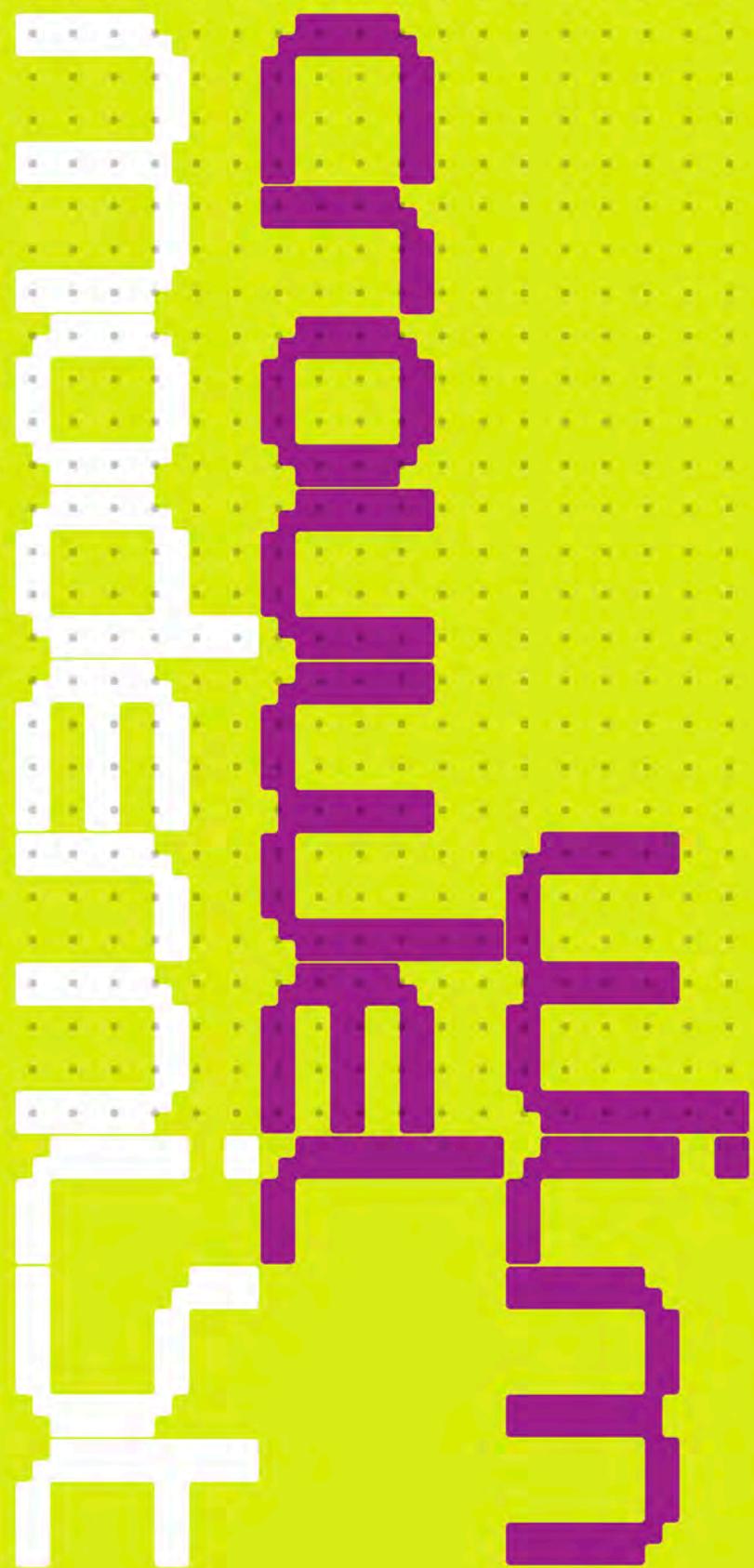


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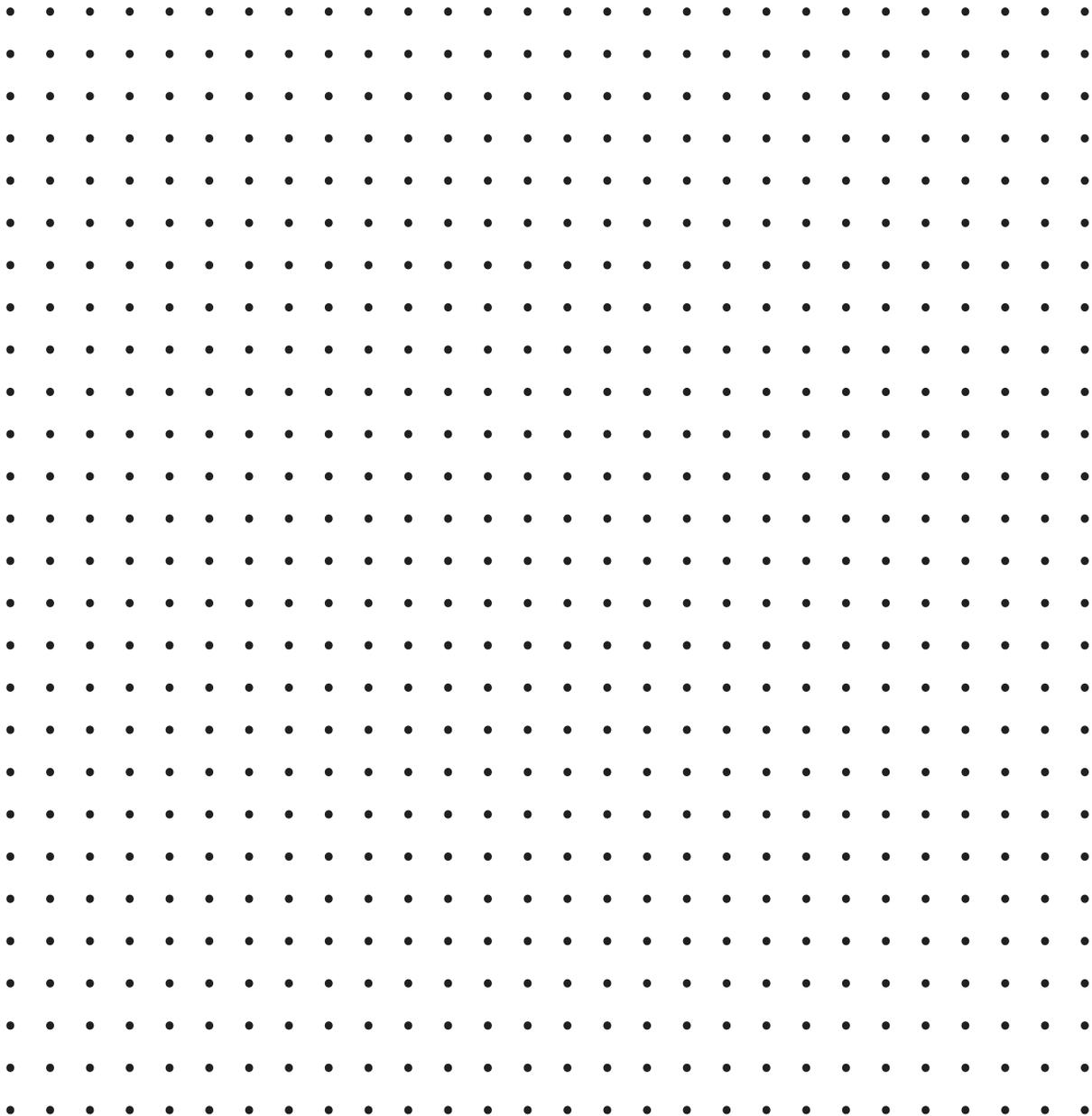
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Frederike Huygen

Lecturis Publishers



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_preface

This book is a monographic study of a designer: Wim Crouwel. The primary object is to give a broad picture of his work and activities. Although since the nineties Crouwel as a 'design hero' has been the subject of a veritable triumphal march in the international design community, this is not a hagiography. I wish to place it on record that Crouwel himself explicitly stated that he expected a critical book. He cooperated in every way but refrained from any attempt to influence the content, for which laudable attitude I am most grateful to him. His ability to put himself in perspective and his personal modesty have contributed greatly to the quality of the book.

_Terms such as 'design hero' and 'star designer' have been bandied about so much in the past few decades that they have lost what expressive power they once had. Nevertheless, Crouwel's reputation calls for a book that shows and clarifies his contribution to the profession, and provides information, backgrounds and context. His status as a hero is part of Crouwel's life and a subject of research. He is first and foremost

a graphic designer, but at the same time he is an interdisciplinary designer, a member of a team, and active in and for the whole of our culture.

_This book is – naturally enough – based on the earlier book in Dutch, *Wim Crouwel, mode en module* (1997), of which Hugues Boekraad and I were the authors. It is, however, a different book. Not only has Crouwel done a lot more work since 1997, but new insights about and further research into the profession have led to new texts and chapters. Thus the book now contains the first account of the genesis and development of the famous New Alphabet and there is extensive examination of Crouwel's sources, examples and inspirations. Crouwel has been shaped and influenced by pre-war modernism, Swiss designers and theorists, the ideas of the design school in Ulm, the British designer Anthony Froshaug and the American Buckminster Fuller, but also by computer art, all sorts of systems thinking, and the visual arts. Analyses of his work, his ideas and his opinions, together with the backgrounds to assignments and clients, make the picture we have of Crouwel both more complete and more interesting. Another change from the 1997 book is the manner of presentation: no longer is Crouwel's work shown in a purely chronological order but in theme-based clusters and groups. In particular his museum work (which accounts for the greater part of his oeuvre between 1956 and 1985) called for a more intensive treatment and more expansive presentation. Together with graphic designer Lex Reitsma an attempt has been made to link the visual information to the texts more clearly, and to create an attractive and intriguing picture.

The book is arranged on a thematic/chronological basis in order to bring out the various aspects and genres of Crouwel's work in their specific context. Chapter one introduces him as the man of modernity and modernism. This is followed by a biography in photographs and an account of his first job as a designer of stands and exhibitions during the post-war period of recovery and reconstruction. In 1956 graphic design gained the upper hand in his career, with commissions from the world of culture and his growing interest in Swiss typography and systems. Next comes the establishment of the Total Design agency in 1963, and its ideals and commissions. Chapter six looks at his work for the Stedelijk Museum against the background of museum policy and Crouwel's personal interpretation of art. A separate chapter is devoted to the creation of the New Alphabet for computers and the pictorial essay of 1970 that Crouwel published in that context. Tracing the provenance of his illustrations gives a fascinating picture of his mindset and sources of inspiration, ranging from technology, science, patterns, systems, computer art, through architecture and nature to the visual arts. Next comes the second decade of Total Design, a period in which Crouwel acted chiefly as a manager and became the agency's figurehead, with all the consequences that this entailed. This is also where the criticism levelled at him and his work after 1972 is discussed. There was growing opposition to him from Jan van Toorn and younger designers, but book designers, typographers and public opinion also had reasons for rejecting his work and his opinions. In chapter nine Crouwel's

numerous appearances in the media and his views and theories are held up to the light and analysed. Chapter ten focuses on Crouwel as the director of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum (1985-93), in particular his role as a commissioner of design work; at the same time he again came to be a highly sought-after exhibition designer. The final chapter charts Crouwel's popularity abroad since the nineties and looks for explanations for it; there is a concluding evaluation in which the term modernism is problematized.

Through my work on the earlier book, and because I spent several years as a curator under Crouwel, I know him well, though in fact anyone in Holland who has even the slightest connection with design is bound to come across him sooner or later. My own career as a design historian and Crouwel's as a designer overlap. Total Design was already designing printed matter for Boijmans Van Beuningen before Crouwel became its director, so it was a place I visited with some frequency. At the start of the eighties both were institutions you looked up to: the museum was under highly hierarchical and authoritarian leadership and the design agency represented a chic and a level of expertise that one approached with respect. Even physically entering TD was intimidating: you first had to pass through a long corridor, then up a flight of stairs to the reception desk to announce yourself before you gained access to the Valhalla of good taste. Even so, innovations and changes were breaking through everywhere and starting to undermine the established order. Design collectives

01 wim crouwel: modish, modern and modernist

This monograph's predecessor appeared under the title *Wim Crouwel, mode en module*. This was a reference to the observation that, in his design work, Crouwel connected two systems and two temporalities: the seasonally changing colours of fashion and the timeless rationality of engineers.¹ In spite of the many pronouncements in which he argued the case for enduring beauty and sided with the engineers, as a designer Crouwel proved very much a man sensitive to transient and modish phenomena. It was not that he bestrode his time: on the contrary, he stood with both feet planted firmly in his time and its actuality.

The ultimate evidence of this spirit is the sixties-era shot of Crouwel dressed in a futuristic suit and 'wearable objects' by Alice Edeling. Thanks in part to its prominent placing at the entrance to Crouwel's great retrospective in 2011, this photograph was to become an iconic image. Here we see Crouwel as the ultramodern man with a love of both technology and modern jewellery, an exponent of the futurism of 1969. Two years earlier he had launched his computer

alphabet, and he was already working on the Dutch pavilion for the World's Fair in Japan. With its aluminium-coloured cladding and a space full of state-of-the-art audio-visual projections, the building seemed equally futuristic.

In another shot from the same series we see Crouwel positioned in front of a poster for the *Evoluon*, an exhibition building devoted to the latest developments in science and technology that had been open for only a few years.² Crouwel had designed the poster at his agency Total Design, using an existing futuristic font which also refers to hip pop art.³ The letters, which are built up of orange and pink dots, have extraordinary curves and openings, and because they are not all constructed in a consistent way the font is both 'technological' and light-hearted. There are two known versions of the poster, one orange and the other silver. Also interesting in this context is the fact that one of the fore-runners of the *Evoluon*, the NINT museum of science and technology (the initials stand for Nederlands Instituut voor Nijverheid en Techniek), had been completely revamped by Crouwel in the fifties.

However, these famous Crouwel photos are not portraits: they come from a fashion report in the magazine *Avenue* in which the designer had acted as a model. They are about the world of fashion, of trends, taste and glamour. Here Crouwel's aesthetic and functional durability, his design for the future, coincides with actuality. As it happened, ten years later the image of the confident and modern Crouwel was to abruptly turn into the opposite when he became the symbol of 'the new ugliness'.

¹ Hugues Boekraad in Huygen/
Boekraad 1997, p. 53.

² For the *Evoluon*, see Hendriks
2006.

³ Wim Crouwel, email 1 July 2014.





Paul Huf's portraits of Crouwel wearing a space silk suit and jewellery by Alice Edeling at Total Design, 1969. The photo was used for the poster of Crouwel's exhibition at the Design Museum London (left); Poster for the Evoluon, 1966, 73 x 55.



_ Art and abstract geometry

There is something else that is remarkable about the report in *Avenue*: the layout of the spreads. Crouwel appears twice on each: once in the foreground and once in the background. One of Huf's hallmarks was to place people in the space as set pieces. In this case the person of Crouwel is duplicated in a collage, though it is also possible that this was done by the magazine's designer. The effect is of Crouwel standing in front of his own portrait, as if the portrait (including explanatory text) is hanging in the background alongside the abstract painting on a bright white, museum-like wall. The painting, a work by the constructivist artist Joseph Ongenae, is a particularly prominent element of the composition of the page. As a result, Crouwel seems to be positioned firmly in the world of art with almost the status of a museum exhibit.

_The painting hung in Crouwel's room at TD. He knew Ongenae from the group of artists that had formed at the beginning of the fifties under the name Creatie (Creation). At that time Crouwel still had plans to make a career for himself as an artist, and he was strongly attracted to abstract art. Creatie's members stressed the flatness of a painting and aimed to achieve a new spatiality departing from purely formal properties such as colour and line, exploring means and elements.²⁰

_Crouwel arranged Creatie's first exhibition in 1953 and also made a floor-to-ceiling three-dimensional structure in Ongenae's studio. A few years later they both joined the Liga Nieuw Beelden (League of New Plastic Creation), a group of artists formed partly of Creatie

members whose goal was the synthesis of all art forms and which proclaimed itself the successor to De Stijl. Once again it was Crouwel who designed the printed matter and the exhibitions. Even so, at about this time he bid his painting easel farewell to devote himself to design: an impoverished existence as an underrated artist did not attract him.²¹ In subsequent discussions and debates he always argued for strict segregation between disciplines, particularly between art and design. As for him, he oriented himself on all art forms and kept abreast of developments in all of them. Although he must be regarded first and foremost as a graphic designer, there are equally good grounds for calling Crouwel an interdisciplinary designer.

_Crouwel's membership of groups like Creatie and Liga points to wide interests and the wish to be at the centre of current developments. To him the discussions that went on in these groups were fascinating and he absorbed it all like a sponge. The explorations of these constructivist artists in their efforts to give the geometric language of form new meaning and substance appealed to him, as did the relationship with architecture, the notion of creativity as a positive force, and the quest for an expression of his own time. Meanwhile he designed the first issue of the magazine *Structure* that emanated from the group, and the booklet *Mondrian or Miro*, both of which appeared in 1958. While the booklet brought the legacy of concrete art up to date, the magazine looked at the relationship between art, nature, science and mathematics. This was also down to the contributions by painter and graphic designer

²⁰ Fritz-Jobse 1988 and 2005.

²¹ Talk 'The Frontiers of Experience', AGI 1 September 2005, WC/SMA archive.



Magazine *Structure* (previously *One*) 1958, 24 x 18.2.



Poster XII. Triennale Olanda, 1960, 80 x 80, Dutch Ministry of Education, Arts & Sciences, with a drawing by Ap Sok inspired by the Delta Works. 'I wanted to work that Dutch element into the letters with the surface of the water, the reflection on the water ... the thickness of the lines also had to relate to that drawing ... It is fairly complicated.' [Broos 2003, p. 64]; poster *Liga Nieuw Beelden* 1957 (100 x 70); book *Mondrian or Miro* 1958 (25 x 19).







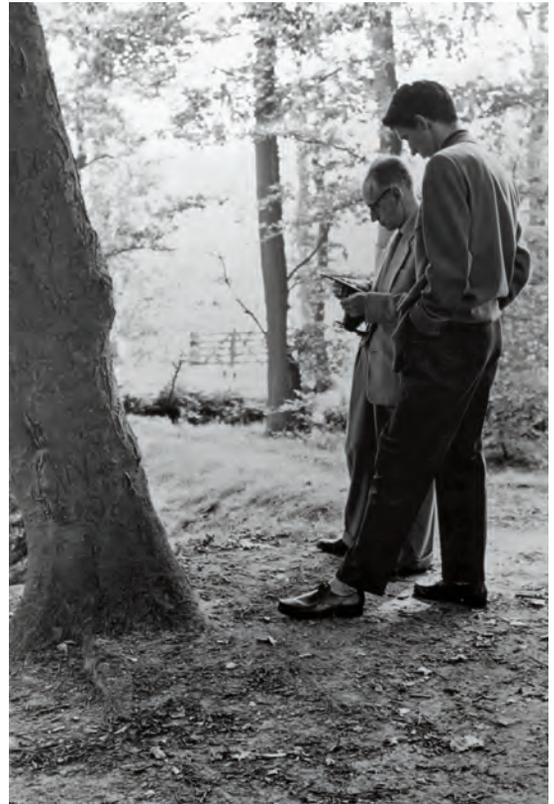






Wim Crowwel (second from right) was born in Groningen in 1928 as Willem Hendrik, though the official who registered the birth entered his first name as Wilm. His grandfather had been a sales representative but his father Jacobus Hendrik (front left), who had had to start work at a young age, became a chemigrapher and block-maker. Wim enjoyed going with him to the factory drawing office. His father was active in the union but also found time for painting and photography. His mother, Anganeta Hilkea Wallerstein (right), had come to Groningen in the nineteen-twenties from just across

the border in Germany. In Groningen she found work in domestic service. She was a neat and tidy woman and extremely precise, but the children, Wim, Henk and Annie, had a liberal upbringing and religion played little part in it.





