

biography

Saul Bass was a prominent American graphic designer of the twentieth-century. He largely designed motion picture title sequences, corporate logos and movie posters. He was a pioneer of the modern title sequence designing. He enjoyed four decades of successful career in his lifetime, winning Academy Award for his exquisite graphic designing. His iconic title sequences appeared in the popular films, such as, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, *Psycho* and *North by Northwest*. On May 8, 1920, in Bronx, New York, Saul Bass was born in the household of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. He attended the James Monroe High School from where he earned his graduation. In 1936, he received a fellowship to the Art Students League in Manhattan. He then went on to study at Brooklyn College, attending night classes with a famous Hungarian-born designer, György Kepes. Upon completion of his studies, he

worked as a freelancer for several advertising companies and agencies, including the illustrious Warner Bros.

He moved to Los Angeles, where he pursued graphic designing as a commercial artist.

During 1940's he took up some Hollywood projects, which involved the print work for promotional purposes. In fact, he started up his own practice in 1952 and a few years later established his private firm as Saul Bass & Associates. In 1954, Bass finally had his big break as he was

offered a job by the filmmaker Otto Preminger to design a poster for *Carmen Jones*.

His work left a remarkable impression on Preminger, who availed his expertise yet again for his film's title sequence.

With the opportunity, came the realization that the title sequence can not only be served as mere static credits but it can enhance the watching experience of the audience.¹

THE
OTHER
HALF OF
THE
APPLE



“What can I tell you? I love the lady. I love her for who she is, and I love her for what she does. When your wife is very talented, very smart and very sensitive to the nature of such a relationship, it’s very easy... I’m lucky in more ways than one.”

Saul Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, London, Lurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 382

How Elaine Makatura become Elaine Bass

Elaine worked for 40 years alongside Saul Bass, a graphic designer, title designer, and filmmaker whom she married in 1961. Together, they developed many projects for directors such as Martin Scorsese and Danny DeVito. She is one of the main designers who helped to elevate the short film and the title sequence to an art form. Seven years younger than Saul, Elaine’s route to working in design and film was even more circuitous than his. The youngest child of Hungarian immigrants, she came from a larger, poorer, but more musical New York family than Saul. Like him, she showed early promise at art and exercised her cinematic imagination by creating stories

and drawing them, frame by frame, on the sidewalk to entertain the other children in the neighbourhood. Her talents won her admission to the New York High School of music and art at the age of twelve, but she was unable to attend due to the difficulty of combining her school schedule with that of singing professionally with her sisters. Similar to the Andrews Sisters, they sang the Belmont Sisters (their agent felt “Makatura” sounded too ethnic). The group began in vaudeville when Elaine was twelve. She was lead singer and soloist, and recordings made when she was fourteen to eighteen reveal a surprisingly mature voice singing swing with touches of Billie.

Elaine Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, London, Laurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 22





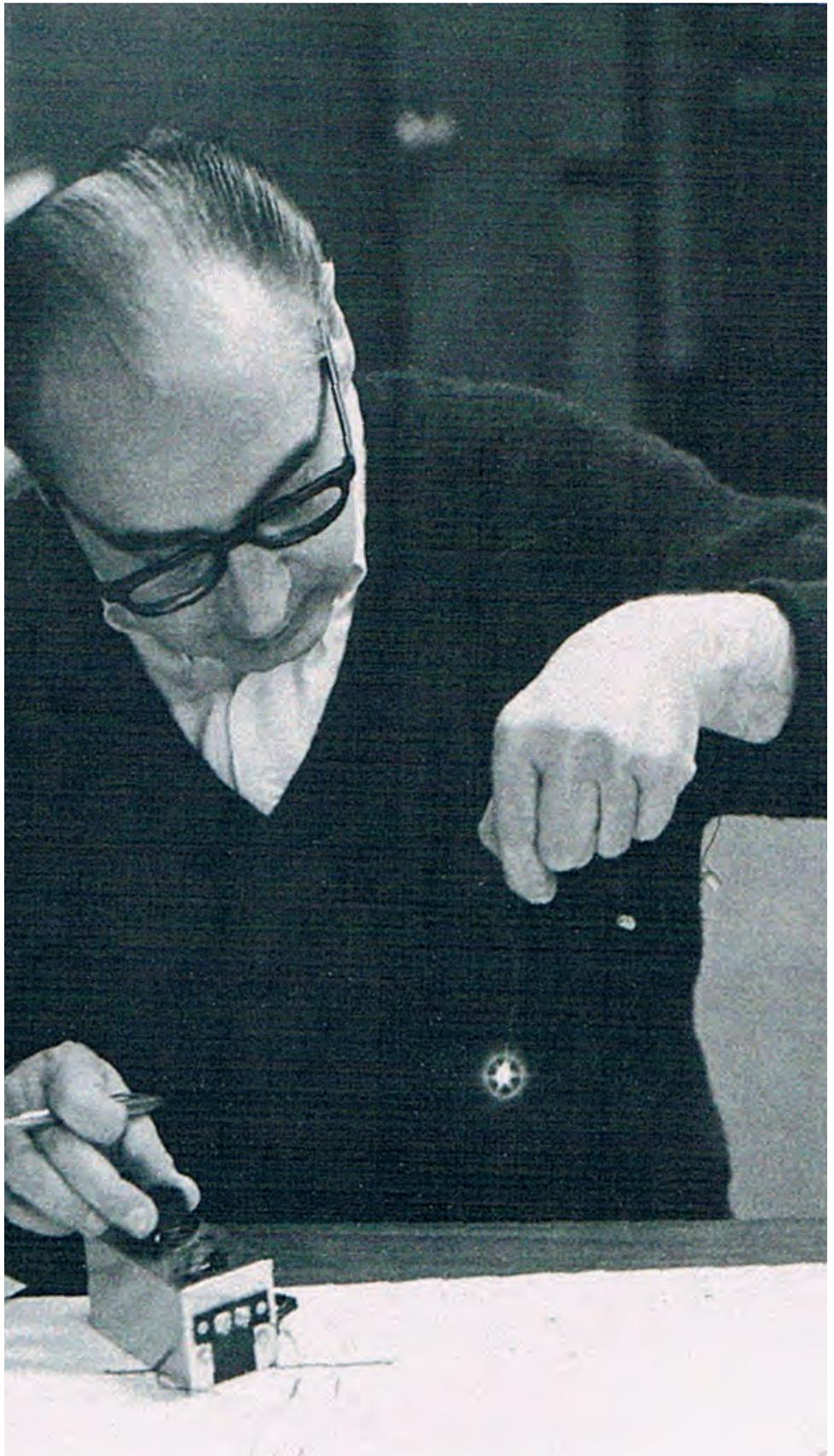
During World War II, the group sang in service clubs and enjoyed a regular radio spot, but soon after the war ended the older sisters left to get married. Elaine recalled:

“I was eighteen years old and I had lost what I had been doing professionally for six years. I would have loved to continue but was far too shy to sing on my own. I loved music and art but had no clear plan for my future”.

Elaine went to work in the New York ready-to-wear fashion industry, producing fashion renderings and sketches and working up design ideas for several fashion houses. She first moved to Los Angeles in 1947, setting there permanently in 1954. Soon thereafter she found a job in the design department at Capitol Records. She recalled: “after about a year I was looking for something more challenging when someone told me that Saul bass was looking for an assistant. I had enjoyed the credits for The Seven Year Itch much but the name ‘Saul bass’ didn’t mean anything to me.”

Once in the office, Elaine found herself developing skills and interests that had lain dormant as well as ones she didn't know she possessed: "I knew I could draw well but never thought that I could contribute to make film titles or short films. The more my ideas were appreciated by Saul and others, and the more they worked out in practice, the more confident I became about putting them forward"

By 1959 Saul was delegating important tasks to Elaine. When he attended the Word Design Conference in Japan in 1960, for example, Elaine was left in charge of producing and directing the Spartacus title sequence. The following year, she and Saul were married. After the birth of their children, Jennifer in 1964 and Jeffrey in 1967, she concentrated on motherhood and filmmaking – short film as well as title sequences.



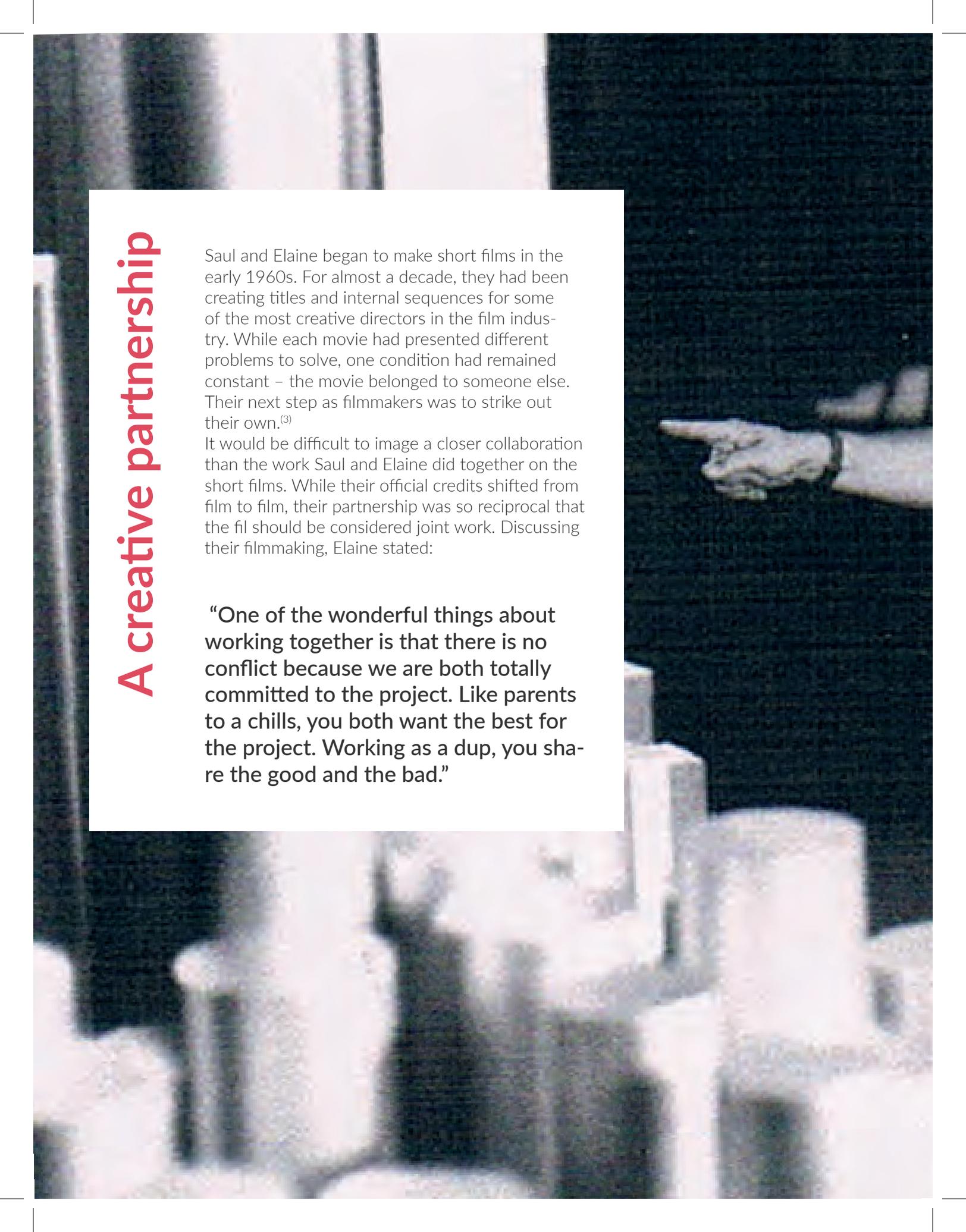
Elaine and Saul, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, London, Laurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 230







Many people saw Saul and Elaine as soulmates. At first one noticed the differences between them, but the way they complemented each other and the balance of their personal and professional relationships soon became apparent. Their closeness was rooted in similarities and shared interests as well as the joining of yin and yang. She was soft-spoken, serene, more retiring and happiest out of the public arena; he was voluble, energetic and gregarious, with a strong, passionate voice and hugely expressive gestures. Yet when they first met they already shared an intellectual intensity, similar aesthetic sensibilities and views about art and design. Each was extremely disciplined, with a profound respect for hard work, and at the centre was the excitement of creativity and thrill of working together. Indeed, throughout and behind the work, theirs was a great love story. ⁽²⁾

