tour of Reuters, Fletcher had watched news information coming through tickertape machines, such was

the technology in those days. He put a piece of punched tape in his pocket. Back at the studio, this memento of his visit presented the solution. The institute of Directors decided it had to broaden its appeal and attract new members but felt that their existing graphic identity made it look more like a smart provincial engineering firm than an influential national organization. The brief listed those not untypical conflicts: 'modern but traditional', 'dynamic but conservative' and so on. The solution, reflecting the spirit of the brief, centred on adopting a traditional form but treating it unconventionally. He went about it by proportionately enlarging three letters of the same typeface into three different sizes, and then fitting them together into a monogram. The larger size of the D emphasizes Director, thus distinguishing this particular Institute from all the other Institutes.



Reuters logotype - Alan Fletcher (1965)

ANMA

Anna logotype Alan Fletcher, 1959)

evə

Eva printer logotype (Alan Fletcher, 1981)

MICHĒLE

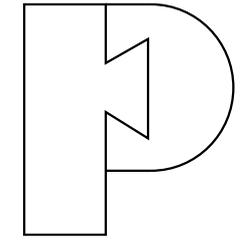
Michèle Cosmetics logotype (Alan Fletcher, 1974)

V&A

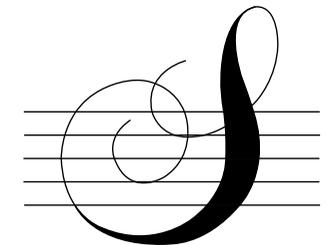
Victoria & Albert Museum logo (Alan Fletcher, 1990)

Economy principle - You don't need to add decorative elements to create distinctive devices. These four examples of 'less-is-more' owe their solutions to supreme typographic economy, in which deft interventions convert letters into symbols which are exclusive to the bodies they represent. Anna was Alan Fletcher's first assistant in 1959. He decided to design her a name style by using wood type inked and pressed on paper, which in turn was folded and pressed again to obtain a transfer. The result – a visual palindrome – is a word which can be read in either direction. A mark for a printer, Eva, is a visual anagram, the 'e' turned upside-down to create a lower case letter 'a'. Michèle, a brand name for the teenage cosmetics marketed by Marks & Spencer, acquired an accent by cutting and lifting the bar of the E. The already classic symbol for the Victoria & Albert Museum (designed in 1989) is in a typeface originally designed by Giambattista Bodoni. The problem centred on endowing the three characters with a single personality. The solution was to divide and remove half of one letter, and add insert an ampersand to reinstate the missing crossbar.

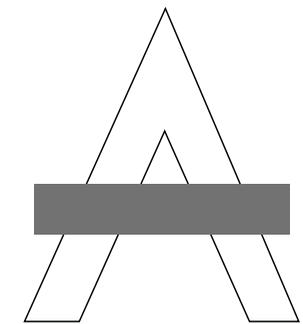
One and one makes three - Sometimes putting two disparate elements together can create a third entity. An emblem for the Stravinsky Festival Trust led to the visual connection between a classical calligraphic S and a musical treble clef. A symbol for the joiner, Mr Purser, who put up shelving in the first studio of Fletcher Forbes Gill, integrates a dovetail with the letter P. The joiner had asked Fletcher what he did for a living – the intention of the symbol was to show him. The year was 1962. An organization founded to promote Islamic culture was called Al Foulk, which translates as The Ark. The horizontal bar of the letter was extended and printed in blue to represent the flood. The apex represents Mount Arafat, on which the Ark came to rest. Herman Miller is an American manufacturer of classical modern furniture and office systems by renowned designers. They hold an annual summer garden party which they call Millerfest. A manipulation created a sunny emblem appropriate to the occasion. Such connections may seem obvious in hindsight, but the skill lies in having the foresight to perceive them in the first place.



W F Purser Ltd logotype (Alan Fletcher, 1962)



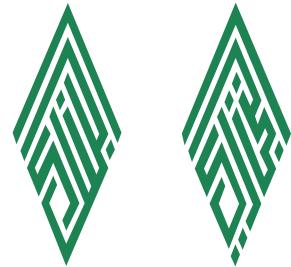
Stravinsky Festival Trust logotype (Alan Fletcher, 1979)



Al Foulk logotype (Alan Fletcher, 1962)

التجاري البنك

البنك التجاري



Visual language - There are many graphic, pictorial and visual languages – heraldry, semaphore, pictograms, hand signs and so on. These are the essentials of the designer's vocabulary. This star for the Commercial Bank of Kuwait was constructed from a written language. The starting-point was two words in Arabic script. The word top left reads 'commercial' and the one on the right is 'bank'. These were written in Kufic, a geometric Arabic script, and shaped into a component which could be assembled into a star. This star can literally be read by Arabic speakers and can also be easily recognized through its pattern by non-Arabs. One doesn't have to understand the language to comprehend the identity. The emblem was for Flagship Portsmouth, a representative body for the various Trusts within the historical naval dockyard of Portsmouth, among them Nelson's flagship HMS Victory and the Mary Rose. Naval flags from the International Code of Signals are combined to make a 'P', to represent Portsmouth, and also spell out 'A Naval History'.

The flags were chosen because of their association with things marine and celebratory and because they could be used to spell out promotional messages. A housestyle with a vocabulary.

Commercial Bank of Kuwait symbol
(Alan Fletcher, 1980)

Scratching around - Alan Fletcher strayed unwillingly into a politically sensitive arena when Vienna and Budapest decided to stage jointly an Expo on the Danube, so reviving the old Austro-Hungarian cultural axis. Initially the organizers held a competition to find a symbol. But, disappointed by the poor entries, they invited three international designers to present recommendations. Fletcher's proposal was selected. The brief called for a 'culture' mark rather than a 'commercial' symbol. He investigated various routers (some of the sketches are shown here), until he settled on the final design. This unites two arrows, representing Vienna and Budapest, to make the letter X. But in Vienna, on the eve of signing a five-year contract to design all the graphic materials, he watched the television results of a referendum. The Viennese voted to withdraw from the Expo. The project disappeared overnight. However, the Hungarians decide to continue. They requested modifications. They wanted the colours to be changed, they didn't want the symbol to be angled, they wanted '95 to be replaced with '96, they wanted amendments to the letters. He revised the designs accordingly. Eventually the Hungarians also cancelled Expo. As Fletcher commented, 'I have a lot of my solutions rejected, but to lose out on what had been accepted was a new twist.'



Vienna and Budapest Expo symbol
(Alan Fletcher, 1995)

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A trademark
is a symbol
of a corporation.

It is not
a sign
of quality ...

It is
a sign
of the quality.

”

ALAN FLETCHER

Jeremy Myerson Beware Wet Paint

Out of the blue

Asked by the Polish government to design a poster commemorating the 50th anniversary of the invasion by Hitler, Fletcher spent days floundering around without getting anywhere – until he wrote down the two dates. The answer had been under his nose all the time. A brilliant solution, even if it doesn't work in America where they write the month first, then the day and the year. The idea for these ashtrays came when travelling on top of a bus down Westbourne Grove to the studio. An unsolicited mental image arrived, complete in all its details: a shape resembling Dutch Edam cheese with two identical halves made from a single mould, providing both base and lid, or two separate ashtrays with serrated teeth to hold the halves together or grip the cigarette. First manufactured in Italy they were instantly copied by other manufacturers and yet he never received a penny from anyone. When he decided to take legal action, one of the producers became so incensed he smashed the moulds with a sledgehammer. The genuine version has a credit stamped on the inner edge, the others don't. As he recounts: 'I saw half of one (with broken teeth) on a bank counter in Buenos Aires holding paper clips, another on the dais of a Bangkok bar where girls blow smoke rings from personal places, and on a designer's desk who told me he salvaged it from a rabbit hutch in Norfolk.' Easy come, easy go.



Clam ashtrays (Alan Fletcher, 1972)

1.9.39

1 September 1939: marks the outbreak of the second world war when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. This year we commemorate those who lost their lives and families: 1 September 1989.

