The language of today’s designer, educator, and artist is rooted in the history of graphic design. This is the essential, comprehensive, and award-winning reference tool on graphic design recognized for publishing excellence by the Association of American Publishers. Now, this Fifth Edition of Meggs’ History of Graphic Design offers even more detail and breadth of content than its heralded predecessors, revealing a saga of creative innovators, breakthrough technologies, and important developments responsible for paving the historic paths that define the graphic design experience. In addition to classic topics such as the invention of writing and alphabets, the origins of printing and typography, and postmodern design, this new Fifth Edition presents new information on current trends and technologies sweeping the graphic design landscape—such as the web, multimedia, interactive design, and private presses, thus adding new layers of depth to an already rich resource.

With more than 1,400 high-quality images throughout—many new or newly updated—Meggs’ History of Graphic Design, Fifth Edition provides a wealth of visual markers for inspiration and emulation. For professionals, students, and everyone who works with or loves the world of graphic design, this landmark text will quickly become an invaluable guide that they will turn to again and again.
Meggs’
History of
Graphic
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Preface

Many different methods can be employed to investigate the evolution of graphic design, including exploring aesthetic movements and ideas, considering economic implications, analyzing audience sensibility, and evaluating the influence of technological innovations such as the invention of movable type or lithography. Naturally, the visual nature of graphic design is our primary concern, but we must also consider the values of the designers, the impact of their work on audiences, and the intrinsic meaning of forms. Traditional art history research approaches are in many ways insufficient for addressing the relatively recent and completely unique history of graphic design. Concentrating only on individual designers and their most important works or placing these designers systematically into schools or overall movements does not adequately fulfill our needs. Invigorating exchanges among designers is crucial to the growth of graphic design, and, because of the Internet, this impetus is particularly relevant to graphic design today.

My own preferences and those of Philip B. Meggs undoubtedly played a role in determining what or whom to include in this edition, but a decided effort was made to arrive at such decisions for reasons other than personal tastes. Ideally, choices were based on how clearly designs impart ideas, aesthetic concepts, or specific graphic forms, even when other examples might be deemed more standard. Obstructions in acquiring publication rights to image reproductions in this edition were also an impediment to the inclusion of certain works of art. For this reason, some significant figures have unfortunately been denied their rightful place in this book and will most likely be denied inclusion in other publications as well.

Although in the history of graphic design, there are moments when shared visions defy any attribution to a single designer, there have also been individual designers forging new paths, with distinctive expressive forms and original means for conveying information. A goal of Meggs’ History of Graphic Design has been to document graphic design innovation and those designers who have made noteworthy contributions to its long-term development. Selecting exceptionally significant designers, especially from the last thirty years, was a demanding undertaking. By “significant” I refer to those who not only created outstanding work but also played a major role in the growth of the graphic design profession. What characterizes a master designer is not easy to define. Such individuals should first possess a unique aesthetic vision, a directly identifiable visual language, and a philosophy that goes beyond mere problem solving. Clearly, many have been unfairly omitted, but there has been a conscious effort to prevent such exclusions. The inventive accomplishments of past great graphic design practitioners have withstood the test of time and continue to inform and inspire new generations. Assessing graphic design from recent years, however, is a more delicate and complicated task, as there is now a far more level playing field. The boundaries between diverse design disciplines have also become less distinct. Provenance has become more complex as well. Particularly during the last century, many designers created publications in companies with rotating staffs and interns. Such designs are the products of many individuals, and acknowledging all of those involved is rarely a viable option.

Thus, presenting an overview of current graphic design will always be a difficult undertaking, as any final chapter will inevitably have no conclusion. As the English philosopher and historian R. G. Collingwood noted in 1924, “Contemporary history embarrasses a writer not only because he knows too much, but also because what he knows is too undigested, too unconnected, too atomic. It is only after close and prolonged reflection that we begin to see what was essential and what was important, to see why things happened as they did, and to write history instead of newspapers.”

The works included in Meggs’ History of Graphic Design represent only a small part of what was created in any given period. A large number of images in this book denote schools, movements, styles, or individual approaches, and there are rarely instances when the ultimate accomplishments of any one designer are presented. A study such as this one is limited to presenting the work of designers at specific stages in their careers, and not their total oeuvre. Readers seeking a more complete account should consult the bibliography for additional exploration.