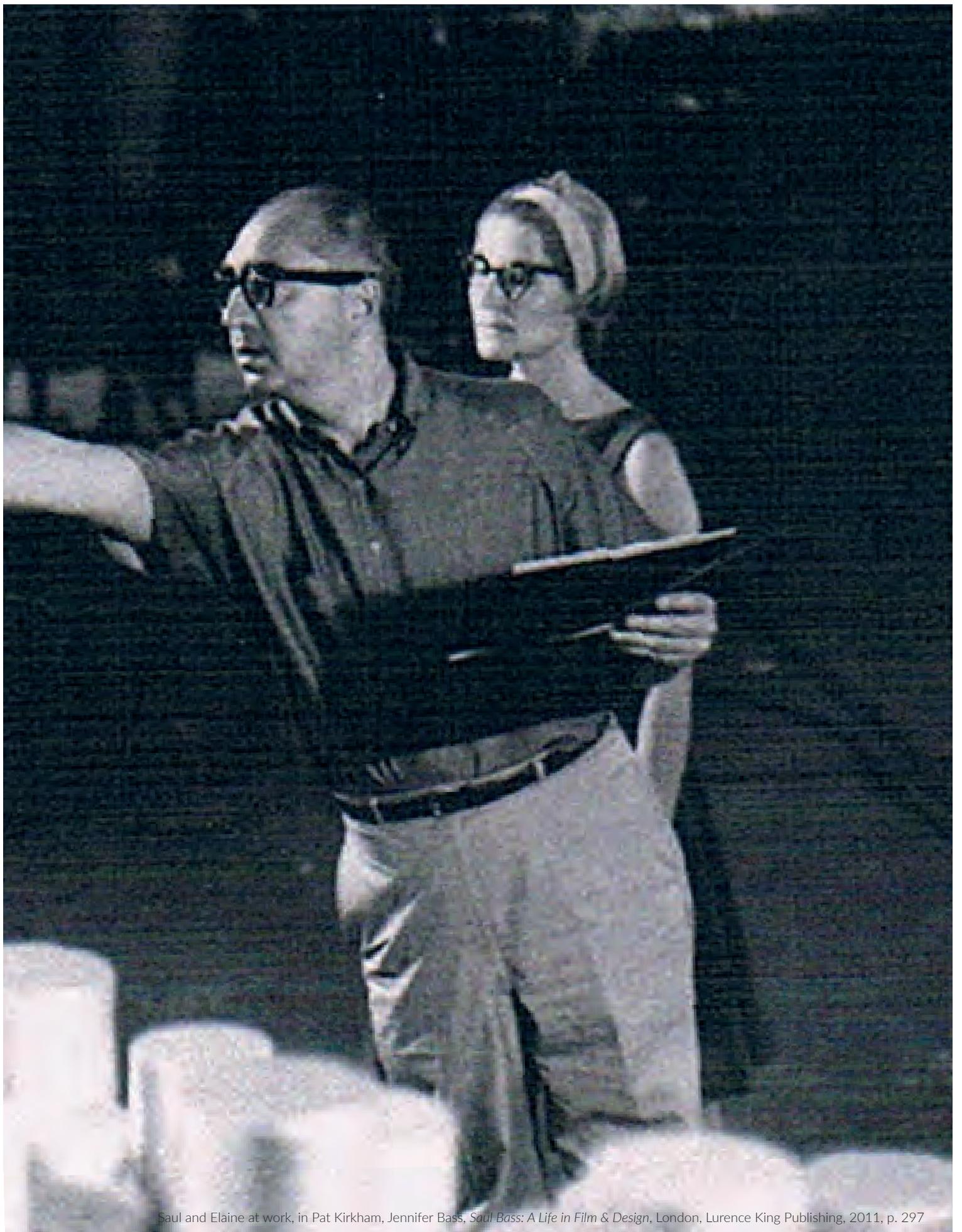


A creative partnership

Saul and Elaine began to make short films in the early 1960s. For almost a decade, they had been creating titles and internal sequences for some of the most creative directors in the film industry. While each movie had presented different problems to solve, one condition had remained constant – the movie belonged to someone else. Their next step as filmmakers was to strike out their own.⁽³⁾

It would be difficult to image a closer collaboration than the work Saul and Elaine did together on the short films. While their official credits shifted from film to film, their partnership was so reciprocal that the fil should be considered joint work. Discussing their filmmaking, Elaine stated:

“One of the wonderful things about working together is that there is no conflict because we are both totally committed to the project. Like parents to a chills, you both want the best for the project. Working as a dup, you share the good and the bad.”



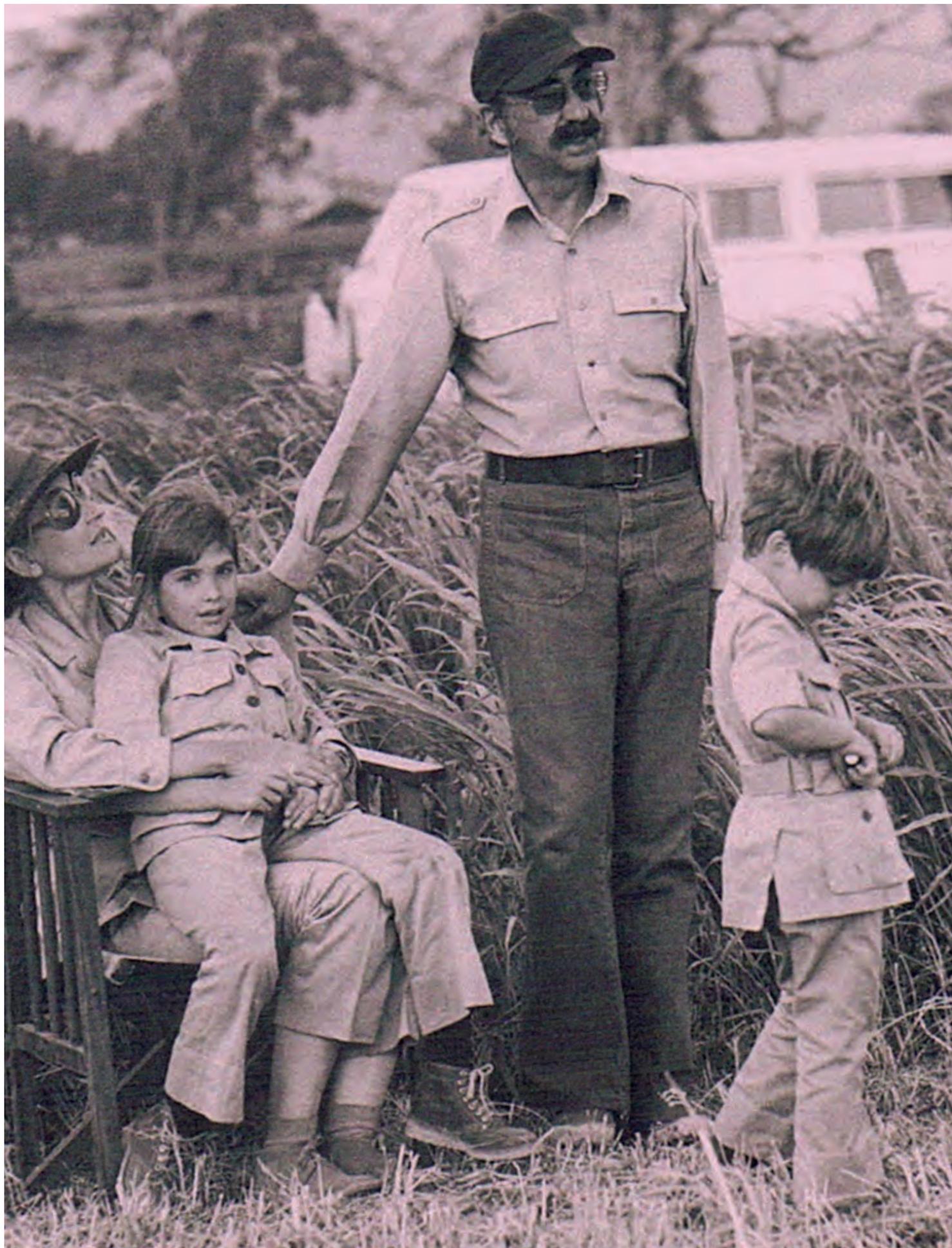
Saul and Elaine at work, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, London, Lurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 297

With his larger personality, Saul took more active role in finding projects and pushing them forward, but thereafter their roles were fluid and depended on their schedules. Elaine often directed individual sequences when Saul was away, and participated as equal partner in the tasks of producing, writing, cinematography and editing. Elaine had a knack for finding simple solutions to daunting technical problems and always played a leading role in choosing the music and working with the computer, though Saul often provided curious vocal effects like the caveman voices in *Why Man Creates* (1968). Even after their children were born (Jennifer in 1964 and Jeffry in 1967), Elaine and Saul con-

tinued to collaborate on every project. In fact, the short films offered the couple more flexibility than was possible with the high-profile corporate design project that the Bass office took on in this period. Both Elaine and Saul had workspaces at home and equipped the office with playpens and high chairs when the children were small. Later, they were allowed to play freely in the studio, borrowing pushpins and typewriters for their own art projects and making towers and forts out of plastic film cores. During filming, Saul and Elaine not only brought Jennifer and Jeffry to the set, but put them to work in small roles in *Notes on the Popular Arts* (1977), *The Solar Film* (1980) and *Quest* (1983).

Saul and his family, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design, Lurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 257





“I always felt a full partner. Saul never dismissed anything I said out of hands. I am quieter but can be forceful when I feel something will work well. It’s hard to describe how we worked. When you are so close to someone and know them so well, you often don’t need to complete a sentence because they will know what you mean; one will grasp something immediately when the other starts

to put a new idea into words. Don’t get me wrong and imagine we always thought along the same lines. Of course we’d say, ‘No. Sorry, but I don’t think that will work – it’s far too simple,’ or ‘I don’t think that will come across as funny.’ Then, if the other thought it has merit, they’d keep pushing the idea. Not forcing the issue but saying, ‘let’s think this one through more. Let’s go back and look at its gain.’”

Elaine Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design, London, Laurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 231







Saul Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, London, Lurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 231

“Elaine is the only person whose artistic judgment and sense of appropriateness I completely trust. She is an idea person who also comes up with imaginative ways of making those ideas happen, sometimes after I’ve said, ‘great idea but there’s no way you can pull that off.’ It’s often a simple solution. She sees things very clearly, has an aversion to waste and excess (she is a true child of Depression in that), and an ability to cut through extraneous matter. But that’s just a part of the wonderful-

fully imaginative contribution she makes. And, of course, she is far more musically gifted than I am. Our interactions are always very lively, very probing. It’s as though we’re climbing a mountain together. There’s always a lot of testing, lots of discussion about the right route. Everything is open for discussion. Elaine is not an aggressive, confrontational person. She is much more polite than I am but if she feels strongly about something she will stick to her guns.”