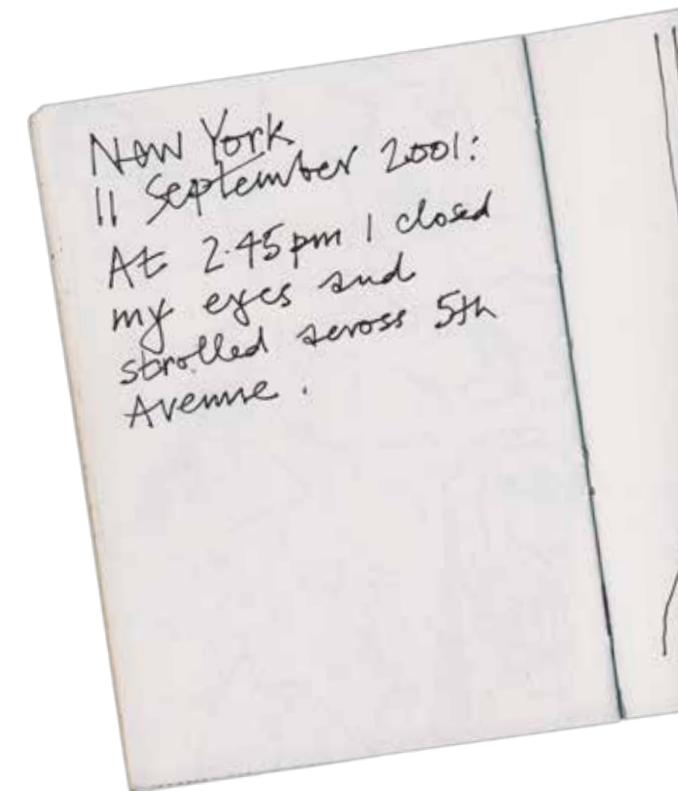
1.9.89

Alan Fletcher Picturing and Poeting

The Twin Towers

'I was in midtown Manhattan on that Tuesday. In the streets people looked bewildered, confused and stunned.

Black smoke blanketed Streets were deserted of traffic. There was an acrid smell. It was hot. Tourists (shorts, sandals, aloha shirts) uncertain what to do, were wandering aimlessly taking pictures of each other. Shops, galleries, museums were closed, so I trawled the street kiosks and bought every postcard I could find that showed the twin towers. I discovered some thirty different views. These commemorate that day.'



Note (Alan Fletcher, 2001)



days

Edited by Elisa Carimati

Alan Fletcher Picturing and Painting
Jeremy Myerson Beware Wet Paint

Stargazing

Illustrations of the Zodiac are invariably of the cute, sentimental and cloying throw-up variety.

The images here take a different tack and just rely on cut paper shapes with a minimal inkpen line or two.

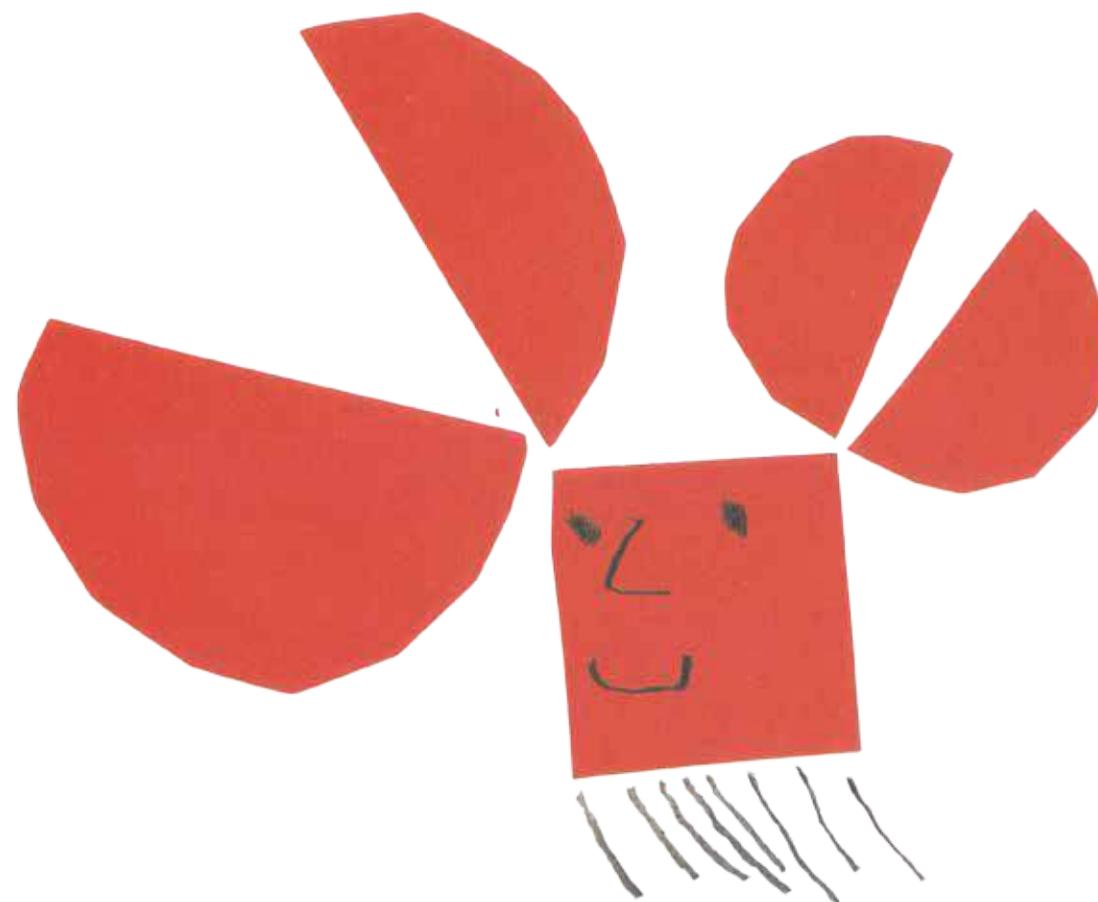
Judging from newspapers and magazines, readers are devotees of the Zodiac.

Even psychologist and philosopher Carl Gustav Jung believed in astrology. He once compared the birth signs of happily married pairs with those of divorced couples. The results, he claimed, revealed that those favourably matched were more likely to have permanent wedded bliss.

Traditional illustrations of the signs of the Zodiac are often overworked and sentimental. Alan Fletcher gave himself the challenge of addressing these symbols more vigorously by emphasizing the

essence of what they are intended to represent. Virgo, for instance, was rendered as a nun. Fletcher used only scissors, coloured papers and a pen – and, of course, no little imagination. These designs populated a calendar on the Zodiac. It was a matter of trial and error as he improvised his way towards each characterization. Thus the use of legal seals to give the scuttling crab (Cancer) serrated pincers and claws.

Some of the other signs shown are accompanied by the sketches which informed their development, or, in the case of Taurus (the Bull), accompanied by a collage elaborated at a later date from the image produced for the calendar. Again the formalizations demonstrate his ability to characterize by implication rather than by representation.





Alan Fletcher Picturing and Painting
Jeremy Myerson Beware Wet Paint

Nothing Wasted

According to legend, Buddah once invited all the animals to join him in celebrating the New Year.

Only 12 came. Naturally the rat was the first and the pig the last. To thank and honour his guests, he named a different year after each animal. Henceforth, anyone born in that year would acquire the animal's characteristics.

And so the Chinese horoscope was founded. I have been collecting printed ephemera for years: tickets to memorable exhibition, baggage stickers for a trip to America, an envelope from a kind letter, my first vehicle licence. The sort of material that holds meanings for me and nobody else.

A palette for constructing the animals. Working with these materials each animal had to be brought to life. However, to up the stakes I restricted the imagery to heads. Alan Fletcher has been collecting printed ephemera for years: tickets to a memorable exhibition, baggage stickers for a

trip to America, an envelope from a kind letter he received – the kind of material that holds meanings for him and nobody else.

This section looks at how he puts this material to use and how in one particular project, hust to make things more challenging, he imposed irrational constraints on the way it could be handled. The brief was for a calendar illustrating the Chinese Horoscope, and as you see – whether a monkey or a dog – nothing goes to waste. The dragon below is the only mythological animal amongst the twelve animals of the horoscope – and as dragons have no natural features, the most difficult. Taking a Chinese festival dragon mask as the main reference, you can discern crate labels to indicate breathing fire, a Rolodex file card to make fangs and Fletcher's first motor tax disc.

For the Chinese Horoscope animals, consider the self-imposed constraints and think about whether they reach

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They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.

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ANDY WARHOL

new levels of self-discipline, arrogance, stupidity or perhaps insight. For instance, he decided to restrict himself to the animal heads. To confine his palette to his collection of ephemera. And, to make things even harder, to employ no other techniques. Working within the narrow limitations prescribed, each animal had to be brought to life. It was only when the project started that he realized the task he'd set for himself. A snake, for instance, doesn't really have a head. An ox's head is hardly very familiar.

Once a likeness had been achieved by assembling and reassembling the materials, the heads were composed by meticulously lining up the edges of papers, picking up typographic relationships and juxtaposing colours and textures.

The collage also use personal referen-

ces, asides and recollections, such as an airmail envelope which once held a letter from André Francois or one of his mother-in-law's tarot cards. Much of the material used is of historical interest, such as the BOAC airline tickets.