On the way to his grandparents, in the house of artist Job Hansen, Crouwel saw brightly coloured paintings on the walls and strange lamps: plates of glass hanging in the space with a lamp bulb in between them. His interest was also aroused by folders with reproductions of art and pictures of modern architecture; these had been put together 'for the aesthetic edification of the more mature young person'. He sought out the Groningen artistic community, followed developments at De Mangelgang, a gallery in the city, and became fascinated by modern interiors. He read all the interior design magazines in the library and in that way discovered the work of interior architect Paul Bromberg and the Goed Wonen (Good Living)

foundation, which promoted modern interior design after the Second World War. At home he made cardboard replicas of the new furniture, thus rebelling against the bourgeois interior in the parental home.

The photographs give an idea of Crouwel's own domain: his bedroom. At one end his bed was completed by a white block; glass shelves hung on the yellow wall.

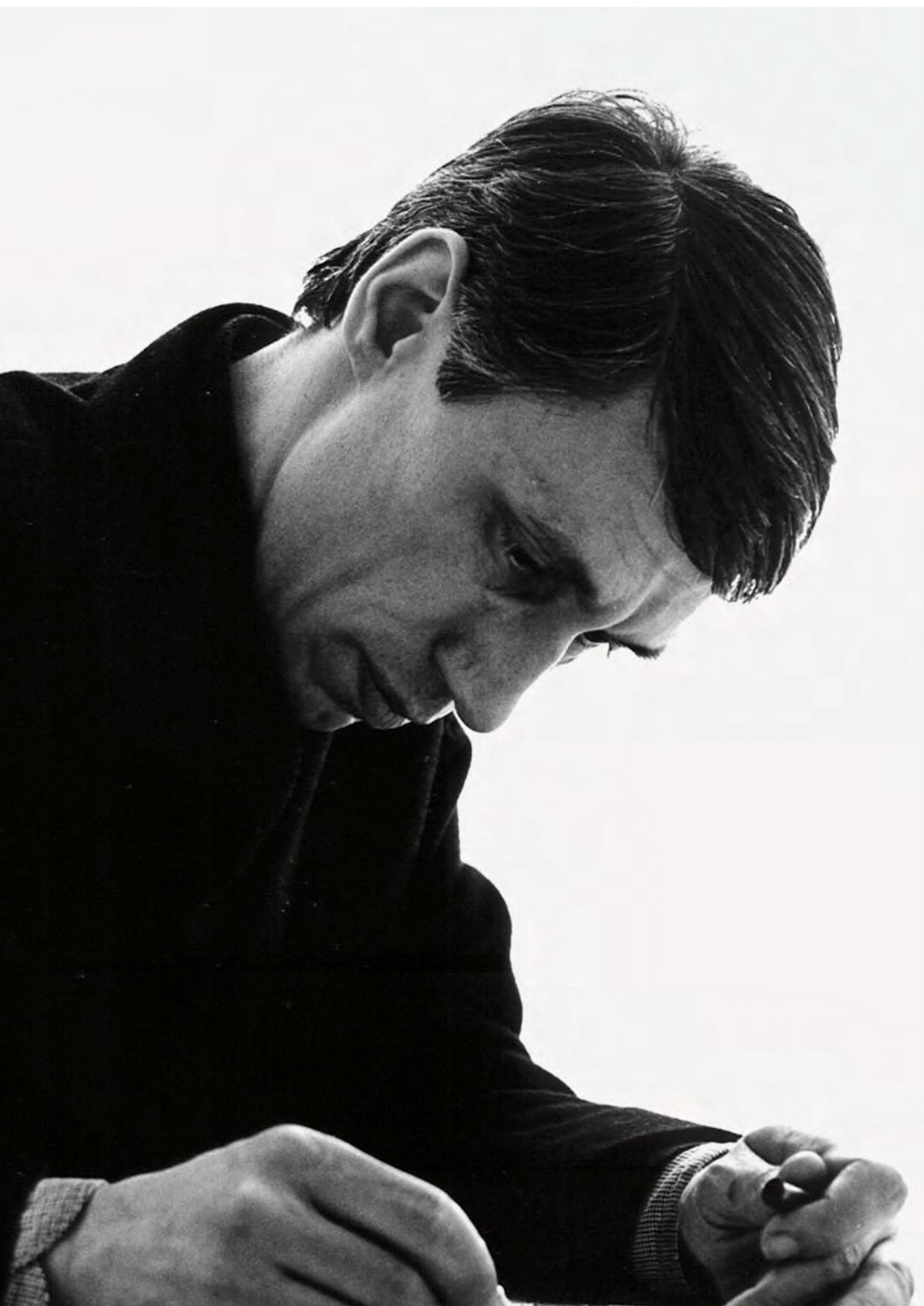
He built a small cupboard to fit in a niche, and painted a motto by the poet, linguist and socialist Garnt Stuiveling on one of the walls: 'daar is geen einde, daar is geen begin, het eeuwig zijnde is wisseling' (there is no end, there is no beginning, the eternal being is change).





Crouwel at the Total Design agency, circa 1965. His room was furnished with Thonet chairs and a carpet in two shades of red.







Crouwel in the Stedelijk with Wil Sandberg and in 1979 during the work on his own retrospective.

stedelijk museum
amsterdam

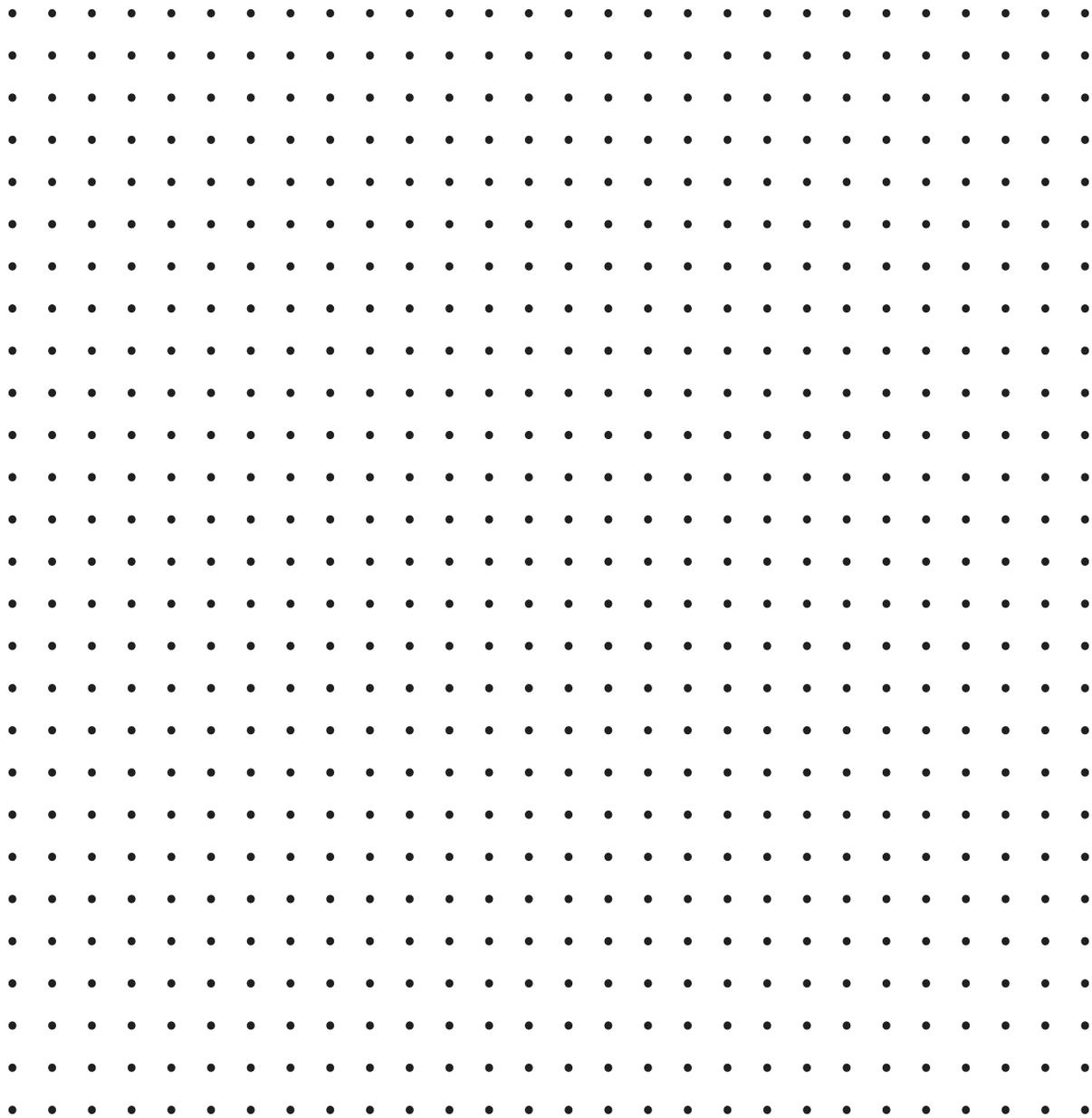


hedendaagse kunst
art contemporain
contemporary art
kunst der gegenwart





Crouwel in London during his retrospective in the London Design Museum, 2011, against a background of Crouwel wallpaper and with a Crouwel rug at his feet.



When in 1952 Wim Crouwel embarked on his career with the Enderberg firm, which specialized in building exhibitions and trade fair stands, it was his first job. He had an introduction there from Dick Eiffers, who designed many stands in addition to his graphic work and non-commissioned work. Although N.P. Enderberg employed his own draughtsmen and display artists to translate clients' wishes into reality, it seemed to Eiffers convenient to have a designer from his own circle stationed there. Crouwel was still inexperienced and, except in magazines, had not seen much. His time at Enderberg's (till 1956) became something of an apprenticeship in the course of which he learnt the tricks of the trade and picked up a wealth of useful experience. 'Enderberg's was a very well-equipped operation where everything you thought up could be made and tried out, besides which making and fitting out stands and exhibitions, often with limited time available, called for fast problem-solving and execution.'¹ Crouwel proved well up to the task and Enderberg soon let him do his own thing. Indeed, confidence in him was so strong that

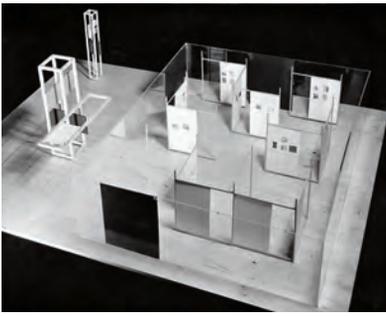
Niels Enderberg gave his young designer his full support. So it was that with a completely straight face he defended the interior design for the headquarters of the Royal Netherlands Automobile Club (KNAC), for which Crouwel had come up with the idea of a pink ceiling ...

__Enderberg's high quality standards were a major factor in shaping Crouwel's career. Not only did the firm have a knack for attracting and keeping interesting clients, many architects found their way to Enderberg when it came to executive work or model making. Crouwel was able to broaden his network and experience. In the fifties that led to such contracts as the refitting of the exhibition rooms at the Werkspoor museum and those of the Netherlands Institute of Industry and Technology (NINT).² These projects, installations dealing with complex and technical subjects, subsequently proved to be a foretaste of the large national shows in which Crouwel was to be involved.

__The exhibition *Alle Hens aan Dek* (All Hands on Deck) of 1952 played a key role in Crouwel's career. Devised largely as a propaganda exercise, it was intended to ensure that the Marshall Aid provided by the United States to help the Dutch economy in the post-war recovery was being used as effectively as possible. To this end two barges, the *Mawa* and the *Maria*, were converted to carry exhibitions on deck and a cinema in the hold. The floating exhibition embarked on its tour all over the Netherlands on 16 December. The national Productivity Commission (Commissie Opvoering Productiviteit, COP) literally took the idea of increasing productivity to the people. Enderberg was asked to put the

¹
Interview with Crouwel,
15 April 1992.

²
The revamping of the NINT
(with separate rooms for
metals, chemicals and earth-
enware) took from 1955 to
the opening in 1957. It was
intended as a public education
facility to help young people
choose a career. Director W.
Heldoorn said that Crouwel's
rooms stood out for their
colour schemes and rhythm.



Model and element for an open-air travelling exhibition about Rembrandt, 1956; Exhibition *Alle hens aan dek* (All Hands on Deck), 1952, on a barge, designed with Ernst Scheidegger and Gérard Ifert.



achieved since 1945 was celebrated, while the future was welcomed with joy and optimism. Like the *Festival of Britain* (1951), these shows acted to pep up general morale. In most cases their organization was in the hands of a coordinator.

_Crouwel's first such exhibition was *De Rijn in de RAI*, with which Amsterdam celebrated the completion of the Amsterdam-Rhine canal. A collection of stands was the vehicle by which towns, cities, ports and companies dotted along the Rhine vied for attention. The stand for the Kali Import Maatschappij, designed by Crouwel, highlighted the importance of the Rhine as the supply route for potassium fertilizers from various areas of production. Here he made the acquaintance of Gerrit Rietveld and Swiss designer Karl Gerstner, who had designed stands for the cities of Utrecht and Basle respectively.

_ *Etappe 1945-1955* (Stage 1945-1955) in the city of Den Bosch became Crouwel's second participation in a grandly conceived event. The fair celebrated a decade of post-war recovery with an exhibition and flower show, coupling them with such activities as balloon trips and a rally. Entirely in the spirit of post-war reconstruction, the city's burgomaster and cabinet declared it their aim 'to advance to a higher plane the spirit of cohesion and sense of civic pride, bolstered by the love of their own city'.¹⁸ More prosaically, this was an exercise in emphasizing what had been achieved since the liberation, focusing attention on the city's importance as the provincial capital, and hoping that companies would move there: in short, it was city marketing.¹⁹

¹⁸
_ *Het Huisgezin*, cutting, n.d.

¹⁹
_ *Oost Brabant and Het Huisgezin*, cuttings, Den Bosch city archives.

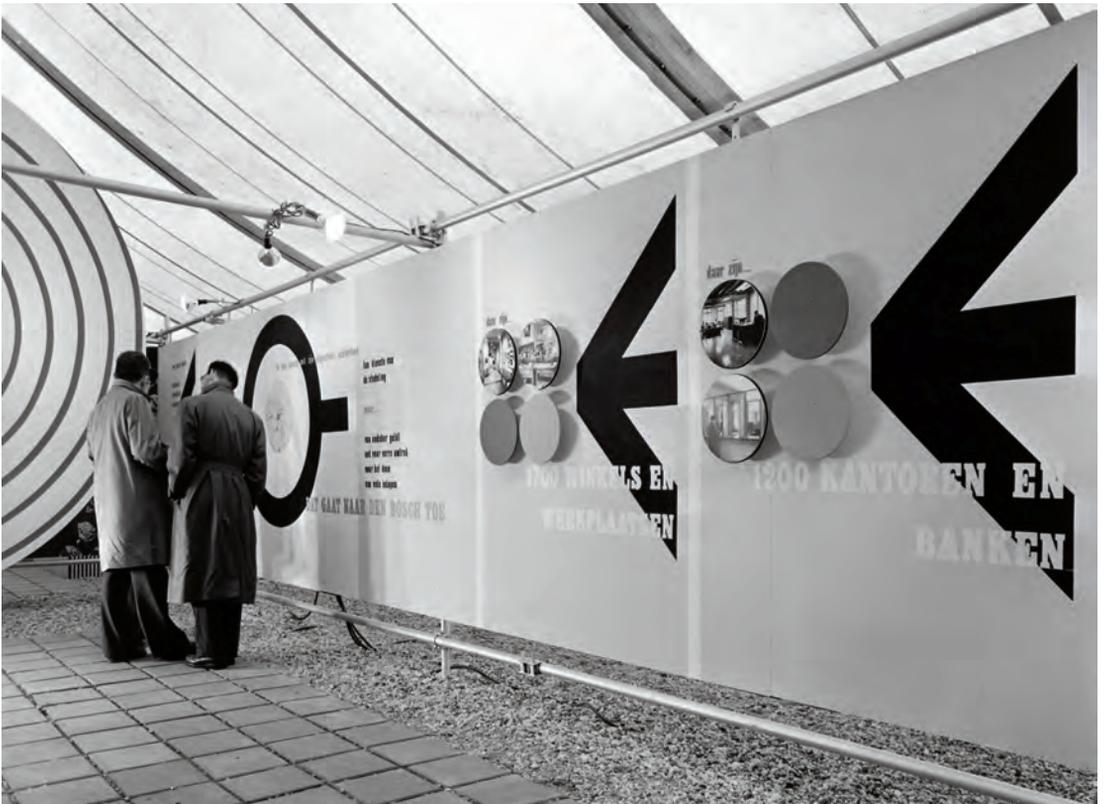
²⁰
_ *Oost Brabant*, 18 March 1955.

_ The director of *Etappe* was Toon Noyons, whose previous experience had been in flower parades. Crouwel was responsible for the exhibition, which he arranged with the help of students from the art school in Den Bosch where he taught. The commission came through the school's director, who had been an adviser to the city council. *Etappe* consisted of a variety of elements: an exhibition about the city (Crouwel), a model of Den Bosch in the year 1975 plus a water organ and flower show, and an Oriental garden by Noyons. For the texts Crouwel brought in writer Jan Elburg. Artists Eppo Doeve and Marius de Leeuw each created a mural painting and there were sculptures by Ossip Zadkine and Wessel Couzijn.

_ Although *Etappe* had little national impact, it was important for Crouwel. Here he was able to work out the concept of the exhibition on his own – and with a great deal of freedom. One local newspaper wrote: 'At twenty-six, Crouwel is still a young artist. However, once he starts telling you about his ideas and designs it soon becomes apparent that even though he aims to abandon anything resembling routine when it comes to exhibition design, his original ideas are very much created with both feet planted firmly on the ground.'²⁰ In the meantime, through Dick Elffers, the 'promising youngster' had been asked to help design two small pavilions for the next exhibition, *E55* in Rotterdam.