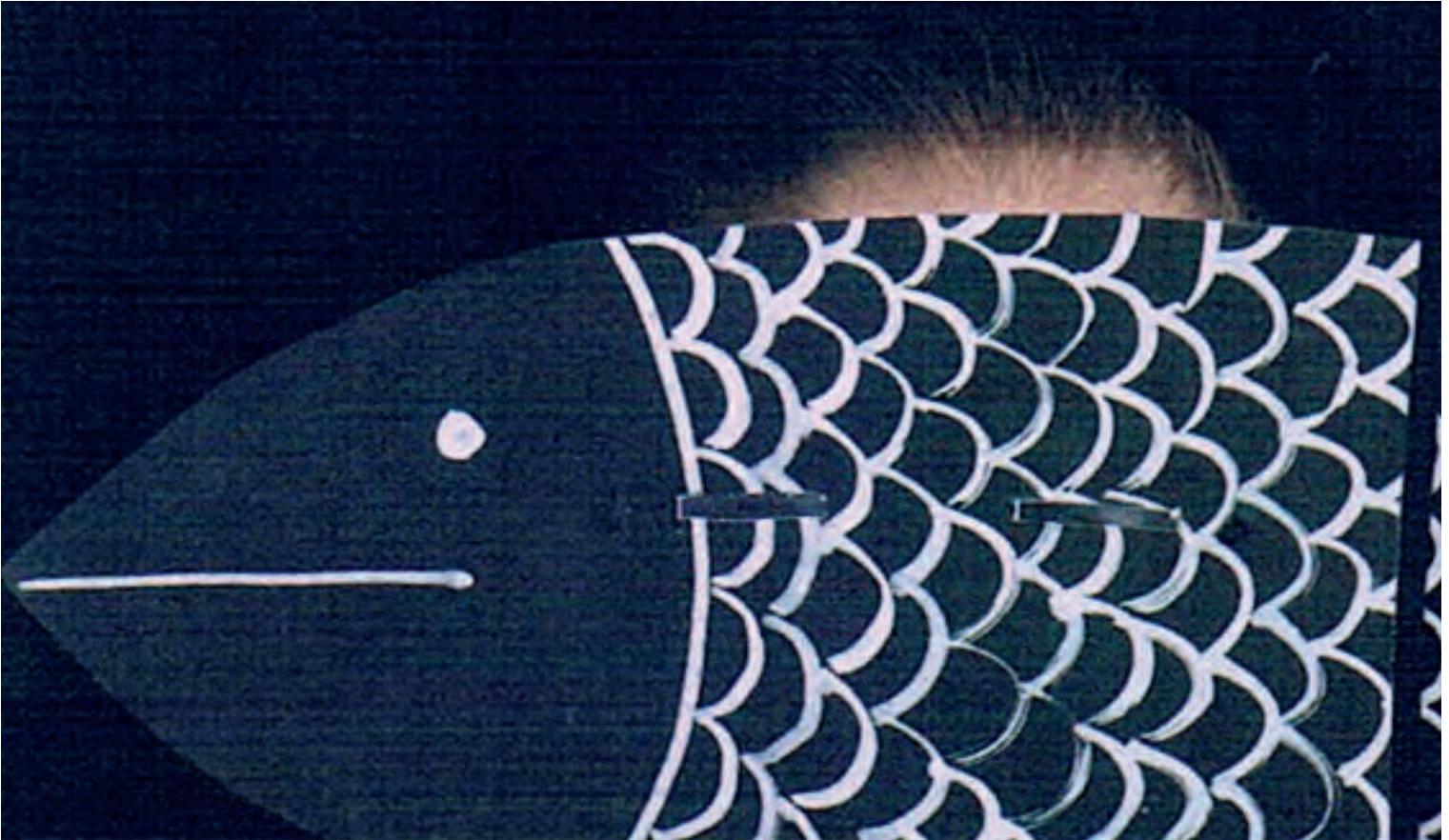
“I’m in the extraordinary position where my life and my work are so interesting and rich that the normal distinction simply don’t exist. Elaine and the kids are deeply involved in my work. And that has created a marvellous bond between us.”

Saul Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, London, Lurence King Publishing, 2011

Saul and Elaine, being interviewed at a film festival, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, London, Lurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 249



Although Saul and Elaine Bass collaborated closely for more than 40 years and Saul himself often spoke of Elaine and used the pronoun "we" when interviewed alone, she is not widely acknowledged as co-creator of these important cinematic works. Indeed, even contemporary critics of the 60s generally focused on Saul alone. For instance, in a 1964 *Hollywood Reporter* review of the films the Basses made for the New York World's Fair, it was noted that "both films were conceived and designed by Elaine and Saul bass," but thereafter the journalist referred only to "he," "Bass" and "a master". In fact, Elaine often directed individual sequences and participated as equal partner in the tasks of producing, writing, cinematography, and editing, and always played a leading role in choosing the music and working with the composer, but is still often ignored or seen as an addendum by filmmakers and journalists. ⁽⁴⁾



Quentin Tarantino, when speaking about Scorsese's collaboration with the Basses, has said:

"Saul Bass was undoubtedly the greatest title sequence maker. Brilliant – just brilliant. He has been a 'hero' for years. But, and it's a big but, I could never do what Scorsese does – give up control of the opening of my film to someone else, not even Saul Bass – I guess I should say Saul and Elaine Bass."

Quentin Tarantino, in Elaine Makatura Bass https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elaine_Makatura_Bass



Saul about collaborating with Elaine:

“It’s a total collaboration... we do everything together, so we’re a lock-step throughout the process. She’s remarkable. What can I tell you? I love the lady. I love her for who she is, and I love her for what she does. When your wife is very talented, very smart and very sensitive to the nature of such a relationship, it’s very easy... I’m lucky in more ways than one.”

Saul Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design*, London, Lurence King Publishing, 2011, p. 382

IN
THE MOOD



“My first reflection about what a title can do is to set the mood and the core of the movie’s story to express the plot somewhat metaphorically. I saw the title as a public airing way, so that when the movie actually started, viewers would already have felt an emotional resonance with it.”

Saul Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A life in Film & Design*, London; Laurence King Publishing, 2011

Inventions and title’s new form of art

Saul brought a Modernist design sensibility to film titles and revolutioned not only what they looked like, but also how they were thought about. The status of credit sequences was low; so low that in many cinemas they ran as the undercurtain was raised, amid audience chatter and popcorn munching. It was, according to Saul “a time when the film hadn’t begun yet”. Saul believed that a film, like a symphony, deserved a mood-setting overture, and used ambiguity, layering and texture as well as startlingly compact imagery to reshape the time before the film proper began. He explained, “my position was that the film begins with the first frame and that the film should be doing a job at that point.

Indeed, his title sequences so effectively captured and disinstilled the essence of the films to come that they came to be regarded as part and parcel of the film itself. Saul, often in collaboration with his wife Elaine, would design more than fifty opening sequences for such films as *Anatomy of murder*, *vertigo*, *psycho*, *spartacus* and *Casino*. In doing so, he would transform our understanding of what a title sequence could be. He was so well known as a graphic designer, many people assumed that Saul’s role in creating title sequences was limited to storyboard and typography. Instead, in most cases, Saul was taking on the role that normally would be divided among the film’s director, producer and editor.⁵



These types of collaboration were new: so much so that they gave rise to the credit line of “visual consultant”. In 1955, Otto Preminger gave Saul the go-ahead to design the type of unified advertising that he had been wishing to do. The result was the impressive campaign for *The man with the golden arm*. By 1958, for a typical film, Saul offered the studios not only the main and credit titles but also a trademark, TV trailer, screen trailer, posters (four sizes), trade ads (up to six per film),



Saul Bass at work in his editing studio: he made the opening title sequences for many movies

the result was the impressive campaign for *The Man with the Golden Arm*. By 1958, for a typical film, Saul offered the studios not only the main and credit titles but also a trademark, TV trailer, screen trailer, posters (four sizes), trade ads (up to six per film), these types of collaboration were new: so much so that they gave rise to the credit line of “visual consultant”. newspaper ads (up to twenty per film), album cover and New York subway car card. But even when he was paid in full for an advertising campaign, there was no guarantee that all or any of it would be used.

Despite his international reputation as a graphic designer, Saul found himself in the odd position of being highly sought after for film titles and trade advertising, but not for posters, the most public film advertising. Large amounts of money were at stake if a film bombed, and film studios were often

reluctant to stake their marketing campaigns on Saul’s bold designs. In all his works, Saul said that he “looked for the simple idea.”

But Saul’s work translated complex ideas into radically simple forms that offered audiences a set of clues, a sort of hermeneutic key to deeper meanings under the surface of the movie.

Saul described the ideal title as having “a simplicity which also has a certain ambiguity and a certain metaphysical implication that makes that simplicity vital. If it’s simple simple, it’s boring.

With his work in title sequences, Saul would elevate the opening of Hollywood films to the status of an art form.

He found himself in the curious position of having to analyze and define something he had reinvented as he went along. Never a fan of fixed categories or absolute statements,



The Saul Bass Poster Archive, <http://www.saulbassposterarchive.com>

Saul came up with a series of open-ended notions, keys to understanding the role his titles could play in the work of the film. "In the mood" was the phrase Saul used to describe the primary function of the title sequence, the point he started from.

Thus, the title sequences is a sort of passage, a transitional vehicle that helps the audience cross from the world outside the theater into the world of the film. In "the man with the golden arm", the titles created a mood of intense anxiety.

In "seconds" the mood is horror; in "bonjpur tristesse" is bittersweet regret, and in "it's a mad, mad, mad, mad world" one of good cheer and old-fashioned fun.

The time before" was Saul's way of describing

titles that expanded the time period covered by the film. Saul wrote "As I moved along and began to do more and more titles, I began to see other opportunities and other ways in which the titles could serve the film. A title can act as a prologue. It can actually tell you about the time before the film. Sometimes it actually become part of the story.

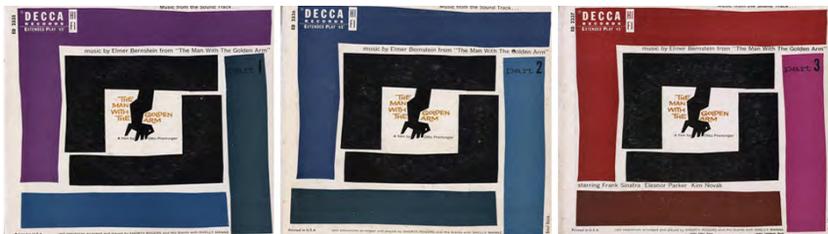
Saul saw his role as working for the director: "I think the creating of a title, which is obviously a small appendage on the film, has to be approached very conscientiously and with some sense of responsibility within the film's total framework- because it is, after all, the tail of the dog and the tail does not the dog wag. "The script is only the bones. I must know how he is going to flesh it out, what his point-of-view is."⁶

A look at his best works

The man with the golden arm (Otto Preminger 1955)

In 1954, Oreminger again defied Production Code guidelines when adapting Nelson Algren's powerful novel about drug addiction, a taboo topic in mid-century America. The challenge facing Saul was how to create a symbol that captured the drama and intensity of the film without resorting to sensationalism. He created an arresting image of a distorted, disjointed arm. The semi-abstract form helped distance the image from the hars realities of shooting up, although they are implicit in the (dis)figuration. As well as being disconnected from a body, the black arm has the appearance of being petrified and transformed into

something else, just as the Sinatra character in the film is transformed by his addiction. He title sequences was equally compelling. Here was modern art on the movie screen. Accompanied by Elmer Bernstein's driving jazz-like score, and set against a black background, white bars appear, disappear and form abstract patterns before finally coalescing into the film's symbol. Contrast between the black and white heighten the strident intensity, and the disjunctures encapsulate the mood of the main character, a downbeat drummer with a penchant for gambling and drugs. Because of the extramely tight schedule, Bernstein had to compose the music at the same time as Saul was creating the title.⁷





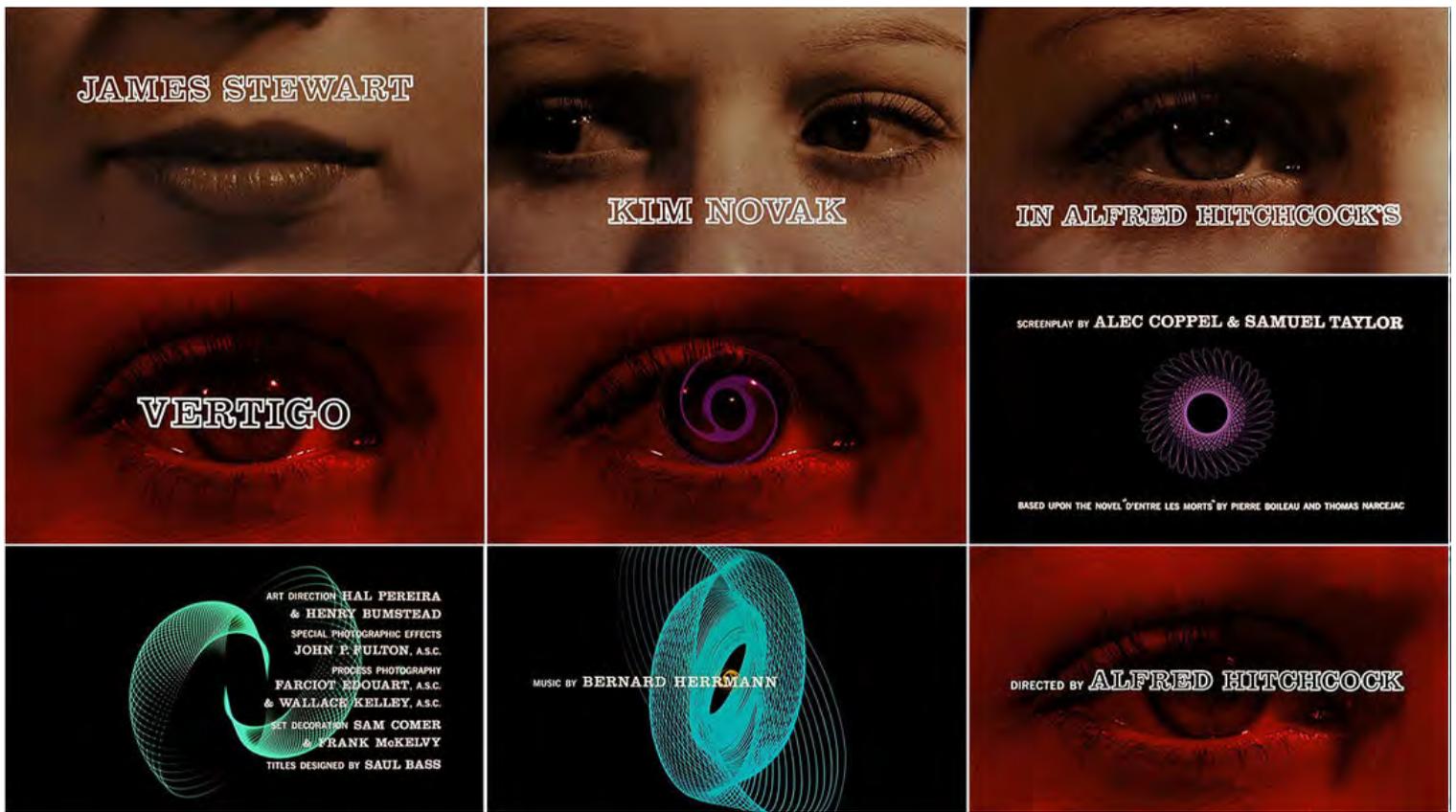
“Otto liked my idea for the film but he thought it should be a series of non-moving images, stills, just like the individual frames in the storyboard. Of course I thought it had to move. we disagree. I got hot. [...] Time went by. I calmed down. I began to think ‘Gee, I blew it’. [...] Static images. Sharp cuts. A sort of staccato kinetic movement. I began to warm up to the idea. I began to like it! The phone rang! It was Otto’s sentorian voice: ‘Hallo, Saul- you know, I’ve been thinking. You are rrrright, it should move!’ [...] We were off again. [...] Finally, he broke in: ‘Stop! I insist! And you will see how wrrrong you are!’ So he was right. And I was right.”

