GRAPHIC ARTIST GUIDEBOOK

THESIS PROJECT SUSANNAH BECKETT PACIFIC NORTHWEST COLLEGE OF ART SPRING 2021

"I can't draw." "I could never make a logo." "That's a designer's job." "I hate using Illustrator." "I don't know typography." These are all phrases one might see scrolling down a twitter thread, reading the comments of a blog post, or walking down the halls of an art school. Illustrators and Graphic Designers today seem very divided, each writing off the other practice as "not my field," or "outside my forte."

To me, this is a shame. I don't have an issue with honing one's craft, or enjoying certain aspects of an artistic practice. I fully understand that some artists have no interest in cross-discipline or expanding their methods. That being said, I would posit that there are some misconceptions regarding the division between the two disciplines, and by refusing to even try Design or Illustration, these artists are doing themselves and their work a great disservice.

Throughout my artistic education, many of my teachers have placed a lot of emphasis on the differences between the two fields. But what are the differences between graphic design and illustration? Where did this rift begin? And are they really so far apart as some may have you believe? Through my next project, I intend to answer these questions and create a helpful resource for future artists.

My thesis project will be a 100-page book for graphic artists, detailing the tenets of both illustration and graphic design. The book's content will be derived from interviews with professionals in both fields, as well as historical testimonies. Once the core ideas are identified, this illustrated guidebook will showcase the opportunities available to graphic artists when skills from both fields are learned.

Historically, graphic design is viewed as primarily based around problem-solving, and illustration may be seen as simply the visual representation of an idea. However, there are so many outliers and crossovers that the two can often defy definition altogether. Both practices revolve around imagemaking, and both utilize many of the same artistic facets: composition, contrast, color theory, balance, and movement.

There are also many areas where the two blend, from zines to logos to type design. This is because the genres are constantly shifting, changing and adapting. They have changed before, and they will change again. There is no need for strict labelling as "designer" or "illustrator," because who knows what that will mean in 5, 10 years? What does it mean now?

The breaking down of barriers and the removal of labels is something very personal to me. I know that labels can often help define who someone is, and find community or common ground with others. To me, though, it feels more like being put in a box: having someone say "this is what you must do, and any other way is incorrect."

I want my work to inspire others. If I can use my artistic voice to lend support or make people feel like they are less alone, then I will do anything I can to make that happen. I have long been a proponent of change starting with the individual. I know that the only thing in my circle of influence that I have direct control over is the way I behave: my actions, my words, and what I create. I want the things I create to help others to find their own path. It is my hope that artists in the fields of illustration and design would be interested in furthering their craft, and that they would be willing to put aside labels and open their minds to the idea that they have the ability to improve.

I know that I am not an unlimited font of knowledge on this subject, and the "art vs. design" concept is not new. That is why I will complete extensive historical and social research in order to present a full understanding of the topic, including conducting interviews with professional artists. This will bring new, varied perspectives to the subject as well as contextualizing the study in the contemporary art world. I will curate a series of questions in order to further investigate the similarities and differences, as well as instigating a conversation and collecting a range of opinions. The inclusion of this will give the reader a fuller understanding and allow them to create an informed opinion for themselves.

During my initial research for where the divide between the two practices began, I researched the fin-de-siècle in France, where the introduction of offset lithographic printing helped the poster become popular. Thanks to artists like Alphonse Mucha and Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, illustration was now used to advertise for theater performances, promote tourism, and even sell products.

The Arts and Crafts movement put an emphasis on the crafts-manship of the work created, saying that art had become too commercialized and mass-produced and that it needed to be functional above all. A few years later, The Bauhaus said essentially the same thing: utility must have precedence over ornamentation. This may be where a divide began: the notion that the decorated and decadent posters of the turn of the century were not to be lauded as design: that true design valued function over style.

It seems like the places where the art world began to see them as different practices were where they began to take on different purposes to the general populace. Art, to some, is something to be looked at, admired for what it is, and that is all. If there is a purpose to the image, like with much graphic design, then that becomes a different beast entirely. Suddenly the work is base, it holds no water and has no true meaning: it's simply something that will help sell an item and nothing more. In order to be sure I need to conduct more research. Based on my initial research, I believe I can narrow down my investigation to two historical eras: the Fin de Siecle and the 1960s, and then contrast that with the graphic art of today. This is where I believe the divide was at its smallest, and researching further will yield interesting and educational results.

