

Is There a Chicago Tradition in Graphic Design?



Talk to the Caxton Club and Society of Typographic Arts, October 17, 2007
by Paul F. Gehl, The Newberry Library

Note: What follows is the script for an after-dinner talk at the regular monthly meeting of the Caxton Club. Films of this and other Caxton Club talks are available on DVD from the audiovisual committee of the Caxton Club; contact information is at www.caxtonclub.org. The author has added a brief bibliography and credits for the slide images in the hope of stimulating further research. Researchers are welcome to contact the Newberry for general information at reference@newberry.org.

Thanks to everyone for coming out tonight. I particularly want to thank Jack Weiss for suggesting this program, which is intended to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Society of Typographic Arts. STA and the Caxton Club have a long and entwined common history, both in terms of overlapping membership and in terms of interest in the book arts. Jack and Ron Kovach have also made it possible to add to my own store of images with some drawn from STA's on-line trove, the Chicago Design Archive. Bob McCamant, Jeanne Goessling, George Thompson, Margaret Beck, Jim Wells, Carole Blomstrand, and Susan Keig have also been generous with help and advice. Thanks to you all.

My idea for this talk is to look at a variety of graphic design materials that evidence the history of Chicago in the twentieth century and to ask an apparently simple question: Is there a Chicago design tradition, as distinct from that of the rest of the U.S.? I am not talking about another "Chicago School." We have too many of those in our critical history, and to my way of thinking it is a conundrum of "Second City Studies" that we have to keep looking for schools to call our own. But I do wonder if there wasn't in fact a *tradition* of design that made working in Chicago different—qualitatively or quantitatively—from other places? The STA anniversary is a good occasion to ask this question, since in fact STA was a major force—really the major force—in Chicago design for decades. The question is also not new. In 1969, *Chicago Magazine* even staged a sort of debate on the subject. Some designers of that period did identify a Chicago school or Chicago look in graphic design but they then insisted it was past tense, out of date, totally square.

My answer to the question will be impressionistic, and most of my examples are

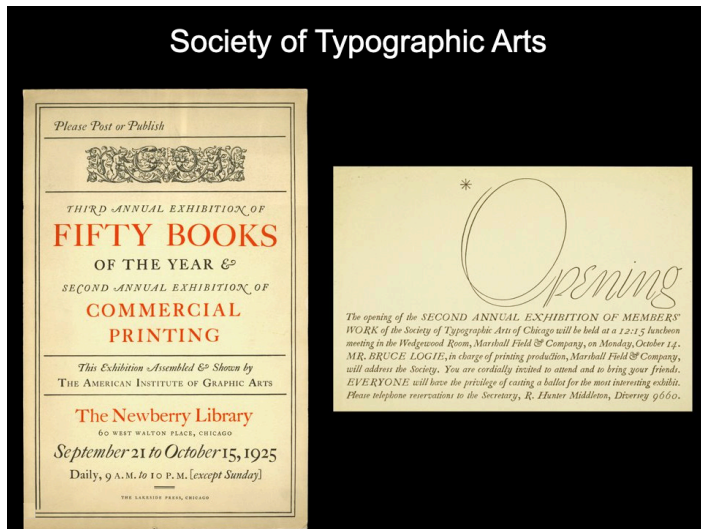
drawn from the collections of the Newberry Library; but along the way I will suggest some of the kinds of research that can be done on design history both at the Newberry and elsewhere in the city.

Also along the way, I want to describe three phenomena that certainly made Chicago a lively place to work as a designer. First, there were voluntary organizations of great vigor, like STA and the Caxton Club, that served as meeting grounds for Chicago designers and their clients. This was, in effect, an old-boy-network, but in Chicago it was more inclusive and democratic than most such networks. STA, for example, admitted women from the start—it took the Caxton Club almost 50 years to catch up on that score. STA's first woman president was Susan Jackson Keig in 1955. Other organizations also played significant roles, especially the Chicago Association of Industry and the Arts, the Art Directors Club, and the Artists Guild.

Secondly, there were educational institutions that provided the city and the region with talented new blood at every period, and which offered exhibits and workshops that showed off new trends from around the world. Along with non-profit and for-profit schools, several important corporations also had this kind of educational or sponsorship function. STA itself had the most important exhibits and workshops of all.

Lastly, there have always been some design leaders—outstandingly talented people to whom others in the community looked for innovative ideas and generous help. Everyone who remembers Chicago in the years after World War II—and fortunately there are many who still do—speaks about the cordial and collegial atmosphere among designers. This spirit was exemplified in the STA. One of the

great privileges of my library career has been to sort and make available to the public the papers of one of the most important of these collegial figures, Robert Hunter Middleton.



Let's start with some history. The STA was founded in 1927 by a group of Chicago designers who were dissatisfied with AIGA, the American Institute of Graphic Arts. The Chicagoans had two reservations about AIGA, first that it was dominated by East Coast folk, especially New York designers. And second that it was too little concerned with typography as such, more with graphic design in a larger and looser sense. Especially in the 1920s, American design was infatuated with decorative ideas derived from the arts and crafts movement and with modernisms that were often pictorial rather than typographic. The founders of the STA wanted to return to the expressive power of type—in both historical and modernist idioms. By 1927 they already knew about the Bauhaus revolution in Germany and they were willing to look seriously at its design results.

A few years later, a group of Chicago designers organized to promote their own work as the Twenty Seven Chicago Designers. The Twenty Seven was a self-selected group, each



designer putting in a percentage of the costs of producing an annual promotional volume. These books are deservedly collector's items today, offering as they do year-by-year snapshots of new work from 1936 to 1991.

The very existence of these two organizations in Chicago – STA and the 27 – tells you there was at the time some coherent sense of place. These people thought of themselves as Chicago designers. They knew each other, helped each other out, and organized to study, exhibit, and socialize. Since its refounding in the mid-1990s, STA has again focused on service to local designers. Its mission has returned to that of the early years in a largely successful attempt to rekindle the old Chicago collegiality.

Plymouth Building
(S. Dearborn St.)

(photo ca. 1895,
courtesy of the
Chicago History
Museum)

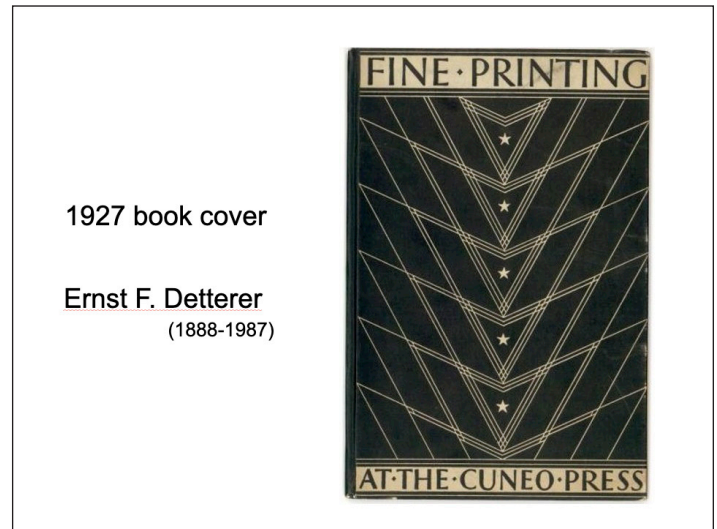


We may well ask where this sense of Chicago as place came from. To my mind, there were several important elements. I have already mentioned the central importance of type to the aesthetic sensibilities of the city. This, I think, was based on two foundations. First, Chicago had a particularly lively tradition of hand lettering. This went back to the 19th century explosion of commercial signage in Chicago, especially after the fire of 1871. Advertising on the street translated easily into advertising in the newspapers and magazines that poured from Chicago presses. Much of the vigor and expressiveness of modernist typography before World War II derived from these wonderful street signs.

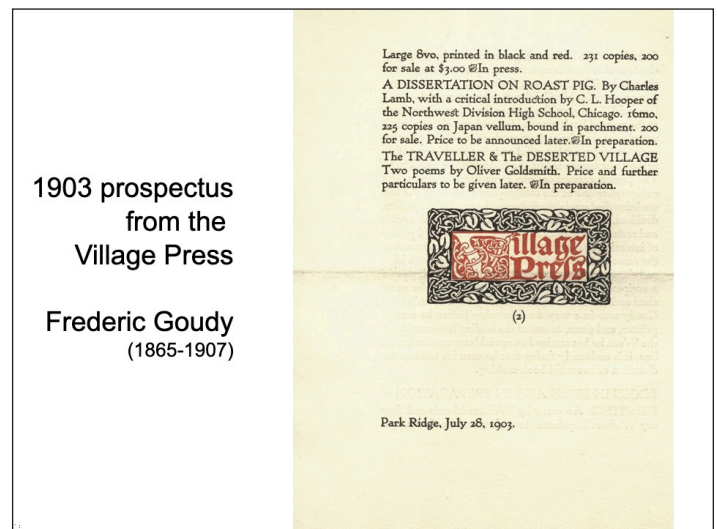


At the same time, ornamental handwriting was in its heyday, and Chicago had some prominent penmen and one super-ambitious collector of calligraphica, Coella Lindsay Ricketts. Ricketts made his collection available to artists during his life, and in 1941 it came to the Newberry.

