



timeless

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Editoriale

Attraverso questa monografia è stato esaminato il senso di atemporalità del design, rivelando la molteplicità di opinioni e punti di vista che concorrono alla strutturazione di un concetto tanto complesso. Questo tema è stato affrontato esponendo la visione personale di due autori lontani nel tempo e appartenenti a due ambienti artistici e progettuali differenti sottolineando quanto entrambi, in modo diverso, abbiano contribuito ad alimentare il flusso di un tempo che va oltre la sua concezione cronologica. Timeless è l'idea di design di Massimo Vignelli ed è anche il momento immortalato dalla macchina fotografica di Julia Margaret Cameron. Oggi il design è soprattutto relazione, e questa relazione si gioca sempre più sul filo del tempo. Un tempo che non vogliamo sia misurato e valutato esclusivamente in maniera scientifica, ma un tempo che vogliamo sia fermato affinché i prodotti di comunicazione siano in grado di continuare a dialogare con la realtà che li circonda, seppur questa sia in costante mutamento. Il timeless design viene analizzato da una prospettiva concettuale, pratica, personale, fotografica, educativa ed infine visuale, per sottolineare quanto siano molteplici e vaste negli approcci le analisi di una stessa idea. "Timeless" è questo, è andare oltre il senso cronologico del tempo, per scoprire cosa si cela dietro forme, strutture e momenti che si propongono di essere eterni, duraturi. La monografia, pur essendo italiana, contiene contributi anche in lingua inglese che non sono stati tradotti al fine di tenere fede alle fonti e conservare integralmente le testimonianze degli autori; questo è infatti uno dei pochi modi per garantire autenticità e veridicità nella trattazione di un tema tanto cruciale nella storia del design.

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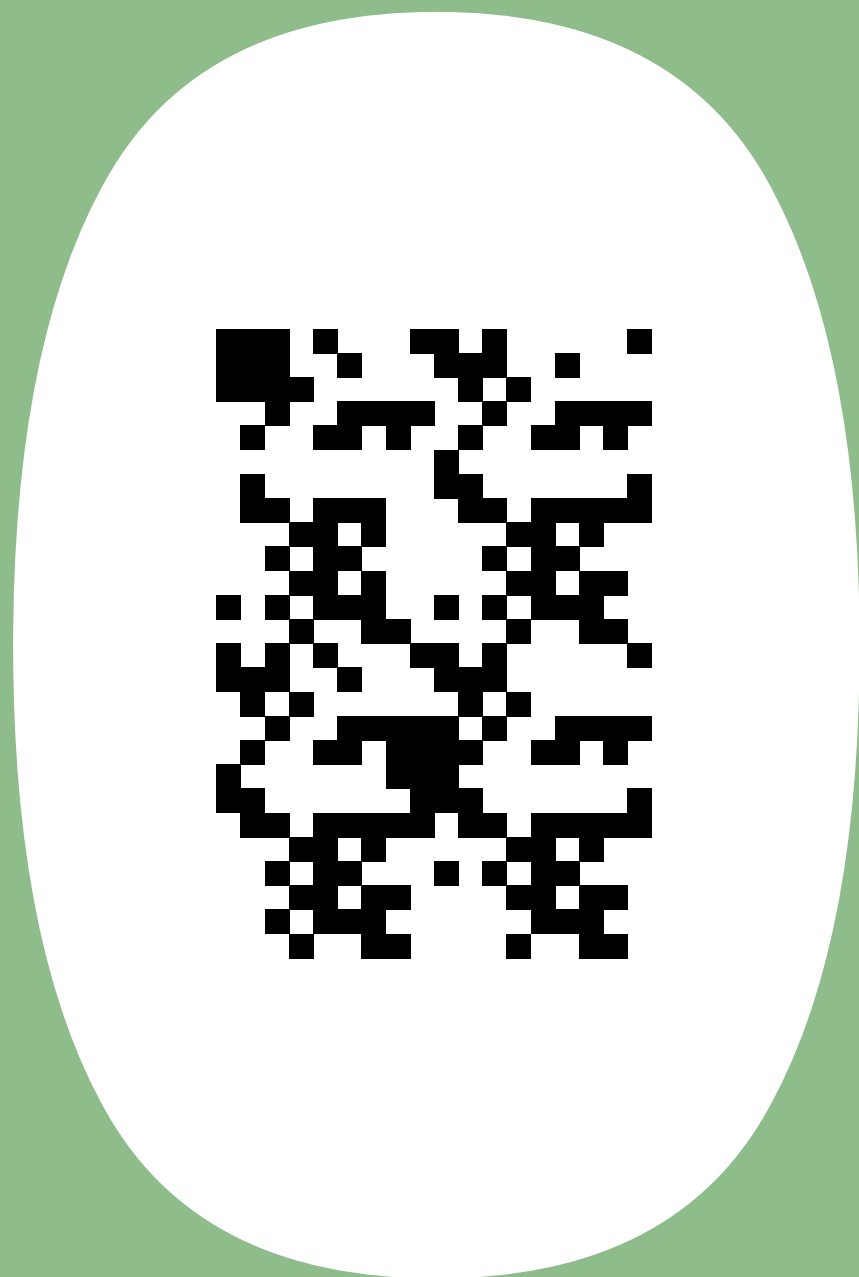
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A timeless concept

What Massimo Vignelli thinks

a cura di Maira Allievi

Massimo Vignelli: Creator of Timeless Design and Fearless Critic of “Junk”

The text looks back to the 1990s, to a debate that polarized the graphic design profession and that had its roots in a panel discussion on typography that took place in the offices of Print magazine and was reported in a 1991 issue. On that panel, Vignelli called Emigre magazine and Emigre fonts “garbage” and “an aberration of culture.” His comments set off a chain of attacks on both sides. For a good part of the ’90s, one could hardly open a design magazine without reading about “the prison of the grid,” as blamed on Vignelli and other Modernists, versus “the chaos of the new aesthetics,” as blamed on the designers of Emigre and others experimenting with deconstruction and unpredictability.

The following conversation, re-edited for Imprint, was published in the July 1996 issue of Print as “NO MORE WAR! Massimo Vignelli vs. The Renegades.”



Immagine 01. Massimo and Lella Vignelli home studio. Pubblicato in VignelliPhotographs. 2019

In 1996, while the debate raged, I sat down with Mr. Vignelli to delve into the reasoning, the specifics, behind his comments. Why, I asked, can't we appreciate both schools of thought? As in painting or music, should there not be room for many styles, all of which are valid? And how, I wondered, would he respond to the criticisms of his work, the collateral damage of the debate? As you'll see, Massimo Vignelli was fearless. He spoke his mind about what he believed in. He didn't mince words when it came to criticizing what he disliked. He even criticized his own clients, those who “tampered” with his work.

Ever since you called Emigre “garbage” and “an aberration of culture,” you’ve gotten a reputation as someone who makes judgments about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ design based on style. Why can’t all of us appreciate many styles of design, just like we can enjoy listening to both Mozart and Coltraine?
Yes, but those are both good music. Then there is junk music, like radio jingles. And there is junk design. It is not a matter of style or taste. It is a matter of quality and non-quality.

How do you define “quality?”
Things that are done with knowledge. I am in

terested in work that is grounded in semiotics, the science or philosophy of communications. Semiotics has three levels: semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics. Semantics relates to how information is expressed. Syntactics relates to structure, discipline, the coherence of elements, the continuity. I am also pragmatic. How is this perceived by the reader? Can he or she retrieve the information in the proper way?

I personally find Taylor's Guides to Gardening, which you designed, in which photographs of plants are arranged by color, size, light requirements, to be an excellent application of this.

The solution was in the problem itself. We're always asking ourselves how we can solve the problem in the way that is the most clear, most beautiful, most timeless, most elegant. Actually, I'm tired of the words, "problem-solving." There is no absolute reality. Only one's interpretation of that reality. Therefore, my solution is my interpretation of the problem filtered through my culture, my education, my understanding, my sensibility. To me, everything has a meaning. Typography is made of minor things, and unless you master the meanings of those things, you are illiterate. In later volumes in the Taylor's series, the client tampered with the typography in ways that changed the visual language of the book. For example, they indented paragraphs that began with an initial cap. That is not the way these things should be! The initial cap should be flush left. [...]

The people who criticize your work say that you give the same design — the heavy black rules, the red, black and yellow, the large Garamond Italic or Bodoni type going over the gutter — to every client.

It's my handwriting, my language, my interpretation. I am interested in achieving a certain effect, such as words becoming images. Every time I do the layout [of large type going over the gutter], it may look the same, but it's a little bit different, a little bit better. The scale may be different, the leading, the thicks and thins,

exactly how the words break across the gutter. I'm not interested in change for the sake of change or novelty. I'm only interested in a projection of intelligence that comes through refinement. If I spoke to Ivan Chermayeff about the same issue, he might say that say that the handwriting should reflect the client, not the designer. Ours are both fine philosophies. American culture is young. It's fascinated by diversity and novelty. European culture is fascinated by refinement. Obviously, I belong to European culture. We are continually refining language and the expression of it. I am very interested in the projection of intelligence that comes through refinement. I'm fascinated by new typefaces drawn from the past, such as our new Bodoni, which we did with Tom Carnase. We're using it everywhere.

You are known for doing everything with five type families: Bodoni, Century, Futura, Garamond ...
... and Helvetica.

The five-family type mafia.
That's a good one! Those are the typefaces with value. In the last ten or fifteen years, in order to generate a new direction the young people threw away things that were good. If architecture had done this, we would have gone back to stilts and caves. The people who like Emigre say it's great because they have no education or sense.

Could you be saying this because it's so unlike your work?
No. Look at April Greiman's work. It's not like my work at all, but it is always exciting, always stimulating. Never gross or vulgar. I like the work of many younger designers. For example, Pippo Lionni, Leo Lionni's son, who works in Paris, Willi Kunz, and of course Michael Bierut. Some typefaces being designed today are very elegant. The work of Adrian Frutiger is very fine. Typefaces designed by Frutiger in the last five to ten years have fantastic refinements. The Emigre typefaces have zero refinement, zero grace. I suppose they're trying to come

out with new expressions. But there is no need for any of them.

Does it matter to you that Emigre fonts were originally designed for output on a dot-matrix printer, pre-PostScript?

No, I don't want to hear any rationalizations. It's all baloney. You measure these things by the end result. None of these fonts have made any contribution to typography. They are commercial and irresponsible.

Do you use the word irresponsible because you think these fonts are cynically being

foisted on a public that's merely hungry for novelty?

No, these people are sincere in what they're doing. They know their business very well. They do what they do for precise reasons. In the same way the writer of radio jingles is sincere about what he does. A whole generation of students and followers is being influenced by this kind of things. Students today need more respect for the past. Many of them know nothing about philosophy, about European history before the French Revolution or after. They know nothing of the major events of the century. They have no early training, such as

“I learned to think of graphic design as a way to create an experience, an experience that was not limited to two dimensions or to a momentary impression. It was about creating something lasting, even timeless.”

Michael Bierut



the Montessori system, in building structures and using color. Instead, their finger-paintings are put up on the refrigerator, and they're led to believe that these smearings are great works of art, like abstract expressionism. In high school they make scrapbooks. In college or art school they start working on computers on day one and stay glued to the screen. We shouldn't be surprised at what we see today: glorified infantilism. Look in Vogue and Vanity Fair and you see those scrapbook layouts everywhere. This is symptomatic of a culture in which everything, the whole environment, is falling apart. [...]

Let's say I showed you a piece of carved, 18th-century furniture, full of gold leaf and so forth. It's not to your taste. Is it beautiful?

Beauty could include the rejection of established values.

Is this something like how certain paintings of Manet were rejected by the French Academy — because only paintings such as those done by Ingres and David, which reflected a certain type of classical idealism or moral platitudes, were valued at the time?

Yes, Impressionism could have been considered ugly by people who had not developed the ability to look at a Manet and see it as beautiful. It's true that I might not have developed an ability to look at some things that are designed today. I understand that these overlappings communicate to the generation that grew up with MTV. I don't see it. For me, it is a mess. But the kids might be more comfortable.

Then are we talking about a generation gap or an absolute definition of intrinsic beauty?

We are talking about a schism rocking our profession! On the one side are the information architects, a term devised by Richard Saul Wurman, rooted in history and semiotics. On the other side are graphic designers rooted in advertising, pictorial arts, and trends. Personally I feel I no longer have anything to share

with the so-called graphic designers of today. David Carson is a terrific artist, very exciting, very talented. But he uses letterforms like a painter, as found objects, not as typography. He could never do something like a price list.

I imagine David Carson will never want to, or have to, do a price list. Is what you are saying that you can make a price list into a thing of beauty? And that you are not embarrassed to admit it.

Price lists, train schedules, I'm not ashamed at all. In addition to semiotics, I'm interested in ambiguity. These things tell you what something costs, when the train leaves. Then you look at them again and see what is happening on another level.

Are you saying that you appreciate the innovators, not the imitators?

The innovators are few. The imitators are few. All they do is look at design annuals and copy. For several years now I've been fighting the vulgarity, the sloppiness, the confusion. Today I'm taking a step to clarify the issue. The dictionary defines an architect as one who plans and achieves a difficult objective, such as the architect of a military victory. I applaud the person who designed the Nutrition Facts label that's on every food package now being sold in the U.S. That is a masterpiece of information architecture, and quite a victory for social responsibility. It has nothing to do with painting or self-expression. And here is a mailer I just received from the AIGA. I am ashamed that the American Institute of Graphic Arts, which ought to represent the highest level of our profession, has done something like this. Then I don't belong! By dropping out I end the war. After all, you cannot tell someone what to paint or not. That is a matter of personal choice.

Are you going to start a new organization for information architects?

Maybe. We can start with Jim Cross, Kit Hinrichs, Michael Bierut. Let's see what happens.



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BigThink interview
to Massimo Vignelli
about the art of
timeless design

The art of timeless design

The legendary designer explains how to avoid fads, cheap tricks, and “vulgarity” of all kinds.

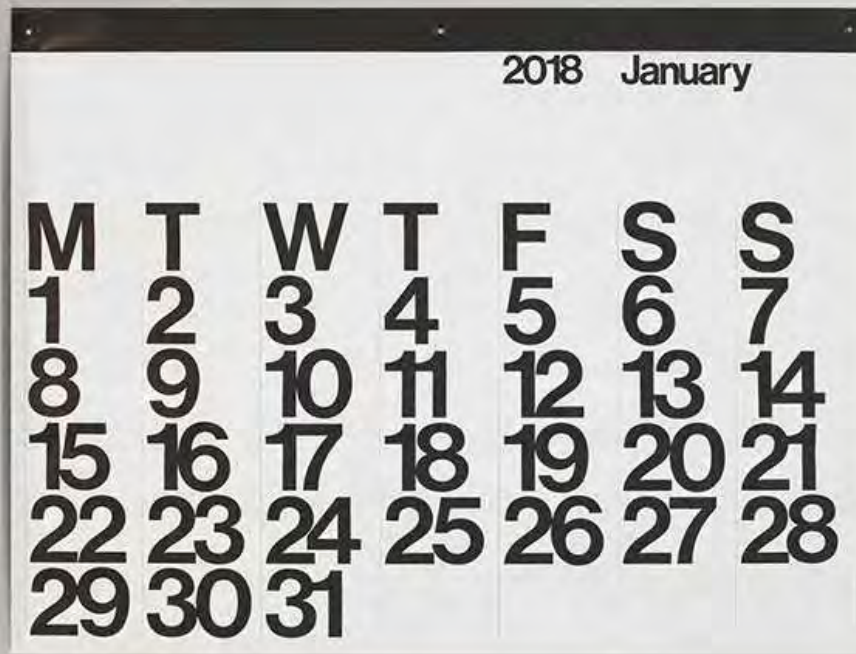
Massimo Vignelli, born in Milan, studied architecture in Milan and Venice. He came to the United States from 1957 to 1960 on fellowships from Towle Silversmiths in Massachusetts and the Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago. In 1960, with Lella Vignelli, he established the Vignelli Office of Design and Architecture in Milan. In 1965, Vignelli became co-founder and design director of Unimark International Corporation. With Lella Vignelli, he established the offices of Vignelli Associates in 1971, and Vignelli Designs in 1978. His work includes graphic and

corporate identity programs, publication designs, architectural graphics, and exhibition, interior, furniture, and consumer product designs for many leading American and European companies and institutions. Vignelli has had his work published and exhibited throughout the world and entered in the permanent collections of several museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Brooklyn Museum. He is a past president of the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) and the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA),



Immagine 03. Vignelli Associates at 475 Tenth Avenue, West Side Manhattan. Pubblicato in Domus 677, 1966 (Mockup di www.harmonaisevisual.com)

Imagine 04. Stendig Calendar by legendary Italian designer Vignelli M. [Poster]. 2020
(Mockup di Stendig Calendars)



“You can reach timelessness if you look for the essence of things and not the appearance. The appearance is transitory — the appearance is fashion, the appearance is trendiness — but the essence is timeless.”

Massimo Vignelli

a vice president of the Architectural League, and a member of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA). His many awards and honors include the AIGA Gold Medal, the Presidential Design Award, and the National Arts Club Gold Medal for Design.

What makes a design work?

Well, it should be visually powerful in the sense that I do not like design that is a flat tire, that has no tension, that has no guts, that has no expression. This doesn't mean to be [boom] like this, it could be on the contrary, extremely elegant. And by that I mean, intellectually elegant. Not fashion elegant, not mores elegant, but intellectually elegant. That means a mind that has been cultivated and refined for quite a long time, you know. Reading the best kind of books and really understanding how the mind can be sublime. And another way intellectual elegance is exactly the opposite of intellectually vulgar, you know. And indeed,

we are surrounded by a tremendous amount of vulgarity, therefore, it is a strive to – it is an effort to change that kind of situation, but it is very exciting because you have a sense of accomplishment. You know. And of course, you like to talk about it, you like to convince people and tell people how to get away from vulgar situations into something which is a little more elegant, a little more refined. And if you multiply, multiply, multiply, then the world is beginning to get better. It takes you a long time. Then the third thing is, people are fascinated with trends. You know, trends are in the air, everybody likes to be trendy, to be up-to-date, you know. But what is up-to-date today is gone tomorrow. And if you are a responsible kind of a designer, you cannot design things that tomorrow are no good anymore. If you like cheating with your client and your public where you use it, whatever it might be. So, you like to design something that is going to last a long time. And so, you

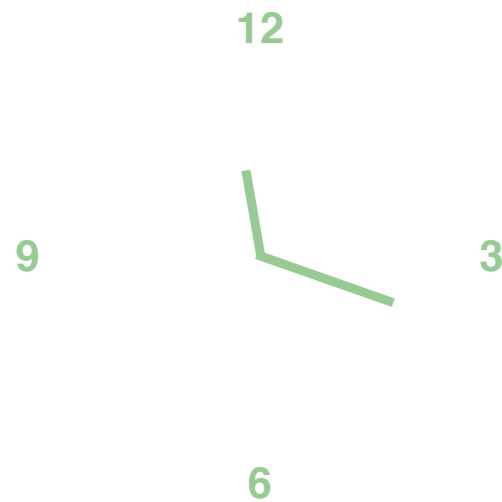
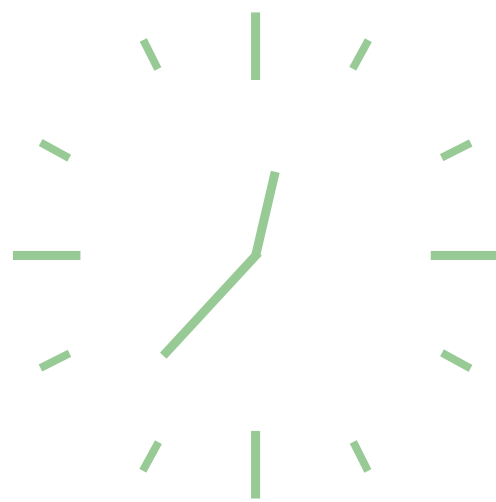
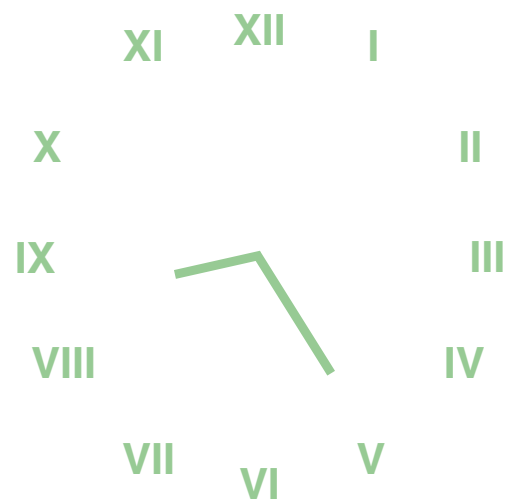


Illustrazione 01. *Timeless ways*. 2020

train yourself to be disciplined and you train yourself to stay away from trends. And in a sense you get automatically involving into the notion of timelessness, so it takes to last a long time. And my god, I can quote so many things. Let's say American Airlines logo I've done. Look how many have been done since I done that one. I done that one 45 years ago, maybe even 50 years ago, and it's still there. It's the only one that's never changed. And how you can change? How can you make it better? It's very legible, there are no tricks, it's half red, half blue. What is more American than that? You give me one and I'll take a look. You know, the type is a type that will last forever. And it's fine. There are so many, the Bloomingdale logo, or the New York Subway, or you know, I mean, plenty, plenty, plenty of things which are – and objects that we have done, plates like the Heller plates. You know, generation after generation grew up by eating on those plates and they are still around today. Furniture that we have designed a long time ago are still there, and so on. So, it is great to design things that stay a long time. They have a long staying power. And when you look at the antiques, one, they have staying power. So, I kind of like the idea of designing things that



Immagine 05. *Vignelli: Photographs*. 2019

in 100 years from now will be looked at with respect and not laughed about, in a sense.