My vision for the project is to create a guidebook that both investigates the historical precedent for the merging of illustration and design as well as applying that information to the contemporary art world.

The text will include contemporary artist interviews, As well as spreads of tips and tricks for illustrators and designers that will also highlight my personal artistic skills. These pages will elucidate different tenets of graphic art, such as lettering, linework, typography, texture, and more.

The tone of the book will be informative and educational, with a cover that mimics old handbooks of the 20th century, giving a feeling of "antiquity meets modernity," which goes along with the content of the book. The historical sections will also include illustrated spreads featuring hand-lettered typography.

My process for the project will be as follows: first, I will continue my research on the history of illustration and graphic design as well as examining academic journals that have previously touched on this subject.

Next, I will reach out to artists from many different fields and ask them their views on both the definitions of the genre and how best the two can assist each other in a professional sense. This will help to solidify the points made in the book. Next will be the design of the book, including sketches, layouts, and iterations.

This is followed by the production of the manuscript, which will be a 100-page 6x9 book with six editions, printed digitally and using perfect binding. These books will be presented during my oral defense as well as certain key spreads from the books as posters on the walls during the presentation if allowed. The full manuscript will also be available as a .pdf so it is more easily available to students, and to allow for maximum accessibility and impact.

The book will help artists to contextualize the precedent for the merging of the two genres and how illustrators taking advice from designers (and vice versa) can help them elevate their individual practices. Ultimately, the goal is that the reader comes out the other side with a broader perspective and a richer understanding of their own artistic practice and the art of their colleagues.

My main influences for this project are artists such as Alphonse Mucha and Milton Glaser, both paragons of their respective times who broke barriers and defied all genre expectations. The work of Alphonse Mucha speaks to me more than maybe any other artist. His use of movement, color, line, and composition

in every piece is unmatched. What I find particularly inspiring about his work is that it looks like fine art, but more often than not, he was making advertisements.

Milton Glaser, arguably one of the most famous and influential designers of this century, is an artist whose work is rooted deeply in illustration. Glaser and Seymour Chwast started Push Pin studios in New York back in the late 50s, and took inspiration from past masters while taking a sharp left turn away from modernist design and narrative illustrations.

He was quoted as saying "I felt suspended between the world of design and the world of illustration. At the time, they were clearly divided. I also didn't feel that I had to pick one."

The result of this is some of the most influential and long lasting works in their field. Neither quite "designer" nor "illustrator," the two created a genre all its own, taking the best qualities of both and uniting them together. It is my goal to take inspiration from these artists and allow their work to color and shape my own, not just in this project but in all future ventures as well.

I have experience with publication design, as well as illustrated manuscripts. In my time at PNCA I have completed two individual hundred page books, both within the confines of a single term, so I am confident in my ability to finish the project within the time allotted. Creating the editions of this book will help to challenge my technical skills as well as exemplify the blending of illustration and design within my own personal practice.

Throughout my academic career, I have found that I am constantly torn between two artistic worlds. Some of my illustration teachers find my work too rigid or meticulous. Some of my

design teachers find that I am too focused on image-making. I don't see these traits as lessening my craft on either side of the spectrum, I see them as strengthening my overall artistic practice. Why should I, or anyone, be confined to a strict set of rules when there are so many ways to enhance my craft? I would personally rather learn from my fellow artists than try to fit in a box.

I will use this project not only to help other artists, but also to widen my own perspective and expand my knowledge. Creating a guide will enable me to compound my personal thoughts as well as learn through past masters and contemporary professionals. As the old saying goes, teaching is one of the best ways to learn.

As I enter the professional art world, I want to help build an industry where there is more inclusion in every regard. The worst that can happen when you try something new is that it doesn't work out. The best thing that can happen is that we all learn, grow and collaborate together as artists. To me, this is worth the risk. In my own experience, nailing down strict definitions of illustration and design can prove quite difficult. It is my belief that this is because the two are not so different. Driving a wedge between those who are "illustrators" versus those who are "designers" is only serving to create an unnecessary divide and prevent interdisciplinary education. Through this project, I will create a learning device to help bridge that divide and help artists reach new heights of innovation.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Susannah is a multidisciplinary artist from Portland, OR. Her focus is in publication design and illustration. Her work thrives on two things: conceptualization and ideation. Her projects address larger issues by focusing on small details and how they work together to complete the whole. Her work draws from personal experience, historical reference, as well as pop culture. She is passionate about showing ideas from a new perspective, and her projects address preconceptions and encourage independent thought.