Again, about 1917, the Johnstonian reform of calligraphy came to Chicago in the person of Ernst Frederick Detterer, who taught at Chicago Normal School, then the School of the Art



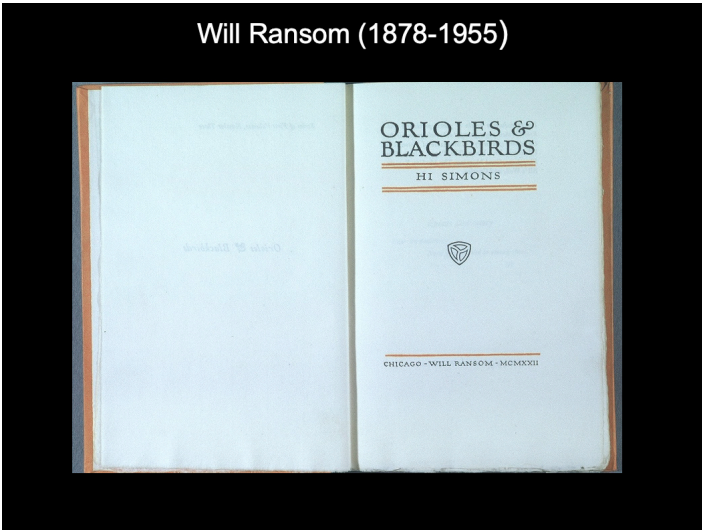
Institute, and finally at the Newberry. As you can see, Detterer's own lettering work was strongly influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement. So, one of the major Chicago facts was lettering design.



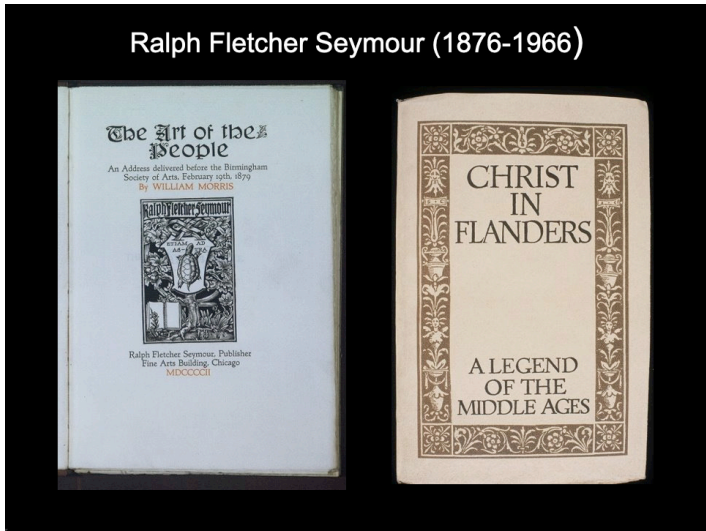
Secondly, Chicago in the 1890s had witnessed a burst of type design under the influence of early English fine presses. The best known figure was Frederic Goudy, who worked in Park Ridge from 1895 to 1903 together with his wife Bertha. The Goudys soon moved on to the East, but left behind friends and disciples and imitators, who felt that new types were appropriate for the new century.

Will Ransom was one. He had a print shop

Will Ransom (1878-1955)

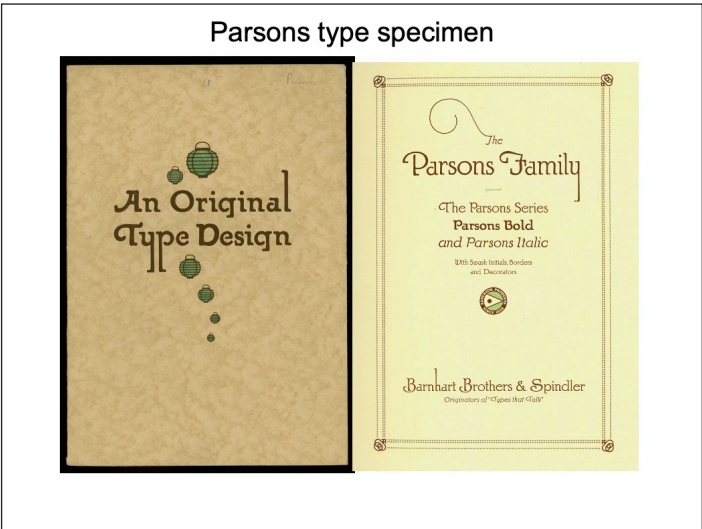


Ralph Fletcher Seymour (1876-1966)



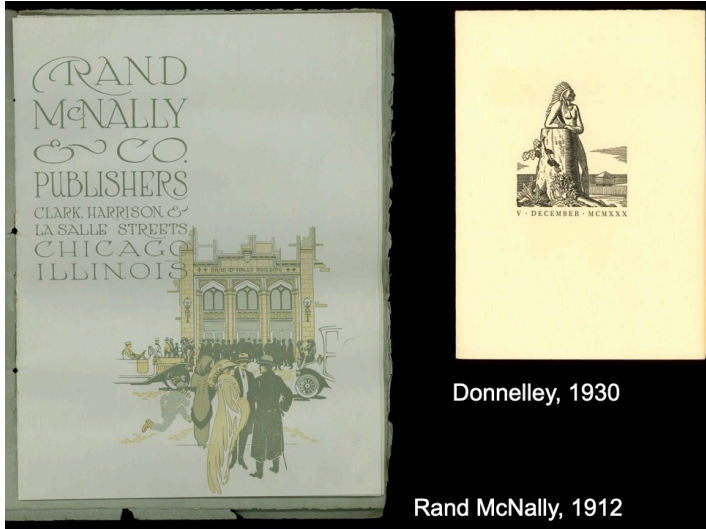
in a Randolph Street skyscraper into the 1920s until he too moved East.

Parsons type specimen



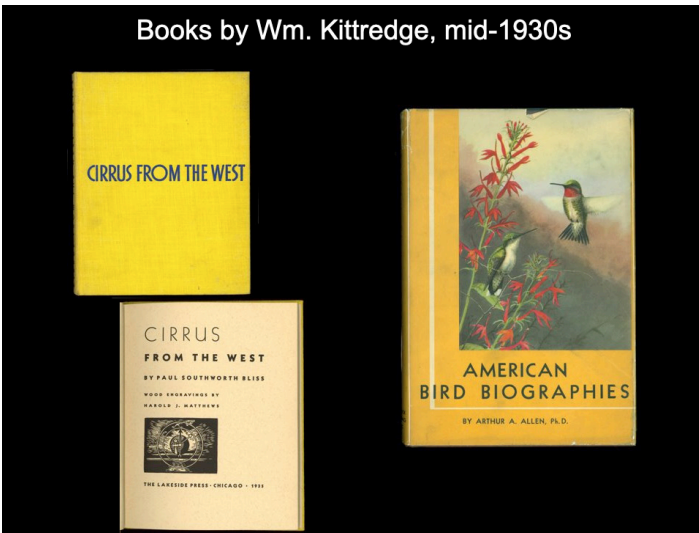
Ransom's Parsons type face was originally designed for Carson, Pirie, Scott & Co., but soon became a popular face for silent movie subtitles.

Ralph Fletcher Seymour was another follower of the Goudys, though he only ever designed one type face. He remained active as a printer, printmaker, and publisher in Chicago until his death in 1966. Seymour, Ransom and others worked for themselves; but others with similar typographic sensibilities worked in printing and publishing firms both large and small.



Rand McNally was one of the big companies that employed designers from all over the city; Scott Foresman was another major employer of designers, and still is. The biggest printer of them all would soon be R.R. Donnelley & Sons, often known by their Lakeside Press imprint. Donnelley was the first printing firm in the city to hire a designer to supervise all their work, William Kittredge, who came to Chicago in 1921 and was instrumental in founding STA. Donnelley continued a tradition of distinguished in-house designers well into the 1970s with Walter Howe and Prentiss Smith.