What aspects of contemporary design do you dislike?

Well, vulgarity is a real ubiquitous thing. You know, vulgarities on everything. On clothing today more than ever is on printed matter, kind of toonish kind of things, balloons, even the subway map has all those balloons. I mean, that's very low level, literally, there's no need. You don't talk down to people, you talk up to people, you know. So instead most of the people -- most of the manufacturers they tend to design things to sell they are more interested in the money side than anything else. And greed is really the religion of vulgarity. And it's that is that kind of greedy you know that everybody seems to have. I mean, as part of the culture, more here than any other place to a certain extent. Maybe because it offers more, maybe because there's more buying power in the people, who knows? I don't know why. But certainly is -- and you know why else because it's a very young country and hasn't had the time to sift what is good from what is bad. But like everything that is young it's fascinating.

With Massimo Vignelli. Timelessness: Essence of Design

The first in a series of conversations dedicated to the ideas and objects of design, starting with the concept of timelessness.

His house speaks of the past, but also the present. This little universe is where Massimo Vignelli lives and works. He is a design world icon, though he cringes when I call him this. We sit at his desk: a plate of metal on a stand. These plates are found all over New York, covering holes in the streets during repairs to the grid and sewer systems, strong enough to support the weight of a truck.

“Timeless objects are made with simple materials and minimal work, work is expensive...”

It's hot, but the metal cools us down enough to have a long and passionate conversation.

We speak of design, all things related to design, how design affects our lives. On one hand, there are so many things on the market created to be consumed and replaced; on the other, there are objects that remain, thanks to their timeless qualities. This is the first in a series of conversations dedicated to the ideas and objects of design, starting with the concept of timelessness. That is, when a design is born and lives to be timeless. “Before speaking of timelessness we should differentiate between design and styling. Design, when it's a good design and possesses all the qualities of

the perfect design, lasts over time, which is its fundamental requirement. Styling is ephemeral by nature, it is whatever is in style. The concept of timelessness refers to long duration and has a basis in “responsibility”. The designer's responsibility toward the user and toward him or herself consists in operating in such a way that things don't get thrown out. True design is not disposable. Styling is “disposable”. Design has a logic, skeleton and musculature of its own.” These words define the entire public and private life of Massimo Vignelli and Lella, his wife, an architect and his companion

in both work and life. Both of their lives are characterized by design; they live it down to the smallest details. It even determines the clothes they wear, their accessories, their linens. Let's begin by quickly confronting the idea that design is an unattainable world and that, especially in today's times of crisis, it can seem like a luxury, or a way of life for the few and the rich. But can't design - timeless design - be a way of saving? Saving signs, materials, energy, and even money? If design lasts, then in these times it could be useful to reflect on the lasting power of our purchases.



Imagine 06. The Home of the Designers Lella and Massimo Vignelli.
130 EAST 67TH STREET APT 6E NEW YORK, NY 10065. 2018

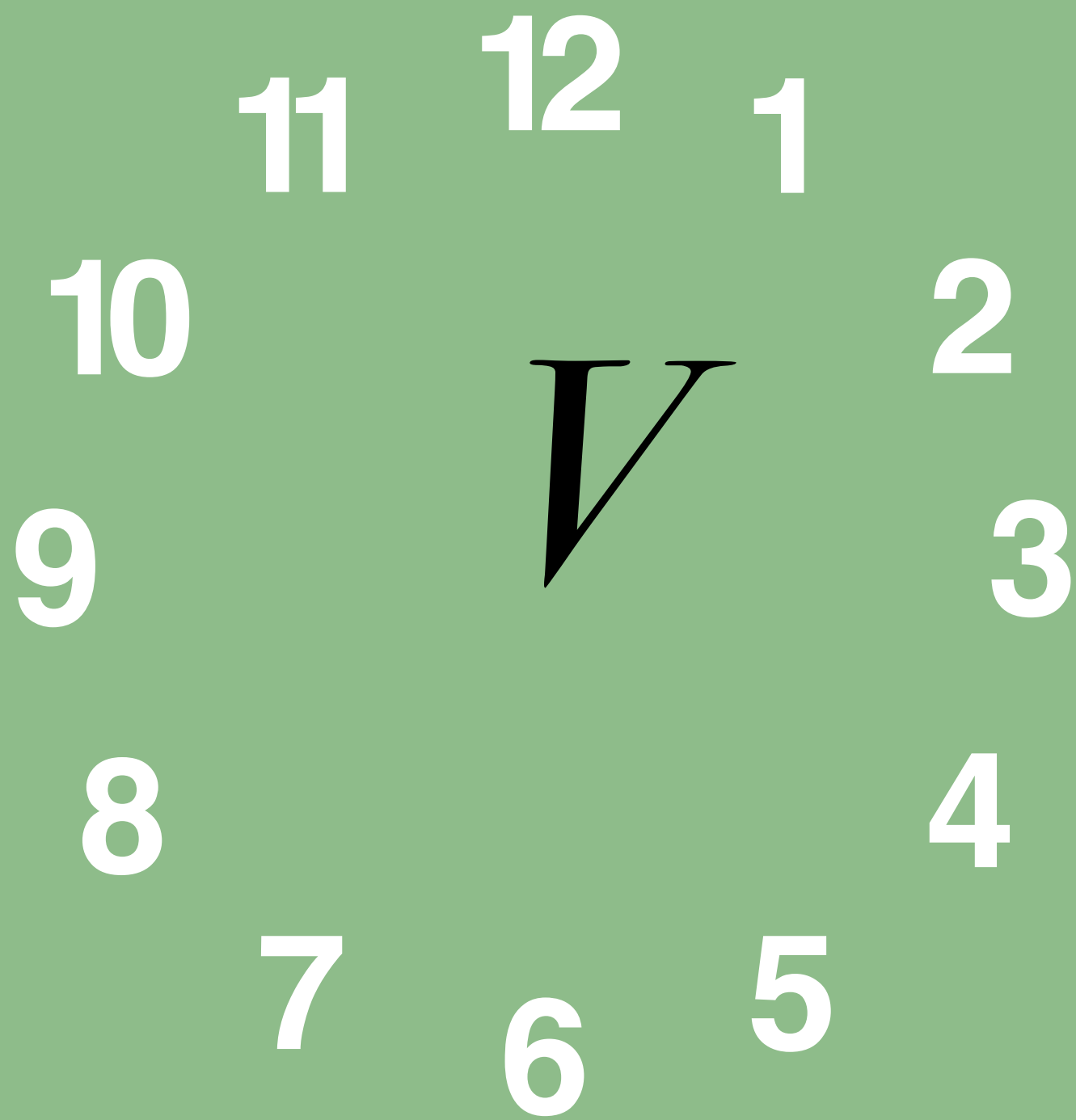


Illustrazione 02. V Clock. 2020

On whether they are necessary or if they serve us.

“Of course design can be a way of saving—and it must be! Good design is above all economical—economy is its fundamental component. In the absence of economy we have styling. Design is the most direct way of achieving a goal, it doesn’t tolerate waste. True design is ethical and moral. Styling isn’t—it’s the opposite. Styling is freedom without limits and confines. Design, on the other hand, proposes these confines, it has its own protocol and can be very severe.” So is design just a world of rigor? Rigid and tedious?

ciologist Francesco Alberoni? Massimo smiles, amused.

“Love is timeless, being in love is ephemeral. The relationship between timelessness and the ephemeral is also the basis for the discourse on design. Our lives are ruled by this dichotomy. Timelessness and the ephemeral. It impacts everything. From choosing a utensil to choosing a whole piece of furniture. A choice based on timelessness will last a lifetime, but an emotion-driven choice will last only a few years. You have to filter everything that passes in front of you, everything you see. The worthwhile lasts, the unimportant passes.

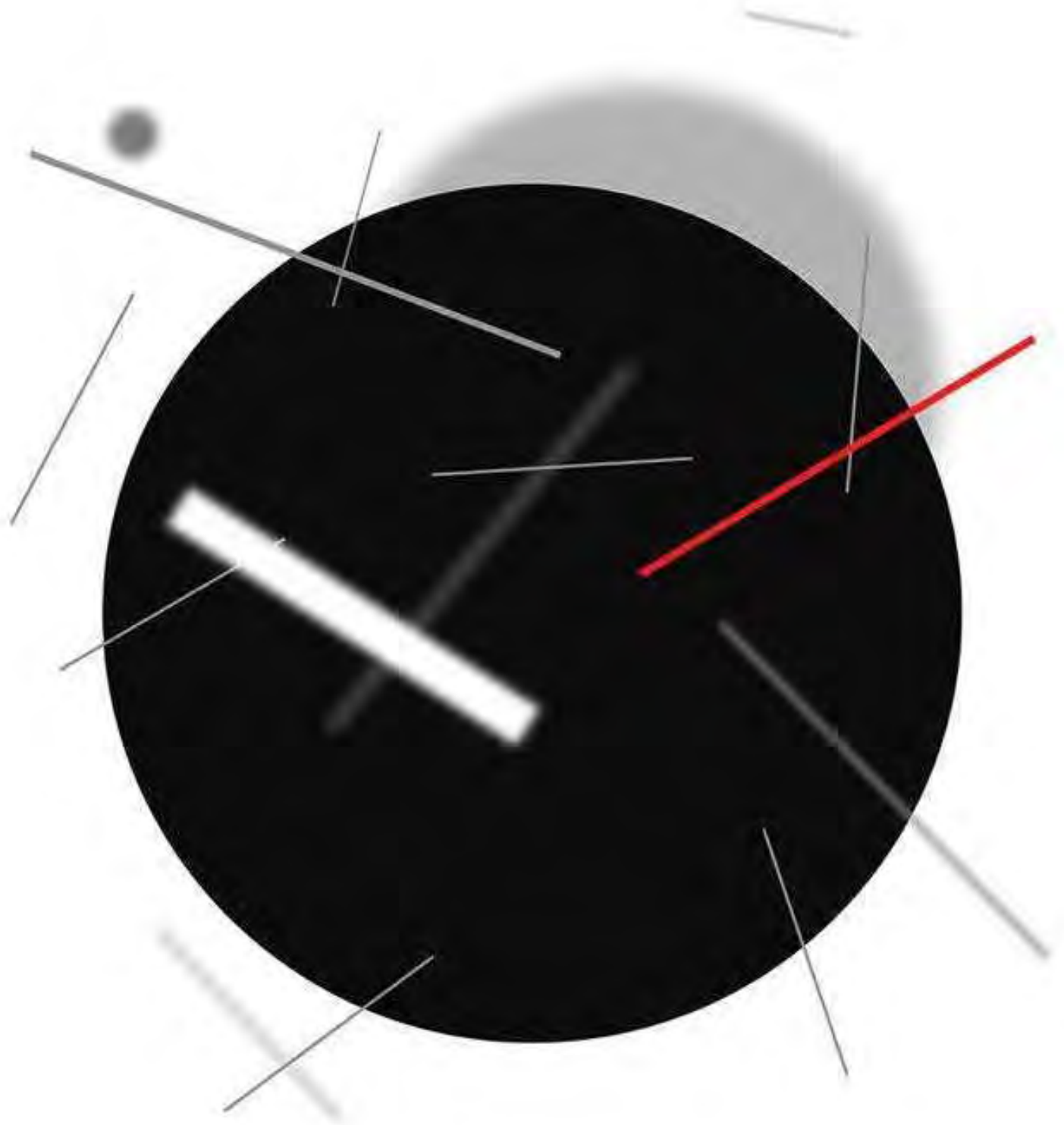
“Styles come and go. Good design is a language, not a style.”

Massimo Vignelli

“No. Design can also be very lively, cheerful, playful. But it’s a joy that derives from intelligence, not emotion. And that’s another big difference between design and styling. It’s not that emotion is necessarily separate from intelligence. There’s a relationship between them. Every work evokes emotion. But when emotion derives from the intelligence of the work’s creator, it has a staying power, and that’s timelessness. When a work is only emotion, on the other hand, everything fades after the initial impact. It’s like an orgasm, fleeting...” I endeavor to draw a comparison. Is it like the difference between Falling in Love and Loving, as in the book by renowned so-

The same is true for music, literature, not just for design.”

Now Massimo Vignelli is on his way to give seminars at the Vignelli Center for Design Studies at the Rochester Institute of Technology. We’ll continue our conversation in issues to come. As we say goodbye, I take a closer look at his desk. I can’t help but noticing one of his drawings. It depicts, in minute detail, all of the (few) objects he plans to take with him. From his suitcase to his socks, from his toothbrush to his iPhone charger.... Design is part of his private life. His life. Down to his list of things to pack.



Timeless.
Massimo Vignelli by Face



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Posters in honor of
Massimo Vignelli rea-
lised for the Timeless
exhibition in
Barcellona in 2015

Timelessness

We are definitively against any fashion of design and any design fashion. We despise the culture of obsolescence, the culture of waste, the cult of the ephemeral. We detest the demand of temporary solutions, the waste of energies and capital for the sake of novelty. We are for a Design that lasts, that responds to people’s needs and to people’s wants. We are for a Design that is committed to a society that demands long lasting values. A society that earns the benefit of commodities and deserves respect and integrity. We like the use of primary shapes and

primary colors because their formal values are timeless. We like a typography that transcends subjectivity and searches for objective values, a typography that is beyond times - that doesn’t follow trends, that reflects its content in an appropriate manner. We like economy of design because it avoids wasteful exercises, it respects investment and lasts longer. We strive for a Design that is centered on the message rather than visual titillation. We like Design that is clear, simple and enduring. And that is what timelessness means in Design.



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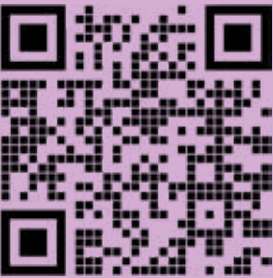
ARTIVIVE



Achieving a timeless style

Massimo Vignelli's rules

a cura di Giovanna Bisconti



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Massimo Vignelli's
speech about grids and
the sistematic way of
designing things

Vignelli Associates Approach to grid-based design

After more than forty years of designing in the modernist tradition, M. Vignelli and the team at Vignelli Associates have established themselves as experts in the organization of information. Whether they are designing for a book or for a direct mailer that folds out into a poster, they use grids to tie together the content within each project as well as link all of those projects under their consistent, grid-based approach. Because the variations and types of grids that can be used are unlimited, the ability to recognize the most appropriate structure for the project and discard the

others is a crucial step in the design process that they have refined over a long career. **"It is important to remember that many devices are available to make layout exciting the purpose of the grid is to provide consistency to the layouts but not necessary excitement which will be provided by the sum of all the elements in the design."** When thinking about a book design, the team at Vignelli Associates first determines the size of the book based on the content, to ensure that the grid system, used to organize the content will provide structure and continuity



Immagine 08/09/10. Knoll manual. Vignelli Canon. Pubblicato da Lars muller Publishers in The Vignelli Canon, 2012



Don't be governed by the grid, govern the grid. A grid is like a lion cage - if the trainer stays too long it gets eaten up. You have to know when to leave the cage - you have to know when to leave the grid.

Massimo Vignelli

from cover to cover without obscuring the content. For example, square pictures tend to work better in a square book format to best exhibit the content without cropping images. After finessing the storyboard and getting the layout just right, the designers build each spread using the storyboard as a guide. Following the sketches as closely as possible so as not to negate the work already done establishes the cinematic flow of the piece as a whole. Another essential step is determining the sequence of the layouts. This is a very important phase of the team's process when looking at books, magazines, and tabloids as cinematic objects composed simultaneously of static pages and the experience of a sequence of pages. Rather than determining this organically

as they go, they build tight sketches of each spread into a story board so that they can easily view them together and individually as well as change them until the pacing and flow feel correct. This then becomes the map that guides and informs the rest of the process. The timeless clarity of the design to emerge from Vignelli Associates over the years is a testament to the designers' philosophy that a design whose structure is invisible to the viewer is stronger than an illustrative or narrative layout where the structure is at the forefront of the design. A neutral, systematic approach to layout aided by an unobtrusive grid and subtly articulated design sensibilities have positioned Vignelli Associates as masters of information organization.



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Interview to Massimo Vignelli about Helvetica, extrait from the movie Helvetica (2007) by Hustwitt G.

Typefaces The Basic One

“As I said, at the time, if all people doing desktop publishing were doctors we would all be dead! Typefaces experienced an incredible explosion. The computer allowed anybody to design new typefaces and that became one of the biggest visual pollution of all times.”

In order to draw attention to that issue I made an exhibition showing work that we had done over many years by using only four typefaces: Garamond, Bodoni, Century Expanded, and Helvetica. The aim of the exhibition was to show that a large variety of printed matter could be done with an economy of type with great results. In other words, is not the type but what you do with it that counts. The accent was on structure rather than type. I still believe that most typefaces are designed for commercial reasons, just to make money or for identity purposes. In reality the number of good typefaces is rather limited and most of the new ones are elaborations on pre-existing

faces. Personally, I can get along well with a half a dozen, to which I can add another half a dozen, but probably no more. Besides those already mentioned, I can add Optima, Futura, Univers (the most advanced design of the century since it comes in 59 variations of the same face), Caslon, Baskerville, and a few other modern cuts. As you can see my list is pretty basic but the great advantage is that it can assure better results. It is also true that in recent years the work of some talented type designers has produced some remarkable results to offset the lack of purpose and quality of most of the other typefaces. One of the most important elements in typography is scale

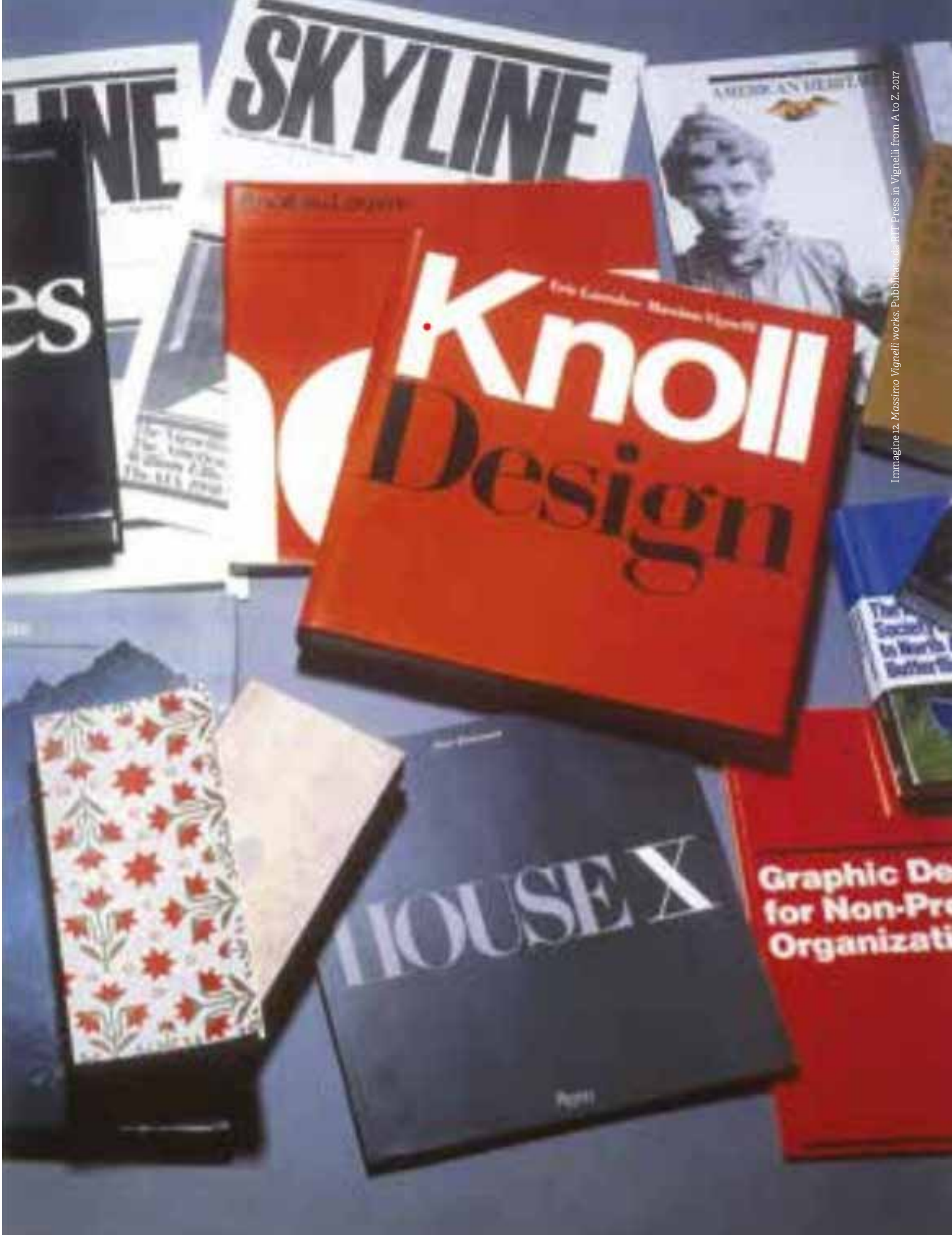


Immagine 12. Massimo Vignelli works. Pubblicato da RT Press in Vignelli from A to Z. 2017



Immagine 13. Helvetica punches: Da Helvetica Documentary, 2007

and size relationship. Naturally there are many ways of understanding and expressing typography. I am not interested in describing all the different possibilities as much I am in expressing my point of view and my approach.