_ The National Energy Exhibition *E55* was once again largely about post-war recovery. Organization was in the hands of Jac. Kleiboer and Jaap Bakema. Here it was entertainment and the fascination for technology and progress





garden exhibition called 'The Woman's Palace', and an amusement park. Once again this was a matter of reaffirming the city's confidence in itself and the future, and its ability to attract industry and employment. Crouwel designed the provincial pavilion with a large air-supported hemispherical dome: 'Messrs Crouwel and Strijbosch, the designers of this structure ... have given us an assurance that venturing into this sphere is completely safe. Plaster material is to hand to stop any leaks and even in the event of a hole appearing it will still take three-quarters of an hour before the marquee collapses...'²⁴ A photo of a model is all that survives of this pavilion, but it is enough to show that Crouwel had given much thought to how the public would experience it. Visitors passed through an open gallery or arcade into a dark tunnel which opened into the bright yellow dome. The dome itself had been imperfectly stitched so that it was pointed at the top, and from the outside it looked like an enormous yellow lemon.

These great exhibitions with their mix of edification and entertainment were all connected with the Netherlands' recovery after the Second World War, and with the government's energetic policy for getting industrialization under way. Everything had to do with progress, optimism, growth, prosperity and hope for the future. After the war, in times of scarcity, there was a great hunger for diversion and intellectual nourishment – and the public came in droves.²⁵ For the architects and artists enthused with the idea of a new society by their experience in the resistance, playing a part in shaping a new culture was a live issue. The notion of integrating

the arts was raised by international architecture conferences, the design association GKf and the artists of the Liga Nieuw Beelden (League of New Plastic Creation). For example, the architect Charles Karsten, an active member of the Liga, wrote with reference to *E55*: 'However, that here and there the realization is beginning to penetrate that life is shaped neither by science or art nor by trade or industry by themselves, but that only these human activities working in concert can arrive at a true union; that, to my mind, is for us the great lesson to be drawn from this exhibition.'²⁶ Most journals endorsed this optimism and were generally uncritical.

Although Crouwel was a member of the Liga Nieuw Beelden, he did not express an opinion about the integration of the arts. He did, however, enjoy collaborating and exchanging ideas. His network was expanding, his prestige and reputation were growing, and he was rapidly gaining experience in organizing things. The exhibitions challenged him artistically to translate abstractions and information into images and forms, while their ephemeral nature gave him the room to experiment with different narrative techniques.

Osaka World Expo 1970

In 1970 the World Fair in Osaka Japan continued the tradition of involving architects, artists and designers in the Dutch entry. Former prime minister and minister of education Jo Cals was in charge and put together a team consisting of architect Jaap Bakema, film-maker Jan Vrijman,

²⁴

'Tilburg Hart van Brabant, 150 jaar stadsrechten', *De Tijd*, 18 July 1959; the artistic director was Andries Freriks, a former architect with Netherlands Railways.

²⁵

Visitor numbers: *Ahoy'* 1.5 million; *E55* 3 million; *Etappe 45-55* 28,000, *Het Atoom* 724,000, *Hart van Brabant* approx. 245,000. (Figures from literature and reports from the organizations as held in city archives.)

²⁶

Karsten 1955, p. 146.



The Osaka team: from the left, J. Cals, hostesses Thea de Blécourt, Lilian Goncalves-Ho Kan Yu, Crouwel, Ursula de Boer, Carel Weeber.



The Dutch pavilion at the 1970 World Fair in Osaka and an interior, designed by Jaap Bakema and Carel Weeber; preliminary sketch for stamp and the stamp as issued on the occasion of Osaka 1970 (21.5 x 28, 2.5 x 3.6).



Exhibition *Karl Gerstner*, 1964,
at De Jong.





Two Stedelijk Museum exhibitions on textiles: one designed by the museum staff, 1960, and Jack Lenor Larsen, 1967, designed by Larsen.

vase full of catkins acted as props. The museum staff were less inclined to stand back, and as a result their design looks more in the tradition of a period room.

In 1967 textile artist Jack Lenor Larsen had a different way of filling a number of rooms with his own work. Photographs show an environment in which the visitor wandered through a landscape of bedsheet-sized swatches. These hung down from various heights in rows that had been suspended in a variety of ways, all mixed up and hanging freely in the space. The concept was based on an interaction between space and material instead of a grid or some other imposed order. Larsen's design was more evocative.

In the exhibition of AGI members' work (1962) and his own, Crouwel gave the design a more spatial character. In both cases, using a range of elements – partitions, panels and display cases – a total space, or a collection of spaces, was structured and rhythmicized. What emerged was a cadence of walking and looking, of overview and detail, horizontals and verticals. In the AGI exhibition Crouwel succeeded in breaking

through the somewhat dull, box-like character of the new wing, first dividing the area up with partitions and long, heavy wooden table display cases, and then, to identify the themes, adding horizontal signs that hung from the ceiling on thin wires. The works were grouped according to the hours of the day – so that film posters, for example, hung in the evening section. The exhibition stood out for its powerful spatial arrangement and soberness.

The series of designs for the Stedelijk was crowned by Crouwel's own exhibition of 1979. Order, restraint and spatial insight produced a solidly structured whole that was at once highly eloquent, subtle and sophisticated. A series of cabinets and the corner room on the ground floor presented a carefully planned sequence, starting with a visualization of Crouwel's design principles by reference to quotations from publications. The next theme was experimentation and non-commissioned work, including calendar pages, the New Alphabet and the posters *Vormgevers* (Designers) and *Visuele communicatie*. After that came Crouwel's printed matter for the



AGI exhibition in the Stedelijk, 1962, by Crouwel.



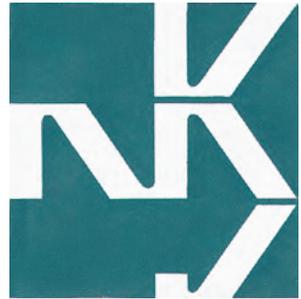
Crouwel's own exhibition in 1979
in the Stedelijk Museum.

Poster *Het affiche* (The Poster), 1955 (39 x 49); New Year's card, Emy and Wim Crouwel, 1955 (5 x 14.5); lettering on a poster for Rik Wouters, 1960.



VDK Enkele feiten (Some Facts), brochure, 1956 (23 x 16), J. van de Kieft, Office for internal company reorganization. Van de Kieft was one of Crouwel's earliest clients. The V, D and K are pulled apart and disassembled into a few basic elements. According to Crouwel, the K was still very painterly: 'When I stopped painting, the lines hardened and it really became pure construction.' [Broos 2003, p. 28]; detail from type specimen leaflet for the

Volta, W. C. den Ouden printers, circa 1958; logo for NKS Nederlandse Kunst Stichting (Netherlands Art Foundation), circa 1955: 'It was an attempt to make a logo like a trademark, by connecting forms together into a continuous figure. Here, the letters are made from one and the same element, which is reversed, repeated, moved over and joined together.' [Broos 2003, p. 24]



03

1956–1964: the van abbe museum and the nederlandse kunst stichting

In the posters that Crouwel did for the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven and the Nederlandse Kunst Stichting (Netherlands Art Foundation) between 1956 and 1963, the leading role was given to two elements: lettering and colour. These are purely graphic posters, one of the most striking features of which is that for each artist Crouwel created an image with letters. Sometimes the inspiration for this came from the artist's work, examples being the black elements in the paintings of Léger, Fernhout's touches of the brush, and the contrasts in the tapestries of Lurçat. At other times his inspiration would come from who knows where.

In the first posters, *NA* (Nieuwe aanwinsten, New Acquisitions) and *50* (Fifty Years of Austrian Art), Crouwel used a logo-like sign. He took particular pleasure in constructing letters out of elements, like an architect or industrial designer, and drew them all by hand.¹ He would begin with a small sketch and then draw it full size. In these letters there are occasionally conspicuous square or rectangular counters (see *Fugare, Trends in Contemporary Dutch Art*).

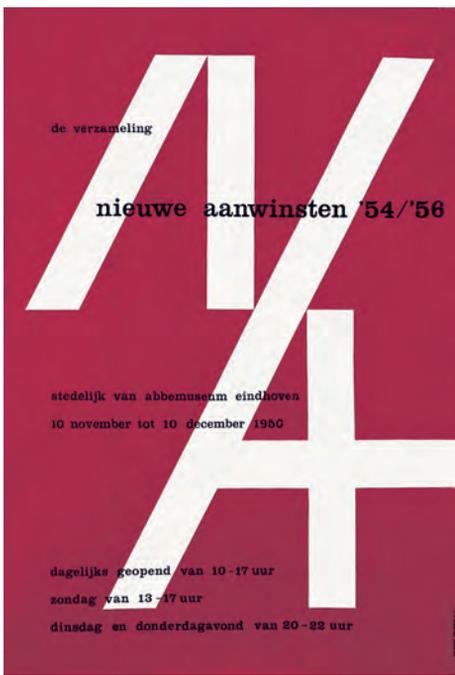
The characters are used to effect, but they also have a compositional role. Often they span the full width of the surface, like a horizon. The coloured areas act as background, but are sometimes divided into horizontal bands. However, the central axis is not a starting point: the texts are off centre. On occasion the bands are vertical (e.g. *Bazaine, Nieuwe Nederlandse kerken*). Sometimes we have to take the horizon at face value, as in the case of Fernhout, who painted abstract landscapes, or in *Beelden in het heden* (Sculpture in the Present), where the word-images stand in the space like sculptures and the bands produce a suggestion of depth.

In the compositions of the posters there is quite a prominent role for the subtexts: information about the museum is positioned in lines or blocks on the surface, often in a different colour. Supporting information is usually set in Gill, partly because at that time the printers, Lecturis, had no other sans serifs. However, in the early sixties this intuitive shifting around of texts until they looked good was something that Crouwel began to reject in favour of a more systematic and reasoned approach. He became disaffected with the whole craft aspect. Despite this, the hand-made words remain the most interesting feature. On the posters with 'ordinary' texts something else has to happen to achieve visual tension. The Steinert poster, for example, derives its effect from setting the text compactly all together. The tendency towards compression and compactness – everything packed in tightly up against the edge – always contrasts with the wider space in which the words and lines swim free. There is at once

¹ Broos 2003.



Posters for group exhibitions
Couzijn, Lataster, 1960, *Beelden in het heden* (Sculpture in the Present), 1961, *Wagemaker, Wolvecamp, Diederens, Stekelburg*, 1961, *Hussem, Bouthoorn*, 1961, silk-screen, 88 x 60.



Poster *Nieuwe aanwinsten '54/'56* (New Acquisitions), 1956, silk-screen, 99 x 69. The basic elements are a large N, an A and a plus sign. Poster *Vijftig jaar Oostenrijkse kunst* (Fifty Years of Austrian Art), 1956, silk-screen, 88 x 60. The large form in the middle stands for the number 50, three abstract forms joined together in three different colours. Later, Crowell regretted having put the text bottom right in italics: 'It falls apart. It is badly spaced ... It had nothing to do with the colours of Austria. It was just for my own pleasure.' [Broos 2003, p. 32] On the left a catalogue cover with the Van Abbe Museum sign.

stedelijk
van abmuseum
eindhoven

fernand leger

dagelijks geopend
van 10-17 uur
zondag
van 13-17 uur
dinsdag- en
donderdagavond
van 20-22 uur

2 februari tot
10 maart 1957

www.stedelijk.nl

Poster *Fernand Léger* 1957, silk-screen, 88 x 60. Léger is linked to the Acquisitions poster by the same diagonals. The black lines refer to Léger's paintings and Crowell interpreted these typographically. 'It is purely constructed. An "R" like this is a pure circle, with no

optical corrections ... It had to be a kind of continuous figure, like a signature. In addition, the rhythm of the parts is important. But why the details came to be the way they are, I cannot say.' [Broos 2003, p. 34]

stedelijk van abbemuseum eindhoven

dagelijks geopend
van 10-17 uur
zon- en feestdagen
van 13-17 uur
dinsdag - en
donderdagavond
van 20-22 uur

hiroshima

panelen van iri maruki en toshiko akamatsu

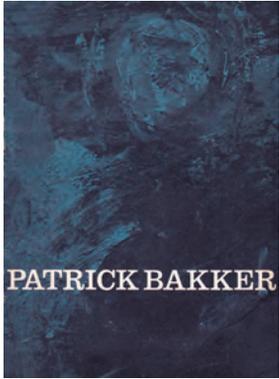
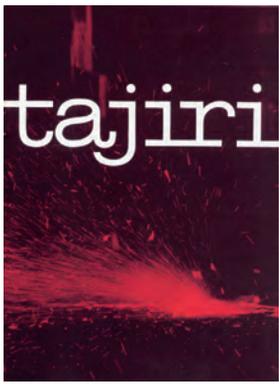
30 maart tot
15 april 1957

van crouvel, the long n. p. 11

Poster *Hiroshima*, 1957, silk-screen, 88 x 60. The exhibition was about drawings relating to the bombing of Hiroshima, which is why Crouvel chose bright red, to mimic Japanese lacquer, and combined it with the heavy black word. The letter was a constructed

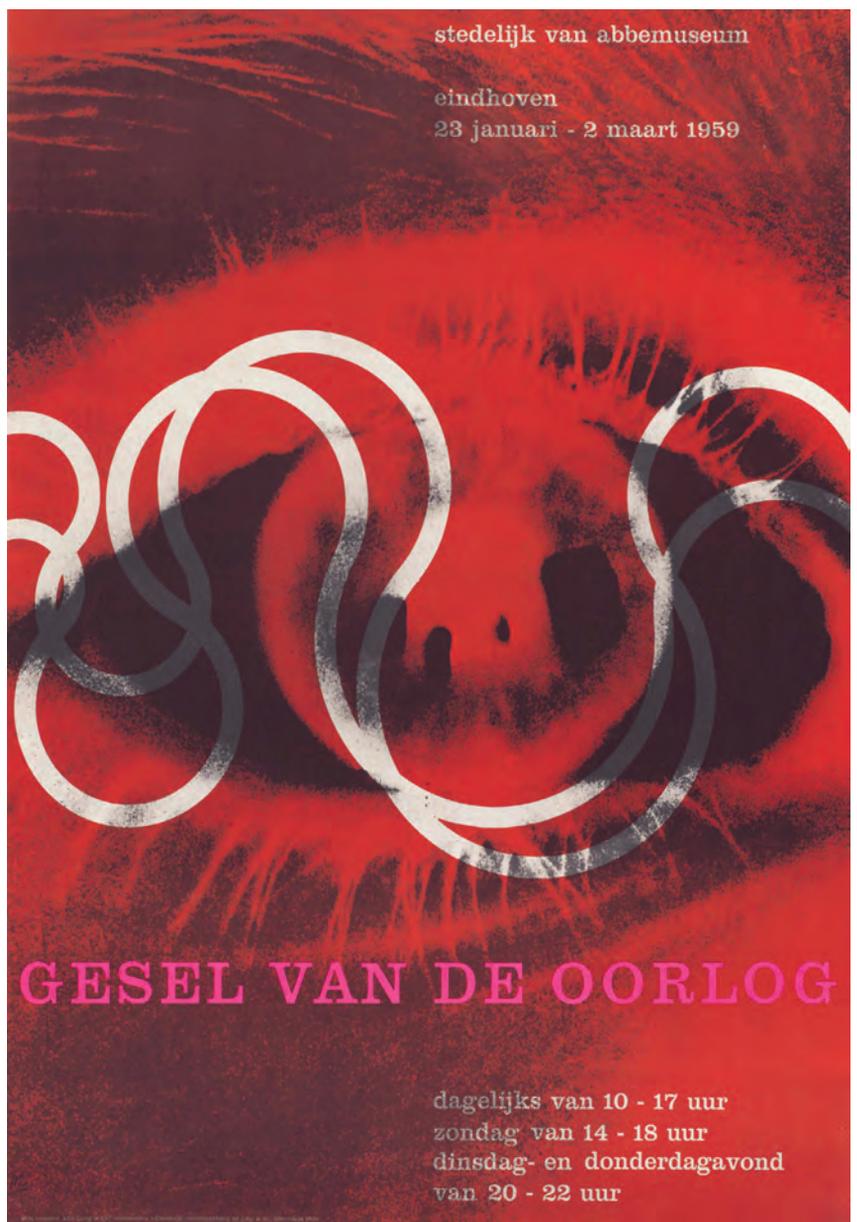
condensed grotesque departing from the thin white lines in between them. This was derived from Swiss designers such as Armin Hofmann. 'I wanted a word image that was itself very heavy and threatening. I had a sort of monolith in my head, in which the white has as humble

a role as possible, which is why I chose this form, with those scorched chimneys rising up out of it.' [Broos 2003, p. 40] Again it was constructed out of rectangular and round forms.



Catalogues *Tajiri*, 1959, *Patrick Bakker*, 1958, *Karel Appel*, 1961, *Jonge kunst uit de collectie Dotremont* (Young Art from the Dotremont Collection), 1960, *De verzameling* (The Collection), 1958, *Eindhoven verzamelt...*, 1960.





Poster and catalogue *Gesel van de oorlog* (The Scourge of War), 1958, for the NKS.

saura

SAURA

van
abbemuseum
eindhoven

van 27 april tot 10 juni 1963

dagelijks geopend van 10-17 uur
zondag van 14-18 uur
dinsdag- en donderdagavond van 20-22 uur

Poster and catalogue *Saura*, 1963.

'I used the word 'SAURA' twice, putting the negative and the positive on top of each other. In the one underneath, I took the final 'A' and moved it to the left, in front of the 'S', then shifted the letters over in respect to the 'SAURA' on top. A negative was made of the letters, two films that I shifted on top of one another, and that was it. I kept shifting the two words, for as long as it took to make it work.'

[Broos 2003, p. 68]



van abbemuseum eindhoven

edgar fernhout

van 9 maart tot 8 april 1963

dagelijks geopend van 10-17 uur
zondag van 14-18 uur
dinsdag- en
donderdagavond van 20-22 uur



Poster and catalogue *Edgar Fernhout*, 1963. 'The form is inspired by the abstract landscapes that Edgar Fernhout was making when I first met him. They were built up with short brushstrokes in beautiful structures. There is a clear division in four sections, all with elements of the same height, because of Fernhout's landscapes, I also introduced a horizon.' [Broos 2003, p. 66]

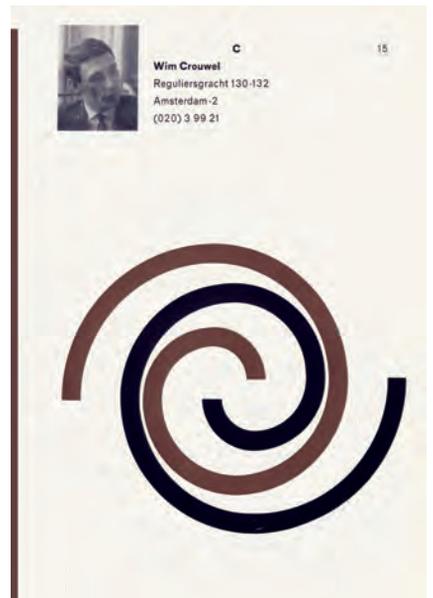


Booklet for IBM, circa 1960 (28 x 21.8),
Crouwel's card as a GKF-member, 1961,
(17 x 12).