One gets a brief glimpse of his lifestyle in the tickets for the Venice Biennale or the voucher for the New York La Guardia Airport Skycap service. And just what did he see at the Royal Court Theatre on 16th January 1960? Whatever production it was, you couldn't get in for 16 shillings today.

Some people can't see the animals, let alone recognize them. But many can. And for them, perhaps, the most sublime touch lies in using the black stripe on the back of a British Rail ticket to denote the monkey's mouth.





The final point

Alan Fletcher's graphic games allow us to play too.

In 1972, he was asked to contribute the April page to a calendar for a typesetting company. His solution: 1972 dots which, when you join them all up, spell out the month, days and dates. What looks like a page of dandruff disguises a do-it-yourself design. To complete this book, you could foolishly try to do it yourself.

For March, Fletcher scratched down sleet as sharp aggressive lines. Then he threw water over the artwork so that it looked as though it had rained on the page. To express the lush green promise of May, he took a house painter's brush to make a wide expanse of verdant optimism and convey the sense of something beginning. The bright glow of the July sun is achieved by dropping a

blob of orange ink onto dampened paper so that it diffused with a fuzzy halo. The heat of an August holiday is expressed by a tear providing the froth as the blue waves hit the blinding yellow sand. The colder, clearer days of September are represented by birds migrating across the blue sky. Fletcher found this month the hardest to resolve, yet in many ways, this is the most successful evocation in the calendar. October's autumnal leaves were made by tearing up brown envelopes containing bills, tax demands and other unfriendly notifications suggesting the onset of winter. Foggy November days are expressed by pencil shading so impenetrable that it almost obscures the dates. The chilly snow of December is evoked by printing his thumbprints in clean transparent varnish.

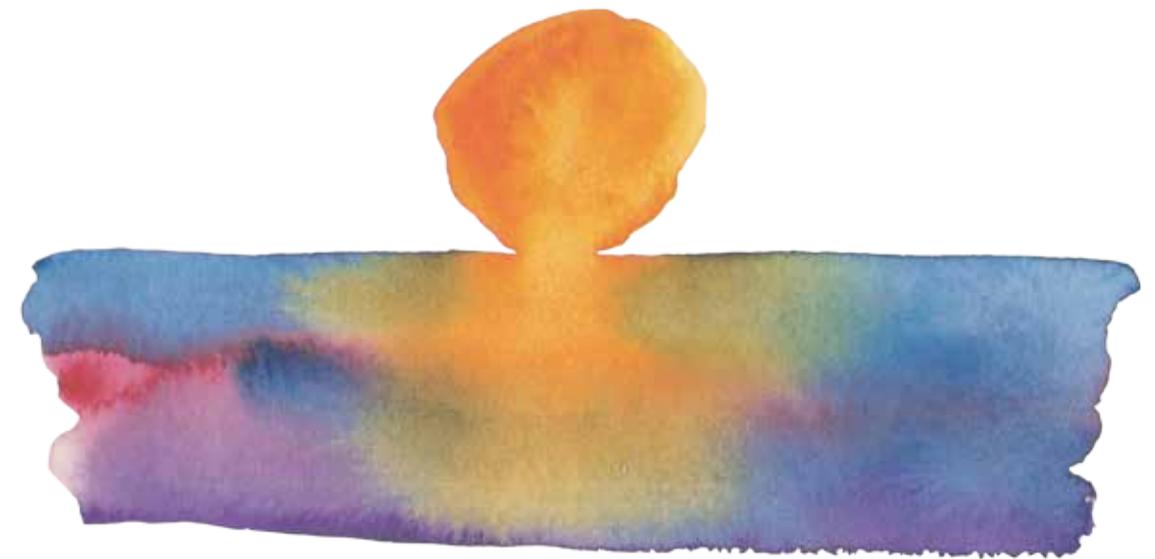


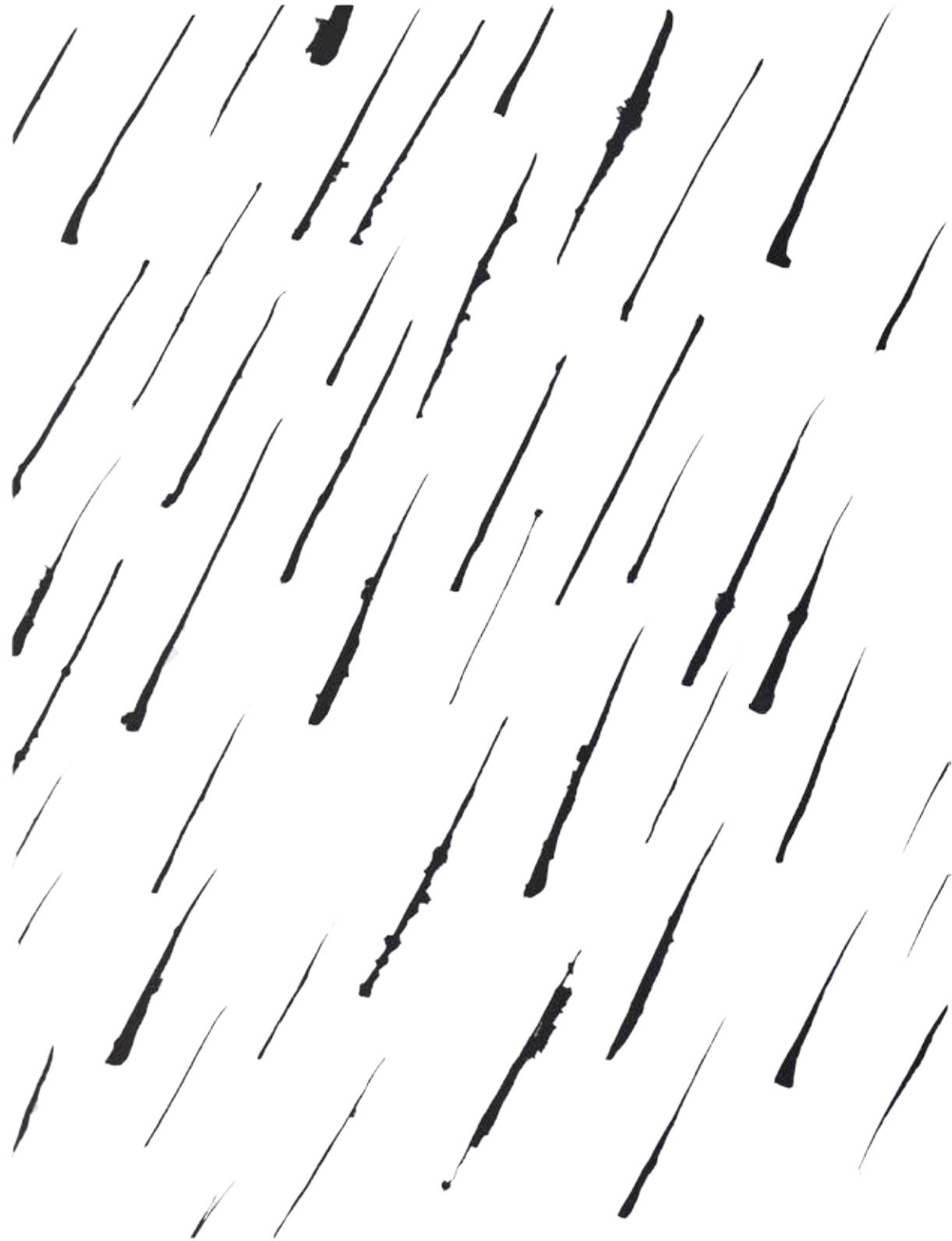
Jeremy Myerson Beware Wet Paint

Weather report

"You can't actually draw sunshine – you can only imply it." This section attempts to register the sensations of weather, humidity and temperature, using just pen and pencil, ink and paper.

With these basic implements, Fletcher manages to make us feel a breeze, warmth, piercing cold, or pervading damp. So abstract are some visualizations taken from a calendar of "Unreliable seasonal predictions", that they remind us that all visual art requires the active participation of the viewer, and a willingness to engage with the proposition being communicated.