Books by Wm. Kittredge, mid-1930s



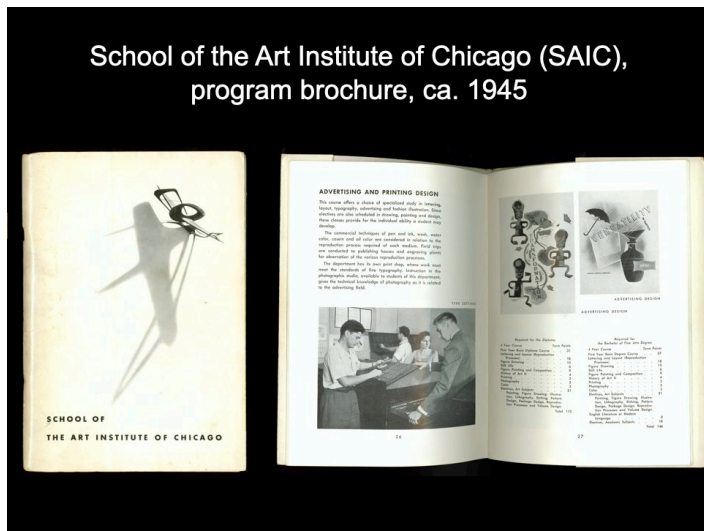
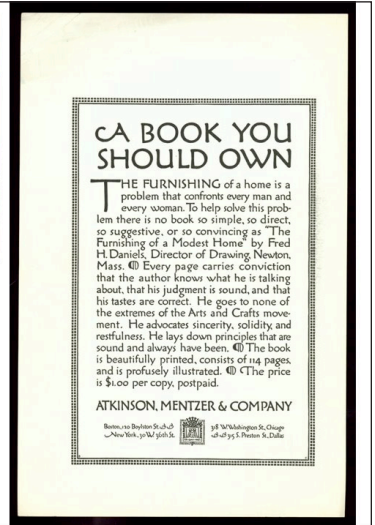
Kittredge is now best known for his collaborations with illustrators like Rockwell Kent and Rudolph Ruzicka. But his own in-house designs were strongly typographic. Some were strongly decorative, but these two follow a modernist style that stressed legibility and expressiveness through layout and choice of type.

an industrial design program. Still, modernist design remained a bit of a stepchild at SAIC in the period, and in 1936, the industrial design program was abandoned entirely. By the time this brochure was printed in the forties, SAIC's graphic program was showing the influence of the Bauhaus.



Oswald Bruce Cooper

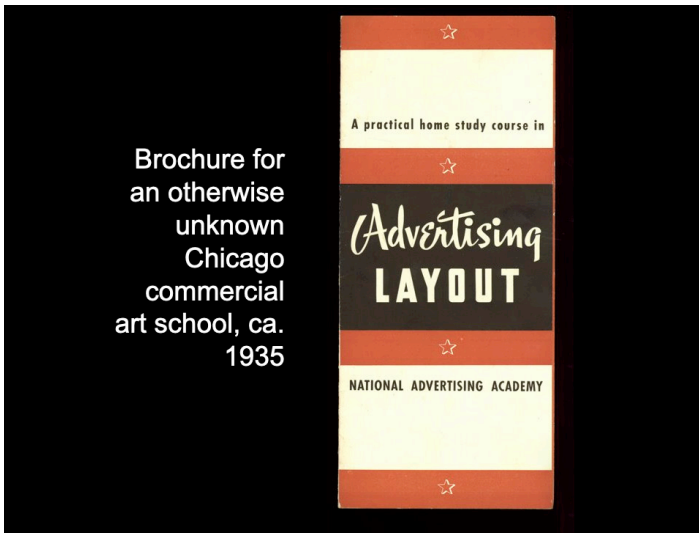
(1879-1940)



I have already mentioned the School of the Art Institute. And there is no doubt that until 1935 or so, SAIC was the most prestigious and influential educational institution in Chicago design. Its printing and design department was established in 1921, and through the twenties and early thirties, it experimented with

Much earlier, however, Chicagoans could get training as apprentices in the big printing shops, or in private art academies like the Frank Holme School, founded in 1898 and located in the Fine Arts Building, where the Caxton Club also had an office at that date. One important graduate of the Holme school was Oswald Cooper, now best remembered for Cooper Black, the most successful display type of the first half of the 20th century. Cooper was essentially a lettering artist, one who brought the bold display sensibilities of Gilded Age Chicago into a modernist mode.

I should mention, too, that the tradition of smaller, specialized commercial art schools continues today with institutions like Illinois Institute of Art (founded in 1916 as the Commercial Art School) and the American Academy of Art (founded in 1923 by Frank

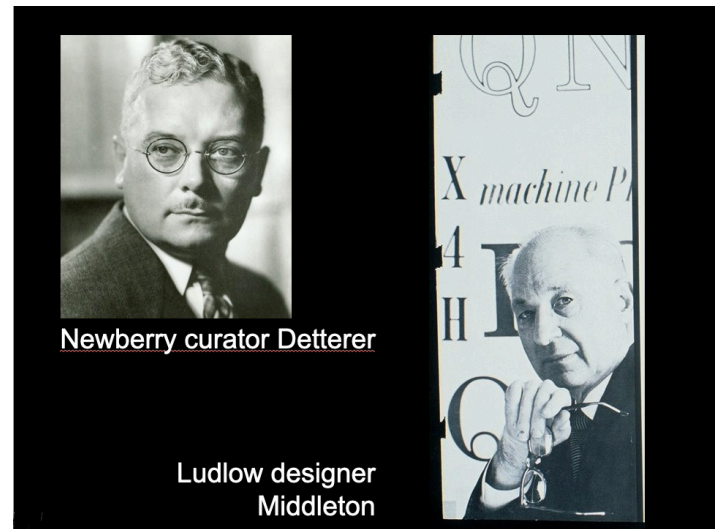


it is also the 70th of the New Bauhaus, which has its present incarnation in the Institute of Design at IIT.

The New Bauhaus immediately became the 800-pound gorilla on the Chicago design scene. Both in popular tradition and in fact, the ideals of the new school took the city by storm, and everyone ever since has had to take Bauhaus methods into account. Indeed, when a young designer came to me some years ago looking for historical materials, he started the conversation by saying, “We want to go way back to the beginning, you know, the New Bauhaus and those guys.”

I think it is worth asking how this happened. Not how we collectively forgot about everyone earlier, but how the Bauhaus got such an enthusiastic welcome in Chicago. And I think the answer is one that demonstrates the existence of a distinctive Chicago way of thinking about design.

Young, an advertising designer). Nowadays, the biggest player in design education is Columbia College, which started as a public-speaking school and added design in the 1940s, probably under the influence of the New Bauhaus. Today Columbia College has over 1,600 students enrolled in the Art & Design program—one of the largest in the country.



All of the early 20th century design schools and traditions have been overshadowed in the historical record by the arrival in Chicago in the 1930s of a series of Bauhaus trained artists. The most important of these was Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, who founded the School of Design in 1937. So 2007 is not only the 80th anniversary of the STA

Twenty years ago I had a chance to read through letters that Ernst Detterer wrote home to his mother in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania every Sunday from 1917 to 1947. They are a remarkable commentary on the Chicago scene, though explained in terms that would be clear

to anyone's mom. One letter from late 1937 particularly caught my eye, because Detterer reported that he was to have lunch on Tuesday with Bob Middleton at the Maryland Hotel coffee shop, near the Newberry where Detterer then worked. Middleton was bringing along a new guy in town whom Detterer was interested to meet. The new guy was named Mies van der Rohe, and the tenor of the letter makes it clear that Detterer was going to size him up. He was not interested in the man's fame but in what he would have to say about design, and especially about typography.

in different fields. This was an important tenet of Bauhaus thought, but it was already implicit in the Chicago world view well before 1937.



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SATURDAY
February
19
2:30 p.m.

Recital of Contemporary Music
FELIX WITZINGER pianist

Compositions by
Bartok, Chavez, Gershwin, Honnegger, Milhaud, Stravinsky

A brief introduction will be given by
ERNST KRENEK
who will also play his new piano sonata (first performance in Chicago)

Ernst Krenek
was born 1901 in Vienna, Austria; studied at the University of Vienna and the Imperial Academy of Music, State Academy of Music, Berlin, with Franz Schreker and other composers.

He came to the U.S.A. in 1938. In 1939 and 1940 he was guest professor of composition at the University of Michigan, 1941 at the University of Wisconsin, 1938-1942 Professor of Music at Vassar College, 1942 Professor of Music and Head of the Department of Music, 1943 Dean of The School of Fine Arts, Hamline University, St. Paul, Minn.

Among his compositions are: 6 String Quartets, 3 Symphonies, 10 operas (among them "Henry VIII" and "produced at the Metropolitan Opera House, 1929),

plano compositions, song cycles, choruses, two piano concertos, two concertos for violin, violin concerto, etc.

Felix Witzinger
was born 1912 in Zurich, Switzerland. In 1932 he passed the "Matura" at the University of Basle. During that same year, he became a pupil of Rudolph Serkin, and later of the Swiss composer, Gerard Beck.