I see typography as a discipline to organize information in the most objective way possible. I do not like typography intended as an expression of the self, as a pretext for pictorial exercises. I am aware that there is room for that too, but it is not my language and I am not interested in it. I don't believe that when you write dog the type should bark! I prefer a more objective

approach: I try to make as clear as possible the different parts of a message by using space, weight, and typographic alignments, such as flush left, centered or justified. There are times when a specific type design may be appropriate, mostly for a logo or a short promotional text, particularly in very ephemeral or promotional contexts. These are not our typical areas of involvement but whenever a brilliant solution is found I appreciate both the intent and the results. I strongly believe that design should never be boring, but I don't think it should be a form of entertainment.

“Typography is really white, it’s not even black. It’s the space between the blacks that really makes it. In a sense it’s like music, it’s not the notes, it’s the spacing between the notes that really makes the music.”

Massimo Vignelli



Graphic Color: Massimo Vignelli

This month we pay tribute to the incomparable designer Massimo Vignelli (1931-2014), whose influential modern aesthetic hinged on primary colors and graphic forms. Born and trained in Milan, Vignelli came to New York in 1965 and set up a multidisciplinary design firm with his wife Leila, an architect. Throughout his career, Vignelli used color to create a graphic language that spoke louder than mere words could. Vignelli was celebrated for his bold use of color and his insistence on simple, functional design. The designer's Heller dinnerware is a staple of many modernist kitchens; his Ford Motors logo has held fast

for 50 years. The designer also employed bright primary colors; his Heller dinnerware and nearly ubiquitous Knoll Handkerchief Chair were issued in a rainbow of shades. He once famously declared, **"Any color works if you push it to the extreme."** His 1972 design for the New York City subway map was both celebrated and controversial. The map omitted many familiar features like streets and parks, and confused riders at first. Gray, not green was used to denote Central Park; beige, not blue indicated waterways. **"You want to go from Point A to Point B, period," he explained. "The only thing you are interested in is the spaghetti."**

Vignelli's revised design was heralded by New York Times' architecture critic Paul Goldberger as "more than beautiful...a nearly canonical piece of abstract design." He favored what has been called a "severe" palette of red, black and white. Vignelli always dressed in black, a color he considered all-powerful. He noted in an interview with the Design Observer: "Black has class. It's the best color. There is no other color that is better than black. There are many others that are appropriate and happy, but those colors belong on flowers. Black is a color that is man-made. It is really a projection of the brain. It is a mind color. It is intangible. It is practical. It works 24 hours a day. In the morning or afternoon, you can dress in tweed, but in the evening, you look like a professor who escaped from college. Everything else has

connotations that are different, but black is good for everything." Red was another Vignelli signature color, as is evident in his work for Knoll, Heller, JC Penny, and his own corporate identity. He coined the term "Vignelli Red" which is "somewhere on the border of red and orange." At Colour Studio we believe judicious use of strong color is infinitely powerful in communicating a message - be it through graphics, product design, or art.

"If you paint a building shocking pink, that has no scale, it is just a huge mistake, but it's not in the scale of the city to have things like that. You know. So, not only because it's not appropriate, not only because it's offensive to the environment, I mean but among them also because that quantity of that color in the urban scale, is out of scale."

"Massimo Vignelli seamlessly employed timeless colors to communicate ideas and emphasize functionality."

Colorstudio



Imagine 15. Handkerchief Chair Designed by Massimo & Lella Vignelli. 1985



Imagine 16. Exhibition of Lella and Massimo Vignelli's work at the Boston Architectural Center, 1976

Chromotype

We are all familiar with the meaning of a logotype, which is a word manipulated by design to achieve a stronger memorability and a faster identification. We usually do this with a word, but we can also achieve identification by the consistent use of a color connected to all graphic aspects of a company's communications media. In this case, we call it a "chromotype." Having realized that concept in the early 1970s while working with my French colleague Roger Tallon, we extended and systematized the concept by applying it to other related fields. For example, if a form

is used as an identifier, as the shell is used by the Shell Oil company, we have a morphotype. If a is used to identify a company or a product, we will have a phonotype. This notion is quite relevant when one has to design a corporate identity. For example, for the Kroin company, which sells beautiful sinks, faucets, and outdoor furniture, we decided to use yellow as a chromotype. Everything became yellow; cards, stationery, catalogs, advertising, and even the interiors of the office. The idea is: you see yellow, Kroin comes to mind. For the IDCNY (International Design Center New York), we

chose black, white, and as the chromotype to use throughout the company's communications. For the GNER (Great North Eastern Railway) in the UK we used a bright red stripe on a blue field. And for Bloomingdale's, the extraordinary department store in New York, in order to express the richness of merchandise offered to customers, we selected a whole set of colors, brilliant and shiny, since we thought that one color could not do justice to such a store. Colors played a dominant role in this latter packaging, which were otherwise totally unbranded. The colors by themselves were the

strongest identifiers since no other department store could use any of them without risking its own identity. This is an example of chromotype by saturation, a one-of-a-kind solution for a one-of-a-kind store. And lastly, for the IBM personal computer, for we designed all the manuals, we decided to use pastel colors to express the character of that product. Chromotypes play a very subtle role, even more so than logotypes or other forms of identifiers, connecting a whole set of connotations for the ultimate user. We have always liked this approach and used it in most of our work.



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Timeless projects

Massimo Vignelli's collaborations

a cura di Giorgia Fulghieri

The Vignellis

The Vignellis were both born and educated in the industrial, more-European north of Italy, he in Milan and she in Udine, 90 miles away. Massimo's passion was "2D" — graphic design; Lella's family tradition and training were "3D" — architecture. They met at an architects' convention and were married in 1957. Three years later, they opened their first "office of design and architecture" in Milan and designed for Pirelli, Rank Xerox, Olivetti and other design-conscious European firms. But their fascination with the United States, which took root during three years spent here after they were married, eventually grew strong enough to lure them away from Italy permanently. "There is diversity here, and energy, and possibility," recalls Massimo, "and the need for design." He cofounded Unimark in 1964, which

ballooned and collapsed as the corporate identification boom of the late 1960s hyper-ventilated, then ran out of breath. In 1972, their present office was formed: Vignelli Associates for two-dimensional design, Vignelli Designs for furniture, objects, exhibitions and interiors. Not only do the Vignellis design exceeding well, they also think about design. It is not enough that something — a chair, an exhibition, a book, a magazine — looks good and is well designed. The "why" and the "how," the very process of design itself, must be equally evident and quite beyond the tyranny of individual taste. "There are three investigations in design," says Massimo. "The first is the search for structure. Its reward is discipline. The second is the search for specificity. This yields appropriateness. Finally, we search for fun, and

"We are
complementary"

Vignelli Massimo



we create ambiguity.” Vignelli design, in both three dimensions and two, is highly architectural in character. Massimo’s posters, publications and graphic designs seem to be built in stories, separated by the now-familiar, bold, horizontal rules. Basic geometry is respected. The investigative design process moves from the inside out: “The correct shape is the shape of the object’s meaning.” The Vignelli commitment to the correctness of a design has taken their work beyond the mechanical exercise of devising a form best suited to a given function. They’ve always understood that design itself, in the abstract, could and should be an integral part of function. More than a process and a result, design - good design - is an imperative. “Everything has its own order,” they’ve said. “You can’t take a piece of music and scramble the notes. You can’t take a piece of writing and scramble the words. You can’t take a space and scramble the chairs around.”

“Since the beginning, our relationship has been strong thank to mutual passion for architecture and design. Lella and I have been partners, lovers, a professional married couple for over half a century.”

We all despise obsolescence in design; we consider it an irresponsible behavior towards the user and society. We detest a wasteful culture based on greed, we detest the exploitation of the consumer and resources; we see this as an immoral attitude. We have shared these principles since the beginning of our relationship. Lella’s work is solid, timeless, responsible and, in its essence, extremely elegant. Her generosity and spirit have become a light for many young people; a beacon of clarity, dignity and determination.” Both in the example set by their work and by their personal commitment of time and energy, design has no advocates more passionate or effective. Both teach, write, lecture, serve on juries and boards, contribute their talent and cast to worthy causes. Unabashedly urban and urbane, their

participation in the world of design is enthusiastic, inquiring, generous. The Vignellis are true believers: “When we were young and naïve, we thought we could transform society by providing a better, more designed environment. Naturally, we found that this was not possible. Now, we think more realistically: we see a choice between good design and poor or non design. Every society gets the design it deserves. It is our duty to develop a professional attitude in raising the standard of design.” The Vignelli love concise thinking. They know that the minimal language of communication is not made up of decorations and accessories; it is based on rigorous design and essential construction. The Vignelli are not looking for objects or images, but “systems” that can be put into service. In this tension against the simplification and the analytical decomposition of the signs, Lella and Massimo have been able to focus on the fundamental rules of graphics and design, rules that are always able to transform things. The search for essential elements that inspired rationalist agents, from Leon Battista Alberti to Walter Gropius, led the Vignelli family to discover elementary and manipulable elements, whose control and transformation has been updated or renewed to a visual and concrete totality. That sounds serious, and the Vignellis are serious about design. But it is seriousness of purpose conveyed most often through exuberance. When either Massimo or Lella says the word “design,” it is pronounced with a capital “d”: “Design.” As individuals and professionals, their commitment to design and their accomplishments in design have rewarded them well. The Vignelli office continues to thrive and assignments come from an ever more diverse range of clients. Graduates of their firm have set out on their own and established well-respected practices. Only a few of the best and brightest are hired out of the schools each year. Their calendars are crammed; their pace formidable.

Un milanese a New York

Massimo Vignelli, fra i massimi graphic designer del Novecento, è stato un eroe dei due mondi la cui biografia quasi ci spaventa: solo stelle nella sua vita professionale, raccontata ora anche in italiano grazie al prezioso volume *Design: Vignelli 1954-2014* (Electa), versione aggiornata di un libro omonimo del 1990, curato per questa occasione da Beatriz Cifuentes-Caballero, ma impostato dallo stesso Vignelli prima di morire. Le parole aggiunte in basso sulla copertina sono “grafica, packaging, architettura, interni, arredi, oggetti”. Già il fatto che l'autore abbia letteralmente disegnato la sua opera omnia e perfino il suo funerale, fa capire quanto fosse erede del modello del total designer varato da Walter Gropius con il Bauhaus, di cui quest'anno ricorre il cente-

nario. E proprio come un fanatico Vignelli si autodefinisce, quando partecipa diciottenne al VII CIAM di Bergamo del 1949, quello sulla sintesi delle arti (e dove c'è una piccola mostra omaggio a Giuseppe Terragni), che certo è un bel vedere per chi come lui sta aprendo gli occhi e si sta iscrivendo al Politecnico di Milano. Passerà poi allo IUAV di Venezia, dove impagina il giornale degli studenti, lavora per la celebre ditta di vetri d'arte Venini, e dà importanza anche agli aspetti più trascurati della vita universitaria, come la segnaletica interna delle aule. In laguna conosce una studentessa friulana, Lella Valle, sorella degli architetti-designer Gino e Nani, che diventerà sua moglie e partner professionale, anche se, analogamente al caso della coppia Venturi & Scott Brown, per



Immagine 19, Massimo Vignelli on a rooftop.

molti anni il ruolo decisivo di Lella faticherà a essere universalmente riconosciuto: la loro è sempre stata “una matita a quattro mani”. Le prime collaborazioni sono con architetti milanesi, certo non sconosciuti: Giulio Minoletti, specializzato nel disegno industriale, e Giancarlo De Carlo, giovane ma già nell’orbita dei CIAM. Di lì in poi sarà un crescendo rossiniano negli anni dello “stile industriale”. Grazie anche a una borsa di studio di Lella, la coppia fa un primo soggiorno a New York subito dopo il matrimonio, nel 1957, poi, scaduto il permesso di soggiorno, torna a Milano, dove nasce il primo figlio Luca. Nel frattempo, anche il paese stava cambiando e Vignelli, come affermerà in uno dei non pochi documentari che gli sono stati dedicati, era sempre più insoddisfatto del provincialismo che in Italia, allora come oggi, si respirava. Il suo ideale era neofuturista, di ricostruzione grafica dell’universo, e Milano, nonostante la ricchezza di incarichi e confronti con altri colleghi estremamente stimolanti, cominciava a stargli stretta: “A Milano il soffitto era troppo basso; sono venuto a New York pensando che il soffitto fosse alto, e ho scoperto che a New York il soffitto non esiste proprio”. All’epoca le ambizioni universali di Vignelli avevano bisogno di un aiuto, una spalla ulteriore, oltre a quella di Lella: la trova in Bob Noorda, il grafico olandese della metropolitana milanese (1963) con il quale torna allo IUAV come docente di Disegno industriale (nonostante non si fosse mai laureato), e il cammino comune prosegue verso Firenze per ragioni editoriali. Come ha notato Mario Piazza, infatti, negli anni Sessanta a ogni casa editrice importante corrispondeva un nuovo progetto grafico destinato a rimanere negli annali: “Senza tralasciare la lezione di Steiner per Feltrinelli, già

felicemente impostata dagli anni Cinquanta, vediamo all’opera Bruno Munari con Einaudi, Mimmo Castellano con Laterza, Anita Klinz con Il Saggiatore, Massimo Vignelli con la Sansoni e le edizioni Schwarz, Giulio Confalonieri e Ilio Negri con le edizioni Lerici. Anche Noorda ne è uno degli artefici, con un progetto molto limpido e originale. Il progetto per le Edizioni Vallecchi”. In questa triangolazione Milano, Venezia e Firenze (dove si trovano appunto Sansoni e Vallecchi), Noorda e Vignelli collaborano sempre di più, creando di fatto uno sodalizio professionale che si consolida con la storica collana SC/10 Feltrinelli del 1964, quella con la grande F a 45 gradi, e culmina poi formalmente con la creazione nel 1965 di Unimark: è questo il salto di scala di cui era alla ricerca, quello che riporterà i Vignelli a New York nel fatidico 1966, stavolta definitivamente. Gli altri soci di Unimark sono Ralph Eckstrom, Jay Doblin, James Fogelman, Wally Gutches e Larry Klein. In pochi anni Unimark apre una dozzina di filiali, perfino in Australia, perché impone non tanto uno stile, quanto un modo di lavorare: “Se è uno stile non è design. Il design è una soluzione professionale a un particolare problema”, ama ripetere Vignelli, ed è così che conquista tutte le grandi corporation americane ristrutturandone l’identità visuale, o corporate identity: Bloomingdale’s, American Airlines, Knoll, Heller, Ford, IBM, The New Yorker, etc. L’affermazione è talmente campale che gli artefici se ne spaventano e si ritirano dalla loro creatura: Noorda perché ha nostalgia di Milano, Vignelli per divergenze con gli altri soci e il metodo sempre più piattamente commerciale. Ma ormai la frittata era fatta: la “svizzerizzazione” degli Usa era iniziata grazie all’uso massiccio di una sola famiglia di



Immagine 20. Heller visual identity pieces. Fotografati da Vignelli Center for Design Studies



caratteri, l'Helvetica, che Vignelli maneggia con abilità fin dal suo primo capolavoro, il poster del 1964 per il Piccolo Teatro di Giorgio Strehler e Paolo Grassi, con le grandi linee nere e l'onnipresente, invisibile gabbia, un esempio di chiarezza classicheggiante che riproporrà anche per la segnaletica della metropolitana di New York e la sua leggendaria mappa ottimizzata a 45 gradi – corretta dall'autorità nel 1979 in maniera più convenzionale perché disorientava gli utenti. Nella Grande Mela Vignelli conquista soprattutto la grafica editoriale. Per esempio, nei poster, fascicoli e brochure per gli eventi dell'Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies (1967-1984) diretto da Peter Eisenman. Lo IAUS diventa allora un'istituzione centrale per la cultura architettonica internazionale e per quella italiana in particolare: Eisenman invita negli USA Aldo Rossi, Manfredo Tafuri e i loro allievi veneziani (Giorgio Ciucci, Francesco Dal Co, Massimo Scolari, Georges Teyssot) e la rivista arancione *Oppositions* disegnata pro bono da Vignelli, dove scrivono Rafael Moneo, Bernard Tschumi, Rem Koolhaas, ne diviene la bandiera. Fra tutti gli architetti, però, quello con cui istituirà un sodalizio più produttivo sarà Richard Meier, ovvero colui che avrà più fortuna professionale negli anni Ottanta e Novanta. Il rapporto, agevolato dal fatto di avere i propri studi nello stesso edificio a Manhattan, sfocia in una serie di pubblicazioni quadrate con un semplice titolo, dove a cambiare sono solo i colori, una vetta di "modernismo reazionario", come definisce Kenneth Frampton (ex redattore di *Oppositions*) l'inclinazione del grafico milanese, ma si tratta piuttosto di un modernismo manierista, in linea con quello dei membri dello IAUS, così insofferenti verso lo statuto funzionalista gropiusiano delle università americane. Né Vignelli né Meier hanno la brutalità del modernismo delle origini, piuttosto inseguono un formalismo colto e classicamente ricercato. Non è un caso che tra

i pochi progetti architettonici vignelliani vi sia un costante riferimento a Palladio, il manierista veneto alla base del mito del bianco che caratterizza tutta l'architettura neopalladiana inglese e quella di Meier. La sovrapposizione fra i due non poteva essere maggiore: Joseph Rykwert ha raccontato a Mario Piazza che una volta gli capitò fra le mani una pubblicazione canadese su Meier, probabilmente l'unica non impaginata da Vignelli. Il raffinato storico inglese, sfogliandolo, ci mise molto tempo a rendersi conto che le opere erano di Meier e non di altri, l'effetto era spiazzante. Ad ogni modo, anche gli ultimi decenni sono stati anni di intenso lavoro per lo studio Vignelli, anche in Italia, dove realizza l'immagine coordinata per Lancia (1978), Cinzano (1984), la rivisitazione di grandi marchi come Benetton (1995), Ducati (1997), le etichette dei vini Feudi di San Gregorio (2001), il logo della Fondazione Renzo Piano (2011) e lavori perfino per aziende statali come il logo e gli studi del Tg2 Rai (1989) – dove trova tuttora posto una delle poltrone Frau disegnate sempre da loro, la rossa *Intervista* del 1988 –, o ancora la segnaletica per le Ferrovie (1999). Il canone Vignelli è stato declinato pressoché in ogni direzione, usando pochissimi caratteri, l'Helvetica, ovviamente, un Bodoni e un Roman type rivisitati per i testi più minuti e descrittivi, oggi piuttosto inattuali. Nel documentario *Helvetica*, Massimo Vignelli compare brevemente affermando che la tipografia in realtà non ha a che fare col bianco e nero, ma solo col bianco – di nuovo, il bianco palladiano – perché i caratteri sono già codificati ed è la distanza fra le lettere quella che conta davvero, un po' come in musica dove è l'intervallo fra i suoni a determinare una melodia: "Da questo punto di vista, la comunicazione visiva, tramite l'arte, l'artigianato o la produzione industriale che sia, è il risultato di un processo logico, che si basa su un credo di purezza ed essenzialità, su un vuoto che è pienezza assoluta".