Saul Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A life in Film & Design*, London; Laurence King Publishing, 2011, pg. 22

Anatomy of a murder
(Otto Preminger, 1959)

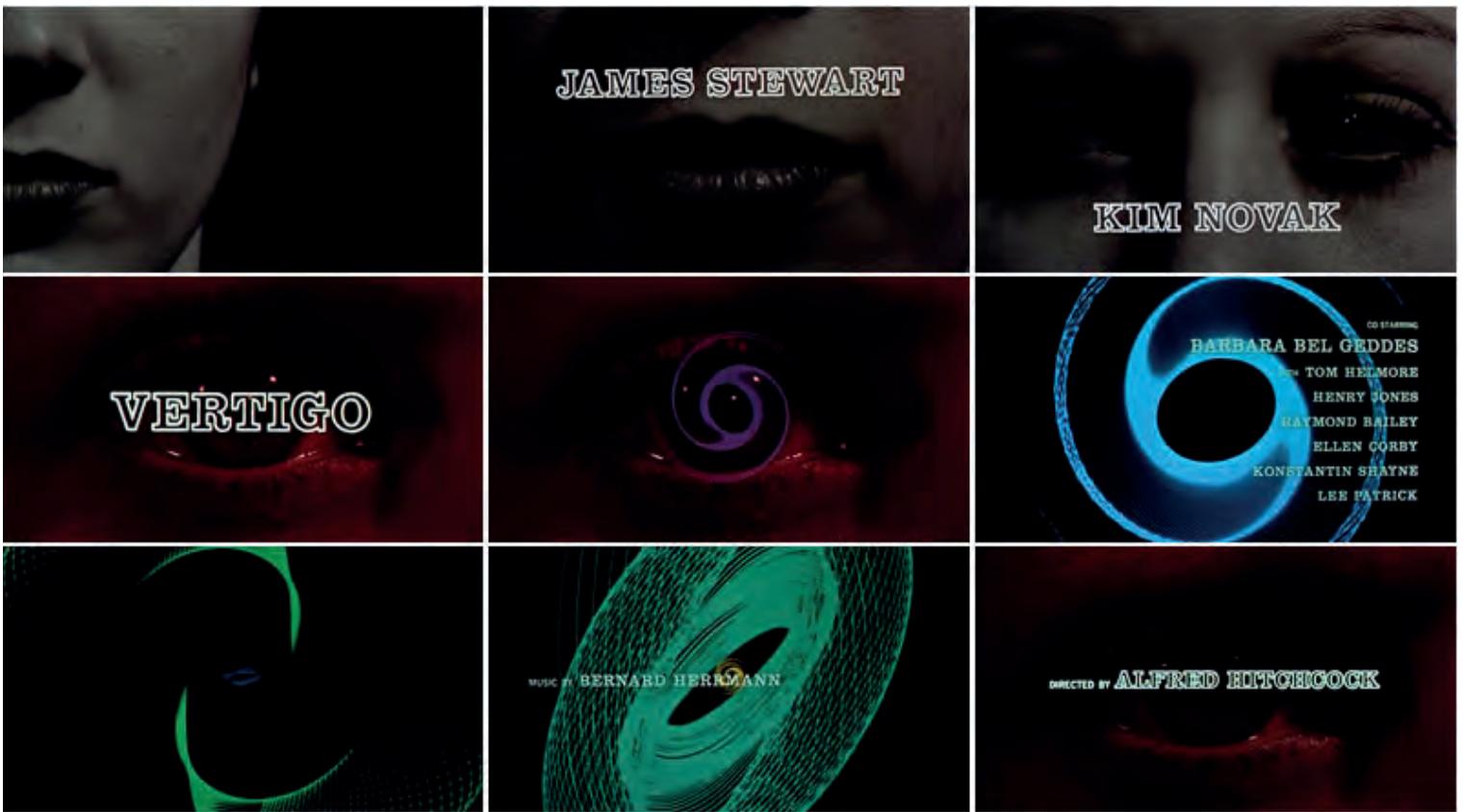
Saul's pun on anatomy aligns the dissection of a human body with the dissection of a body of evidence in a court of law. The abstraction distances the viewer while the figuration pulls in the opposite direction. Here, as elsewhere in his work, we see Saul's fascination with the "primitive"; each piece looks as if it has been cut out by an untutored hand. The hand lettering in various sizes and forms signals inconsistency; every version of every letter is different, just as every version of events is different in this film about a lawyer who comes to doubt his client's story. The symbol appeared on a wide range of items, from invitations and lobby cards to a record album and posters. Once again, to see the range in its entirety

entirety is to realize how Saul excelled at subtle variation. The title sequence is one of Saul's most simple and most successful, with its seemingly effortless integration of text, image and sound. The symbol forms and falls apart in synchronization with the Duke Ellington score, while the bold white layer of contrast and syncopation. Saul described it thus; "Working closely within the framework of a fine contemporary jazz score, the title sequence had a staccato and fragmented style. The various pieces of the segmented figure quickly form its total configuration after which arms, legs, head, body and hands pop on and off in counterpoint with the appearance of the various credits...[...]"⁸



Vertigo
(Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

One of Hitchcock's most admired films "Vertigo" confounded contemporary audiences. Saul's title sequence and advertising designs, by contrast, immediately began to win awards and have always been among the most admired in his repertoire. In the titles, Saul sought "to express the mood of this film about love and obsessing" and to capture "the very particular state of disequilibrium associated with vertigo" He explained, "Here is a woman made into what a man wants her to be. She is put together piece by piece. I tried to suggest something of this, and also of the fragmented mind of Julie (Kim Novak), by my shifting images. The main poster also encapsulated the sensation of vertigo by having a couple sucked into a vortex. The slightly off-kilter, irregular capitals further



hint at the the vertiginous. The figures were drawn by Art Goodman, who recalled Saul specifying and sketching out a black silhouette for the man and a lightoutline, like an apparition, for the woman of his obsessions.

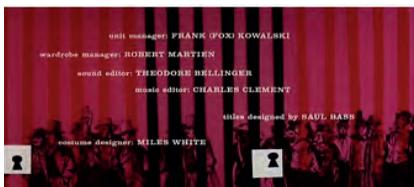
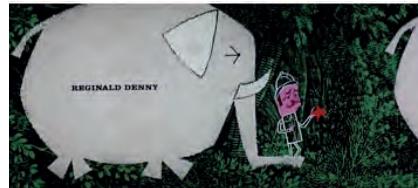
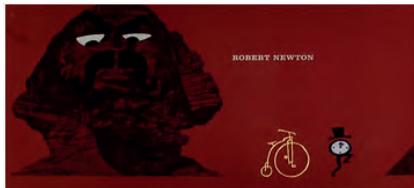
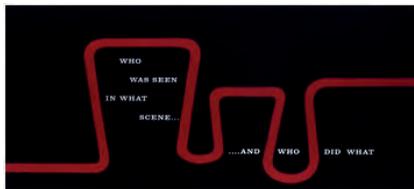
The title sequences opens with the camera exploring different parts of a woman's face, coming to rest on her eye (an organ Saul thought the most vulnerable in the entire body). Then, from the depths of the eye and accompanied by shatteringly violent chords, the title of the film emerges. Spiraling light patterns (Lissajous forms) emerge from the pupil as the music makes a vertiginous climb. Saul's interest in spiralin Lissajous forms and other ways of notating light and vibrationa was part of a wider Modernist interest in bringing together ciscience and art.⁹

Around the world in eighty
days (Michael Anderson,
1956)

There were so many people to be credited in this movie extravaganza that Saul persuaded producer-impresario Mike Todd and director Michael Anderson that the film would be best served by an epilogue. The result was a hilarious six-minute recapitulation, in animated form, of the preceding three hours. In order to retain audience attention after an already long film, Saul created amusing parodies of incidents from the movie as well as humorous caricatures of the main characters. Both film and epilogue were smash hits. Animator John Halas noted that "In spite of the fact that the credit titles containing hundreds of artists' and technicians' names were placed at the tail end of the film... the audience not only stayed to see them all but applauded them, admiring the graphic invention and witty visual ideas."



<http://www.artofthetitle.com/title/around-the-world-in-eighty-days>



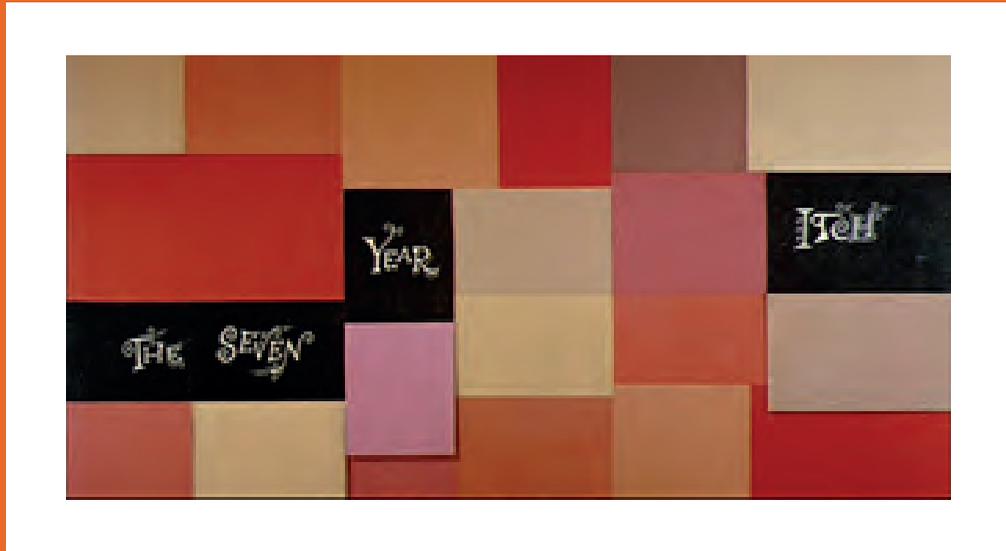
“The main thread of continuity is maintained by the bicycle and top-hatted clock, symbols of Passepartout, Phineas Fogg’s jack-of-all trades valet and the punctual, precise Phineas Fogg...,” he explained, adding, “The final sequence finds Phineas Fogg and Aouda (the Indian princess he rescue) colliding – the watch enlarges and opens revealing its inner works, which explode leaving a pulsating heart.”