Since 1934, he has given concerts in several European countries; regular performances over the Swiss radio station; also performed with the Basler Trio.

Witzinger came to America in 1945. He made his New York debut in the Swiss Pavilion at the World's Fair and his Boston debut at the Gardner Museum.

At present, he is teaching piano at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn.

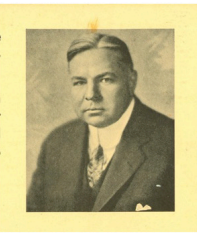
Admission 50 cents plus tax • Members of the "Friends of the School of Design" will be admitted without charge.

This minor incident, mentioned in passing, has always seemed emblematic to me of a Chicago culture that welcomed all newcomers as long as they were really smart and that, particularly in the 1930s, was open to people and influences from Europe. Notice that Middleton, who had been Detterer's student at SAIC, thought that it was important for the last director of the Bauhaus in Germany to meet Detterer, who represented the older, arts-and-crafts tradition in Chicago printing. What the three men had in common was a conviction that all artistic fields were interrelated and that there was something to be learned from good, modernist practitioners

So, this is not a story about three men. These three represent a broad spectrum of design professionals in the city in the 1930s. They had radically different kinds of education and experience. But their variety of interests, their openness to outsiders, their willingness to relate to each other in terms of process made Chicago design professionals at the period more receptive to the Bauhaus than others might have been. Chicago had long been a destination for European immigrants. In the early 1930s we even had a Czech-born mayor, Anton Cermak.

R.R. Donnelley
1933 prospectus for
Century of Progress exhibit

The Chicago world's fair of 1933 had brought even more Europeans to the city, and R. R. Donnelley made sure that the fair also had an important design exhibit. So it was a crossroads in the center of the U.S. in the way the great cities of central Europe—Leipzig, Prague, Budapest—were crossroads for Europe between the wars. The look of our crossroads city was, by many contemporary reports, chaotic. The graphics, by analogy, were wildly eclectic. Even at the fair, famous for its modernist looks, there were many other styles.



Talk to union typesetters, undated (1929, 1935?)

Chairman, Please Post

Douglas C. McMurtrie
 Director of Typography, Ludlow Typograph Company, and noted authority on design in printing, is to be guest speaker at the next meeting of the Guild Typographica to be held

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22—7:00 P. M.
 17th Floor • 130 North Wells Street

Mr. McMurtrie is well known to Union printers everywhere, and especially in Chicago. This is an age of rapid changes in production methods and styles. The speaker's subject is:

Present and Future Typography
 Union Printers cannot afford to miss this meeting To keep abreast of progress in the Art of Printing is compulsory if our Craftsmen are to continue leadership in their field.

GUILD TYPOGRAPHICA
 Room 1516 • 130 North Wells Street

Set at Ludlow Kerned Medium, Kerned Black and Book Condensed

rarely did rigidly Bauhaus-style work. I think this is an area where a great deal of useful research could be done. Who in Chicago was teaching type? Which institutions had a real house style based on type use or the consistent application of logotypes? What was the role of the big type companies like Bundsho or Monsen-Thormond? And what about the higher-end typesetting boutiques like Runkle, Thompson or Gordon Martin's Type Shop? These were post-war shops, but starting already in the mid 1920s, Douglas McMurtrie of the Ludlow Typograph Co. gave repeated lectures and workshops on modernist type design.

This slide offers another research question: What was the Guild Typographica? This is the only document I have ever seen that mentions it.

Ludlow, by the way, practiced what McMurtrie preached. Here they are offering greater profits to newspaper and job printing offices that used the Ludlow Typograph, their typesetting system. Note that this is a purely typographic ad. Even the minimalist ornament is set with Ludlow types.

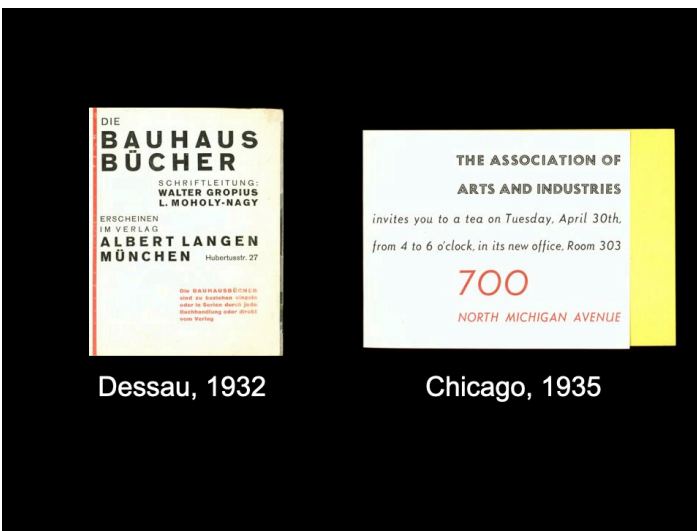
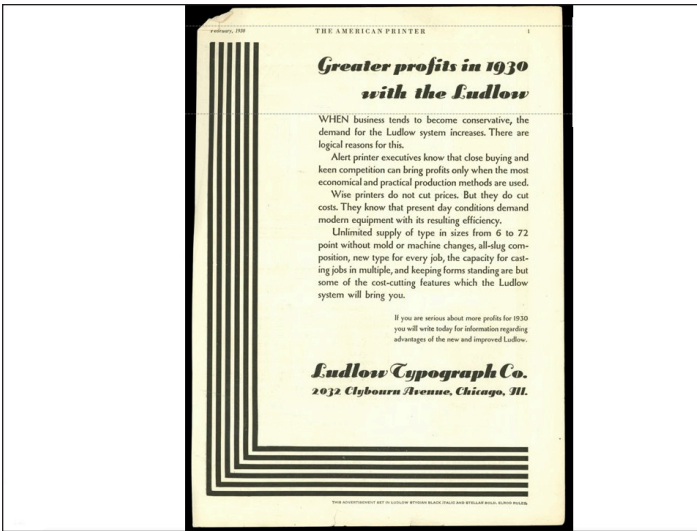
Of course, I cannot prove the affinity of Chicago type for Bauhaus type with a just a few examples, but look at this 1930s Chicago brochure and one from the Bauhaus side by

Container Corp. vehicle, 1936 design by Egbert Jacobsen



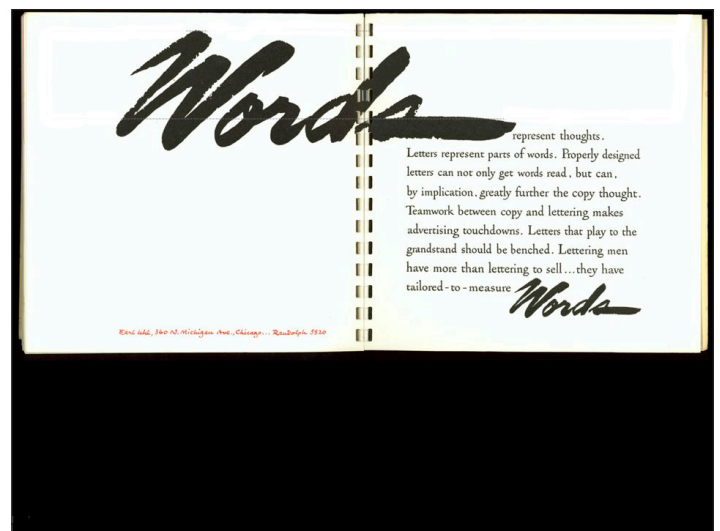
Chicago, moreover, had native personalities of central European extraction who were boosters for modernist design. The single most important of them was Walter Paepcke, head of the Container Corporation of America, who mandated an innovative integrated corporate design program in 1936. Paepcke was responsible for bringing Moholy-Nagy to Chicago in 1937 and in 1940 he hired Albert Kner to head CCA's design laboratory.

Also on the Chicago scene there was the important matter of type. The STA's emphasis on typographic design was by its very nature more congenial to Bauhaus ideals than other, more decorative approaches. But Chicagoans



Dessau, 1932

Chicago, 1935

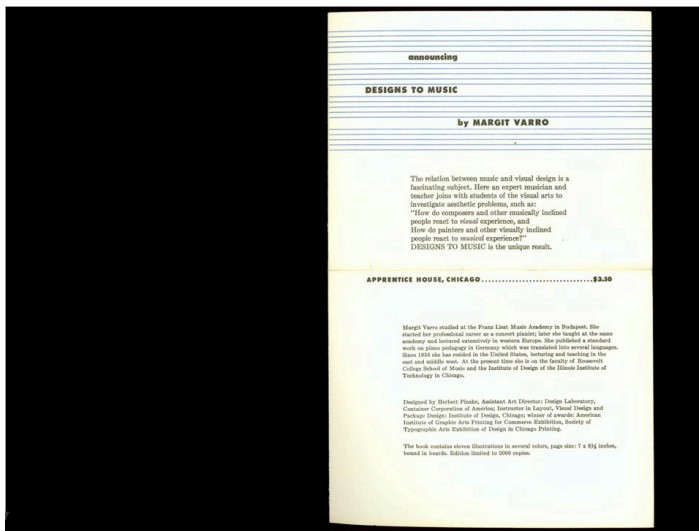


side. Strong, clear type and clean, modern lines were already well done in Chicago. The Bauhaus added some edge and a system to the look. But the basic aesthetic was already there and complacent Chicago didn't necessarily need the rest.