Loopt uw administratie u uit de hand?

IBM service bureaux
staan
tot
uw dienst!
met
een
uniforme
netto loon
administratie.



 **Wim Crouwel**
Reguliersgracht 130-132
Amsterdam-2
(020) 3 99 21

c

15

_04 _constructivist: liga, switzerland and ulm

The lyricism that Crouwel displayed in the catalogue *Beelden in het heden* (1959) for the Liga Nieuw Beelden seemed a one-off outburst of 'ecstatic inspiration'. At this time his work was tending more in quite the opposite direction of the severely geometric idiom. Both forms of abstraction were represented at this exhibition of sculpture, but the museums had a great preference for the lyrical variety. Sandberg in particular showed himself to be a passionate advocate of individual expression and vitalist art.¹ His deputy director Hans Jaffé, who in his introduction defined art in terms of opposing currents, was more appreciative of Apollonian art and in 1956 had taken his doctorate on De Stijl. In the early fifties, Crouwel's own paintings with their organic formal idiom would have been better described as Dionysiac.

Crouwel was emerging as an exhibition and graphic designer with broad interests. This coincided both with the interdisciplinary character of the major events on which he collaborated and with the ideals of the Liga, which aimed for a synthesis of the arts and positioned itself as the

heir to De Stijl.² That said, it was the Swiss designers that acted as Crouwel's catalyst. Early in the decade he had met Gérard Ifert and Ernst Scheidegger, who had not only introduced him to Akzidenz Grotesk but also, more particularly, impressed him with their grandiose and no-nonsense approach to exhibition design. 'I could see these people working on the exhibition on the ships and that was an eye-opener – their ideas were completely new. Their use of photography on such a large scale was impressive. The size of that gesture was something I had really only ever seen in the Cassandre posters hanging on the walls at art school in Groningen', he said.

Much later he was to write: 'For us it was a real discovery to see how one could make a subtle, functional, and well structured typography with only one typeface.'³ He had already met Gerstner in 1952 at *De Rijn in de RAI* where each had designed a stand. 'At *De Rijn*, Rietveld's stand had been frivolous compared with what the Swiss were doing', he recalled. 'He was developing in parallel with me, except that I always had a sense that he was a step ahead of me. His systematic way of working and his lucid and lively writing on typography and type were a guiding influence on the path I was seeking for myself.'⁴

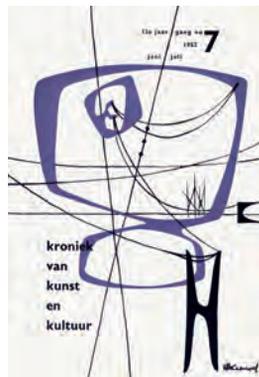
Crouwel's 'mentor' Dick Elffers had already distanced himself from *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) in the thirties, and had started working in an expressionist style. In the early fifties graphic design saw a preponderance of illustrative tendencies. Otto Treumann was the only one to work in a more architectural style and he had already made several visits to Switzerland. Crouwel was to be completely converted to

¹ Roodenburg-Schadd 2004.

² Jobse 2005.

³ Interview with Crouwel, 26 August 2014, and Crouwel 2009b.

⁴ Quotes from interview with Crouwel, 15 April 1992 and Crouwel 1994, n.p.



Crouwel's cover for the magazine *Kroniek van Kunst en Cultuur*, 1952.

GKf

advertenties
affiches
boekverzorging
briefpapier
brochures
gelegenheidsdrukwerk
handelsmerken
kalenders
katalogi
tentoonstellingen
verpakkingen

19 januari
tot 12 februari 1962
amsterdam
stedelijk museum



Poster for the GKf exhibition, 1962,
in the Stedelijk Museum, 100 x 70.



Brochure *Harde feiten...* (Some Facts...), circa 1961 (29.6 x 21), and blotting papers for Bruynzeel, 1961-63 (22 x 9.7). These were issued monthly as business gifts. Bruynzeel was a timber factory that produced plywood, floors and kitchens. Piet Zwart had been their chief designer since 1919. Crouwel and Kho also designed a kitchen for Bruynzeel in 1966.

8T

harde feiten spreken voor bruynzeel 8T bekistingsplaat

Met 8 Bruynzeel 8 T bekistingsplaat.

Met moderne, geïmporteerde Amerikaanse en Zweedse 8T (8T) en andere, top kwaliteit, goed prijke voor bekistingen. De enige oplossing, uitdaging, voor het met beton gieten (ook voor grote vloeren). Gevoelbaar, licht, stevig, duurzaam, gemakkelijk te plaatsen. Gevoelbaar, licht, stevig, duurzaam, gemakkelijk te plaatsen. De enige oplossing 8T met 8T. Bekistingen 8 bekistingen. 8T met 8T. 8T met 8T.

VOOR GLAD EN STRAK BETONWERK BRUYNZEEL BETONPLEX

SEPTEMBER '61

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

BRUYNZEEL
FAESFABRIEK
NV
ZAANDAM
TEL. 8 30 01

by K&L...
VEREDELDE WERKSTENDE
MULTIPLEX AAN BEIDE ZIJDEN
GEPOLIET EN AFGEWENT
MET GLADDE DRAAGSAM
KUNSTHARSDEKLAGEN.

parket is van alle tijden
BRUYNZEEL VLOERENFABRIEK NV ZAANDAM

SEPTEMBER '61

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

voor horizontaal werk, voor binnen en buiten indien gewenst voorgoed leverbaar.

november 1961

bruynzeel

basalocus profielschroten

5	12	19	26	z
6	13	20	27	m
7	14	21	28	d
1	8	15	22	w
2	9	16	23	v
3	10	17	24	v
4	11	18	25	z

BRUYNZEEL
SCHAVERIJ N.V.
ZAANDAM

05

total design

1963-1972

Wim Crouwel's reputation and development as a designer were very much shaped by the Total Design agency (TD) – and vice versa. Having worked for it for so many years ever since its foundation in 1963, Crouwel long ago came to personify the agency. He also, crucially, acted as the group's spokesperson – in addition to being a walking advertisement for TD design and the TD approach. At the agency itself he worked on both design and the agency's management until 1985. Total Design was the first large and multi-disciplinary design agency in the Netherlands and its influence would be difficult to overestimate. It became the cradle of the particular form of Dutch post-war modernism that grew to become a dominant style and philosophy.

_ Founding

The Associatie voor Total Design NV was founded on 5 March 1963 by the designers Wim Crouwel, Friso Kramer and Benno Wissing, and the brothers Paul and Dick Schwarz. The firm's name reflected their ambition: all forms of

design under one roof. The idea had been floating around since about 1961, when the Schwarz brothers had left what had been the family business Polak & Schwarz, but which following a merger went by the name of IFF: International Flavours and Fragrances. Paul had been its manager in the Far East, Canada and South America, while his brother had studied advertising and journalism at Stanford, and held the post of secretary to the management at IFF. They were now looking for a new destination for both their talent and their capital.

_ Paul Schwarz, who was married to a childhood friend of interior designer Benno Premsele, approached him about it. Premsele happened to mention hearing of a number of designers who were planning to start an agency together. The names Kho Liang Ie, Friso Kramer and Charles Jongejans came up. Kho believed that Dutch designers were falling behind in international developments: an interdisciplinary approach with a team was the current thing and large commissions such as house styles necessitated delegation of executive work. That necessity became abundantly apparent when the national airline KLM chose the British agency of F.H.K. Henrion for its new house style. KLM had originally started working with graphic designer Otto Treumann, but that had come to nothing.¹ Kho and Jongejans withdrew before the talks about TD were completed, and in their place came Wim Crouwel and Benno Wissing.²

_ In the spring of 1962 the plans – and the ideals – were agreed. The participants wanted to join together 'to arrive at the most efficient mode of working possible in the practice of

¹ In a letter to Pieter Brattinga KLM wrote: 'it then also appeared that so extensive a commission could only be carried out by a firm of designers with a considerable studio capacity. At that stage there was no such organization in the Netherlands ...' Letter of 7 October 1963, Pieter Brattinga archives PB00535 UvA/BC.

² According to Joost Elffers, son of Dick Elffers, Crouwel was unwilling to join Premsele in an agency so that the Schwarz brothers had to choose between them. Dick Elffers apparently said they should take Crouwel 'because then it will work'. (Personal communication, 9 September 2014.)



TD in 1964, clockwise: Dick Schwarz, Friso Kramer, Benno Wissing, Ben Bos, Paul Schwarz, Wim Croweul. The logo for TD was designed by Wissing and Croweul.

Gevestigd

TD

Associatie voor Total Design NV

Wim Croweul GKf AGI
 Friso Kramer GKf NIDY
 Benno Wissing GKf
 Paul Schwarz
 Dick Schwarz MBA

Herengracht 567 Amsterdam C
 Telefoon 33243
 Telegramadres Totaldesign

Adviseurs voor architectuur
 Oyebaar Stalje van Gool/architekten

1963: The printer was happy: 'People are talking about it and that's what matters.' Every year the calendars also brought in new clients . However, distorting the letters, which was referred to as 'calliconstruction', was not to everyone's liking. Professor Ovink thought this experiment was too decorative and a case of what he called self-projection: according to him, the designer's desire for form stood in contrast to his pretension of the objective visual engineer, (45.5 x 45.5). [Mager and Ovink 1964]

1965: The current month is in black at the top with the following month below in grey; month names in narrow Akzidenz Grotesk in two colours, (25 x 50).



Wim Crouwel continued to design at Total Design for his long-standing clients Turmac and the Peter Stuyvesant Collection, and Edy de Wilde at the Stedelijk Museum. In the cultural field they were joined by the Amsterdams Historisch Museum (now the Amsterdam Museum) and Museum Fodor (a branch of the Stedelijk) and the world fair in Osaka (see chapter 2). He designed a number of logos for banks and other businesses, and was involved in the major project for the PTT house style, which began in 1970. During that decade he worked with Jolijn van de Wouw on complex assignments such as the telephone directory and an encyclopedia. TD also had a first: cities like Groningen (1969) and Rotterdam (1972) wanted logos. It was the start of city marketing and market-oriented thinking at government institutions and agencies.

Crouwel's oeuvre is dominated by the large number of catalogues and posters he designed for the Stedelijk in the two decades between 1964 and 1985. Despite his great love of system and order, seen in retrospect this 'house style' derives its strength precisely from Crouwel's

personal interpretation of it. Paradoxically enough, the Stedelijk's house style is the best possible proof that design according to a system does not preclude an individual style, variation or freedom. Nevertheless, the recognizability of the Stedelijk, this cultural institution that held countless highly diverse exhibitions, proved unmistakable. Crouwel's signature became synonymous with the Stedelijk's house style.

Sandberg's Stedelijk (he was director from 1945 until 1963) was 'an environment where the avant-garde can feel at home, which is open, lucid, on a human scale, without huge hallways, majestic stairwells, overhead light, gate-like doors, officials in uniform, but a place where people are not afraid to talk, kiss, laugh out loud, be themselves, a focal point for contemporary life.'¹ It was, in other words, not so much a venerable institution as a place where Art and Life came together. With his emphasis on the art of the now, and on experiments and dynamic, Sandberg had made of the Stedelijk a leading museum of the avant-garde and modern art.²

Under the more aloof and authoritarian Edy de Wilde, who took up his appointment as director at the end of 1963, the museum became more of an institution. Unlike Sandberg, de Wilde was no artist among artists. Both staff and institution grew and improvisation made way for a more professional attitude. De Wilde was someone who liked looking at things and he loved painting. At the same time the museum paid plenty of attention to recent developments and a design department came into being – though

¹ Sandberg in *NU* 1959, n.p.

² Petersen 2004 and 2007; Leeuw Marcar 2004, Roodenburg-Schadd 2004.

The Stedelijk posters all measure 95 x 63, or 95 x 32; the catalogues 27.5 x 18.5, and as of 1968: 27.5 x 20.8. Not all catalogues are numbered.

They were all printed at the Stadsdrukkerij, the city printers of Amsterdam.



General poster SM 1971.



Atelier 3, 1966 (s.n.); Atelier 5, 1967 (426) and misprint; Atelier 6, 1969 (453); Atelier 8, 1971 (494); Atelier 9, 1971 (510); Gedrukt in Japan, 1967 (407).





Hannes Postma, 1967 (423); David Hockney, 1966 (s.n.); Josua Reichert, 1966 (s.n.); Jean Bazaine, 1967 (428); Mark Brusse, 1968 (446); Arie, 1969 (454); Bob Gill, 1967 (425); Plakat Praag, 1966 (s.n.).



catalogue. There were comparatively few photographic covers; tilted or diagonal texts were almost non-existent.

_ Inside the catalogues the number of columns and their width varied, but they generally formed solid blocks of text on the page – often extending almost to the edges. In the arrangement of the text there were similarities and variations such as Crouwel had seen as early as 1957 in the book *Schiff nach Europa*, which had been 'optisch organisiert' by Karl Gerstner.

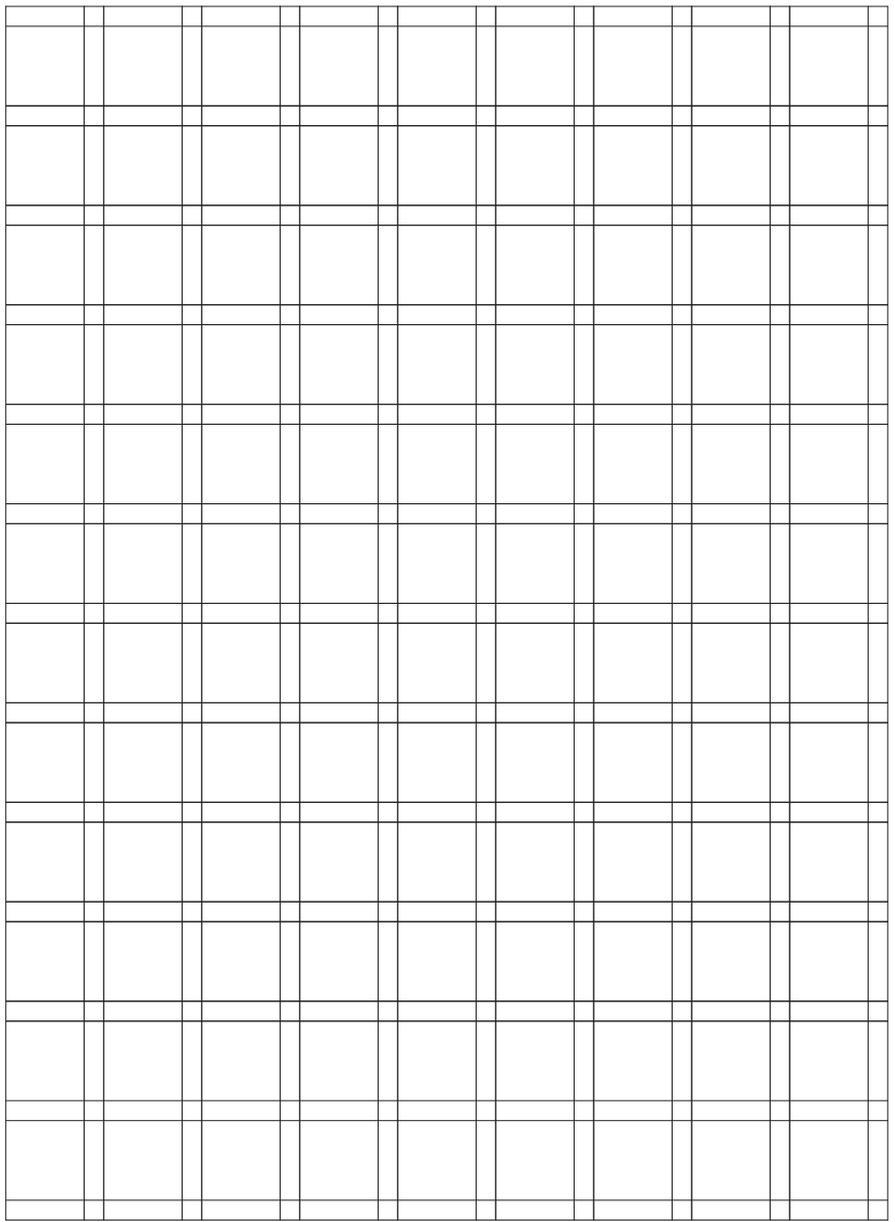
_ Because Crouwel used an intricate grid for the Stedelijk catalogues, in the typography he was able to achieve not only tremendous variety but above all great expressive power that was also sensitive. In the way he composed the pages he revealed himself to be a true artist, achieving a supremely sophisticated balance that bordered on the impossible with texts in bold and normal and carefully judged relationships between text, space and images. In that respect the early catalogues in particular are at once succinct and poetic, solid and robust – and calculated to the millimetre. On the covers too, the positioning of text and image often creates tensions that verge on the extreme. Asymmetry, proportions and positioning: putting something just a fraction off centre or up against the edge, or at an unexpected height – tricks like these create a wonderful balance out of imbalance. Later catalogues were typographically speaking less detailed, more homogeneous, so they looked considerably duller and more ordinary. Every now and then a serifed face would turn up. From the seventies onwards there was also plenty to fold or turn – oblong formats abounded,

as did extensive folders, fan-folds and fold-outs. Inserted drawings on tracing paper and leaves in pockets gave some catalogues a more tactile and three-dimensional character. Many booklets about textiles exploited the graphic possibilities of the subject to good effect. In the eighties there was a succession of typographic covers that have the appearance of a series but are not always connected. This was at a time when the museum was releasing significantly fewer catalogues and publishing more larger publications in book form.

_ Catalogue production was a constant race against the clock. In theory the time available was five to six weeks, but that deadline was seldom met. Right up to the end things would change, or there would be yet more modifications. Curators did everything at the same time: preparing, organizing and designing exhibitions, and writing, correcting and proofreading catalogue texts. The seventies were especially productive, with some thirty to forty presentations a year. Then new art forms, offset technology and input from artists often made for unusual catalogues.

_ *Vormen van de kleur, Op losse schroeven* and *Sonsbeek*

Groundbreaking exhibitions included *Vormen van de kleur* (Forms of Colour, 1966), *Op losse schroeven* (1969; On Loose Screws, Tentative Connections, or Square Pegs in Round Holes) and *Sonsbeek buiten de perken* (1971; Off Limits; Beyond the Pale), curated by Wim Beeren of the Stedelijk. In the case of the open-air



Crouwel's grid for the Stedelijk catalogues.

instruments to pieces and then created compositions out of the fragments.²³ For the cover of a second Arman catalogue (1969) he imitated one of the artist's own works. The catalogue for Jean-Pierre Raynaud was printed entirely in red because that signal colour played a dominant role in his work, while in the case of Rauschenberg Crouwel's method resembled that of the artist, layered and including photography. The posters took up a lot of time, even if it was 'seeing what you came across: a matter of chance', or 'tying yourself into all kinds of knots'.²⁴ His artistic ambitions and his role as a service-oriented designer were sometimes at odds with each other.