GRAPHIC ARTIST GUIDEBOOK is

a book for young artists entering college who are torn between the fields of graphic design and illustration. The book takes the reader through the last hundred years of graphic artists, detailing how one may incorporate both fields in order to improve their overall artistic practice. Interviews with contemporary professional artists offers the reader a unique insight into the roles of graphic design and illustration in the art world of today. The book encourages young artists to find their own path, and to try new artistic practices and techniques.

The title of my project is the graphic artist's guidebook, and I've created it because we have a problem.

Allow me to take you back to that dark, terrifying time in every young person's life: entering art school. This particular young person is very excited to learn to struggle with using the pen tool in illustrator for four years. But before they do that, they have to make important decisions about their artistic career. Now, this young person really enjoyed making that bakery logo for their aunt Brenda. But they also really love drawing weird video game fanart. And the school they got into only offers degrees in graphic design, or illustration. They're torn! How are they supposed to figure out which major to go into? Well, let me tell you something. That young person was ME. At this point you're thinking, what's the problem here? A tiny nerd has to make a decision. Big deal. Well it IS a big deal! Because it's not just one tiny nerd. It's MANY tiny nerds! And they're confused! In fact, 75% of college students don't know their major going into college.

This is the problem: the student sees two completely separate paths before them, and never the two shall meet. Except! Those paths used to meet! They met all the time! They met with reckless abandon! Graphic design and illustration used to be almost completely interchangeable, and it's a shame that they seem to be so strictly divided by artists today. I hear you saying "Susannah," you're crazy. Your jokes aren't funny and I'm leaving the zoom call. And also, graphic design and illustration are completely different, and there's absolutely zero crossover.

And to that I would say okay, but what about Zines
Icons
Logos
Infographics

Album Covers
Graphic Novels
Illustrated Type
Rave Posters
Band Posters
Propaganda Posters
Movie Posters
Tourism Posters
Presidential Campaigns
Branding Elements
Motion graphics
AND MORE?

The utilization of both graphic design AND illustration in these examples are either crucial to the project's success, or helps to enhance their effectiveness.

Now it's fine to go into one field or the other, but the issue is that many students are scared to even try the other one because they're taught that they're entirely separate. Not only are there barely any classes that merge the two fields, but there are so many preconceived notions that are perpetuated by the artistic community about what design or illustration is, or isn't. For example, the idea that an illustrator can't make a logo, or that design can't be used in storytelling. Or that graphic design is a good way to make money.

It makes sense to be scared! It makes sense to approach one field and not think it to be time or cost effective to look at inter-disciplinary education. Graphic Design in particular has a huge problem with elitism, and any cursory glance at instagram shows how daunting it can be to enter the field of illustration. But what if we instead could show students that it's not only okay to dabble in both fields, but it can be hugely beneficial to their education? What if we start to remove some of the barriers of entry

for these two fields, and encourage experimentation?

Now I hear you. Susannah, how will we get college kids to start experimenting? It doesn't seem possible. Well, I have a solution. I've created what we in the biz call a book.

But not just any book. The graphic artist guidebook is a book for young artists entering college who are torn between the fields of graphic design and illustration. The book takes the reader through the last hundred years of graphic artists, detailing how one may incorporate both fields in order to improve their overall artistic practice. It includes interviews with contemporary professional artists and offers the reader a unique insight into the roles of graphic design and illustration in the art world of today. The book encourages young artists to find their own path, and to try new artistic practices and techniques.

I'd like to begin to normalize the idea of the "graphic artist" and also reintroduce the conversation regarding the differences and similarities between the two fields into the public.

The main objective of the book is to help artists to identify the precedent for the merging of the two genres and how illustrators taking advice from designers (and vice versa) can help them elevate their individual practices. Ultimately, the goal is that the reader comes out the other side with a broader perspective and a richer understanding of their own artistic practice and the art of their colleagues.