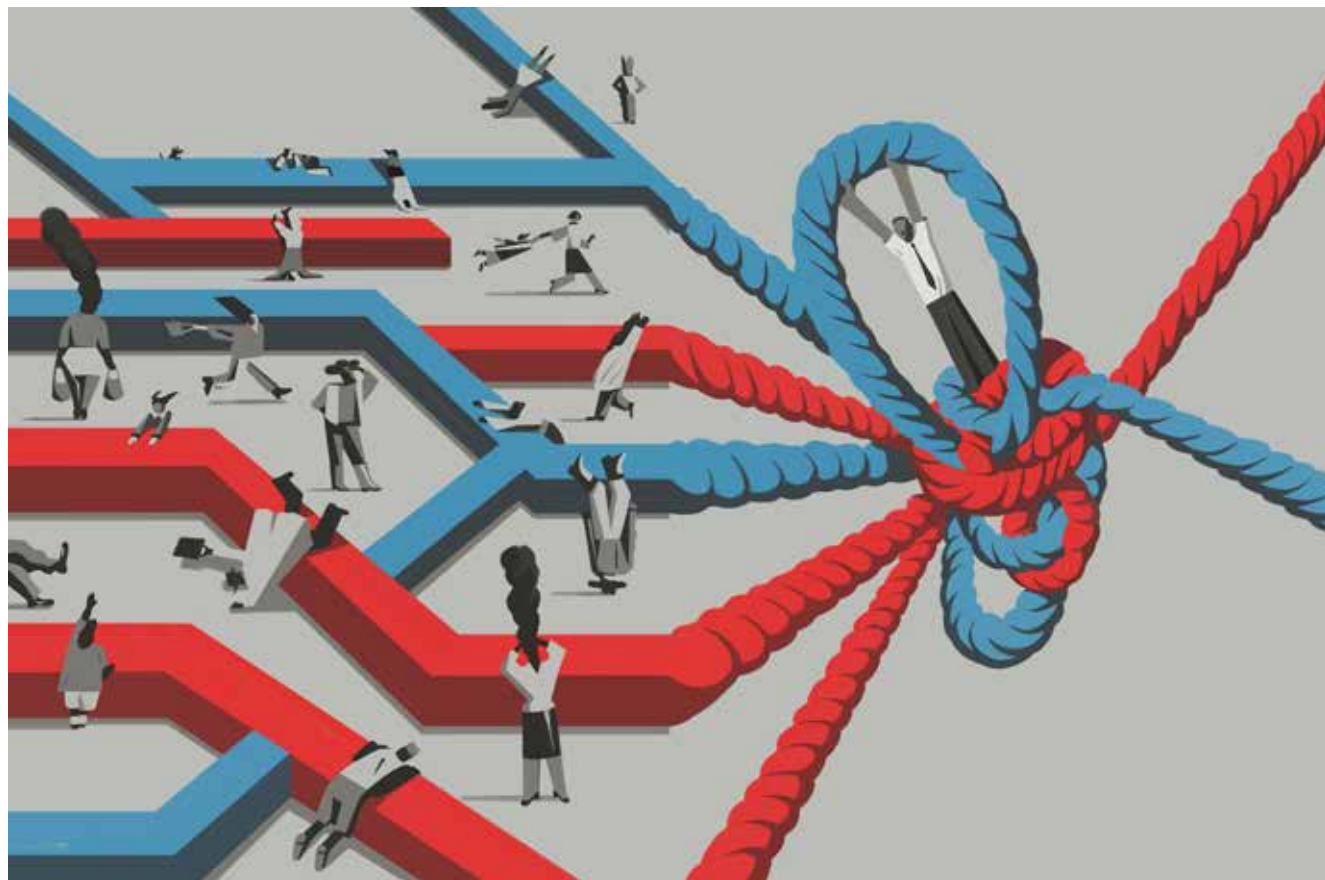
The subway map that rattled New Yorkers

Dal 1966 al 1970 Vignelli realizza il manuale di identità visiva della metropolitana di New York la alla segnaletica e la mappa, a questo lavoro collabora con Bob Noorda. Non appena la Metropolitan Transportation Authority introdusse questa nuova mappa del sistema metropolitano di New York il 7 agosto 1972, l'organizzazione venne inondata di lamentele. Molte stazioni sembravano essere in posti sbagliati. L'acqua che circonda la città era di color beige, non blu. Per quanto riguarda Central Park, sembrava quasi quadrato, piuttosto che un rettangolo allungato, tre volte più grande di quanto suggerito dalla mappa, ed era raffigurato in una triste tonalità di grigio. La mappa era, infatti, piena di anomalie, ma quello era il punto. Il suo designer, Massimo Vignelli, aveva sacrificato l'accuratezza geografica, reinterpretando il labirinto intricato della precedente mappa della metropolitana di New York in un diagramma pulito. Ogni stazione veniva mo-

strata come un punto e collegata ai suoi vicini da percorsi codificati a colori che correvano ad angoli di 45 o 90 gradi. Vignelli aveva usato le sue capacità progettuali per riordinare la realtà. Molti newyorkesi sono stati oltraggiati da ciò che hanno visto come se quella fosse la falsa rappresentazione della loro città, mentre i turisti hanno faticato a mettere in relazione il design del signor Vignelli con quello che hanno trovato in superficie. Nel 1979, il M.T.A. si inchinò alla pressione pubblica sostituendo la sua mappa schematica con una geografica. Forse l'errore dell' M.T.A. fu quello di introdurre solo una delle quattro mappe progettate da Vignelli con l'intenzione di fornire collettivamente ai passeggeri tutte le informazioni necessarie per spostarsi in metropolitana. La famosa mappa schematica ha dimostrato come andare da A a B, ma doveva essere accompagnata in ciascuna stazione da due mappe geografiche. Una che rappresentava l'intera rete e un'altra



Immagine 22. New York Subway Map detail by Vignelli M. [Poster], Pubblicato da MOMA Press, 2012.
(Mockup di Mockup di www.mockupworld.co)



del quartiere locale, oltre che da una mappa verbale che spiegava a parole come andare da un posto all'altro. Vignelli non aveva mai immaginato che la mappa sarebbe stata usata senza accanto le altre tre. Vignelli l'aveva modellata sull'estremamente popolare mappa schematica del 1933 della metropolitana di Londra disegnata da Harry Beck, un designer freelance che la compilò nel suo tempo libero. Il "diagramma" di Beck, come lo chiamava, applicava principi organizzativi simili, probabilmente con un rigore ancora maggiore. Diversamente da lui, Vignelli aveva incluso alcuni riferimenti geografici, identificando Central Park e aree come Manhattan e il Bronx. Da allora si è pentito di averlo fatto, sostenendo che la mappa avrebbe dovuto essere totalmente astratta, priva di tali distrazioni. Ma il design di Beck era più delicato nello stile, in particolare nella sua scelta tipografica, mentre Vignelli usava un carattere accattivante e moderno come l'Helvetica. Vignelli ritiene che la sua System Map si sia sporcata di quelle che lui chiama "persone verbali", la cui capacità di comprendere mappe e altri diagrammi è meno sofisticata di quella di "persone visive"

come lui. "Le persone verbali, non possono mai leggere una mappa", ha detto nel documentario pubblicato nel 2007 "Helvetica". La mappa è particolarmente apprezzata da molti designer grazie all'estrema purezza formale e chiarezza dell'informazione che deriva dal suo spazio astratto e dal brillante uso della geometria. Fra gli svariati apprezzamenti, nel 2004 Michal Bierut ne scrisse un omaggio sul "Design Observer". Nel 2008, il vice direttore di "Vanity Fair" (allora staffer di Vogue Uomo) commissionò a Vignelli un'edizione aggiornata della mappa, sulla quale Vignelli lavorò a fondo con il suo staff per correggere ogni precedente difetto. La mappa è stata successivamente tradotta in una versione digitale che ha dato vita all'applicazione ufficiale per dispositivi mobili "The Weekender", realizzata dalla Metropolitan Transit Authority, l'ente che nel 1979 sostituì la mappa di Vignelli con quella tradizionale tuttora in uso. L'applicazione si aggiorna tramite internet e permette di conoscere in tempo reale eventuali variazioni o disguidi sulle varie linee metropolitane, oltre ad accompagnare la mappa con delle indicazioni verbali, com'era intenzione di Vignelli sin dal 1972.



Scansiona il QR Code

Illustrazioni della
mappa di New York di
Emiliano Ponzi

Design love: Vignelli Associates

Many people know Mr. Vignelli for designing one of the most beloved renditions of the New York City Subway map. However, the Vignellis' contributions to design have included everything from book design to furniture design. Whether it's identities for Bloomingdales, United Colors of Benetton, and American Airlines or their environmental and product design, the Vignellis consistently deliver relevant, beautiful, thought provoking solutions to any problem. The couple joined forces in 1960 to create the Vignelli Office for Design and Architecture in Milan, and in 1971 formed Vignelli Associates in New York City. Idsgn recently had the pleasure of speaking with Mr. Vignelli about running a design studio for over 50 years with the person you love.

How did the two of you meet?

We met at an architectural convention, where Lella's father, an architect, came with her. I was a student helper at the conference. Then I

started courting her and eventually convinced her to study architecture in Venice, where I was also a student. In 1957 I got a fellowship from the USA, so we got married and came to the USA. My fellowship was as designer at Towle Silversmith and Lella's fellowship at the MIT. Then we spent two years in Chicago, I was teaching at the Institute of Design at the IIT, and Lella was working at SOM. In 1960 we went back to Milano (where I came from) and opened the Vignelli Office for Design and Architecture. It benefits to have complementary attitudes and characters as we have.

How do you balance studio life and personal time?

Sometimes, during the growth of the children, life was difficult for Lella in her role as mother and architect, but eventually solutions were found. Our professional life and social life were often integrated, friends were clients or colleagues and we had good time together.



Immagine 24. Lella e Massimo Vignelli. Massimo Vignelli e Lella Vignelli di fronte al Vignelli Center for Design Studies al Rochester Institute of Technology. 2010



Immagine 25. Vignelli Center for design studies. 2014



What are the best and worst parts of living and working together?

The nicest thing is the sense of continuity between work and living, since in reality, for us, they are the same thing, one merging smoothly in to the other. I have not seen the worst part of it, yet.

What are some of the odd things that take place at a husband/wife design studio?

Sometimes we will fight on projects issues, but then things will get back to normal, no bad feeling hanging. In a normal office politeness and politics take precedence.

How long have you been married, and how long have you been working together?

We have been married for 53 years and have worked together for 50 years. Although I worked on the whole field of design, Lella has worked mainly in products and interiors, plus overseeing all administrative issues.

How do you manage disagreements in the workplace?

If one has a profound love for the partner, everything else is rather relative. Disagreements are the salt of life and a partnership grows stronger by having some of them, and resolving them every time.

Did you ever think you would marry another designer?

I had several couples inspiring me, Alvar and Aino Aalto (the finnish architects), Ray and Charles Eames were great mentors professionally and as designers, and some others as well.

Could you have married a bad designer, or a designer that didn't challenge you to be better?

Never! Never, Never!

“Collaboration, for us, means sharing the same cultural platform, a similarity of intets and aiming to the same objectives.”

Vignelli Massimo



4

Per vedere le copertine in
realtà aumentata scarica l'app:

ARTIVIVE



Timeless portraits Julia Margaret Cameron's photography

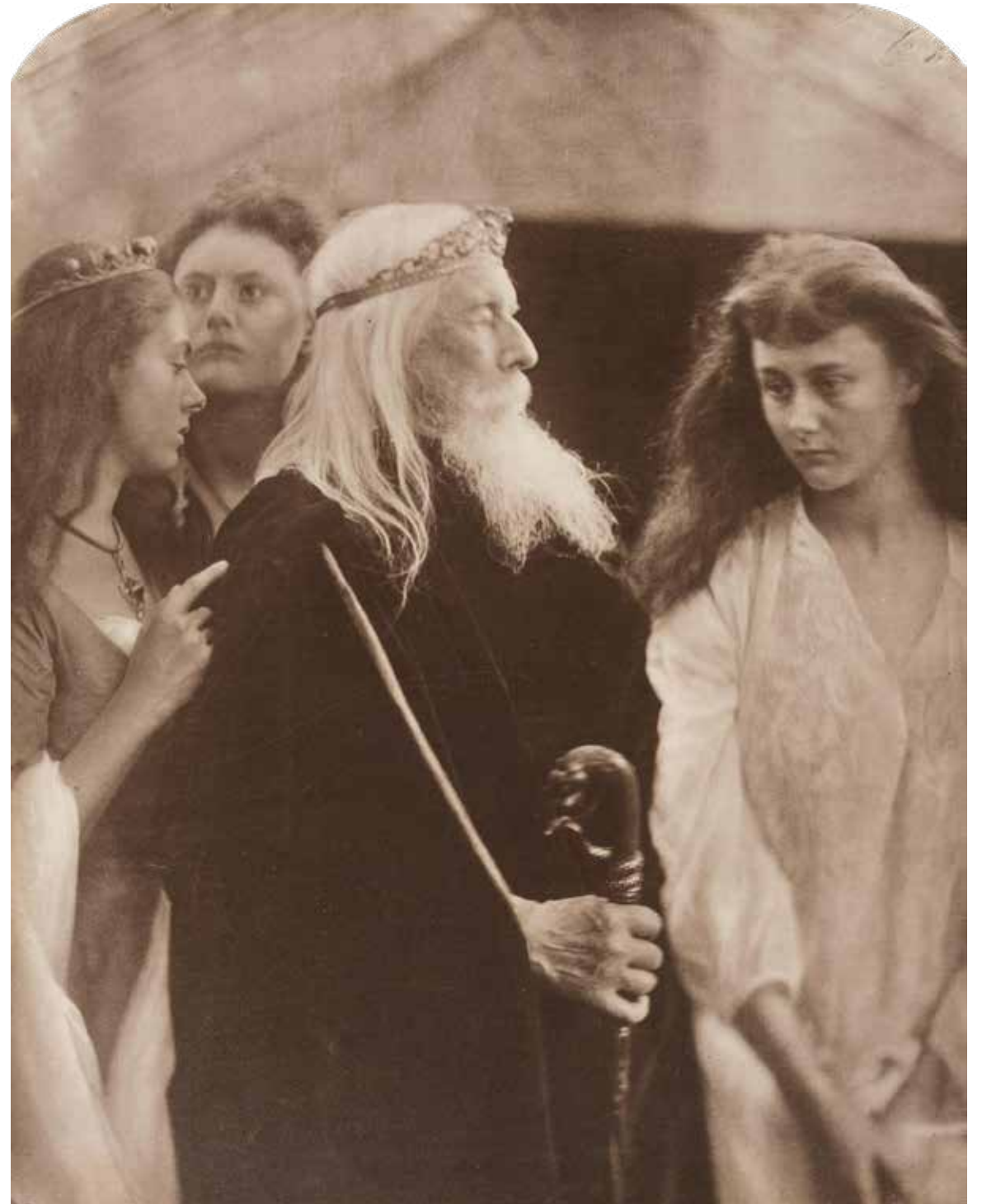
a cura di Tosca Branca

The female gaze

On the occasion of the publication of Sylvia Wolf's *Julia Margaret Cameron's Women*, Sara Bancroft gives an overview on the photographer's life and work.

Nearly five years ago Charlton Heston made a pilgrimage to Freshwater on the Isle of Wight. The local council had refused planning permission for the house of Julia Margaret Cameron, one of the pioneers of photography, to be opened as a museum. "It is staggering," he said, stepping from his open-top Bentley. "In America they would have made this a national museum. This side of Jane Austen, I cannot think of any woman who made it so big in the arts." The episode in all its theatricality would almost certainly have delighted Cameron. Heston is a fitting descendant of the Victorian male celebrities she photographed – Darwin, Carlyle, the astronomer Sir John Herschel and Tennyson – and for which she is best known. But it is her female portraits that make up the majority of her work, and Sylvia Wolf's excellent *Julia Margaret Cameron's Women* is the first volume

to give serious attention to these. A devout Christian and devoted wife of 40 years who also raised 11 children, Cameron understood the qualities Victorian Britain expected of women. These had been famously articulated by Coventry Patmore in his four-part poem "The Angel in the House" (1862) as a combination of innocence, devotion and infinite capacity of nurture. But the way in which Cameron used the camera, from the moment she was given one in 1863, demonstrated a sensibility well able to question, command and acknowledge paradox and complexity; more akin to George Eliot that Honoria, the poem's heroine. At the age of 48, she moved from parenthood to photography. From the beginning Cameron went against photographic fashion. As well as larger portraits, carte de visite were immensely popular by the mid-1860s – 3.5 × 2.25-inch prints mounted on card.



King Lear allotting his Kingdom to his three daughters, 1872
Marina Liddell, Edith Liddell, Charles Hay Cameron and Alice Liddell
Carbon print, 345 × 285 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 27. © The Royal Photographic Society
[external borders cropped]

As the writer Anne Isabella Thackeray described them, “people like clear, hard outlines, and have a fancy to see themselves and their friends as if through opera-glasses, all complete, with the buttons, nicely defined”. Cameron refuted the details of daily life: “When focusing and coming to something which, to my eye, was very beautiful, I stopped there instead of screwing on the lens to a more definite focus.” Mary Hillier, her maid, along with other locals, modelled in the studio converted from a hen coop as often as socially superior subjects. Class was mere circumstance to Cameron; as with the pre-Raphaelites she was interested in a different kind of “truth”. She frequently filled much of the frame with the model’s head and shoulders, literally concerned to get in close. Light and shadow play over pale skin; there is intimacy, sometimes powerful sensuality. You are encouraged to look, admire; and yet simultaneously to pause, too, where you find melancholy, loss, ambivalence about such attention. What is evident in the construction and expression of these portraits is underscored by their titles. Unlike the male sitters, only a few female subjects are named; more often they take on mythical or historic roles. The story of “Beatrice”, for example, of which Cameron made at least five interpretations, is one of sexual abuse and patricide. “Christabel”, likewise, is a tale of loss of innocence and duplicity. Cameron’s madonnas are little more than children themselves. She portrayed a world in which death did the work that divorce does a century later – five of the children Cameron brought up were orphaned relatives. The age of consent for women was 12 and sex was inevitably mixed up with death through pregnancy and the perils of childbirth.

The details of fascinating lives escape round the edges of the photographs in this book – Cameron herself, born in India, educated in France, later to return to Ceylon; the actress Ellen Terry, married at 16 to the 47 years old painter G F Watts; Mary Ryan, the daughter of an Irish beggar, raised by Cameron, married by a man who fell in love with Cameron’s image of her, became Lady Cotton. Prosperous Victorian Britain was in full swing, the 1851 Great Exhibition had shown that, but its very success had thrown up a multitude of doubts and questioning. The English translation of The Communist Manifesto started circulating in 1850; nine years later Darwin’s Origin of Species was published; in 1869 T. H. Huxley coined the term “agnosticism”. The wayward Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell were related to Cameron. Their mother, Julia Jackson, was Cameron’s niece, a famous beauty and the model for a series of intense portraits that follow her from youth, through marriage and widowhood. As Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf described her: “One wanted 50 pairs of eyes to see with... Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with.” The writer Sir Henry Taylor described Cameron as one “who lives upon superlatives as her daily bread” and Woolf, likewise, was inclined gently to mock her great-aunt. In fact, as someone who saw herself as an artist from the outset, who promoted her work through the prestigious Colnaghi Gallery and ensured its place in South Kensington Museum (now the V&A), she was among the first to tread a path down which a chain of women would follow. Heston was not far wrong: practising for little more than a decade, only 25 years after photography had been invented, this wife of a coffee planter worked a minor revolution.



Julia Prinsep Stephen (née Jackson, formerly Mrs Duckworth), 1867
Albumen print, 292 × 238 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 28. © National Portrait Gallery, London,
[external borders cropped]



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Deathbed Study of Adeline Grace Clogstoun, 1872.
Albumen print, 137 × 203 mm
J. M. Cameron

© National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

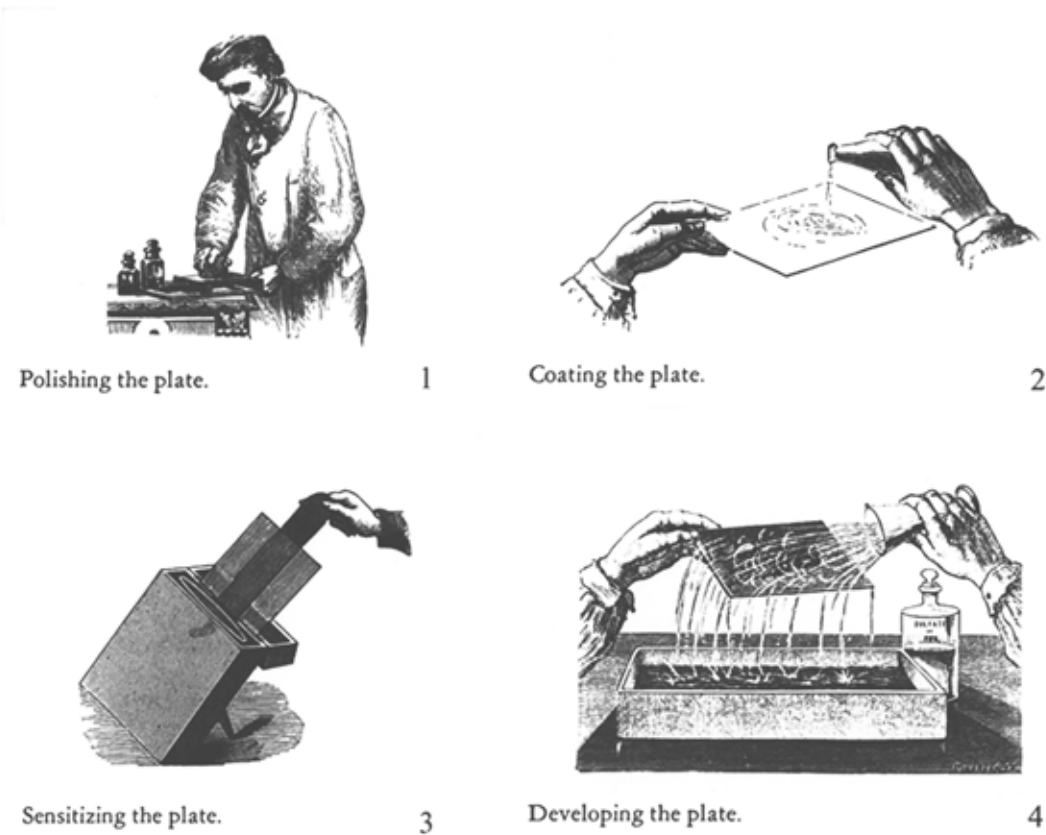
This sad photograph hides an interesting detail: at the top right corner you can see Cameron's camera itself, reflected in a mirror.