Years later he was to say: 'I always wanted to bring in elements that would create a connection with the work. The result was that my posters were symbolic of the way I saw the artist. Mad, when you come to think about it. This is at its most obvious in a poster for Kupka at the end of the sixties. Kupka's peculiar dualism is that on the one hand he makes Mondrian-like paintings and on the other his handling of line is very decorative and whimsical. That's the interesting thing about Kupka. The bottom half of the poster was a line spiralling in and out of itself, with which I as it were created a symbol, a brand of that one aspect of his work; and above that there was a symbol of that other face. The colours were borrowed from the colours that most struck me in Kupka's work – his use of colour was very decorative and elegant. Absurd, of course, to think you were expressing Kupka in that way, because of course that wasn't Kupka at all, it was just my poster, in which someone who understood

these things could see why I had done it like that.'²⁵ And yet, at the time, Crouwel was under the impression that his work was consistent and in line with his theories.

About the catalogue for the artist Peter Struycken, who like Crouwel had been influenced by the Swiss and was just as fascinated by systems and computers, Crouwel was later to say: 'I made a catalogue with you for the Stedelijk in which I tried in my grid to give an interpretation of your serial starting points. That way it became almost a Peter Struycken, but really it was an illustration of my thinking about your work. I have never got so close to someone else's work. ... Look, what I did then in your catalogue must have happened in a moment of madness. With typography, I always try to impose clear structures and absolutely not to produce a translation, as Anthon [Beeke] does. But however loudly I keep shouting that the typography has to be subservient, I still don't always manage it. And with hindsight, when I look back on my catalogues for the Stedelijk, I was always a very obvious presence through my composition and structure – and probably for some artists that was even worse than what Anthon does.'²⁶

In a complex way his own catalogue, a double folder of 1979, visualized his work and his method. In the background there was a selection of his work in the form of colourless photos (laid out to the Stedelijk grid), on top of which, in black, is the text (set in three columns indicated by full points), plus a number of quotes and some works, printed in red or blue. Captions, printed sideways, are in italics in the margin.

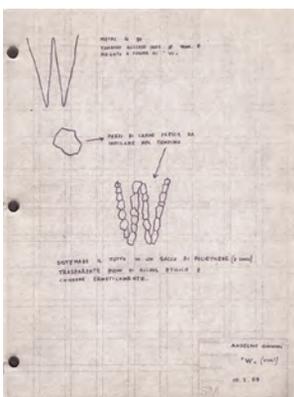
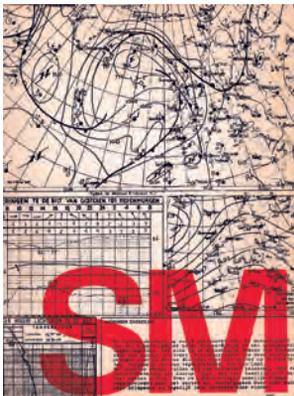
²³
Dooijes 1965.

²⁴
Conversation with Wim
Crouwel, autumn 1990.

²⁵
Crouwel/Struycken 1986,
p. 63.

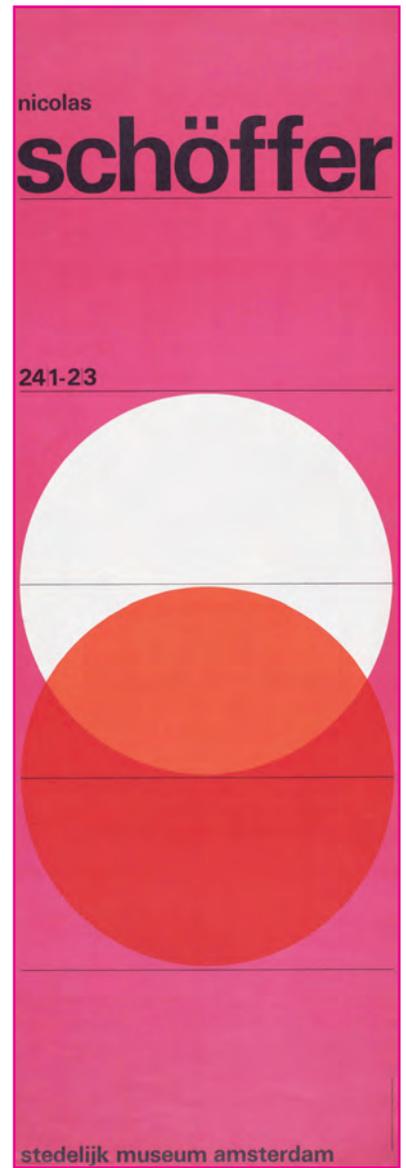
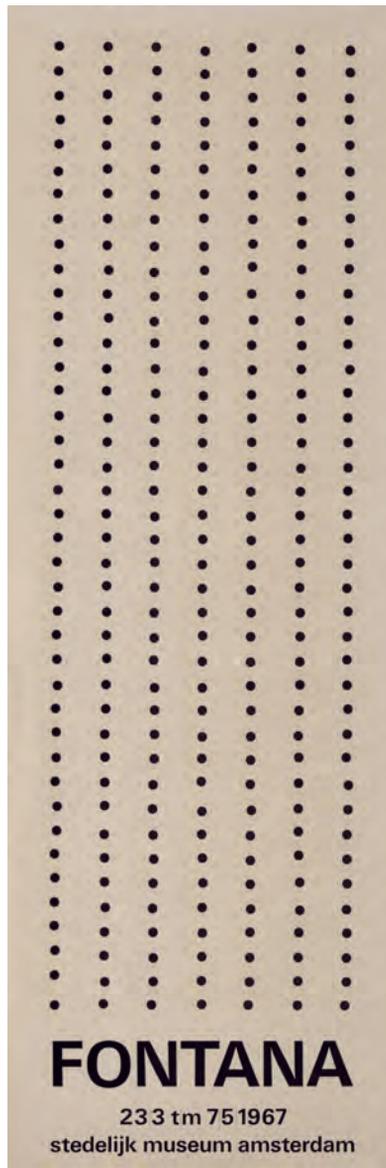
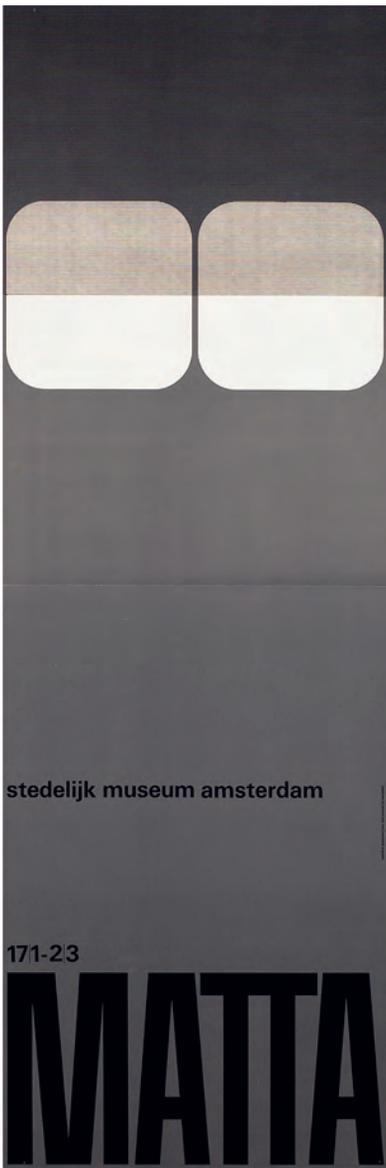
²⁶
Crouwel/Struycken 1986,
pp. 60, 61.

Poster and catalogue *Op losse schroeven*, 1969 (457);
catalogue *Sonsbeek*, 1971.

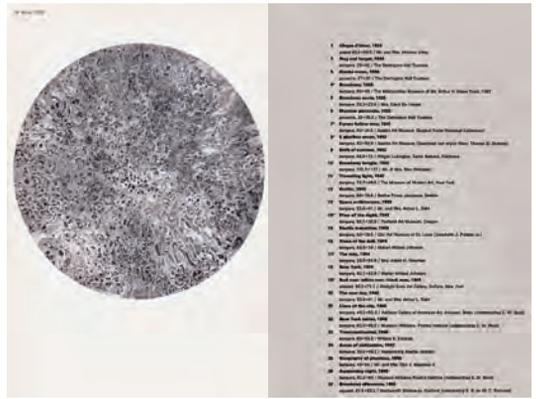
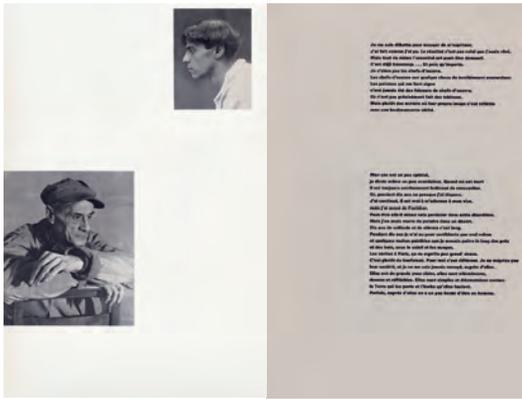


**VIJFTIG
JAAR
ZITTEN**

stedelijk museum amsterdam
3 juni t/m 4 sept. 1966



Posters *Matta*, 1964; *Fontana*, 1967;
Schöffer, 1964.



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Pages from Roger Bissière, 1966 (392); Mark Tobey, 1966 (393); Yves Klein, 1965 (385); Victor Vasarely, 1967 (406).



karel appel
stedelijk museum
amsterdam
25 juni t/m
29 augustus 65



stedelijk museum amsterdam 7 mei tot 14 juni 1965

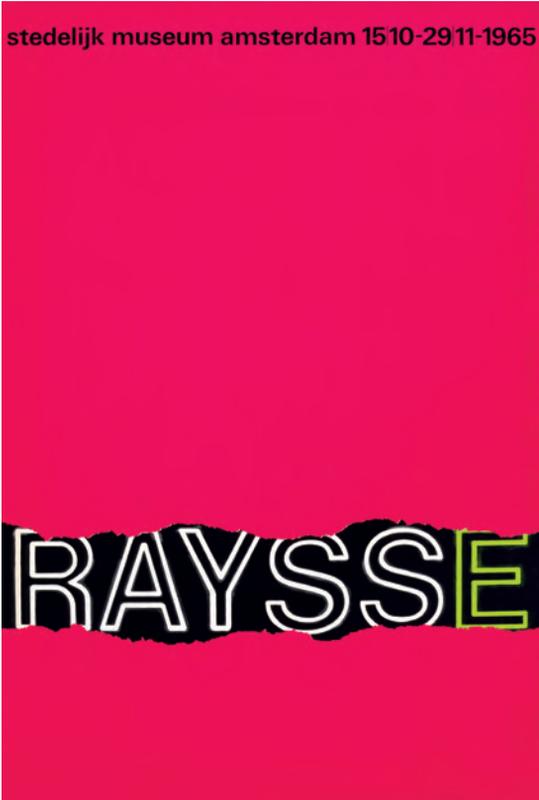
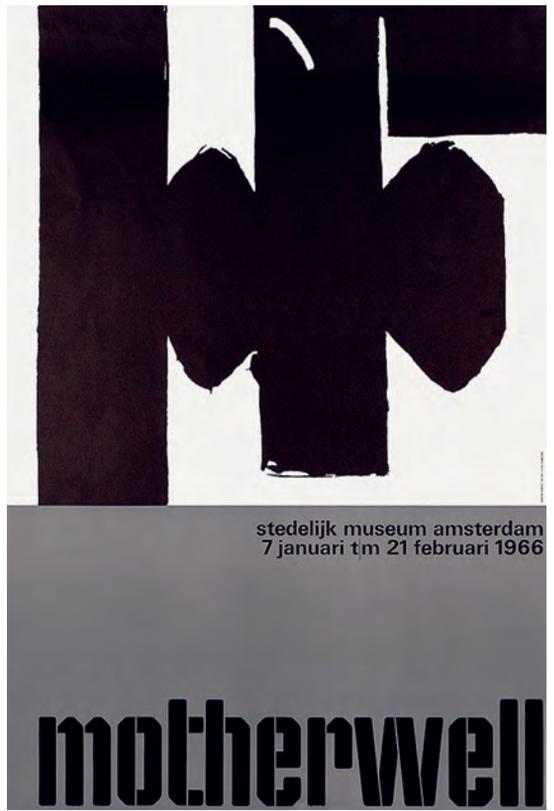
Hochschule Hogeschool
für voor
Gestaltung Vormgeving
Ulm Ulm

YVES KLEIN

stedelijk museum amsterdam

22 oktober t/m 12 december 1965

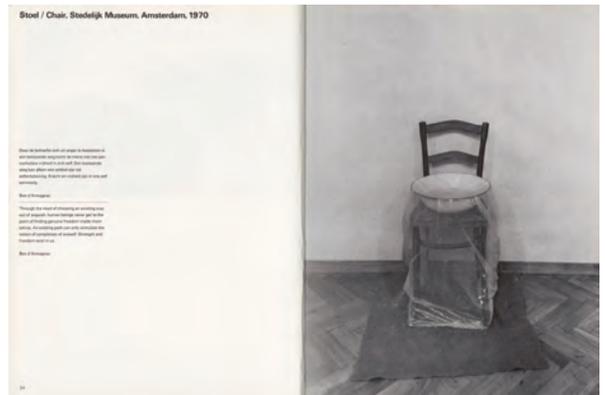
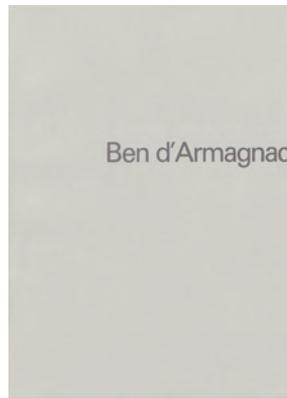
Posters Appel, 1965; Ulm, 1965;
Yves Klein, 1965.

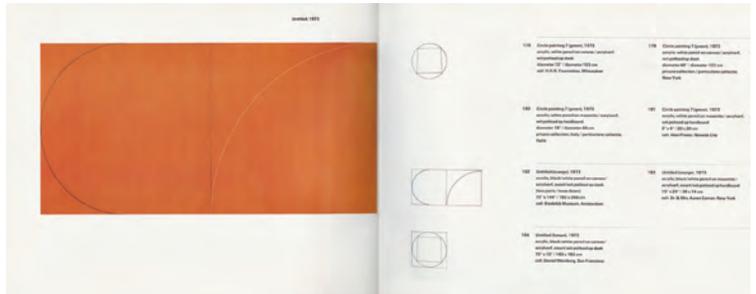
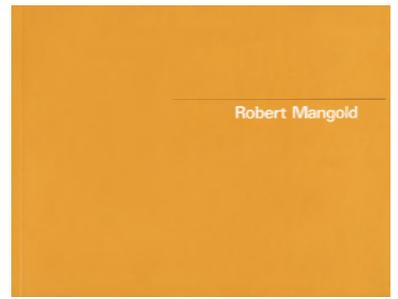


Poster and catalogue (389) *Robert Motherwell*, 1966; poster *Raysse*, 1966.



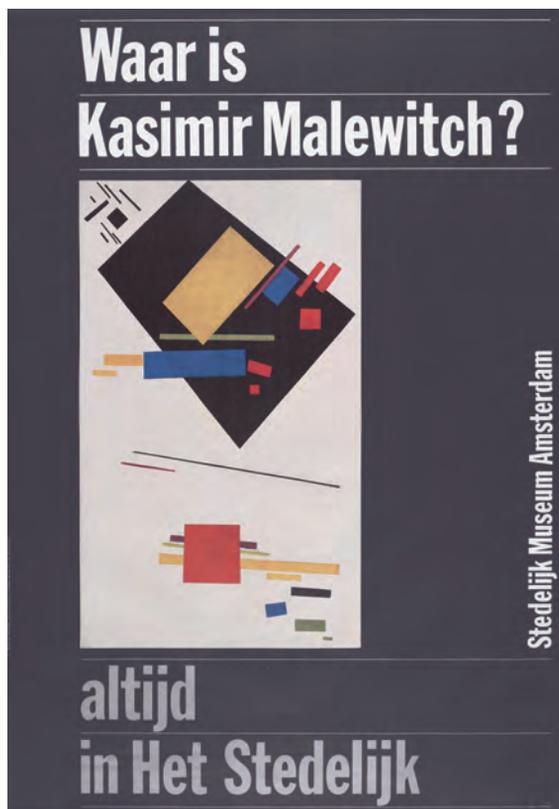
Ulrike Rosenbach, 1980 (674);
 Atelier 16, 1979 (659);
 Ben d'Armagnac, 1981 (683);
 Jan Roeland, 1978 (646).





Rob van Koningsbruggen, 1979 (652); Robert Mangold, 1982 (697); Jan Lucassen, 1979 (658); Georg Baselitz, 1984 (703).





Poster series *Waar is...*, 1975;
poster *Neil Jenny*, 1982.

Waar is Karel Appel?

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam



altijd
in Het Stedelijk

Neil Jenney

in het
Stedelijk

Threat and
Sanctuary 1979
152 x 200 cm
acryl op boek
Coll. Jenney
New York



15 januari t/m 7 maart 1982
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
Paulus Potterstraat 13
dagelijks geopend van 9.30-17.00 uur
zondag van 13.00-17.00 uur

Deze
tentoonstelling
is mede mogelijk
gemaakt door
Amey in het
kader van het
200-gang betaam
van de
diplomatieke
betrekkingen
tussen Nederland
en de
Verenigde Staten

Edward Hopper



Georganiseerd door het Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, en het National Endowment for the Arts en Philip Morris Incorporated

in het Stedelijk

24 april t/m 8 juni 1981
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
Paulus Potterstraat 13
dagelijks geopend van 9.30-17.00 uur
zondag van 13.00-17.00 uur

Julian Schnabel in het Stedelijk

De verantwoordelijkheid is mede mogelijk gemaakt door Amstel
This poster was the 200th anniversary of the Stedelijk Museum
Amsterdam's 100th anniversary in 1982.



Black Table with Sword (1979-1980)
204 x 270 cm
Oil on canvas
Collection Zeno

29 januari t/m 14 maart 1982
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
Paulus Potterstraat 13
dagelijks geopend van 9.30-17.00 uur
zondag van 13.00-17.00 uur

Posters Edward Hopper, 1981;
Julian Schnabel, 1981;
Robert Mangold, 1982;
Susan Rothenberg, 1982.