WIND

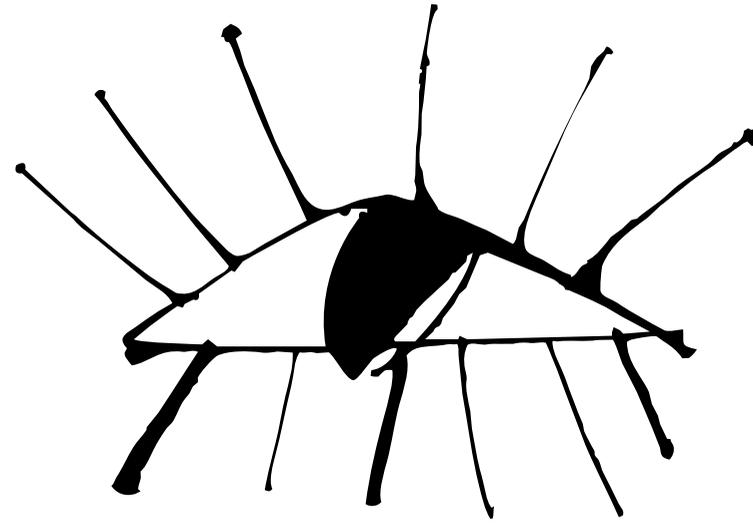
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Sometimes I am,
sometimes I think.

”

perceptions

Edited by Beatrice Smania



Wink (Alan Fletcher)

Mind sets

In Plato's allegory of the human condition, we are tied by chains in a dark cave, able to see a passing parade of objects we think real but which are only cast shadows. Since the Renaissance it has been held that the world is a tangible phenomenon slowly being unravelled by science. An alternative view is that it's a mirage, a construction of imagination. A web of ideas, a fabric of our own making. The Greeks assumed that light entered the eye bringing with it what we see and the beauty of nature. They were wrong. Nature is a dull affair, 'soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the scurrying of material, endlessly, meaningles-

sly'. Even light comes as invisible wavelengths. It's the brain who does all the work, parses the spectrum, sorts out the shapes and lines, puts everything together to form a mental picture. What happens is this. Light waves arrive on the retina, this translates them into tiny upside-down images. Millions of receptors carve these up into messages which race off to several billion cells. These interpret the data and send back messages to project the images the right way up. That's what you see in the mind's eye. Actually that's not quite true. The picture translated by the retina and the image projected in the mind's eye are

not necessarily the same. During the process language and culture act as prisms to bend and shape our view, so although we all start out seeing the same things each individual unconsciously creates their own interpretation. Therefore although we think of the world as an entity existing outside our head it's only a mirage in the mind. [...] Stephen Hawking: 'We see the universe the way it is because if it were different, we would not be here to observe it.' And, on a less metaphysical plane, Werner Heisenberg: 'What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.' Or plainly

put, what a piece of bread looks like depends on whether you're hungry or not. Our notion of reality is moulded by our parents, schooling and culture. Since we all come from differing backgrounds so do our perception of things. That is not to say we experience totally different aspects of those things. The Hindu's view of a cow in no way corresponds to that of a canning factory meatpacker, and in Istanbul they keep their pigs in the zoo instead of making them into sausages. We build our own models of reality. Even those created by Newton or Einstein or fashioned by Picasso or James Joyce, are merely alternative versions of the same

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Who are you going to believe,
me or your eyes?
”

GROUCHO MARX

hologram. To alter our particular personal construct requires a substantial leap of imagination as we need to see things from a new angle. And only when this is expressed through a creative action, can it be experienced by others. At which point their perceptions can also change. What things look like is a convention not a truth, as how we see things is a weird amalgam of observer and observed. We have to accept the uncomfortable fact that much of what seems real to us is governed by our own perceptions.

During his lifetime Van Gogh couldn't give his paintings away yet eight years after his death Sunflowers was sold for £ 24.75 million. The painting hadn't changed but aesthetic and visual attitudes had. Now the artworld considers there is a strong possibility that it is a fake [...]. Of course you may find all this sort of thing a bit tedious and prefer to be a goldfish. The awareness of a goldfish is about four seconds, so it never gets bored as each trip around the bowl is a new journey. A condition which has advantages.

to **see** reason  to **see** someone off  to **see**
a point of view  to **see** what one can do  to **s**
 to **see** it's put right  can't **see** the wood
wait and **see**  oversee  to **look** down on som
up to someone  to **look** someone up  to **look**
someone over  to **look** something up  to
to take a **look** see  to get a **look-in**  to keep
it **looks** like  a **look-alike**  if **looks** could kil
looker  outlook  overlook  **look in** 
ing up  **eyewitness**  **eye-opener**  **e**
the mind's **eye**  the third **eye**  a sharp **eye**
 private **eye**  keep an **eye** on things  easy
more than meets the **eye**  my **eye!**  an **eye**
e  keep a weather **eye** open  cock-**eyed** 
pie-**eyed**  **eyeful**  **eyewash**  **eyesc**
ing  **eyesight**  fore**sight**  hind**sight**
out of **sight**  second **sight**  over**sight** 

Colour prejudice

Associations with colour are emotive, irrational and deep-seated. There is an old advertising story about making three packs of detergent in different colour to test market reactions. One was done in yellow, one in blue, and one in yellow and blue. A panel of housewife were asked to try them out. They judged the power in the yellow pack as corrosive, the blue one as too mild, the yellow and blue just right. Actually the packs all contained the same stuff.

Colour colours our life. Dr Max Luscher diagnosed personality disorders through colour associations, and his application of the principles to marketing is thought by some to be mildly sinister. Broadly speaking, his conclusions are that dark blue appeals to people motivated by security – a popular house-color among financial institutions. Blue-green is associated with constancy and is often used on packaging for intimate products like toiletries. Orange-red seems to be rela-

ted to activity and is common choice for those who market leisure and pleasure. As a corporate colour bright yellow is associated with modernity. Not surprisingly, combinations of yellow and red are the corporate colour of Kodak and Shell. Not that Henry Ford seemed to give a toss – remarking you could have his cars in any colour you liked as long as it was black. He had his reasons – only black enamel dried quickly enough to be used on the conveyor belt. However, he also had fixations, believing that 'machine' blue and 'eggshell' white were beneficial for 'order and morale'. Five thousand men continuously painted in the vast Ford plant in Detroit. Every month they used eleven thousand gallons of both colours. They are still the company colours.

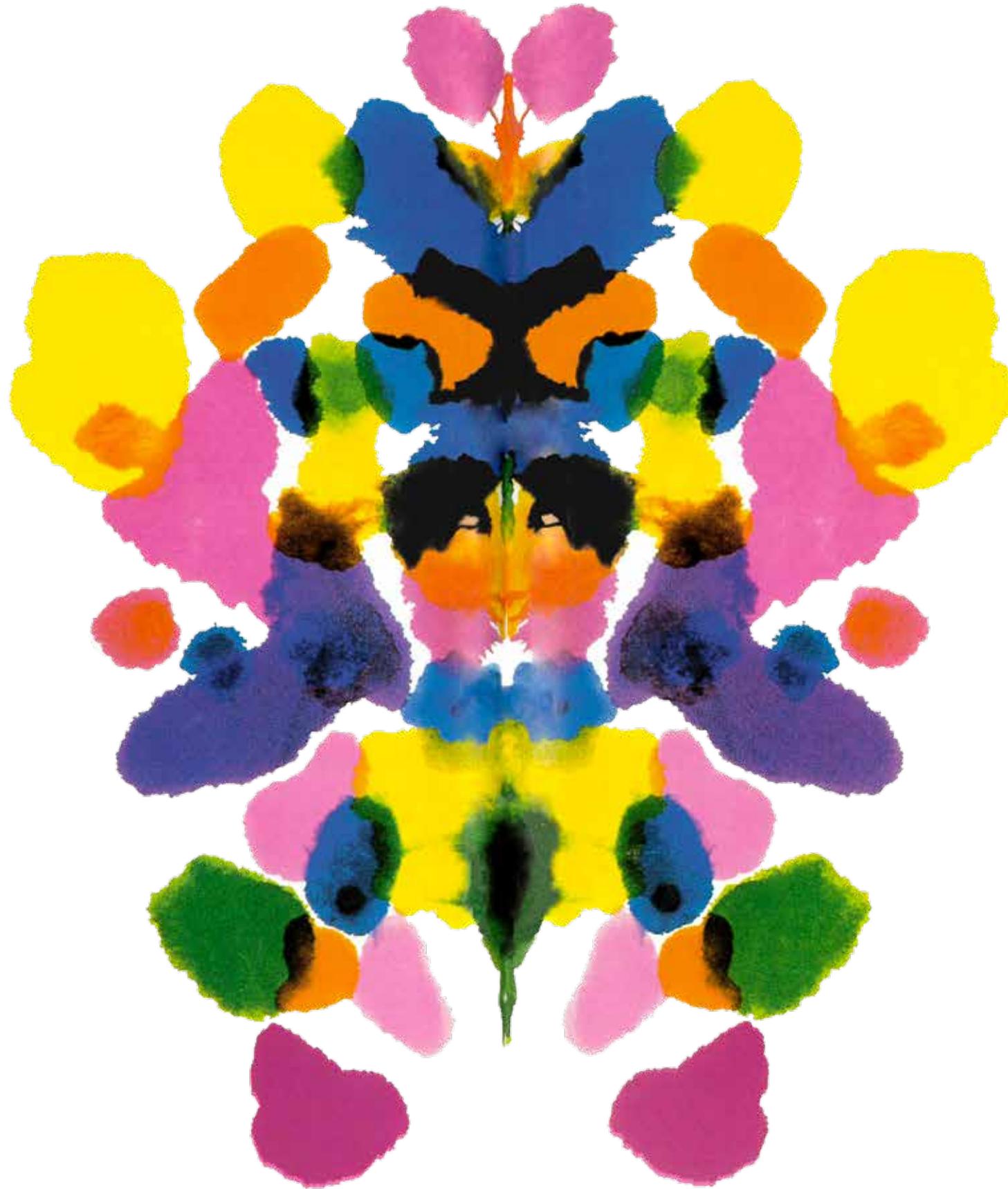
When I was designing an identity for a classy hotel group in the Far East, it was suggested that each manager should have a say in the choice of colour for each hotel because of local cultural pre-