Animator John Halas noted that “In spite of the fact that the credit titles containing hundreds of artists’ and technicians’ names were placed at the tail end of the film... the audience not only stayed to see them all but applauded them, admiring the graphic invention and witty visual ideas.”¹⁰

Psycho
(Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

Hitchcock involved Saul from the earliest stage. They had meetings before writing began, and Saul received each section of the screenplay as it was completed. For the titles, Saul aimed at a mood of dysfunction within a wider sense of order. Simple bars suggest clues coming together without ever offering a solution: "Put these together and now you know something. Put another set of clues together and you know something else." Bars of equal weight slide onto the screen in various patterns disturbed by irregularities of speed and length. Oppositions are strong: black and white; vertical and horizontal; short and long; on and off-kilter; on and off-screen. Part of each credit appears on different bars but are only legible when they are in alignment, another signal of disturbing uncertainties to come.¹¹





The seven years itch
(Billy Wilder, 1955)

In this delightfully light-hearted, slick and witty sequence, rectangle and square of bright modern colors randomly pop out or slide into position on a black screen, eventually filling it. Credits and jokes are revealed in time to a tempo as quirky as the random opening of boxes recalling magicians' acts and popular TV game shows. There was no symbol for "the seven Years Itch", but Saul played with the idea of an itch in the title sequence. He wanted to avoid literal or sensationalist graphics for this story of a middle-aged married man (Tom Ewell) lusting after his sexy neighbor (Marilyn Monroe) during a long hot New York summer. He and Wilder agreed that establishing a playful, upbeat mood would ensure the audience would be receptive to a comedy.¹²

“The epilogue is a recapitulation of the environment within which the film’s story takes place. Thus all the walls and surfaces are intimately explored. As the camera moves over these walls, fences, doors and signs, it discovers, among the graffiti on them, different credits. I had a lot of fun making those credits. Look out for SB & EM in a heart -that’s Elaine Makatura, of course- we had just got engaged! And I put the credit ‘Music by Leonard Bernstein’ on a ‘No left turn’ sign. Figure that one out!”

Saul Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A life in Film & Design*, London; Laurence King Publishing, 2011, pg. 202

West side story
(1961, Jerome Robbins & Robert Wise)



Saul was visual consultant on this musical, which retold Shakespeare’s “Romeo and juliet” in an urban gang milieu. Saul and Elaine created an unusual opening sequences that accompanies Leonard Bernstein’s romantic overture. Brilliant, saturated hues slowly change color over a dingle delicate drawing. The image is indeterminate and abstract, until it dissolves into the tip of the Manhattan skyline and we understand what we have been gazing at all along. Saul was also responsible for directing the superb aerial photography that followed -starting high above the tall buildings and deep canyons of the city and finally zooming down in one seamless take to the teeming streets of New York City.

There, in the stylized language of dance, the audience is introduced to rival gangs, the Sharks and the Jets, as they contest and defend their turf. Saul and Elaine laid out detailed storyboards and shot extensive test for this sequence on the streets of Los Angeles. It was ultimately filmed in New York by Jerome Robbins. The lengthy credits for West side story were shifted to an epilogue, because those for the Broadway musical as well as the film had to be incorporated.

This also gave viewers time to compose themselves after the tragic climax.

Graphic designer, Bob Gill, still cites the sequence to students as a “classic” example of title design.¹³



**THE
INDIVIDUAL
WORKS**

Some years ago I was asked, “When you were a kid what did you want to be when you grew up?” Back then I thought the answer I gave was funny. I said, “Saul Bass.” It was no joke.

King of Graphics, February 1st, 2012, <http://www.cdipatch.com/>

Context: experimental and sponsored films

When Saul arrived in Los Angeles in 1946, the city was home to some of the greatest avant-garde filmmakers in the world. Oskar Fischinger, Maya Deren, Alexander Hammid, Kenneth Anger and Curtis Harrington were among the many who put experimental filmmaking on the map. The films they made subverted the rules of conventional commercial moviemaking and instead were notable for their fascination with movement, abstraction, light, metamorphosis, sensuality and the self.

By 1950, L.A. boasted at least five theaters that programmed experimental films. The year Saul arrived, Deren and Hammid’s groundbreaking 1943 short, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, was re-released. Saul loved its moody,

dream-like visual poetry.

He told me, “I became aware of... Cocteau, Maya Deren and Kenneth Anger, all of the experimental filmmakers. [Their films] were all terribly exciting, terribly upsetting and created a great yearning in me to emulate this, to do something that would embrace this kind of daring... It seemed to me like truly the future... And that’s what I wanted to do”.

In this period, many of these filmmakers were trying their hand at sponsored films, not only as a way to pay the bills, but because – paradoxically – corporations often offered greater creative control than was possible with the film studios. Sponsored films date back to 1922, when the furrier Revillon Frères sponsored Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*.

During the 1930s, new government agencies produced documentaries about the plight of American agriculture and the promise of New Deal public work projects, but it was not until World War II that sponsored films were made on a large scale. Largely of a documentary, educational and morale-boosting nature, they paved the way for more adventurous sponsored filmmaking in the postwar era, when such films as Bell Telephone's *Adventure in Telezonia* (1949) and General Electric's *A is for Atom* (1953) became an important sector of the U.S. film industry.

By 1959, the number of short "business" films made was 5,400, compared to 223 longer entertainment features. Articles and books were written about them, and the journal *Business Screen* promoted them. Seduced by claims of "1,000,000 new customers... from one little reel," film was seen as the perfect vehicle to convey everything from the germ-killing powers of a new cleaning product to the ideology of a nation.

Most of the big companies were in on the act, or thinking about it. The bigger the company, the more inclined it was to "soft-sell" advertising that never mentioned a specific product, but instead put forward an image of the company as a benevolent patron of art and culture.

By the late 1950s, Wheaton Galentine had directed the strikingly imaginative *Color and Texture in Aluminium* (1956) for Alcoa, and IBM had commissioned Charles and Ray Eames to direct a film about computers. Francis Thompson went from making independent art films such as *NY, NY* (1957) to artistic sponsored films such as *To Be Alive!* (1964, with Alexander Hammid) for Johnson Wax, which was shown at the same World's Fair as Saul and Elaine's first films. By the time the federal government commissioned a multiscreen presentation on science for the Seattle World's Fair, it was thoroughly respectable for major institutions to commission films of a type considered too experimental for mainstream culture only a decade earlier.

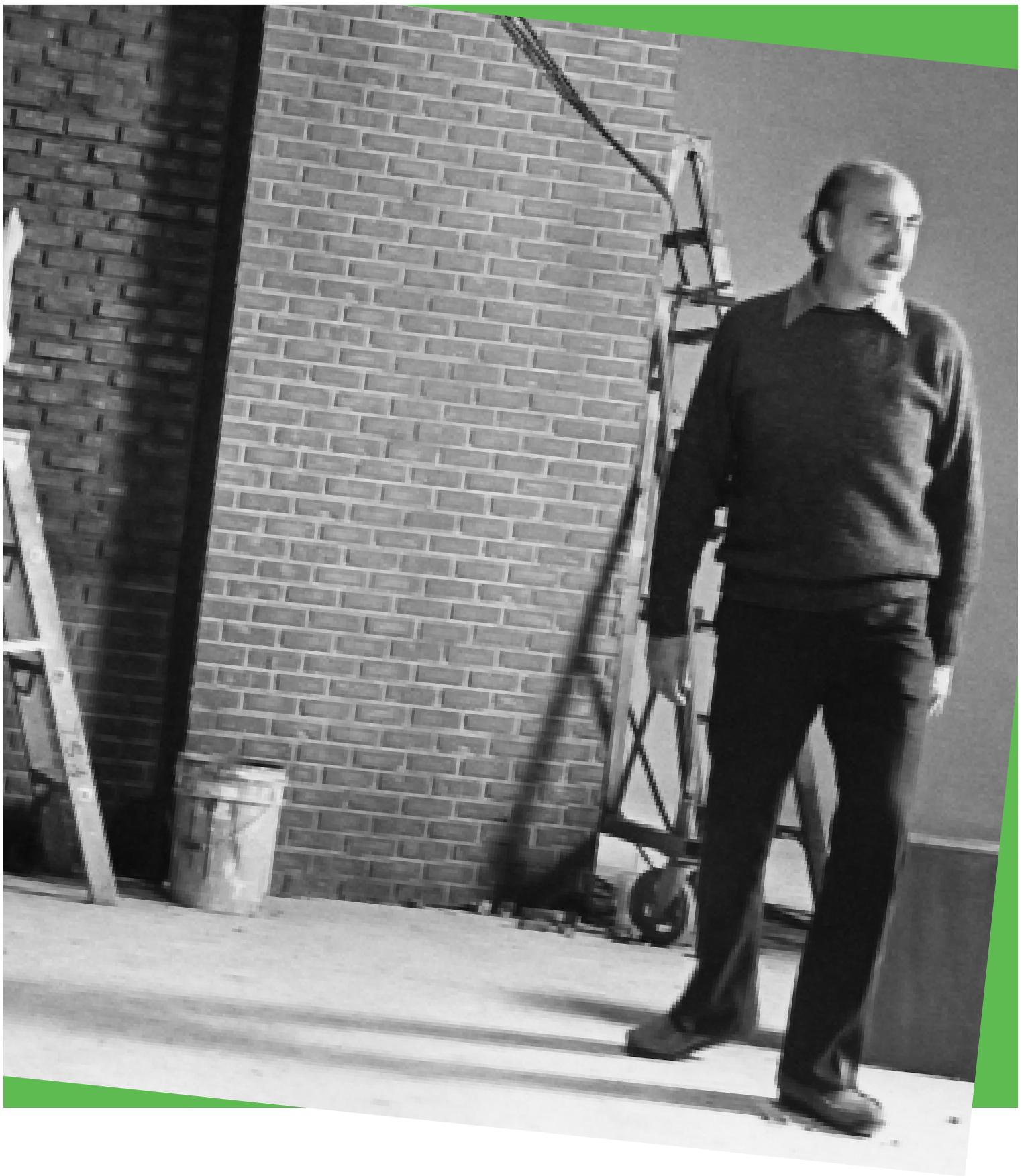


Los Angeles, 1950, Daniel Strohl, <https://www.hemmings.com/blog/2012/09/07/los-angeles-1950/> Sep 7th, 2012

The more imaginative sponsored filmmakers were often asked how they got a way with creating the types of films they did for the types of clients they had. For Saul, it was a question of winning the sponsor's confidence. Saul and Elaine were fortunate that, once a concept was accepted, Saul's powers of persuasions and the clarity of their proposals convinced company managers to grant them a remarkable degree of creative control.

Saul's friends Morton and Millie Goldsholl were among the first graphic designers in the U.S. to also make experimental films, sponsored films and television commercials. Morton Goldsholl chaired the Aspen International Design Conference in 1959, and shortly afterwards he and Saul collaborated on design projects for Kimberly-Clark. Saul also assisted the Goldsholls on a film, *Faces and Fortunes*, and in 1962 was asked to work on a film for CBS, *Apples and Oranges*.¹⁴





