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Design Pioneers — Craig Ward

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"DESIGN IS AN UNDENIABLY BROAD and - crucially - non-denominational church. There are the

purists, the minimalists (and the maximalists), the avant-garde, the punks and the fetishists, all of

whom congregate in offices and studios the world over to create the great visual melting pot that

is graphic design" (Ward, p. 11).

Craig Ward was born in the rural steppes of Lincolnshire in the East of England. Not raised in

a place where design, or even art was much appreciated Ward didn't know he had creative talent

until he was nineteen years old. He entered school for journalism and it was during his first

internship when he met the designer at the printers that he became fascinated with the process of

printing. There he fell in love with print and began his education in design. He completed his

degree at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University in Fine Art and Graphic Design then trained as an

Art Director at Buckinghamshire New University and is currently based in New York. He is best

known for his experimental typography work that revolves around the juxtaposition of clean,

classic type with various organic or uncontrolled processes. He has designed several typefaces that

vary from the traditional appeal of his classic Dior lettering, to the organic look of the Hairy

Alphabet to the faux 3D effect of the 2018 England World Cup Font he designed for Nike. Ward

challenges the traditional 'rules and regulations' of the design world, the idea of type clarity, type

legibility and balance, stating that instead "You should make people want to read something, as

opposed to just laying it out there" (Creative Bloq, p. 1). Believing that sometimes accidents can be

used to tell better stories and to communicate language, Ward uses these accidents as inspiration and as a basis for his projects to convey the emotion behind his messages. Straddling the disciplines of photography, illustration, typography and the sciences, Ward's minimalistic yet extremely impactful designs have labeled him a pioneer of experimental typography.

NM SERIF FOR PARFUMS CHRISTIAN DIOR, WARD, 2014
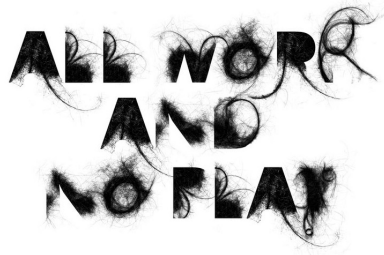
HAIRY ALPHABET, WARD, 2008

NIKE WORLD CUP ENGLAND, WARD, 2018

Ward's Inspiration and Style

When interviewed by *The Creative Chair*, Craig Ward talks about what and who his inspirations for his work have been. "I've always loved to 'symbolize and simplify' maxim of designers like Saul Bass and Alan Fletcher, and I love their playful way with words. And of course, you can't help but pay homage to designers like Herb Lubalin but, all that being a given, I think I'm more inspired by people like Chris Cunningham and Nick Knight—real field pioneers" (Creative Chair, p. 1). Originally feeling like typography was more of an obstacle that needed to be worked around than a centerpiece of design, during Ward's third year at university inspired by his type tutor, Henrik Kubel of A2 Graphics, he began playing with type physically and started working with a letter press in the printmaking department.

He finds most of his inspiration not from looking at other people's design work but more so in process and accidents—misprinted posters; peeling, faded or broken signs, smudges, environmental wear and tear, the fashion and art worlds for material inspiration, factual blogs, scientific books and theoretical physics. All of these inspirations have centered his work around

clean, classic type and the unpredictability, the "accidents" of the organic, natural world. With Ward's artistic goal of defeating the conception of legibility he composes type that consistently conveys energy and excitement by involving a chaotic or organic process. " 'Ninety percent of advertising is product shot plus headline. I make headlines that art directors can only dream of'. He does it by arranging, carving, burning and otherwise manipulating objects into typographical forms, then photographing them and refining the image digitally" (Shapiro, p. 1). It is the experiments and the unpredictable elements that Ward uses to create compelling results that binds together all of his different projects.

Ward's Career and Projects

After Ward graduated from Buckinghamshire New University in 2003 he worked as a designer or art director at several major London advertising agencies including MCBD and CHI & Partners. In 2009 he moved to New York City as the Head Creative Director at Grey Advertising. While developing his career and handling major clients such as Dior, Calvin Klein, Hennessy, Nike, Macy's, Gillette, Peugeot, The New York Times, Wired, the V&A Museum, Mulverry, Dockers and (RED) he always pursued his own visual experiments and he took on client work in the editorial and advertising industries outside of his regular hours.