ferences. The scenario went like this: the hotel in Hong Kong didn't want blue as it symbolizes death and requested "Chinese" red. To avoid debate on the precise shade I cut a corner off the red menu of the China Garden restaurant behind the hotel. A sample of the saffron orange material worn by Buddhist priests provided the specification for the hotel in Bangkok. The manager in Singapore was keen to the same maroon as his tie (but declines to provide a swatch). San Francisco wanted the same red as the Stars and Stripes. The daughter of the hotel owner in Malaysia suggested a delicate salmon pink. Not my inclination, but as she was going to marry the chief executive I thought it ungracious to quibble.

A character in a George Elliot novel explain that colours deeply penetrate her like scent, and author Dorothy Parker went for reds. She painted her living room in nine shades of red: pink, vermilion, scarlet, crimson, maroon, raspberry,

rose, russet and magenta. Pianist Glenn Gould's favourite colour was battleship grey (he committed suicide), and Matisse more subtly is said to have loved "the delicate transparent pinks of baked shrimp shells".

Green has always been considered restful. Pliny wrote that "emerald delight the eye without fatiguing it". Nero peered through an emerald while enjoying lions devouring Christians. In the Middle Ages engravers gazed into a green beryl to rest their eyes, and since the seventeenth century theatres have had a green room so actors could relax from the footlight glare. Green was Oscar Wilde's colour – decadent, provocative. He told his followers in the Aesthetic Movement to always wear green carnations supplied by his florist, Goodyears: "They grow them there." Then of course there was the Emerald City in The Wizard of Oz whose citizens saw everything in beautiful shades of green.



Now you see it, now you don't

The things people believe can be quietly extraordinary. A few years ago someone suggested that the more intelligent a bird or animal the better it tasted when cooked. That's about as sensible as thinking that because a rose smells better than a cabbage it makes better soup. Even that expert of deduction Arthur Conan Doyle believed in fairies, despite the fact that the photographs taken by two little girls at the bottom of their garden in 1917, which had convinced him, were revealed to be fake. In some quarters it is still held that Walter Sickert was Jack the Ripper. Perhaps he was.

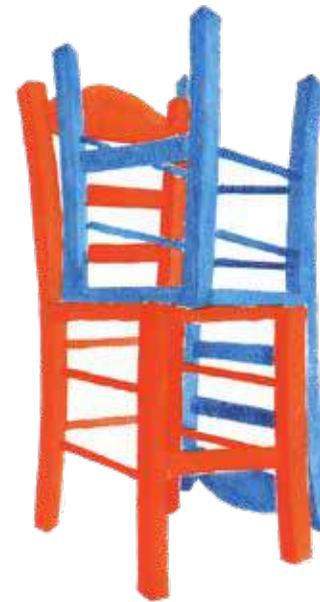
Although such fanciful opinions could be considered eccentricities, there is a very real condition called Capgras's syndrome in which sufferers believe that someone they know has been replaced by an iden-

tical impostor. The same credibility gap is created by the optical illusion.

Here the difference between what we see and yet know can't possibly be, leads us to think we are "seeing things" or that we must "dreaming". The power of illusion lies in its untranslated immediacy through a suspension of disbelief.

Manipulating the eye - Fletcher's observations of unsuspected balances, encounters, or collisions, have their repercussions in his designs. Such visual conundrums hold his fascination and fuel the amusement of finding unusual solutions to prosaic problems.

Although the emblem for the International Society for Hearth Research is flat and linear, the pattern implies it is spherical. A demonstration that two dimensions can make three.



Two chairs (Alan Fletcher, 1995)

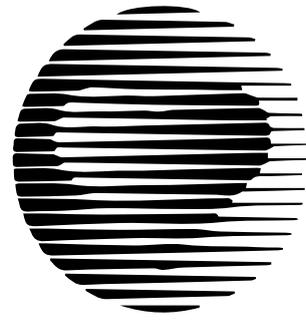
The Z for the Zinc Development Associations appears three-dimensional but analyse it and you will discover it is an impossible preposition. The design amalgamates both positive and negative to represent the dual forms of a zinc die-casting mould.

Asked to design an emblem for advertising agency Manton Woodyer and Kettle, Fletcher constructed the intriguing visual illusion. Are the flowers in the picture frame or in a vase on the table in front of the frame? The illusion could be viewed as a wry comment on advertising agencies – all smoke and mirrors! But the flowers, also look like an owl and owls are wise. Incidentally the design was physically set up in the agency's reception but they kept forgetting to change the flowers, which rather spoilt the effect.

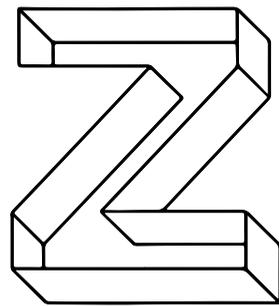
A similar ambiguity can be found in an evocation of Wimbledon, which appeared on a calendar on the page for June. The shadows leaves the question of which side of the line the tennis ball has fallen on unanswered.

Two chairs, noticed whilst lying on a beach, prompted the thought that perceptions are formed by points of view. By slightly moving his head Alan Fletcher noticed that the stacked chairs could be bisected by the horizon. The implication was obvious and didn't need to be tested by standing on his head.

The invitation card for a client's 50th birthday party requires the viewer to turn their head to read, a move which then presents the glass ready to drink. Thus, what appears to be nonsensical is made entirely sensible.



Emblem for International Society
for Hearth Research (Alan Fletcher)



Logo for Zinc Development
Associations (Alan Fletcher)

“

Reality is
merely an illusion,
albeit a very
persistent one.

”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Colourways

Colour is used in a number of ways. Fletcher treats it with subtlety or with brute force. It might be haphazardly applied, or matched with painstaking precision, but it is rarely used for decorative or arbitrary reasons.

Take a rainbow. This one doesn't show the whole thing and it doesn't even depict the right colours. But that doesn't matter. It's a notation of a rainbow and says enough to convey the impression without descending into cliché. This kind of economy and clarity of purpose extends right through Fletcher's work, encompassing a spectrum which ranges from subtle to super bold.

The intention of the calendar, published in a limited edition by Olivetti, was to regularly change an environment by twelve number paintings. It was not intended to be legible but evocative, stimulating and colourful. Hand printed in fluorescent inks, mismatched to produce sensational optical sensations... even the printer had to wear sunglasses. The ink company thought it the most vulgar calendar they had ever seen. It is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. At the other end of the scale is a more delicate exercise.

