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Corporate Diversity: Swiss Graphic Design And Advertising By Geigy 1940 - 1970



Synopsis

The design studio of J. R. Geigy AG was the launching pad for one of the great periods of Swiss graphic design, in the 1950s and 1960s. The open-minded corporate culture of the chemical company in Basel combined product and company advertising in an exemplary way. The resulting works reveal a modernist formal idiom without being indebted to a specific, formulaic look. There was room in it for visual symbolism as well as the acquisition of nonrepresentational art, with which some of the graphic designers involved were connected. Under the leadership of Max Schmid for many years, the studio employed Roland Aeschlimann, Karl Gerstner, Jürg Hamburger, Steff Geissbühler, Andreas His, Toshihiro Katayama, and Nelly Rudin, among others. Freelance designers such as Michael Engelmann, Gottfried Honegger, Armin Hofmann, Herbert Leupin, Warja Lavater, Numa Rick, and Niklaus Stoecklin were also used. In the 1960s, the Basel office, most especially George Giusti and Fred Troller, was involved in developing the studios of the subsidiaries in the United States and the United Kingdom, placing more emphasis on advertising. This is the first comprehensive presentation of Geigy design, an important Swiss contribution to the international history of design, in all its determination and independence.

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Customer Reviews

A remarkably thorough, comprehensive look at the graphics output of this Swiss chemical company. The clean, elegant designs of the Geigy 'look' really took off in the early fifties though the head of the publicity department Rene Rudin, as early as 1944, said: 'We must take care that a certain

artistic level is maintained, marked by impeccable typographic design, high quality illustrations and technically flawless reproduction'. An excellent example of this design approach is shown with two pack shots on page sixteen. A 1942 insecticide spray shows a dull, unimaginative can the total opposite of the 1959 version, now with clean type (Helvetica, of course) and a simple graphic. Page forty-three reveals an interesting observation: Geigy had no style manual, except for the packaging. The company relied on choosing designers who all had a similar attitude to design and were mostly trained at the Allgemaine Gewerbeschule in Basel. Clearly this paid off judging by the high quality of the printed material shown throughout the pages. As the leading Swiss chemical company with an impeccable corporate face (I would place Hoffman La Roche a close second during the fifties and sixties) the company exported this to divisions in other countries. There is a chapter on Geigy in America and another dealing with United Kingdom. An interesting chapter, by graphic historian Roger Remington, though not relating directly to the company deals with the influence of Swiss graphic design in America. The first part of the book takes an overall look at the how Geigy organized and ran their Publicity department (a footnote says that before 1966 this was known as the Propaganda Department) in Basel.

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