Now, is this just about semantics? People stop calling themselves "designer" or "illustrator" and I'm happy? NO! I'll never be happy! But also, while I do think that calling oneself a graphic artist instead of a designer/illustrator does send the right message, the book is more about showing how the two fields can work together and encouraging students to experiment as they are evolving their practice.

I honestly don't care what they call themselves, as long as they're not afraid to try out things that are more stereotypically "design" or "illustration," like an illustration student using grids to create a poster, or a design student incorporating hand done texture into their layouts.

When I first pitched this project, my audience was anyone and everyone who was interested in graphic art, but I soon came to realize that the demographic that would benefit most from the book would be younger artists about to begin their artistic education and careers. It seemed easier and more productive to encourage artists who had not yet decided on one or the other to experiment and try new techniques.

I know from experience the confusion and unease of being a student and feeling like you cannot choose between two of your passions. I have always felt like when the two fields play off each other and mix with one another, the work is elevated beyond the confines of either genre.

After reading through this book, it is my hope that young artists will understand that learning both fields can only improve their practice, and that it's okay for their work to exist between the two.

I love art history, but so many art history books look very similar, rigid and minimal. I wanted to breathe new life into these works while also honoring the artists' intentions.

Maybe everyone who reads this book will know all these artists already, but maybe not looked at from this angle. And, if even one young artist is inspired to take a look at illustration or design and see how they can work together so wonderfully, then I feel like the project is a success.

Originally, I proposed the lofty goal of detailing all the differences and similarities between graphic design and illustration, pinning down exactly what design and illustration are and mean.

While the meaning and closeness of the two is certainly an aspect of the book, I thought back to my original aspirations for the project, and reframed it to be more inspirational instead.

So that was a lot of big talk, but how does the book actually help to shape developing minds?

The project is bookended by this "artist" character, who is meant to represent the reader. Throughout they are seen questioning their path, see themselves in the historical sections, and ultimately choose to take charge of their own artistic direction. I wanted to incorporate different artistic elements in each section's opening, playing off trends of the time and showing how the artist "fits in" with these artists.

Since the book is all about making design and illustration seem less intimidating, I created two characters to serve as narrators, literally guiding the reader through the book. The characters started out as human, and then changed to a serious, strict cat to represent graphic design and a fun loving, chaotic dog to represent illustration. They went through a lot of changes, from being human to the dog at one point the dog literally just looking like Poochie from the Simpsons. I don't actually watch the Simpsons so please don't tell me if it still looks like him. Adding these two enabled me as an author to have a more direct voice, provide running commentary and also to add a bit of fun. The narrators poke fun at the stereotypes about design and illustration, and remind the reader that while people may think of these two as incompatible, they actually work well together.

The book is divided into two main sections: Belle Epoque (aypoke) and the 1960s, with contemporary artist interviews sprinkled throughout. Within these sections are the artist spotlights of four artists and two artistic groups: Alphonse Mucha, Bauhaus, Aaron Douglas, Push Pin Studios, Tadanori Yokoo and Bonnie MacLean. Some famous, some lesser known, but all examined

through the lens of the graphic artist. These sections discuss the artists' personal artistic ethos, in the hopes that the reader might find further common ground with them. The book describes how these artists elevated their work by walking the line between design and illustration, hopefully to serve as inspiration to the reader.

I experimented with many different illustration styles and image-making techniques before landing on this one. I wanted the designed portions to feel dynamic and clean, contrasting with more organic illustrated elements to further push the proposition of the two styles being different but working well together. I challenged myself to not include any photographs or photo textures, and have the design system revolve entirely around illustrative elements and page layout. I wanted it to follow a system but free-flowing and incorporate aspects of my personal design style. In the interviews I asked what designers would like to see illustrators do more of and vice versa. one thing was the reintroduction of personality into design. I think it's easy to follow trends or be specific to the persona you're designing for, but it could benefit designers to allow for more personal style. I wanted to create visually dynamic layouts in an attempt to better appeal to my audience, who might be discouraged by more minimal art books. One color blending into another spoke to my theme on a meta level, and added visual interest. I color coded each section to set them apart and make for easy identification when trying to find a specific section if you're too cool for the table of contents. Throughout the book there is a line, curling and curving around and over the text. I included this line as a running element through the book to add visual interest and illustrate how everything is tied together. I wanted it to draw the viewer's eye from text to image and back again. I used each section's gradient for the color of the line, and at the end it is revealed that the artist has been drawing it all along to forge something new.