When a Kuwait consortium commissio-



Rainbow (Alan Fletcher)

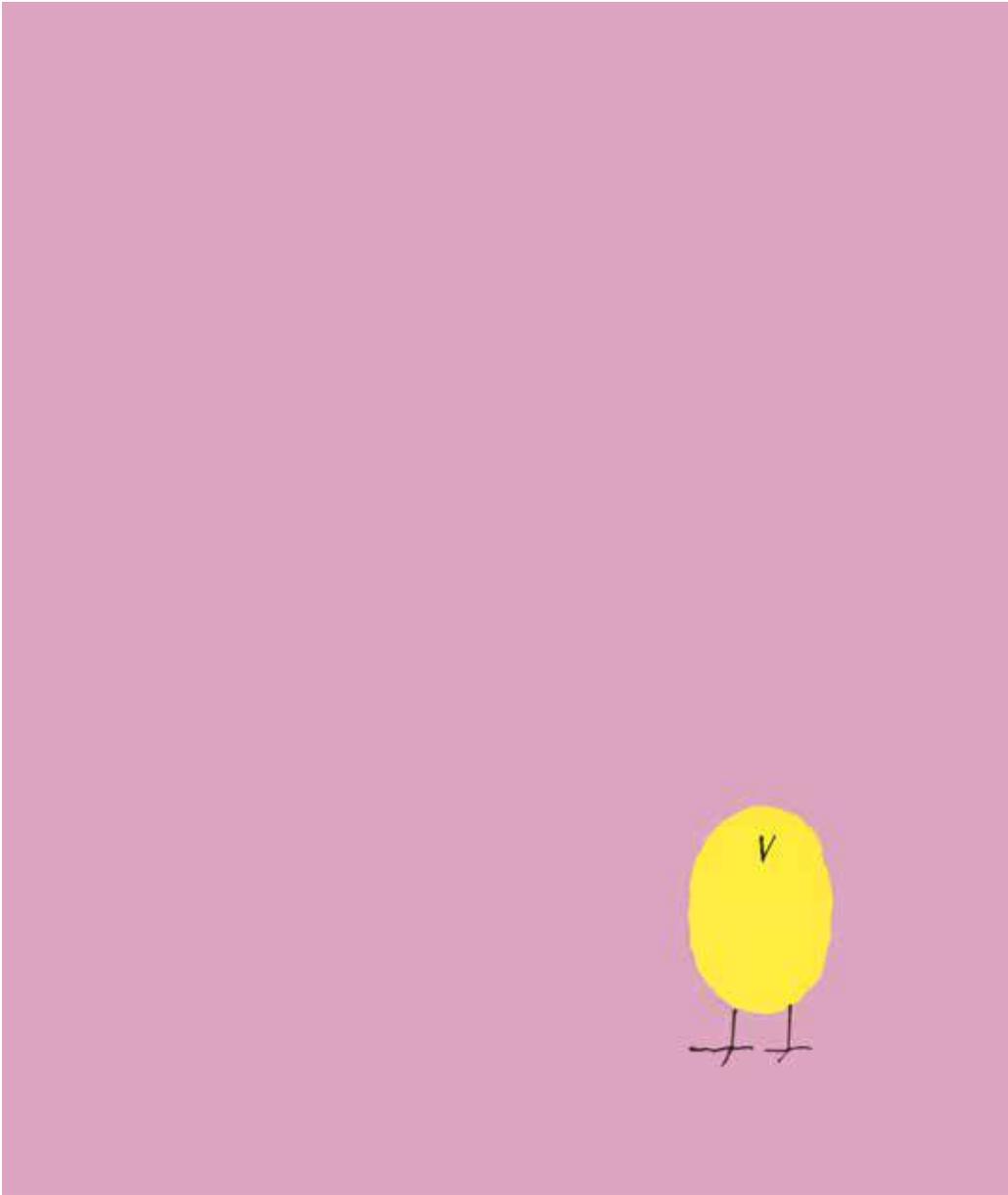


Fields of blue flowers (Alan Fletcher)

ned an annual report, Fletcher decided to turn the financial diagrams into demonstrations of a colour theory. In the example shown the two vertical turquoise bars are exactly the same colour and only appear different due to an interaction with the colour backgrounds. This is known as the Bezold Effect. [...] Compare this with the studied treatment for a field of tiny vivid blue flowers in which each single flower is a different shade of blue from cerulean to indigo. The presence of the one yellow flower was to make the blues appear bluer. The deliberate combination of pink, as a background, with yellow Easter chick

creates a sensation which is both cute and sentimental, an effect other graphic devices might struggle to match. Colour can also be applied to prod the sub-conscious.

For a number of different Polaroid posters, promoting a new colour film, Fletcher created an intriguing Rorschach test. This is a diagnostic technique used by psychologists to get patients to say what they think an abstract form represents. The design was made by dropping colours onto a flat sheet of paper, which he then folded in half, and squashed. Opened up, it revealed a picture rich in potential meaning.



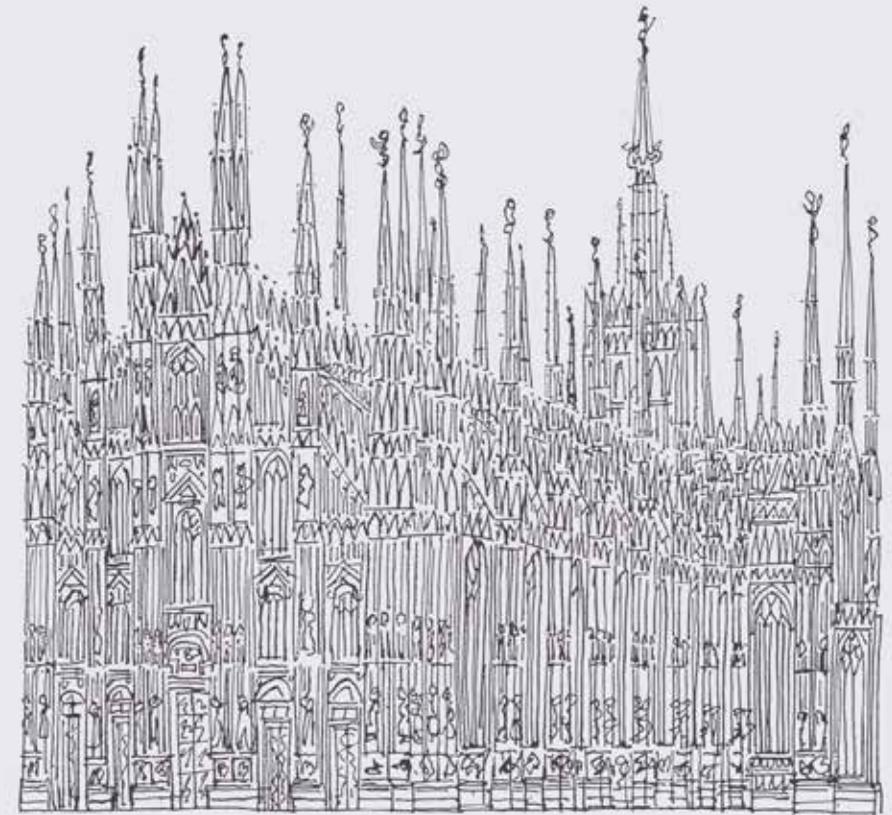
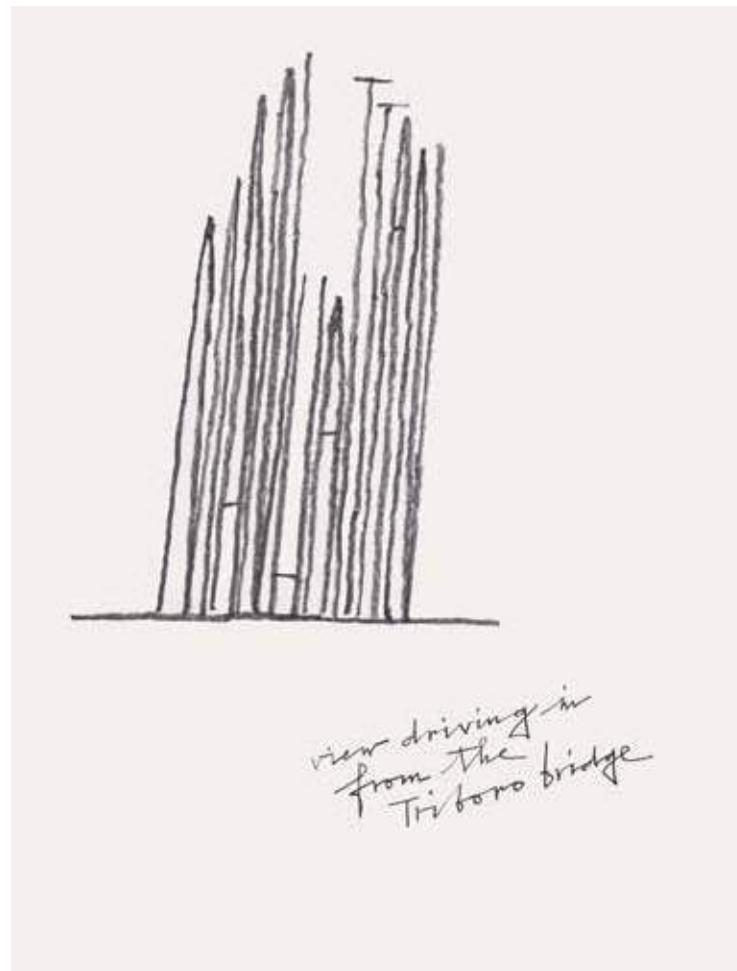
places