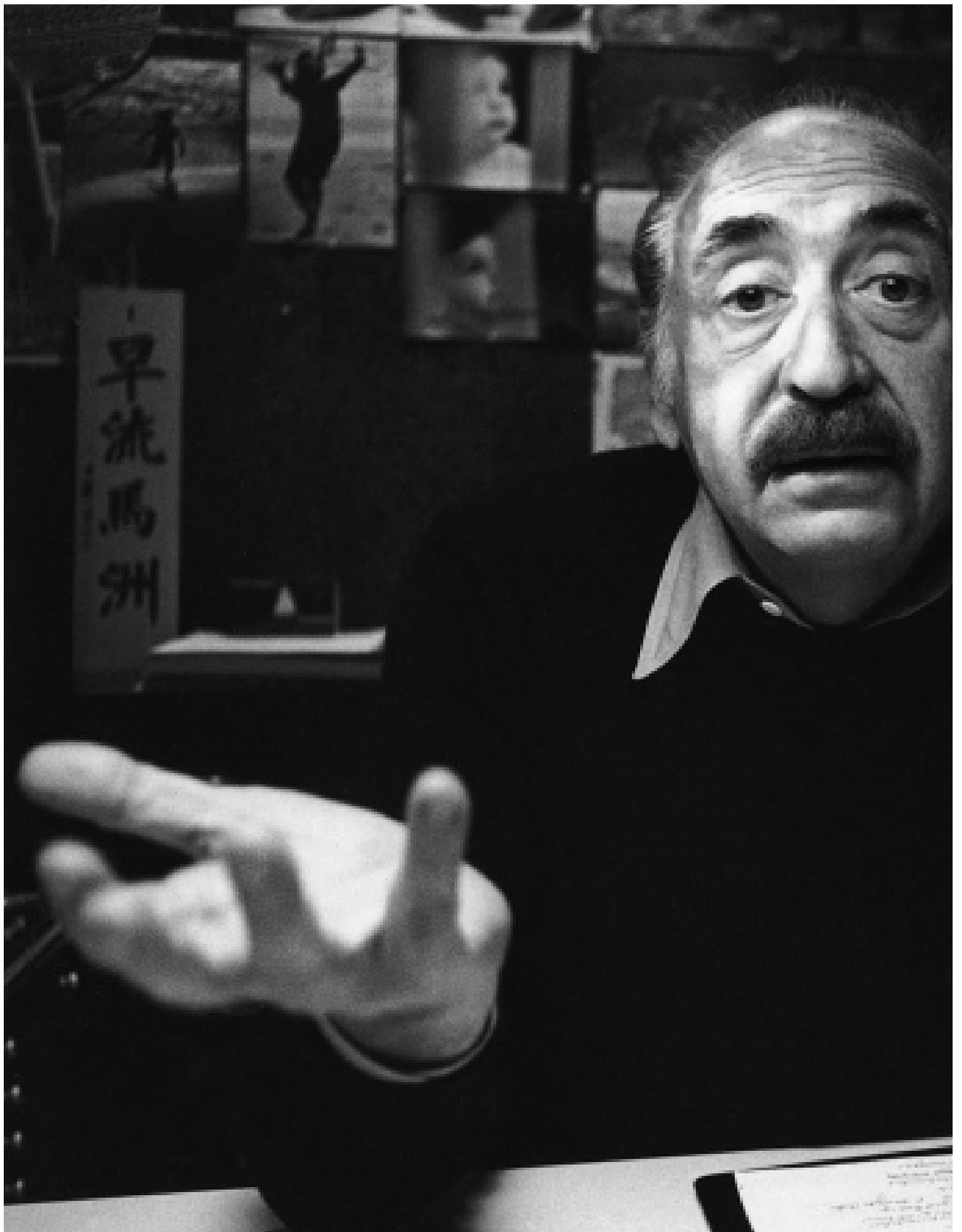
Saul Bass during the production of *Why Man Creates*, 1968. <https://www.oscars.org/videos-photos/saul-bass-celebration/?fd=37896>, 2015



Saul Bass holding his Oscar award, 1968.
<http://www.news18.com/news/india/snaps-hot-when-saul-bass-won-an-oscar-607911.html>, May 8th, 2013

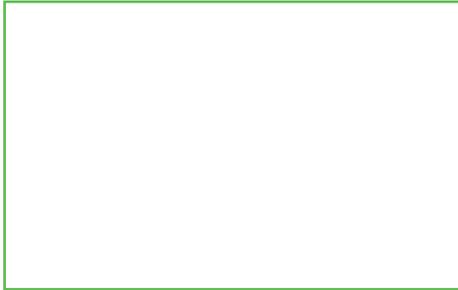
Why Man Creates: Saul Bass' Oscar-winning animated look at Creativity

Maybe you already had a fascination with Saul Bass' celebrated movie title sequences, but you can round out your understanding of the man's artistic sensibility by watching *Why Man Creates*, the animated film by Bass and his wife/collaborator Elaine which won the 1968 Academy Award for Documentary Short Subject. An eight-part meditation on the nature of creativity, the film mixes animation and live action, using Bass' advanced repertoire of optical techniques, to look at the issues surrounding how and why humans have, throughout the history of civilization, kept on making things. It begins with early hunters felling a beast and making a cave painting out of it. From that cave rises a tower built out of every major phase of human civilization: the wheel near the bottom, the pyramids somewhat higher up, the literal darkness of the Dark Ages as the camera rises higher still, ultimately capped by a heap of planes, trains, and automobiles. One wonders how Bass might, in an update, have stacked his representation of the internet atop of all this, but the sequence's datedness costs it none of its virtuosity.



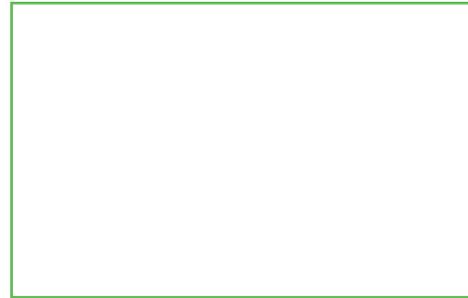
A black and white photograph of a person's hand holding a lit cigarette. The hand is in the foreground, and the cigarette is lit, with a small flame and smoke. The background is dark and out of focus, showing what appears to be a wall with some papers or posters. A large green text box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing a paragraph of text.

Some of v subsequent chapters, in their bold late-sixties “trippiness,” may strike you as more dated than virtuosic. But it would take a hardened viewer indeed not to crack a smile at Bass’ Pythonesque turn when a drawn hand flips open the tops of a series of unthinking partygoers’ heads, revealing the emptiness inside. In its 29 short minutes, the film also looks at the creative struggle in terms of the coarseness of evaluative crowds, the tendency of successful radical ideas to become self-perpetuating institutions, and how people just like things better when they have American flags on them. Its journey ends in an unexpected setting, amid the toil of agricultural and medical scientists who may pursue an idea for years only to find that it has no application. This note of frustration leads into a montage of sun, fire, statuary, the Sphinx, canvasses, and rockets. Assembled with Bass’ signature subtle visual complexity, it takes us from antiquity to modernity in a way only he could.¹⁵



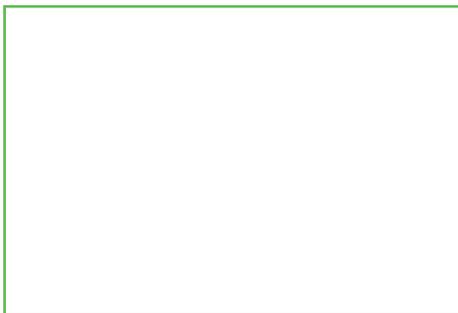
THE EDIFICE

By using the metaphore of a construction, Bass illustrates the history of mankind through the inventions that have transformed the habits of the human being.



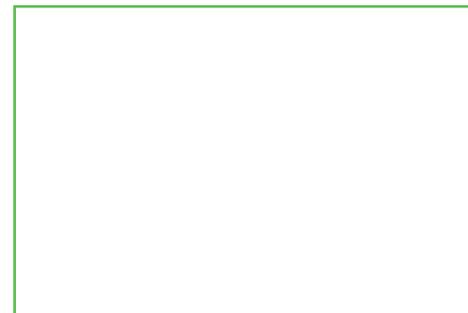
FOOLING AROUND

In this section, Bass illustatesv how and when ideas come across. It's kind of a spontaneous and unconscious process.



A PARABLE

In this part, Bass tells us a story about a little ball that, bouncing higher than the others, disappears in the sky, becoming a legend between the ordinary balls.



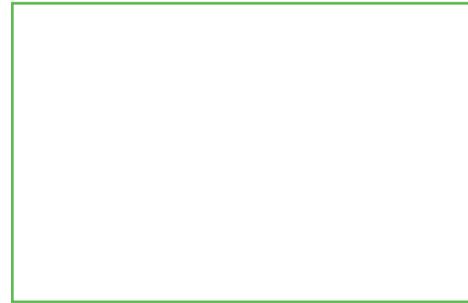
DIGRESSION

"Have you ever thought that radical ideas threaten institutions, then become institutions and in turn reject radical ideas which threaten institutions?"
"No".



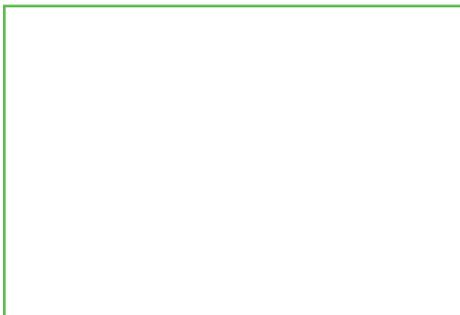
THE PROCESS

Once the artist has found the idea, he must put it into practice. This is a strenuous and sometimes tiresome part of the work.



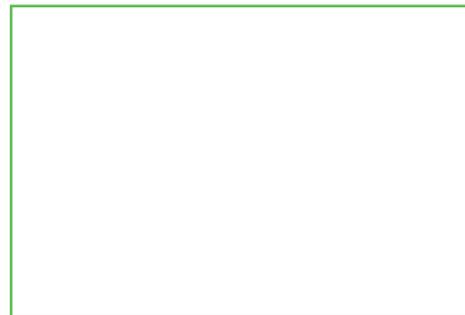
JUDGEMENT

This section illustrates the moment the work comes into contact with the public. The audience's criticism is metaphorically compared to gunshots hurting the artist.



THE SEARCH

Scientists working on different subjects are interviewed. Through their experience, we learn that to understand any aspect of life, we need dedication and years of research.



THE MARK

Then, why does Man create? There are many reasons, but we can conclude that it's a need, an impulse of human expression.

“Learn to draw. If you don’t you’re going to live your life getting around that and trying to compensate for that. [...] You can’t get away with that, it’s a crippling absence [...] and the unfortunate thing is you can get by without it, and you can even get a job [...] but then, when you realize that you really wish you knew how to draw, it’s too late because you’ll never go back to school.”

Saul Bass- Advice to Design Students, February 12th 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7I0mlIzx_I

Personal handwriting

Saul used the term “personal handwriting” to refer to a certain category of work, mostly posters, where he was free to create and explore images and ideas on his own terms. This work was often for clients, such as films festivals or cultural institutions, who did not interfere, largely because the commissions were pro bono (carried out voluntarily and without payment), but also because they were grateful to have a poster by Saul. Such was also the case with work for causes and organizations with whose aims Saul sympathized – for example Human Rights Watch or the Special Olympics. Looking at these posters, we see Saul playing around with a theme, an idea, a form or palette; sometimes over a very short period, and sometimes over a

period of years.¹⁶

Saul’s “personal handwriting” extended to many other areas, ranging from photography and doodles to the collecting of artifacts and his involvement in the annual Aspen Design Conference.

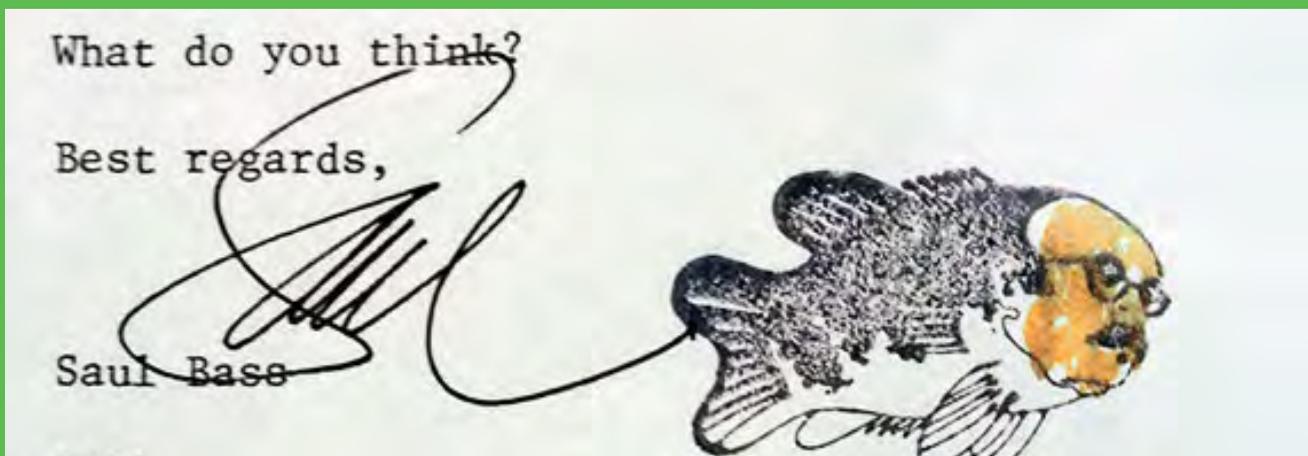
Saul spoke of “an emotional need for direct contact with a surface,” adding “I like to feel the pencil’s abrasion, or the brush’s slither. It’s where I started, and what I need to come back to periodically: a free and open area of expression.” Well-sharpened pencils and his favorite pens were among the few tools on his desk, always carefully placed near a clean pad of paper.

Saul also took hundreds of photographs, usually when travelling, as a sort of sketchbook or diary of images.

For him, these “frozen moments” were both document and source of inspiration. Some were taken to capture an idea or an insight, others to record an image, a new way of seeing an everyday object or as a study in light, texture and pattern.