The invention of photography

[...] Julia Margaret Cameron had first heard about the new invention of photography in 1839 when she was newly married and still living in India. Her great friend Sir John Herschel had sent the Camerons some very early examples, as Julia Margaret reminded him in in 1866: "I remember gratefully the very first information I ever had of Photography in its Infant Life of Talbotype and Daguerreotype was from you in a letter I received from you in Calcutta." Curiously, however, it is not at all clear when she actually began to practise photography herself and the evidence she has left is conflicting. In a letter to Herschel on 26 February 1864, she wrote: "At the beginning of this year I first took up photography and my kind and loving son Charles Norman gave me a Camera & I set to work alone & unassisted to see what I could do. All thro' the severe month of January I felt my way literally in the dark thro' endless failures, at last came endless successes! May I not call them so?" [...]

Timeless portraits

Imagine 29. Collodion process, illustration from *A History and Handbook of Photography*. Gaston Tissandier, edited by John Thomson, 1878.



On 7 January 1839, Francois Arago (1786 – 1853), Director of the Paris Observatory, made a remarkable announcement to the members of the Académie des Sciences. Reminding his audience of the accuracy and beauty of the images seen in a *camera obscura*, a device which had been known and used since the sixteenth century, he told them that they need no longer regret the fact that these images could not be made permanent. Arago was both and publicist for Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1789–1851), a painter and co-owner of the Paris Diorama, who had, as Arago told the Académie, “discovered special screens on which the com-

plete image was reproduced in minutest detail, with exactness and incredible delicacy”. Arago was describing in public, for the first time ever, the process of photography. Three weeks later, the eminent scientist Michael Faraday (1791 – 1867) told the Royal Institution, England’s equivalent of the Académie des Sciences, that the landowner and scientific experimenter William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 – 1877) had developed his own method of photography four years earlier. Fox Talbot’s negative and positive photogenic drawings were very different from daguerrotypes, which were direct positives on silvered metal, but they too would later be

called ‘photographs’. As vital new nineteenth century technology and art form had been born – in both Britain and France. [...] Herschel was by then back in London, and surely found the announcement of the invention of photography in January 1839 of particular interest. Although he did not know how Daguerre’s or Fox Talbot’s processes worked, he at once gave the matter some thought, and began to experiment for himself, recording the results in notebooks: “Jan 29 Expts. Tried within the last few days since hearing of Daguerre’s secret and that Fox Talbot has also got something of the same kind. Three requisites: (1) Very susceptible paper; (2)

Very perfect camera; (3) Means of arresting the further action.” Herschel already knew how to achieve the third of these – the fixing agent that had eluded the earliest pioneers. He had discovered hyposulphite of soda – known to photographers ever since as *hypo* – twenty years earlier. Within a week he had invented his own, totally original, process of photography, borrowed a camera obscura and “formed image of telescope with the aplanatic lens of Dolland’s [sic] make on my construction and placed in focus paper with Carbonated Silver. An image was formed in white on a sepia-cold ground after about 2 hours exposure which bore washing with the hypos. Soda & was then



Slough telescope, (very first photograph taken on glass), 1839
Negative plate, 179 × 143 mm
J. Herschel

Imagine 30. Public domain

no longer alterable by light. Thus Daguerre’s problem is so far solved – for granting a perfect picture, the picture of this may be taken.” Herschel is describing a photographic negative, and has already grasped the idea of making a positive from it. He had taken a day or so to reach the point that Daguerre and his partner Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765 – 33) had needed more than a decade to achieve and Fox Talbot about six years. [...] Herschel soon sent samples of the new wonder to his friends the Camerons and, later, when he learned of the discovery that gun-cotton, an explosive prepared by soaking cotton in acid, could, when dissolved in ether,

be spread to produce a smooth, even and impenetrable membrane (its first use was in hospitals, to seal wounds), sent them samples of that too. The compound, known as *collodion*, enabled photographic chemicals to be spread evenly and thinly over glass, creating much smoother and far more translucent negatives than ever before. Its discovery changed the whole practice of photography, enabling amateurs like Julia Margaret to take it up. Herschel’s own contribution to photography seem to have included not only the discovery of *hypo*, but the coining of the words *snapshot*, *negative* and *positive* in their photographic sense, and perhaps even of *photography* itself.



Annie, My very first success in Photography,
29 January 1872
Annie Wilhelmina Philipot
Albumen print, 188 × 145 mm
J. M. Cameron

Below:
reproduction of the
original inscriptions

Imagine 31. © The J. Paul Getty Museum
[external borders cropped]

Annie

My very first success in Photography
January 1864

She shall be made immortal

Julia Margaret Cameron's Photography and the Construction of Celebrity

In his pioneering 1948 study of the life and work of Julia Margaret Cameron, Helmut Gernsheim recalls the moment when his interest in Cameron's photography was first piqued. While waiting for a train at Brockenhurst in the New Forest in the early decades of the twentieth century, the renowned photo-historian sought shelter in the station waiting-room, where he "was suddenly struck by familiar faces gazing down from the walls": "To my astonishment I found no fewer than eleven autographed portraits of famous Victorians by Julia Margaret Cameron. I must admit that I was rather puzzled to see these photographs decorating a dingy railway waiting room, of all places, but a moment later I came across the surprising explanation inscribed on one or two of the photographs. This gallery of the great men of our age is presented to this room by Mrs. Cameron in grateful memory of this being the spot where she first met one of her sons after a long absence of four years in Ceylon. 11th November 1871." Cameron's improvised *gallery of great men* recalls another visual anthology of eminent Victorians put together by a member of the Freshwater circle

(N.d.R.): painter G. F. Watts's Hall of Fame. However, whereas Watts's celebrity portraits formed an important part of the National Portrait Gallery's collection at the time Gernsheim was writing, Cameron's were hidden away in the *dingy railway waiting room* of a small Hampshire village. By the twentieth century, it seems, Cameron's name had slipped from the collective cultural consciousness, as well as from the photographic histories to which a curious Gernsheim subsequently turned for information; significantly, few of the source books he consulted during his researches in the 1940s "deigned to mention her work at all". His fall from recognition is somewhat ironic given the concerted efforts Cameron made during her lifetime to establish a reputation for herself not simply as a photographer, but as an *artist*. Unlike the male members of her circle, [...], she welcomed public acclaim and engaged unabashedly in strategies and seizing with gusto opportunities to raise her profile, however, Cameron's conception of and relationship to fame was by no means free from the kinds of contradictions and complexities that characterised Tennyson's and Watts's.

N.d.R.: Freshwater

Location on the Isle of Wight where Tennyson and Cameron created a circle of intellectuals and artists



Julia Margaret Cameron, 1850/52
Oil on canvas, 610 × 508 mm
J. F. Watts

Immagine 32. © National Portrait Gallery, London

[...], the idea of celebrity sponsored within Cameron’s portrait photography – that is, celebrity as exalted, timeless and enduring; the corollary of innate greatness and nobility – sits uneasily alongside the more pragmatic understanding of celebrity as condition conferring material rewards and financial security – a condition that might be achieved through hard work and persistence – revealed in her private writings, what is more, the gendered vision of celebrity suggested by her *gallery of great men* (it was not without cause that posthumous collection of her work was titled *Victorian photographs of famous men and fair Women*) is destabilised by her own active pursuit of personal renown. The complex gender politics of Victorian celebrity culture have been explored at length in a number of recent studies. As Brenda R. Weber points out, “The nineteenth century offered a marked rise in opportunities for women to occupy public and celebrated positions” – opportunities that many female writers, artists and performers readily exploited. Nevertheless, women’s relationship to celebrity culture was often fraught owing to its disruption of embedded cultural codes and the gendered assumption around issues such as visibility, pro-

fessionalism and propriety. As Tom Mole notes, though the doctrine of “separate spheres” for the genders does not accurately describe the historical reality of the nineteenth century, it does indicate the existence of a “prescriptive discourse” that encouraged women “to adjust or excuse” their practices and behaviours in the line with established norms. Consequently, celebrity for Victorian women was often a matter of careful management and negotiation between conflicting cultural imperatives. Alexis Easley observes that “obscurity was required to maintain social respectability, yet women found it necessary to balance privacy with visibility to enhance public interest in their lives and work. Too little exposure could mean invisibility ... yet too much exposure could mean being cast aside”. Given this ideologically charged cultural environment, it is perhaps understandable that some women (along with their biographers, family and friends) chose to represent themselves as *accidental* celebrities whose fame was “a matter of fate rather than of design, of rewards passively received rather than conquests actively pursued”. While others drew attention to their conventional domesticity and femininity in order to present their celebrity in socially

acceptable terms. Maura Ives argues, however, that “we must not allow such cautionary tales to obscure the agency of women within celebrity culture”. Certainly, the experiences of the Freshwater circle discussed in this book belie the notion that the celebrity infrastructure inhibited women while enabling men. Julia Margaret Cameron does not fit comfortably into the paradigm of the reluctant or self-effacing female celebrity; whereas her male friends Tennyson and Watts publicly schewed the active pursuit of fame, Cameron was mostly open about her ambitions, candid about her talent and, as Agnes Weld (a niece of the Tennysons) pointed out:

“She refused to be bound by any of the artificialities of modern society life”

Her status as a photographer further distinguished her from the literary women who have been the focus of existing scholarship on the gender politics of Victorian celebrity. When Cameron first took up her camera, photography was still a relatively new art form and had not accrued the kinds of inveterately masculinised values that had long attached the activities of authorship and portraiture.

Indeed, a tentative consensus clustered around the idea that photography might be a medium *pre-eminently suited for women*; its dependence on so-called *femenine* skills, such as delicacy, taste and patience, appeased the conservatively minded while, for the emerging women’s movement, photography offered unprecedented opportunities for female professionalisation and employment. Therefore, although Cameron’s innovative artistic style often brought her into conflict with the conformist ideal of critics and photographic societies, her gender proved no significant barrier to her creative – or commercial ambitions. Her privileged social standing, meanwhile, helped both to shield her from accusations of impropriety and to facilitate her photographic career. Born into a leading Anglo-Indian family, Cameron was able to draw upon the connections made available to her by birth and by the advantageous marriages of her six sisters (two of whom married into the English aristocracy). As Coventry Patmore noted in 1866, “her position in literary and aristocratic society gives her the pick of the most beautiful and intellectual heads in the world”. Owing to its apparently transparent relationship to ‘fact’, photography was thought to

Drawing of Julia Margaret Cameron,
(detail)
Date unknown
Ink on paper
J. Prinsep

Imagine 33. © Collection Sven Gahlin, London



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To find out more about Cameron and the Freshwater circle



Illustrazione 03. Victorian celebrities belonging to Cameron's circle. 2020

differ from, and enjoy and advantage over, other media. Anne Thackeray, in the Pall Mall Gazette, suggested that though “type, and printers’ ink, and paper” may provide a “record of things as they are”, “a photograph of your friend will, to a certain point, tell you more about him in one minute than whole pages of elaborate description. You see him himself – the identity is there”. Wynter claimed a similar representational superiority for photography over painting, arguing that whereas the artist’s style inevitably influences the portrayal of the subject in traditional portraiture, photographs present us with “the very lines that Nature has engraven on our faces, and its realism and its concomitant ability to render celebrity visages as intimately familiar to the public as those of their own kin”. (Indeed, Tennyson famously complained to Julia Margaret Cameron, “I can’t be anonymous by reason of your con-founded photographs”). The fact that images of celebrities could be collated and displayed in albums alongside those of genuine acquaintances helped to elide further the distance and difference between then, transforming the celebrity into a recognisable and knowable entity. Yet, the value of celebrity portraiture did not derive solely from its claims to verisi-

mitude, nor from the fantasy of intimacy it helped to sustain. From its earliest inception, photography was invested with a special memorialising power. As Elizabeth Barrett marvelled in an 1843 letter to her friend, Mary Russell Mitford, on the subject of daguerreotypes, “it is not merely the likeness which is precious .. but ... the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed for ever! It is the very sanctification of portraits”. Julia Margaret Cameron was only too aware of photography’s value to posterity; she frequently made reference to the eternalising power of her work, coaxing one potential sitter with the words:

“Bid her come, and she shall be made Immortal.”

It was to the portraits of the eminent poets, artists and scientists who sat before her lens that she most regularly applied this signifier, however, oanne Lukitsh argues that Cameron perceived herself as “a witness to human nobility”, nothing that, in a letter to her close friend and mentor, the eminent astronomer



and chemist Sir John Herschel, she wrote of her *longing* to take his photograph, adding, “I often think I could ... do a head that would be Valuable to all ages”. She was similarly keen to capture the genius of her friends Tennyson and Watts for the benefit of future generations, producing over twenty portraits of the two between 1864 and 1869. Her conviction of the historical value of these representations is clear from her comments regarding them; she described one portrait of Tennyson as “a National Treasure of Immense value”, and another, commonly known as *The Dirty Monk*, as an “Immortal head” and “a column of immortal grandeur”. Importantly, Cameron’s use of the term *immortal*, here, conveys something more than the simple arresting of the Laureate’s image in perpetuity. Like Elizabeth Barrett’s description of the daguerreotype process as “the sanctification of portraits”, it implies a kind of consecration. A number of critics have noted that ideas of immortality were in a state of flux in the Victorian age; indeed, Braudy claims that from the eighteenth century onwards “hope of heaven, hope of immediate fame, and hope of fame in posterity were becoming difficult to distinguish”. In Cameron’s work, however, the modern understanding of

immortality as “enduring fame or remembrance” (OED) never quite supplants traditional ideas about immortality and divinity; a strong religious tendency runs through both her photography and her written reflections on her art. In an album presented in 1864 tho her friend and mentor, Watts, she wrote: “To The Signor to whose generosity / I owe the choicest fruits of / his immortal genius. / I offer these my first successes / in my mortal but yet / divine! Art of Photography.” This short dedication generates a complex range of meanings around the interrelated concepts of fame, genius and immortality. Cameron is careful to position herself as a mere mortal in relation to the great Watts, who is deified as a transcendental genius. Her praise implicitly gestures towards Watts’s immortalising skill as an artist, while signaling that, because of this, his present fame will persist through the ages. In her own case, by contrast, Cameron suggests it is to the photographic medium, rather than the all-too-human photographer, that divinity must be assigned. By ascribing the gift of immortalisation to her inanimate camera rather than herself, the neophyte artist modestly avoids claims to personal recognition, while simultaneously positioning her work as theophanic.

Sir J.F. Herschel, 1867
Albumen print, 279 × 227 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 34. © The J. Paul Getty Museum



G. F. Watts, 1865
Albumen print, 365 × 291 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 35. © The J. Paul Getty Museum
[external borders cropped]



Tennyson/ The dirty monk, 1865
Albumen print, 354 × 206 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 36. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London
[external borders cropped]



Alfred/ Lord Tennyson, 1864
Albumen print, 279 × 227 mm
J. J. E. Mayall

Imagine 37. © Royal Collection Trust



Men great thru'genius...

By determined application over roughly a decade, Julia Margaret assembled a considerable portfolio of fine close-ups – mostly males – heads, virtually life-sized because of the large negatives she used. The increased size of her negatives and prints when she acquired a second, larger camera in 1866 added to her difficulties – from preparing the negative through the length of exposure, to making and finishing the final print.

But from then on her portraits had an extra intensity, living up to the exhortation from Watts to make “photographs that are not only From the Life, but To the Life, and startle the eye with wonder and delight”.

[...] These extraordinary powerful portraits are virtually the first *close-ups* in photographic history. Each of them is taken against a totally dark background and shows only the sitter's head and shoulders, with the torso often

draped in dark velvet or other cloth. The effect is much enhanced by Julia Margaret's virtuoso handling of light. Which became increasingly accomplished over the years. Illuminating these heroic heads from one side only highlights every detail, every valley and every bump. Julia Margaret first used the term “Immortal head” for the man she considered perhaps even more important in her gallery of eminent Victorians than Carlyle and Herschel – Alfred Tennyson. Although Tennyson was far from enthusiastic about being photographed (he was, after all, already one of the most painted, drawn and photographed faces of the age), he was often persuaded to move from the Cameron's dining room at Dimbola to Julia Margaret's “little dark room – half reluctant, half willing to take part in this shadowy presentment, but wholly interested in his old friend's success”. No less than seventeen

Timeless portraits

of Cameron's solo portraits of him survive, in addition to two with his sons, Lionel and Hallam. Because they never flatter him, nor attempt to make him appear urban or sophisticated, nor disguise the effect of age, illness, introspection, gloom and even despair, they tell us more about the real Tennyson than all the other painted and photographed portraits of him put together. Tennyson himself may well have realised that Julia Margaret did not make him look his handsome best. When he came to select a frontispiece for the 1884 edition of his collected works he chose a formal studio portrait by Mayall, who had ensured that Tennyson was tidily dressed, his collar neatly turned down, his hair properly coiffed, his deeply lined, swarthy complexion pale and smooth. Julia Margaret was appalled, writing of her own profile portrait (dubbed by Tennyson *The Dirty Monk* it is a fit representation of

Isaiah or of Jeremiah & Henry Taylor said the Picture was as fine as Alfred Tennyson's finest Poem. The Laureate has since said of it that he likes it better than any photograph that has been taken of him except one by Mayall that *except* speaks for itself. The comparison seems too comical. It is rather like comparing one of Madame Tussaud's Wax work Heads to one of Woolner's *Ideal heroic Busts*. There is of course nothing unusual about a sitter preferring a flattering image to one that is revealing. But it is hard not to side with Julia Margaret. Her raffish unwashed monk is an intellectual and an artist. Even if one knew nothing about him, one might guess he was a writer from the book clasped in his left hand (which looms unnaturally large because of the short focal length of her lens). Mayall's Tennyson is a dull and respectable Victorian gentleman – a banker perhaps.

Julia Margaret Cameron, a critical biography - 2003
Colin Ford

The Angel in the House, 1873
Emily Peacock
Gelatin print, 346 × 255 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 38. © The J. Paul Getty Museum



...Women thru’ love

It was extremely difficult for women in Victorian Britain to achieve public status in their own right. Most of Julia Margaret’s female subjects were family and friends, and on the whole it was not their strength of character, nor their talent, which interested her, but they’re physical beauty – usually the sort of longnecked, long-haired, immature beauty familiar to us from Pre-Raphaelite paintings. [...] Julia Margaret’s photographic portrayal of *The Angel in the House* is a head-and-shoulder close-up, but one has only to compare it with her portraits of male heroes to see how much more softly lit and conventional it is. The model, Emily Peacock, is dressed in dark velvet, as are many of Julia Margaret’s men, but the

velvet is edged with white fur, giving a much gentler, prettifying effect. [...] Julia Margaret usually photographed her female models when they were teenagers, though their dress makes them seem older to modern eyes. With such girls, she drew her camera back from its extreme close-ups position, uncovered all the windows in her glasshouse studio (or even took her subjects out into the garden) and modelled their faces and figures in a softer and more flattering light than she used for her heroic men. The exceptions in this assemblage of female portraits are few, most notably the series of fine head-and shoulder pictures of Cameron’s niece and godchild Julia Jackson, of whom



Below: **Sadness**, 1864
Ellen Terry
Carbon print, 241 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 40. © Smith Archive
[external border cropped]



Left: **Ellen Terry as Queen Katherine**, 1892

Imagine 39. © Royal Photographic Society

there are more than fifty known portraits. These dramatic busts were taken within days of the equally striking set of four portraits of Sir John Herschel. There is also a handful of powerful studies of a Mrs Keene – particularly as Milton’s Mountain Nymph Sweet Liberty and Tennyson’s Lady Clara Vere de Vere. These descriptions are themselves revealing. Only Julia Jackson is consistently portrayed in her own right; Mrs. Keene, like many other sitters in this chapter, is posed as different literary characters and is known only by her husband’s name. [...] There are, of course, some famous names here. Ellen Terry, in *Sadness*, is shown as G. F. Watts’s pretty child bride rather than as the

greatest actress of her generation, which she became long after that short-lived marriage had ended, Alice Liddell, mostly in various guises as characters from classical literature and Shakespeare rather than as herself. There are twenty-one portraits of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Marie Spartali, although she appears mainly as one character or another from Greek mythology, as befits her Greek origins. Terry and Liddell were in their teens when Cameron photographed them, as were a considerable number of the women in this chapter. Their very youth helps to ensure that “fair” rather than “famous” sitters; friends, relatives, and even domestic servants (of whom there are none among the male portraits) predominate.

When mistakes make the art

Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographs were smudged, smeared, out of focus – and triumphs of artistic expression 150 years ahead of their time.

Just six months after she was given her very first camera, Julia Margaret Cameron applied to join the Photographic Society of London (now the Royal Photographic Society). For a 48-year-old woman in the Victorian era, a time when photography was both brand-new and completely dominated by men, this showed serious chutzpah. Overcoming the less than warm welcome she received required more confidence still. From the start, Cameron’s work was lambasted in the press. And the biggest cause of criticism was the thing that, ironically, would turn out to be the hallmark of her style and her enduring fame: her mistakes.