Robert Mangold / Distorted Circle in and out of a Polygon / 1972 / Sammlung Oeuv. / Zatz



Robert Mangold in het Stedelijk

22 oktober t/m 5 december
Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
Paulus Potterstraat 13
dagelijks geopend van 10-17 uur
zondag van 13-17 uur / maandag gesloten



Deze tentoonstelling is mede mogelijk gemaakt door Amway
in het kader van het 200-jarig bestaan van de diplomatieke
betrekkingen tussen Nederland en de Verenigde Staten

deze tentoonstelling
is mede mogelijk gemaakt
door Amway
in het kader van
het 200-jarig bestaan van
de diplomatieke betrekkingen
tussen Nederland en
de Verenigde Staten

susan rothenberg in het stedelijk



15 oktober t/m 28 november
stedelijk museum amsterdam
paulus potterstraat 13
dagelijks geopend van 10-17 uur
zondag van 13-17 uur / maandag gesloten

susan rothenberg / blue bars / 1982



... As a medium printed matter is just as likely to assume meaning as architecture or exhibition design. The designer has to carefully avoid projecting his own artistic imagination onto the art that is the subject of information. Typographically speaking this means that there is less opportunity for rich variations but all the more for careful nuances. The artist and his product speak their own clear language for those who are willing to hear; printed matter functions as an introduction to this language but is not some kind of textbook. Because printed matter is just as much part of a programme based on conscious choices in activities, it may take for instance, a magazine-like form. This emphasizes the fact that no publication is a singular affair.

The term 'house style' is often deliberately interpreted as a kind of uniform sauce that can be poured over many things of a very varied nature. This is such a misinterpretation that the notion can hardly be used anymore. However, we do have to understand this term as the visual design of a content that does not have a clouding effect but rather a clarifying one.

If we assume the existence of a house style at the Stedelijk Museum – even though we never have used this word, nor did we ever deliberately aim for it – then we define it as the visual appearance of any printed matter that attempts to express the commonality and the basic principles of the museum as an institute. Its form is determined by these basic principles, by practical considerations concerning the collaboration of people, by a number of functional requirements and, 'last but not least', by the designer himself. This actually comes down to:

- _A Typography is to visually order text in the service of legibility.
- _B Text and image are equally important (where catalogues are concerned).
- _C Texts are typeset in such a way that their different parts are experienced as such, combining the length of lines, type size and line spacing in order to achieve optimal legibility, as well as a clear distinction between the different languages.
- _D The image section will be arranged according to a chronological, alphabetical or other order, but not according to visual rhyme.
- _E Images are treated as the representation of reality rather than an imitation of it. The starting point is that reality should be seen. A reproduction is not an autonomous element.
- _F The composition will be determined by functional-aesthetic considerations, trying as much as possible to avoid subjective interventions (even though aesthetics are never objective). The wishes of the artist or the exhibition curator will be respected and incorporated but their importance should never overrule the basic design principles.

To choose a starting point is a prerequisite and in general this chosen starting point determines the design of the graphic means. However, this does not automatically lead to a specific form, since to design is a subjective activity. It is the people cooperating on the translation of a starting point who primarily determine form. From this it even follows that the design –



i.e. formal solutions – or completely different problems can lead to surprising similarities. As long as the effectiveness of design has not been studied to such an extent that its effects are known and manuals can be written, subjective decisions will be the most important element in determining form. Up to now, only a few basic conditions have been defined for the use and functioning of media and they are so elementary that they do little more than stating the obvious. These conditions mainly concern aspects such as legibility, colour, optical illusion and so on, and therefore only determine design to a very limited extent.

Design can situate itself between two extremes: on one end it is a highly subjective use of visual elements in order to arrive at a highly personal interpretation of information that is very recognizable and thus becomes a message by itself. The other end is using visual elements as objectively as possible in order to arrive at an unobtrusive, optimally service-oriented information with a restrained expressive power of its own. These poles indicate the wide margins within which designers take up their position. However, they often only seem to be extremes, as the most detached and clinical approach can lead to design that is highly expressive and may become the message itself, whereas the most subjective approach can lead to a highly businesslike way to convey information.

From: *Om de kunst* (About Art),
Lecturis documentary 8, 1978,
pp. 18-20.



Extra Bulletin, Crowwel's retrospective, 1979; folder *Ontwerp: Total Design*, 1983.

Zomer summer

hoogtepunten van moderne kunst
HIGHLIGHTS IN MODERN ART

stedelijk museum amsterdam

Poster *Zomer* (Summer), 1984.



60-80 Attitudes, Concepts, Images, 1982 (694); 20 jaar verzamelen, 1984 (s.n.); La Grande Parade, 1984 (704).



_07 _technology, systems and patterns

When half-way through the sixties Wim Crouwel – ‘computer-happy man’¹ – somehow let the press get wind of his New Alphabet, what followed was the first wave of publicity surrounding Crouwel the man. There would be many others. All the national and regional papers reported the event and Crouwel, in countless interviews, was big news. Within the profession too there was much debate both at home and abroad as Crouwel gave talks and published articles about it.² Other designers responded with their own types and alphabets. Towards the end of the eighties the letters started turning up in the pop music scene, ushering in a true revival. The alphabet really gained a second life when David Quay of The Foundry digitized it in 1997. Since the first publication as a *Kwadraat-Blad* from Steendrukkerij De Jong & Co. in 1967, Crouwel has told the story of the New Alphabet’s genesis many times.³ It began when he went to Drupa, a major printing and paper exhibition in Düsseldorf, and saw the Hell company’s Digiset digital typesetter. ‘To me, the typefaces produced on these machines looked horrible.

The shapes, as seen under the magnifying glass, were badly distorted and very different from their traditional and original examples. Also the shape changed with every size that was requested. Especially round forms were very receptive to distortion as a result of the basic regular configuration of the underlying dot matrix.

... At that time, to me it was a challenge to start from the dot matrix principle of this new technique. It intrigued and struck me mostly by its straightforward and clear regular grid.⁴

However, the creation of the New Alphabet turns out to have been a good deal more complicated than that. The typeface ‘determined by contemporary man, who knows the computer and also how to live with it’ was preceded by something else.⁵ Crouwel had claimed as early as 1961 that he was working on a new typeface. That was in the Christmas issue of *Drukkers-weekblad*, where he wrote: ‘I am taking as my starting point a single basic form which, according to my needs, I can make thin, thick, italic and so on by optical means. With a normalised type like this, which eliminates the distinction between upper and lower case, you get in the first place a much more relaxed page.’⁶ Some of the sketches in his archive are indeed dated 1961, and on one of them he had noted that the new alphabet had been created ‘out of the need for a form of standardization to arrive at a simpler text line image, a more suitable connection with our times, simpler and easier operation, simpler possibilities for new typesetting methods’. Whether these new typesetting methods were to be photographic or computerized is unclear. Here Crouwel referred to the

¹ Raadman 1968.

² Talk at ATypI 1968 (typescript), articles in *Delta* 1969 and *Journal of Typographic Research* 1970; Purcell 1969, Spencer 1968, Gerstner 1972; see also Palma 2003.

³ Crouwel 1980 and 2000, Quay 2000, Broos 2003, Palma 2003, and the 2011 London exhibition catalogue.

⁴ Crouwel, foreword in Palma 2003, English text in WC/SMA archive. The Düsseldorf printing machinery trade fair took its name from the initial syllables of the German words *Druck* and *Papier*.

⁵ Crouwel 1969a, p. 60.

⁶ Crouwel 1961, p. 96.

linea grafica

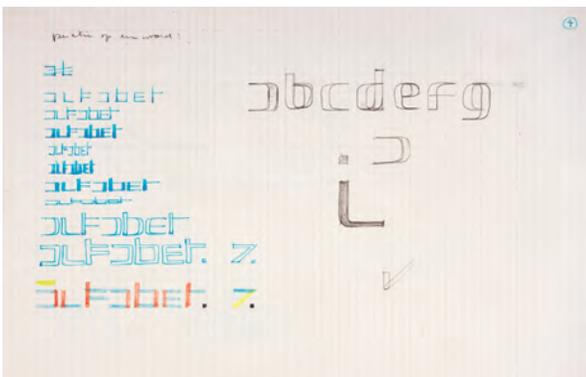
rivista bimestrale
delle arti grafiche
n.4
luglio / agosto 1968
gruppo 4

linea
grafica

rivista
bimestrale
delle
arti
grafiche

n. 4
luglio
agosto

gruppo 4



Magazine cover *Linea Grafica*, 1968 (23.5 x 30) and detail from a sketch for the New Alphabet, 21 x 33.5.

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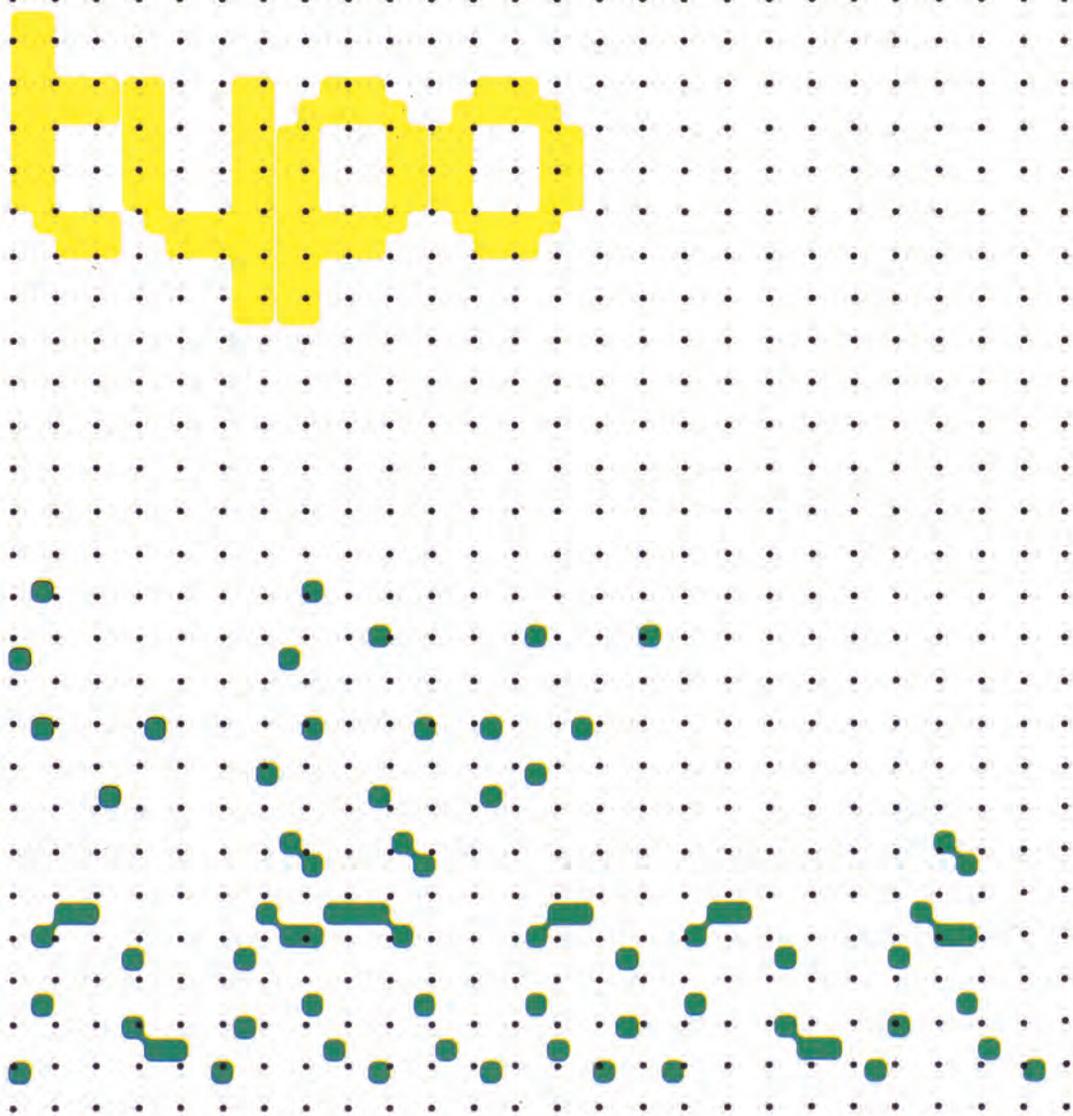
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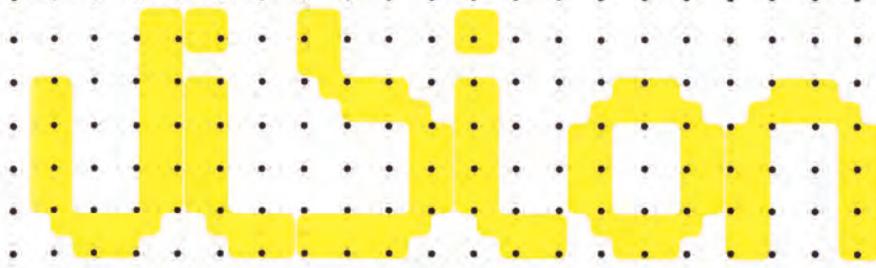
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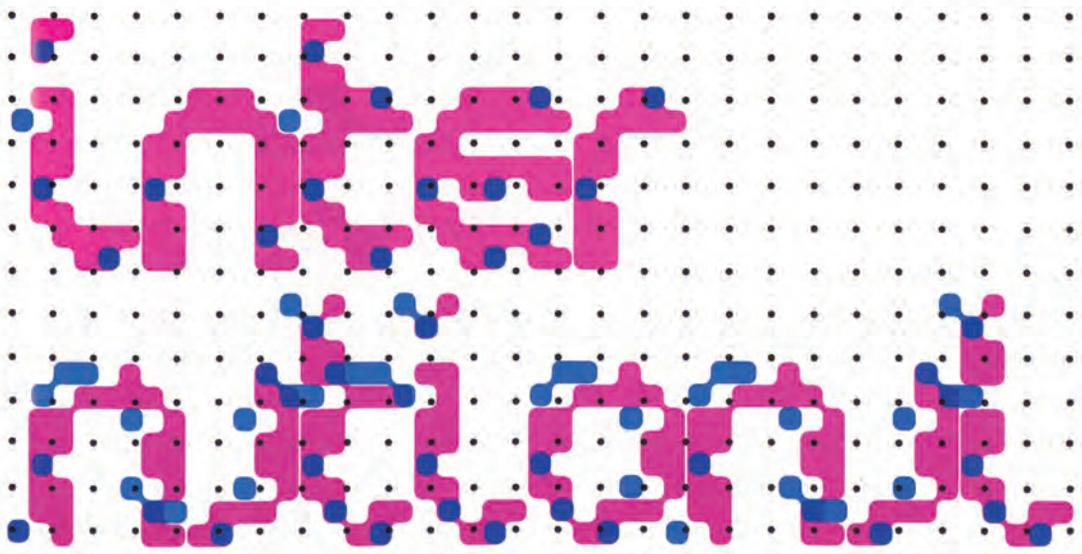


typo

Folder *Typo Vision International*, a
supplement to *Druckspiegel* Magazine,
1972, 34 x 48.



Babilon



inter
national

Letter based on squares. 'The word falls apart, disintegrates. Pieces belonging to the letters on the right were printed separately on the left. The image is deconstructed, as it were. I let the letters disintegrate. ... The whole idea that

concerned me was a kind of animation of how the text, 'typo vision international', had been created. In addition, I wanted to generate the idea of pixels. That is why there is a complete pattern of dots behind it. We had to work with an original

drawing. The raster [matrix] was hand-drawn as well.' [Broos 2003 p.100] The Day-Glo colours were influenced by Pop Art, psychedelica, Op Art and art works in neon.

_08 _TD 1973-1985: crouwel criticized

After the crisis of 1972 the management of Total Design was in the hands of Wim Crouwel, Ben Bos and Hans Wierda. Wierda succeeded Dick Schwarz as financial and general manager. This meant Crouwel was now the heavyweight both on the management board and in the agency. He was the one with authority, both internally and in the eyes of the outside world: the mediator in conflict situations and the binding medium. In effect, Crouwel had become TD, though his teaching activities in Delft were now making increasing demands on his time. But from 1978 to 1980 he devoted himself to TD full-time. After that, until 1985, his work for the agency was confined to an advisory role.

_The new triumvirate decided that TD should concentrate on graphic design – and make drastic cuts in the payroll. As to the agency's management as such, few changes were made. The team structure remained, but so too did the problem of overstaffing, so they stopped taking on staff and left it to natural turnover to bring about a reduction. At this point Crouwel decided that TD should never grow beyond a

total payroll of thirty. That limit determined the manageability of the agency in its existing organizational form. Financially the agency was just making ends meet, and it was a matter of keeping the ship afloat. The guarantee of survival came in the form of the PTT and super-market chain De Gruyter.

_In addition to the problems facing the economy – in 1973 the limits to growth had been painfully brought home by the oil crisis – substantive criticism continued to simmer. Staff members were still muttering about the lack of contact, about having too little say and no time for research, and they were beginning to question the quality of the work TD was delivering. Their unrest had been made worse by the departure of board members and team leaders. They no longer knew what kind of agency it was they worked for, and they were uncertain about their future prospects. 'If we carry on simply offering visual identity programmes that get cheaper all the time because they are losing value,' wrote Wim van der Weerd, 'then surely our days are numbered.'¹ Following in his wake, one young designer lamented the lack of opportunities for self-advancement for 'the young', who felt insufficiently involved and informed when they compared themselves with their elders, who thought only about continuity and the status quo. As to the elders, Crouwel did realize something had to happen, and not just because he wanted to develop other activities besides being a director. Growing competition and a changing market for design were new storm clouds gathering on the horizon.

¹
Memorandum of 18 June 1973,
n.p., TD/SAA archive.



Crouwel at TD, surrounded by Gracie Kihara, Ben Bos, Daphne Duijvelshoff-van Peski, Zdena Sernets and Jos van der Zwaal, circa 1972; Anne Stienstra, Renée van de Griend, Roel Zandee, Jolijn van de Wouw.



joy, all of which I think should also be present in your work.' Gerard Hadders of *Hard Werken*: 'In the seventies the Netherlands was "tee-deed". ... It was because with Total Design/TD Crowel had formulated his principles so clearly and then so abundantly put them into practice that I could reject them so fiercely.'³⁸ Meanwhile Crowel himself continued to be part of all sorts of debates, as chairman, as participant or in the media.

_ From the angle of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of art, graphic design can be seen as a 'field', an area with a certain autonomy, with its own standards and rules, its own schools and a mentality that he called 'habitus'.³⁹ Within that field the participants take up positions and there is a constant struggle for recognition, reputation and attention. In the fifties and sixties Crowel had gained a position for himself by rejecting the role model of the artist and arguing for professionalism and rationality. In the decades that followed, his hegemony was disputed at all levels. He was driven out of the spotlights by the differently minded and those of younger years who demanded their place and elbowed him aside as no longer relevant. They conducted an aesthetic battle about style and taste, but at the same time eroded the conventions, mentality and values that until then had been valid within the graphic design community. The result was a new configuring of positions.