I created an icon set to go along with the tips that pop up in the historical sections, corresponding with the type of tip. For example, the pencil icon represents something to try for the reader's next project.

I chose to pair two typefaces for the display text throughout the book. "Sequel," a bold, minimal sans serif to represent design, and a single letter in "White Angelica," to represent an illustrative element. These two typefaces show that, while different, when paired together create a unique style.

These sections feature a look back at graphic design and illustration during the 20th century. Rather than attempt to encompass all of human history in one book, I decided to hone in on times when design and illustration were at their closest, and also might have more relevance to the reader. In these historical sections, I discuss the roles that illustration and design had at the time, how they evolved, and why.

The introductions to these sections help to put the work in a historical context, giving the reader insight as to what the art world was like when the artist was making. Here are two excerpts from these historical sections:

Belle Epoque:

With the invention of chromolithography, or color lithographs, posters began to flood the art world, allowing for artists to mass-produce artwork. Advertisements began to show typographic and illustrative styles working together in tandem create a more dynamic and eye catching visual experience. The attention to ornament and retreat from Academic painterly styles, coupled with a sudden need for and ability to make mass-produced advertisements created a perfect storm for the integration of illustration and graphic design.

Freed from the confines of the letterpress, artists were able to hand-draw their typographic elements on their posters. Suddenly illustrations were being used to sell products like never before, and the illustrations needed to get the point across quickly.

During the sixties, graphic design had been separated into two tasks: image making and layout or type-setting. Glaser, along with his fellow artists working at his publication Pushpin Group, helped to realign these two aspects of design to one cohesive conception. Similar to the artists towards the turn of the century like Alphonse Mucha, Glaser viewed the design as one complete work with the ability to house a multitude of ideas. After the introductions, the book continues onto informative essays about each artist or group. The essays discuss how they incorporate design and illustration, to what effect, and their general artistic ideology. For example, the section on Aaron Douglas discusses his use of Art Deco typography and how Art Deco represents modernity and a faith in social progress, which corresponds perfectly with Douglas' vision for the future.

Throughout these sections I also feature tips and tricks inspired by each artist or group's work. These encourage the reader to try, for example, incorporating illustrated typography into their next layout, ala Mucha, or creating a set of parameters to abide by for their next project, similar to the tenets at Bauhaus.

I chose these artists in particular not only because their work encapsulates the idea of the merging of design and illustration, but also because of what their work represents for art in general. I believe that all of these artists' work have one thing in common: they honor the past while looking to the future, which is something I am encouraging the readers of this book to do.

Since everyone is stuck at their computers right now, I was able to trick four professional artists into speaking with me for about thirty minutes at a time: Angie Wang, Michael Wertz, Nick Stokes and Meg Hunt. I included different kinds of artists (not just strictly designers or illustrators), in order to bring a varied perspective to the subject, to contextualize the study in the contemporary art world, and to break up the longer essay sections.

Everyone was an absolute dream to talk to, I was so honored to talk to such talented and knowledgeable artists. And everyone had different things to say about the differences between graphic design and illustration, particularly within their own practice. Some admitted that they were not comfortable even trying the other field, because they felt that it might be too steep of a learning curve. Others acknowledged that they were already using elements of both graphic design and illustration to create their work. Everyone was in agreement however, that the idea of utilizing both tools had merit. The general consensus seemed to be: use whatever tools you have at your disposal in order to successfully create your project. They're ultimately two different tools of storytelling. It's just a matter of whether you need to use a pen or a paintbrush.

We also spoke about a student's choice of major, and how trying out new things is a part of school. I asked them what they would recommend to young artists about to enter art school, and this is where I heard potentially the best advice that I heard from these interviews. Regardless of which field of study you choose, your artistic voice will shine through. That is the thing to cultivate and investigate, and experiment with. Use all the tools in your toolkit to enrich that personal voice and you will thrive as an artist.