“She was immediately controversial,”

says Marta Weiss, curator of the Julia Margaret Cameron exhibition on show at the Victoria

& Albert Museum until 21 February. (Another exhibit marking the 200th anniversary of Cameron’s birth, Julia Margaret Cameron: Influence and Intimacy, runs until 31 March at London’s Science Museum).

“Her photographic contemporaries criticised her work for being out of focus – which she says she did deliberately – for being ‘slovenly’, as they put it. For leaving flaws, like splotches and swirls you get from the uneven application of chemicals, or smearing things when the plate was still wet. Those kinds of flaws are things that the other photographers would have discarded as mistakes. She seemed to either accept, at the very least, or embrace them.”

- Marta Weiss

Cherub and Seraph, 1866
Freddy Gould and Elizabeth Keown
Albumen print, 232 × 289 mm
J. M. Cameron

Immagine 41. © National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, Bradford



Photograph by Miroslav Tichý (1926 - 2011)
Date unknown

Immagine 42. © Miroslav Tichý



“What is focus, and who has the right to say what focus is the legitimate focus?”

J. M. Cameron

The art of accident

At the time, many saw photography as a science rather than an art. Cameron’s peers had correspondingly mechanical tendencies: their goal was the accurate, precise rendering of a subject – none of this artsy, emotional expression. But Cameron, who used the extremely messy and difficult-to-master wet collodion process – which involves coating glass with an even layer of collodion, sensitising it with a bath of silver nitrate, and exposing and developing the plate while it’s still wet – wasn’t nearly as fussed about precision. As *The Photographic News* snorted: “What in the name of all the nitrate of silver that ever turned white into black have these pictures in common with good photography? Smudged, torn, dirty, undefined, and in some cases almost unreadable, there is hardly one of them that ought not to have been washed off the plate as soon as its image had appeared.” One of the major *flaws* of Cameron’s work was her blurred focus. It’s not clear if this came about deliberately or not. After all, her first lens and camera had a short focal length and a fixed aperture that made it impossible to get everything in sharp focus. Making it more difficult was the fact that, because exposures at the time could be some 10 minutes long, any movement on the part of her models, who weren’t professional and were unused to such work, would result in blurred pictures. Cameron herself said that her first successes in taking photographs with the kind of focus she wanted, like Annie, were “a fluke”. But not wishing to create the impression that

this was all a happy accident, Cameron added immediately: “That is to say when focussing and coming to something which to my eye was very beautiful I stopped there, instead of screwing on the Lens to a more definite focus which all other Photographers prefer.” A mistake became an act of rebellion against the status quo. It also became an element that made Cameron’s photographs not only different – but helped raise photography to an art form. At the International Exhibition of 1862, there even were debates over whether photographs should be shown with the machines, or with the painting and sculpture. (In the end, unable to decide, the organisers gave photography its own section). Cameron had no doubts where her pictures, at least, belonged. “My aspirations are to ennoble Photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art, by combining the real & ideal & sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to poetry and beauty,” she wrote to the astronomer Sir John Herschel, her friend and mentor, in 1864. Poetry, beauty, a mix of the real and ideal: what could achieve those aims better than a soft focus, dramatic lighting and the subjects’ emotive expressions? Today, looking at her portraits feels almost like communing with spirits. Take the *Mountain Nymph*, shot in July 1866: with the direct gaze, high contrast and hazy atmosphere, the portrait looks dreamy and ethereal, like a phantom appearing out of the past.

***The Mountain Nymph Sweet Liberty*, 1866**
Mrs. Keene
Albumen print, 362 × 283 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 43. © The J. Paul Getty Museum
[external borders cropped]



***The Astronomer*, 1867**
John Herschel
Albumen print, 610 × 507 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 44. © The Royal Photographic Society
[external borders cropped]



An artist’s aims

Given Cameron’s devotion to photography as an art, it’s unsurprising that she was inspired by other artists, too, particularly Renaissance and Baroque painters. Or that, even while most photography critics eviscerated her, those in the art world celebrated her work and her aims. Many of her photographs incorporate familiar Renaissance elements like heavy drapery, triangular compositions and diagonal lighting. Her treatment of Sir John Herschel (2) – an important man made real and intimate to the viewer with his weary, intense expression and unkempt hair – seems reminiscent of portraits like Raphael’s Pope Julius II. “If someone else were approaching it, it would probably be a formal portrait, quite stiff,” says Tim Clark, curator of the exhibition at London’s Science Museum. “Not here. She pushes the camera really up close and personal to dwell on his features.” Before photographing Herschel, Ca-

meron even ordered him to go wash and tousle his hair, giving a halo of intelligence. But it was the pre-Raphaelites who especially embraced Cameron. One of the things she shared with them was a propensity to stage tableaux: many of her photographs were of religious or literary scenes, drawn from the tales of King Arthur or Greek legends. She used props and costumes, and she was notorious for luring potential models to her studio; she even hired maids based not on their housekeeping skills, but on how they would look in her pictures. While this kind of staging now seems sentimental and Victorian, it would also, of course, become thoroughly postmodern. In some ways, you can draw a line from Cameron right up to Cindy Sherman. No matter how staged the composition itself, there’s almost always a Cameron *flaw*. Or was it a flaw at all? In *La Madonna Vigilante*, she has scratched the



The Rosebud Garden of Girls, 1868
Eleanor, Christina, Mary
and Ethel Fraser-Tytler
Albumen print, 294 × 267 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 45. © The J. Paul Getty Museum



The Beloved, 1865/6
Oil on canvas, 825 × 762 mm
D. G. Rossetti

Imagine 46. © TATE BRITAIN



La Madonna Vigilante, 1864
Mary Ann Hillier
and Percy Seymour Keown
Albumen print, 254 × 200 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 47. © The J. Paul Getty Museum



Paul and Virginia, 1864
Albumen print, 254 × 198 mm
J. M. Cameron

Imagine 48. © The J. Paul Getty
Museum

Right: detail of the feet [1a]



emulsion off the plate on the upper right of the picture. Perhaps there was some thing in the photograph she didn't like. Or perhaps she did it for effect: to emphasise the halo around the Madonna's head. These *mistakes* also allow the viewer into the studio with her. In a series she made of two children, entitled Paul and Virginia, each image gives us a different glimpse behind the scenes. One shows the disembodied hand of a helper holding a dark cloth. In another, the hand is gone, but Cameron evidently didn't like the size of little Paul's feet; she has scratched into them to make them smaller. This frank, open approach put Cameron far ahead of her time. "It's not too much of a stretch of the imagination to imagine her in a postmodern vein, where she's revealing the

artist's hand and the process of picture-making" Clark says. Still, would Cameron have preferred a more seamless execution? Are these tell-tale signs really, in fact, *mistakes*? It's hard to know. What we do know is that there were plenty of photographs that she discarded – some of which are on display at the V&A. The rest were those that she wanted to be shown. That made her, as one of the kinder critics of her time wrote in 1866, "the first person who had the wit to see her mistakes were her successes." And that, in many ways, may be the true mark of genius – artistic or scientific. As Weiss says, "That's how people make discoveries. You stumble upon something, and then it becomes deliberate."



5

A timeless legacy Massimo Vignelli's lessons

a cura di Giorgia Di Tria

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La lezione di Vignelli

La metodologia di progettazione di Vignelli è ben documentata in molte interviste, articoli, libri e video, ma è riassunta con particolare chiarezza ne “Il Canone Vignelli”, un breve libro che ha scritto verso la fine della sua carriera. La prima metà, con i principi di progettazione fondamentali di Vignelli in non più di 40 pagine, è una delle guide più chiare all'estetica del design modernista disponibile ovunque. Qui il designer si discosta dalle mode e da quella che definiva “cultura dell'obsolescenza e dello spreco”.

“Siamo per un design che duri, che risponda

ai bisogni e ai desideri delle persone. Quella del designer è una vita di lotta, una lotta contro il brutto”.

In un'intervista al St. Louis Post Vignelli criticò aspramente il modo moderno di fare design: **“Ci sono troppe persone senza nessuna preparazione che si occupano di graphic design e siccome hanno un computer, non c'è limite alle cose che possono creare: newsletter, segnaletica e così via. È inquinamento! Non hanno la minima idea della dignità della professione”.**

Il designer non perdeva mai occasione per ribadire che, come in tutte le professioni, non

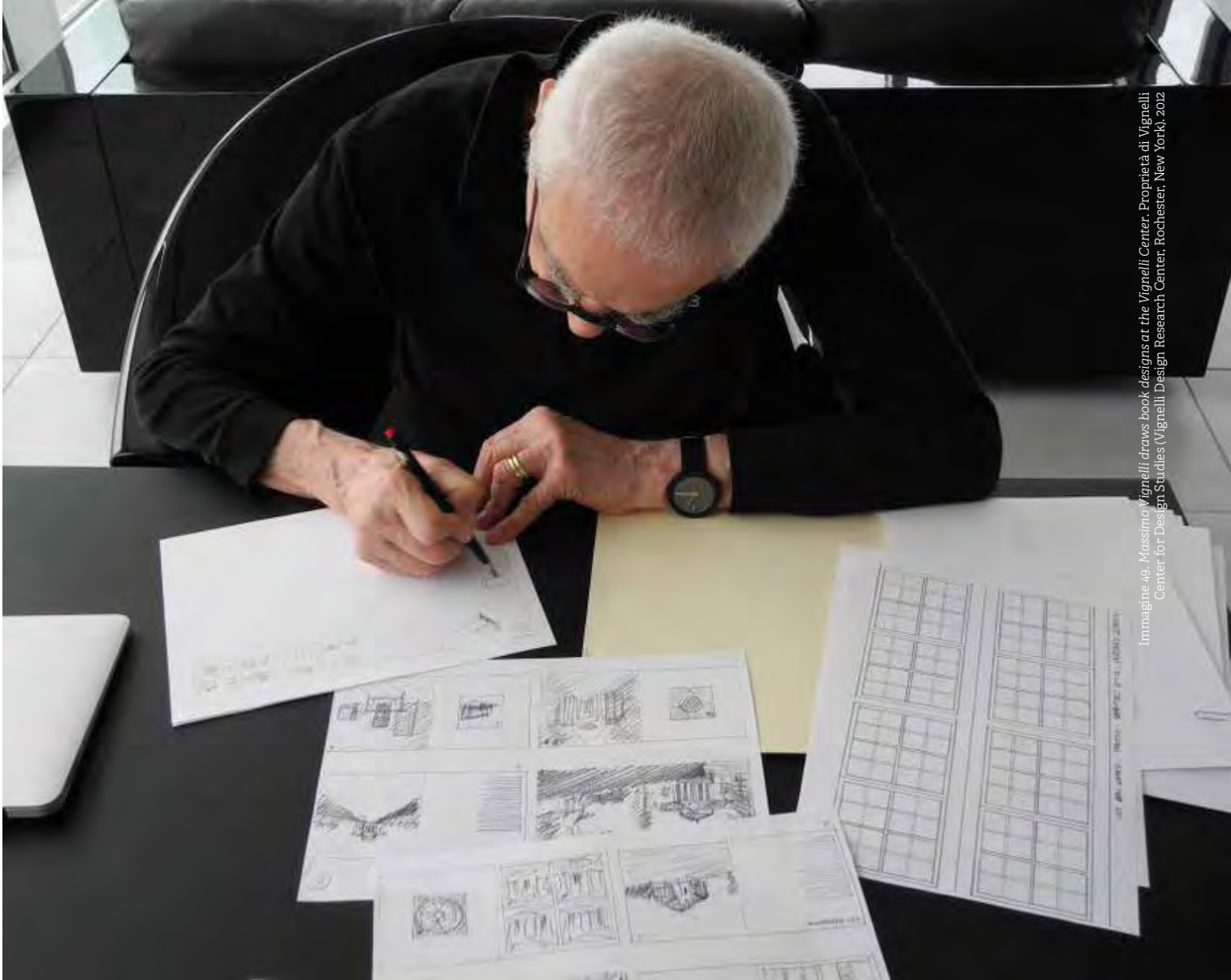


Immagine 49. Massimo Vignelli draws book designs at the Vignelli Center. Proprietà di Vignelli Center for Design Studies (Vignelli Design Research Center, Rochester, New York), 2012

ci si può improvvisare: per diventare graphic designer serve una preparazione adeguata e tanta esperienza. Quali sono, dunque, gli insegnamenti che un giovane graphic designer può trarre dalla lezione di questo grande maestro? Secondo il concetto alla base di tutta la sua filosofia, il design è un'unica disciplina che si declina poi in varie forme per le quali, però, è necessario utilizzare lo stesso approccio. Partendo da questo, Vignelli ha poi espresso una serie di principi nel già citato Canone, dei suggerimenti utili per tutti coloro che lavorano nel campo del design. Eccone una sintesi.

Semantica: “La prima cosa che faccio quando inizio un nuovo lavoro di qualsiasi tipo è ricercarne il significato”. Prima di mettersi all'opera occorre farsi delle domande e conoscere a fondo la storia e le caratteristiche dell'oggetto del nostro lavoro per comprenderne a pieno il significato e per riuscire poi a farlo emergere nella sua realizzazione.

Sintassi: “La sintassi del design, come quella della grammatica, è composta da varie componenti che fanno parte della natura del progetto. [...] La coerenza in un lavoro di design è data

dal giusto abbinamento dei vari elementi sintattici del lavoro". Le componenti della sintassi nel graphic design sono ad esempio la struttura generale del progetto, i caratteri tipografici, i testi, i titoli e le immagini: tutti questi elementi devono essere associati in modo coerente e funzionale, affinché ogni parte contribuisca al risultato finale.

Pragmatica: "Se ciò che creiamo non viene capito, vuol dire che abbiamo fallito nella comunicazione". Per il maestro, se un designer realizza qualcosa il cui senso non viene compreso, vuol dire che non ha svolto bene il suo lavoro. In sostanza, un oggetto di design deve parlare da solo, deve rispondere alle reali esigenze delle persone e deve essere "senza tempo", ossia destinato a durare e a non perdere mai la forza del suo significato.

Disciplina: "L'attenzione ai dettagli richiede disciplina. Non c'è spazio per la negligenza, per la trascuratezza o per la procrastinazione". Ogni particolare è importante nel processo creativo perché contribuirà al successo del risultato finale. L'attenzione al dettaglio, dunque, è di primaria importanza per un designer: non bisogna essere approssimativi.

Appropriatezza: "L'appropriatezza ci dirige verso il giusto mezzo, il giusto materiale, la giusta dimensione, la giusta espressione, il giusto colore e la giusta texture". Il principio è un po' la somma di quelli appena elencati: se, nel processo creativo si seguono i passaggi appena elencati, si arriverà a scegliere i mezzi e i metodi più appropriati per realizzare ogni progetto.

Ambiguità: "Io do un'interpretazione positiva al termine ambiguità. La intendo come pluralità di significati o come l'abilità di conferire a un oggetto o a un lavoro di design la possibilità di essere letto in modi diversi, ciascuno complementare all'altro, per arricchire ulteriormente il significato finale". Le parole di Vignelli si spiegano da sole: tuttavia, avverte, bisogna essere cauti e usare l'ambiguità nella giusta misura, altrimenti si rischia di ottenere l'effetto contrario a quello desiderato.

Responsabilità: "Come designer abbiamo tre livelli di responsabilità: verso noi stessi e l'integrità del progetto in tutte le sue parti; verso il cliente, per riuscire a risolvere un problema in modo efficiente sotto tutti i punti di vista, compreso quello economico; verso il pubblico, il consumatore, l'utente del prodotto finito".

“La funzione del design è di disegnare delle cose che durano sempre, non effimere. Quando qualcosa è effimero vale per quel che vale: niente.”

Massimo Vignelli



Secondo Vignelli bisogna essere responsabili e pronti a risolvere qualsiasi problema a qualsiasi livello, senza compromessi.

Rispetto: “Considero i loghi consolidati come qualcosa da proteggere”. Vignelli sosteneva che se un’azienda ha un’immagine ormai consolidata e conosciuta, questa non dovrebbe essere alterata, perché rappresenta una sorta di patrimonio. Quando un cliente chiede un rebranding il designer deve agire con responsabilità: deve essere in grado di capire quando è controproducente un cambiamento radicale e agire di conseguenza. Il designer cita come esempi i loghi di Coca-Cola, Shell o American Airlines, icone entrate ormai nell’immaginario collettivo e che rappresentano la nostra storia. Nel suo stesso lavoro Vignelli ha messo in pratica questo principio, limitandosi spesso a un ritocco o a un upgrade del logo esistente, come ad esempio nel caso di quello della Lancia.

Conoscenza dei font: “Sono convinto che molti font vengono creati solo per scopi commerciali, per fare soldi o per creare un’identità. In realtà il numero dei font di qualità è piuttosto

ristretto”. Oltre a pensare che la vastità di font creati con il computer “inquinassero” il mondo del design, Vignelli sosteneva che i giovani oggi non conoscono i principi della tipografia: per un designer, invece, è fondamentale studiare i font per poter poi scegliere il più adatto a ogni progetto. I suoi preferiti erano l’Helvetica, il Garamond e il Futura: secondo lui, una volta individuato il migliore per un determinato lavoro, bisogna usare sempre quello.

Altri suggerimenti: nella parte finale del suo Canone, Vignelli fornisce ai suoi lettori altri suggerimenti pratici per riuscire al meglio nel proprio lavoro. Eccone alcuni: giocare con le dimensioni e alternare caratteri grandi a caratteri piccoli creando anche spazi vuoti, perché “in un mondo dove tutti urlano, il silenzio diventa rilevante”; scegliere il giusto materiale per ogni prodotto, perché è anche “attraverso questa scelta che articoliamo la forma di un oggetto ed esprimiamo il suo significato”; infine, mettersi in gioco, essere curiosi e cercare sempre di arricchirsi provando a fare nuove scoperte, “trovando nuove vie per fare la stessa cosa meglio di prima”.

An interview with Massimo Vignelli

What did you want to do when you were growing up?

Exactly what I have done: working in all the fields of design, from graphic design to architecture, from interior design to product. As I have always said, "Design is One".

What was your educational path?

Basically working in the studios of the greatest architects of my time: Achille Castiglioni and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, Giulio Minoletti, Giancarlo De Carlo, Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella, and many others, before as a ruler

penman and then as a partner. Moreover, the cohousing with Max Huber was a great occasion to learn much about graphic design. Then, the experience with glass design at Venini. Always with a great passion for architecture and industrial design.

What was your favorite subject at school?

At the art school: Architecture, History of Art, and Decoration.

When and how did you start your career?

I did my first job when I was 16, working for

the Castiglioni brothers; and with all the others until 22 years old. Then I started working freelance in graphic design, packaging, and exhibit design.

What is the project that you remember with most pleasure and interest?

Every project, from the one I did on the very first day to the last one that I made yesterday.

A project that you would like to realise.

A corporate identity for a country, for example Italy or Vatican City. I will go to the Pope and say: "Your Holiness, the logo is O.K., but everything else has to go!"

The company's graphic image of American Air-

lines has been changed after 45 years—when it was redesigned by Unimark. When is it better to change a visual identity and when to retain it?

Design reflects the responsibility towards the producer and the consumer and naturally constitutes a durable solution. Styling is ephemeral and gives shortlasting solutions. They have a different liability towards the user and it is economically important to understand such a difference. In a coordinated image for the industry it is important to design a long-lasting identity. The implementation of a new image is expensive and can't be changed for the sake of novelty or—even worse—to cover up the shortcomings of a bad management. The same goes for design of furniture that, unlike a dress, will not be thrown away



Immagine sz. Herbert Matter and Massimo Vignelli. 1981

after a short time. Forced obsolescence is a crime, an expression of social irresponsibility that increases waste of energy and money, damaging the users.

One or more designers that you admire.

There are many, unfortunately almost all dead. In graphic design Pierre Mendell, in architecture Mies van der Rohe, in industrial design Dieter Rams (still alive), in furniture design Charles Eames, in editorial design Willy Fleckhaus. And many others.

A typeface that you like.

The new digital edition of Helvetica, called Neue Haas Grotesk. [Note: It was the original name of Helvetica, when it was first introduced by the Haas Type Foundry in Switzerland in 1957.] It is perfect and with many weights: thin, light, regular, medium, bold, extrabold, etc.

Can you tell me the story of how Helvetica was brought to Italy?

It was 1960 and no one in Italy had Helvetica. So I went to Felice Nava, whose printhouse was then located under Max Huber's apartment, and asked him to go to Switzerland and

buy it. A man of few words, he only answered: "I'll go!" and left. On the way back, once at the customs, the border officers became suspicious seeing that his car was running really slow and all squashed to the ground. "Why is your car walking so low and slow?" they asked him. "Well... It could be the carburettor!" Of course it was full of lead blocks! They searched the car and confiscated all the typecases. When he came back to Milan I asked him what we should do and he said: "Huh, now I've wised up! I'll come back to Switzerland and pass the border through a different way!" This is what he did and this is how Helvetica was brought to Italy. From then on Nava's fortune began: all the graphic designers went to him because he was the only one with the right typeface. The peculiarity of Helvetica didn't lie only in its shape, but in the fact that the types didn't have shoulders, so that the letters could be set almost stuck one to the other, obtaining a unique compactness which was lacking with all the other typefaces.