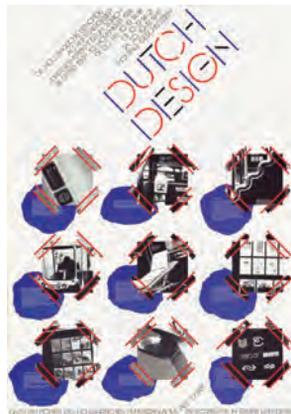
_ All these designers belonged to an elitist, highly cultured group in which autonomy – independent freelancers, freedom, experiments, art and their own signature style – was regarded as a great good. As modernists they were in opposition to

the banality of commerce and mass culture. That van Toorn, Beeke, Schreuders and other designers brought in elements of that banal culture does not detract from the fact that their work remained high culture. They broke a lance for an expansion of graphic means of expression and greater pluriformity. The enormous effect they brought about in that world does after all in itself prove the existence of boundaries, standards and rules, and their high-culture status is illustrated by the way their work is still written about today. The terms used to characterize them are unchanging: they are rebellion, protest and the daring of courageous loners and iconoclasts. In short, it is the romantic image of the artist as bohemian and contestant against the established order, an avant-gardistic ideal par excellence that stands in a long tradition.

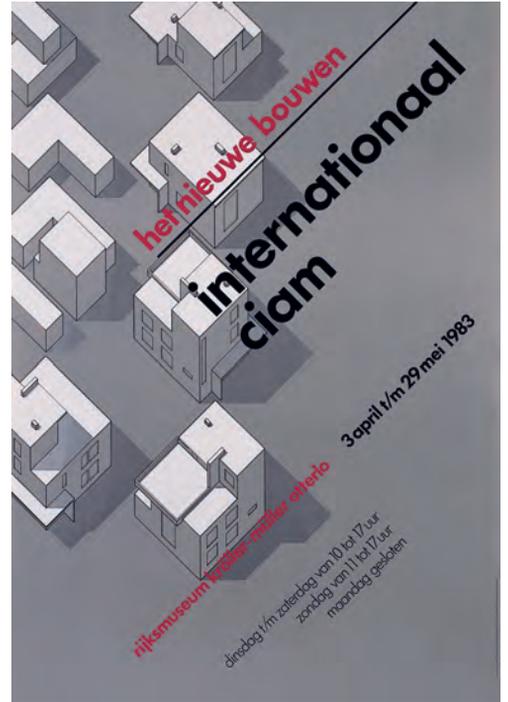
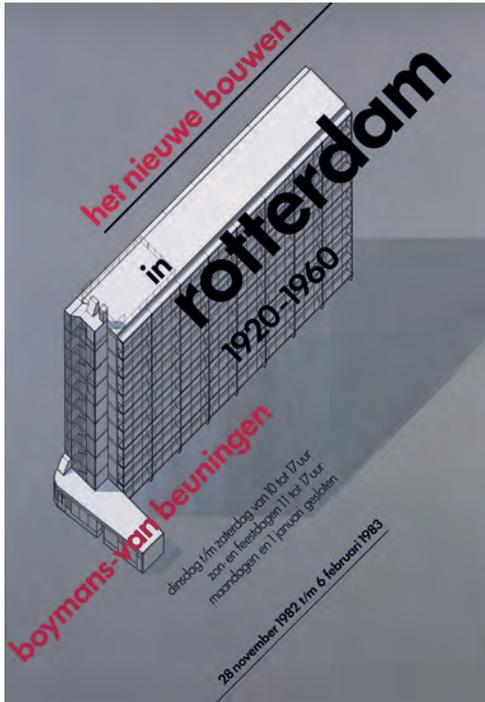
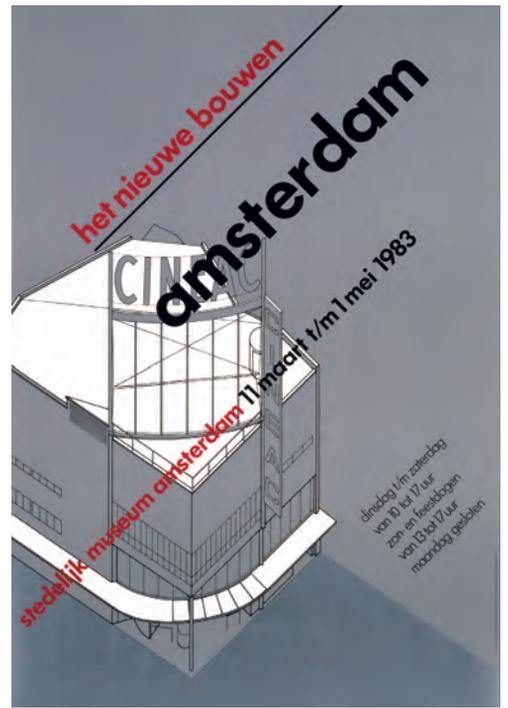
_ It is remarkable how strongly this modernist tradition continued to exert its hold in the Netherlands. In the post-war period artists and movements such as *De Stijl* were rediscovered and again brought to public attention. Starting in the seventies, research into the historical avant-garde took off and leading art journals such as *Museumjournaal* revitalized this body of ideas. Almost without exception, designers have all fashioned themselves after the movements of the twenties – Crowel being the prime example. This means that we can ascribe the 'struggle' between Crowel and the other designers to the dynamic of the field – the constant shifting of positions and authority – and to a specific period of history in which new aesthetic and social values were being advanced ('the sixties', pop art, social change, individual-

³⁸
Quotes from successively
Hefting 1981, Vroomans
1982, Schreuders 1983, p. 6;
exh. cat. Amsterdam 1984,
p.9; *Kunstschrift* 1986, p. 42.

³⁹
Bourdieu 1993.



Poster *Dutch Design for the Public Sector* by Gert Dumbar, 1974.



Posters *Het Nieuwe Bouwen* for exhibitions on architecture in various museums, 1982, 79 x 55.

The postage stamp as an object to be designed is important because it has an intrinsic monetary value; it is interesting because the Dutch post office always has maintained a tradition in its commissioning policy of encouraging developments in graphic design. It did not shrink back from experimentation. To designers it was always a singularly prestigious assignment. And for the organizations to which stamps were dedicated, they were an important part of putting themselves in the public eye.

_In addition to his numeral series, Crouwel designed nine commemorative stamps – though it has to be conceded that he was often approached for a less elevated reason: the job needed to be done quickly.¹ He saw the numeral stamps as providing the public with

a utility, whereas commemorative issues were like designing a poster. At the same time the element of monetary worth had to be expressed and he was naturally aware that any postage stamp would become part of design history. Even so, these three sometimes conflicting factors – value, representation, experiment – did not, in practice, interfere with each other. In many of Crouwel's stamps there is a role for colour fields and gradients, and it is conspicuous that he often used greys, silver and blue. Usually he also tried to introduce depth. Although he preferred to interpret the theme or subject through abstraction he also did some that were based on photographs. For the De Stijl stamps he worked with drawings.

¹

Holstege n.d.; Crouwel's notes in the TD/SAA archive, and 'Het ontwerpproces van een postzegelserie' ('The process of designing a series of postage stamps'), 6 February 1980, WC/SMA archive; Hefting 1983, Hage-Sprakel 1988.

Stamp commemorating the centenary of the first International Postal Conference, 1963, 3.6 x 2.5, offset. The white circle symbolizes the shared efforts to promote the harmonization of international postal communication. Blue and green represent sky and earth. Crouwel's aim with the positioning of the text was to achieve an effect of depth comparable to that in his poster *Beelden in het heden*. One critic thought it a 'failed traffic sign'.



Stamp commemorating four hundred years of the Dutch national anthem the *Wilhelmus*, 1968, 3.6 x 2.5, offset. The anthem's origin is the battle hymn of the Geuzen, the Dutch irregulars fighting in support of William I of Orange in the Eighty Years War (1568–1648). The text in orange was the hopeful element in dark times (the grey background) and the red-white-blue stood for the inception of the formal Dutch state.



Stamp marking the World Fair in Osaka, 1970, 2.5 x 3.6, gravure. Crouwel did several designs, eventually deciding on this one with the pavilion – though in print it turned out to be lacking in contrast.



Two series of stamps to mark Amphilex, an international philately exhibition held in 1976 and 1977, 3.6 x 2.5, gravure and offset. In the spirit of the theme Crouwel chose to depict earlier stamps, their

perforated edges being designed to give them a certain depth. This pattern and the positioning of the numerals was different in the two series.



_Crouwel in the media: a dogmatist full of contradictions

From the moment in 1965 when the media so enthusiastically pounced on the New Alphabet, Crouwel was never out of the news. Dailies and weeklies alike interviewed him at the drop of a hat: about the World Fair in Osaka (1969-70), on his appointment to a professorship (1973), when his retrospective opened (1979), or on the subject of the New Ugliness, or because he had been made director of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (1985) – or when he left – or for no reason at all. These were often full-page articles in interview form, unfailingly illustrated with a sizeable portrait photo, thus focusing more on the person than on his work. Crouwel became a public figure and a celebrity.

_For a designer in the sixties and seventies this was unique. Design received little attention in the ordinary press, and in the news media – with a few exceptions – a specific design journalism only began to take hold when the eighties arrived, which was also when museums other than the Stedelijk started to pay substantially more attention to design. Those with a professional interest already knew Crouwel as an outspoken

figure from his lectures, talks and other public appearances, his publications, or through the design association. In the design periodicals, in advertising magazines and journals for the printing industry, too, Crouwel was just as omnipresent. In short, there was not a single other designer who was quoted as often as he was. His unconcealed opinions, his glamorous appearance and his sympathetic personality made him an eminently mediagenic man: in short, a star designer *avant la lettre*. But how did that image come about?

_From the thirty-five and more interviews Crouwel gave in the national press between 1967 and 1994, a number of recurrent elements stand out: to start with there were his appearance, his interiors and his cars. The overwhelming impression is of aestheticism and vanity, and thanks to the tendency of journalists to repeat certain themes there is a degree of stereotyping. In 1967 Crouwel was 'a fashionable apparition in a sand-coloured corduroy suit and striped shirt with button-down collar'.¹ The same article wheels out his cars: an Austin for the family man, a 1911 Morgan and a vintage MG. Two years later he is a fast and articulate talker with a solemn face and upright posture: the interviewer quotes an employee of the agency: 'Crouwel is frightfully keen on appearances, always looks at how someone presents himself and what kind of shoes and shirts he wears; if he cuts a slice of cheese, the result has to be a square.'² The vainest of all was an interview with Aad van der Mijn in 1969, which begins with an elaborate description: 'The designer (forty, divorced, two children) is himself smartly dressed. He wears

¹
Van Konijnenburg 1967.

²
Ischa 1969.

³
Depondt 1993.

⁴
Also in van Colmjon 1985,
Kokke 1993.

a dark brown lace shirt on his slim, otherwise bare torso, then velvety trousers, high at the waist; black shoes. The greying hair worn very long in the neck. He is surrounded by an aura of fresh perfume.' This interview again looks extensively at Crouwel's love of clothes and fashion, and lists the cars he has had in his garage: an AC Aceca, a Volvo, assorted old-timers and an Alfa Romeo. When Crouwel was appointed to a chair at Delft in 1973 there were again remarks on his appearance: this time it was his spotted bow tie. The reporter also noted that Crouwel would have preferred not to wear a gown and ceremonial beret as he found them unmodern, 'styling'. Twenty years later it was 'Crouwel is, well, the *Crouwel type*: that very tall and slim figure, impeccably and perfectly dressed, inseparable from that spotted bow tie; that unmistakable voice ... the tips of his index fingers pressed to his lips, not exuberant but courteous, immaculate and disciplined.'³ The hip Crouwel, then, had made way for Crouwel the distinguished gentleman of 'impeccable manners'.⁴

Character sketches like these and descriptions of TD's squeaky-clean white office or Crouwel's own interior, which was full of classic design chairs and where the works of art hung on wires on a grid through the room, tell us something about the way he presented himself and about the way the media saw him. The designer – manufacturer of images for other people – seems to be equally conscious of his own performance. At the same time, the journalist wants the human interest angle. But in this attention to outward appearances there is also an element of 'functional nudity' in that it is a beautiful

bridge to subjects of conversation such as order, aesthetics and styling. In this, the articles turn out more or less the same: there is something of a pattern. Clothes and interiors lead on to Crouwel's personal need for order and his sense of aesthetics and form, and from there to his work and everything he rejects: superficial, uninnovative, ephemeral, modish and trendy design and advertising. Personal character traits (e.g. his orderly nature) thus determine and explain his work and his approach. And paradoxically enough the designer, this lover of fashion and clothes, emphatically rejects all design that concerns itself exclusively with outward appearances.

Some examples. The young man of 1967, the alphabetic iconoclast in a hip corduroy suit, is seamlessly linked to the approach of design agency TD: 'diving into the problems in a modern, easy, contemporary way – and above all staying cool while doing so. But still hip' (van Konijnenburg). The fresh-perfumed forty-something hates clutter and arriving late, and calls his own love of order a compulsive neurosis (van der Mijn 1969). As a super-aesthete he is precise and demanding, 'cool' in both senses of the word, with an impersonal rather than an emotional or artistically cluttered approach. Clean regularity is what marks out the man, design in general and TD's design in particular. 'Our typography simply could not have been created in messy surroundings', and employees of SHV (PAM) could henceforth be 'proud that the company looks so neat and tidy'.

Crouwel himself had no quarrel with the link between man and work. 'Friends sometimes

_10 _museum director, commissioner and museum designer

After the appointment in the eighties of the new director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam had turned into something of a shambles when the two candidates' names leaked out, leading to a battle in the media between parties for and against, Rotterdam decided to try a different approach. The selection of the successor to Wim Beeren at the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum (he had gone to the Stedelijk) passed off almost silently. The appointment of Wim Crouwel, however, came as a complete surprise to everyone.¹ Not only had everything been tied up very quickly, the choice of a designer was anything but obvious. Crouwel was not an art historian and he had little in-depth knowledge of art or experience as a curator. He was, however, on the museum's supervisory board – and indeed he had not even applied for the post but had been approached by Rotterdam's portfolio holder for the arts when the appointment committee had failed to come up with suitable candidates. That Crouwel also had a knowledge of spatial design, and as a dean of faculty at the university of technology in Delft had management experience, sealed the deal.

¹
Newspaper articles, WC/SMA
archive.

²
Adèr et al. 1987; van Es et al.
2012.

_Crouwel's directorship of the Boijmans Van Beuningen (1985-93) is relevant to this book because while he was there he used his abilities as an exhibition designer and found himself in the position of a commissioner of work from graphic designers. These two aspects will be discussed here against the background of how he interpreted his task at the museum, but I shall also look at his work as a designer after 1993. In that year he retired, but he was soon busier than ever. The large and impressive mega-exhibitions he had designed at the Boijmans made him a much sought-after designer for similar events elsewhere. Many museums and other institutions were grateful to be able to use his expertise in spatial and graphic design. He also designed – generally in collaboration with his son Remco – all the exhibition texts and catalogues involved.

The Boijmans Van Beuningen is named after two collectors whose extensive collections were the basis for the museum which was founded in 1849. Over the years, numerous gifts and purchases have endowed the museum with a broad and rich palette of artistic forms under one roof: from early art, prints, drawings and modern art to decorative arts and design, from the Middle Ages up to the present.² Major artists including Jan van Eyck, Pieter Bruegel, Titian and Rembrandt were represented, but also Degas, van Gogh, Dalí, Kandinsky, Richard Serra, Claes Oldenburg and Walter de Maria. Under Wim Beeren the accent had come to lie entirely on modern art, though the museum already had a considerable number of surrealist paintings. Beeren had also accepted the large gift of



Van Beuningen-de Vriese pavilion by Hubert-Jan Henket, realized in 1991; exhibition 153x (design acquisitions) in this extension, 1991.



Interior design for the Singer museum in Laren, 1995.

_ Return to exhibition design

Apart from the Chinese exhibition the grandly conceived exhibition *Schatten van de Tsaar* (Treasures of the Tsar, 1995) was also conspicuous for its display of magnificence and splendour in a setting that was cleverly presented and cunningly lit. A range of treasures from the court of Peter the Great – regalia, costume, weapons, goblets and gifts – stood in large glass vitrines on blue pedestals. Exhibitions like these brought Crouwel's qualities as an exhibition designer back into the public eye and his career took a new turn: all of a sudden he was a highly sought-after exhibition designer.

_ His talent lay in combining disparate three-dimensional objects in a single exhibition, as in *De dageraad van de Gouden Eeuw* (Dawn of the Golden Age, Rijksmuseum 1993), in which paintings, prints, sculpture, decorative art and tapestries from the period 1580-1620 were displayed. Curator Henk van Os, sometime director of the Rijksmuseum and now active as a guest curator for numerous museums and similar

institutions, brought Crouwel in for many other projects. Museums old and new came to him, ranging from the Van Gogh Museum and the Centraal Museum in Utrecht to the Nieuwe Kerk and the Hermitage, a new exhibition venue in a former infirmary for the elderly, which came to him for advice in 2002.¹⁸

_ The complexity of the task varied from exhibition to exhibition and from space to space. For example, in the Prinsessehof in Leeuwarden, a ceramics museum, the building was a composite of older buildings that had been altered and completely rearranged inside. Between 2000 and 2004 Crouwel advised on internal layout, house style and wayfinding, and completely redesigned the permanent exhibition. The exhibition of the van Gogh letters – a complex project because it included the republishing of all the artist's letters, including annotations, notes and references to artworks – received the AICA's certificate for 2011 for the 'atmospheric overall experience with dark blue and liver wall panels interspersed with minimalist bright white vitrines'.¹⁹ Crouwel and his son Remco were also

¹⁸ Documents on all exhibitions WC/SMA archive; in chronological order they were: *De weg naar de hemel*, Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam (2000), *Saenredam*, Centraal Museum Utrecht (2000), *In het licht van Verwey*, Frans Hals Museum Haarlem (2000), the revamped Prinsessehof Leeuwarden (opened in 2004), *Vier generaties... Toorop/Fernhout*, Centraal Museum Utrecht (2001), various

exhibitions for the Letterkundig Museum, The Hague (2001-2002), Hermitage Amsterdam (consultancy and jewellery exhibition, 2002), event *Hofvijver in poëzie en beeld*, The Hague, (2002), *Paul Huf*, FOAM Amsterdam (2002), *De kleine meester werken van Egypte*, Museum van Oudheden Leiden (2003), *Het ontstaan der dingen*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Rotterdam (2003), *Verzameling Corboud*, Kunsthal Rotterdam (2003),

Herkomst gezocht, Fries Museum (2003), *Edouard Manet*, Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam (2004), *Pier Pander*, Fries Museum Leeuwarden (2007), *125 Grote liefdes*, Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam (2008), *Caspar David Friedrich*, Hermitage Amsterdam (2008), *De ontdekking van Nederland*, CODA Apeldoorn (2008), *De brieven van Van Gogh*, Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam (2009), *100 Jaar Juliana*, Paleis

Het Loo Apeldoorn (2009), reorganized rooms, Amsterdam Museum (2010), *Matisse tot Malevich*, Hermitage Amsterdam (2010).

¹⁹ AICA: Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art. The judges' report will be found at www.aicanederland.org/aica-oorkonde-2011-voor-van-gogh-museum/



Schatten van de Tsaar (Treasures of the Tsar), 1995.