Look, I don't know if anyone will be persuaded by this book. But I feel like I've made a pretty good case for trying out merging design and illustration by: showing inspiration from others who have successfully done it before. By addressing preconceptions, specifically showing that design and illustration can live outside the boundaries of what they are considered to be today By breaking down the barrier of entry, showing easy exercises to incorporate into one's work. And by restarting the conversation with professional artists and amongst ourselves. I've talked to many people about this project and everyone was interested in discussing the topic at the very least.

Apart from the artists I focused on, my influences for this project were books like Understanding Comics, where Scott McCloud incorporates cartoonish characters without talking down to the audience or dumbing down his content. He also talks about Art History in a way that is funny and easily digestible for younger readers, which is something I aspire to.

In a way, I was influenced by art history books I have read throughout college so that I could do the exact opposite. I understand the notion to keep the design of these books as minimal as possible in order to highlight the art displayed, but that just wasn't in keeping with the narrative I was trying to portray. I wanted to take a step away from those books, and make something a little more fun to look at, while still honoring the work of the artists.

I was also influenced by the artists that I interviewed. Ironically, I struggled a lot with this project with where to place my illustrations and what stylistic genre to place it in. When I was stuck on what to do, I thought back to the advice given in those interviews: sketch out everything, step away from the computer, incorporate character. I also tried to follow my own advice: create rules, follow a grid, play with typography, but also use narrative

storytelling, and above all, let my artistic voice shine through. When I made this project, I really had to remove myself from social media because there was so much I wanted it to be and I kept trying to put the book in...one of two categories. But as you might have guessed, that actually goes against everything I'm trying to say in this book. When I first started school, I remember a goal of mine was to be less derivative and more independently creative, and I think I have accomplished that with this project.

Next for the project: I bought graphic artist guidebook.com domain so that I could put the book online. It's not all on there yet but I hope to put it up soon. I think that a website would not only create greater outreach, but also converts the book to a living document, and also could form the basis of community. There are also so many great graphic artists throughout history that I couldn't include because the book would be 600 pages long. But rest assured that I have essays prepped for Saul Bass, Emory Douglas, Ellen Lupton, Ethel Reed, the Beggarstaffs, etc. If you'd like to read them, too bad, they're not in the book. But! I could put them on a website. The website could also include a forum or discussion board to continue the conversation regarding the merging of these two genres, or a place to share work.

I hope that this book advocates for examining graphic art as less binary and more of a spectrum. I hope that younger artists realize that when they experiment with both of these fields, they are in fact taking their place in a long line of graphic artists. 54. What I'm trying to say with this project is that artists, especially young artists, shouldn't feel discouraged if they don't see their exact path laid out before them, in academia or even in the contemporary art world. I feel like getting through that initial barrier is the biggest challenge, and I hope that this project helps some people at least consider looking at things from a new perspective. If I learned one thing from all of this research

is that art changes and shifts, pushes away from the previous movement and then cycles back.

So please don't be scared to branch out and try new things. You are the next generation of artists, and you get to dictate what that means. This project was a lot of work, but I am hopeful that it will all be worth it if I can help someone like that little nerdy kid who began their art school journey an eon ago.

A new path is open. All that remains is to see who will walk it.

CREATIVE BRIEF

PROJECT VISION

The purpose of the book is convince artists to study aspects of both fields in order to improve their craft. The book includes essays about and work from artists who incorporated both Graphic Design and Illustration in their work, as well as interviews with professional artists regarding the subject. These interviews bring varied perspectives to the subject as well as contextualizing the study in the contemporary art world.

The main objective of the book is to help artists to identify the precedent for the merging of the two genres and how illustrators taking advice from designers (and vice versa) can help them elevate their individual practices. Ultimately, the goal is that the reader comes out the other side with a broader perspective and a richer understanding of their own artistic practice and the art of their colleagues.

AUDIENCE

The audience for this project is young artists entering college, or artists who have yet to decide on their artistic focus. It could also be artists like me, who feel stuck between the two worlds and want guidance or inspiration.

METHODS & MATERIALS

This book is created using Adobe Creative Suite, and printed digitally on specialty paper, then perfect-bound with a cardstock cover.

COMPARATIVE MEDIA

I would compare this book with other art history books, like Meggs' History of Design, or Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud.

MARKETPLACE APPLICATION

This book could easily enter the art world as a beginner's guide for students entering college. It could also become a website for a more direct connection to the community.

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