Is it better drawing a new font or using the existing ones?

There are two main font families: serif (elzevirs) and sans-serif (grotesks). In both families

“You do design because you feel it inside; you have a moral issue to spread quality in our environment.”

Massimo Vignelli



Immagine 53. Massimo Vignelli working in his home studio.

there are some (few) great typefaces, the rest is commercial production. Among the serifs we have Garamond, Bodoni, Baskerville, Century Expanded, and Clarendon. Among the sans we have Futura, Gill Sans, Helvetica, Univers, and Optima. Sometimes it is possible to use a font with a weird look, but only to set a title or a logotype. There is no need to design a new font: what matters is the typographical structure, not the typeface!

And what about Our Bodoni, the typeface that you designed in 1989 in collaboration with type designer Tom Carnase?

Our Bodoni originated from our need to match Bodoni with Helvetica, keeping the same body-size with the same upper- and lowercase proportions. I think such an operation is more useful than designing a new typeface. There are many typefaces that could be im-

proved through a redesign, for example Century. We did the same with Our Futura, changing the proportions and making them similar to Helvetica: higher lowercase and lower uppercase, improving the x-height and the kerning.

Has the way people perceive the design changed?

Definitely, but it is still unclear the marking between design and styling. Design is permanent, styling is ephemeral. The responsibilities are different, so are the results. However, we appreciate much more the aesthetic value—not the ethic—today than fifty years ago. Design, good or bad, is now part of our environment: It is around us and it has an influences on us.

A piece of architecture that you appreciate.

Villa Savoye by Le Corbusier, the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies, and the National Assembly

Building of Bangladesh by Louis Kahn. In my opinion, the three masterpieces of the twentieth century!

Without considering technology, what are the main differences between the design from the past and the current one?

Over the past fifty years, graphic design has acquired professional awareness, moving away from the original painterly positions. Now graphic design is becoming visual communication. The term “graphic” does not make sense anymore, it does no longer correspond to our time and current technologies. From two-dimensional it has become four-dimensional. Complexities have increased, but the basic discipline remains valid.

Screen or printed paper?

Both: printed paper less and less, screen more and more. It is more versatile, it provides better colors, and it doesn't take space.

Hand drawing or computer?

They are both useful: the first one to capture a concept, the second one to refine it.

Design, art, craft.

Design is not art. Design is utilitarian, art is useful but not utilitarian. Craftmanship is manual by nature, design is industrial by nature.

What would you recommend to a young designer?

Deepen your knowledge of the history of

design and learn the work of all the protagonists. Learn the theories that determined the development of design. Develop a critical attitude and refine it continuously. Sieve and continuously assess everything surrounding us. Acquire a professional identity and enforce it. Meet the needs of the clients and not their desires, but if necessary evaluate them. Always remember that from a bad client you get a worse client, and from a good client you get a better one. Remember that the word aesthetics contains the word ethics: without this one the first one no longer exists!

A definition of good design.

A good design is a responsible design, expressing an intellectual elegance rather than its contrary: vulgarity.

A description of the Vignelli's design.

From the very start sixty years ago, our design has been a constant struggle against the vulgar, the ephemeral, and the irresponsible rather than a quest for novelty. Based upon universal principles of rationality—expressed by the development of the Modern Movement in the 20th century—our design believes in discipline but not in dogma, it is not static but dynamic, versatile and coherent even within its own language.

What was your favourite game when you were a child?

The Meccano, and making imaginative scenographies.

Design that endures

Italian architects Massimo and Lella Vignelli on finding timeless pieces.

Inspiration

- We have a motto: if you can't find it, design it. In 1964, we were looking for a sofa for our house, so we designed the saratoga for poltronova, which has leather cushions and a boxy, lacquered frame. It's in our living room—we still use it.

- Design should solve problems. For heller, we made stackable melamine dinnerware. When you finish eating, you put your flatware inside your dish, and then stack the next plate on top. This way you make a clean pile of dirty dishes.

- Training the eye is crucial. Go to Venice or Florence. Walk down the street there and you will learn more about design than at design school. Not everybody comes back a master of the renaissance, but something sticks. The domes on venetian churches inspired the ribs on our ciga glassware, which is fluted to catch the light and create shadows and reflections.

On a mission

- It's not just a matter of creating pretty things. We're not in the fashion business. We're missionaries on a crusade against vulgarity.



Designers have a responsibility to make things that are functional and long lasting.

• The best-designed products right now are from Apple. We have an iPad and a MacBook Air. They are beautiful. You can see the intelligence throughout. Steve Jobs is a real leader who understands that design must be integral, not just a fad for increasing sales. In Italy, Olivetti, who used to make typewriters, was a guy of that caliber.

Strong lines

• Design is not a style. It’s an attitude. We don’t like “limp” design. Sweet and delicate is not us. We like design that has strength. This is what the Bauhaus was all about: simple things that work, that last, that are good, that are real. Our favorite cups are plain white Wedgwood ones designed long ago. Five hundred years from now, they will still be beautiful. And they didn’t mess it up with decoration. There was no need to.

• We like black, white, beige, and red. Red is our favorite. There is a color that we call Vignelli red. We use it for our logo and for many other things. It’s on the borderline between red and orange.

Invest in Design

• When you buy a chair by Mies van der Rohe, Eames, or Saarinen, you automatically show that you have a truly discerning taste. Choose things that are timeless. You don’t have to spend a lot of money. There are folding chairs that cost \$10 to \$15 that are great design, just as there are chairs that cost thousands of dollars that are junk.

• You can throw away a dress or a pair of shoes; clothing doesn’t last a lifetime. But a chair or a sofa should last forever. Don’t just go out and buy the first sofa you see. The more options you look at, the more you’ll discover what best fits your situation. You’ll see many monsters. Select a few good styles, and then pick the one that suits your life.

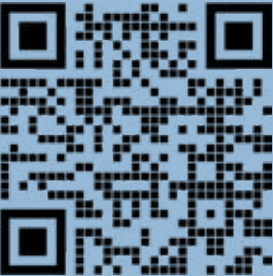
• More and more stores are selling good-quality design at an affordable price. This was not true 30 years ago. We like CB2, Muji, and even IKEA. For furniture that will last, go to a company like Cassina, Bernini, B&B Italia, Knoll, or Herman Miller. EBay is great. We bought a fabulous Thonet chair on eBay and had it shipped from Germany.

“Design is not art. Design is utilitarian, art is not.”

Massimo Vignelli



Imagine 56. Heller White Mug, by Vignelli, M. [Prodotto]. 1972 (Mockup di FreeTemplates)



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Massimo and Lella
Vignelli speaking
about how to keep
design simple, elegant
and timeless

Five lessons from Massimo Vignelli

Massimo Vignelli is one of the masters of design and have inspired so many designers including me. He also inspired Canadian designer Anthony Neil Dart to create this poster series with five phrases to live by Massimo Vignelli.



Immagine 57. Five lessons from Massimo Vignelli, by Neil Dart, A. [Poster].
(Mockup di Di Tria Giorgia)



Immagine 58. Five lessons from Massimo Vignelli, by Neil Dart, A. [Poster].
(Mockup di Di Tria Giorgia)



Immagine 59. Five lessons from Massimo Vignelli, by Neil Dart, A. [Poster].
(Mockup di Di Tria Giorgia)



Immagine 60. *Five lessons from Massimo Vignelli*, by Neil Dart, A. [Poster].
(Mockup di Di Tria Giorgia)



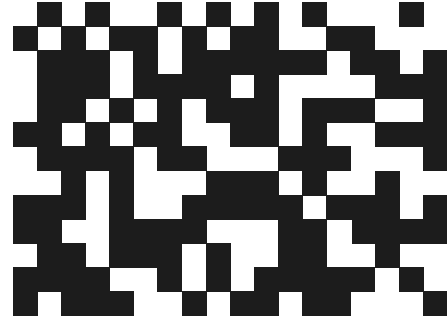
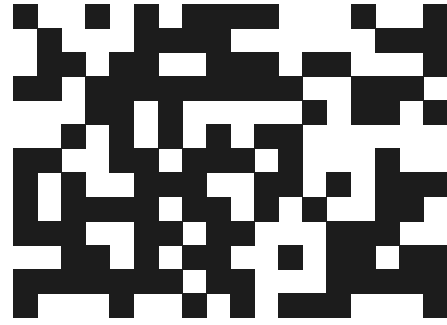
Immagine 61. *Five lessons from Massimo Vignelli*, by Neil Dart, A. [Poster].
(Mockup di Di Tria Giorgia)

Timeless masterpieces

Art that was meant to be eternal

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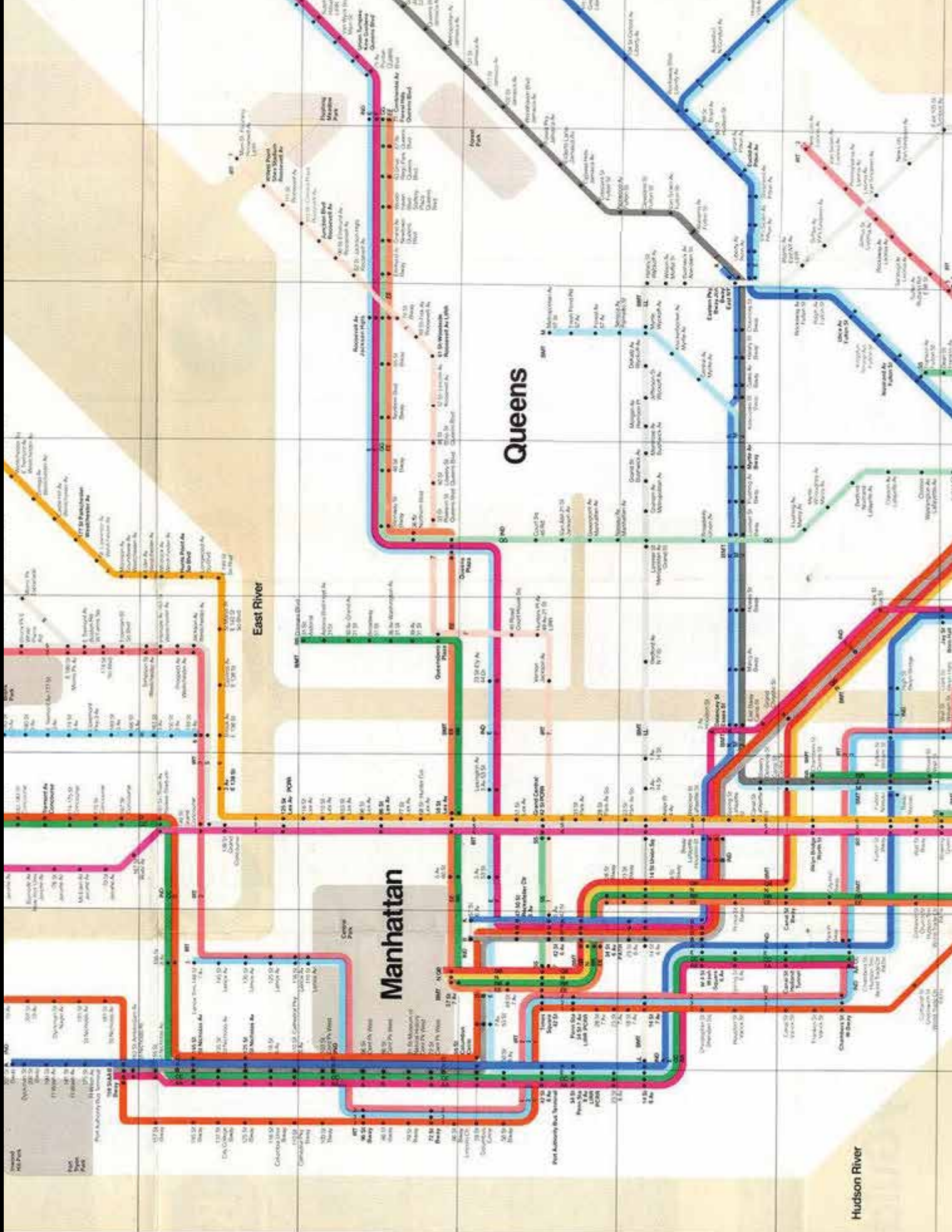
ARTIVIVE



New York Subway Map

Massimo Vignelli

Immagine ex. New York SubwayMapby [Dettaglio].





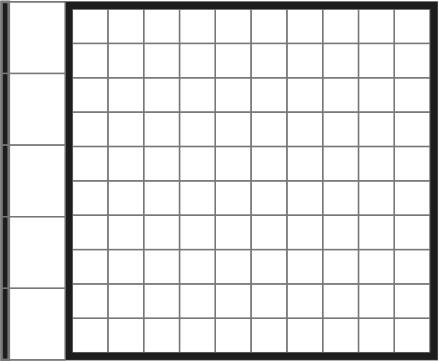
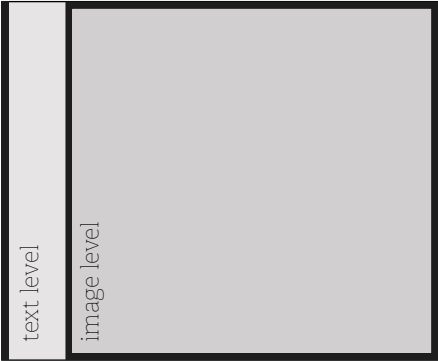
Imagine 63. © M. Vignelli, J. Charysyn, B. Noorda

New York Subway Map, 1970-1972
Lithograph, 149.9 x 118.7 cm
M. Vignelli, J. Charysyn, B. Noorda
(Unimark International)

- NCS S 1070-R20B
- NCS S 3040-G
- NCS S 4010-R50B
- NCS S 1070-Y70R
- NCS S 1040-R90B
- NCS S 1050-R
- NCS S 3040-R80B
- NCS S 0550-Y20R
- NCS S 1505-Y30R

Grid and structure

- Standard Medium font
- 45° and 90° angles
- Need for objectivity
- No geographical references
- Structured graphic code explained



“NY Subway Map, going from dot...., an easy navigation of a complex system”

Hillery, A. (2019). *How Vignelli's Design Still Influences NYC's Subway Maps Today*. Nightingale. Disponible in <https://medium.com>

Visual and historical references



Pocket Underground Map, 1933
Print, 14.0 x 20.0 cm
H. C. Beck

Imagine 64. © London Transport Museum

Cultural influences

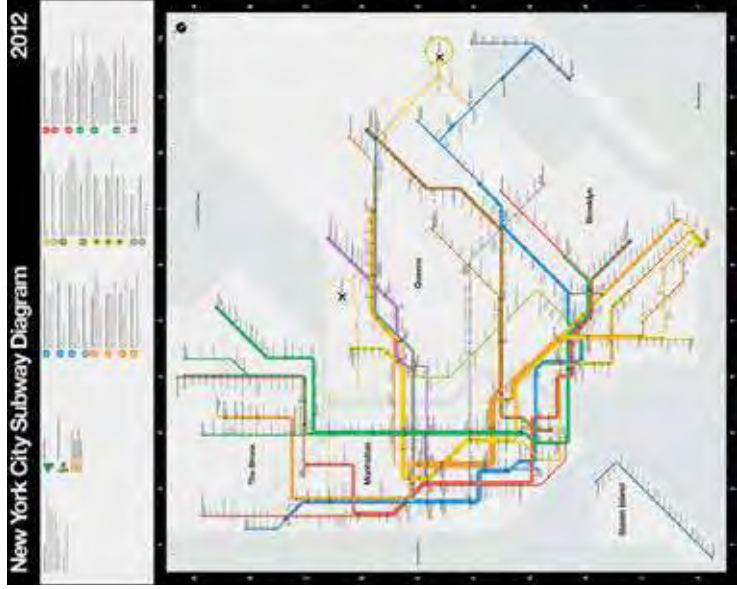
Background and context

*New York City Transit Authority
Graphics Standards Manual*, 1966
Lithograph with screenprinted binder, 34.6 x 39.4 x 73 cm
B. Noorda, M. Vignelli
(Unimark International)

Imagine 65/66/67/68. © B. Noorda, M. Vignelli



Recognisable and iconic pattern



Imagine 69. © M. Vignelli, B. Cifuentes, Y. Waterhouse



Imagine 70/71. © MTA

The weekender, 2012
App and Website
M. Vignelli, B. Cifuentes,
Y. Waterhouse



Imagine 72. © E. Ponzi

The Great New York Subway Map, 2017
Illustration,
29.8 x 23.4 cm
E. Ponzi



Imagine 73. © SuperWarmRed

Subway Diagram Detail Series, 2015
Printed posters,
40.6 x 60.9 cm
SuperWarmRed

United Colors of Benetton

Massimo Vignelli

Immagine 74. United Colors of Benetton clothes. [Dettaglio].



UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.



Immagine 75 © Museo del Marchio Italiano



Immagine 76. © Pino, G. Luciano Benetton fondatore del gruppo Benetton.

Nel 1996, fu affidato a Massimo Vignelli il restyling del marchio e lo sviluppo di una nuova corporate per l'azienda. Toscani ha discusso dell'identità di Benetton con Vignelli, alla ricerca di una brand identity visiva completa. Tutte le attività di vendita al dettaglio della società erano centralizzate sotto il nome unico, "United Colors of Benetton".



Immagine 82. © Vignelli, M.

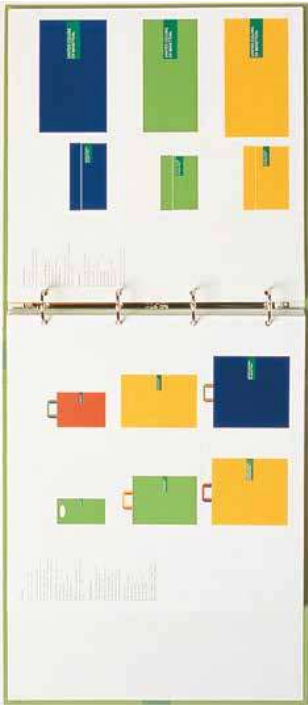


Immagine 83. © Vignelli, M.



Immagine 84. © Vignelli, M.

Packaging

Vignelli applica la teoria dello "spazio vuoto" alle borse di carta create per Benetton, le quali sono caratterizzate da un unico colore con la presenza del logo posizionato sul lato destro: in questo modo il logo verde va a colpire inevitabilmente l'occhio, probabilmente più che se riempisse l'intero lato della borsa.

- NCS S 3065-R90B
- NCS S 2570-G20Y
- NCS S 0570-G40Y
- NCS S 0575-G90Y
- NCS S 1085-Y80R

1971

Immagine 77
© Giacometti, F.
& Citterio, G.



1972

Immagine 78
© Giacometti, F.
& Citterio, G.



1989

Immagine 79.
© Sutter, B.



1996

Immagine 80.
© Vignelli, M.



2011

Immagine 81.
© Pentagram



confronto

A seguito delle campagne di comunicazione ad impatto sociale del fotografo Oliviero Toscani, nel 1989 si sviluppò uno slogan: "Tutti i colori del mondo".



Immagine 85. © www.robertomaioino.it



Immagine 86. © www.moneycontrol.com

Avendo la Benetton negli anni '90 già una trentennale storia alle spalle, Vignelli si trovò di fronte ad un insieme di segni che già possedevano caratteristiche consolidate da cui scaturiva la forza identificatrice.



Immagine 87. © Vignelli, M.

Etichette

Schizzi originali di Massimo Vignelli per il manuale d'identità coordinata. A partire dal logotipo, fu sviluppato un identico cartellino (e di solito un'etichetta) Il concept era monolitico e rigidamente universale.

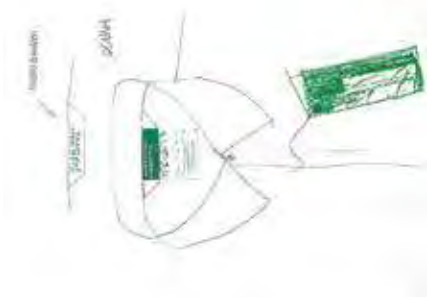


Immagine 88. © Vignelli, M.



Immagine 89. © Vignelli, M.

Leggibilità

L'utilizzo del layout rientrato a sinistra è il più naturale, in quanto nella cultura occidentale la lettura, e dunque anche la scrittura, avviene da sinistra a destra e dall'alto in basso. Semplicemente seguendo il percorso dell'occhio la leggibilità ne viene aumentata.

Griglia

30X10

Font

Gill Sans, Regular



NCS S 2570-G20Y



Immagine 90. © United Colors of Benetton

Punto maglia

Il simbolo del punto maglia cadde in disuso già nel 1989 con il restyling approntato da Bruno Sutter, quando iniziò a comparire solo come motivo decorativo sui capi d'abbigliamento.



Immagine 91. © Museo del Marchio Italiano



Zerododici

Per la linea zerododici, per bambini, Vignelli decise di mantenere il layout e il carattere utilizzato per il logo ufficiale.

Knoll international

Massimo Vignelli

Immagine 92. *Knoll international*. [Dettaglio].





Immagine 93. © Vignelli, M.