By the 1940s, Chicagoans had embraced the Bauhaus notions of the wholeness of the design process, the service of design to society, and the value of collaborative design work. Chicago designers had been cogitating many of these things even before the Bauhausers arrived; the New Bauhaus gave them a theoretical framework and a sense of purpose.

This 1941 design by Earl Uhl is a nice example of the fusion of Chicago calligraphic sensibilities with a Bauhaus sense of structure. It is all about letterforms.

By now, you are all probably looking at your watches and wondering if I am ever going to get past mid-century. The answer is yes, and two key figures will get us there. I have already mentioned both of them. One is Walter Paepcke, because he founded two very important institutions—the Container Corp Design Lab in 1940 and the Aspen design conference in 1951. The second giant whose work spanned the pre- and post-war periods is Bob Middleton.



Here is Middleton at his most Bauhaus-ian.

I do not, however, intend to go into much depth with the post-war period, for several reasons. First, I know less about it; and the better part of wisdom is not to pontificate on what you do not know.

Second, the Newberry has fewer resources for the later period, and so I invite you to look to the University of Illinois at Chicago (where the design collection assembled by Gretchen Lagana is named for Bob Middleton). You need to make use as well of the University of Chicago library (which holds the Paepcke papers and the R.R. Donnelley archive). UIC also has the Aspen Conference papers. The Chicago History Museum and Northwestern also have important design collections; and in recent years, Columbia College has been building a useful historical collection.

Third and most importantly, however, I think there is less reason to think that Chicago after the war had a distinctive school of design thought. The Bauhaus, ironically, was both cause and effect of this new age of Chicago design. Chicago's openness to new ideas made it the perfect host for the New Bauhaus, and the New Bauhaus in turn opened Chicago to the world and made our style theirs.

Exactly the same thing happened in architecture. Sullivan and Wright and their followers are called Chicago School or Prairie Style everywhere. But what we call the Second Chicago School in architecture is everywhere else called the International Style. Mies and his followers created a style for the world. So did Moholy-Nagy and the generations of students who have trained at the Institute of Design.

I do want to look at some of the important individuals, and show you some of their work. And for that I need to go back to the great corporate patrons of the 1930s.



Walter Paepcke, as I have already said, was one of the major patrons of modernist design. He hired or approved the hiring of a great variety of important designers, including Egbert Jacobsen, one of the original Twenty Seven Chicago Designers. Jacobsen was responsible for the corporate design program that put bold geometry on everything from letterheads to delivery trucks. He was succeeded by Ralph Eckerstrom and then by John Massey, all working with Paepcke's vision of the corporation as leader in design and design education.

Another major corporate patron of design in the city was Abbott Labs, which already in the

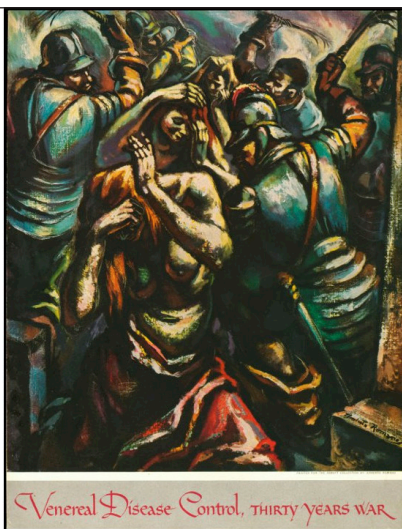
Abbot Laboratories



1930s had one of the most important corporate art collections in America. Through World War Two and into the 1970s, Abbott commissioned artists to create art work on health and health-care themes, and displayed many of their works in a monthly magazine called *What's New?* The magazine was art-directed by Bert Ray, another early member of the 27, whose papers are at the Daley Library at UIC. Like Jacobsen at Container Corp., Ray hired numerous Chicago designers and illustrators to work on the magazine.

Abbot Labs'
What's New
F.F. Goessling,
art director.

Raymond DaBoll
did the lettering



When Bert Ray left Abbott to open his own firm; Mick Goessling took over *What's New?* Perhaps needless to say, Ray and Goessling (as well as Jeanne Goessling) were all members of

STA and eventually became Caxtonians too. This page includes lettering work by Raymond DaBoll, another of our joint alums –his papers are at the Newberry.

Elmer Jacobs (1900-1981)
Greeting card designs for Rand McNally



Perhaps needless to say the big printers and publishers in the city also promoted splendid design. I have already mentioned Donnelley and Rand McNally. They employed many free-lancers over the years. Elmer Jacobs was just one.

Sketch for *Chicago Daily News* advert, ca. 1940



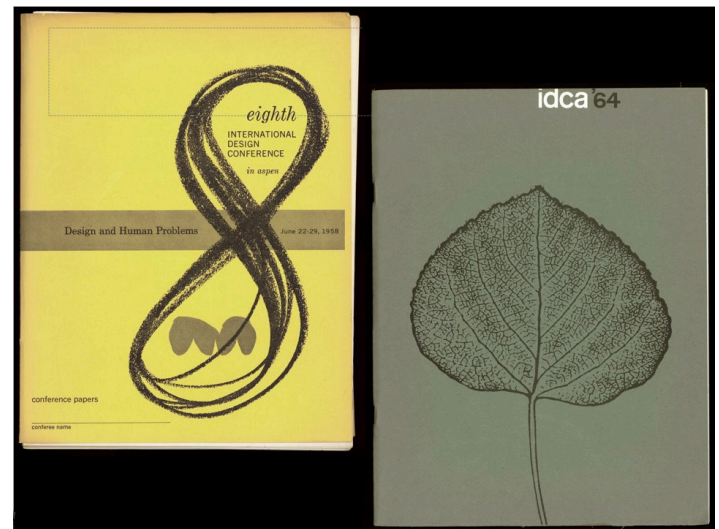
Chicago newspaper advertising was an important field for local talent starting in the nineteen teens already, and after the war the Chicago papers continued to be a locus for much lively lettering art. During and just after the

war, Donald May was prominent in Chicago as the re-designer of the Chicago Daily News, as art director for Esquire, and as an advertising designer for magazines and newspapers. He moved his family to California in 1947. Caxtonian Bob Williams is currently sorting his papers for the Newberry.

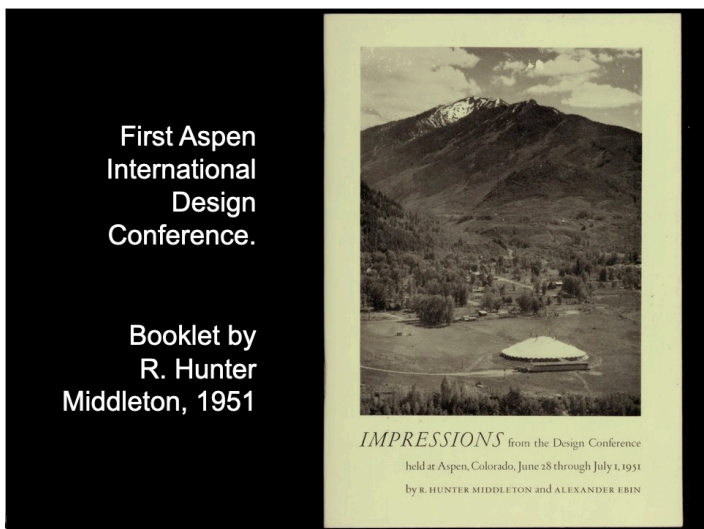
One initiative of Paepcke's that is well studied is the series of design conferences he organized in Aspen, Colorado, starting in 1951. The annual conference was one of a series of initiatives that Paepcke patronized under the auspices of the Aspen Institute –the music festival is perhaps the best known. The design conference was not national but international in scope, and it represented the opening of American design to the post-war world. My sense is that this was the reverse-flow of Chicago's openness in the twenties and thirties to international design, then represented by the Bauhaus. Under Paepcke's leadership, the Chicago design community came to include many Europeans before and during the war years. After the war, Chicagoans in turn gave back their vitality and methods to the newly internationalized design world. After which, Chicago design history ceases to be a local affair and becomes part of world design history.