In 2008, FontLab asked Ward to create some typefaces for a new piece of software called Photofont. The brief was completely open and Ward had total creative freedom on the job, which according to him is the best and worst kind of brief you can get. "The software allows you to make these transparent, full-color, really detailed bitmap typefaces for use in Photoshop. I wanted to collide organic elements that you don't have any control over with these really cleanly designed typefaces and see what would happen" (Creative Bloq, p. 1). While getting his hair cut, Ward glanced down at the clumps of hair on the ground and saw that they were vaguely making shapes

and was inspired to bag up the hair and take it home. Once there he randomly dropped the clumps of hair on the scanner to achieve an 'incidental look' and scanned them in at high resolution. "Some shapes fell into letters very naturally—the 'K', 'G' and 'R' especially. Not all were formed so easily, however, and he admits to having to come back to some later" (Creative Bloq, p. 1). After scanning the hair, he digitally enhanced it to create the 'Hairy Alphabet'. Following a similar process with different materials his 'Blossomwell' font used dying blossoms from a Cherry Tree to form the letters of the alphabet; he refers to this alphabet as a 'beautiful decay'. Much of Ward's works are conceptual pieces like Blossomwell and Hairy Alphabet, resulting in something raw, real, and natural. Ward uses methods that respects "veritas" in which he uses the actual thing that inspired him for the design of the final font. Finding these materials not only as inspiration but as the creation itself sets Ward apart from traditional typographical designers and their processes and demonstrates how he is pioneering the field of typography.

HAIRY ALPHABET, WARD, 2008   BLOSSOMWELL, WARD, 2008

At the end of 2008 Ward conceived a piece that would be known as "You Blow Me Away". One of his more ambitious pieces, Ward sought out photographers who could help him realize this project and he found Jason Tozer, a kinetic still life photographer, with whom he later collaborated. In 2009 the photography project began in January after being approached by the organizers of the Art Mosh (a travelling exhibition) who wanted him to create 10 new pieces by the end of March. Tozer and Ward began their creation with 20 sheets of 7mm glass that were

screen printed with the words 'You Blow Me Away'. Tozer set up the studio lighting using reactive

flash photography and as Ward catapulted objects through the individual pieces of glass, Tozer

captured the moment of impact. "The images whilst at once kinetic and exciting, are also studies

in the boundaries of legibility as we managed to capture the glass at various stages of destruction"

(Ward, p. 1). If you can imagine the words "You Blow Me Away" as a visual representation you can

see destruction, energy and movement, all embodied in these words. When you combine the

words with the actual destruction of the piece they are printed on the end result does more to

convey the emotion behind "You Blow Me Away" than any still piece of typography ever could.

This effect could be done in photoshop but the unpredictable outcome of actually propelling an

object through screen printed glass can never truly be duplicated digitally. This chaotic process

and the end result of the project are what makes Ward's work stand alone.

YOU BLOW ME AWAY, WARD, 2009

In 2009 Ward designed the annual cover for *Creative Review* and described this process as a

way to bring design back to the original creative process that he believes is organic and human. He

decided to take away the cold detached feeling of the previous covers and worked with

immunologist, Frank Conrad, to grow and train a culture of pollen cells to create the traditional

shape of an A. Photographed at 400x magnification Ward digitally enhanced the images to create

the cover of the magazine. Using organic cultures that were encouraged to grow into this shape

transformed a normally digital and disconnected cover into a more scientific and human related design. The human connection to creativity is a common theme through most of Ward's projects and you will see how he continues to use these elements in more experimental ways.

CREATIVE REVIEW ANNUAL COVER, WARD, 2010

In 2010 another opportunity from *Creative Review* surfaced and the brief stated, "make creative review a part of your world" (Ward, 1). Inspired by real world, perspective-defying work of Swiss artist Felice Varini, Ward had been waiting for this opportunity to present itself. "He wanted to create something clean and graphic and slightly out of place in a real world setting and the reflective properties of fluorescent gaffer tape turned out to be the perfect material" (Ward, 1). "My original idea was to just sort of paint Creative Review into a corner. But Jason Tozer thought we should do something more complicated and involve the stairwell. The lighting was tricky—because it's fluorescent it was giving off more light than it was absorbing—but it was really fun. The legs were accidental, but the blue tights work really well and make it more fun" (Creative Bloq, p. 1) The red gaffing tape, the blue legs and the distorted projection of the image within the stairwell really make this project interesting. The process Ward and Tozer followed resulted in a more dynamic outcome than what it could have been if limited to just a computer design. The end result of both of these projects were dictated by the process that Ward followed until he achieved the incidental appearance of these pieces. Again separating his work from that of traditional typographic designers.