An habitual doodler, Saul's were mostly done while on his telephone, on vacation or during conferences. His doodles included lettering and abstract forms, as well as sketches of people, places and imaginary landscapes. Many doodles were done at the Aspen Design Conferences – of fellow board members and speakers, from Lou Dorfsman to Peter Reyner Banham. Doodles aside, Aspen, the debates and the people were all important sources of creative energy for Saul.

So too were the artifacts that Saul and Elaine collected. Originating from ancient or “pre-industrial” societies, they were mostly Native American but also Pre-Columbian, African, Middle Eastern, Greek and Roman. To them, such objects were carriers of myths and meanings: at once knowable and unknowable, material yet mysterious. Saul surrounded himself with them in his office and at home because he thought that, in addition to their intrinsic beauty, they brought “a special kind of mystery – a quality of the unknown that reaches the very deep and hidden place,” and showed how, despite working within particular traditions, conventions and forms, each was unique. For him and Elaine, the creators of these objects were kindred spirits.¹⁷



THINKING MADE VISIBLE



“The ideal trademark is one that is pushed to its utmost limits in terms of abstraction and ambiguity, yet is still readable. Trademark are usually metaphors of one kind of another. And are, in a certain sense, thinking made visible.”

Saul Bass, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A life in Film & Design*, London; Laurence King Publishing, 2011, p.281

The great guru of corporate identity

Corporate identity design is the creation of a distinct and unified visual identity for a company or institution, usually centering on a trademark. According to Saul “The fundamental objective of altering the visual look and house mark for any corporation is to make the change faithfully represent the company, and reflect the role it plays in the environment. On the surface that sounds simple. But, before you start changing anything, you have to clearly understand what you are changing, and why you are changing it.” Advertising copywriter Barbara Baer Capitman

observed that corporate identity systems are “the closest a giant corporation can come to anthropomorphizing itself, to presenting a face, a personality.” Saul, who created “faces” for more than fifty well-known companies, and as many again for lesser-known ones, understood this—just as he understood that new identities lacked what he called “the authority of existence.” They entered the marketplace with only their intrinsic visual qualities, acquiring currency through exposure, familiarity and people’s experiences of a company’s products or services.

Corporate identity design, as we understand it today, dates back to the 1890s and 1900s, when architects and designers became involved in the creation of new visual identities, mainly for large companies. In 1898, the American-owned film and photographic business, Eastman Kodak, commissioned a revised identity from British designer George Walton prior to expansion abroad. In cities as far apart as Dublin, Moscow and Alexandria, the company's shop fronts, retail interior and hoardings were designed in a bold and distinctive house style.

The large, comprehensive corporate identity programs of the postwar era are usually seen as beginning with Lester Beall's logo and related designs for Connecticut General Life Insurance Company (from 1956) and International Paper (1960). Also, at this time, Paul Rand began to update the image of IBM (from 1956), becoming more heavily involved in corporate identity design in the 1960s.

Saul entered the field in the early to mid-1950s, before he began his film identity work, but always felt that his involvement with large comprehensive programs started with the 1959 Lawry's commission, closely followed by Alcoa (1963), Fuller Paints (1963), Hunt-Wesson (1964), Celanese (1966) and Continental (1967). Because Saul's film work generated so much popular attention, it is easy for those not familiar with his early graphic work to overlook the fact that he was part of a small group of American designers who were instrumental

in developing a strongly rationalist approach to corporate identity of work, Saul was possibly the most prolific designer in this field over the period 1960-96, and one of the most influential. He went on to work for some of the largest and most high-profile companies in the world, including the Bell Telephone System, United Airlines, AT&T and Minolta. Saul was also one of the first U.S. designers to create house style manuals, those for Alcoa and Celanese dating to 1963 and 1966 respectively. Given the huge amounts of time and effort put into large identity programs, design manuals were a way to ensuring the work would remain visually intact over the years and across many applications.

Saul thought of manuals as part of an educational control system, always with some flexibility built in. He devised each manual "with an awareness that arbitrary rules were less likely to be embraced, than those for which reasons are clearly enunciated and rationally presented. "we made each manual a persuasive document as well as an instructional one".

As corporations grew in both size and complexity, so too did manuals: those the Bass office created for the Bell System in 1968 and Exxon in 1981 were both among the most comprehensive of their day. The Bell commission itself was one of the largest ever undertaken by any designer and therefore, by the late 1960s, the Bass office was regarded as one of the offices most capable of dealing with the very largest and most complex corporate identity programs.¹⁸



Saul with his work, 1980, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A life in Film & Design*, London; Laurence King Publishing, 2011, p.283

Saul's ability to listen what company executives wanted, or thought they wanted, and to their hopes and fears about their businesses, proved an important asset. He also had a rare capacity not only to come to a powerful and appropriate image, but also to successfully convey the rationale behind the designs to his clients. He took great care to guide executives through each stage of the process, creating a rational structure within which visual forms could be evaluated in the order to bridge any potential divide. Saul was also able to make sense of huge amounts of information generated by depth studies of major corporations. Lou Dorfsman was but one of many contemporaries who marveled at Saul's ability to digest and synthesize it all.

Pat Kirkham, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A life in Film & Design*, London; Laurence King Publishing, 2011, Corporate identity, p.282



Williams recalled, “In about 1960, Hunt Foods, the company I was working for, was trying to redesign the Wesson Oil Bottle - unsuccessfully, until I meet Saul. One of the people working the phones with me at charity telethon said that he was an accountant for a talented designer. I told him of our design problem and he suggested we talk to Saul. “It was a surprisingly complex assignment. We wanted to get away from the then standard tube-shaped bottle and compete with the narrow-waisted bottle of a new product put out by Crisco. Sauls seemed to hit all the buttons, both functionally and aesthetically. His design did exactly what we wanted it to do, and did it better. Then, when I was heading Hunt Foods and we wanted a corporate symbol, along with a redesign of our label’s fundamentals, Saul once again captured what we were trying to convey. “When i left Hunt Foods to head the Graduate School of Management at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), I again commissioned Saul to create a symbol. And when I entered government service and chaired the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), I retained Saul to find out how the SEC was perceived by the public. His presentation, based on taped interviews, really opened our eyes. It wasn’t only that the SEC was seen more negati-

vely than we’d expected but also that there were serious misunderstanding of its role in certain areas. The study didn’t really go any place because it was too difficult for us to move the government bureaucracy.

When I became head of the Getty Trust, Saul was a logical choice to deal with issues of how that body was perceived. “It’s atypical of many artists, but Saul starts with a system approach, an effort to understand the problem and the objective, then to articulate it, and finally to translate what he’s learned into an artistic solution. Often it turns out to be a different problem than the once that the client himself might articulate, but Saul really takes you along with him through all the steps, the logic of what he’s doing, the process of elimination. There’s an elegance to his artistry, but also a simplicity and modesty..” Edward Block of AT&T, who described Saul as “the great guru of corporate identification and a delight to work with,” emphasized that Saul was “not one of those who is up on a pedestal. I’ve worked with some who have a great tedious. You want a letterhead and they want to build the Taj Mahal. Saul is very straightforward and practical in seeking solutions to design problems. We knew of his reputation in Hollywood, but he was not at all a “Hollywood guy.”

He did great work for us without making a lot of waves. He did it on time and he did it right.”

Saul turned down work when he was not convinced of a commitment to excellence on the part of a prospective client or when his talents would benefit a product that he knew to be harmful to living things. He was not mild person by any means, but he could rein in his frustrations so long as he left points under discussions were valid ones and that his opinions would be considered. He was willing to concede certain issues, but there was no compromise in terms of design. Saul was always prepared to rethink a design, but refused to accept a CEO, group of executives or anyone else altering one. In 1975 Stanton Avery, the inventor of the self-adhesive label, tried to do just that. Saul recalls, “I spent months on the project, researching the company and visiting Avery Products facilities all over the world. Finally it came to the presentation.

I went through every alternative and finally “unveiled” my choice (an “A” formed by links of a chain). The room was silent, as everyone waited for the boss’s response. “Stan Avery, a tall patrician man of great intelligence and thoughtfully demeanor, rose from his seat, walked up to the design on the wall, and studied it closely. “He took a fountain pen out of his pocket and unscrew the cap. “Listen, Saul”, he said, “I hesitate

to... can I draw on that?”

“Sure,” I said. “Avery crossed out the “International,” leaving only “Avery”, and drew a circle around the design. “What do you think? Does that make it better?”

“I walked to the wall, looked at the design, removed the pushpin and held the design in my hand.

“Stan,” I said quietly, “when I was a kid my mother told me never to argue with the boss.

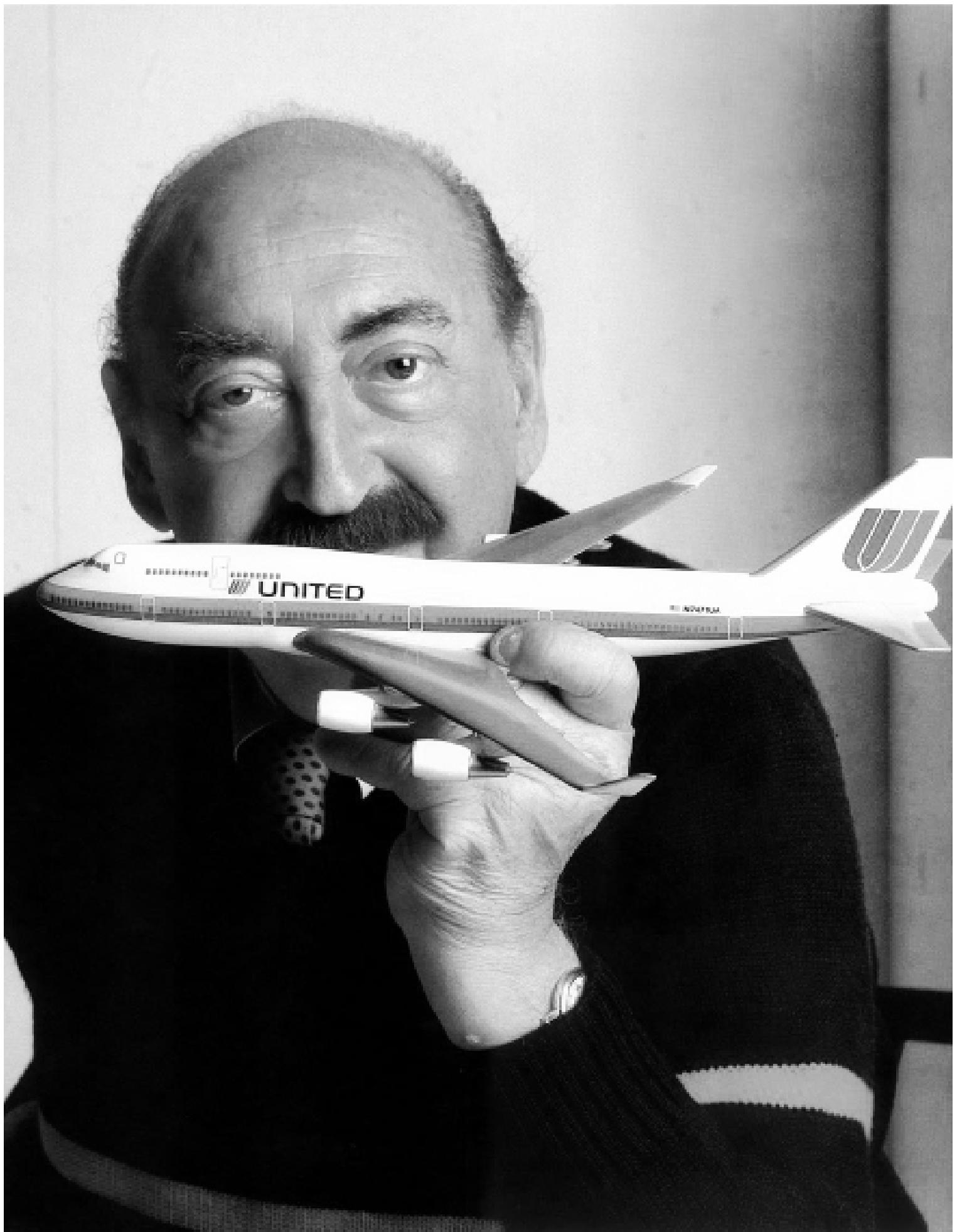
So i asked her, even if he’s wrong? And she told me that when the boss was wrong, i was really important to find a nice way to let him know. Pause..” Stan, you are wrong..”