Knoll International poster, 1967
Offset lithograph,
81.3 × 120.7 cm
Massimo Vignelli

Questo poster raffigura il logotipo Knoll in grandi lettere che si sovrappongono per formare un modello quasi astratto. Il supporto è una litografia offset su carta intessuta bianca, utilizza lettere trasparenti e sovrapposte ed esemplifica il suo approccio al design nitido e audace sottolineando l'identità di Knoll attraverso la tipografia.



Immagine 94. © Vignelli, M.

Coppa la Rinascente, 1952
Stampa offset,
70.0 x 100.0 cm
Max Huber



Immagine 95. © Huber, M.

XXXI Fiera di Milano, benvenuti, 1952
Stampa offset,
70.0 x 100.0 cm
Max Huber



Immagine 96. © Huber, M.

8000 Unique Covers for Eye 94, 2017
Stampa digitale HP Indigo 10000,
70.0 x 50.0 cm

Paul McNeil and Hamish Muir

Immagine 97. © McNeil, P. & Muir, H.



Immagine 98. © Huber, M.

Per l'estate di tutti, 1954
Stampa offset,
70.0 x 100.0 cm
Max Huber



Immagine 99. © McNeil, P. & Muir, H.



Immagine 100. © McNeil, P. & Muir, H.

Influenze grafiche

Brand identity

Nel 1967, Massimo Vignelli fu incaricato di ridisegnare l'identità grafica della società americana di mobili Knoll. Conosciuto per i suoi mobili modernisti, i prodotti Knoll erano perfettamente adatti all'estetica senza tempo di Vignelli. Nel programma grafico che Vignelli ha prodotto per Knoll, si possono vedere molte delle sue idee al lavoro, dalla sua preferenza per uno spazio chiaro e organizzato al suo uso del nuovo carattere Helvetica.



Immagine 102. © Vignelli, M.

Opuscoli listino prezzi, 1976

Stampa
Massimo Vignelli

Knoll au Louvre, catalogo, 1971

Catalogo,
29,0 x 29,0 cm
Massimo Vignelli

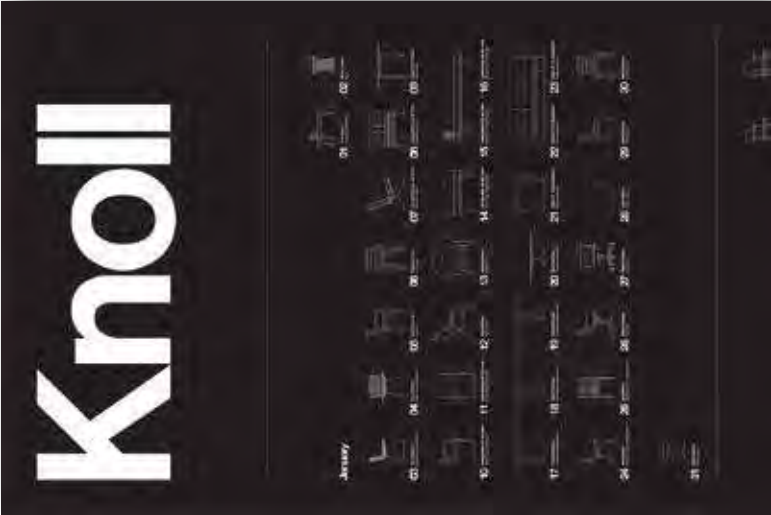


Immagine 101. © Vignelli, M.

Knoll Chair poster, 1967

Stampa
Massimo Vignelli,

Il logotipo di Knoll, anch'esso progettato da Vignelli, scorre sulle copertine anteriore e posteriore del catalogo, generando così una soluzione visivamente potente che ha reso il prodotto un pezzo iconico di storia del design grafico. La forza visiva è anche enfatizzata dal contrasto della scala delle dimensioni del testo e dall'uso dei tre colori classici della tipografia: bianco, nero e rosso, che in questo caso è il rosso caldo di Vignelli.



Immagine 103. © Vignelli, M.

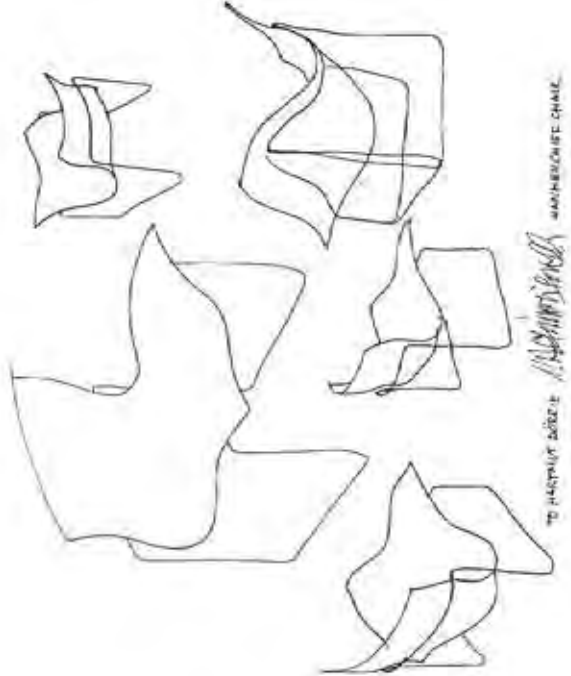


Immagine 104. © Vignelli, M.

Handkerchief Chair, 1983

Compensato rivestito in tessuto,
W 67cm- D 57cm - H 75cm - seat H 45cm
Lella e Massimo Vignelli

Schizzi Handkerchief Chair, 1983
Massimo Vignelli



Immagine 105. © Vignelli, M.

Arredamento per Knoll

PaperClip Table, 1993

Piani in vetro trasparente, nero o bianco,
91,0 cm, 107,0 cm, 122,0 cm D x 71,0 cm H
Lella and Massimo Vignelli,

Schizzi del PaperClip Table, 1993
Massimo Vignelli

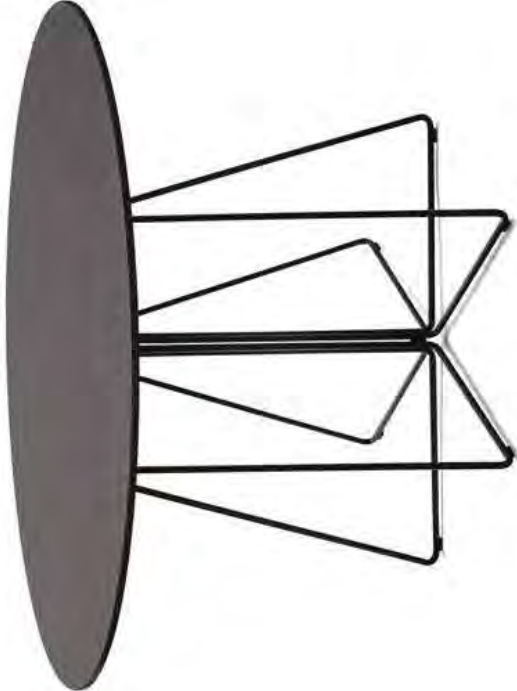


Immagine 106. © Vignelli, M.



Immagine 107. © Vignelli, M.

Carlyle Like a Rough Block of Michael Angelo's Sculpture

Julia Margaret Cameron

Immagine 108. Carlyle like a Rough Block of Michael Angelo's Sculpture. [Dettaglio].



Thomas Carlyle, 1868
Oil on canvas 660 × 533 mm
G. F. Watts



Imagine 109. © National Portrait Gallery, London

Thomas Carlyle, 1867
Carbon print 570 × 458 mm
J. M. Cameron



Imagine 110. © The Royal Photographic Society

Thomas Carlyle, 1862
Albumen print
88 × 53 mm
W. Jeffrey



Imagine 111. © National Portrait Gallery, London

Carlyle Like a Rough Block of Michael Angelo's Sculpture, 1867

Thomas Carlyle (british intellectual and essayist)

Place created: London, England

Albumen print 367 × 259 mm

J. M. Cameron

On Heroes, Hero-Worship & the Heroic in History - Thomas Carlyle

Andrews UK, 2012

First edition: James Fraser; London, 1841

cover: Arrangement in Grey and Black,

No. 2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle, 1872–73

J. M. Whistler



Imagine 112. © Andrews UK



Imagine 113. © The J. Paul Getty Museum

Nonfinito: Pietà Rondanini, 1552 - 1553
Michelangelo

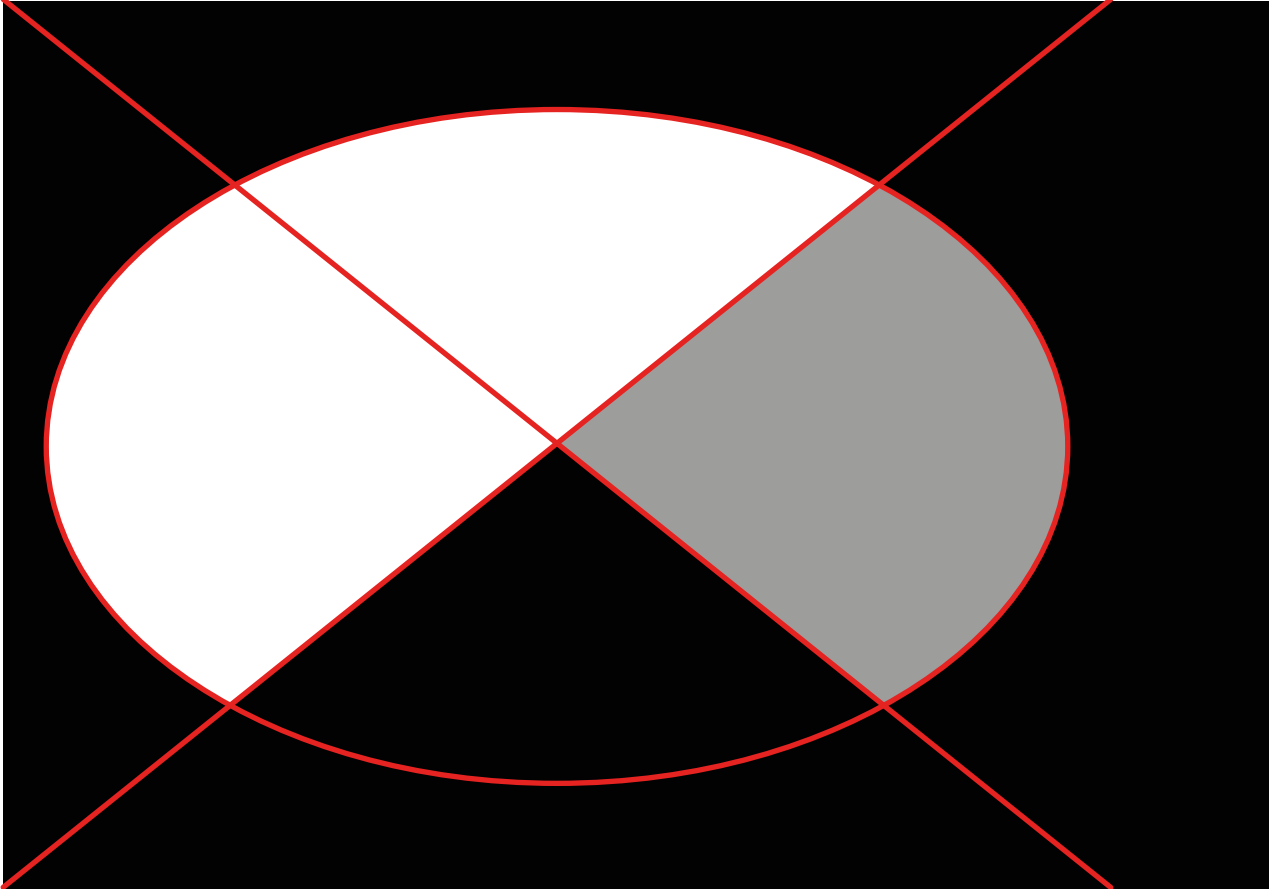


Immagine 114, © Abbrescia Santinelli

Nonfinito: Allegoria del Giorno, 1526 - 1531
Michelangelo



Immagine 115, © Brogi

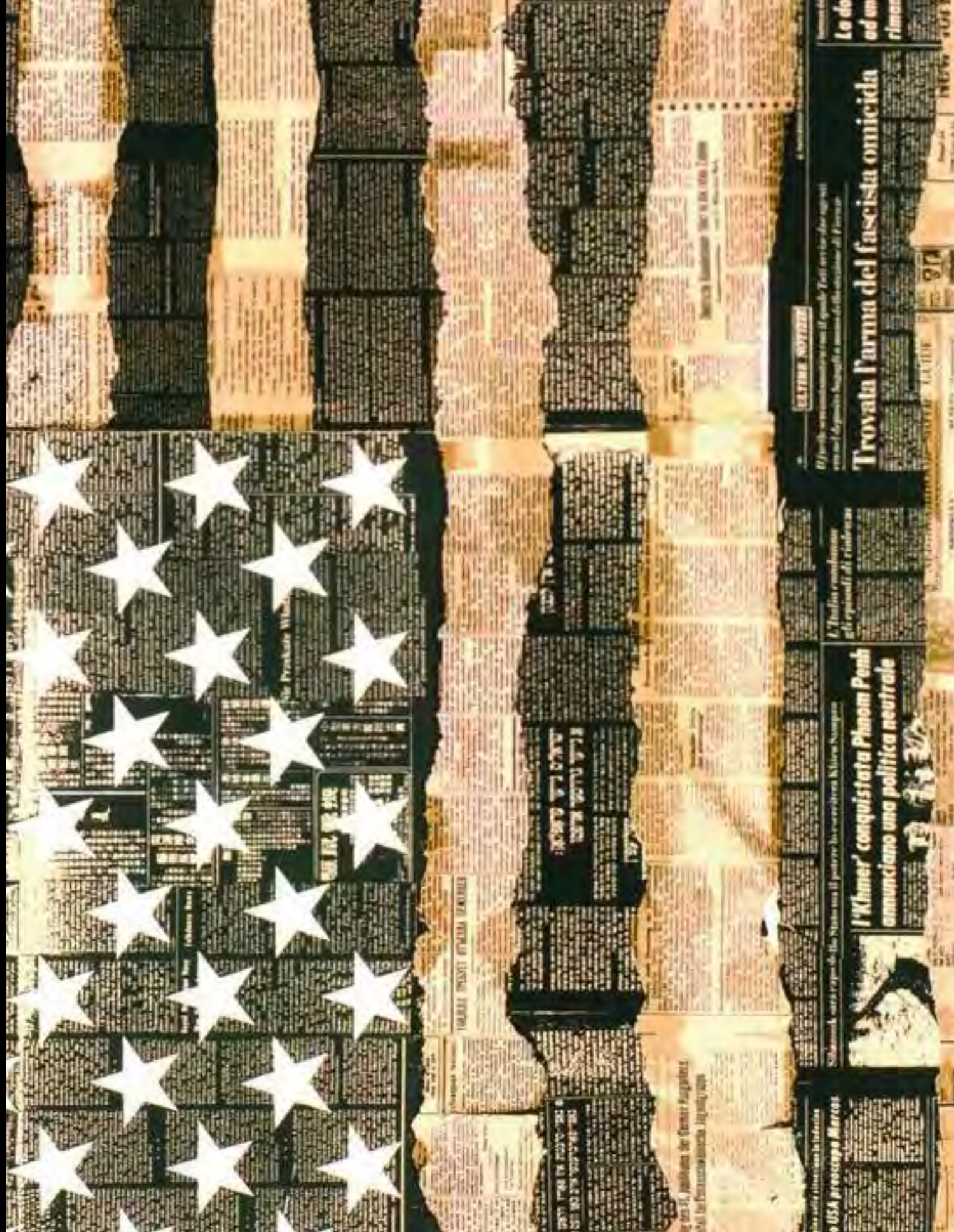


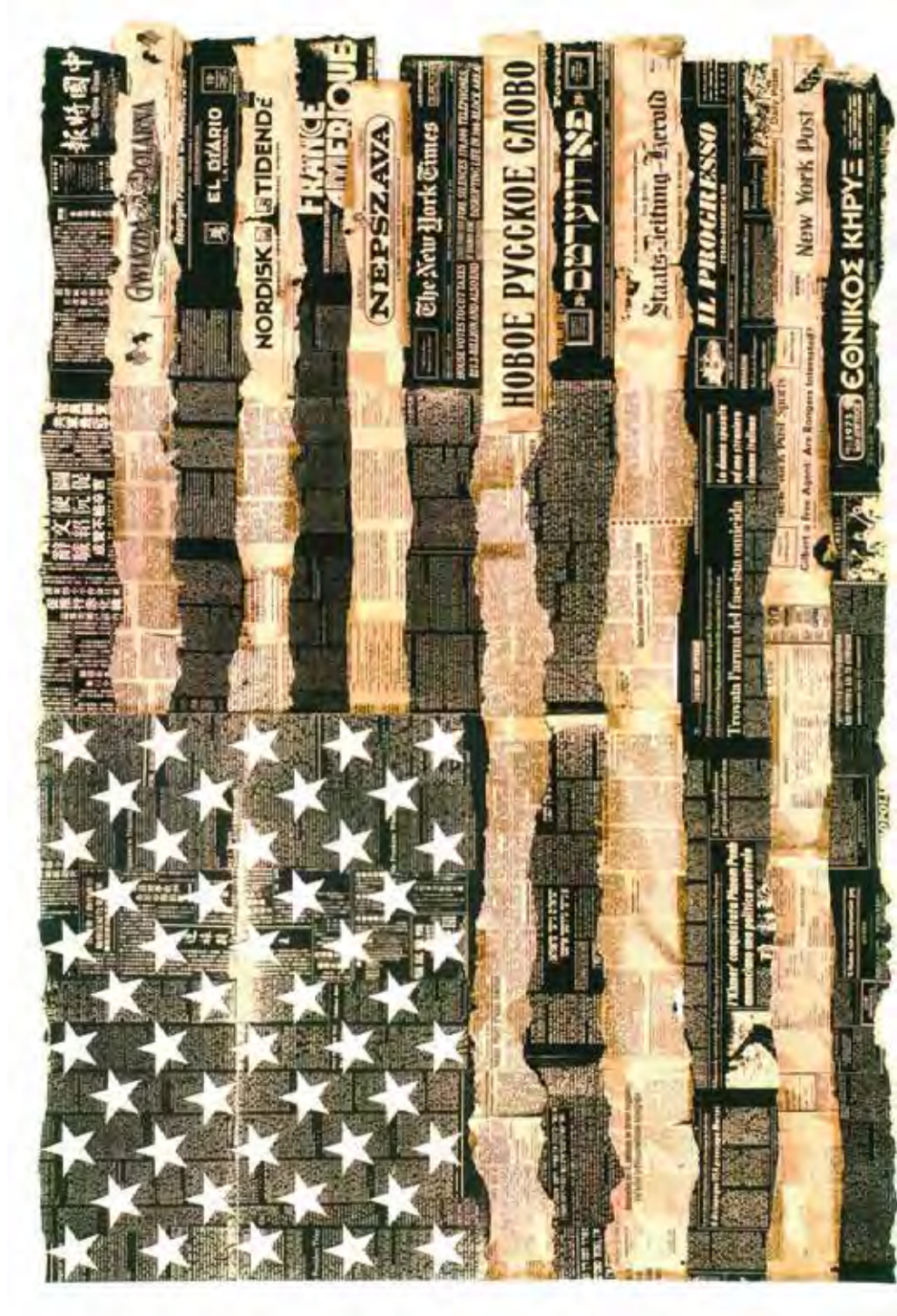
"He is a man who carries his bright intellect as a light in a dark-lantern; he sees only the subjects on which he chooses to throw that blaze of light; those he sees vividly, but, as it were, exclusively. All other things, though lying near, are dark, because perversely he will not throw the light of his mind upon them." - Anna Jameson on Carlyle, 1854

America the Melting Pot 1976

Massimo Vignelli

Immagine 116. America the Melting Pot 1976. [Dettaglio].





Imagine 117. © Vignelli, M.

As part of a series for the bicentennial of the United States of America, this poster was commissioned in 1976 to celebrate the "melting pot" of American society. Massimo Vignelli bought all foreign newspapers published in New York by the various ethnic communities, and represented an American flag. Everyone liked it in Washington, except a Pentagon bureaucrat who called Massimo asking him to do it again with better news. He refused the request and in the end the flag was not printed. It is still present in Massimo's office as a symbol of this "melting pot".

America the Melting Pot 1976
(United States is the Melting Pot, or Melting Pot of America), 1989
Screenprint on acid-free archival paper with deckled bottom edge, 88.9 x 127 cm
M. Vignelli
Edition of 300

A flag created by newspaper clippings from around the world symbolizes a land that's made up of different ethnicities, cultures and ideas all living and evolving together.

Visual Analysis



Imagine 118. © Nepszava
Imagine 119. © Shingler
Imagine 120. © El mercurio

Some international newspapers used by Massimo Vignelli to create the flag



Imagine 121. © Wikipedia

Flag of the United States, 1960
Thirteen horizontal stripes alternating red and white; in the canton, 50 white stars of alternating numbers of six and five per horizontal row on a blue field
Wikipedia



Ronald Reagan elected in landslide vote (original version and negative version), 1980
Newspaper
Mitchell Archives



Imagine 122. © Mitchell Archives

America the Melting Pot (detail)



United States official flag (detail)

Stars pattern took from the official flag of the United Staes.

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