CREATIVE REVIEW SUBPAGE, WARD, 2010

Tired of working the night shift Ward decided to leave Grey Advertising as the head of design and open 'The Words are Pictures Studio'. Ward set up this studio with the initial focus to be on custom and experimental typography. With sketchbook in hand, the old press on standby and the computer an arm's reach away Ward was ready to experiment. Adding a new skill to his arsenal he decided to tryout 3D typography. 'Let's Go Get Lost' was an experiment in Cinema 4D inspired by lyrics from the Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Road Trippin'*. Looking for the words to be interwoven and to have depth, Ward had to let go during the process and be surprised by the end result. "I knew I was applying depth, I knew where I'd put my light, but I didn't know how it would look until it was there rendered on the screen" (Creative Bloq, p. 1). The impact of this message in the computer generated 3D environment is playful in an unexpected way and triggers a desire to read it and to interpret the meaning behind the words. The movement and the shape of the design inspire you to do just what the message says, 'Go Get Lost'. The motion and shape of this project doesn't so much walk the edge of legibility that Ward is known for but it does give you the experimentation, depth and movement that is found with his work.

LET'S GO GET LOST, WARD, 2011

With his love of journalism still ever present in his life Ward decided that in between commissioned projects he would combine his love of writing and design and publish his first self-authored book. In 2012 *Popular Lies About Graphic Design* was published. Reminiscing on all the bad advice Ward was given while working with agencies and all of the students who asked for his opinions over the years, he took his 5,000-word blog posts and created a book. When released it was number one in Amazon's graphic design category for several weeks and is now in its second edition. In this book Ward refers to "design as a religion that its most devout are blindly adhering to a school of thought without ever questioning its validity" (Roberts, p. 1). His book gives insight to the biggest lies that have been told including quotes from designers such as Milton Glaser, David Carson, Stefan Sagemeister and James Victore. My favorite lie in this book is from Carson, "You can't judge a book by its cover. If the designer has done their job, you should absolutely be able to do this" (Ward, p. 66). Not only is this book an educational read, Ward has designed it in his typical striking and energetic manner. This book has inspired me as a designer and given validity to a lot of the self-doubts I was harboring. One of the most impactful parts of this book was his chapter 'Graphic Design is Easy', in which Ward states, "Frustratingly of course, like the very best practitioners, design maestros like the Paul Rands of the world can truly make the craft of graphic design appear effortless" (Ward, p. 59), however, this is not the case, graphic design is not easy and more often than not people overlook that it is actually physically exhausting spending hours at your desk, thinking conceptually for days at a time, maintaining focus for extended periods of time and working through the night on long-term projects to meet hard deadlines. There are times that many of us designers will spend days squinting at the screen, walking away from the task for days at a time only to come back, start again, change things up and throw it away, try different combinations and then finally send it to print and still wonder if there was

room for improvement. Ward explains, design is hard and "you will not become famous as a

designer, but you will come to realize that the work you do you will be proud of and can look back

on fondly" (Ward, p. 37). Inspiration comes in many shapes and forms and when struck with

inspiration you should breathe life into it and surrender to the process because the best results are

often from an uncontrolled process, much like Ward's fonts Hairy Alphabet and Blossomwell as

well as his projects for *Creative Review*. Keeping with the same unpredictability and

experimentation Ward continues to push the envelope of readability and legibility and encourages

designers to embrace the journey.

During Ward's Tedx Drexel U presentation he discusses that a lot of his inspirations come

from reading or listening to music and every now and again a visually loaded word will jump out

and beg to be brought to life. One of those words was 'Collapsed in Love' from a song by Blur

called 'Till the End'. This inspired an experimentation with crushed chiffon silk and photography.

Ward and Bill Wardmen threw this silk up into the air and shot it on the way down to see what

shapes would take place and eventually after hundreds of pictures these ethereal shapes created

letters and a headline that lent itself to the meaning behind this project. The combination of the

silk shapes and the design of the message give you the feeling of falling in love, something a plain

text headline could never accomplish. The collapsed in love headline with the ethereal shape of

the scarves inspires you to let go and not be so rigid in your routine and desired outcome. It is

more often than not that designers try to control the outcome of what they do or what they are

creating. If instead they spent more time on enjoying the journey the process would all be more

surprising, and the designers would be impressed by their work. This project, like Ward's others,

sacrifice legibility over meaning and emotion and allow you to see type in things you normally

would not. Making him very different among traditional practitioners who pride themselves on legibility.