“Everyone remained silent until Avery spoke. “Well, Saul. What can i say? A long time ago I learned that if a man goes to a doctor he respects, and ignores his advice, he does so at his own peril. So I think I will defer to your judgment.” “But I knew that Avery was still dissatisfied, and I understood why. Unlike other trademarks that had been around for years or decades, this one had just been exposed to the light of day. “To allay Avery’s qualms, I did what I had sometimes done in such circumstances. I put the new icon on a small board, together with several other well-known marks, and asked Avery to display the card in his office in a prominent place where he would see it every time he went in or out. A week later, Avery called me. He said, “the design is beginning to grow on me.”¹⁹



Saul enjoyed exceptionally good relationships with his clients. Although not all captains of big business shared his liberal outlook, they appreciated his professionalism, intelligence, integrity and good company, and often retained his services for many years. Lawry's Seasoning & Food Company, for example, was a client for forty-seven years, and AT&T for more than twenty-eight. Harold Williams, "struck by Saul's ability to understand and capture what I wanted to convey," utilized Saul's talents in one way or another for more than thirty-five years.

Pat Kirkham, in Pat Kirkham, Jennifer Bass, *Saul Bass: A life in Film & Design*, London; Laurence King Publishing, 2011, Client and Designer, p.288



Saul's first identity campaign was for **Lawry's Seasoning & Food Company**, based in Los Angeles. It was founded in the 1930s by Lawrence Frank (known as L.L.), who first created Lawry's Seasoned Salt in his garage and opened the popular Lawry's Prime Rib Restaurant. His son, Richard, who became president in the late 1950s, had new ideas for expanding the product line, which had barely made a dent in the nation's giant food seasonings industry, and a conviction that the company needed a new look. Its trademark, originally designed for the restaurant, consisted of an English gentleman in a top hat and the name "Lawry's" in an old-fashioned script. When Frank asked his in-house advertising manager for advice, the man suggested a designer named Saul Bass. Saul's view was that, in a highly competitive marketing situation, this medium-sized company had to stand out visually and establish itself as innovative. The new design was the launching pad for a profusion of new seasonings. Since the budget did not cover designs for all of these new products, Saul incorporated a space in the label design for the name of each particular product. Saul continued to design all the company packaging thereafter, as well as graphics for the restaurant branch of the business, from exterior signs to menus and doggy bags. With Saul's help, the company established itself as a market leader in the U.S., and he acted as design consultant even after Liptons took over the company in the 1980s.

In March 1961, after a five-month search, the **Aluminium Company of America** appointed Saul as graphic consultant with a view to revamping the company's public face. The company had already established itself as an industry leader, committed to imaginative development programs and adventurous advertising. The new symbol was unveiled in January 1963. Saul's recommendation was to acknowledge the reality of the situation by relinquishing the old mark entirely and designing a new one for the company's exclusive use. He devised a new emblem in which three diamonds combined to form a highly stylized letter "A" that suggested the sleek, modern precision of aluminium itself. In order to retain continuity, he incorporated the triangles of the original into the new symbol. It formed the basis of a corporate identity system, complete with its own typeface, design manuals and an opening sequence for sponsored television programs.

"I suggested adopting the name Alcoa, among other recommendations, during a lunch with Lawrence Litchfield. At one point he turned to me and said, "I agree and understand the need to do it, but I'm personally not comfortable with it." "As one might guess, Litchfield soon developed a strong attachment to his company's new name and his stationery followed suit. The moral of the story: that corporate identity can carry deep meaning for those within a corporation, and it is not to be lightly changed or lightly shed."

In the early 1960s, Hunt Foods took over **W.P. Fuller & Company**, one of the oldest manufacturers of paint in the United States. Saul was asked to devise a new logo - an abstracted tin of paint and color spectrum, which was used on everything from brushes to stepladders to calendars. In collaboration with exhibit designer Herb Rosenthal, Saul also created signage for fifty Fuller home decorating centers. Sited outside one of the largest stores, three sixty-foot totemic pylons of painted aluminum, known as the Towers of Color, rotated in synchronized motion like giant medieval pennants. In addition, a thirty-four-foot-high sculpture, made out of eighty-one poles that ranged across the entire color spectrum, gave the corporate headquarters a more colorful public face.

By 1965, when Saul was called in, the **Celanese Corporation of America** had evolved from a domestic company specializing in acetate fibers (to which its well-established, calligraphic trademark alluded) to a billion-dollar multinational manufacturer of synthetic fashion fibers, chemicals and paints. Saul considered the existing trademark too old-fashioned and feminine to represent a company that was a major player in the world of paint and chemical industries. He realized it would not be easy to create a logo that would symbolize the diverse product lines: "The two prongs of the problem seemed in opposition to each other. To the degree a configuration becomes more fashioney, so to that de-

gree it becomes less industrial, and vice versa." To find a unifying symbol, Saul took the initial letter of the corporate name and gave it a literal twist, akin to the flourish of a calligrapher, fashioning an elegant yet robust symbol that looked as comfortable on a boxcar loaded with chemicals as it did on the tag of a cocktail dress. When asked to create a sculpture for the corporation's New York headquarters, Saul translated the logo into three-dimensional form. Shortly afterwards, it was voted one of the year's ten best pieces of environmental art in New York.

For the **United Way**, the aims of the identity program were to present the organization as an up-to-date charity sensitive to the changing needs of society and to create a single identity for an umbrella organization of more than 2,000 fundraising groups across the United States. Saul described the tripartite logo as a "visual phrase" that symbolized human potential made possible by the existence of United Way; a figure stands on a helping hand beneath a rainbow of hope. In order to combat the considerable resistance to change within the organization, Saul wrote a two-page spread for the in-house magazine. He pointed out that, since the early 1960s, most Fortune 100 companies had changed their images, and asked if United Way could afford to lag behind the business community on which it relied for support. Most people agreed that the design represented the organization as "vibrant, exciting, colorful, positive and changing."

The brief Saul was given by **Continental Airlines** was “heralding the future.” This energetic and growing company had undergone eight changes of image in the twenty-three years before Saul was commissioned in the 1965 to mastermind yet another. The company operated in the American West and Southwest, but CEO Robert Six planned to incorporate the Pacific Far East within five to ten years. The first recommendation was to abandon the existing golden bird logo. Saul explained, “Birds and bird-like forms are the most frequently used airlines symbols. They are inherited from the early years of the airline industry, when flying like a bird was a wonderful notion indeed. But it’s hardly the most appropriate symbol for a jet-age airline. The objective of the new Continental symbol was to capture the basic power thrust notion of the jet engine, as well as the airflow patterns of high-speed flight.” The appropriateness of the design for future markets was also a major consideration. For ticket offices, waiting areas and company buildings, the color palette was China red, orange and gold. According to Saul, this combination triggered cultural references to the Far East and flagged the warmth with which the company was, and hoped to be, regarded. This was one of Saul’s most comprehensive identity programs to date. By 1967, more than 456 items had been designed or redesigned, including aircraft, baggage labels, china, glassware, flight bags,

business cards, infant seats, overalls, pilot badges, napkins, airsickness bags and slippersox.

The **Rockwell** commission came about in 1968 after a merger between North American Aviation, a high-technology aerospace giant, and Rockwell Standard, a high-volume automotive components and consumer products manufacturer. The new corporation was composed of more than twenty entities, as diverse as Atomics International, several aviation companies, a car parts manufacturer and a loom company. To find a unifying symbol while retaining some degree of individual identity for each subsidiary was no easy matter.

The solution was a chameleon-like icon that managed to suggest thread for the loom company, waves in an airstream for the aircraft and rocket divisions, and, above all, signaled innovation, efficiency and a forward-thrusting dynamism. It worked as well on the sides of buildings as it did on uniforms, vehicles, shipping cartons and the tails of Rockwell planes. Fears and rivalries ran so high, however, that Saul could not get agreement on the name he recommended.

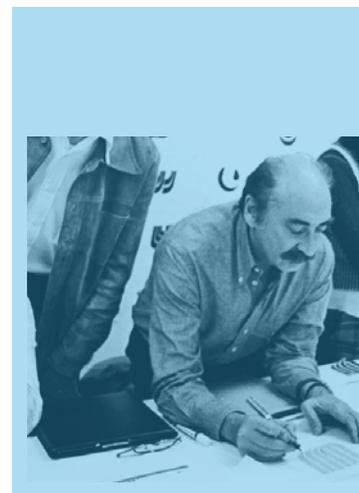
Even though most personnel agreed on the need for an international profile, former North American Aviation staff felt left out by Saul’s recommendation of the parochial nature of the adopted compromise, North American Rockwell, and lived to win another day. After three years the symbol was so well seated that it seemed a small matter to adopt the new name.

In 1968, when Saul was invited to update the corporate identity of the gargantuan Bell network of companies, it was the largest corporation in the world. It employed almost one million people and served one hundred million people and served one hundred million telephone lines. It had yearly sales approaching \$100 billion and a fleet of vehicles almost as large as that of the U.S. Army. Although company stock sold under the name AT&T, it and its twenty-three operating companies were better known as the **Bell System**. “Our work had two primary goals. First, to unify the disparate-looking Bell entities; second, to modernize the look of the corporation. With a more contemporary look, the Bell System might convey what it actually was, a source of state-of-the-art technology and an organization you’d like to work for.” The Bass office designed an enormous range of items and equipment, from letterheads to vehicle livery, and from packaging and wallpaper for public offices to uniforms designed by Elaine. The size and scope of the project can also be gauged by the creation of a dozen manuals including one each for stationery, business forms, vehicles, signage, color specifications and telephone directories.

When **Quaker Oats** turned to Saul for a new visual identification in 1969, the company was more than a century old and enjoyed an abundance of goodwill. Company executives, however, felt that its trademark no longer served its needs.

For Saul the necessity was clear: a mark that would connect with the Quaker Oats Company’s wholesome, whole-grain reputation while also signaling its broad new product line. Another design firm had recommended replacing the Quaker Man with an abstract letter “Q” but Quaker’s management was uneasy about such a radical change. Saul agreed, “I reinforced their uneasiness. I felt that for them to give up the accessibility, the humanity and the particularity of the Quaker Man was a serious error. I myself have always striven for accessibility, more or less successfully, and the Quaker Man was, after all, something we’d all grown up with something we’d seen at breakfast all through our childhood and youth. It was an icon that conveyed feelings of trust, integrity, comfort and dedication to quality.”

Warner Brothers was established in 1923, and its history was, in large measure, the history of Hollywood’s golden era. The problem here was that the shield logo was recognized worldwide; if it was used to represent the company as a whole, the public would continue to perceive it as primarily a film studio. This was not, as Saul pointed out, an optimum image for a corporation heavily involved in areas more stable and predictable than motion pictures. Saul recommended an electronically inspired version of the letter “W”, set within a shape suggestive of a monitor or television screen, that would convey the communications focus while serving all the various divisions.





A seemingly insignificant issue brought Saul one of his biggest corporate identity commissions of the 1970s. Edward Carlson, the relatively new chairman of **United Air Lines**, disliked the random ways in which stripes were placed on the company's airplanes. Happily for Saul, Carlson mentioned it to a board member, Robert Stewart, who, as chairman of Quaker, had worked closely with Saul on its identity campaign. At the heart of the new identity campaign was the "flying U" logo based on the first letter of the company name. Saul further simplified United's visual signature by changing the name to United Airlines. Orange was added to the existing red and blue color scheme, partly to distinguish it from the red, white, and blue of other airlines and partly to add a touch of warmth and punch. Further impact came from using a very bright white for the base color. Saul called it "Cape Canaveral white," and stated, "We were saying in effect that the plane should have the pristine, advanced look that people associate with the Apollo moon shots. They should look like pure projectiles."

The commission to modernize the image of the

Girl Scouts of America grew out of redesigning Girl Scouts cookie boxes for the Burry division of Quaker. Saul regarded seventy million boxes mostly sold door to door to homes across the country as a marvelous opportunity to communicate the fun, self-reliance and self-realization of scouting to parents and girls alike. The cookie boxes were a resounding success - so much so that the Girl Scouts subsequently hired Saul to update the organization's symbol. "He interviewed us and talked with the leadership, both volunteer and staff, until he had absorbed the culture of the organization. He understood the importance of the trefoil and eagle pin - handed down from mother to daughter, sometimes over generations. He understood its spiritual and emotional basis, the very powerful ties we had with the past. We wanted to carry the best of our traditions into the future, and Saul understood perfectly too. When he redesigned the pin he preserved the trefoil, but now there were profiles of three girls who were clearly of different races. When you looked at that pin it said, "this is a contemporary program, a diverse program, these girls are facing the future."²⁰

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MILANO 1863

Design Verso

Saul Bass

Make the ordinary extraordinary

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Communication design

A.Y 2016/17 C2

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