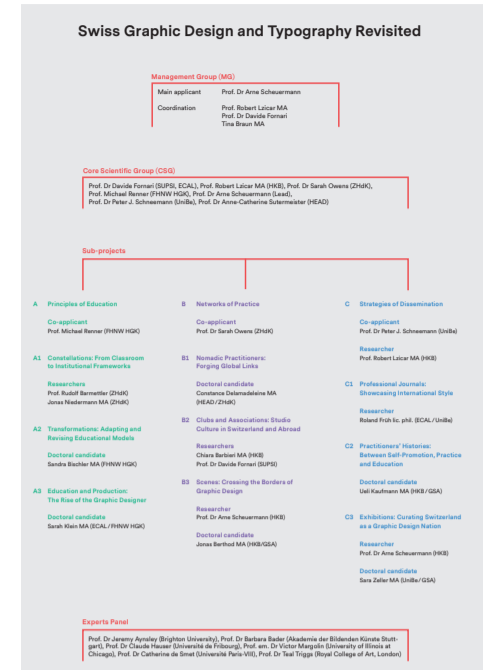




Second Experts' Panel Meeting, ZHdK, 4.-5.5.2018
(Image: Chhandak Pradhan)



Organigram of the project

Institute of Design Research

Swiss Graphic Design and Typography Revisited

Abstract: This three-year Sinergia project examines the development of “Swiss graphic design and typography” during the 20th and 21st centuries. It does so in three subprojects: “Principles of Education”, “Networks of Practice” and “Strategies of Dissemination”. In order to approach a topic as broad as this, a team of researchers from the University of Bern and the universities of applied sciences of Basel, Geneva, Lausanne, Lugano and Zurich will work together, coordinated by the Bern University of the Arts. Using methods grounded in current approaches to historical analysis and cultural theory, they will search through archives, analyse textual, pictorial and design sources, and will interview key figures in the field. This will culminate in a comprehensive publication with contributions from all three sub-projects, a travelling exhibition and six PhD theses.

Das auf drei Jahre angelegte Sinergia Projekt untersucht die Entwicklung von «Schweizer Grafikdesign und Typographie» im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert in den drei Teilprojekten «Principles of Education», «Networks of Practice» and «Strategies of Dissemination». Um sich dieses umfassenden Inhalts anzunehmen, arbeiten Forschende der Fachhochschulen aus Basel, Genf, Lausanne, Lugano und Zürich sowie der Universität Bern, koordiniert durch die Hochschule der Künste Bern, zusammen. Ausgehend von aktuellen geschichtswissenschaftlichen und kulturtheoretischen Ansätzen gilt es, Archive zu erschliessen, textliche, bildliche und gestaltete Quellen zu analysieren und wichtige Akteure zu interviewen. Daraus soll eine umfassende Publikation mit Beiträgen aus allen drei Teilprojekten, eine Wanderausstellung sowie sechs Dissertationen entstehen.

Introduction: The inclusion of “Swiss graphic design and typography” as one of eight Swiss candidates submitted to UNESCO in 2014 for inclusion in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage confirms its national and international historical significance. It is discussed in classrooms, studios, exhibition spaces and publications. But more than this: it is still being made and has recently been claimed as “one of the country’s leading products” (Gimmi 2014, 9). The label “Swiss graphic design and typography” thus oscillates between a closed mythology and a history still in the making. As the term originated both in Switzerland and abroad, it represents the culmination of a broad body of works, multiple stories and explanations about its nature and history, and today’s ongoing graphic design practice. But how did “Swiss graphic design and typography” achieve its legitimacy, reputation and status? Is the attribution of a national label to various design approaches obscured from the vantage point of the present? What might be a contemporary definition of “Swiss graphic design and typography”?

Methods: The sub-project “Principles of Education” (A), focuses on the education of graphic designers in Switzerland by analysing interviews, curricula, teaching materials and results, and literature by and on teachers and teaching methods. Instead of singling out individual designers, the second sub-project “Networks of Practice” (B) analyses graphic design as a social practice produced by networks of people, institutions, associations, objects and ideas, with a focus on their migration beyond national and linguistic boundaries. Finally, the sub-project “Strategies of Dissemination” (C) deals with professional journals, history books and exhibitions as instruments of historiography and, at the same time, as predominant forms for the production and dissemination of “Swiss graphic design and typography” itself.

Interim results:

- Sub-project A: The context of the “Gewerbeschulen” and their proximity to trade is a key factor influencing the educational principles in comparison to the curricula developed at Academies abroad. Beyond this relevant difference a vivid exchange between Swiss and foreign institutions in the field of design education can be observed throughout the 20th century.
- Sub-project B: All case studies may be characterised as pursuing alternative narratives in regard to design practice and professional networks. The studied designers and their networks represent marginal histories which shed new light on well-established narratives of Swiss graphic design. Their relevance lies especially in showing how the unconventionality of the studied cases unfolds previously largely hidden or omitted layers of professional practice.
- Sub-project C: The evaluation of the corpuses of all three case studies revealed that the discourse on Swiss graphic design and typography is shaped by canonization. In order to deconstruct predominant narratives, the sub-project decided to pay attention to isolate terms or phenomena and to describe these in detail.

Project coordination:
 Davide Fornari, Robert Lzicar, Tina Braun (Assistant)

Project responsibility:
 Arne Scheuermann

Team:
 Chiara Barbieri, Rudolf Barmettler (ZHdK), Jonas Berthod, Sandra Bischof (FHNW HGK), Tina Braun, Constance Delamadeleine (HEAD), Davide Fornari (SUPSI, ECAL), Roland Früh (ECAL), Ueli Kaufmann (HKB), Sarah Klein (ECAL), Robert Lzicar, Jonas Niedermann (ZHdK), Sarah Owens (ZHdK, coordinator of sub-project B), Michael Renner (FHNW HGK, coordinator of sub-project A), Peter J. Schneemann (UniBe, coordinator of sub-project C), Sara Zeller (UniBe)

Partners:
 ECAL: Ecole Cantonale d'art de Lausanne, FHNW HGK: Academy of Art and Design Basel, HEAD: Geneva School of Art and Design, SUPSI: University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland, UniBe: University of Bern, Institute of Art History, ZHdK: Zurich University of the Arts, Aiap: Associazione italiana design della comunicazione visiva, Federal Office of Culture FOC, Graphis, Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, Swiss Graphic Design Foundation, SGD Swiss Graphic Designers

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Contact:
 Bern University of the Arts, Research
 RA Communication Design
 Fellerstrasse 11
 3027 Bern

robert.lzicar@hkb.bfh.ch,
 www.hkb.bfh.ch/kommunikationsdesign

Projektwebsite/-blog: <http://sgdtr.ch/>,
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sgdtr>,
 Twitter: https://twitter.com/SGDTR_2016