Edited by Aurora Saita

Writing architecture

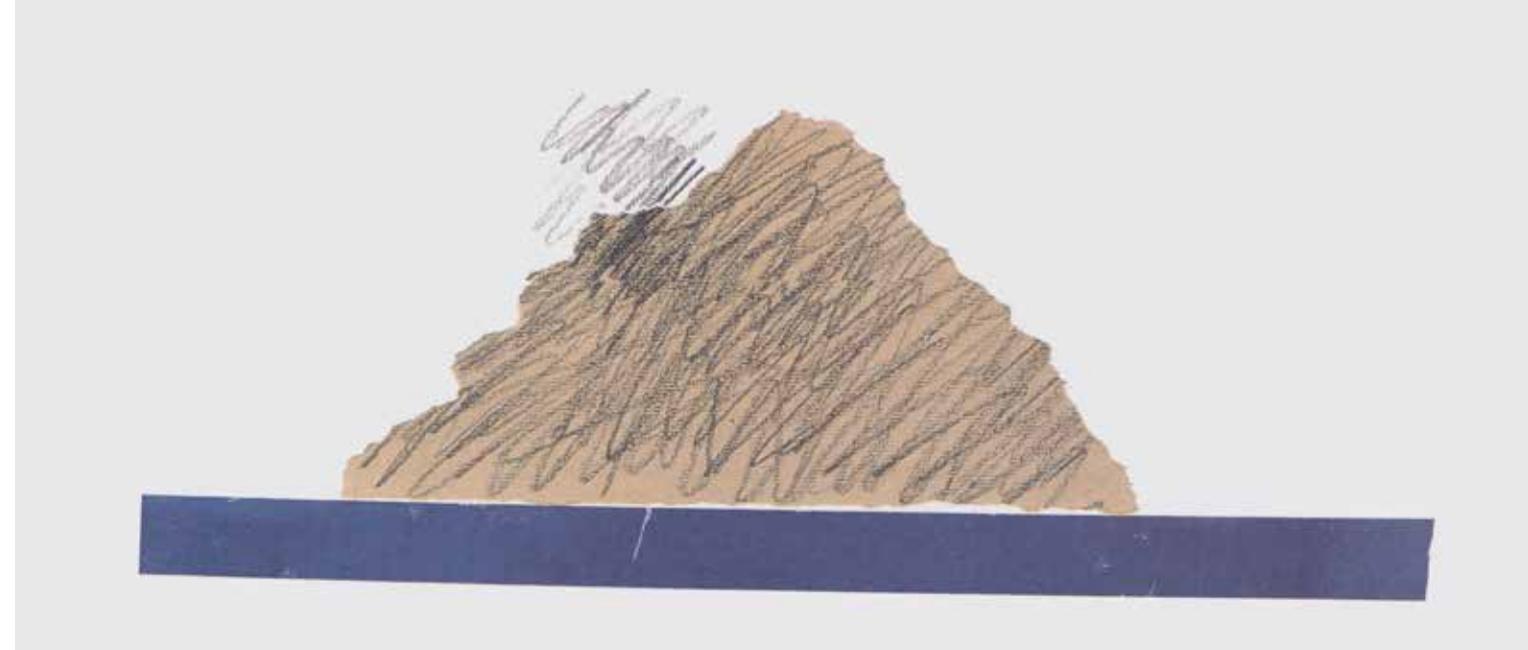
These designs, which relate the names of places to their built form, were all completed within a two-year period. The silver of Chinese-red skyline of Hong Kong was a poster for the Deutsches Architektur Museum in Frankfurt. The density of letters was intended to reflect the title and subject of the exhibition. The configuration of Stonehenge, again drawn to represent rather than imitate, was for a book jacket on the monument's future. By using non-waterproof ink, the splodge of yellow diffused the lettering to create the solstice, and the dazzle of seeing the stones against the sun. The drawing of Manhattan was a contribution to a promotional exercise launched by designer Massimo Vignelli to persuade the city to erect a sculpture – a Big Apple. Vignelli asked design colleagues around the world to send in their interpretation of Manhattan. Here is Fletcher's.

Manhattan: view driving in from the Triboro bridge (Alan Fletcher)



Il Duomo, Milano (Alan Fletcher, 2000)

Facading - These facades were constructed by Fletcher with a variety of pens and pencils on various papers by different methods. The intention was to employ all sorts of materials and tools yet use them within limited constraints. The buildings were loosely copied from postcards, photographs, travel books and other visual references. No travel expenditure, no problems with inclement weather. The objective was to reverse the architectural process by reducing volume to line, to convert three dimensions into two. In other words, to flatten space.



Stromboli (Alan Fletcher)

A graphic excursion

A pictorial tour of the twelve countries of the European Community for a calendar is the subject of this article. The task of representing each of the countries could have been tackled in a variety of ways. Fruit, flowers and vegetables presented an early option – from Dutch tulips to Brussel sprout. Other subjects such as Danish bicycles and Portuguese men-of-war crowded into Fletcher's mind as he juggled with concepts. Fletcher's method is to cut down the options steadily, settle on one route, and then fix constraints into both subject and technique until the essence can be defined and its execution achieved. In this case, he decided to search for a single theme that could be interpreted in twelve ways, rather than an ad hoc assembly of disparate approaches. The theme he settled on was landscapes or at least various aspects of landscapes. The toughest subject was Luxembourg;

'A big name for a small place,' he thought. Remembering that a girl at Pentagram came from there, he asked her to give him some suggestions. She responded that she was from Lichtenstein. He finally looked it up in Pears Cyclopaedia. This said that Luxembourg was a small country of hills and valleys. Some of the scenes use old, scuffed and distressed industrial coloured tapes. Apparently they were lying around the studio. How he made the connection between industrial tape and flags, or seascape and canals, is not quite so easy to explain – intuition perhaps. Just as Fletcher was pondering on a solution for France, he went to a Raoul Dufy exhibition. The festive scenes, often full of flags, triggered the thought of a Tour de fete. A joyful assembly of tricolours, or rather red and blue tape. Note that the white stripe is implied, not shown. The depiction of 'Ireland as seen from

Wales' is also deceptively simple, but it belies its execution. The flick of a pencil produces the whiplash of rain. The white capped waves of the sea were arrived at by scratching printed grey paper with a scalpel. The black strokes and white scratches in turn tonally affect the single grey which is made to appear as two different greys.

A plan of Amsterdam suggested a design based on an aerial view, with blue tape used to represent the grid of canals and a page taken from a telephone directory to signify the buildings. The design makes more than a passing nod to Mondrian's 1943 painting, *Boogie Woogie*, showing Manhattan as seen from the top of a skyscraper. 'I knew there would be nothing Wim would like less than a sloppy Mondrian,' said Fletcher mischievously. Greece is represented by the memory of a summer holiday spent on a particularly

arid, hot island. Torn brown wrapping paper – its grain reflecting a rocky terrain – sits beneath the most prickly, aggressive sun Fletcher could draw. Pushing this a step further, the sun was printed in fiery fluorescent orange to convey a sense of searing heat. The German landscape on the next page parodies a national trait of uniformity by depicting the Black Forest as imprecise trees on a precise grid. The scene for Belgium is inspired by *Poppy Day*, when the war dead are commemorated in Britain with the wearing of a red paper poppy in the lapel. A symbol to recall the death and destruction in World War I in the fields of Flanders. The landscape is made to recede into the distance as the flowers gradually diminish in shape and size. The glow of sunburnt bodies on a crowded beach on the Spanish Costa Brava was achieved by printing in bronze metallic ink.



Black Forest (Alan Fletcher)

Feedback - Fletcher's visual interpretations of different countries are reflected in one of his best-known and most useful innovations. He has his favourite places to visit. And his favourite places have become ours because he has created a unique international information network about the attractions to be found in cities around the world. Feedback is a series of Pentagram booklets, distributed to clients, colleagues and friends, which began in the 1980s.

Inside each edition, designers, artists, architects, writers and photographers give descriptions of the most interesting hotels, restaurants, street markets, shops, theatres, galleries, etc. they have encountered on their recent business travels. He attributes his decision to launch Feedback to one cold, rainy winter night in Hamburg.