These pieces are by Raymond DaBoll, whom we have already met before, working for Abbott. This is everyday, ephemeral design. But it is where many nationally prominent Chicagoans got their start and made their living. And it is the level on which virtually the entire population of the city was a consumer of design. This kind of design, however, is essentially unstudied. There is room for a good book on it.

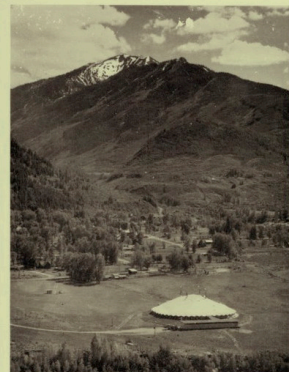


Aspen, of course, had more than one meaning. Paepcke's original vision was that it would educate business executives to the value of design. The first conference was titled "Design—A Function of Management." This was a very Chicago version of Bauhaus ideals. The first



First Aspen International Design Conference.

Booklet by R. Hunter Middleton, 1951



IMPRESSIONS from the Design Conference held at Aspen, Colorado, June 28 through July 1, 1951 by R. HUNTER MIDDLETON and ALEXANDER EBIN

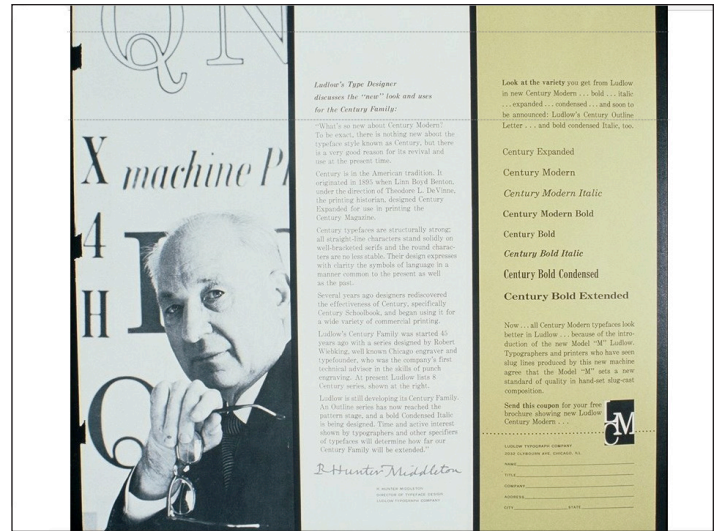
chairman of the conference, Egbert Jacobsen, hardly softened the idea when he said the point was to bring “better understanding of the value of first-class design to industry and incidentally to improve public taste.”

In the event the first few conferences were far more idealistic than this, and the businessmen often complained they were too theoretical. By the mid-fifties, the conference had gotten very much tied up with design theory and social criticism. In the sixties, it became the single most important forum for international thinking about design. Susan Keig remembers that the Japanese attempted to copy the model by organizing the first World Design Conference in 1959.

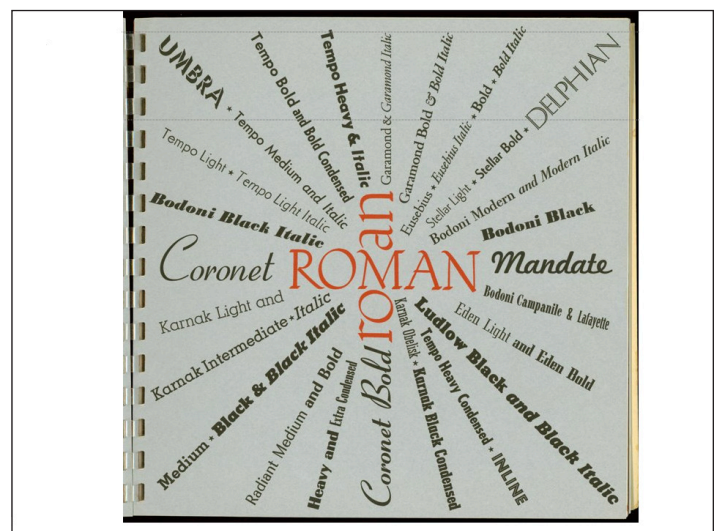
An important part of the post-war dynamic is that it skipped New York. The STA had already made the break in the twenties on behalf of Chicagoans. The Twenty-Seven confirmed the existence of a Chicago school of thought. The arrival of the Bauhaus, skipping the East Coast and landing in Chicago, confirmed both the openness and the vitality of Chicago as a design center. After the war, the STA took the lead in organizing Aspen, and Chicago designers tended to look to continental Europe, especially Italy and Switzerland for ideas.

I am perhaps overstating this case. But I think it gives us a good perspective from which to view the last third of the twentieth century. Chicagoans continued to chafe at the prominence of New York design, and so they have deliberately looked out to the larger world both for inspiration and to market their work.

After 1960 or so, the design history of the city resolves into a series of internationally prominent Chicagoans. A large number of them continued to design type or to use it in innovative ways. Bob Middleton continued to be a key



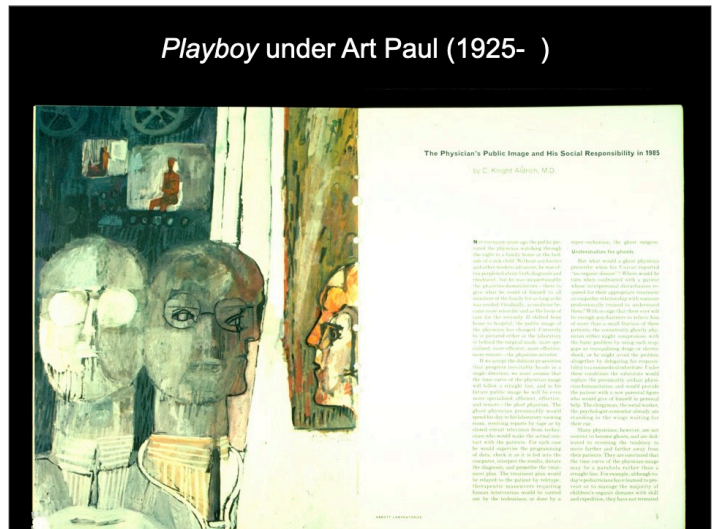
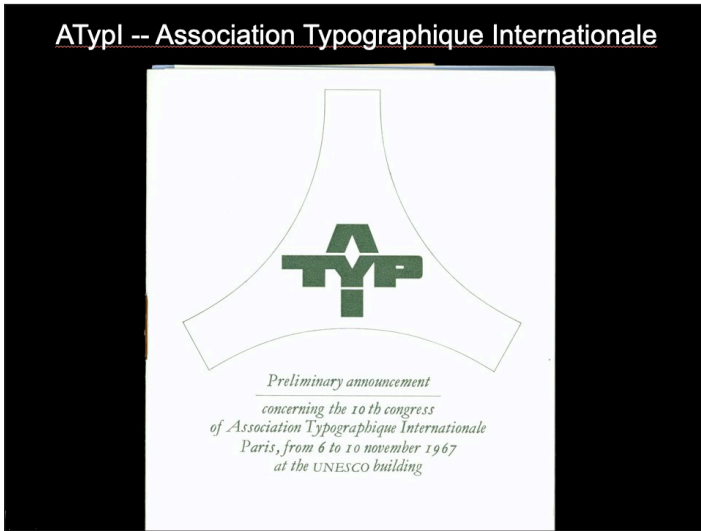
figure, I think. He had risen to prominence in the 1930s and in the 60s continued to be one of those who helped younger designers get their start and who brought European ideas and Europeans to Chicago. It is hard to overstate this role as a helping hand—it is one of the things that characterized the Chicago design community at all periods. Its greatest single proponent was Bob Middleton, and its greatest institutional embodiment was the STA.



Middleton’s many types for the Ludlow Typograph are now largely unknown, but at the period Ludlow machines were widely used for newspaper work both in the U.S. and abroad, and Middleton’s was a famous name. He was

an active player at Aspen, and responsible for keeping Chicago in the international spotlight as a type center.