Meggs’ History of Graphic Design was never meant to be an all-inclusive catalogue, as that would necessitate far more than one volume. Instead, we have attempted to offer a wide-ranging survey of significant stages and accomplishments in the development of graphic design. A guiding consideration in deciding what to include was how specific cultures, movements, works, and individuals affected what graphic design has become today. The current graphic design field is much broader than in the past and now
Preface

includes disciplines such as motion graphics, environmental communications, and new media. Inevitable space restrictions prevented a thorough exploration of these exciting new topics. Although graphic design is obviously closely related to illustration, photography, printing, and computer technology, it was not feasible to provide a thorough presentation of these related fields within a single volume.

As with any volume of this scale, some key players and topics were omitted in previous editions. A vital consideration for this edition, though, was to record developments since 2004, the date of the most recent images included in the fourth edition. Although the organization of Meggs’ *History of Graphic Design* is fundamentally sequential, there are occasions when periods blend together and share common characteristics.

For the fifth edition, we added and replaced many images, and some have been deleted to provide space for additional content. Many designers who merit inclusion were omitted because of space restrictions, and to them I offer my apologies. Although we have become a global culture since the publication of *A History of Graphic Design* in 1983, many regions and countries were excluded, also for space reasons. In this edition Spain, Portugal, Brazil, and China have been duly included.

William Addison Dwiggins arrived at the phrase graphic design in 1922, but it was rarely used until after World War II—until then graphic designers were called “commercial artists.” The field expanded dramatically in the last decades of the twentieth century, with technology playing an increasingly critical role. As we move forward through the digital era, graphic design is undergoing spectacular changes. Naturally, future generations of graphic designers will challenge existing means of perception and established aesthetic concepts. Whenever we assume we stand at the vanguard, we realize we are truly only at the beginning of an uncharted landscape.

We are continually confronted by new visual messages, and those that remain significant must be visually striking, intellectually stimulating, and deeply genuine. The computer has augmented the pace at which graphic design problems can be solved and permits designers to work more resourcefully. Projects that in the past would have required months are now resolved in a matter of weeks or even days. The profession is no longer limited to books, posters, and advertisements but now includes motion and interactive media and more. In spite of being increasingly involved with technology, there are distinct ties binding the graphic design profession to past crafts and aesthetics. Printed media still retains its importance, as witnessed by the revival of letterpress printing in recent years.

Graphic design rests upon historical foundations, and this rich legacy now has an essential place in graphic design education. During a time when established notions of graphic design are being questioned, it is vital that new generations of graphic designers have a historical knowledge of their vocation. In gaining inspiration from works of the past, be they ancient or recent, designers acknowledge the evolution that, in the words of Meggs, has “enabled designers to achieve a gradual transition from Renaissance design to the modern epoch.”

Since it was first published in 1983, *A History of Graphic Design* has remained the most complete book in its field. It is my objective to retain and further contemporize the book through the restructuring and enhancements of this edition. I hope that the fifth edition, with its expanded content and fresh images, will continue to enlighten and inspire both students and professionals.

Alston W. Purvis
There is a German word, *Zeitgeist*, that does not have an English equivalent. It means the spirit of the times, and refers to the cultural trends and tastes that are characteristic of a given era. The immediacy and ephemeral nature of graphic design, combined with its link with the social, political, and economic life of its culture, enable it to more closely express the zeitgeist of an epoch than many other forms of human expression. Ivan Chermayeff, a noted designer, has said: the design of history is the history of design.

Since prehistoric times, people have searched for ways to give visual form to ideas and concepts, to store knowledge in graphic form, and to bring order and clarity to information. Over the course of history, these needs have been filled by various people, including scribes, printers, and artists. It was not until 1922, when the outstanding book designer William Addison Dwiggins coined the term *graphic design* to describe his activities as an individual who brought structural order and more visual form to printed communications, that an emerging profession received an appropriate name. However, the contemporary graphic designer is heir to a distinguished ancestry. Sumerian scribes who invented writing, Egyptian artisans who combined words and images on papyrus manuscripts, Chinese block printers, medieval illuminators, and fifteenth-century printers and compositors who designed early European books all became part of the rich heritage and history of graphic design. By and large, this is an anonymous tradition, for the social value and aesthetic accomplishments of graphic designers, many of whom have been creative artists of extraordinary intelligence and vision, have not been sufficiently recognized.