He had arrived there on a Sunday eve-

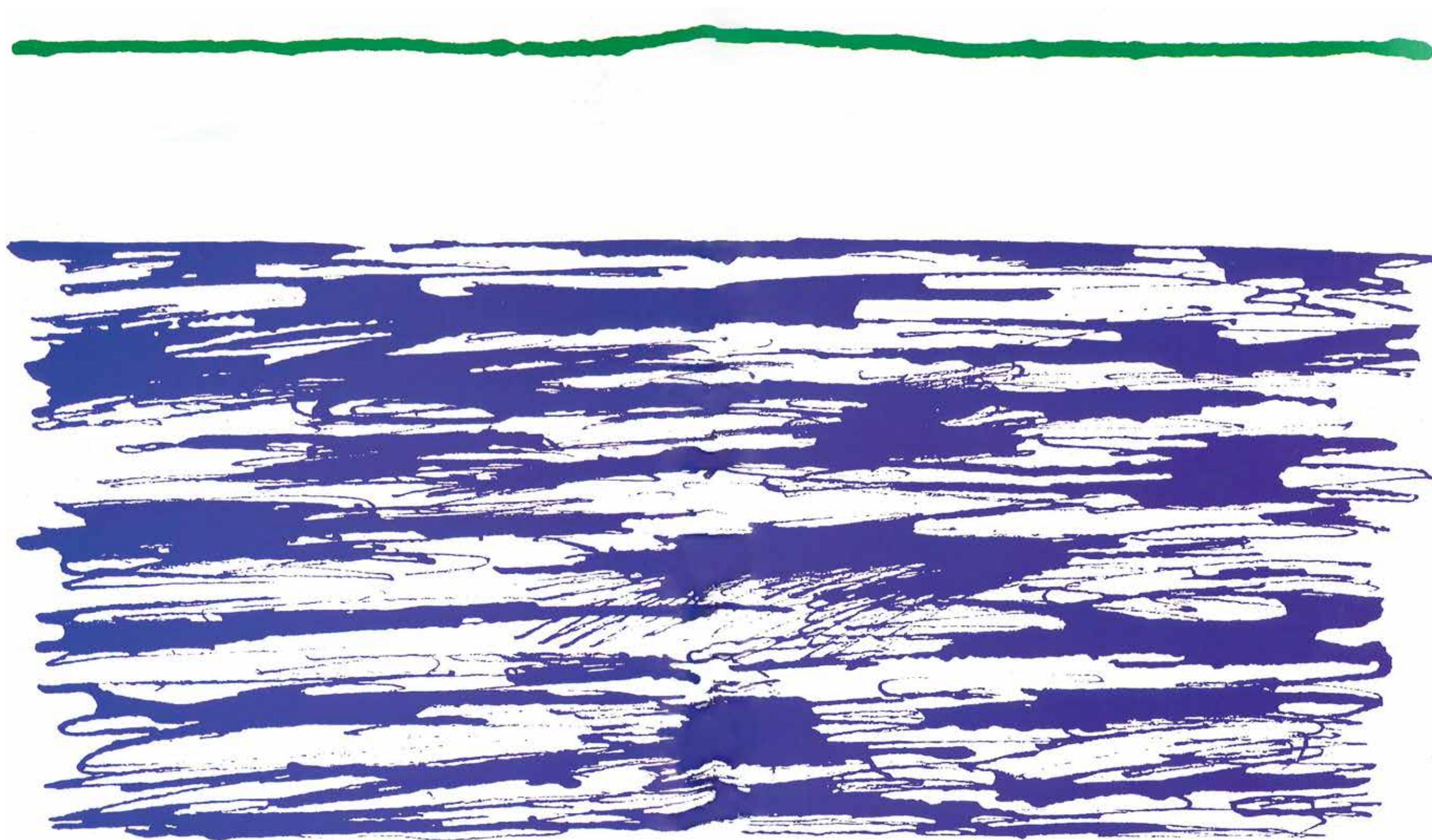
ning as he had an early meeting on Monday morning, but he didn't fancy dining in the empty hotel restaurant. He asked the concierge to recommend another and was directed to one which on arrival he found equally drab and gloomy. He deeply regretted not having asked a local designer beforehand where an interesting restaurant could be located on a Sunday night in February.

Then the thought occurred to him.

Many designers travelling abroad on business must find themselves in the same fix. Fletcher wrote to his contacts in the creative community, requesting recommendations on what to do, where to eat and where to stay in the world's major cities. Slowly the feedback trickled in. Today Feedback is an institution.

There are quite a few designers who refuse to leave for the airport without the latest edition packed in their case.





Wayfinding

The design of signs for buildings that are architectural landmarks, or are complex in their functional layout, or both, represent some of the most difficult challenges a graphic designer is likely to face. This article looks at four of Alan Fletcher's sign programmes: for Richard Roger's Lloyd's of London building, for Norman Foster's Stansted Airport Terminal, for the Victoria & Albert Museum, and for the IBM European headquarters at Tour Pascal in Paris. All of these projects required a diverse approach as they all presented different problems. These projects reflect his belief that signs, in addition to their purpose, should be tailored to the environment in which they appear. The last thing that architects who create innovative buildings want are signs that will detract from the aesthetic clarity of their work.

Lloyd's of London - The governing idea for the concrete and steel-clad expanses of Lloyd's was to use a stencil (attributed to Le Corbusier) to frame the information so that one could look directly through the signs to read the architecture. Right-angling the sign panels enabled them to be inserted between the joints of the steel cladding, which was already in place on site, and to project out from the walls, thus increasing visibility. Signs encircling columns were spaced off the surface and other fixing variations were developed to ensure sensitive integration with the interiors. Colour coding was used to identify the various levels and areas. The assignment reveals Fletcher's ability to reduce a problem to its bare essentials, and yet also come up with an aesthetic, innovative and appropriate answer.

I don't know where I'm going but I'm on my way

Quote (Alan Fletcher)

Victoria & Albert Museum - Some of the most intelligent people in the world can get totally lost in the Victoria & Albert Museum. This nineteenth-century building is uniquely disorienting as one vast space simply opens into yet another. As a consequence, visitors rarely know where they are, or on which floor they are standing, or even in which direction they face. Finding a method to guide them around was further complicated by the need to avoid interfering with the ornate ceilings and decorated walls found in many of the spaces. After analyzing the situation, Fletcher concluded that installing directional signs would turn the V&A into a museum of signs. However, if people couldn't be directed, they should at least know where they were located. The answer was to introduce an orientation system based on a colour-coded compass

indicating north, east, west and south. The relevant directional colour was repeated on the signs, and a colour-coded floor plan of the exhibits given to visitors when they entered the museum. For instance if a visitor looked north, they would see signs in the representative colour, and by orienting the plan they would know which way they wanted to go. There still remained the intractable problem of how to clearly signal the spaces and identify the permanent collections. It was seeing old military flags hanging in Westminster Abbey that suggested the thought of using banners. The scheme began to unravel almost as soon as it was unveiled. The programme could only be partially implemented due to severe funding shortfalls. Banners were not properly lit, some were hung in the dark, some still are.

Space-time

The world is not only stranger than we imagine – it is stranger that we can imagine. Take the weird branch of scientific inquiry called quantum physics where electrons, protons, tachyons, neutrons, and other kinds of particle exist in unpredictable anarchy. A particle can be in two places at once, travel forwards and backwards at the same time, disappear and reappear in the same instant, have mass but no volume. Then there is all that strange stuff like superstring theory with ten-dimensional loops of energy which occupy a space as small as the atom, as the atom is to the solar system. Indeed there is a proposal that it's only looking

at things that gives them an existence and that the universe is no more than a figment of imagination. That is to say if no one looked at the moon it would gradually disappear. I'm mystified how people can work with things they can't see – with microbes, molecules, knots in time, black holes, wormholes and curved space. I have immense difficulties working with things I can see, which are tangible, flat and immobile. But how is it, I ask myself with dubious self-satisfaction, that I can probably draw a better cat than your leading-edge mathematician? Many scientists predict the universe will

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There is no difference between Time and any of the three dimensions of Space except that our consciousness moves along it.

”

H.G. WELLS

end as it began by collapsing back into a single point. If so, at a specific moment, time could reverse and run backwards. Unless we are in a non-linear situation and merely flip back and forth like a coin tumbling through eternity. Time was absolute and unchanging until Einstein equated it with motion, space, length, breadth and height – all at once and in one dimension. On the other hand perhaps time is no more than a convenience which stops everything from happening all at once. A category of abstract thought by which the world is practically organized and supposedly understood.

As people say, the essence of action is timing. Time doesn't move or stop any more than length extends or contracts. Time is relative. Not that I find that a comforting thought as when I was a child a year was an eternity whereas nowadays I seem to be having breakfast every fifteen minutes. Perhaps the best way of thinking of it is like philosopher-idler Henry David Thoreau who remarked that 'Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in.'

“

We are bound to perceive
objects in the external
world as existing in
Time and Space and as
being governed by causal
relations, and we cannot
trascend the limitations
which our concepts of
space, time, and causality
impose upon us.

”