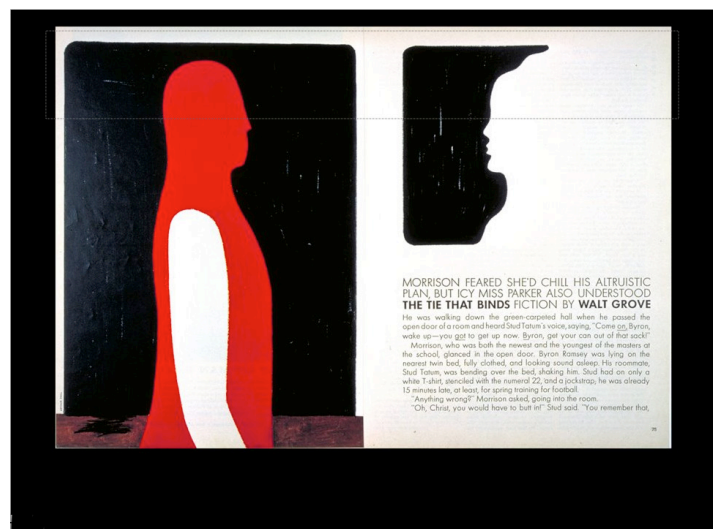
city. Container Corporation remained a leader under John Massey, who headed their design efforts from 1960 forward. Massey also became one of the most prominent design educators in the city.



He was also active in ATypl, the international association of typographers, whose conferences were a European answer of sorts to the Aspen conference. Middleton's role in this group ensured that Chicago had a presence in the small but highly international field of type design. Middleton was also a mainstay of both the STA and the Caxton Club.

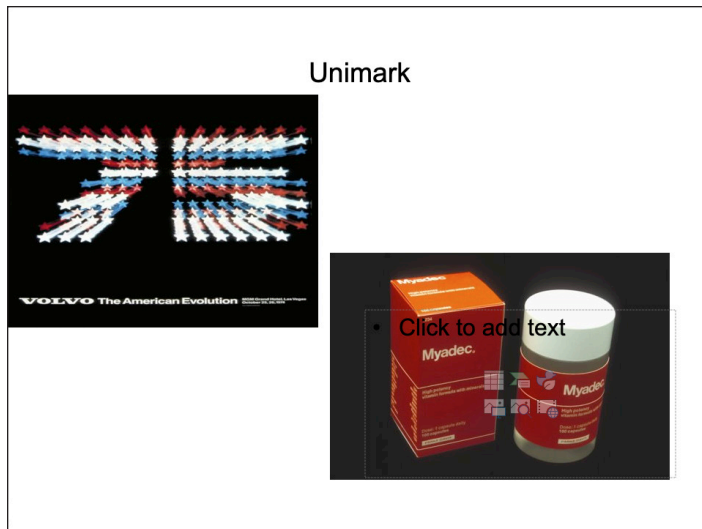
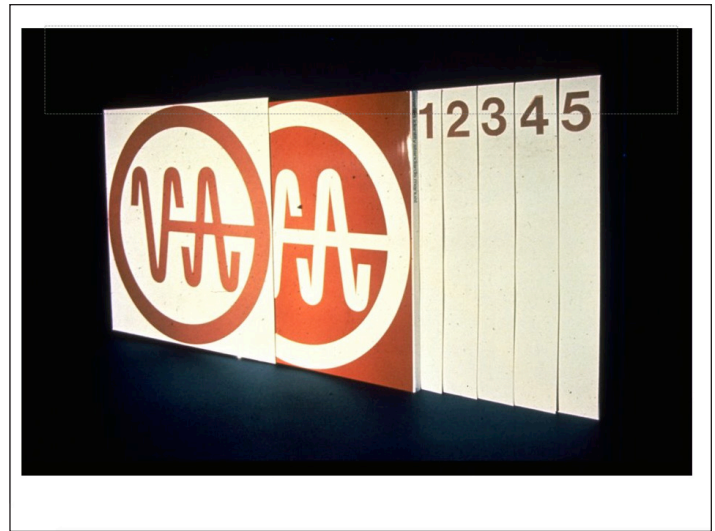
The Chicago magazine world may be the one place where we can say Chicago had its own style and presence internationally after the War. Esquire had led the way in the 1930s; and when *Playboy* was founded in 1953, its creators made a deliberate attempt to one-up old *Esquire* in design terms as well as adventuresome content.

The art director at *Playboy* was Arthur Paul, and he followed a new Chicago trend toward bold illustration matched by equally bold lettering.



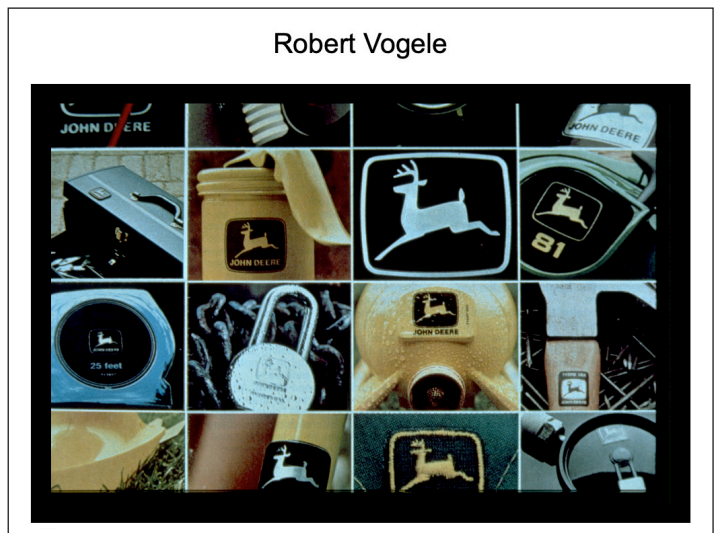
The biggest drivers of post-war Chicago design remained the big corporate clients and a few ad agencies that were headquartered in the

His penchant for punchy spreads became a trademark of the magazine. The covers and article spreads he supervised presented Chicago to the most worldly part of the public, if not exactly to the whole world. It is hard to underestimate this magazine's influence, because even if most Americans were too prudish to see it, most of the men in positions of influence in the corporate and design world did.



programs for large corporate clients.

In the sixties, and under the influence of Aspen, I think, Chicago designers began to form innovative new partnerships. Much of the energy we associate with Chicago design in this period came from designers who worked as teams. Unimark was easily the most prominent of these, led by Aspen president Ralph Eckerstrom and Massimo Vignelli, a Milan designer who initially came to Chicago to teach at IIT. Again, the theme of the openness of Chicagoans to European designers comes up.



From 1965 to 1977 Unimark proved the model of integrated, international design, with six offices in American cities and five abroad, and work that ran the gamut from graphics to interior design. Unimark also pioneered in strategic planning and management consulting. Their most lasting achievements were probably in identity

Robert Vogele was another prominent Chicagoan who made his mark as a designer of corporate identities and who has always surrounded himself with talented collaborators. His RVI Corporation was founded in 1965, the same year as Unimark. Vogele always worked in collaboration with other designers, under various firm names including VSA Partners. His papers are among the treasures of the University Illinois at Chicago.

Unimark was probably unique in its scope and ambitions, but it was an influential model. There were other similar if looser and more local versions of design collaboration too. One was

DESIGN PARTNERSHIP

Bud Mabrey, Hank Robertz, Hayward Blake.
Seated: Bruce Beck, Jack Weiss. (Ken Kaiser not shown.)
Chicago office.

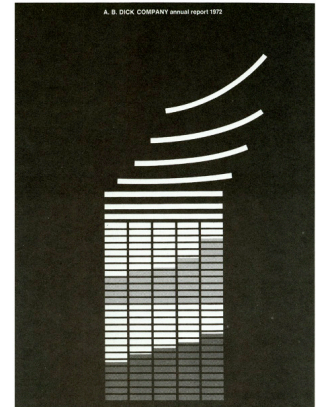
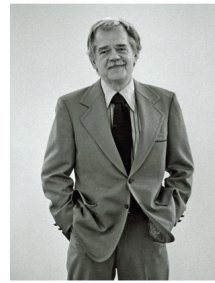
The Design Partnership



American Graphics Corporation which united Robert Snyder, the old Bertsch & Cooper agency and a typesetting firm. Another collaborative was formed in 1968 by several STA and Caxton Club members. Calling themselves The Design Partnership, Bruce Beck, Hayward Blake and his associate Jack Weiss, Henry Robertz, and Lindell Mabrey set out to institutionalize the old Chicago concept of collegiality in a collaborative of four design offices. The idea was born in the old 205 W. Wacker building, where they all worked in the sixties, and then moved to an office in downtown Evanston.

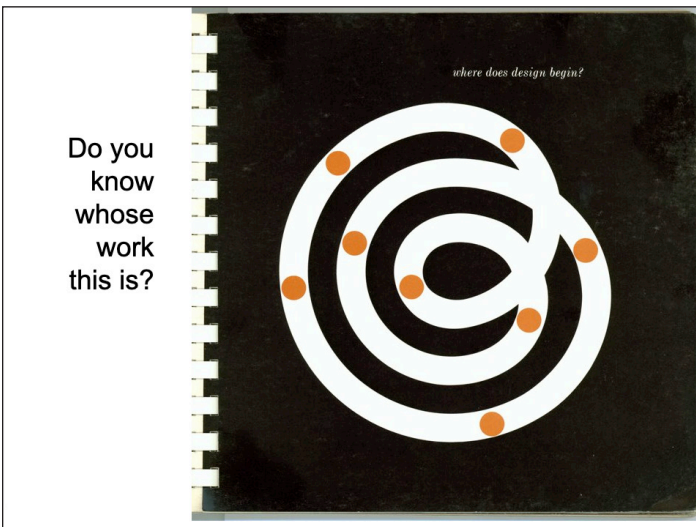
striking self promotion? [Right, it was Bruce Beck, in 1960.]