History is in large measure a myth, because the historian looks back over the great sprawling network of human struggle and attempts to construct a web of meaning. Oversimplification, ignorance of causes and their effects, and the lack of an objective vantage point are grave risks for the historian. When we attempt to record the accomplishments of the past, we do so from the vantage point of our own time. History becomes a reflection of the needs, sensibilities, and attitudes of the chronicler's time as surely as it represents the accomplishments of bygone eras. As much as one might strive for objectivity, the limitations of individual knowledge and insights ultimately intrude.

The concept of art for art's sake, a beautiful object that exists solely for its aesthetic value, did not develop until the nineteenth century. Before the Industrial Revolution, the beauty of forms and images that people made were linked to their function in human society. The aesthetic qualities of Greek pottery, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and medieval manuscripts were totally integrated with useful values; art and life were unified into a cohesive whole. The din and thunder of the Industrial Revolution turned the world upside down in a process of upheaval and technological progress that continues to accelerate at an ever-quickening pace. By jolting the arts and crafts from their social and economic roles, the machine age created a gulf between people's material life and their sensory and spiritual needs. Just as voices call for a restoration of humanity's unity with the natural environment, there is a growing awareness of the need to restore human and aesthetic values to the man-made environment and mass communications. The design arts—architecture and product, fashion, interior, and graphic design—offer one means for this restoration. Once more a society's shelter, artifacts, and communications might bind a people together. The endangered aesthetic and spiritual values might be restored. A wholeness of need and spirit, reunited through the process of design, can contribute in great measure to the quality and raison d'être of life in urban societies.

This chronicle of graphic design is written in the belief that if we understand the past, we will be better able to continue a culture legacy of beautiful form and effective communication. If we ignore this legacy, we run the risk of becoming buried in a mindless morass of a commercialism whose molelike vision ignores human values and needs as it burrows forward into darkness.

Philip B. Meggs
Detail from the Papyrus of Hunefer, c. 1370 BCE.
Acknowledgments

Numerous scholars, collectors, friends, colleagues, students, and designers have kindly contributed suggestions and knowledge that have aided in completing this volume, and it is difficult to sufficiently convey my appreciation to them all.

First, I am particularly indebted to Libby and Elizabeth Meggs for their support, assurance, and eternal friendship. Brandy Gibbs-Riley has collaborated with me throughout the entire curatorial and writing process. Her contribution as cowriter and researcher for chapters 23 and 24 was essential in bringing this final section to a successful conclusion. Her fresh ideas, contemporary knowledge, thorough scholarship, and insight regarding the selection of new work and representation of new designers has been of immeasurable value. Likewise, her counsel, research, and expertise in midcentury modernism proved critical in updating chapters 17 through 20.

Elizabeth Ryan's unwavering assistance in cataloguing the large amount of incoming work for the book was essential. In addition, her service as chief liaison between the editors at John Wiley & Sons and myself was of incalculable value. Organizing everyone involved was one of her many tasks, and she handled this with the highest level of professionalism. Her arrangement of my writing schedule helped keep me focused on goals along the way.

Ekaterina (Katya) Nick's efforts in procuring images, editing, and revising were especially helpful as were those of Regina Milan. Alyssa Hoersten merits special recognition, especially for her persistent and enthusiastic efforts in obtaining permissions and images for the entire text. Emilio Gill was most supportive in providing images and information regarding Spanish graphic design, and the help and insight of Sónia Teixeira made possible the inclusion of Portuguese graphic design. Majid Abbasi's assistance with providing information and images regarding graphic design from Iran added a special ingredient to chapter 23.