COLLAPSED IN LOVE, WARD, 2011

Over the summer of 2015 Ward rode the trains of each of New York City's 22 subway lines and his font 'Subvisual Subway' was born. Using sterilized sponges that were pre-cut into the corresponding letter or number of the subway line, samples from each of these trains were swabbed from the seats and railings. These swabs were then pressed into pre-poured agar plates and incubated for up to a week and photographed at various stages of development. "The resulting images are a portrait of the city's complex ecosystem that each of us contributes to and an excellent visual analogy for the subway and city at large. They hopefully serve as a reminder that in a place that can make you feel extremely small, there are countless billions of smaller inhabitants" (Mr Cup Creative Studio, p. 1). This process created an end result that makes you stop, observe and think about what you are seeing and its relation to this world—the exact achievement Ward hopes for during his pursuit of communication.

SUBWAY SUBVISUAL, WARD, 2015

Returning to his love of experimenting with anamorphic perspective Ward created the "Adobe Remix Project" in 2015, where he used 2000ft of cable and hundreds of light bulbs to create the Adobe Logo with the idea behind the execution being, 'ideas'. "The lightbulb has long been a visual expression of inspiration, and the Adobe Creative Cloud represents a coming together of countless creative minds. Inspired by this, I created a 1700cu/ft installation of the Adobe logo, suspended in a 3-Dimensional space using hundreds of suspended lightbulbs and anamorphic perspective - meaning the Adobe logo is only visible from one specific viewpoint." (Ward, p. 1). The process he used had to make what is traditionally translated in a 2-Dimensional plane into a 3-Dimensional sculpture hanging in midair. Seems simple when you look at the final piece, as do most of his projects, but the reality is the process involved: taping off a 3D area while looking through a camera; creating a 3D model ahead of the build to understand the complexities of the project and planning for placement and execution. The installation of this project took Ward's personal process to whole new level and the project itself was a personal triumph for him as it was the largest piece he'd ever created as well as teaching him how to direct and remain hands on throughout the process. This project transcends just font design and headlines, it creates a conceptually relevant piece that reminds us of how brilliant the ideas are behind Adobe and the Creative Cloud using basic lightbulbs in an unconventional design. This is what makes Ward a pioneer of typography—the unpredictable and often chaotic process, the experimentation with new materials and the ultimately thought provoking outcome.
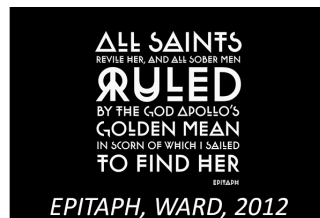
ADOBE REMIX PROJECT, WARD, 2015

Reflection

Craig Ward's work shows that the future of typography is in finding new ways to communicate a message, moving away from traditional type design and exploring new ways to create with new methods to create with different materials. Ward has reintroduced what we have long forgotten in this digital age, the ability to craft more physically than digitally the meaning behind his headlines. He inspires us to use more raw materials and to step back from our computers and surrender to a more experimental process to create more emotional messaging. "Craig Ward is certainly a designer that brings the fine arts back into design with his personal projects and is a true pioneer in experimental typography" (McNicol, p. 1). The process that Ward takes to achieve the impact his headlines have, breaks the bounds of traditional type by sacrificing the legibility of the type to convey the meaning behind the design. His minimalistic approach, unconventional methods and experimentation with organic elements have paved a new path toward the future of redefining typography's rules and regulations.

Ward has influenced me to redefine the way I approach typography and to look more into my environment and see the imperfections and allow them to influence the outcome of my projects. I spend so much time on the computer and planning the final result of my projects that I forget about experimenting with a new process and accepting a different outcome. I have seen

with Ward's projects that his messages are impactful not in just what they say but what materials have been used and the process he has chosen to create the overall feel of the message. When I look at his "You Blow Me Away" project, it was not just the simple type treatment of the words but the effect of the shattered glass that distorts the headline that creates the feeling of being blown away that I could understand the bearing his message had on me visually. Ward has motivated me to step back from my computer and look into the world around me a little deeper and to reclaim my fine arts background to inspire the messages I want to create.

Ward is forging new directions in the creation of type from unconventional objects like biological cultures, scarves, hair, shattered glass, burned wood, etc. and that has not been done before him. The path he is paving is breaking down the boundaries we have been designing within by showing us how to bring fine arts into design and surrender to the process. The best advice Ward gives to young designers is "Make the kind of work you want to do. Then get it in front of the people that count. Make them notice what you're doing" (Shapiro, p. 1). After all, when you look at Ward's work you understand why the people who count are noticing and labelling him as the next Herb Lubalin, a typographic pioneer.

NM SERIF CHRISTIAN DIOR, WARD, 2014

EPITAPH, WARD, 2012

GO VOTE, WARD, 2012

NIKE WORLD CUP ENGLAND, WARD, 2018

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