

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Secretary's Office of the Palace of Typographic Masonry. I wish to draw your attention to a unique phenomenon: graphic design. While it may not enjoy a very high profile, this discipline has a very long history and has constantly played a key role in the development of human society. Take the invention of writing, for example, some 5000 years ago already. And graphic design continues to have a major impact on our public space – our shared environment – to this day. Which is actually why I am writing you this letter....

Think of what would happen to a bureaucracy without figures and letters, forms, diagrams, sign systems, the arrangement of words and images in encyclopaedias, annual reports, websites and law books! It's impossible to picture a world without graphic design – not just in a functional and administrative sense, but also in terms of ceremony and the imagination. A culture without pennants, symbols of faith, stamps, money, posters, album covers, buttons, corporate identities, designs for shops signs, festivals, etc., lacks orientation and opportunities for collective representation. You will probably agree that graphic design is of crucially importance as a public activity! But despite its undeniable significance, the discipline

is not given the attention it deserves: as a carrier of meaning, it remains hidden behind the messages it conveys....

The graphic design profession is home to a wide range of perspectives and practices – I won't be bothering you with the details. The one thing I would like to impart is that each time round, graphic design involves the marriage of art, science and technology. Graphic designers rely on their imaginative capacity, visual rhetoric and technical skill to create new order through a wide range of approaches. With their talent and ability to organise and manipulate text and images, designers can create new visual forms of communication, which link abstract patterns of thinking to everyday life. This sounds a bit magical – and in a sense, you could see it as magic, I like to call it a form of alchemy, with signs, ornaments and symbols....

What many people don't know is that this magic can be used in two distinct ways: in an illustrative and a formative manner, as Penny Sparke sets out in 'An Introduction to design and culture' (2004). In its formative role, a design precedes the culture in which it is being produced, so that it becomes a means by which to construct and imagine the values and ideas that ultimately become part of the social environment. In its illustrative role, a design takes its cue from the

culture in which it is produced. It depicts and affirms existing ideas and values. In short: the formative role sets an interaction of images and counter-images in motion – greasing the wheels of social communication. In an illustrative approach to graphic design, these dynamics are discouraged – with social communication threatening to become rigid and ossified....

When you look around it's difficult to ignore: more than ever, our everyday life is inundated with graphic design. Printed and projected images abound in our streets, in public transport, packaging, websites, print, displays, clothing, buildings, vehicles and everywhere else. As soon as we enter the public space, we are unable to escape the visual communication that ultimately forms our collective visual identity. And that's why it's so important to give this discipline the attention it deserves, and to pause and reflect on its role in our public space. I'm interested in hearing your views on this issue....

Yours sincerely,

The Governor of the Palace of Typographic Masonry



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