Bruce Beck



I want to dwell briefly on our own Bruce Beck, who achieved prominence on the national scene in the 1950s and was a recognized leader in the STA for three decades. In many ways, Bruce inherited Bob Middleton's role as the guy who made collegiality happen. No surprise, then, that when Print magazine wanted to do a Chicago issue in 1953, Bruce did the overall design.

When the Caxton Club came to publish a tribute to Middleton in 1985, Bruce designed it. It still one of the most beautiful books we have ever produced –and that is saying something. And it is equaled by his design for the Caxton centennial history in 1995.



So here is a puzzler for you. Which member of The Design partnership did this



Both the Caxton Club and STA can also claim Hayward Blake. I'm only giving Hayward one slide because I don't want to embarrass him. Caxtonians surely know him best for his book work, but many here tonight also know his advertising work. I have a small file of really striking advertising pieces at the Newberry, though as you can see, not every piece is securely dated. This is a perennial problem for researchers.

One last bit of history concerns the 1970s. The recession of the mid-1970s and a rash of corporate buyouts and consolidations that followed forever changed the design scene in Chicago. But the seventies were also an enormously creative and productive time in Chicago design. Design firms increasingly moved into corporate planning, and design increasingly made claims to create and not merely reflect cultures. Designers convinced government bodies to become more and more interested in good design as an expression of community values. STA was a leader in presenting these broader design ideas through the traditional means of workshops, conferences and exhibits.



In 1979 STA founded *Design Journal*, a

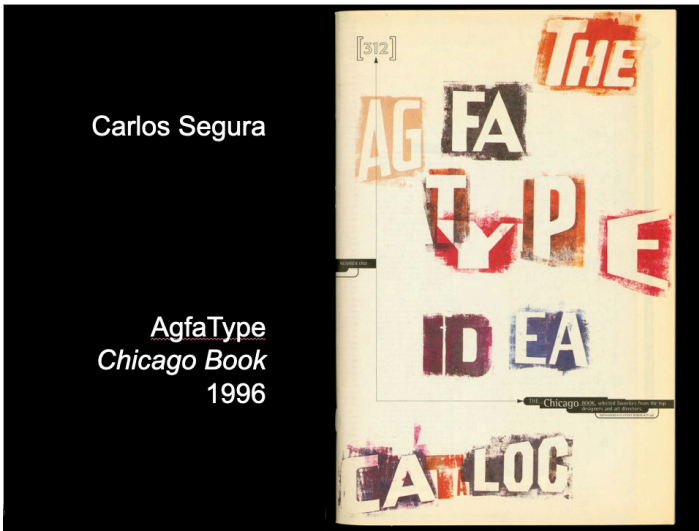
magazine devoted to research in design.

I am not going to talk about the 1980s and beyond, which I still have difficulty thinking of as an historical period. It is, after all, when I started to get interested in design history myself. Suffice to say that one of the most active players on the design scene nationally in those years was STA. STA kept Chicago in the international eye as America's Second City of design, no small feat in an age when the design scene pretty much went worldwide and ceased to have real regional styles or capitals.



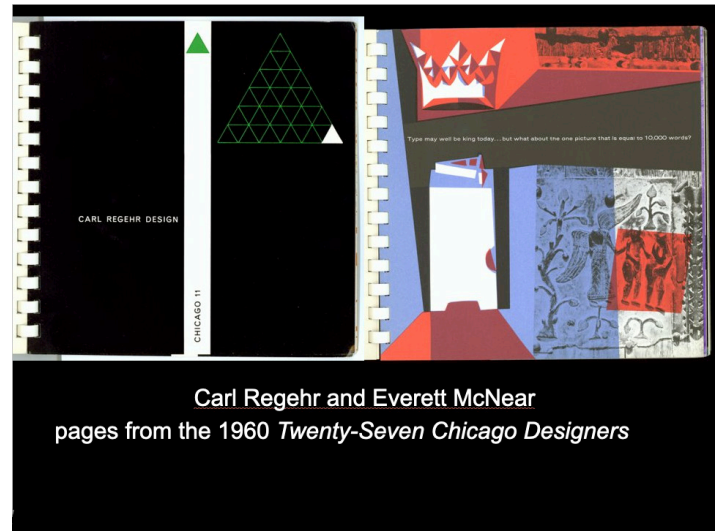
Among Chicago designers active today, I would like to mention just two. Again, those who design type have a privileged place in my mind, because they have influence not only through their own clients' work but by giving tools to other designers. And—to come clean—because I absolutely love collecting type specimens. The Newberry has one of the best type specimen collections in the world and I am always looking for more.

Two Chicagoans today, Rick Valicenti (whose work we just saw) and Carlos Segura (in this slide), have truly international reputations precisely because they both design type themselves and distribute their popular faces and



Carlos Segura

AgfaType
Chicago Book
1996



Carl Regehr and Everett McNear
pages from the 1960 *Twenty-Seven Chicago Designers*

those of others worldwide.



In closing, let me return to my first question: Is there, or was there a Chicago design tradition distinct from that of the U.S. generally? I trust you know my answer already. Certainly Chicago had a reputation for being a little provincial in the 1920s. But there was already a Chicago design tradition. The STA was a key player in fostering that tradition in the 1930s, when design was still the new kid on the block and Chicago was beginning to really make waves through the work commissioned by big corporate clients.

After the second World War, as I have said, the picture becomes less clear. Chicago

had a critical mass of designers –very collegial and supportive ones-- but was not so big that its community broke down into factions. Chicago started to be a net exporter of design ideas in the years after the war, especially through its sponsorship of the Aspen phenomenon. The Unimark “phenom” is symptomatic. Yes, the idea was born in Chicago in the shadow of the Institute of Design, but the company was global from the start and so were its clients. Chicago was a big exporter of personnel too. Especially from the 1960s forward, many talented people went to New York or California, some even to New South cities like Atlanta and Charlotte and Dallas. This exodus created a certain centrifugal force in the city’s design life.



On the other hand, if there ever was a true “Chicago style” it may well be that of the classic adverts of Abbott, CCA, and *Playboy* in the sixties and seventies. Punchy type and punchy illustration no matter what the context.

I hope I have given you food for thought tonight. Certainly I have not solved any historical problems, but I hope to have suggested that there is plenty to do in studying the history of Chicago design. I know I speak not only for my colleagues at the Newberry but for all the archivists and librarians of the city when I invite you to explore our collections of Chicago design materials.

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Slide List / Picture Credits

1. Title slide: Elmer Jacobs Christmas card for Rand McNally, 1950s
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2. AIGA poster 1925; STA advert, 1930?
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Wing ephemera.

3. *27 Chicago Designers*, vols. 5 (1941) and 21 (1960).
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4. Plymouth Building signage. (S. Dearborn St., ca. 1890).
Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum
5. Giambattista Verini, *Luminiario*, 1527.
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6. Ernst Detterer. Cover for Cuneo press booklet. Private collection. Photo courtesy of the Newberry Library.
7. Frederic and Bertha Goudy. Village Press prospectus, 1903.
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8. Will Ransom, printer. Hi Simons, *Orioles and Blackbirds*, 1922.
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9. Will Ransom. Parsons type specimen.
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19. Steen Hinrichsen woodcut, *The Mediator*, 1929.
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44. Robert Vogeles, RVI design for John Deere.
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45. Design Partnership. Group portrait from
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Collection of Bruce and Margaret Beck;
photography courtesy of the Newberry Library.

46. Bruce Beck, self promotion from *27 Chicago Designers*, vol. 21 (1960)
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47. Bruce Beck, portrait and logo work.
Collection of Bruce and Margaret Beck;

photography courtesy of the Newberry Library.

48. Hayward Blake, self promotion, 1968.
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49. STA Design Journal, 1985.
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50. Rick Valicenti, Bronzo type specimen, 2001?
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51. Carlos Segura, type specimen for Agfa Type,
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52. *The Mediator*, Chicago, May 12, 1923.
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53. Carl Regehr and Everett McNear self-
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54. Collage of 1960s and 1970s designs.
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*Note: This small book combining Paul Gehl's
manuscript with images from his PowerPoint
presentation was created by Jack Weiss. 6.7.24*