11

comeback and revival

Wim Crowwel has never lacked either attention or recognition, but in the nineties, and particularly in the decade that followed, his reputation as the Grand Old Man of graphic design took off as never before and he found himself a focus of interest all over the world. But what were the reasons for and the circumstances of this renewed international interest? To answer that question we must look at the way people were writing about Crowwel outside the Netherlands, and at developments in the field such as the revival of modernism.

In about 1960, work by Crowwel was sometimes shown and discussed in foreign periodicals and yearbooks, in some of which he was placed in the category of the modern dynamic Dutch designers.¹ As a member of the AGI (he was elected in 1957) and ICOGRADA he took part in group exhibitions and attended international conferences and gatherings, sometimes talking about his New Alphabet. Occasionally his work won prizes abroad at poster exhibitions or in international competitions. But most of the publicity in those years was focused on the

Total Design agency and not so much on Crowwel himself. The result was that reporting tended to stress matters of corporate identity and design for the public sector. After all, the designers at TD had all given up their individual identities to work in a collective – the ultimate consequence of the requirement of anonymity in Swiss typography. Nevertheless, in 1972 Crowwel made a folder for the Typo Vision International supplement to the German journal *Druckspiegel* as one of a row of seven internationally known and influential designers. But even that turned out to be an exception. In 1979 it was possible to see Crowwel's work at his great retrospective exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum – yet there is no record of a single review of that exhibition having appeared anywhere outside Holland. In Philip Meggs's standard survey of graphic design (1983) there was no mention of him – he first appears in the third edition (1998) – and even then only in the context of TD.² It may be, then, that many outside the Netherlands were unfamiliar with Crowwel's work.

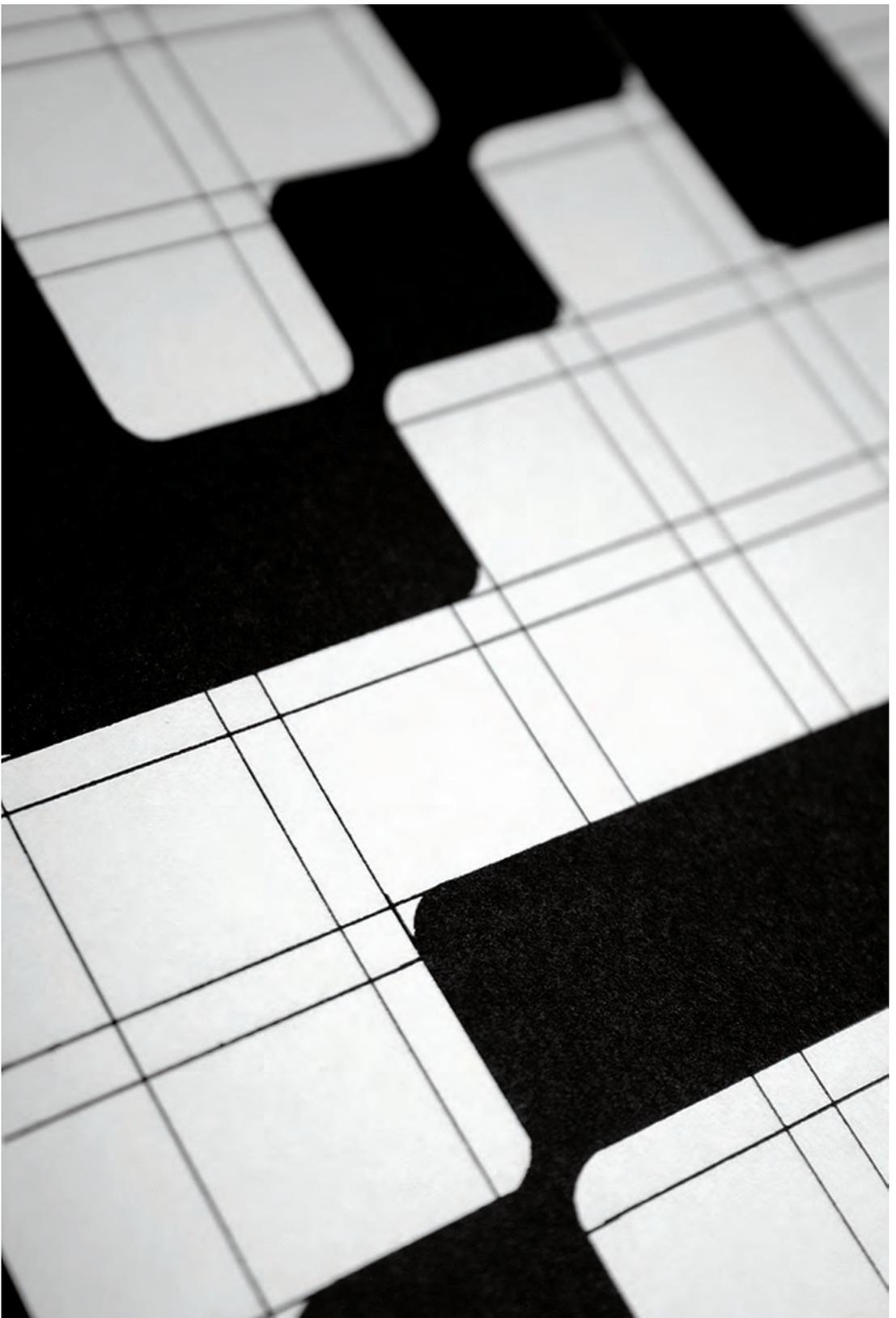
US and UK

In the eighties, designers in other countries started to take notice of Dutch design. They included Katherine McCoy, Helmut Schmitt-Siegel, Michael Rock and critic Rick Poynor, for whom the 1983 book about TD proved an eye-opener.³ Their admiration was aroused by the way public space was ordered (by modernist design) and the important role designers played in the public domain, from public transport all the way to postage stamps and the country's currency.

¹ For example: *Graphis Annual* 1957-8; Plata 1960; *Print in Britain*, no. 10 1961; *Delta*, Summer 1960; *Idea*, no. 79 1966.

² The same applies to Martha Scotford's 1991 investigation of the graphic design canon (in De Bondt/De Smet 2012) based on overview books. While there is a mention of Piet Zwart there is nothing about Crowwel; but Scotford looked at only a few books.

³ McCoy 1984, Schmitt-Siegel 1985, Rock 2004, Poynor 2010.



Reprinting Crowel's poster *Vormgevers* (1968) in 2008 by Blanka.

Seen/Unseen makes clear, for them it was also a genuine first acquaintance with his work, even though the exchange of information about designers and design had meanwhile seen exponential growth thanks to the Internet. In the small catalogue, British designers paid homage to their predecessor with compliments such as 'fresh, vital, bold, rigorous, inventive, inspiring, still original and modern', and 'a challenge to conformity', at the same time admiring in his work a humanist spirit, emotion and warmth. Meanwhile Crouwel's types were launched on the world – Gridnik, more than any other, becoming a favourite in magazines.¹⁷

_New exhibitions followed, as well as lectures, talks, publications and many interviews, not just in the UK but in Australia, Japan, France, America and the Netherlands too – and online. In particular, Crouwel's essay of 1970 on the New Alphabet was translated and reprinted countless times. Crouwel's types were also the focus of *Wim Crouwel Alphabets* (2003), in the Italian book *New Alphabet* (2003) by Paolo Palma, and in the bilingual French-English catalogue *Wim Crouwel: Typographic Architectures Typographiques* (2007) from the Paris gallery Anatome. *Idea* went a step further with a fat and opulently produced monographic issue with many illustrations and a complete facsimile reprint of both the New Alphabet issue of the *Kwadrat-Blad* and the 1979 exhibition folder about Crouwel.¹⁸ Thanks in part to the inclusion of testimonials from contemporaries, authorities and admirers, this was Crouwel's ultimate canonization. The deluge of compliments – including 'Crouwel's work transcends all the "isms" and

elevates itself to a level that defies categorisation' – was one great warm bath. Young and old alike saw his work as inspiring and relevant. The British designer Michael Place, who like Crouwel had featured in the 2007 documentary *Helvetica*, wrote: 'Modernism is an attitude I can relate to on many levels, Wim Crouwel showed what you can do with it, and move it forward. His generation showed the way forward through graphic design, now it's up to our generation to take it to new places, always moving forward...'¹⁹ Modernism was back as never before.

_That Crouwel had become a hero was also made clear by the award in the Netherlands of the Piet Zwart Prize (1991), the Oeuvreprijs 2004 and the Gerrit Noordzij Prize 2009 – but the seal was definitively set by the great retrospective in the Design Museum in London, which was held in 2011 at the instigation of Tony Brook and subsequently travelled to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.²⁰

_Design hero and pragmatist

With the renewed interest in his work Crouwel became a design hero whose name was fairly quickly elevated to an indisputable place in the international design canon. He had achieved his goal of giving his work durability and seemed to have risen above and beyond the nineteen-sixties. Following the cacophony of postmodernism and the New Wave the pendulum was now swinging back towards simplicity. But did this renewed interest in Crouwel mean anything more than a neo-modernism as a stylistic revival? The greatly enlarged *Avenue* photo of Crouwel in a

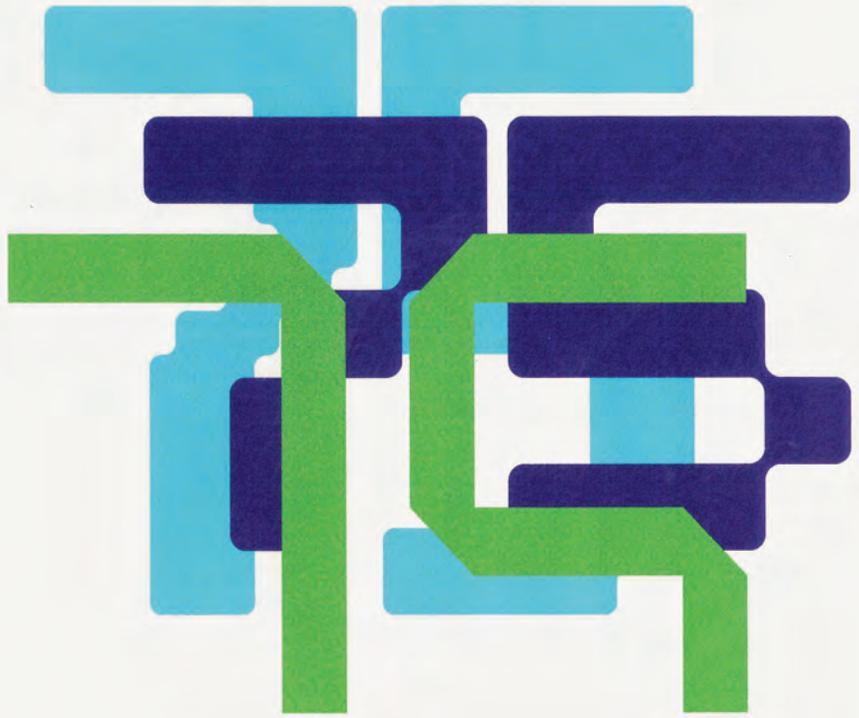
¹⁷ See *Grafik*, August 2005, which references the periodicals *AD*, *Arena*, *GQ*, *MAP*, plus Vodafone and the museum of modern art in Stockholm.

¹⁸ *Idea* 2007, no. 4/323: 'Wim Crouwel's Adventures into the Experimental Worlds'.

¹⁹ *Idea* 2007, p. 180.

²⁰ The Piet Zwart Prize is awarded by the Dutch design association BNO. The Oeuvre-prijs was an initiative of the Fonds voor Beeldende Kunsten, Vormgeving en Bouwkunst, now part of the Mondriaan Fonds, a trust which is responsible for the awarding of subsidies and other forms of support to artists and artistic initiatives both in and outside the Netherlands. The Gerrit Noordzij Prize is awarded by

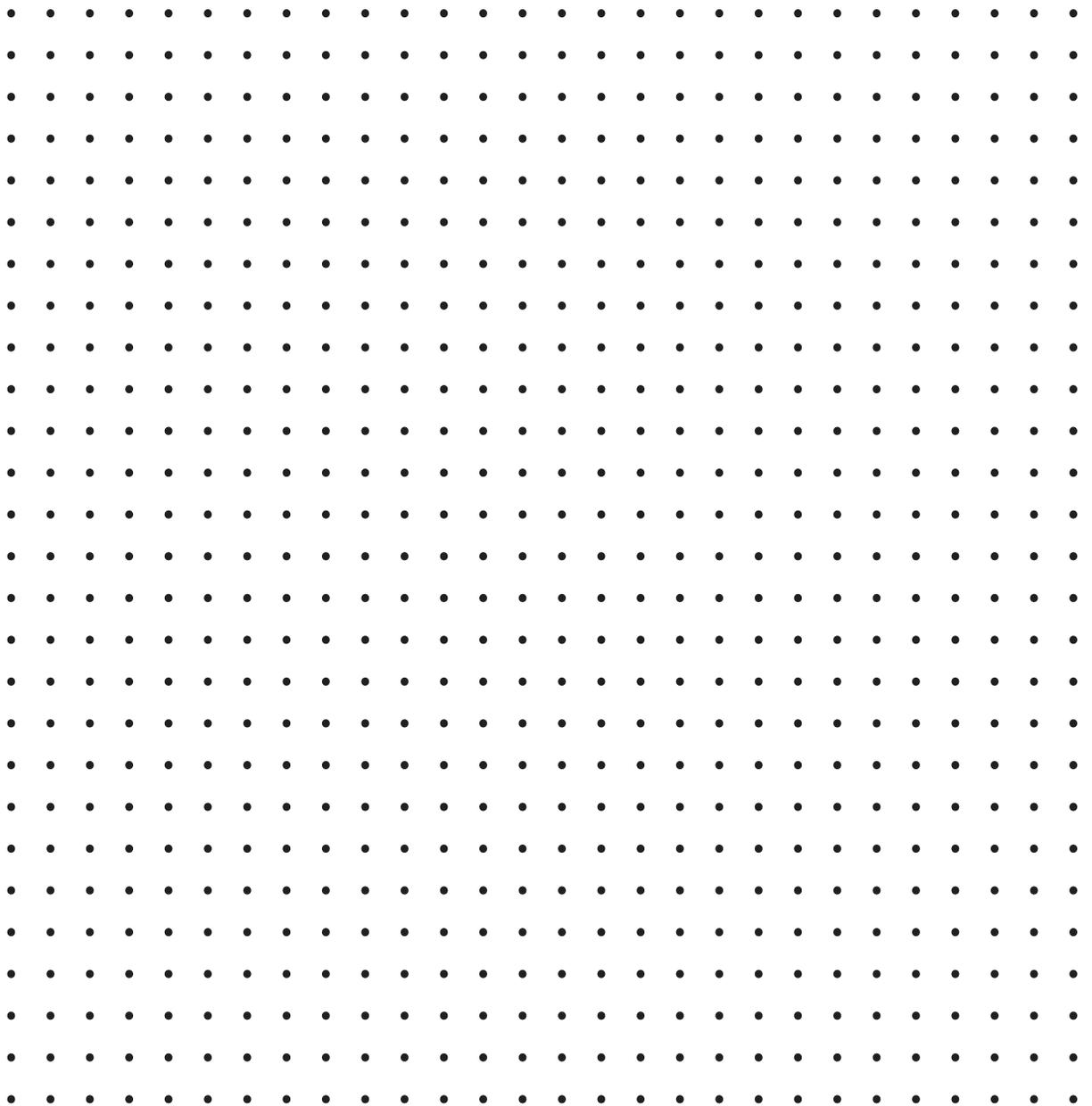
the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague and every two years recognizes 'those who have played an important and internationally acknowledged role in type design and typography'. Designer and publisher Tony Brook met Crouwel through 8vo in the nineteen-nineties, invited him to give a talk at his agency Spin, and collected his posters. It was through Brook that many others came into contact with Crouwel.



compositie van twee rijen door edo spier

judith cuhen en vln crowdel

Composition *Edo Spier* 75,
29.7 x 21.



_A Vision on Design, 1974

Ladies and Gentlemen. May I introduce myself: I am a designer and I hardly believe that design today is an activity that is needed to help inter-human relationships. I am very sorry that I have to make this remark; it is a shame that design is not in the position to really fulfil the very important role that it should fulfil; design should and could serve society.

_We, designers and producers daily produce tons and tons of printed material without properly knowing how this will affect the world and the people that live in it. All this material together forms a large part of the total visual environment and the result of it is exactly the same as the result of everything there is too much of; it pollutes the world. This is a visual pollution that is as dangerous as all other types of pollution. It is this theme that I should like to talk about today; for this is what I think a major designers' problem.

_I have been in this sacred hall once before as a guest of your society; it was on the occasion of an AType congress; a gathering of type designers and producers from all over the world. It was one of these events where we talked about the most important details of type design and where we believed that serifs or non-serifs were the crucial things; able to change the visual world definitely.

_Sometimes design seems like some sort of religion. And not only type designers, but most designers in general are religious maniacs, who believe they create a new way of visual life through good design! But unfortunately their activities often have the opposite result!

_The world is full of most different and ugly things, and full of badly designed printed things also; only a small part of a percentage of everything that is visible around us has been designed properly. And of course designers think it their task

to change this! Unfortunately, each of those designers wants to get this change in the most original way; if possible in his *own special* way; signed by himself as the originator and hoping to be mentioned in the annuals of art- and other directors.

_Designers are the greatest individualists, and because of this individualism they will most possibly never be able to change anything fundamentally in the world of visual communication at all. On the contrary: the existing visual pollution is mainly getting worse due to this cult of design originality. We do not need more difference and more original ideas! We all need to work on one idea, a simple idea, doing things in the same way instead of in different ways. Even if most biologists will state that human beings need different stimuli to develop harmoniously without frustrations of whatever kind, and that monotony is anti-human; it is my idea that this existing visual pollution is not a stimulus at all, it is a danger.

_If I am against the pattern of diversification and originality, it does not mean I am in favour of monotony or uniformity. I only think we need more design on basic problems; I think we have to find a solid design grammar where a new starting point for design could be made from. Personal design solutions and interpretations would be more valid in this way and less subjective. The new visual variety, that could be the result of this new grammar, would be a variety within a visible framework, and linked to this grammar.

_May I make a comparison with the so popular football game; this possibly sounds very profane but it is a comparison that is clear. If eleven individualists tried to get the ball in the other goal, each in their own way, without rules, they would most likely lose the game. The strong set of rules and regulations, the grammar of the football game, the white lines on the grass, and the specific tasks in the team together

Wim Crowel, graphic designer and exhibition designer, changed with his agency Total Design the face of the Netherlands. His modernism was expressed in posters and catalogues for the Stedelijk Museum, in postage stamps and experimental work such as a sensational computer typeface. He attracted criticism, but he is now seen as a cult figure and an inspiration. This lavishly illustrated monograph shows a vast quantity of work. The texts examine his career and his views, provide backgrounds, and give a critical appraisal of him in his context.



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