Among my many collaborators I would like to express my gratitude to Robert and June Leibowits for their generosity and intellectual support for this and all of my writing projects. Beginning with my first book, Dutch Graphic Design, 1918–1945, Wilma Schuhmacher's help has been especially gratifying, and she continues to share her consummate knowledge of this subject. I am also grateful to the editors at John Wiley & Sons and myself was of incalculable value. Organizing everyone involved was one of her many tasks, and she handled this with the highest level of professionalism. Her arrangement of my writing schedule helped keep me focused on goals along the way.

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They include Vita Paladino, director; Sean Noel, associate director; Katherine Kominis, assistant director, Rare Books; and Perry Barton, exhibition and publication coordinator. I am indebted to Roger Remington for sharing his ideas and for providing valuable reproduction material for this edition, and to Michael Hearn for his input on Russian graphic design. By making available his extensive archives on H. N. Werkman, the late Jan van Loenen Martinet will always be my mentor on this subject.

Special thanks are due to the administration of Boston University, Jeannette Guillemin, assistant director of Visual Arts, provided me with encouragement and editorial help whenever requested. Others include Lynne Allen, director of Visual Arts; Dean Benjamin Juarez; former dean Walt Meissner; Lügen Zimmerman, fiscal coordinator of Visual Arts; Lynne Cooney, coordinator of exhibitions and special projects; Alana Silva, administrative coordinator of Visual Arts; and Emily Wade, Visual Arts librarian.

Richard Doubleday's collaboration in writing the sections on contemporary Chinese and Mexican graphic design was both illuminative and invaluable, and Robert Burns's insight regarding Paul Rand was greatly appreciated. Kristen Coogen's contributions on Spanish Civil War posters, Corita Kent, and Raymond Loewy helped to fill in some gaps in the previous edition. Stephen Goldstein deserves special recognition for his work with the Mexico City and Beijing Olympics as well as his coauthorship on contemporary Chinese graphic design. Austin Porter's perceptive research and suggestions, especially concerning chapter 11, were particularly beneficial.

Alvin Eisenman, John T. Hill, and Bonnie Scranton were especially helpful in providing information about the legacy of the graphic design program at Yale University.

My undergraduate and graduate assistants at Boston University approached their tasks with unwavering diligence. They include Marc Ghayad, Joseph Haddad, Adrienne Jensen, Scott Dasse, Lu Chen, Minzhe Chen, Laiang Kou, Caitlin Grant, Amy Ahrens, Nicholas Pioggia, Claudia Yan Valenzuela, Donovan Ryan, Nicole Steiner, Jon Brousseau, and Abigail Beau regard Lewis. Their loyal, professional, and tireless support was essential in bringing this project to a successful conclusion.

Margaret Cummins, my editor at John Wiley, and her assistant, Lauren Poplawski, were constant reservoirs of patience and encouragement. David Sassian, senior production editor, provided diligent and persistent attention to
detail without losing sight of the larger picture. Cees de Jong, my publisher in the Netherlands, made available numerous images from his extensive archives, and I am happy that he is the designer of the fifth edition of Meggs’ History of Graphic Design. Martijn Le Coulbre, with whom I have collaborated on numerous publications, provided incisive advice and many fresh images for this edition.

In addition, grateful acknowledgment is made to the following people whose contributions have greatly enriched this publication: Bryce Ambo, Anthon Beeke, Matthew Carter, Murray Forbes, Yael Ort-Dinoor, Laura Giannitrapani, Patrick Graham, April Greiman, Thomas S. Hansen, Lance Hidy, Steven Heller, John Kristensen, Ernst H. von Metzsch, Stephen Pekich, Pim Reinders, Sumner Stone, James M. Storey, and Erik Voorrips. Special thanks is extended to James Lapides for providing numerous images from the International Poster Gallery Collection.

Many members of the staff at the Yale Beinecke Library were helpful, but Leah Jehan deserves special mention. Also, Ulla Kasten of the Yale Babylonian Collection opened worlds of information and generously provided unique cuneiform images from the collection. Earle Havens, curator of rare books, provided images of the singular works at the Sheridan Libraries at Johns Hopkins. In addition, special thanks are extended to Fernando Pena, head librarian at the Grolier Club of New York, for providing rare images from the Grolier collection.

And especially, I want to thank my wife, Susan, and my son, Philip, for their patience during the long periods when I was away working on this project.